

Nadiah Binti Ahmad; S1476971

Understanding ASEAN's Formal Narratives on Women's Advancement

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis attempts to assess formal narratives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), by uncovering the reasons for the inclusion of women's advancement as part of its human development agenda. The thesis hopes to conceptualize women within the Southeast-Asian region through the lenses of the association's decision-makers, exposing dominant perspectives that inform and influence the position of women, structural forces that shape these narratives, and examine possible contradictions and deficits in ASEAN rationalities. The thesis would first look at ASEAN as an association; after which, it would discuss the hypothesis, method of research as well as the research's limitations. It would then specifically assess declarations and plans of action that include women as part of their development agenda. After which, there would be a detailed assessment of the reasons behind their inclusion, and concluding remarks on the findings.

Understanding ASEAN

ASEAN was established in reaction to containing threats of the Cold War; consisting of five newly de-colonized and independent nations, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia, the member-states found it imperative to protect themselves from the possible political and military manipulation from external powers due to the power vacuum that was created right after the departure of colonial powers in the same period (ASEAN, 1992). Each member-state also sought the potential for collective bargaining power in security and economic issues the association could provide amongst an emerging global society that was becoming more inter-twined. Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN had been noticeably state-centric in its intra-regional principles, as reflected in its fundamental principles. Part of the Bangkok Declaration, which formally established the association, included fundamental principles which looked to ensure political, economic and cultural growth with the insistence on the privileging of sovereignty between member-states, and upholding non-interference and consensus-building practices in its decision-making mechanisms (ASEAN, 1967). All of its formal declarations and agreements had had to take into account these rigid principles and ultimately, the association's subsequent collective actions were seen as self-serving and placed the nation-state as the prime unit of concern (Nesadurai, 2009).

Newly formed states like those in ASEAN believed they were in a precarious position of development, with the possible threat of external forces impeding their demands on how to shape the state; in this instance ASEAN was helpful to provide a collective shield between states within the region from intervening in each others' domestic affairs, but also to ensure the superpowers of the time did not take advantage of their fragility (Nesadurai, 2009). ASEAN's role was a reactive, and passive one, allowing for its individual member-states to leverage on its existence to further their own economic and political agenda; the association was created as a tangible platform for legitimizing and protecting its member-states' existence and their processes of state-making in the international society and allowed for a relatively uninterrupted period of economic growth (Dorsch & Mols, 2014). At the same time ASEAN was a reflection of the new global order that had been culminating since the end of the Second World War, namely the increase of inter-regional and international cooperation of states to ensure mutual dependence and security. Since the Cold War, ASEAN had taken small steps towards further integration whilst still maintaining its fundamental principles.

The conceptualization of the ASEAN Charter (2007) saw the association's pivot towards more formal cooperation in economic and security policies, especially in its effort to increase intra-regional trade and access to regional markets; moreover, it also highlighted the association's awareness of international principles of governance, as reflected in the inclusion of upholding human rights and development in its principles, using the United Nation's Charter as a reference for its understanding of international and humanitarian law. Unlike the international environment in which the association was conceived, the post Cold War era came with more space for unpredictable threats - this included the region's catastrophic experience during the Asian financial crisis in 1997, when all of its member-states were affected, in varying degrees, by the failure to manage the market economy effectively (Emmers & Ravenhill, 2011). The experience put to test the successful socio-economic practices of each member-state during the Cold war, of which inevitably became more precarious and less reliable in the "era of deregulation" (Higgot, 1998, 339). The experience led ASEAN to "revitalize its efforts at economic integration", understanding the need to secure the region of new threats like the precariousness of the free market economy (138).

Thus, the existence of the Charter was the first instance of a subtle reconceptualization of the association's purpose and also of who or what its units of concern were. This shift can be seen as to include the reinterpretation of the notion of security, to include a more concrete concern for human development, which addressed the need to create mechanisms and processes for the "freeing of people...from the physical and human constraints" so as to allow them to do "what they would freely choose to do" (Carabello-Anthony, 2004, 157). In 2003, the association decided to establish the ASEAN Community, which was to become a formal entity by 2015; the community was the most recent manifestation of this reinterpretation and was conceptually made up of a culmination of the ideational and material issues split into three pillars that addressed politico-security, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The sub-community of which this thesis would endeavour to assess, along with other ASEAN formal declarations and agreements, would be the socio-cultural community or ASCC as it formally addressed women as part of its development agenda.

Research Statement & Methodology

In lieu of the formal instatement of the ASEAN Community in 2015, the thesis attempts to enquire into the association's formal narratives on human development, with specific interest on women's advancement. The thesis wants to uncover the reasons behind the inclusion; for the purpose of this thesis, 'formal narratives' are discourses that can be accessed publically in key declarations, and plans of action. By analyzing the terms and language these documents use to define women in the region, the research hopes to understand the motivations, limitations and deficiencies to ASEAN's rationalizations. In the end, the thesis hopes to add to the discourse of women's advancement in the region. As mentioned, the research looks assess key declarations, and plans of action. These specific documents were chosen due to their explicit inclusion of women as their unit of concern. The research would also use a key document from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), that is the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and women empowerment, as a comparison to ASEAN's ideational and material concerns on women.

The documents are listed in the table below:

Table 1.1. Table of ASEAN Documents Used in Thesis

ASEAN Declarations	ASEAN Plans of Action	International Document
Declaration for the Advancement of Women 1988	Hanoi Plan of Action 1998	UNDP Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and women empowerment
Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 2004	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint	
Hanoi Declaration on Enhancement of Welfare and Development for ASEAN Women and Children 2010	ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) Work Plan 2011-2015	

Literature Review

There are many literatures that are relevant to the research. Andaya's (2006) book, *The Flaming Womb*, and particularly the chapter on "Women and Economic Change" gives a historical account of the various roles women played during the early modern period in Southeast Asia, noting that women were very significant actors in trade and commerce (104). Another book that charts the historical positioning of women is a book by Peletz (2009) called *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* in which the author explains the crippling effect of polarizing gender through "canonical orthodoxies" that merged colonial and religious ideologies (85). Both literatures are pertinent in highlighting the historical shift in women's position as they began to be defined by their servitude to men, and their role in the home as opposed to the market place.

There have also been numerous literatures on women in contemporary Southeast Asia and their roles in the labour economy. Elias (2010) discusses the gendered political economy that effects position of the disadvantageous female migrant worker in Southeast Asia through the "neglect of social relations of reproduction" in advancing labour rights (71). Following the theme of social reproduction, Elias (2010a) has also written about the invisibility of domestic workers in the rights-based discourse,

appealing for human rights standards to re-evaluate its universality (842). Whilst Elias, along with others, like Chin (1998) and Ong (2006)¹, give an insightful account of the labour dimensions effecting the position of Southeast Asian women, they fall short of assessing the role of organizations like ASEAN in influencing these dimensions.

Literatures that critique ASEAN's economic development are also pertinent in providing perspectives on how marginalized groups, like women, are excluded in the overall discourse of Southeast Asian regional development. An article by Higgot & Nesadurai (2002) discusses the Southeast Asian Development Model initiated in 1980s by ASEAN member states and how this has "reflected an overwhelming emphasis on growth as a goal at the expense of development" (28). Another article by Carabello-Anthony's (2004) discusses human security, and is critical of ASEAN's emphasis on "regime stability and ...economic development as a major means or instrument to bring domestic stability", ignoring human development (161). Francisco (2007) discusses gender as "systemic barriers" and believes that "economic integration removes rather than reinforces" them (107). The literatures above discuss pivotal issues of the region, however there is a gap in discussing socio-economic rationalities within the region's development discourse effecting marginalized groups, like women, and their genesis. The research hopes to add to this gap.

Theory

There are several theoretical frameworks that inform this research. Subaltern realism explains the behaviours of post-colonial territories like the ASEAN region, whereby Third World states are seen as the subalterns of the international political community; as state making was "directed and premeditated" by external forces that marked territorial boundaries arbitrarily, these states vie for survival through constantly negotiating political, economic and cultural lines (Ayoob 2002: 44). In this case, the extent of including women in ASEAN's development discourse is dependent upon other forms of development that extend its member-states' "pursuit of other identities and associated interests" (Narine 2009: 371). Graduated sovereignty is a perspective that emphasizes on the neoliberal rationalities and market calculations that treat populations according to the aim of maximizing returns, thus "different segments of the population are subjected

¹ Chin and Ong have written on the exploitation of domestic workers in Malaysia and the factors that lead to them

to different technologies of regulation and nurturance” based on their profitability in the global capitalist system (Ong 2000, 58).

Lastly, postcolonial feminist insights on development also help with rationalizing member-states’ behaviours. Kapoor (2008) discusses women in development, perceived as essential and suppressing, and suggests that subordination of women is multifaceted and beyond patriarchy, to include the adjustments towards neoliberal logic by post-colonial states that adopt a tradition-modernity dichotomy whereby women are located in the traditional realm (35). Scott (1995) extends this further by referring to the dichotomizing practices of development. She discusses how modernization theory’s “reliance upon evolutionary and linear notions of social and political change” creates an “oversimplification of the development process”, which allows for the “construction of traditional society” to be likened to “women, family and community” (23).

Limitations & Ethical Concerns

There are several limitations to highlight. Firstly, even though the thesis is only looking at three declarations and three plans of actions, there are many more documents that mention women’s advancement and protection; the thesis has had to limit its inquiry to six documents so as to consider enough space and time for evaluation and discussion, but the selection of documents also comes with the knowledge that many of these documents overlap in intents and purposes; thus the documents for this thesis were chosen based on their timeliness, and how they have content that adds, rather than reiterates, to the region’s women advancement discourse. The research could end up more descriptive than critical, as there are multiple dimensions that inform and contribute to ASEAN’s gender development discourse and this thesis may not extensively include all of them. However, due to temporal and spatial limitations, these various dimensions, including historical ones, cannot be explored in depth. The thesis is also limited in its access to the minutes of meetings and discussions involved in the culmination of the chosen documents due to time and resource constraints; this access would have been beneficial to understanding the rationalities of including women in the association’s human development agenda. The research would also be biased towards focusing on the rationalities and perspectives one segment of the regional society, that is the leaders in ASEAN, and not other affected segments. Subsequently, the thesis could have also benefitted immensely by including first-hand insights through structured

interviews but, as mentioned, the thesis was limited by spatial and temporal constraints. With all of the limitations considered, the thesis would end up rather abstract in its findings, and that can impede on further revealing and deconstructing the discourse it wishes to assess; if given more time, space and resources, the research would be expanded to include the limitations listed. Finally, an ethical concern would be the bias of the researcher to have premature conclusions on the findings, as she is Southeast Asian woman, however the researcher hopes awareness of this bias would not pre-determine the research findings.

Chapter Two

ASEAN official documents and their formal narratives

As discussed earlier, formal narratives of ASEAN are entailed within key public documents published by the association. Thus this chapter involves the detailed assessment of formal documents ASEAN has put out in relation to women's advancement, to look at the suggestions and the goals they intend to achieve, and the language in which these documents are framed within. Chapter three would then discuss the discourse surrounding the issue of women's advancement and the possible rationalities behind them, as well as their limitations and deficits. It is helpful to understand that none of these documents are legally binding, and only offer suggestions for its signatories to endeavour in advancing women's position in the region.

Declarations

a. Declaration of the Advancement of Women, 1988

There have been several declarations pertaining to the advancement of women in the ASEAN region. This declaration was the first formal ASEAN document to specifically address women, and it made special mention of the burgeoning role of women in the region, in which they “constitute half of the total population” of the region, and especially in understanding “the importance of active participation and integration of women in the region in sharing the future development and progress of ASEAN and the necessity of meeting the needs and aspiration of women in the ASEAN Member Countries” (ASEAN, 1988). The declaration further called for its signatories to endeavour in the promotion of women as “active agents and beneficiaries of national and regional development” in contributing to “just and peaceful societies”, as well as “a productive force to attain the full development of the human personality” (ibid). The declaration included brief mentions of ensuring the promotion of “programmes involving the participation of the community and nongovernmental organizations towards strengthening national and regional resilience” whilst also to “strengthen solidarity in the region and international women forum” (ibid). The document was highly rhetorical, mostly signaled a general understanding of the inclusion of women in the association's human development agenda. The declaration did not offer any suggestions for proper implementation, or the extent to which member-states should participate in achieving these goals.

b. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 2004

This declaration signaled the acceptance of the association to the vulnerable positions of women in the region, as well as marked the few early instances of ASEAN's attempts to integrate supranational conventions into regional affairs; this particular declaration correlated with the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 48/104 passed in 1993, known as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (ASEAN, 2004). The declaration defined violence as that which “violates and impairs their human rights and fundamental freedoms, limits their access to and control of resources and activities, and impedes on the full development of their potential” (ibid). In so far as to include human rights language reflecting the UN documents, this declaration made specific mentions on the efforts to “fully implement the goals and commitments made related to eliminating violence against women and monitor their progress” (ibid). The document urged its signatories to ensure the “systematic research collection, analysis and dissemination of data” pertaining to the aforementioned theme, to develop mechanism which focused on “providing services to fulfill the needs of survivors, formulating and taking appropriate responses to offenders and perpetrators, understanding the nature and causes of violence against women and changing societal attitudes and behaviours” (ibid).

The document further elaborated on the various measures to protect women against violence, which included to “strengthen economic independence”, to “promote human rights and fundamental freedoms”, to “develop and/or improve existing legislative, educational, social measures and support services”, and to increase the “training of legal, judicial, enforcement officers, social workers and health personnel” (ASEAN 2004). The document also made a special note to encourage ASEAN member-states to strengthen “bilateral, regional and international cooperation for resource mobilization and technical exchange programmes”; it also echoed the 1988 declaration through its suggestion of supporting women advocacy and nongovernmental organizations, to enhance “collaborative relationships with these organizations, and with public and private sector institutions” (ibid). This declaration was more elaborative in its motive, and included more economically inclined suggestions, compared to the 1988 document. It was more transparent in its goals and offered more specific instances of how to

achieve them, aligned women with the region's development agenda, extending from the first declaration mentioned earlier, and explicitly included a human rights-based language that can be said to be a reflection of ASEAN increasing awareness and gradual compliance of international norms and behaviours.

c. Hanoi Declaration on the Enhancement of the Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children 2010

This document further embedded ASEAN's intentions to include women within its development discourse, by acknowledging its previous efforts of accepting international conventions towards eliminating violence against women, and strategically placed them as a segment of society to protect and develop as part of its overall ASEAN community framework. The declaration included children as part of its agenda – the grouping of women and children were considered to be especially susceptible to “vulnerable conditions”, though the document did not elaborate on what a ‘vulnerable condition’ was (ASEAN, 2010). The language of the document extended the same human rights-based sentiments as those in international conventions, another instances of normalizing international norms and behaviours regionally. Unlike the first declaration in 1988, this document was more extensive in its appeal for its signatories to strengthen and concretize its national mechanisms and bilateral and multilateral relations between member-states and with nongovernmental organizations to “promote gender equality, women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming” and “share information and best practice through the establishment of regional knowledge system”; it also mentioned the importance of “family resilience...and the capacity of families in meeting new challenges arising from rapid social economic and environmental/climate changes” (ibid).

Like the 2004 declaration, it also made a point to mention the economic wellbeing of women, but more thoroughly so, in suggesting to “undertake concrete measures to promote gender equality and women's participation in labour market, address gender-based occupation segregation as well as strengthen their economic skills” whilst also to “improve maternity protection in the workplace” (ASEAN, 2010). The gender equality dimension was also extended to children in suggesting the improvement of “the quality of and gender equality in education and school enrollment to children” (ibid). This document was more comprehensive in its intentions and goals, reflecting the evolution

of the association's development agenda and discourse over the decades. It included a more concrete direction in the association's development agenda, which can be said to complement the association's effort in establishing its ASEAN Community, having the aspiration to be "outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies" (ASEAN, 2003).

Plans of Action

ASEAN's plans of actions documents are manifestations of the rhetoric and intentions of the previously discussed declarations. Beyond looking at the language and discourse of development in the declarations, these plans of action provide a more detailed account of ASEAN's actions with regards to its development agenda. This section looks at the documents that reference women, though it should be noted that none of them are specifically about women's development; rather, women's advancement has been discussed along with other forms of socio-economic development and they are also collectively discussed as part of a larger group of vulnerable people, i.e. children and people with disabilities.

a. Hanoi Plan of Action 1998

Interestingly, its intentions to advance the position of women in the region did not take into effect until the Hanoi Plan of Action in 1998, almost decade after the declaration was made. The plan was drawn up in lieu of the economic crisis that had stuck the Asian region in 1997, and "recognized the need to address the current economic situation in the region", with the intention to "implement initiatives to hasten economic recovery and address the social impact of the global economic and financial crisis" (ASEAN, 1998, 2). The plan spanned between 1999 and 2004, and included the need to ensure "equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities" (5). Though the document mainly focused on the economic recovery on the region, specifically detailing the various actions in which its member-states should take to integrate its trade efforts, it also mentioned the need to "mitigate the social impact of the regional financial and economic crisis"; among its suggestions were the further strengthening of "ASEAN collaboration in combating the trafficking in, and crimes of violence against, women and children" (15) and the further implementation of "the

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international instruments concerning women”, correlated to its 2004 declaration on the issue (16). Women were barely mentioned beyond this, the only other instance of women’s advancement would be the suggestion to “intensify efforts of the ASEAN Network for Women in Skills Training to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged women to enter the work force” (ibid). The document framed women as a vulnerable group negatively impacted by the economic crisis, but also a group that could contribute to the economic development of the region, as seen in the suggestion to provide skills training.

b. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2009-2015

The ASCC blueprint was a more comprehensive plan of action by the association, with regards to the development of women. It specifically positioned women as part of its socio-cultural community, believing that the advancement of women would contribute to realizing the community as “people-centered and socially responsible” and a “caring and sharing society, which is inclusive and harmonious” (ASEAN, 2007, 1). The ASCC was split into five characteristics, namely human development, social welfare and protection, social justice and rights, ensuring environmental sustainability, building the ASEAN identity and narrowing the development gap. Women, along with children, and people with disabilities, were mentioned as segments of society to consider for protection and development in several of these characteristics. They were mentioned as part of human resource development, in which the blueprint suggested for greater access to education and skills development, while also promoting an intensification of “capacity building programmes to increase information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy” (3). It also urged its signatories to “create favourable conditions for women entrepreneurs, including providing at the national level, access to micro credit, technology, trainings, markets and social protection services” (5). Women were also mentioned in the context of protection from the “negative impacts of integration and globalization”, though only in terms of possible exploitation in Internet pornography (ASEAN, 2007, 6). Women were extensively mentioned in the “promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of women, children and persons with disabilities”, whereby previous declarations were referred to, reiterating previous suggestions to implement mechanisms that enhanced gender equality, while also including the promotion of “the percentage of women’s participation in all fields and at

all levels, including political, decision-making as well as socio-economic empowerment” (12). Like the Hanoi Plan of Action, this blueprint also had a strong emphasis on the assurance of women’s economic wellbeing, but also included the need for more women’s participation in public sphere.

c. ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) Plan of Action 2011-2015

This plan of action was the most comprehensive document addressing women’s advancement by ASEAN. The committee and subsequently, the plan were drawn up as a complement to the ASCC blueprint, as well as other declarations made by the association in previous years, not excluding those discussed in this chapter, with the purpose “to influence the various pillars of the ASEAN Community Blueprints particularly on the ASCC and the ASEAN Member States so that there will be visible, credible and strong gender mainstreaming inputs to government and inter- government policies, programs and processes” (ACW, 2012, 12). The document also referenced the Joint Declaration of the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in ASEAN in 2009, with close reference to the third goal – gender equality and women’s empowerment, as its main guide for producing credible suggestions and frameworks to achieve its purpose (3). The plan firstly made the reiteration to address various inadequacies involved in the protection of women, like to develop “more gender-responsive policies” to curb violence against women (VAW), to ensure better data collection and information dissemination on violence, to “strengthen institutional mechanisms and capacity to handle VAW” while evaluating “policies and programmes on the elimination of VAW”, as well as to promote better regional integration in eliminating VAW (ACW, 2012, 13). The plan also listed specific challenges (8-10) to the advancement of women in the region, these were:

- Age structure and women’s care and unpaid work
- Poverty and women’s care and unpaid work
- Maternal deaths and reproductive services
- HIV AIDS transmission
- Violence against women and sexual minorities
- Cultural attitudes and educational systems
- Inadequacy of sex disaggregated data
- Impact of global economic slowdown

To address the challenges, the plan then explained its “conceptual elements” that would assist in meeting them; they included the “recognition and application of international conventions of human rights”, to pursue “the complementation and integration of gender analysis and goals with other work programs and committed actions of the ASEAN”, and to apply “a more vigorous gender lens to a variety of political, economic and social issues” (14). It mentioned specifically the ASCC characteristics; as part of the human development characteristic, it suggested for a “more holistic and strengthened gender-sensitive curricula” in response to “persistent and new forms of gender-based discrimination in an era of globalization and economic integration” (ibid). For social welfare, it referenced the “realizing a set of expanded targets around MDGs”, as well as increasing “cooperation in microfinance” and microfinance institutions (15). It made general acknowledgements of the social justice and rights characteristics already mentioned in above, including ensuring better participation of women in political and decision-making positions, while suggesting to include the “gender perspective” in the issue of climate change and to also to mentioning “a focus on including art work and studies on women’s contribution to ASEAN arts and culture” as part of building the ASEAN identity (15). The plan had a monitoring and evaluation component to it, in which it briefly stated the importance of such mechanisms to ensure proper implementation; however these mechanisms were still “being considered by the relevant ASEAN sectorial bodies” for development and eventual implementation, and there had not been any updates on their progress since the publication of this document (16). Though the plan listed concrete challenges to women’s advancement, it clearly showed limitations to addressing them due to bureaucratic processes.

United Nations Development Program’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on gender equality and women’s empowerment

The MDG was adopted as part of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, during the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 (UN, 2000). The MDGs were eight development goals for its signatories to achieve by 2015, one of these goals included to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, or Goal 3 (UNDP, 2000). As part of the achieving Goal 3, UNDP distinguished four criteria in which to measure the level of advancement of women. These four were education, non-agriculture employment,

political representation and sexual and reproductive rights and they have been measured based on the disparities between genders (UNDP, n.d.). The MDG was referenced in the ACW Plan of Action, and many of ASEAN’s recent declarations, including the ones discussed above, have been inclined to incorporate human rights-based language and discourse into the issue of women’s development. Thus, a comparison to the MDG goal mentioned above would add to understanding the concerns ASEAN has for the advancement of women, but also to highlight some of the issues in which it has not addressed, particularly in its plans of action. The criteria would be used as a scoreboard to evaluate the extent to which ASEAN’s declarations and plans of action address and integrate international normative criteria for women’s advancement into its regional agenda.

Table 2.1. Table of Comparison between MDG Goal 3 Criteria and ASEAN Declarations

	Declaration 1988	Declaration 2004	Declaration 2010
Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-Agriculture employment	N/A	N/A	The document mentioned promoting “women’s participation in labour market, address gender-based occupation segregation as well as strengthen their economic skills” (n.p.)
Political representation	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual and Reproductive rights	N/A	The document mentioned briefly the need to train “health personnel” (n.p.)	The document briefly mentioned to “improve maternity protection in the workplace” (n.p.)

Table 2.2. Table of Comparison between MDG Goal 3 criteria and ASEAN Plans of Action

	Hanoi 1998	ASCC 2009-2015	ACW Plan of Action 2011-2015
Education	N/A	The document mentioned to promote greater access to education and skills development, while also promoting an intensification of “capacity building programmes to increase information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy” (3).	The document acknowledged inadequacies to education systems as a barrier to gender equality (8).
Non-Agriculture employment	The document mention the need to “intensify efforts of the ASEAN Network for Women in Skills Training to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged women to enter the work force” (n.p.)	The document mentioned the need to create favourable conditions for women entrepreneurs (5).	The document made mentioned of “age structure and women’s care and unpaid work” as a barrier to women’s empowerment (9). It also mentioned “poverty and women’s care and unpaid work” as part of the challenges to gender inequality (9). Also, it mentioned increasing “cooperation in microfinance” and microfinance institutions to strengthen

			women's economic wellbeing (15).
Political representation	N/A	The document mentioned the need to increase "the percentage of women's participation in all fields and at all levels, including political, decision-making as well as socio-economic empowerment" (12).	The document made mention of the need to increase women's participation in political and decision-making positions, as already mentioned in ASCC (15).
Sexual and reproductive rights	N/A	N/A	The document mentioned maternal deaths and reproductive services, and prevention of HIV and AIDS transmission (8).

Chapter Three

Reasons behind ASEAN's Women's Advancement

While Chapter two elaborately discusses the ways in which women are included as part of ASEAN's development agenda, this chapter hopes to discuss why they are included. There are several rationalizations for this inclusion; the chapter looks at the how the association rationalizes vulnerabilities in the context of the global economy, and how empowering women can subvert them. The push for women's advancement can also be an instance of how ASEAN and its member-states are trying to assimilate itself into the international society by adopting international conventions and norms; this exercise legitimizes the association as a viable entity, and leverages its member-states' credibility in the global political and economic stage. Lastly, women's advancement could be an exercise to subvert the certain colonial manifestations of suppression by restoring the women's place in the economy, which was previously marginalized due to the arrival of colonialism and subsequent systems of patriarchy.

Women's Vulnerability in the Market Economy and Economic Advancement

As mentioned in the Introduction, since the end of the Cold War, the association has had to reorient its purpose. Economic development became an overarching purpose for the region, with many declarations and subsequent actions to liberalize its trade and domestic markets; the "Southeast Asian Development Model" also saw the region rapidly integrating into the global market with the "overwhelming emphasis on growth as a goal" (Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002, 28). At the same time, ASEAN and its member-states also needed to reorient its notions of threat, as, unlike before, the post Cold War era came with threats that were less predictable and hence less manageable; the region reacted by ensuring that economic stability became one of the primary forms of security in the region (Carabello-Anthony, 2004). This rapid integration caused many global economic sectors to be outsourced into the region, like manufacturing, and this caused an exodus of women from the rural economy to join the assembly-line and to be part of the "global production systems", in which women became the source of cheap and flexible labour (Ong, 2010, 145). Flexible labour policies that epitomized profit making over labour protection allowed for the major increase in investments by foreign firms, and subsequently women ended up falling between the cracks of cost cutting for profit-making measures, in which women were paid less than men, and did not have adequate

health and safety protection at work (Resurreccion, 2009). Moreover, women became victims to labour migrant flows within the region, in which exploitation occurred within the processes of acquiring and maintaining cheap labour, leaving many women in highly precarious positions (Elias, 2010).

When the 1997 Economic crisis hit the region, economic stability became more of an imperative for the association and its member-states, and more so than before, rationalized the need to treat economic stability as a regional form of security. As an extension of this goal, ASEAN seemed to have understood how the processes of liberalization and integration had affected its women. In the ASEAN Third Report in Women's Advancement published in 2007, the association acknowledged the relative marginalization that occurred for women in the region, stating, "how the opening of domestic markets to the free flow of goods, services and investments are affecting the economics options of women" (39). Considering women made up half of the region's population, the report became an instance of understanding how its economic goals can affect various segments of its regional society, but at the same time, also understood how empowering them could "unleash their capabilities to contribute more meaningfully to the economy and the society as a whole" (Francisco, 2007, 107). Many of the plans of action discussed in the previous chapter mentioned the need for women to gain more access to education, skills development, micro financing, and entrepreneurship opportunities. The ACW Plan of Action also suggested for member-states to ensure more gender-responsive policies for the protection of women and to be more receptive towards gender-mainstreaming policies and issues into national and regional debates on development (ACW, 2012). ASEAN's many declarations and plans of action to empower women to contribute to the regional economy is an instance of understanding the need to ensure human security, by aiding in its advancement, to achieve its related and overall goal of economic stability.

However, with much of its intent to include women's advancement in the overall discourse of the region's development, ASEAN's logic still functioned within a "graduated sovereignty", privileging and nurturing certain segments of its regional society over others based on their direct contribution to the regional and global market economies (Ong, 2000, 58). ASEAN had, many times, been criticized as a highly bureaucratic institution, that privileged those that could directly contribute to its

economic development; hence political bureaucrats and business entrepreneurs were given more say and room to establish processes that were advantageous to them (Higgot & Nesadurai, 2002). This explains the relatively extensive and more detailed ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint, which highlighted various methods in which trade and business sectors can flourish in the region; the ASCC's plans of action for its disadvantaged target groups paled in comparison the economic community blueprint (ASEAN, 2007). When evaluated within this context, women can be seen as less significant in their contributions, hence less privileged in treatment and nurture; they were sporadically positioned in its many plans of action, mentioned in various contexts, but not definitively; the first declaration in 1988 which specifically mentions women was highly rhetorical, and laced with idealistic notions of development without placing much focus of the specific vulnerabilities that women were faced with. Subsequent declarations positioned women as the literal site of vulnerability, often positioning women as the object of violence, without specifying why violence occurred against them and how to subjugate violence methodically. In the context of the ASEAN community, women were placed with other vulnerable groups, like children and disabled people, making the notion of vulnerability a general one, simplifying vulnerable people based on how obviously disadvantaged they were. Furthermore, when women were discussed in the context of economics, it is discussed in general statements to ensure more integration in policies and the market, without providing substantial methods for suggesting how this could be executed efficiently. One can say that ASEAN was also trying to support industries specifically for women to be nurtured in, as opposed to ensuring successful gender mainstreaming of labour and market policies in established industries like manufacturing. In the 2007 report mentioned above, various highly-gendered industries were mentioned in relation to women, like tourism, domestic work and garment making; women were encouraged to develop skills and establish businesses within these sectors, but the report did not mention of the ways in which other sectors, that are not solely proliferated by women, have altered to include processes for women's empowerment (ASEAN, 2007).

ASEAN's Integration in International Society

Another reason for ASEAN's push towards women's advancement is its willingness to assimilate into the norms and behaviours of international society. Previously, the association was conceived to deter external threats from impeding on its' member-states

individual growth within the context of the Cold War. Each member-state was determined to ensure its economic and political stability according to their own notions of development, especially since three of the five original members, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (the other two being Thailand and Brunei) were newly independent states, and did not want to repeat the relative exploitation, as it had experienced during colonialism, that might occur while they worked on shaping their national agendas; this also accounted for the necessity to protect each member-states sovereignty and uphold the principle of non-interference and consensual decision-making mechanisms (Mohd. Sani & Aby Hara, 2013). After the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, ASEAN's member-states had relatively established their economies in the global market, and the association began to rationalize the need for a more legitimate existence within the international society to encourage more economic growth within the region (Dorsch & Mols, 2014). This could account for the adoption of human rights and development discourse within the overall regional discourse; by adopting international conventions and norms set by supranational entities like the UNDP Millennium Development Goals, and regionalizing certain aspects of international declarations like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ASEAN was trying to legitimize its existence through selective compliance. The association has not adopted all international conventions and declarations, but ASEAN has had little apprehension in agreeing to protect and advance women; based on its rigid principle of consensus building, women may have been one of the few overlapping concerns of which member-states agreed to address. This may be attributed to how visibly disadvantaged women were in the region, and how they have been exploited in lieu of the region's efforts to attain economic growth, as mentioned above.

The adoption of human rights and development language into the overall development discourse in the region also points ASEAN's eagerness to be an active participant in the global pursuit towards modernity. ASEAN increasing practice in mimicking the discourse of its more successful and development counterparts in the West, through adopting many of the conventions of which can be seen as the region's way of vying for legitimacy in its own notions of progress. It should be noted though that most of the language adopted in ASEAN declarations for women's advancement was culminated outside of the region's own processes of rationalization, and ASEAN members were not

privity to the cultivation of the discourse of human development that emerged during the Cold War, as member-states were preoccupied in individual state-making agendas (Ayoob, 2002). Instead ASEAN adopted the global/western discourse of economic development as a form of human development in its regional agenda; economic development became a natural, universal, culturally-neutral and transposable solution to the relative inequality faced by ASEAN women, generalizing and desensitizing vulnerabilities through its overarching solution of economic advancement, without having to further deconstruct the multi-dimensional layers of vulnerabilities that women might also be faced with (Kapoor, 2008). As already discussed, much of the development discourse on women centered around providing economic stability to advance the position of women; besides the 2004 declaration on the elimination of violence against women, which sought to emulate international discourse on the women's vulnerable position, all of the documents discussed mentioned some aspect of women's economic role in the region, and suggested to enhance it by widening their access to financing, and entrepreneurship activities, whilst also providing more skills for women to be productive the market economy.

This pursuit towards global integration has left ASEAN with the contradiction of wanting to progress towards the general notion of modernity, whilst still holding on to its distinct cultural or traditional notions of society; this subsequently signals a dimension of post-colonial anxiety of ASEAN's member-states (Kapoor, 2008). As discussed above, ASEAN's adoption of the international language and discourse on human development is a sign of its willingness to assimilate and integrate itself and its member-states into the wider international society, in its efforts to legitimize its existence. Yet, even though the adoption of human development discourse signals the evolution of its previously rigid state-centric principles, ASEAN is more concerned with the "utility maximization" its assimilation affords the region, to "help them secure their own political goals" rather than the overall goal of providing humanitarian relief and advancement (Davies, 2013, 208). This explains why its principles of non-intervention and non-interference are still upheld in spite of how they may impede ensuring women's advancement. Furthermore, ASEAN selectivity in its compliance to international norms and behaviours, as seen in its values of the ASEAN Community, is a reflection of how the region also wants to set itself apart of the rest of its international members. Whilst the international development discourse centres around the notion of

the individual, and the ways in which he/she must be protected and advanced in the global society, ASEAN provides an alternative to this by epitomizing the discourse of the family, and how individuals ultimately serve it; the woman also becomes the embodiment of the family and this is exemplified in many instances including the 2010 declaration, where women extend the importance of “family resilience ...and the capacity of families in meeting new challenges arising from rapid social economic and environmental/ climate changes” (ASEAN, 2010). ASEAN and its member-states both struggle with the need to consolidate inner cultural tensions with universal values; as seen in its official documents on women’s advancement, ASEAN is willing to rationalize the need for women’s economic advancement but does not rationalize it to the extent of treating them as individuals as international norms and behaviours are likely to do – instead ASEAN documents group and generalize them as part of a larger group of vulnerable people, using them as a non-controversial point of reference to assimilate itself into the international society.

Subverting Colonial Socio-Economic Transgressions

ASEAN’s move to include women as part of their development agenda could also be argued as a way for the region to subvert previous colonial socio-economic subordination of women. Historically, the position of women in commerce and other socio-economic sectors within the region were relatively equal and autonomous as compared to their position in contemporary context. Many anthropologists have documented this historical phenomenon, whereby women were active participants in the public sphere, engaged in commerce and trade alongside their male counterparts. Andaya (2006) noted how “local exchanges relied heavily on a female network” as men were preoccupied with labour and other forms of capital exchange; furthermore, while men engaged in long-distance trading and the “acquisition of knowledge, experience and the purchase of prestige items” abroad, it was the women in the region who ensured trade and commercial activities flourished (115). Local markets were rife with the presence of women, which “contained its own status hierarchies and even spatial arrangements” based on the success of female vendors (123). Women did not only have a relatively successful position in commerce and trade, but were also significant in other socio-cultural areas within the community - women were vessels of local knowledge related to health and culture; women were also given the equal, if not superior, authority in inheriting and distributing land ownership (ibid). Even though, the women’s position

was still gendered in terms of their activities, i.e. men were more likely to engage in long distance trade while women were more bounded to their commercial space like the “pasar” or market, the concept of gender was not as antagonistic, or dichotomized as contemporary manifestations would suggest, rather both genders functioned more often than not, to complement each other in the public sphere.

The arrival of colonial ideologies deconstructed the position of women in the region, according to religiously and politically established norms. The arrival of colonialism is various part of the Southeast Asian region signaled an “intensification of commerce, state building and territorial consolidation”, which led to the dichotomizing of gendered roles and positions. “Canonical orthodoxies”, informed by “Protestanism of western missionaries and colonial elites”, were transplanted into the region, and reorganized daily commercial activities, as well as re-interpreted the overall socio-economic and cultural discourse in the region (Peletz, 2009, 85). Part of the colonial re-constitution of the regional discourse was to question the centrality of women’s position in the region; significantly, there were many bureaucratic activities, based on scientific forms of governance, that were exercised by colonial administrators which privileged male participation and presence in public and private spheres while marginalizing women. One example was the use of the written document – this caused the displacement many women from their inherited land because colonial administrators were more likely to register land in the name of the male head of the house as opposed to the woman (ibid). Moreover, the increase in foreign traders in the region also brought about an overall increase in competition for trade and commerce, but also an increase in the commodification of sex, which forced women to precarious commercial endeavours like engaging in prostitution, “concubinage” and temporary marriages (96). Peletz further explained how the marginalization and the exacerbation of gendered binaries became even more embedded once the region’s political and religious elites tried to rationalize and assimilate the region’s culture and religion according to the “puritanical ethos and the sex/gender binaries and hierarchies” of western and Christian colonial traditions (93).

As explained above, the colonial presence in the region not only redefined what gender was, but also re-established the gendered environments in the region, in which women were previously engaged in with relative success, but had since been called in to

question of their overall significance. When ASEAN was established, many of the member-states were newly independent and recently decolonized. The administrative ideologies, and bureaucratic practices were very much embedded in the systems of governance and women were still subordinated by consequence. Thus, when ASEAN decided to acknowledge the importance of women's advancement in the region, it was an act of subversion against the "imposition of European patriarchal relationships that presupposed the universal subordination of women" which had framed women's socio-economic position (Acosta-Belen & Bose, 1990, 307). The association's documents discussed in the previous chapter addressed the relative subordination caused by gendered policies that have been naturalized since the colonial era, and call for member-states to be more receptive towards their gendered composition (as seen in the 2012 ACW plan of action). The documents also strongly positioned women's advancement as being contingent upon their economic success. This mirrored the historical socio-economic and cultural position of women prior to colonialism, where women had a more equal presence in commerce and trade, along with other significant contributions, like being the bedrock of a resilient family, and a caring regional community. ASEAN's documents specifically mentioned the need to enhance women's economic participation via skills development and micro financing for businesses, all of which point to the reclaiming of the women's historical position in the region. Consequentially women become the embodied site of regional progression; making women part of the human development agenda was not only an exercise to advance their position, but more so to modernize all forms of traditional and backwardness in the region as compelled by the discourse of development – to advance the ASEAN woman is to advance the region (Scott, 1995).

However it is imperative to not overstate ASEAN's efforts to subvert colonial gendered manifestations. Even though it had been explained above, of women's relatively equal and autonomous socio-economic positions in the region, there were many other regional and local socio-cultural factors that insinuated and embedded the gendered dichotomies in the region, sans colonial/external influence. It was not say that these factors were crippling the ways in which colonial influence had exacerbated the position of women, but regional and local cultures still very much positioned women in relation to men; a woman's social status was always contingent upon her husband's, and economic power did not automatically translate to superior social status; but arguably, colonialism, the

processes of state making and assimilation into international society have exacerbated this binary further, instead of resolving them (Brenner, 1995). The local dichotomies were extended in contemporary discourse as exemplified in various ways; one would be the fact that women were not given the authority or autonomy to define their vulnerabilities; instead their positions were evaluated in opposition to their male counterparts, and men were never addressed within the abuser-victim paradigm (Sarmiento, 2012). Another example would be the way in which women were generalized as a group in the region, “represented as undifferentiated, homogenous, without a face or name” (445). Noticeably, ASEAN also did not address the complicity of other regional and local socio-cultural ideologies and practices, which reiterated the subordination of women, instead its documents concentrated on the contemporary reconstitution of women in a specific and desired ways like focusing on the more culturally neutral and transposable economic advancement to ensure women’s empowerment (Rajan, 1993).

Conclusion

ASEAN's declarations were progressive in their understanding and subsequent inclusion of women's advancement in the region's development agenda. From the first declaration in 1988, the association broadened its concerns for the position of women by incorporating more specifically the areas that needed to be addressed to ensure their protection and development. These included:

- To eliminate violence
- To ensure women's economic productivity and independence
- To appeal to signatories to cooperate in producing systems and mechanisms to promote gender equality

Whereas the plans of action discussed earlier reiterated similar themes with regards to the protection and advancement of women, while also addressing new areas of development not mentioned in the declarations. Themes that were reoccurring:

- The elimination of violence
- To provide skills training
- To increase women's exposure to political and decision-making positions
- To increase the amount of women entrepreneurs
- To promote regional cooperation to integrate mechanisms for women's advancement

Much of the discourse that surrounded the advancement of women by ASEAN were adopted and integrated from international discourse on human development. The thesis found three reasons for ASEAN's recent initiative to include women as part of its human development agenda. Firstly, the inclusion was an admittance of how processes of integrating regional market economies into the global market have made women vulnerable; ASEAN's documents signaled a need to assist its women to advance economically to ensure their protection from future vulnerabilities that manifest from increased processes of global economic integration. The regional discourse on women's advancement also indicated ASEAN's gradual willingness to participate and integrate into international society; by mimicking the discourse on development and producing declarations and plans of actions, ASEAN gradually legitimized its position in the international society through assimilation. Moreover, the exercise of discussing the

advancement of women and the intentions to subvert their vulnerabilities can be said to be ASEAN's and its member-states' attempt to delineate past colonial socio-economic transgressions in the region, which left the region's women in a more vulnerable position compared to before colonial presence.

All of the rationalities above came with limitations; ASEAN only rationalized the advancement of its women in so far as to ensure they contribute more fully in the regional economy, but with an understanding that women would not be able to contribute as fully as the business and corporate sectors. This was manifested in the ways in which women were generally defined as vulnerable, without discussing more thoroughly how and why vulnerabilities affected them, while also suggesting the widening of economic opportunities according to gendered industries like textile and tourism, without giving more thought as to how to ensure the implementation of gender-mainstreaming processes in established, male-dominated industries. ASEAN's efforts to emulate and integrate itself and its member-states into the international society through championing women's advancement also came with limitations, in that it was only willing to comply to certain forms of discourse on human development while ignoring others – ASEAN was willing to submit to protecting the position of women but were not likely to treat them as individuals but as part of a larger group of vulnerable people; furthermore, ASEAN related women's advancement purely based on economic assurance - this diluted the particular socio-cultural struggles women endured, beyond economic marginalization. Lastly, though ASEAN's women's advancement discourse could be said to be a source of subverting colonial socio-economic transgressions, in which colonial processes and ideologies left women in the region less significant and more marginalized, ASEAN had not addressed the extent to which local and regional cultures also dichotomized gender in the public sphere, and its documents still positioned women in relation to men, as opposed to transcending the discourse beyond gendered binaries.

Though ASEAN's initiative to talk about women in the region and their position is commendable, the association falls short on discussing how and why women became vulnerable; most of its rationale is based on economic understandings, however it fails to include socio-cultural factors, that are highly local, into the discussion. While it is understandable why the association prefers to abide to its rigid principles, partly due to

post-colonial anxiety, ASEAN's insistence on being state-centric or community driven, while upholding the principle of non-interference, leaves those who are in need of intervention for protection and advancement displaced. Even though there has been a stark improvement in the ways in which ASEAN discusses its women in its formal documents, the intentions and plans to act merely become rhetorical if mechanisms within the association are not willing to transform ASEAN's suggestions into commands, or legislations.

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