Article

Queering Solidarity: Civil Society at the Fringes of ASEAN Regionalism and Alternatives for the LGBTQ+

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Abstract

The neoliberal politics governing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) diplomacy has pushed this intergovernmental body to further close its doors from civil society. This deficit of political will to engage substantially with civil society puts the member-states' credibility into question as they proclaim to work for a "people-oriented, people-centered" regionalism. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and individuals (LGBTQ+) not falling into the categorical matrix of capitalist social reproduction—that of the heterosexual family—continue to face discrimination, harassment, and even death under the ineptness of Southeast Asian governments and ASEAN as an intergovernmental body. Marginalized sectors, such as workers, farmers, indigenous peoples (IPs), and women, share similar and differing plights. The current situation, thus, deserves a rethinking at the onset of this already shrinking democratic space for civil society.

This paper champions the possibility of an alternative regional integration that emerges from the collective efforts of diverse Southeast Asian peoples and formations against the hegemonic development paradigm, which has left the LGBTQ+ far behind. In criticizing ASEAN's heteronormative neoliberal framework, the researchers suggest that solidarity

with other sectors must be and is becoming central to LGBTQ+ and sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC)–based advocacy in Southeast Asia using the frame that links neoliberalism and homophobia. This paper closes by showcasing cases of alternative practices that contribute to realizing an alternative regionalism that emphasizes civil society, including and celebrating the LGBTQ+.

Keywords:

alternatives, ASEAN, civil society, LGBTQ+, queer, alternative regionalism

Introduction

In 2020, a 42-year-old trans woman, Mira, was burned to death in Jakarta, Indonesia. Decades after pivotal lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) activism, which includes the mainstreaming of such socio-political-cultural identity, a trans woman was—under broad daylight—set on fire by a group of men (Fachriansyah 2020). This is not the only case of sociocultural denial, discrimination, harassment, and violence inflicted on persons on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC). In 2014, Filipina Jennifer Laude was brutally murdered by 19-year-old Private First-Class Joseph Scott Pemberton under the auspices of the Visiting Forces Agreement between the Philippines and the United States of America. In 2018, a 32-year-old trans woman was beaten to death by youths aged 16 to 21 in Klang District, Selangor, Malaysia, upon the premise of theft. Perpetrators of these human rights violations reason that their prejudice is rooted in deep-seated beliefs sustained by "traditions" and "norms" in Southeast Asia (Capaldi 2020, 313; Dalidjo 2021, 78–79).

More inexcusable are the unsatisfactory responses from Southeast Asian governments and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) against these crimes. Often, religious beliefs have been invoked as grounds to deny people of diverse sexual SOGIESC fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to free expression, political association, family, health, and the like (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus [ASC]

2017, 5). Disavowal from gender stereotypes and sexual norms is always met with harsh criticism and religious intolerance (6). Cultural identities have also been used in the region to deny the existence of the LGBTQ+ (6–7). Despite this challenge, pride groups—so named for their celebration of dignity, equality, and increased visibility of LGBTQ+ persons—in the region emerge to lobby for human rights with the support of civil society organizations (CSOs) from the grassroots level to the regional.

The regional networks blossoming especially in the last two decades from cross-national campaigns among SOGIESC-based organizations prepare a fertile ground where advocacy that cuts across identity markers can be cultivated. This study reflects on this possibility by championing the praxis of an alternative regionalism that emerges out of the collective efforts of Southeast Asian peoples and formations in contesting the hegemonic development paradigm, which leaves the LGBTQ+ behind. As economics, trade, and investment become central in ASEAN affairs with neoliberalism establishing as the hegemon, this study uses international political economy theories and perspectives in analyzing Asian regionalism and regional institution building to underscore the dynamism of scholarly investigation and a "transformative scholarship" which "theorizes from below" and whose end goals are social change and people empowerment (Beeson and Stubbs 2012, 6–7; Tungpalan and Bawagan 2015, 73–88). In critiquing ASEAN and its concomitant heteronormative superstructure, we suggest that multisectoral solidarity must be and is becoming central to Southeast Asian SOGIESC-based advocacy by framing in Marxist and other radical queer perspectives that link neoliberalism and homophobia. It employs "praxical reasoning" through the action-reflection-action approach in field research (Hobbs and Wright 2006 in Tungpalan and Bawagan 2015) to fortify "being there" as a data-gathering method where "context and process variables are viewed as equally important as quantifiable outcomes" (Tungpalan and Bawagan 2015, 87).

This paper challenges ASEAN and its human rights mechanism for prioritizing profitmaking policy over concerns faced by peoples on the ground, of which the LGBTQ+ experience is part. Although we are also aware that conservatism and religious values may impinge on LGBTQ+ rights in ASEAN, the paper primarily assumes a political–economic approach in critiquing ASEAN regionalism. This paper

also casts doubt on adopting a human rights discourse as the sole mechanism for LGBTQ+ advocacy. Thus, it closes by showcasing three cases of alternatives, emerging from solidarity, that propose novel political, social, and cultural practices. In documenting all these, the authors envision the continued movement toward a Southeast Asian counterhegemonic regionalism that emphasizes civil society, including and celebrating the LGBTQ+ (Nesadurai 2012).

Queerness as an international phenomenon

Internationalizing queer. A now multifarious term, "queer" has been articulated by activists, scholars, and policymakers to encompass defiance, celebration, and the refusal of limitations. Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick understands the word as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality are not made (or cannot be made) to signify monolithically" (1993, 8). It embodies an invasion, an unsettling of binarized sexes and genders, which have been frozen in history through exercises of hegemonic power of states or regional bodies.

This paper crafts a critique and proposal through a lens that recognizes the link between internationalization (or regionalization) and queer experiences. Queer-centric international studies "primarily investigate[s] how queer subjectivities and queer practices—the 'who' and the 'how' that cannot or will not be made to signify monolithically in relation to gender, sex, and/or sexuality—are disciplined, normalized, or capitalized upon by and for states, nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], and international corporations" (Weber 2014, 597).

Internationalization is a linchpin in the history of the queer liberation and rights movement throughout the world. It was in 1978 that the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) was established, launching the queer affair into internationalization. ILGA adopted a human rights approach to their battle, undergoing institutionalization and creating regional groups throughout the seven continents (Kollman and Waites 2009). LGBTQ+ liberation movements followed this trend worldwide. The internationalization of the struggle is not without its victories. In the last decade, two high-profile documents, the Declaration of Montreal and the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in

Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity were drafted and signed by global LGBTQ+ activists and other nonstate actors (Corrêa and Muntarbhorn 2007; Kollman and Waites 2009; Yulius 2018).

A concurrent project of internationalization, (Söderbaum 2012, 12) regionalism is "a state-led project that promotes a definable geographic area by means of the development of specific institutions and strategies" (Beeson and Stubbs 2012, 1). In other words, it is a top-down policy of national governments to coordinate activities in a particular part of the globe. Formal regional integration—which is led by an interstate body such as ASEAN—seeks to advance "regional economic and security cooperation on a range of issues" (3). Regionalism, however, can be contested in that it is not only state actors who define the scope of a region and the objectives of regional integration (Bøås et.al. 2003, 21 cited in Söderbaum 2012). As will be shown in this study, even non-state actors can "build effective regional institutions and promote regional cooperation and even integration" (Beeson and Stubbs 2012, 5).

Coming out in a neoliberal world. Profit, as will be shown later, trumps human struggles and experiences, including queer lives. Interestingly, it has been assumed by some that the freedom of the market, the feminization of labor outside the factory, and the eight-hour workday under late, multinational capitalism paved the way for the frustration of the nuclear family and thus, queer liberation. However, as John D'Emilio (1993, 474) sharply explains, capitalism "needs to push men and women into families, at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers. The elevation of the family to ideological preeminence guarantees [. . .] heterosexism and homophobia."

Capital accumulation threatens lives, including those of the LGBTQ+, given its dependence on gendered labor production and social reproduction. LGBTQ+ rights, such as same-sex marriage, may be celebrated in "developed" countries but only insofar as a pool of heteronormatively gendered labor is available in peripheral nations, such as Vietnam and the Philippines in Southeast Asia.

This phenomenon persists under the auspices of neoliberalism. In this late 20th-century conception that adopts a process of creative destruction, institutions, firms, medium- to small-scale industries, cooperatives, and communities throughout the world must perish

so that those of superpower countries may thrive vigorously and weather the spasmodic crises of capital failure (Harvey 1976). Neoliberalism, Peter Drucker (2018) explains, bolsters the role of the market, which intensifies the growth of the casualization of wage labor and the informal sector in the developing world. Attached to this phenomenon is the whole exclusion package of transgender people from most sectors of formal employment. Having been pushed to the wall, queer communities must therefore double their hard work to meet their necessities.

The sexual dimension of neoliberal globalization never acquired much explicit attention in official development policy that generally positions the heterosexual or nuclear family (husband, wife, and children) both as a provider of and a beneficiary of market-based economic growth (Capaldi 2018, 327; Drucker 2018). This reality has only encouraged the underrepresentation or invisibility of the LGBTQ+ peoples because they do not fit into the normative gender and sexual categories in the dominant development narrative subsumed into the process of production and capital accumulation. When this policy turns its gaze into the private sphere, it only imagines the heterosexual, nuclear family as the linchpin of economic growth. Stevi Jackson gives shape to this critique of the LGBTQ+ rights activism: "[Heteronormativity] is taken as the standard on which human rights are founded and hence the issue of rights is posed in terms of equality *with* heterosexuals" (1998, 70). This paper decisively follows these critiques by deviating from the widely accepted discourse of human rights believed to be directly oppositional to the masculinized episteme of the neoliberal state.

Interrogating the "ASEAN Way" and ASEAN's human rights mechanism

The dilemma of the ASEAN Way. ASEAN was first convened in August 1967 in Bangkok by five male foreign ministers—those of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—hailed as its "Founding Fathers"[1] (ASEAN, n.d.). Its inaugural objectives express a high preoccupation with poverty eradication, structural adjustments, growth, intra-ASEAN dispute, and an end to Communist Party-led insurgencies in the region influenced by Cold War U.S. Red Scare propaganda shrouded by the slogan of building regional peace and stability (Eccleston, Dawson, and McNamara 1998, Söderbaum

2012). As a model of regional integration, ASEAN has been lauded to have benefitted economic and sociocultural cooperation comparable even to that of the European Union (Idris and Kamaruddin 2019, 2). By 2019, ASEAN has stood as the third-largest economy in Asia and seventh globally because of its promotion of peace and stability across member states (2–3).

However, it must be noted that ASEAN's socioeconomic "growth" and "regional peace" operate through a neoliberal framework, where foreign direct investments and multinational corporations target countries in the region for profit (8). Thus, ASEAN saw Communists as a challenge to said development and peace paradigms given its intensification in Southeast Asia following the Communist victories in Indochina (Soon 1976; Söderbaum 2012). Collins (2008, 315) stressed that ASEAN's history, "first and foremost an Association for the elite," revealed the centrality of state security as a way of safeguarding their bureaucracy.

In 2017, fifty years after its inauguration, the ASEAN 10-member states announced its success of coming together as an intergovernmental organization in the developing world (ASEAN, n.d.). It has determinedly trodden its "ASEAN Way" or state-to-state conduct that is "governed by a set of informal, procedural norms emerged through repeated practice, consensus decision making, non-confrontational and deliberative style of interaction" (Nesadurai 2008, 228). This ASEAN Way consequently "supported a narrow elite-centered and sovereignty-bound framework of regionalism confined to intergovernmental contracts" (Acharya 2003, 380). These norms of sovereignty, non-interference, and the ASEAN diplomacy of "noncoercive, consultative and consensus-seeking interactions and decision-making" disallow this elite intergovernmental body to openly discuss "sensitive issues with domestic political implications such as democratization, marginalization, exclusion, rights, social justice," which on the contrary, are central to the CSO discourse (Nesadurai 2012, 166). One primary reason why ASEAN cannot simply abandon its notion of non-interference is the sensitive element of poverty and oppression discourse that will intervene on members' domestic policy (Collins 2008; Langlois et al. 2017; Weiss 2021).

Collins (2017) explains that ASEAN's rule of thumb is not to impinge on domestic affairs and politics of each member-state even when national policy implies gross human rights violations. This consensus-based diplomacy safely guarantees that no decision could be made against outright opposition, to enable the elite to be at ease with one another. Thus, ASEAN has moments of silence to the many human rights abuses, inclusive of LGBTQ+ cases. Beyond its discomforts in dealing with the issue, ASEAN holds back its commitment to recognizing LGBTQ+ rights as human rights that must be protected. The regional LGBTQ+ rights group ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) explained that this inaction stems from the putative yet contested belief that SOGIESC equality is alien to the region's local culture and history, and therefore departs from ASEAN values (see Langlois 2014; Weiss 2021).

CSOs' demands for ASEAN accountability substantially target these non-interference and consensus decision-making assertions that will otherwise entail a dramatic reorientation of ASEAN's "reason for existence" (Collins 2008, 315). Various LGBTQ+ groups in the region recently mentioned that Southeast Asian states generally have a low rate of ratification of international human rights instruments (see table 1) and insufficient support to LGBTQ+ rights as reflected in the region's voting record regarding the establishment of the United Nations Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (UN IESOGI). Out of the 11 countries in the region, only Cambodia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam voted in favor of the establishment (see table 2) (Destination Justice 2018).

Table 1: Southeast Asian States' Ratification of Relevant Human Rights Instruments

Country	ICCPR	OP-ICCPR	OP2-ICCPR	ICESCR	OP-ICESCR	CEDAW	OP-CEDAW	CAT
Brunei	No	No	No	No	No	2006	No	2015 (s)
Cambodia	1992	2004(s)	No	1992	No	1992	2010	1992
Indonesia	2006	No	No	2006	No	1984	2000 (s)	1998
Laos	2009	No	No	2007	No	1981	No	2012

Malaysia	No	No	No	No	No	1995	No	No
Myanmar	No	No	No	2015 (s)	No	1997	No	No
Philippines	1986	1989	2007	1974	No	1981	2001	1986
Singapore	No	No	No	No	No	1995	No	No
Thailand	1996	No	No	1999	No	1985	2000	2007
Timor-Leste	2003	No	2003	2003	2010 (s)	2003	2003	2003
Vietnam	1982	No	No	1982	No	1982	No	2015

(s) signed only, no ratification

Source: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard" (as of September 9, 2016), cited in Destination Justice 2018, 214

Table 2: Southeast Asian States' Votes regarding Establishing a UN IESOGI

Country Vote	(Yes/No/Abstain)
Brunei	No
Cambodia	Yes
Indonesia	No
Laos	Did not vote
Malaysia	No
Myanmar	Abstain
Philippines	Abstain *
Singapore	No
Thailand	Yes
Timor-Leste	Yes
Viet Nam	Yes

Note: The Philippine government in 2019 changed its position to Yes when the UN HR Council voted on the extension of the mandate of the UN IESOGI.

Source: GayNZ.com, cited in Destination Justice 2018, 215

The AICHR as a paper tiger. ASEAN operates its own human rights mechanisms through the ASEAN Intergovernmental

Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), which has the mandate to address human rights issues in the region under international law (Collins 2018; Capaldi 2020). Although it has a few independent-minded representatives in its roster who are serious in pursuing this mandate, the AICHR remains ineffective in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, mainly influenced by ASEAN's non-interference principle and emphasis on consensus (Langlois 2014; Piromya 2019). Since its inception in 2009, AICHR cannot implement its plans and decisions because it is the member states or national governments which should comply with human rights. There are three missing fundamental elements of human rights protection in its operations: (1) a process or procedure for receiving complaints, (2) the right and facility to investigate such complaints, and (3) the capacity to provide remedies (Collins 2018).

Pride movements and LGBTQ+ activists across the region mobilized by ASC have had sporadic meetings with the AICHR because several spirited AICHR representatives support SOGIESC-based advocacies. The void, however, is AICHR's protection mechanism for SOGIESC equality and LGBTQ+ rights (Destination Justice 2018). A passive "wait-and-see" position has become the "official position" of the AICHR—and ASEAN in general—in responding to the conflicts that arise between pro- and anti-equality formations in the region (Weiss 2021, 202; Yulius 2018). Weiss (2021, 198) also points out that the languaging of the AICHR is potentially "slippery" as it sidesteps the cultural "messiness" of sexuality and gender in determining rights, such as marriage. Everyone has the right to marry, but does this apply to *all* couplings?

Interrogating human rights. Today, it is generally accepted by many CSOs that sex and gender intersect with other realms of positionality such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, geographical location, and citizenship (ASC 2017). Nevertheless, caution must be made, as big-time non-government organizations (NGOs) and global institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund "seek to shape and deploy information, symbols, and expertise to frame [issues] in ways that suit their purposes best" (Kollman and Waites 2009, 9). Whereas these institutions have made significant contributions in the queer liberation movement (the ILGA, case in point), feminist and queer specialists have launched criticisms against the rhetoric developed and utilized by these institutions: human

rights. To Jackson, "the issue of rights is posed in terms of equality with heterosexuals" (1998, 70). To Seckinelgin, same-sex marriage laws and other gender equality legislations lobbied around the world by NGOs and other institutions "[tie] recognition to specific categories and [imply] that these categories are universal and natural [thus] human rights norms limit sexual diversity and positive recognition of sexual difference" (quoted in Kollman and Waites 2009, 9).

Human rights discourse, in other words, may miss the point that "homosexualities will inevitably be regulated, oppressed and stigmatized while heterosexuality retains its privileged position as the unquestioned, institutionalized cultural norm" (Jackson 1998, 74). It also blankets over diverse gender identities and the granting of self-autonomy to determine one's gender identity and expression. Non-state players seem to have no other way but to lobby for queer liberation *through identifiable categories*—the *human*—which defeats the purpose. Yet, the focus on rights both limits the diversity of queerness, which is its raison d'être, and depoliticizes the movement by leaving oppression and heterosexual privilege—chained to the economic necessity/fiction of "family" within capitalist production—unquestioned (Engels 2000, 42).

Indeed, human rights are a process and a product of social movements. Seventy years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly, its claim of universality has been consistently challenged to benefit ruling interests. Hegemonic state actors have configured the human to stipulate deep-seated bigoted notions of what is "human," which may exclude the diversity of the LGBTQ+ sector (Langlois et al. 2017; Yulius 2018). "While all human beings are deemed born naturally free endowed with equal rights, the very definition of human itself in practice is not always neutral and hence, dynamic" (Yulius 2018). "Human rights," as mobilized by neoliberal institutions such as the ASEAN, have thus only relegated the sector's specific needs and experiences into an inferior status within the mainstream human rights movements.

Understanding and gendering the ASEAN agenda

This troubling and unjust inaction of ASEAN is intricately knitted to its heteronormative economic pursuits. The evolution of ASEAN

mirrors its heavy preference for a gender-blind regional economic integration. In fact, the unbridled union of the "ASEAN Way" and the heteronormative vision for economic integration has compromised the reputation of this regional body in the face of civil society even as ASEAN saw it as their "competence power" (Nesadurai 2008, 235). Civil society criticized ASEAN's privileging of neoliberal economies over other sociopolitical norms. Homeland security (of states and regimes) was preferred over the security of the people (Acharya 2003; Nesadurai 2008).

ASEAN Economic Integration. Through the years, CSOs witness the deepening of ASEAN regionalism (Nesadurai 2012). In 1978, ASEAN took the advantage of the Cold War to construct its regional economic cooperation when it initiated the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference as a single corporate entity. In 1994, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was formed as the first multilateral security forum (Beeson and Stubbs 2012; Nesadurai 2008). Meanwhile, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was formed in 1992 to attract foreign direct investments to a single, geographical economic space that is Southeast Asia. Although there were internal struggles among ASEAN states to balance liberalization policies with their domestic economic interests, such formations demonstrated the beginning of a long-term goal for regional liberalization known later as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which aspires to create an integrated and singular market and production base to concede to the demands of the 21st-century global economy (Nesadurai 2008; Nesadurai 2012). The present-day enthusiasm over new generation trade deals reflects this economic goal.

ASEAN in 2003 pledged to establish the ASEAN Community (Nesadurai 2008) and materialized it in 2015, comprising the AEC, along with the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), to chart its regional integration direction. Dovetailing these three pillars was the adoption of the *ASEAN Community Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together* and the three corresponding Blueprints that extensively discussed the content of each of these pillars. Among the three pillars, prominence was on the AEC as manifested in the ASEAN Integration Report 2019, which claimed to be building on the success of the first AEC Blueprint that culminated in 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat 2019). Rights of business through increased protection for investors and corporations were

reflected in the intellectual property rights. But provisions on human rights and protection of peoples from all forms of discrimination, abuse, and corporate crimes because of ASEAN's commitment to this neoliberal heteronormative trading were unwritten (ACSC/APF 2018; Langlois et al. 2017; Weiss 2021).

The pursuit for a global ASEAN that underscores "open regionalism" has been more evident in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a larger free trading deal being claimed as an "ASEAN-led framework for regional trade architecture" (ASEAN Secretariat 2019, 168). The RCEP is a new-generation free trade agreement being spearheaded by ASEAN with Australia, South Korea, Japan, India, New Zealand, and China.[2] It seeks to cover regional cooperation in the trade of goods and services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property rights, competition policy, and dispute settlement, among others (Purugganan 2017). Looking closely into this ambitious mega-deal, however, it is more than just market competition but a battle over trade rules—who gets to set the rules and whose interests should be favored or protected by these rules (Purugganan 2017). Although ASEAN asserted its centrality in the negotiations, it cannot match the economic size and power of its trading partners in terms of Gross Domestic Product (Purugganan 2019).

People's movements have criticized the transparency of the negotiations which were done with very limited public consultation and where results of the negotiating texts have yet to be released for public scrutiny (Purugganan 2019; Univerity of Hong Kong Law and Technology Centre 2017). And because massive public consultations were shunned during the negotiation process (except for those initiated by civil society), not many among the marginalized sectors such as the LGBTQ+ are aware of the repercussions of this trade deal (Purungganan 2019). The RCEP agreement leads to worsening inequality and stronger corporate power, which are core issues affecting the LGBTQ+ peoples.

As the AEC progresses through the RCEP, the missing part however is in fulfilling the social agenda. ASEAN's Socio-Cultural Pillar underscores the national security framework, deviating from the CSO's centrality on rights-based and human security approach (Nesadurai 2012). Notably, the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/

ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) saw a de facto downgrading of its status before ASEAN as the mention of "ACSC" in the 2009 version of the Socio-Cultural Blueprint's Chapter E [Building ASEAN Identity Section E4- Engagement with the Community] was removed from the 2015 version (in reference to Vision 2025). The latest document instead just simply refers to civil society and government engagements (Lopa 2016).

The AEC is therefore fashioned to look as if it prioritizes peoples' welfare. However, its details unveil the prejudice on business and multinationals while its spirit has been nothing but a race to the bottom with domestic and global capital (Santiago 2015). The ASEAN language of market through AEC's neoliberal character heightens the yawning gap between ASEAN's richest and those still grappling for development as it endlessly puts primacy on competition and productivity but fails to integrate the principles of human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability (ACSC/APF 2017, Nesadurai 2008).

Demanding for regional democratization and gender justice would therefore require investigation of the political and economic interplay in ASEAN as the world market increasingly puts pressure to this body. This phenomenon is bolstered by *and* bolsters a sociocultural structure that solicits tacit consent for such inclination towards capital accumulation (Dalidjo 2021; Yulius 2018). Considering ASEAN's deliberate exclusion of LGBTQ+ discrimination and SOGIESC-based violence issues, a sociocultural code that decides which sex's concerns matter more than those of others must be operating in ASEAN's model of regionalism. Its history has established that ASEAN per se is an institutional product of a system that reproduces heteronormative politics.

Searching for the peoples in ASEAN's regionalism

Frustrations of CSOs over ASEAN's model of regionalism and the compromised space for dialogue through the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA) organized by ASEAN-ISIS, a network of think tanks, pushed them to organize their own regionalism (Gerard 2013). Until 2009, APA was supposed to be a platform that bridges ASEAN and civil society, termed "participatory regionalism," which features the nexus between governments and CSOs (Acharya 2003, 382). However,

CSO participants criticized the lack of independence of ASEAN–ISIS members from their governments, which resulted from the structured boundaries of CSO participation in APA through their own selection process that became a source of tension (Gerard 2013). APA highlighted the differing views of organizers and CSOs, especially the former's support for the AEC creation, a stark contrast to the CSO position (Chandra 2006 cited in Gerard 2013). Chandra (2009 cited in Nesadurai 2012) stressed that although CSO participation in APA was diverse, there was an air of reluctance by preferring to attend only the opening and closing ceremonies.

The ACSC/APF, the largest annual gathering of civil society in the region that engages on ASEAN issues, becomes the turning point for the evolution of an alternative regionalism (Nesadurai 2012; Gerard 2013). Despite socioeconomic strides afforded by ASEAN's regional model, organizations participating in the ACSC/APF criticize ASEAN for falling short in addressing issues faced by marginalized populations. The ACSC/APF reinforces the thesis that although regionalism is clearly a political project, having ASEAN states taking the lead in regional institution-building in Asia, the construction of regionalism is not necessarily state-led as states are not the singular political players working within and around a regional project (Bøås et al. 2003 cited in Söderbaum 2012; Beeson and Stubbs 2012). Current scholars have identified several regionalism projects presenting a very different foundation for theorizing regionalism (Söderbaum 2012). This alternative regionalism discourse, championed by the LGBTQ+, takes flight from the intergovernmentalist approaches favored mostly by IR scholars who perceive regionalism as an inter-state bargaining process (Hoffman 1995; Moravsik 1998 cited in Beeson and Stubbs 2012).

Marking itself as a radical space after being pushed to the fringes of the ASEAN integration process, the ACSC/APF made a collective stand disputing ASEAN's claims of progress by declaring that there has been no positive outcome nor historical milestone to celebrate with the heedless exclusion of civil society, the neglect of peoples' voices, and the rise of authoritarian regimes that shrink peoples' political space to demand state accountability (ACSC/APF 2017; ACSC/APF 2018).

The ACSC/APF regularly presents its counternarrative through the annual conference statement. Disappointingly, ASEAN has never substantially addressed the litany of demands within these statements. This scenario found a repeat in 2019 when ASEAN leaders failed to meet a consensus for an interface with ACSC/APF in Bangkok, Thailand. This failure only exposed ASEAN's "controlled partnership" preference, which only deals with the concerns of its self-appointed representatives and business groups (Auethavornpipat 2019; Boonlert and Mala 2019; Sutthichaya 2019). ASEAN's refusal to talks to CSOs also demonstrated its compromise to Thailand's military leadership and its suppression of activism (Auethavornpipat 2019).

Historically, the latest ASEAN–CSO interface occurred in 2015 when Malaysia chaired ASEAN. However, the quality of the dialogue and the process it went through faced a barrage of criticisms. The CSO representatives were only allowed a few minutes to discuss their agenda in front of state leaders making the meeting a token act, a ministerial gesture of ASEAN that looks pleasant for a photo opportunity (Tadem 2017). There were no meaningful discussions especially about human rights at the end of the meeting, disgruntling CSOs over the outcome (Tadem et al. 2020). Some governments did not recognize the autonomous selection process of the ACSC/APF, choosing their own CSO representative instead and thereby rousing some CSO representatives to boycott the interface.

The LGBTQ+ activists get a share of discontent too. When LGBTQ+ activist Ryan Silverio spoke to a panel of human rights defenders during the ACSC/APF 2015 in Malaysia, a Laotian diplomat among a set of reactors from the government repulsively remarked, "Why are we talking about LGBT issues here? ASEAN should be all about economics and trade. There's no point talking about LGBT rights" (Destination Justice 2018). Such a statement only impressed how civil societies, especially the LGBTQ+, have been excluded in ASEAN's development equation.

This historical fiasco hinges on Gerard's (2015) points: If ASEAN indeed heard the ACSC/APF through the dialogues, it did not translate the outputs into substantial policy outcomes. ASEAN's engagement with CSOs remains uneven, limited, and with unclear mechanisms for CSOs' participation. Rather, it prefers CSO participation in the area of functional utility that is usually depoliticized. It chooses to

accommodate those who will support the achievement of already established goals and projects of its governing elite (Gerard 2013; Nesadurai 2012).

Malaysia also hosted the first ASEAN–CSOs interface in 2005, the year when the ACSC was conceived. But after that event, Malaysia was criticized for not controlling the participation of CSOs whose legitimacy and mandate were questioned by Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Singapore (Chongkittavorn 2009 in Nesadurai 2012). Beginning in 2009, ASEAN officials decided to make this interface optional instead of holding a permanent meeting during the ASEAN Summits (Gerard 2013; Nesadurai 2012).

These episodes of failed engagements also establish how queer groups are always outside the policy circle of ASEAN. If more than a decade ago, ASEAN left a door ajar to hear civil society voices (Collins 2008), that door could now be considered shut. Gerard (2015) further explained that these spaces for token ASEAN–CSO engagements through the ad hoc consultations did not guarantee policy changes. Although the GO–NGO (government-organized, NGO) Forums that were formal dialogues were but tightly controlled by governments that excluded dissenting CSOs, relevant ASEAN bodies have likewise created an opportunity for CSOs' critical views to be represented, but these views were not advanced to shape political outcomes (Collins 2018; Tadem 2017). These dialogues that took place under the purview of ASEAN signified power relations that permeate the civil society space for participation. Cornwall (2002, 8) discussed that these spaces made available by those in power (in this sense, the hegemonic power of ASEAN) "may be discursively bounded to permit only limited citizen influence, colonizing interaction and stifling dissent." Worse, there are critical spaces for the exercise of citizenship and rights that are delegitimized by government and development institutions (22).

Although the ASEAN Charter, signed in 2007, contains critical elements such as democracy, human rights, good governance, and the rule of law (Nesadurai 2008), civil society called it a disappointment when their recommendations were excluded from this regional policy (Collins 2008). Rather, it institutionalized ASEAN's tradition of upholding the norms and principles of sovereignty/non-interference to maintain its internal cohesion (Nesadurai 2008). This top-down, state-centric persona of ASEAN that is apparent in the Charter made

no mention of the institutionalized roles of CSOs and their space to provide input into the ASEAN decision-making process. Furthermore, "the apparatus (coordinating councils; community councils; sectoral ministerial bodies; committee of permanent representatives, national secretariats)" remains state-driven (Collins 2008, 326).

Solidarity as (queer) counterstrategy

The outcomes of ASEAN engagements suggest that the LGBTQ+ community under the neoliberal order will remain unheard of, unseen in the eyes of ASEAN leaders. A crucial contribution of the LGBTQ+ community therefore would be to engage SOGIESC-based activism to the tactical solidarity-based battles for social justice as neoliberalism encroaches on all corners of public and private (even sexual) life (ASC 2017). On many occasions, some LGBTQ+ activists in the Philippines have tried to carry this forward. One of the landmark events in the history of Pride March in the Philippines is the 1994 LGBTQ+ mass action that, aside from commemorating the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 and protesting the many forms of discrimination and state-sanctioned homophobia, also dared to raise the issues of the onerous Value Added Tax program and the oil price hike that affected the Filipino people in general (Kapederasyon 2016; Evangelista 2017). In the Pride celebrations decades after, queer activists brought the issue of labor contractualization during the event to show their support to the striking workers (Kapederasyon 2016). Both examples showed the courage and depth of perspective of the queer peoples to intersect their own fight for identity and recognition with the mass movement's struggle against regressive policies and exploitative conditions under neoliberalism.

Mason (2018), as a counternarrative, recommends queering the concept of development, an important theoretical interruption of ongoing processes and powers that have been reinforced by heteronormativity. Being queer is about challenging not only sexual norms but also other cemented codes operating in society that normalize the status quo, such as current norms in understanding development (Jolly 2000 cited in Mason 2018). Queer politics in the Third World also concerns poverty, imperialism, and underdevelopment. The fight for gender equality is braided with the liberation from poverty and socioeconomic dependency (Kinsman 2019). Solidarity, then, must be the core of LGBTQ+ and SOGIESC-

based activism. This is a product of a people-to-people interaction that works hard to overcome social inequalities along with a systematic transformation of societies (ACSC/APF 2018; Tadem et al. 2020; Weiss 2021). Emerging from the ideologies and histories of plurality and diversity, it values and extends support to the important cross-border political struggles of other communities (Dalidjo 2021). The praxis behind solidarity concerns the presence of a greater opportunity for people to share their experiences and knowledge, learn from each other, and build networks (Tadem et al. 2020). This requires queer groups to imagine more creatively tolerance and acceptance without necessarily being confined within liberal human rights discourses. Therefore, to move forward and deepen the agenda for queer liberation, the LGBTQ+ movement must adopt an internationalist character by building an alliance with the labor front, founded on a common identification between queer people and all working people worldwide (Dalidjo 2021; Drucker 2017).

This appears an uphill task given the prevalence of heteronormativity among mainstream labor movements within capitalism's binarized division of labor on the basis of sex (Engels 2000). Optimistically, the LGBTQ+ possesses a valuable capacity to queer the labor movement and thereby interject class politics among queer formations (Drucker 2017). In appreciating the nexus between the political, social, economic, and sexual, Drucker (2018) cites South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a movement led by those living with HIV/AIDS who battled for peoples' access to adequate health care. TAC's landmark activism is an emblematic example of queering the grassroots movement by waging the local to the global campaign against pharmaceutical multinationals and the global medical industry such as drug patenting and the World Trade Organization's free trade agenda (Drucker 2018). TAC has connected sexual emancipation with global justice and, correspondingly, the solidarity between social movements with a solid and active LGBT base and radical political movements.

Queer spaces within alternative regionalism

The alarmingly shrinking regional space for dialogue and dissent only fortifies the urgency for alternative regionalism as a queer space, a ground-based collaboration that anchors to the reimagination or redefinition of spaces and participation from the perspective of

the marginalized and neglected sector. This is about creating bigger spaces of contestation when previously there were only pockets of resistance, building a platform for diverse opinions to be heard or otherwise debate issues when formerly there was little room for public participation, and enabling people to reclaim their spaces that were denied from them (Cornwall 2002; Dalidjo 2021). These initiatives elaborate the efforts of space transformation under the theme of negative space and identity within a heteronormative society (Price-Chalita 1994).

The task therefore of CSOs and LGBTQ+ within is to revalorize this already shrinking space imaginary which under the neoliberal condition, nevertheless, allows activism and resistance to flourish. This "predatory mode of capitalist development" governed with "authoritarian state behaviour" (Gerard 2015, 7) has provided a platform for CSOs to organize and mobilize this "regionalisation of activism" (Gerard 2013, 414) or "regionalism from below" (Nesadurai 2012, 175). These are sites of radical possibility or critical spaces of the poor for action to resist, to challenge their conditions and create alternatives (Cornwall 2002). These spaces have become spaces for intersectionality, or "horizontal solidarities," cross-cutting the usual boundaries between issues that are important in advancing queer communities' alternatives and advocacies (Drucker 2018). Described as a "school for citizenship" in which participants learn new meanings and practices of citizenship (Cornwall and Coelho 2007) through solidarity work and collective action, these initiatives motivate them to see beyond their own parochial problem and evolve into a regional perspective.

Another responsibility of civil society is to develop an alternative knowledge that deconstructs prevailing concepts, policies, and practices related to neoliberal globalization (ACSC/APF 2018; Tadem et al. 2020). And from that, the mission is to create a coherent counter-hegemonic project from the dominant ASEAN framework of development, to strengthen solidarity, to articulate strongly and advance alternative regional models (Nesadurai 2012). Following the path to alternative regionalism, the first imperative is to distinguish ASEAN from the bigger and wider scope of Southeast Asia, a geopolitical region of diverse peoples of all sexes, sexualities, and genders sharing common cultures, traditions, histories, and struggles.

Beyond the ten ASEAN states, Southeast Asia also includes the peoples of Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste. Moreover, according to the geographical demarcations of "Zomia," Southeast Asia straddles the states of Northeast India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura) and the provinces in Southwest China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Sichuan) (Scott 2009, Preface). Inclusion should recognize the diverse migrants in Southeast Asia as well. In other words, the identity of a region rests from the vantage point of the peoples who self-determine themselves as Southeast Asians or those within this geographical region but are at all times excluded from ASEAN's mainstream development perspective (ACSC/APF 2018).

This kind of regionalism must be woven from a relational fabric of an alternative vision of a region that is not contingent on citizenship and location. It is developed from the various forms of people-to-people exchange, growing from multitudes of initiatives that defy the dominant and mainstream narrative, paradigm, concepts, and policies such as the ASEAN Regional Integration. After all, networks of CSOs have been working on campaigns, projects, and activism on many diverse social issues (Tadem et al. 2020, 17). This radical vision of regionalism is along the principles of solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, and grounded on peoples' alternative practices that have proven to transform regional solidarity (17–18).

To close this study, the paper presents three alternatives—out of the many that exist in Southeast Asia—that exemplify the practices of solidarity that can build and sustain regional solidarity that cuts across marginalized positions, experiences, and visions. Although it is not the sole representatives of the diversity of practices in the region, the ASC, Arcoiris in Timor-Leste, and 100% Yogyakarta in Indonesia all illustrate how queer solidarity with poor, oppressed, and marginalized sectors take the shape of political, social, and cultural alternatives.

ASC tries to situate queer's participation in alternative regionalism as it strengthens its political leverage to resist hegemonic and heteronormative regional governance arrangements of ASEAN. ASC undergoes a process of redeveloping the value of "collective memory" in amplifying the demands of the LGBTQ+ community that strives to bridge the other demands of civil society. They explained

collective memory as a reference to their cultural narratives, including precolonial local culture that is centered on a shared identity in relation to both an imagined common past and a common vision of the future. Derived from an evolving culture and shared values and principles, this collection of remembrance also serves as a synthesis of recognized historical events and their meanings to the LGBTQ+ existence (ASC 2020). In its articulation of the memory, the operative verb is *remembering*. It is a retrospect that requires a deeper understanding of life's past events or accounts with historical significance that help them reconstruct their contemporary notion of identity with a strong correlation to their ongoing activism. This is a deflection from the binarized discourse on identity and sexuality that is largely promoted by the state and its institutions.

Determined to defend this "memory activism," ASC believes that there is underexplored cultural evidence of Southeast Asia, both past and present, that affirms gender and sexual diversity but is hidden behind ASEAN's heteronormative narrative. Still on its early stage, what is hoped for is for this memorialization to serve as a springboard that will help solidify the growing movement of alternatives throughout the region.

Another SOGIESC-based alternative practice is by Arcoiris,[3] the first LBT (lesbians, bisexuals, and trans men) group in Timor-Leste. Arcoiris has jumpstarted this approach, driven by a common objective to support LBT persons suffering from sexual abuse, discrimination, and other forms of violence, as well as to raise public awareness about their untold horrific stories while they endured pain from their families, community, and society. Arcoiris conducted a pioneering research study that sheds light on the concerns and challenges faced by Timorese LBTs. Using personal memories to describe their marginalized and suppressed identities, Arcoiris members dared recall their silenced past of how society confronted those who do not conform to prevailing societal norms. These stories mostly occurred in a landscape of poor socioeconomic conditions, compounded by less social support and care (Saeed and Galhos 2017). They altogether collated these shards of memories and published them, even when the publication cost them their lives which were determined for a long time by a domineering narrative of heterosexuality.

This kind of a life "theirstory" development that bestrides as action research became a turning point for the LBT movement in Timor-Leste that led to their first Pride March in 2017. Arcoiris members were later invited to gatherings to present their research findings along with their powerful testimonies. It eventually spurred the creation of a safe space with a support group for LBT persons, a venue for deep-seated solidarity where they meet, share, accept, connect, validate, or just for homestay. In this space, they rise united to challenge the normalization of violence against peoples of diverse SOGIE in Timor-Leste (Saeed 2018).

Demonstrating the potential of cultural alternatives, 100% Yogyakarta celebrates awareness and acceptance through the arts. The event has been described as a "a gathering that is a city, a group just beginning to experience itself, a choir that has never practiced, an impossible entity with many faces—assembled into ever-changing new group pictures: group pictures as replacement for family—as fleeting portraits of belonging" (Gokkon 2015). What sounds nebulous in form is in fact a unique production launched by internationally acclaimed Indonesian theatre troupe Garasi Performance Institute and a group of German directors Rimini Protokoll starring Yogyakarta's layfolk sharing their everyday life and struggle. Their "100%" projects envisioned bringing together communities by allowing them to share regarding pertinent issues with the intention of increasing social tolerance, or as the paper argues here, acceptance. The same project has been launched in Vienna, Zurich, London, Tokyo, and Melbourne, with Yogyakarta as the 27th city in the circuit.

The performance in Indonesia deserves interest given the participation of a trans man, along with other members of the LGBTQ+ community, in a play featuring local food vendors, housewives who make batik wear, a 90-year-old woman, and a woman who was imprisoned without trial during the 1965 anticommunist purge, to name a few. Such a choice, which calls attention to the existence of uniquely queer challenges, places the LGBTQ+ within the diverse panorama of marginalized sectors, each with their own plight that together exposes the socioeconomic structures that sustain inequality, such as heteronormativity and the concentration of wealth to the elite (male) few. The performance art becomes even more provocative given the "gargantuan struggle" faced by the LGBTQ+ in conservative Indonesia (Saputra 2020). 100% Yogyakarta, responding

to the similarly conservative Indonesian government that sustains SOGIESC-based discrimination, paints fleeting portraits of belonging, asking questions such as "who is missing? Who thinks they might give answers on stage that are different from the ones they'd give in response to a telephone survey or in the voting booth? And what have the statistics failed to record?" (Gokkon 2015). The performance demonstrates an alternative to the hardly existent solidarity among the marginalized many fostered by the national government and ASEAN-at-large.

These diverse alternatives have been sowing the seeds of regionalism that truly crosses borders and connects boundaries that only the peoples can fulfill. They show the potential of queer activism to stand against ASEAN's neoliberalism that reinforces the LGBTQ+ disenfranchisement. Albeit they exist, their chronicles remain unpopular, under-researched, and therefore, under-supported in the mainstream field of development. The proceeding task of civil society, then, is to create the infrastructure that will facilitate greater people-to-people interactions toward building a formidable people-led regionalism. Southeast Asia is therefore in its tract of forming a people-led and gender-just alternative regionalism which Nesadurai (2012) described as a phenomenon of an increasing coherent counterregionalism that will gain strength even as it faces obstacles from ASEAN.

Towards a(n LGBTQ+) Peoples' Regionalism

In view of the many failures of ASEAN based on its current structure and mechanisms juxtaposed to the possibilities of cross-border solidarity where LGBTQ+ peoples find a place, a people-led regionalism must take precedence over the profit-centered regional model critiqued in this paper. This alternative regionalism project already has a life of its own, not contingent to ASEAN and governments.

Meanwhile, since regional policies target governments, this paper also supports Acharya's (2003) analysis on democratization that requires redefining official outlooks towards state sovereignty and opening space for CSOs in order to enhance the legitimacy of ASEAN's regionalism project. The current ASEAN formation will not be receptive to this, but in the long run, for ASEAN to legitimize their

regionalism project in the face of peoples, it can be operationalized through the civil society recommendations previously raised (ACSC/APF 2017 and 2018).

Mechanisms for LGBTQ+ peoples protection. The sociocultural and economic violence against the LGBTQ+ sector pushes them further into the margins. For this reason, a regional means for the recognition and protection of LGBTQ+ peoples must be instituted. To make this possible, governments must first assess the experiences and struggles of queer peoples in Southeast Asia through already existing social movements that provide a democratic space for the sector. A context-sensitive legislative framework that examines the unique dynamics of SOGIESC-based acceptance, tolerance, and discrimination in Southeast Asian nations must be established to pave the way for the legal recognition and protection of LGBTQ+ peoples of each country.

ASEAN must ensure LGBTQ+ rights to equal access to the affordances and protection of the state as part of the peoples' democratic rights. The principle must be to uphold the universality and interdependence of human rights. The fundamental rights of LGBTIQ+ must be recognized as the human rights of every person enshrined in the Universal Human Rights Declaration and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration. To "democratize" human rights requires attention to other arenas of social inequality, such as economic poverty, inaccessibility of welfare services, and cultural marginalization.

ASEAN must integrate human rights promotion and protection in implementing the AEC Blueprint and desist from initiating and joining unequal and unjust trade deals that prefer corporate interest over peoples' interest. ASEAN must further review existing trade and economic agreements and amend or terminate those that jeopardize the fundamental rights of all peoples, including the LGBTQ+.

Transform AICHR. ASEAN must institute measures for seeking accountability for LGBTQ+ and human rights violations by providing a legal space for the LGBTQ+ community to access justice. The protection mandate and the Terms of Reference of the AICHR should be strengthened. Although AICHR representatives are government-appointed, they have to be accorded independence and autonomy from the intrusion of their governments over their mandate. This

institution must be operationalized to investigate, monitor, intervene in cases of LGBTQ+ discrimination and peoples' rights violations ranging from the political to the economic, and provide effective redress and remedy for these violations.

Adopt a new paradigm beyond the ASEAN Way. To become people-oriented and people-centered, ASEAN should meddle in internal state affairs, especially when gross violations of peoples' rights occur. There must be no other way but the peoples' way.

This new paradigm must therefore promote and incentivize social protection programs to ensure that all Southeast Asians can live a life with dignity. Both ASEAN and CSOs may even learn from and institutionalize the measures of social protection that are already working on the ground through grassroots communities and social movements.

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Notes

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1. The five foreign ministers were: Adam Malik of Indonesia, Narciso R. Ramos of the Philippines, Tun Abdul Razak of Malaysia, S. Rajaratnam of Singapore, and Thanat Khoman of Thailand.

2. India was part of the original negotiating states until it opted out of the RCEP on November 4, 2019.

3. The group derived its name from the Portuguese word "rainbow."

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