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GLOBALISATION

GLOBAL MY ASS.



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COMBATING GLOBALISATION, FROM

EDITOR'S
NOTE

GAGNAM STYLE TO LANGKAH LESTARI

One doesn't need to read too deeply into Psy's *Gangnam Style* to decode his sarcasm against the rich and famous.¹ A bit of Koonian kitsch with a demoralising socialist undertone, the song is addictive that it unashamedly resembles one of those catchy pop tunes. When its Youtube Views surpassed 40 millions per month, we knew Psy's career was not going to be the same anymore. 3 months after, it hit No. 2 on Billboard Hot 100; another 2 months later, we found him winning an MTV Award for the Best Video. Going through this commercial (over)exposure, has Psy's message lost its revolutionary potential (if any)?

We can examine two possibilities. A pessimist would assume that his fame has eclipsed his lyrical cynicism. To say this is to make the conclusion that Psy is capitalising on the operation of the "rich and famous" to reproduce yet another *gangnam* in himself. Or an optimist could think of Psy's message as one of the instruments for a Gramscian passive revolution,² one that is gradual and incremental, disruptive to the global system by exposing its contradictions. To the optimist, Psy can be the epitome of an anti-Oedipus, elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari as the intensities of schizophrenic capitalism.³ Even with capitalist exploitation, so they say, we are still capable of positive rhizomatic rebellion against homogenisation. Thus, one way is to see Psy's presence in the US Billboards as an *Othering* contaminant, and from here we anticipate future events that could continuously deterritorialise the system of production to reterritorialise it; from global to glocal.

At the time of writing, the controversy of Lynas Advance Materials Plant (LAMP) in Kuantan has also culminated into *Langkah*



Lestari. A small group of protestors took 14 days to walk from Kuantan to Kuala Lumpur, arriving at Dataran Merdeka with a big group of about 30,000. It must be noted that the fundamental driving force behind Lynas is globalisation. This compels us to look deeper into the issue, perhaps, to be less pessimistic. For it isn't just a multinational enterprise

encroaching foreign lands for operations or waste storage, it is largely driven by the demand for Lithium in the production of ion batteries to be used in phones, laptops and other electronics. Chasing Lynas out of Malaysia does not solve the problem, we are complicit in the problem. What we witness today however are the struggles against the system of production – it is easier to blame the producers without putting too much thought on the collective demand of the consumers. Being a pessimist is convenient.

But isn't it too late to be a pessimist? Or is it too early to be an optimist? While we can easily point our fingers at Psy or Lynas, we should reconsider our consumption needs too.

Reading through the articles in this issue, one could be surprised by the similitude in sentiments – the writers write like victims of globalisation! Their subject matters vary but they arrive at conclusions that resonate with one another.

We begin with Mohammed Elnaïem's *Dance Puppets Dance*, an autobiographical narrative that outlines his angst and disappointment with Islamic fundamentalism. Mohammed caught himself in the clash of civilisations, he contends that many advocates of Islam have failed to transcend the East-West divide and overlooked the complication in contemporary politics. And

perhaps for his critical disposition, he has being simplistically labelled as a “Westernised” Muslim. It seems that “globalisation” has yet to come up with a new “global” language that may fully override the East-West binary. This prompts us to question whether “globalisation” is truly global? And can the so-called “East” maintain a sense of geopolitical security where the “West” ceases to be a convenient scapegoat to haunt the fearfuls or to discriminate the liberals?

Or, we can move further by asking deconstructively: Is globalisation limited to a synthesis of “East” and “West”? In his sarcastic write-up written in a Myanmar context, TS’s *Yayy! We got democracy now!* would have considered an East-West hybrid insufficient. He argues that globalisation and cultural homogenisation, creeps in from both sides of the fence. On one hand, there’s the “Western” Americanisation; on the other, there’s the “Eastern” Koreanisation – combining two hegemonies doesn’t make the whole world any less unequal. TS’s article reminds us about the imbalance flow of information, an age-old issue recounted in the MacBride Report. The report was later rejected by the great powers fearing that their freedom will be infringed or compensated as a consequence of greater equality.⁴ Increasingly, globalisation has come to signify a struggle between “equality” and “freedom”. However, precautions must be taken for the implied “freedom” is commonly associated or limited to the “freedom of market” in neoliberal late capitalism.

The-West-versus-the-rest mentality is a stubborn stain in the presumably globalised world: if you are not for American market freedom, you are a threat to democracy; if you are not with us, you are against us. After the fall of communism, the United States has aggressively manufactured a new enemy called “terrorism”. The recent Gaza-Israel conflict undeniably fights a war of perception: Israeli attacks are sanitised while Hamas retaliation is portrayed as terroristic. In parallel, Gazan victims receive more sympathies than Israeli victims. Frustrated with the loop, Nazreen Fazal says, “*Just Stop!*” She demands all to contemplate on the sense of loss shared by both Gazan and Israeli: can this shared sense of agonism provide the fundamental platform for peace and democracy?⁵

In *Aunt Agony asks: Why South China Sea, China?*, Xiao Ming Wee sheds light on ASEAN regionalisation and its attempt to negotiate with China as a single geopolitical entity. Indeed, discussion on globalisation today cannot ignore the emergence of China – it has returned to trouble the regional waters. Meanwhile in 2011, China issued new biometric passports that contained a map with the nine-dotted line running to the coastal areas of the Philippines and Malaysia. A cunning trick since foreign recognition of the Chinese passports could indirectly legitimise their claims on the Paracels and Spratlys. With competing claims even amongst ASEAN members, negotiating with China is an uphill battle. Xiao believes that ASEAN must stand united and ASEAN Community 2015 must be taken seriously prior to confronting China.

What makes a good ending if not poetry? Joseph Tang’s *Ignorance is Bliss* is by far the most pessimistic voice. He posed a penetrating question to our present condition: “what else to ask

for?” Being a mobility student now studying in UK for a semester, he is a direct product of globalisation. His statements are short and convinced but they sound too good to be true, revealing the many contradictions of a deluded society. Relooking at the previous articles, this is in fact how many of us have experienced globalisation: comforting *and* disrupting. But what else is there to ask for? Joseph’s question should be taken as a challenge: in the midst of globalisation, can the Left create a new political language to counter neoliberalism? Can socialist ideas be carried out without the state? How do we encourage localism and decentralisation? How do we resist the system of production with our consumption habits? — **TZH**



Notes:

[1] Max Fischer, “Gangnam Style, Dissected: The Subversive Message Within South Korea’s Music Video Sensation” [online] (The Atlantic, August 2012), retrieved from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/08/gangnam-style-dissected-the-subversive-message-within-south-koreas-music-video-sensation/261462/>

[2] Antonio Gramsci, “The Concept of Passive Revolution” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 106-114.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1972).

[4] “The MacBride report was rejected by powerful Western interests for its vision of social justice and its criticism of corporate control of media flows. Indeed, the US, followed by the UK, withdrew from UNESCO, insisting that the MacBride report’s criticism of the one-way flow of information amounted to support for censorship of Western media by authoritarian regimes in the non-Western world.” Robert Ivie, *Dissent from War* (United States: Kumarian Press, 2007), p. 102.

[5] Chantal Mouffe is known for her “agonistic pluralism”, an alternative model of democracy that recognises the conflictual nature in nation-building. Her conceptualisation extends our understanding of “democracy” beyond that of liberal democracy established in Kantian informed models (e.g.: Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls). See Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2005).

THE ONE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION **ON** GLOBALISATION:



**“DO YOU PREFER
SALAD **OR** YOGURT?”**

[Multiculture]

[Assimilation]

DANCE PUPPETS DANCE

by MOHAMMED ELNAIEM

The first time I was ever compelled to write, ever compelled to vent my frustration with humanity was during the Danish cartoon controversy. To the surprise of my brethren, it wasn't frustration towards the cartoonist, neither was it anger towards the media. I was angry at them; my classmates, my teachers, my extended family, my Ummah. I wasn't articulating a defence for freedom of expression, in fact that wasn't even a concept I grasped as I was only 13 years old. I witnessed a society that loves the Prophet, but their conception of Him was entirely different. Throughout my life, my parents convey to me a Prophet that is benevolent and forgiving. He was an orphan that knew the pain of shackles, who liberated slaves; a loving husband that brought an end to female infanticide; a Prophet of God who struggled from hardships and abuse to help the poor. What has been the most inspirational of all is his ability to forgive, for legend tells how he has accepted those attempted to murder him. He even advised his wife to treat those who had abused him in a nice manner.

This image still exists in me, it still guides me. Then came the image that shook my faith: when my brethren began to kill those who insulted Him. They needed the blood of an ambassador to pay the price for an insulting low-budget movie. They thought of themselves as defending the beloved Prophet but I saw them insulting Him; insulting Him by shooting the innocent Malala for her advocacy on women's education; insulting Him with their indifference when an innocent soul carried the burden of others; insulting Him by believing that violence against the opponents could invoke our love to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The fragility of their faith has made me vulnerable.

Now I find myself in the same position as I was in 7 years ago. But I've grown wiser. I look to epistemology and theology for guidance. I've grown

comfortably numb holding on the hot coal called faith, if only I could grasp it firmer. I seek guidance from alternative interpretations of my religion, one that respects minority rights and the freedom to express. Yet today, I find myself living in a society that justifies wife-beating – a society that remains indifferent to the struggles faced by those abandoned by the capitalist economy. A community that kills those who come out as homosexuals and hold the hymen to be more sacred than personality. I feel compelled to stop burying my head in the sand, I feel compelled to educate.

It's a tough struggle to hold onto my faith when the masses of the poor sleep under the lights of a huge clock-tower in Mecca. I find it hard to hold onto my faith when Syrian children have been forsaken by their Ayatollahs. It becomes harder when the protests needed to resolve these conflicts are narrowed to a petty attempt to get a meaningless and cheap movie on YouTube banned. Yet my faith becomes my source of inspiration when I hear of the Prophet's wife who devoted her life to helping the poor. My faith inspires me to liberate the slaves from the capitalist system, to acknowledge the humanity of any human being regardless of sexual orientation. My faith makes it an obligation to accept a woman's personality as my Prophet accepted the personality of His own wife. I also acknowledge that this is my own subjective interpretation of my religion. I find myself comforted when I accept the relativity of religious truth. It gives me hope to shift paradigms and alter interpretations. It provides me the hope that one day, as it was in the past, it will be a religious obligation to alleviate the pain of those collectively abused by our own society. The one day, where my image of the all-forgiving Prophet of God overrides the image espoused by the Saudi establishment. I pray for the days when we don't hide behind conspiracy theories and the illusion of being oppressed.



Indeed we must question how we have come to the notion of “being oppressed”, how collectively, whether in Iran or China we are all offended by a movie shot in America. Gone are the days when Ottoman Muslims proudly exclaimed the superiority of the Turks, when African Muslims turned to music for their spiritual needs. Globalization brought wonders to the world, and everybody is able to experience first-hand the celebrations and the struggles of Muslims worldwide. We can exchange ideas through unfiltered airwaves. The internet provides an unfiltered anarchy too powerful for the governments to fully censor. With these wonders come disastrous outcomes too, we have clerics ordering the destruction of Sufi-mosques, we have the privileged elites brainwashing the masses, attempting to monopolize the dissemination of truth, destroying the very foundational synergy between culture and religion that keeps the belief alive in various regions. Those very privileged elites find themselves building their own legitimacy by exploiting political events. We have those attempting to boycott YouTube, and we are now witnessing various reactionary attempts in a globalized world that isn’t truly global. The post-colonial Western world has placed the Muslims in this state of psychologically defensive victimhood. With globalization, comes sexual freedom without a sexual revolution. It’s understandable why societies that have been systematically oppressed, ostracized and subjugated would feel threatened; it’s understandable why the need to defend the Prophet has come to represent the need to defend one’s religion from the “Western” occupying forces. We then must question the validity of a “globalized” world. And whilst we can understand the subsequent reactions, should we excuse them?

I choose not to, and this is where I come in as a Muslim. I come in to provide the alternative interpretations; Progressives like me defend the very

“freedom of expression” the Muslim community so evidently dislikes. We lift our heads out of the sand and challenge the orthodoxies that subjugate the less privileged. We are the glitches of the globalized world. We are a product of neo-colonialism but that does not define us. We are a product of Islam and we don’t mangle on semantics like “the post-colonial”. We believe that civilizational progress is collective, and that it transcends caste, race and religion. We feel insulted by the term “Westernized” Muslim, and worse, when our brethren do not share humanistic ideals. We too are the products of the globalized world, albeit glitches in the system. Unfortunately, we are less privileged, when we voice out for God, we were told to quiet down. According to the overriding interpretations, we are in rebellion to God. If it weren’t for the beautiful but chaotic mediums provided by the “globalized” world, we wouldn’t be able to voice out our opinions. We have tasted the bitterness of the fruits of globalization, but with puritanical interpretations, some have hijacked the very medium of communication we had benefitted from. Arguably any religion may hold an absolute truth but interpretation is relative and differs from one person to another. I just hope that one day an equal and globalized world can be materialized; that the interpretations of Islam wouldn’t compel one to kill an innocent ambassador; that our passion can take us to the streets to protest against poverty instead of a meaningless film that wouldn’t even affect my love for the Prophet.

Globalization, I love you, but fuck you.

If you yourself are a Muslim writing a commentary; or a Sufi pir instructing your murid [disciple]; or a conscientious jurisconsult deciding a tricky point of law; or are a modern Oxford educated Muslim reflecting on contemporary life; or a 12th century Sherazi housewife; or are a left wing leader of the slave revolt of the Zanzi protesting against what seem to you the exploitation and hypocrisy of the establishment – in all such cases the correct interpretation of the particular Quran verse is the best possible interpretation that comes to you or that you can think up. – Cantwell Smith

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yay! WE GOT CRAZY DEMOCRACY NOW!

by TS

“CULTURAL IMPERIALISM”,

a word that worries me when I think of my country's (Myanmar) promising future and all the development opportunities that we've been striving for all these years (if they are really going to happen).

And I'm not being sarcastic here. Of course, “ME” being part of everyone, hopes all these could happen. I heard some people, who are probably a bit obsessed with all things modern, are saying that the big McD's is coming to our country. Ok, hold on! Wait! What? Ahh I see, they can't wait to be Americanised because every bits and pieces of being American would make them look smart. And guess what? They have even bigger dreams. They said in 10 years' time, our cities will be just like Singapore. Umm, ambitious! But couldn't we formulate our own model of development?

So, my country is now opening up to a lot of investments and not to mention those patriotic folks coming back for the “salvation” of our country. Here, I love what Aung San Suu Kyi has to say about this: “Using the word ‘to save’ doesn't indicate one's authentic good will to contribute to the development of our society; rather it connotes one's condescending attitude regarding themselves as saviours, better than others.” And some economists deduced that if IMF and World Bank come in right now, it might cripple our national economy considering what has happened to our predecessors. But, I'm not an economist so I have nothing to comment for this. So what does Aung San Suu Kyi have to say about this?

Ok, just leave her poor soul out of this. She's not even our president yet. Y u people expect her to get everything done when she hasn't been given much authority in the parliament! She is much like a bird recently released from a big cage, now in love with travelling all around to meet the people she has only been able to see on the TV all these years. So, let her be the president first — I really love to see it come true — and we will see what she's capable of.

I'm only concerned with what the wonders of capitalism might do to our culture. A few years back, not everyone of us could secure a cell phone

and someone who seems busy in the city centre with a touch-screen mobile would be described as “coconut in the monkey's hand” (as we mean people like to say hehe). It is because our evil government has ruled us in decades of disconnectedness. Buying a cell phone was more expensive than buying gold and owning one meant that you are rich. Now look, our mobile phone dreams come true and I can hear at least two or three Nokia's “tutududus” in the classroom (well they are new to this and some don't really know how to put it in silent mode. So I don't mind and I'm, in fact, happy). We are enjoying the mobile phone culture (only after so many years when most of the world became jaded!). But yay! Now all my cousins are on Facebook! Isn't that nice! Yes, there are the good things and what we all really need is a nasty dose of consumer culture with a plenty of everything to buy, only to find out years later that we have a plenty of environmental problems too.

Ok! So what would happen to our culture? Well, honestly I don't know! But one thing I do know is that most artists in my country just looove to COPY! That's why American and Korean copycat shows and songs are buzzing on TV every time I turn to our national channel. So, are we now ready for the full ride of modernisation? Or have we confused “modernisation” with “Americanisation”, or even “Koreanisation” (Kimchism)?

Now is the moment where my country is in an awkward position, trying to jump into a pool of global homogenised culture by striping off our distinct and unique Myanmar identity worn for decades in self-appraised exclusive existence, fashioned by the government who showed us how it feels like to live in isolation from the world.

P.S.: This is for my country-mates who just love to do nothing but to sit, wait, criticise on “who-cannot-do-what” for no apparent reason.



Just Stop!

by NAZREEN FAZAL

When you ask a question long enough it ceases to be one
and just plays itself out in a loop like a broken record:

How? How? How?
How. How. How.
Why? Why? Why?



I keep asking myself. "Why?" Why are we doing this to ourselves? What's so incredibly messed up in the brains of the "smartest living beings on the planet" that makes us want to kill each other, to take down the "other" and build a supermarket on his grave?

Bill Watterson said it right, the surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that it hasn't contacted us. If they do, we'd probably shake their hands and stab them at the back when they sleep, take their resources and pollute it until their kids starve into nothingness.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't been born. I wish I were the ocean or the sky...anything just to stay away from this madness. But then I realize, this madness would still find its way to me. If I were the ocean they'd stain me with their blood; believe themselves purged by letting me bleed with their sins. If I were the sky they'd dissect me and make boundaries of me in the air, forgetting that I was never meant to be contained.

Sometimes I pray, really hard. You know that prayer when you just shut your eyes and forget about everything else around you? That prayer when you so desperately want something to happen that every atom, every cell in your body wishes for the same. I pray that we just stop.

Stop. Keep the guns down, loosen your grip on the enemy's throat and just stay still.

Stop. Take a step back. Breathe.

And get out of your highly opinionated, propaganda fed, socially conditioned mind and go over to the other side. I don't care who you are – Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Christian, Pagan, Atheist...Just get out of those self-imposed shackles and learn to think, feel and live the other person's life. Be him. Be her. Be them.

Be Jihad Misharawi who lost his 11-month-old baby boy to a deadly strike. Be Mira Scharf who died, leaving 3 young kids, when commemorating the death of another. Be the people who live in fear every single second of every single day.

Just stop being you for a second.

Do you see it now? Do you feel it? His mother, your sister, their sons, our daughters – doesn't "loss" feel the same? Doesn't it still hurt as much?

So stop making pills of pain and feeding it to the "other" because in the end the side effects will show on you more than anyone else.



Students In Resistance presents

HOW TO RESIST GLOBALISATION IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE???

10 QUICK TIPS



1.

BE CREATIVE & INNOVATE

Try solving a problem without spending too much, be creative with available resources.

2.

READ MORE

Equip yourself with knowledge, conscientise thyself.

3.

LOVE YOUR MOTHER

Recognise our non-"working" mothers or housewives as important contributors to the world economy.

4.

GO GO LOCALISM

Support local initiatives!
Engage your neighbours.

6.

COPYLEFT

Copyright is overrated, try Copyleft or Creative Commons.

5.

RETHINK "OUTSIDER"

"Immigrants" are by-products of globalisation.
Treat them as you want yourself to be treated.

7.

AVOID COUPONS & VOUCHERS

Coupons and vouchers save your money, but they make you start spending.

8.

STAY HEALTHY

Stay healthy because pharmaceutical companies earn big bucks from your illness!
Do sports – avoid gyms, use public space.

9.

TRY DIFFERENT FOOD

Diversify our diet, monoculture is shrinking our food basket!

10.

STOP DONATING

Don't donate, get involved!
Financial supports prolong poverty.
Think about what you can do for them instead.





AUNT AGONY ASKS:

by XIAO MING WEE

WHY SOUTH CHINA SEA, CHINA?



South China Sea. ASEAN. P.R.China.

When these three words are put together in one sentence, we will have scholars and politicians working on the topic, arguing about the complexity of the issue at hand. Yet, it disappoints me that the awareness on ASEAN affairs among the youth is not as high as it should be. Like, come on! At least know the 10 member states within the association!

This edition of *Students in Resistance* deals with the idea of “Globalization”. However, sad to say, the Malaysian youth who are crying for injustice, advocating for changes, challenging ideas and norms, do not seem to know or care about what’s happening within the region. Well, it is hard to expect the youth to concern about something if we do not know about it first! This makes me wonder why isn’t the national education syllabus teaching about the politics of ASEAN? We are one of the founding members after all, aren’t we?

I usually write my articles based on my own cynical observation. Direct, blunt, no sugar coating. Of course, while other people have written critically on this topic with sophisticated arguments backed with sound reasoning, I appear to sound like an “Aunt Agony” here. Before we all jump into the indulgence on how globalization has affected our lives, it is quite incomprehensible for me as to why we aren’t looking into issues across our borders. It is about time for Aunt Agony to ask this question to the People’s Republic of China: why South China Sea?

South China Sea 101

For the benefit of our readers, I shall attempt to give a brief account on the origin of the issue at hand. A couple of quick facts here: South China Sea’s marine territory can be traced from the coastal lines of the southern mainland China, island of Taiwan, east of Vietnam, north east of the Peninsula of Malaysia and Singapore, north of Indonesia, north west of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei until the west coast of the Philippines.

It is huge. So what’s the problem? Everyone claims ownership. Why? It is the second most used sea lane, an important naval route connecting Europe to East Asia (via Straits of Malacca) and a massive oil reserve.

What are they really claiming now? About 3,500,000 km² of marine territory.

Putting it as “everyone claims it” sounds vague, a sweeping statement to be avoided in any political analysis. So, when we phrase it as “everyone claims it”, what we actually mean is the claims of Indonesia on the waters North East of the Natuna Islands; the Philippines on Scarborough Shoal; Singapore/Malaysia on the Strait of Johor and the Strait of Singapore; Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are fighting over the Gulf of Thailand; Vietnam on Spratly Islands, with competing claims from Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines.



South China Sea: Whose seas? Whose lane?

Source: UNCLOS & CIA

Sounds complicated? Hold on a second. And on top of all these claims, we have both the P.R.China and Taiwan claiming the whole marine territory based on the nine-dotted line. Yes, it overlaps with every other country’s claim.

This is where things get interesting.

[Before we proceed, one must be aware that there are two issues on the table between ASEAN and the P.R.China. One is the maritime security of the region, which is dealt in the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). The other is the multiple overlapping territorial claims. Both are simultaneously interrelated yet distinct. In this article, I will be looking at the whole issue at a glance for the benefit of our readers who are still new to this issue.]

ASEAN and the P.R.China

ASEAN, the Association of South East Asia Nations, consists of 10 member states from the South East Asian region. As a regional entity, its strength is based on the ability to stay absolute and consistent when confronting conflicts and crisis. This was evident in the Chang Mai Initiative, the ratification of the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Community blueprint.

The failure of ASEAN to issue a joint communiqué in Phnom Penh, the first in the association's 45 years history, leaves more questions than answers. The inability for all 10 member states to agree on what to say about the P.R.China with regards to the maritime border challenges ASEAN to rethink about their diplomacy in a new light. It signifies the end of ASEAN's famous "common consensus".¹

On one hand, some member states argue that there is a need to include South China Sea in this joint communiqué because it ensures ASEAN's position in the official record. On the other hand, the oppositional voices insist that a bilateral disagreement should not be included in this joint communiqué, which is the nature of the document itself.

However, question arises among the skeptics, doubting the association's ability to resolve the conflict with the P.R.China as a coherent regional entity. Aggravating the problem, the P.R.China has insisted on dealing with this issue bilaterally. Would this dent the credibility of ASEAN?² How will this affect the formation of an ASEAN Community by 2015? Are we witnessing a new political paradigm within ASEAN? Or is ASEAN ensnared in a power-play between the P.R.China and the United States of America?

And again, ASEAN only disagrees in the joint communiqué on the issue of South China Sea. The disappointment of the member states after the summit was largely due to the failure to form consensus on other parts of the joint communiqué, to which in retrospect they have already agreed. (The weakness of having a common consensus). ASEAN is still strong, just that they disagree on South China Sea. And does this conflict become so critical that ASEAN's inability to agree on a single statement signifies a two-tier ASEAN? I don't think so.

Talk, and more talk.

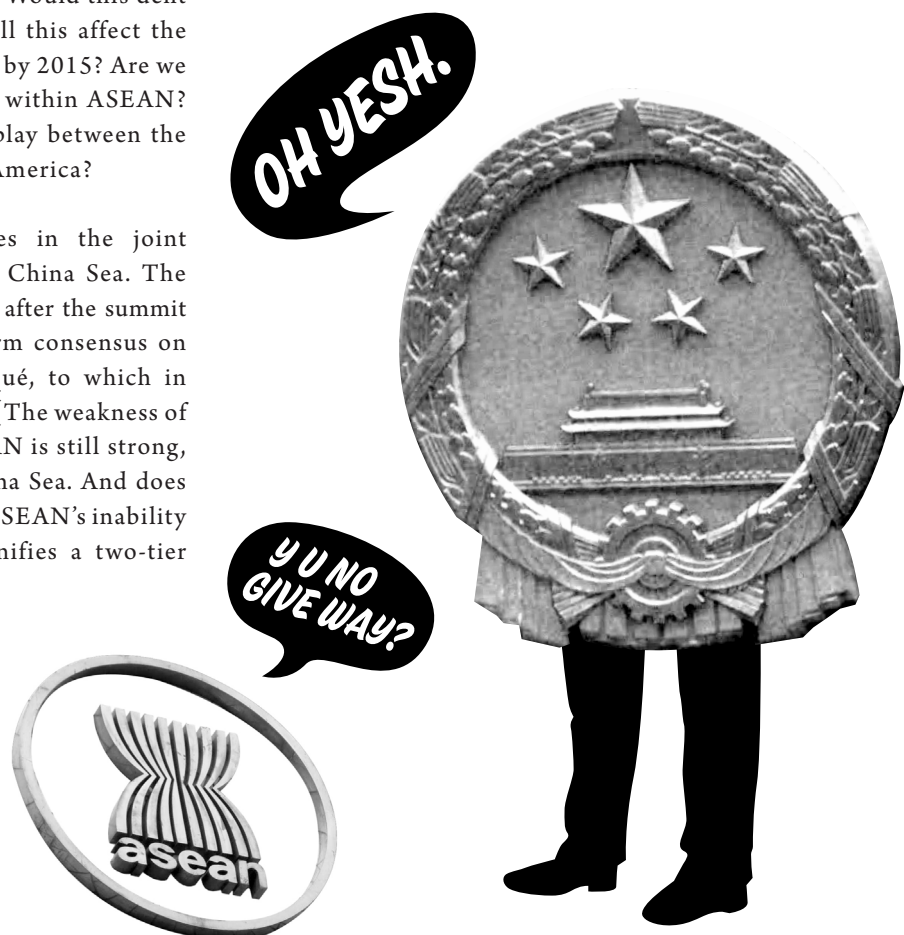
ASEAN (and many other international organizations) has been accused of, like what Bon Jovi sings, "all talk, no action". When ASEAN is not "talking" as one voice, are we expecting actions any time soon?

Well, yes we did.

Optimism can be drawn from the fact that high ranking officers from ASEAN member states and the P.R.China have met to discuss on a Code of Conduct over disputed territories (the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea [DOC]). The outcome of the workshop sends a clear message that both ASEAN and the P.R.China are committed to ensuring peace and stability within the disputed marine territory through the full implementation of the Code of Conduct.

ASEAN has travelled a long way since the ASEAN Regional Forum in July until the recently concluded workshop in Thailand. It was described as a "frank and open" discussion.³ The ASEAN approach of diplomacy, talks and more talks, seems to have a long-lasting effect towards defining ASEAN and its tactic on conflicts and cooperation. Maybe the P.R.China's refusal to discuss this issue back in July and chose instead to wait until the "conditions are ripe" doesn't sound that bizarre after all. So, what are the conditions here? What has changed since July? I do not have a clear answer but what we have witnessed is, at the very least, an effort to prevent future military conflict and to ease the military standoff over the disputed territory.

All eyes on Brunei⁴ now, the next ASEAN rotating chair, to build on the momentum.



Now USA, what?

The United States of America has never shy away from the affairs of South East Asia. And undeniably, the influence of the P.R.China in this region is immense. The USA has always been a strong proponent in advocating ASEAN as a single entity to negotiate with the P.R.China rather than engaging in bilateral dialogues.

Political ties have been strengthened during Obama's administration, which the president refers this change in paradigm as the "Asia Pivot".⁵ His visits to the three nations (Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia) after his successful reelection demonstrates how important the United States of America weighs its relation with the region. It might not shift the pivot of attention away from the Middle East,⁶ but at least it sets the backdrop for a long-term strategy in dealing with the P.R.China and Middle East through the region.

In terms of financial investment,⁷ the Americans have invested heavily in South East Asia over the past decade, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even claims that the amount exceeds the Chinese investment. The problem is, while the South East Asian nations have the intention to increase America's involvement economically, politically and militarily, they are doing the same with the Chinese.⁸

**YOHOO,
I CAN
SEE
WHAT
YOU
ARE
DOING
THERE!**



On one hand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have strong economic ties with the P.R.China; on the other, Vietnam and the Philippines have growing military ties with the USA.⁹ Understandably, South East Asia will be the microcosm of power-struggle between the USA and the P.R. China. However, the analysis should also take into consideration the role of ASEAN as an actor in the dynamics of international relations within the three parties.

Conclusion, or can there be one?

I do not have an overarching argument for this piece, nor do I intend to have one. So, it is difficult to come up with a concluding argument, or an approach that ASEAN could take in resolving conflicts. Many questions need to be addressed before reaching a resolution for overlapping claims.

However, I would like to postulate that ASEAN should remain determined as one, and the failure in Phnom Penh should be perceived as a maturing process of ASEAN as a regional body. ASEAN needs to adapt to remain effective and relevant; its prospect relies heavily on how it can define us as a regional force deserving international recognition.

ASEAN should capitalize on their strength, which is to remain united even though critics would argue that it is a weak one. ASEAN deals with conflicts as one entity, even if we bicker among ourselves. ASEAN signed the joint human rights declaration, through thick and thin, to built a foundation for the future. It is about collectivism, moving forward as one. Yes, it should move faster, it should be tougher; but it should not do so at a capacity where it deviates from the foundational values of ASEAN. Sounds familiar? Yes, it's about time to take the ASEAN Community more seriously.

Well, that is being optimistic. Very optimistic. Realistically, ASEAN might just be another powerless "pawn" between the P.R.China-USA power play. Will the ASEAN have an influence in affecting the relations between the two nations? Should a conflict reach a critical point, will the Americans support the ASEAN or the Chinese? Will they "sacrifice" their economic interests and stand by ASEAN's geopolitical struggle with the P.R.China?

Thus, there is more reason for ASEAN to stay united. ASEAN might not have the capacity to influence, but certainly it has the potential to do so!

ASEAN is like a big family where the young adults are arguing with their teenage siblings. One thing for sure, we cannot afford to have our young adults be ill-informed about our identity. ASEAN deserves more focus in our national education syllabus. We cannot

rely on our youth to learn about ASEAN-centric issues by themselves, similarly, we cannot rely on them to learn about sex and relationship through the internet! Aunt Agony cannot give all the answers!

Yes. And that's why Aunt Agony here asks WHY!

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Notes:

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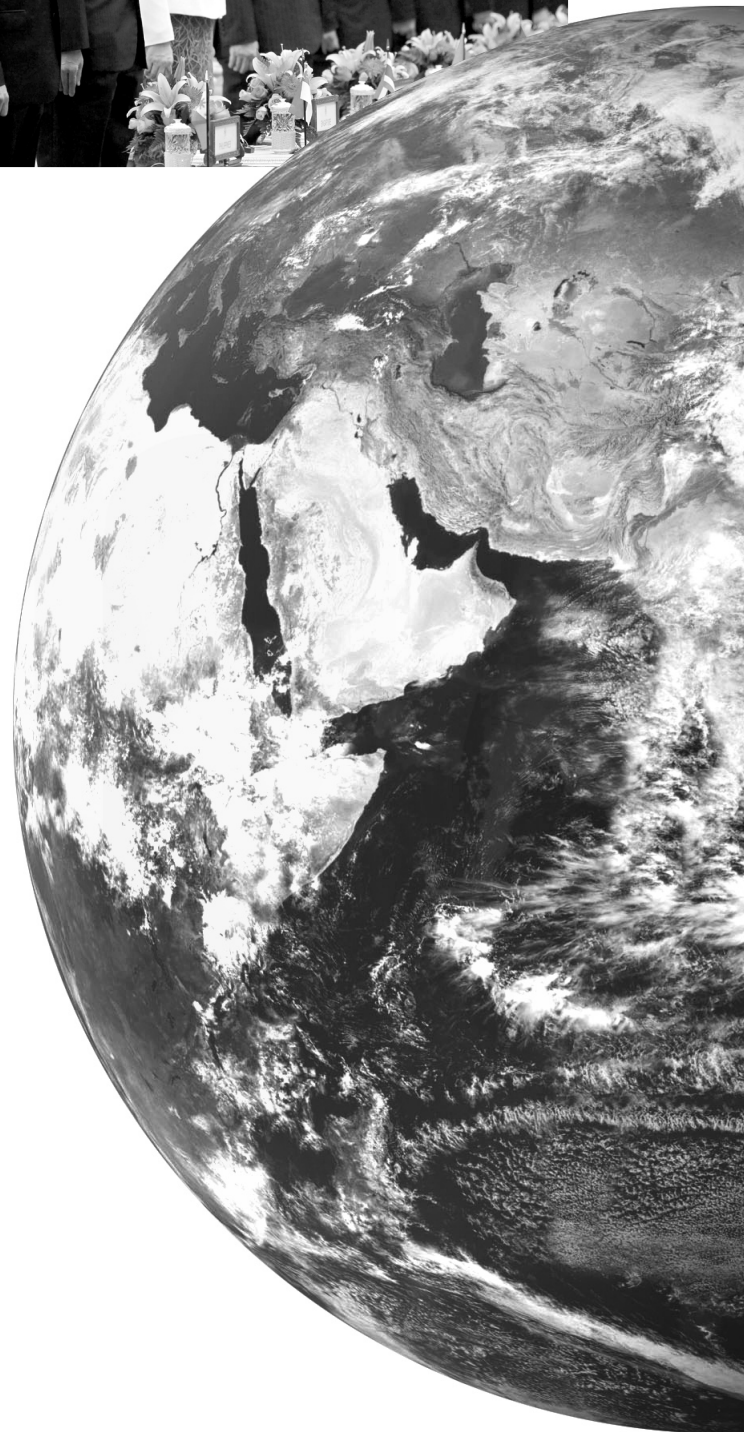
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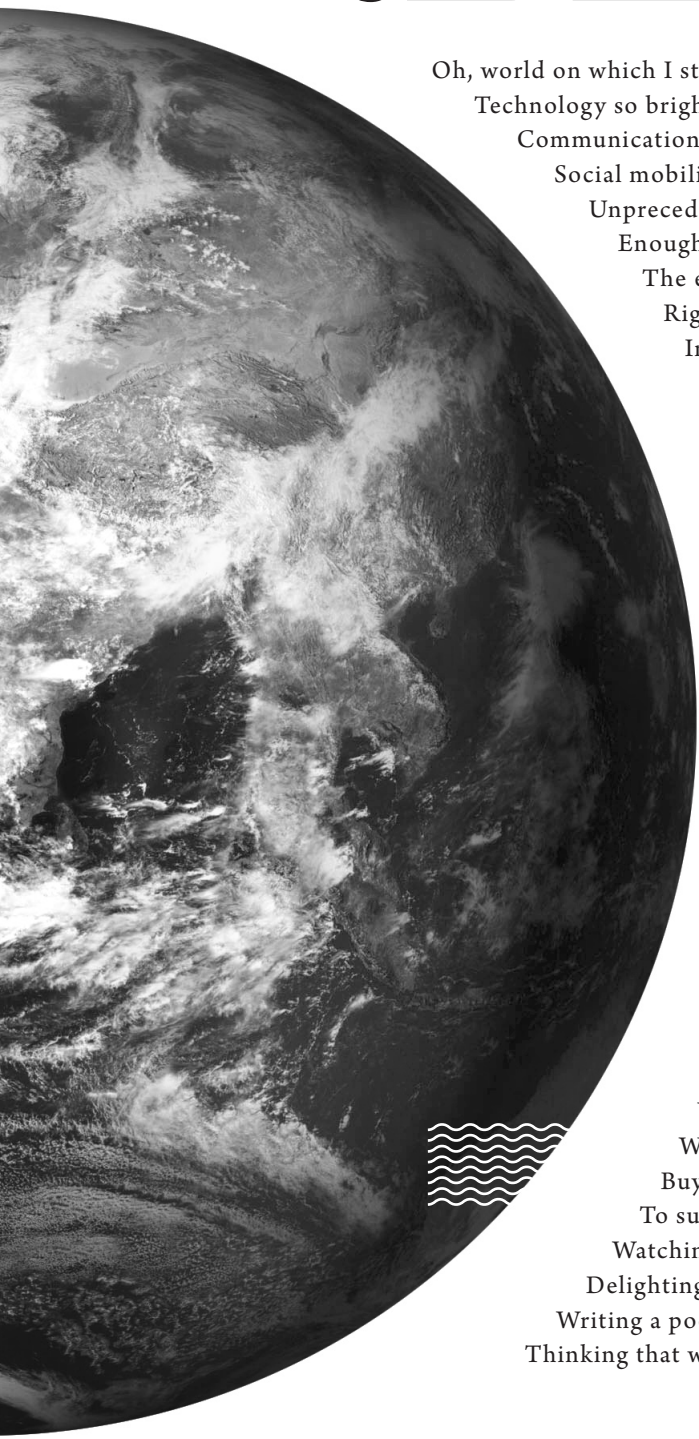
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Way Forward: ASEAN Community by 2015
Source: Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines



IGNORANCE IS BLISS



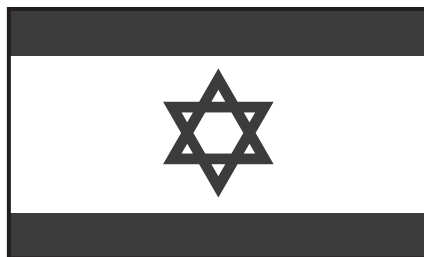
Oh, world on which I stand,
Technology so bright and true,
Communication so fast and varied,
Social mobility so convenient,
Unprecedented numbers (of people) on the earth,
Enough food to feed the whole world,
The emancipation of slavery,
Rights for women granted,
International trade abounding with capital,
The future never looked better.



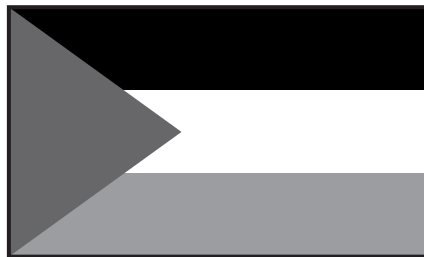
Oh Globalisation,
English muffins for breakfast,
Mexican tacos for lunch,
Japanese sashimi for dinner,
What else to ask for?
Name-brand sneakers,
Made in sweat shops,
Pills made by pharmaceutical companies,
Too expensive for those who need it,
Oh Globalisation,
What else to ask for?
Gadgets from Apple and Android that are uber cool,
But are obsolete in the blink of an eye,
Transportation and energy,
Destroying the earth once lush and green,
Oh Globalisation,
What else to ask for?
McDonald's and KFC, fast food aplenty,
As well as diabetes, obesity and kidney failure,
Sending a man to Mars of course,
While billions die of hunger,
What else to ask for?
Buying cheap DVDs,
To support illegal syndicates,
Watching a movie or an advertisement,
Delighting in the sexual objectification of women,
Writing a poem,
Thinking that will change something.



**Can Muslims
understand Jews
beyond “Zionism”?**



**Can Jews
understand Muslims
beyond “Anti-Semitism”?**



Students In Resistance offers
condolences to all victims of the conflict.

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this is a free publication, to be circulated in the University of Nottingham, Malaysia