



The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Saving the States' Face: An Ethnography of the ASEAN
Secretariat and Diplomatic Field in Jakarta**

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of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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Declaration

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**In memory of my brother,
*Rahul***

Abstract

Among the most enduring diplomatic projects in the postcolonial Third World, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN has for long inspired antipodal reviews ranging from the celebratory to the derisive among the scholars and practitioners of international relations. These judgments notwithstanding, the varied practices of ASEAN's diplomacy have impressively grown in scope, ritual, and ambition in the years following the Cold War and well into the contemporary post-unipolar conjuncture where ASEAN has emerged as a default manager of a geopolitical landscape bookended by the material and symbolic power struggles of China and the United States in Asia

Despite the abundance of writings on ASEAN and Asian security, much about its routine production and performance remain enigmatic. Little is known about the everyday practices that constitute this diplomatic activity; the quotidian administrative and 'emotional labour' nourishing its production; the sociological biographies of its practitioners and the endowments of class, language, and social capital shaping their shared dispositions; and the cultural idiom in which this diplomacy is produced and performed.

This thesis is an attempt to study ASEAN's diplomatic practice *in action* with an eye to answer these concerns by pursuing ethnographic fieldwork for 13 months in a site of ASEAN diplomacy *par excellence*. This site is the ASEAN Secretariat in South Jakarta and a field of multilateral diplomacy of Great and Middle Powers clustered around it in a city that has laid claim to becoming no less than "ASEAN's diplomatic capital".

This thesis argues, first, that in contrast to pervasive understandings of its inconsequentiality, the ASEAN Secretariat plays a central role in sustaining ASEAN's diplomatic project by *a)* coordinating its burgeoning apparatus of diplomatic interactions and activities, and *b)* by rendering its 'emotional labour' to save the figurative and embodied 'face' of ASEAN's state representatives as they meet among themselves and with their vaunted foreign partners in routine interactions.

Second, by analysing the everyday practices of Secretariat staff, ASEAN diplomats, and foreign diplomats based in Jakarta, this thesis draws on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman to construct a wider argument about ASEAN's diplomatic practice. It argues that ASEAN's diplomacy is produced in everyday life not by prevailing representations of the 'ASEAN Way' but instead through a stock of historically structured, sociologically patterned, tacit and embodied group dispositions – a diplomatic habitus. ASEAN's diplomatic habitus is organised around a perennial concern among its practitioners to save the physical and figurative 'face' of the state – instantiated by its representatives – to enable their performances of a mythic sovereign equality among each other and satisfy their demands for recognition from Great and Major powers, especially as they strive for 'centrality' in the performative games of Asian security.

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Acronyms

<i>ADB</i>	<i>Asian Development Bank</i>
<i>ADMM</i>	<i>ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting</i>
<i>ADR</i>	<i>Assistant Director</i>
<i>AFTA</i>	<i>ASEAN Free Trade Area</i>
<i>AICHR</i>	<i>ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Attachment Officer</i>
<i>APEC</i>	<i>Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum</i>
<i>APT</i>	<i>ASEAN Plus Three</i>
<i>ARF</i>	<i>ASEAN Regional Forum</i>
<i>ASC</i>	<i>ASEAN Standing Committee</i>
<i>ASEAN</i>	<i>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</i>
<i>ASEC</i>	<i>ASEAN Secretariat</i>
<i>AusAID</i>	<i>Australian Agency for International Development</i>
<i>CIDA</i>	<i>Canadian International Development Agency</i>
<i>CLMV</i>	<i>Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam</i>
<i>COREPER</i>	<i>Comité des représentants permanents</i>
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Committee of Permanent Representatives</i>
<i>CPR (WG)</i>	<i>CPR Working Group</i>
<i>CSIS</i>	<i>Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Jakarta)</i>
<i>DG</i>	<i>Director General</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Dialogue Partner</i>
<i>DSG</i>	<i>Deputy Secretary General</i>
<i>EAS</i>	<i>East Asia Summit</i>

<i>ERIA</i>	<i>Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia</i>
<i>EAMF</i>	<i>Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum</i>
<i>GIZ</i>	<i>GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)</i>
<i>ILO</i>	<i>International Labour Organisation</i>
<i>JICA</i>	<i>Japan International Cooperation Agency</i>
<i>MFA</i>	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
<i>MoU</i>	<i>Memorandum of Understanding</i>
<i>PoA</i>	<i>Plan of Action</i>
<i>SG</i>	<i>Secretary General</i>
<i>SOM</i>	<i>Senior Officials Meeting</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Senior Officer</i>
<i>TO</i>	<i>Technical Officer</i>
<i>ToR</i>	<i>Terms of Reference</i>
<i>TRIPS</i>	<i>Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights</i>
<i>UNDP</i>	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>
<i>USAID</i>	<i>United States Agency for International Development</i>
<i>WTO</i>	<i>World Trade Organisation</i>

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Map 1: ASEAN Member States

CHAPTER 1

A SECRETARIAT IN THE SHADOW OF INCONSEQUENTIALITY

1.1 A Diplomacy in Crisis

In July 2012, the ‘Peace Palace’ in Cambodia’s capital of Phnom Penh was the setting for a dramatic diplomatic breakdown. Described by the journalist and biographer Sebastian Strangio (2014: 120) as a “massive block of concrete and jet-black glass ...built in a neo-fascist idiom of dominating size and symmetry,” the Peace Palace was where ten foreign ministers from one of the most enduring intergovernmental associations in the Third World had gathered to engage in a week of back-to-back meetings among themselves and their influential foreign partners. As they converged within the expansive, spotless white rooms of the Peace Palace, bedecked with pleated claret drapes, furnished in a rich arrangement of upholstered chairs in Rococo style with gold trimmings, all arrayed around a conference table, they were weighed in and chased by the shadows of much wider and ominous international forces.

It had been exactly three months since China and the Philippines had entered a standoff over a triangular chain of reefs and rocks called the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, an impasse that would ultimately unravel in favour of China’s feisty paramilitary maritime vessels, with naval warships looming on the horizon (Taffer, 2015). Likewise, it had been only two weeks since China’s offshore oil

behemoth had announced nine new blocks for oil and gas exploration located comfortably within Vietnam's 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ (Fravel, 2012). The short-lived standoff on Scarborough and the infringements in Vietnam's EEZ were only the latest episodes in a much older history of contention over the spectral sprawl of atolls, islets, and seabanks in the resource rich waters of the South China Sea (Fravel, 2011; Yahuda, 2013). Magnifying, if not propelling, the spate of physical, discursive, and cartographic maritime tussles were the politics of a distinct post-unipolar conjuncture in the Asia-Pacific, where the growing economic and military capacities of China and its international aspirations were being discerned by the smaller states of Southeast Asia and apparently matched by the counterpoint of American military and diplomatic presence that had only in 2009 declared its 'return' as a 'Pacific Power' (Yahuda, 2013; Simon, 2012; Bisley and Phillips, 2013).

In the meeting room on the third floor of the Peace Palace these forces began to press on the semantic form of arguably the most banal of bureaucratic productions to emanate from this ritual interaction of the foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹ A joint communiqué, a text "denoting official information made public by governments of two or more States and treated as an official document" (Osmańczyk and Mango, 2003:426), is a diplomatic document that not only memorialises the discussions of ASEAN's foreign ministers, its annual issuance has also historically instantiated their claims to functional diplomatic kinship. Habituated to producing joint communiqués for over four decades, a slew of

¹ Its ten member states are (in an alphabetical order recalled in rote-fashion and in a single breath by a seasoned Secretariat staff): Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

familiar procedures accreted over the years kicked in as preparations began for drafting yet another communiqué in Phnom Penh. As per usual practice, the first draft – indeed, a “zero draft” – was prepared by officers at the ASEAN Secretariat who, using the previous year’s communiqué as a template, collated, updated, tweaked and scripted whole paragraphs on the various domains of inter-state economic, security and cultural collaboration conducted under the ASEAN banner. Secretariat officers, however, stayed well clear of paragraphs that express – with an air of rarefaction and anxiety – the domain of ‘high politics’. “Member states,” as one staff put it, “totally control those paragraphs and we are categorically asked not to touch them.”²

Once state delegations and Secretariat staff arrived in Phnom Penh in early July, this preliminary draft – with paragraphs on the South China Sea copy-pasted from the previous year’s communiqué – was thoroughly examined by civil service mandarins from the ten states in a drafting session. These brisk, forthright and busy preparatory meetings of ‘Senior Officials’ – who had emerged from the days of the Cambodian crisis as “ASEAN’s mafia” (Abad, 2011: 20) – would have often enough finalised the draft of the communiqué. At Phnom Penh, however, they were unable to overcome disagreement and the wording of the paragraphs was shoved up the grave pecking order of the state’s apparatus.

In a series of interactions that were subsequently leaked, reported, and analysed in much detail, the meeting of foreign ministers ended in an ill-tempered impasse.³

² Interview, Jakarta, 8 March 2013.

³ See, in particular, Carl Thayer’s (2012) account of this meeting, which this discussion both draws upon and expands.

Discussions on the wording of *one* paragraph on the South China Sea, in particular, inspired contrasting and severe responses. While ministers from Vietnam and the Philippines, with varying degrees of support from other ministers, appealed for the communiqué to explicitly name the recent infringements on Scarborough and the EEZ, Cambodia's Foreign Minister Hor Namhong, seated at the head of the meeting table as ASEAN's annual rotating Chair, countered these calls, arguing that ASEAN was no "tribunal" and warning – in his brusque conclusion – that "either we have a compromise text ...[or] there should be no text at all" (Thayer, 2012: 5). While Namhong had to dodge and ward off interventions by other foreign ministers, he swiftly shot down efforts by the ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan to offer suggestions and ideas for a compromise. One staff would enact an apocryphal scene with Namhong's arm outstretched to Surin "I know you will say this. No!"⁴ Besides serving as a vivid expression of Cambodia's 'special relationship' with China built on economic dependence (Burgos and Ear, 2010) and historical ties (Acharya, 2012), the Chair's position appeared to resonate China's stated policy of dealing with the four claimant states in Southeast Asia on a bilateral basis rather than diminish its leverage before the collective performance of solidarity staged under the props of ASEAN.

Observing and taking notes of these interactions from the background of the meeting rooms, officers from the ASEAN Secretariat expressed their "surprise" to each other as they met over breaks in their Delegation Room at the Peace Palace. "It was the first time," one veteran staff recounts, "that I heard a Chairman who took such as

⁴ Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

drastic position. The role of the Chair is to work out a compromise...not to be so tough on other member states.”⁵

Heightening the sense of drama at the Peace Palace were other elements of this diplomatic interaction that aroused presentiments, misgivings and mistrust among ASEAN’s core diplomatic family: the “malfunction” of the Philippine Foreign Secretary’s microphone as he raised his disagreements on the penultimate day of the meetings (Basilio, 2012; Mogato and Grudgings, 2012); Hor Namhong’s movements to and from the meeting room carrying drafts of the Communiqué to allegedly consult with Chinese officials outside (Bower, 2012: 2); and finally, the last ditch efforts of the final day – with the Indonesian Foreign Minister reportedly asking his Singaporean counterpart to return from the airport (Mogato and Grudgings, 2012) – that ended when the Cambodian Foreign Minister “picked up his papers and stormed out of the room” (Thayer, 2012:6). After 18 versions of the draft, with references to those “frightful” rocks that Captain D’Auvergne’s *Scarborough* struck on 12 September 1784 (Purdy, 1816: 499) rephrased from “disputed areas” to “conflict areas” and finally “affected shoal,” the joint communiqué had run aground.

Perhaps as unprecedented as the failure of ASEAN’s foreign ministers to issue a joint communiqué in their 45-year history of diplomatic interactions was the sheer depth of recriminations that broke out between their foreign policy elites in the full public view of national and international press. Accusations and ripostes were traded back and forth between senior diplomats from the Philippines and Cambodia over sound bites to local and international press; first person accounts published in national

⁵ Interview, Singapore, 5 August 2013.

broadsheets and websites; numerous angry letters shot off to newspaper editors (Kuong, 2012a, 2012b; Basilio, 2012; Sereythanh, 2012; You Ay, 2012); while the Cambodian ambassador to the Philippines was summoned and subsequently recalled (Lee-Brago, 2012; Boyle 2012). As these recriminations played out, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa – expressing and embodying Indonesia's claim to a leadership role in the Association (Emmers 2014; Leifer, 1983) – engaged in a round of 'shuttle diplomacy' to the capitals of five member states to forge consensus on a sparse 'Five Point Statement' that was passed to Hor Namhong who then announced its contents in a press briefing at Phnom Penh a week after the ill-fated meeting. "Indonesia," one scholar observed, had "save[d] ASEAN's face" (Emmerson, 2012).

The alleged but apparent success of a foreign power in pressuring an ASEAN member to project its interests into ASEAN's "inner sanctum," as Carl Thayer put it (cited in Mogato and Grudgings, 2012) and thus thwart its ritual performance of a fragile, if not mythic, autonomy, provoked a slew of commentary examining the long-range ramifications of the disruption at Phnom Penh. Of key concern to this body of journalistic, scholarly and think-tank voices was the extent to which this incident had undermined ASEAN's cohesion and its claims to 'leadership' and 'centrality' (Caballero-Anthony, 2014) in designing, organising and driving wider webs of interactional arrangements where the "great game" and "power plays"⁶ of post-Cold War Asian security have been partly performed and mediated (Simon 2012; Welsh 2013).

⁶ Words used by the former Japanese Ambassador to ASEAN Kimihiro Ishikane, and the ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan, respectively, in a BBC report on the aftermath of the Phnom Penh meeting (De Launey, 2012).

Sprouting forth from this din of prognoses and prescriptions was an unmistakable line of argument that asked pointed questions about the role of the Association's seemingly sleepy Secretariat in Jakarta. A prolific Thai journalist argued that the ASEAN Secretariat "could have saved the faltering credibility of its members" and "should have played the central role when the members got stuck in their deliberations at Phnom Penh." The Secretariat, he continued, merited this role not only because it possesses the "expertise and institutional knowledge" which state officials and rotational chairs lack, but also because it keeps "an impartial watch of Asean's interests" and "its staffers can perform summersaults ending deadlocks and biases existing within the organisation" (Chongkittavorn, 2012a). Prominent scholars of ASEAN argued that the disorder at Phnom Penh was a "wake up call" to "strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat" (Acharya, 2012) and that an "institutional solution" to the flaws of the "ASEAN Way of leadership" which favoured the whims and caprices of its rotating Chair country "would involve upgrading the ASEAN Secretariat, enlarging its budget and authorising its secretary general to be less of a secretary and more of a general" (Emmerson, 2012). Likewise, practitioners in the ASEAN circuit praised Marty's role in touching up ASEAN's scars from Phnom Penh but asked – given that Indonesia was neither the ASEAN Chair nor an active claimant to the dispute – "shouldn't member states entrust such a mandate to the Secretary General?" (Mochtan, 2012). International policy think tanks chipped in as well, arguing that in order to be seen as a "neutral broker" in the company of Great Powers in East Asia, ASEAN would have to "transform itself", notably, by "seriously revamping its Secretariat" into a "powerful and knowledgeable body" and

by “empowering a high profile secretary general to speak for ASEAN” (Kurlantzick, 2012: 21, also see 14-15).

Articulated in a moment of crisis, these prescriptions echoed muted pleas from the past for strengthening the Secretariat but, more significantly, they would be amplified by a wide constellation of actors involved in the everyday circuitries of ASEAN activity – from foreign diplomats and scholars in Track Two forums to journalists and analysts at local and international think tanks – as they converged in the humdrum of ASEAN workshops, seminars and meetings in the region.

The fallout at the Peace Palace, then, had been unprecedented not only in raising questions about the texture and strength of ASEAN’s functional diplomatic kinship, but also in linking up, in varying ways and to varying degrees, the future of this Third World and postcolonial diplomatic project to the status of its seven storied white tile cladded Secretariat in the precincts of a small compound in South Jakarta.

1.2 An Inconsequential and ‘Invisible’ Secretariat ⁷

That there exists not a single academic title on the ASEAN Secretariat to date might seem striking – for a generous observer – given that a great deal has been written

⁷ Mathiason’s coinage. The obscurity of the ASEAN Secretariat is in contrast to several substantive studies of the European Commission (see, Hooghe, 2005; Cini, 1996; King Tee, 1999; and Nugent, 2001) and the UN Secretariat (Gordenker, 2005; Young 1958; and Mathiason, 2007). While Secretariat’s are prone to being ‘invisible’ (Mathiason, 2007), the large Weberian bureaucracies of several international organisations, along with their explicit legal capacities and mandates, provides a theoretical basis to make claims about their agency and potential impact on regional and world politics (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999).

about multilateral institutions in the international relations of Southeast and East Asia.

Scholars have pored over how ASEAN – created in 1967 in the heyday of the ‘global’ Cold War (Westad, 2005), and in the context of decolonisation and state formation in the Third World – served as a diplomatic framework to reconcile a host of embittered inter-state relations in Southeast Asia. The iterative and embodied face-to-face interactions inaugurated and sustained under the ASEAN sign – at formal meetings, rounds of golf, informal retreats and over innumerable meals – enabled the elites and regimes of five Southeast Asian states to commit to a practice of diplomatic cooperation. The commitment to interact in this manner was enabled by, but also buttressed, a convergence over the desirability of a capitalist economic model of national development that secured these regimes from left-wing political movements and armed Communist insurgencies that offered an alternative model for organising their societies, and coevally, from the malady of outright external dependence and the prospect of superpower intervention during the Cold War (Turnbull, 1992: 606-620; Tarling, 2006: 95-140).

The rationales for sustaining ASEAN’s diplomacy were extended by the Association’s elites in the context of uncertainties that came with the end of the Cold War (Khong, 2004).⁸ Having stabilised relations among its members through regime consolidation and economic growth, ASEAN’s practice of multilateral diplomacy was slung over a broader geographical space varyingly identified as ‘East Asia’ or

⁸ Khong identifies four such uncertainties faced by Southeast Asian elites: the future of US commitment to Asia, the implications of China’s rising economic and military power, Japan’s turn towards a ‘normal’ state, and the “relevance” of ASEAN. See, Khong, 2004:176-190.

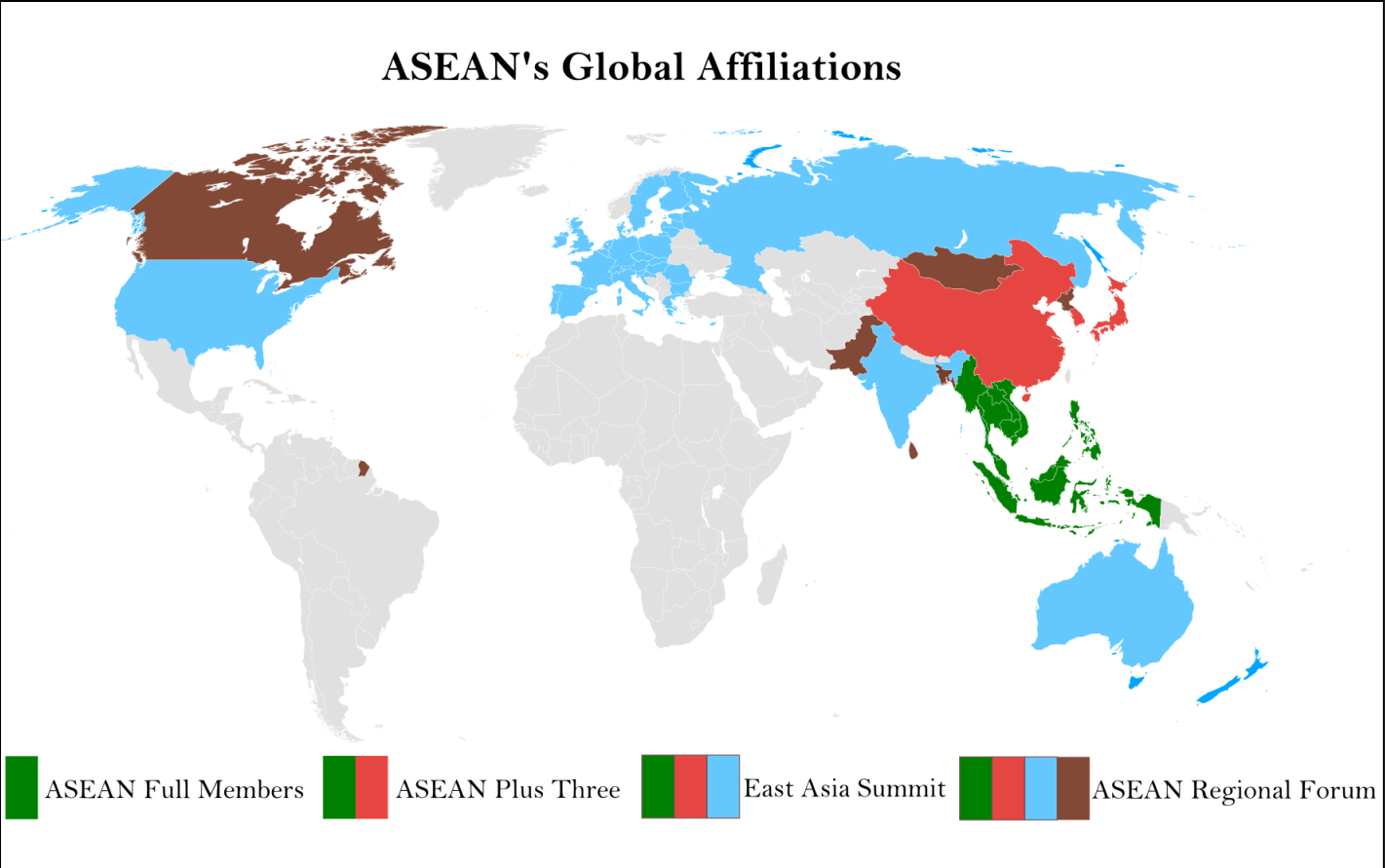
‘Asia Pacific’ to order inter-state interactions and anxieties on a grand scale⁹. Hitherto studied mostly by foreign policy specialists and area studies scholars, ASEAN’s claim to a prerogative role in managing Asian security raised the stakes of studying the Association and its style of work. The Association and its web of pan-Asian frameworks (See Map 2 and Annexure 5) thus emerged as a site – and a non-‘Western’ site at that – where self-consciously theoretical research programmes synched to prevailing trends and concerns in the Anglo-American International Relations academy were explicated and developed.

Scholars grew curious over whether ASEAN designed institutions could – like ASEAN, presumably – provide venues for face-to-face interaction among a more diverse cohort of state elites, facilitate information exchange, enable norm creation and diffusion, and foster convergence over the desirability of a status quo premised on the institutions of sovereignty and international law coupled to a model of capitalist economic growth. These concerns were articulated and interrogated through a series of simultaneous and long-running intellectual debates on a range of questions: Are regional institutions a viable “pathway” to regional order (Alagappa, 2003: 33-69; Bisley, 2009; Tow, 2001, 2008)? Are institutions a “complement” or “alternative” to the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific (Leifer, 1996; Khong, 1997)? Are they venues for the ‘socialisation’ of state representatives (Johnston, 2008; Ba, 2009b; Katsumata, 2009; Kawasaki, 2009)? Is the strength of social interaction produced in and through institutions like ASEAN potent enough to produce a “nascent Security Community” (Acharya, 2000: 24-25), a “thin security community” (Emmerson, 2005) or does it produce a “working diplomatic

⁹ On the construction of regions see Katzenstein, 2005: 6-13; Pan, 2014; and Ba, 2009a.

community” (Leifer, 2005: 105-106) with a distinct “diplomatic and security culture” the existence of which is always a matter of empirical enquiry (Haacke, 2003)? Further, do the socialising effects of ASEAN suggest similar possibilities on a broader Asian scale (Ravenhill, 2009, 2010; Acharya, 2007; Leifer, 1997; Ba, 2009b; Hund, 2003; Stubbs, 2002; Katsumata, 2009; and Jones and Smith, 2007)?

ASEAN's Global Affiliations



Map 2: ASEAN's Global Affiliations

Given the ink spilt, pages spent, and energies expended on studying ASEAN, the Secretariat's invisibility is intriguing. Indeed, even a 'literature review' of the Secretariat is encumbered by the meager material that exists on the subject. Peruse some of the key texts on the 'international relations of Southeast Asia,' on 'regionalism,' and 'ASEAN,' and one may be hard pressed to find more than a few pages devoted to the Secretariat, if not brief references to its Secretary General. Examples abound: the Secretariat is mentioned in seven out of nearly two hundred pages in Amitav Acharya's influential and widely referenced text (2000) about an ASEAN Security Community in Southeast Asia; the "Secretariat" and/or "Secretary General" are mentioned in roughly over ten pages in Alice Ba's monograph (2009a) on the history of ASEAN regionalism; once in Ralf Emmers' (2003) work on the "balance of power factor" within cooperative security arrangements like ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); in sixteen pages of Haacke's (2003) study on ASEAN's "diplomatic and security culture"; in four pages in Donald Weatherbee's (2009) study of Southeast Asia's "struggle for autonomy"; and in fifteen pages of Dewi Fortuna Anwar's (1995) study of ASEAN in Indonesia's foreign policy. More than any other, Donald Emmerson's works (2007; 2008) have called attention to the Secretariat and its status as an issue of some consequence to ongoing debates about the status and prospects of ASEAN. Fuller, albeit limited, accounts of the Secretariat appear in works of former employees of the organisation, in particular, former Secretary General Rodolfo Severino's book (2006) on Southeast Asia's "search of an ASEAN Community" and in a book chapter by a retired Secretariat veteran Termsak Chalermplanupap (2008). Pedantic and indeed fastidious this exercise may be, but the number of pages scholars expend on the Secretariat serves as an easy marker of

their limited engagement as well as the wider concerns valorised within the academic field.

Writing about the obscurity of everyday forms of resistance in studies of power, James Scott (1985: xv) observed, “the limitations of any field of study are most strikingly revealed in its shared definitions of what counts as relevant.” The inability to take the Secretariat seriously in the international relations of the Asia-Pacific points us towards a similar “shared understanding”, that is, a perception or judgment about a situation to which a number of people contribute. There are two qualities of this shared understanding that are worth noting. First, it is shared precisely because it seems to cut across scholars and research programs of different theoretical persuasions. Second, this understanding operates without an explicit acknowledgement of its construction. That is, none of the works referenced above have had to justify their treatment of the Secretariat.

1.3 The Construction of Inconsequentiality

What explains this indifference? I shall venture three possible explanations for why a site like the Secretariat has left much scholarship unmoved.

1.3.1 Privileged Actors: A Gaze on the Reified State

Perhaps an obvious reason for the Secretariat’s obscurity lies in the explicit attention of various IR theories on the state and its behaviour in international politics. Theories

like realism, liberal institutionalism and constructivism, all of which occupy the dominant space in the field of Anglo-American IR scholarship, have been appropriated, tested and elaborated in the study of Southeast Asian international relations (see Tan, 2009, for an critical assessment of the field). ‘Realist’ studies of the region couched in foreign policy analysis and the precepts of the ‘English school’ (as opposed to behaviouralism and neorealism) have argued about the salience of sovereignty, diplomacy and the balance of power in explaining the behaviour of *states* in the region. Constructivist accounts of Asian security that emerged in the 1990s were fashioned as responses to realism but in how they shaped up, they did not break radically from realism (and neorealism) in epistemological terms by smuggling in rationalist ontologies and a reified pre-given state in their analysis (Tan, 2006). Moreover, while constructivists shifted our attention to regional institutions and the study of norms and regional identities, they have nonetheless privileged norms and identities engendered and diffused in the interaction of state representatives.¹⁰ There is no reason to assume that the norms, identities and practices operating in and through state representatives necessarily capture the broader universe of actors and social artefacts that are worth investigating.

1.3.2. Privileged Questions: The Impact and Effects of Institutions

The Secretariat’s marginality is also rooted in the kind of questions that research programs have deemed interesting for the study of international relations in the

¹⁰ In contrast to constructivist works in other empirical contexts that have delved in greater detail on the role of bureaucracies and epistemic actors in international organisations (See Finnemore, 1993; Klotz, 1995; Katzenstein, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; Price, 1997; and Barnett, 1997).

region. As I suggested earlier, IR theories and research programs in the international relations of the Asia-Pacific have shaped up around debates on the effectiveness of institutions, and on whether they have any *impact* on the behaviour of states (see, especially, Kai He 2006; Nischalke, 2002).

Answers are varied. While realist accounts acknowledge ASEAN's role in fostering a "working diplomatic community" out of its numerous inter-governmental interactions, they are skeptical of claims – often made by foreign policy makers and some scholars – that these institutions can serve as venues for counter-realpolitik socialisation to the extent of transforming state identities and preferences (Leifer, 1987; Emmers, 2003; and Narine 2009a, 2009b). This, however, is precisely what constructivists have argued: that institutions like ASEAN and the ARF are "social environments" where state representatives are socialised into the norms of inter-state interaction. To this end they have teased out causal and constitutive mechanisms: Acharya's (2009a) "cognitive prior" is one instance, as is Alastair Ian Johnston's (1999; 2008) more social scientific explication of the mechanisms by which socialisation occurs – through persuasion, social influence, and mimicking – within environments like the ARF.

What we see here, then, is how dominant research programs have shaped an intellectual *field* where certain kinds of questions couched in a particular vocabulary, and techniques of interrogating them, have acquired something of a *doxic* or commonsensical hold over scholars operating and reproducing them.¹¹

¹¹ And in which this writer has also been complicit, see, Nair, 2009; Nair, 2011.

1.3.3. *Privileged Sites and Temporalities: The Grand over the Everyday*

The marginality of the Secretariat, and indeed of a *whole swathe* of social relations and spaces where international relations is anchored, performed and produced, arises from how IR theories excise that seemingly unwieldy morass of quotidian practices operating in the realm of everyday life.

While all dominant IR theories and research programs are complicit in ignoring politics and power in their quotidian contexts, it is possible to grumble just a bit louder with the role of constructivism on this count. As noted earlier, constructivism – a broad church in IR with conventional and critical variants (Hopf, 1998; Adler, 2001), and with peculiar ‘soft-realist’ features in Southeast Asian IR (Peou, 2002) – have been co-opted into a terrain of contestation set out by the realist orthodoxy they had set out to challenge. This cooptation has meant that constructivism in IR has forsaken a range of possibilities for explaining power and politics that are allowed by a more *faithful* social constructivist approach rooted in social theory.¹² It is possible to elaborate this point by highlighting some of the exclusions that describe extant constructivist scholarship.

First, constructivist accounts have overlooked a much wider *field* of activity with a diverse set of participants engaged in producing this diplomacy. Second, while constructivists conceptualise ASEAN and its related institutions as “social environments,” their focus has been on examining how norms, values and identities issue from or operate within these environments. There is, however, a great deal of

¹² Important exceptions include Tan See Seng’s (2007) superb study of Track Two actors talking – and constructing – Asia Pacific security, and more recent works like Quale, 2013.

this environment that has not yet been accounted for. The material features of a setting such as the props and symbols that announce the space as fitting for particular kinds of interaction; the organisation of space within such settings in terms of the size and layout of conference and meeting rooms; the mere arrangement of furniture, of “sign equipment” (Goffman, 1959: 33), and the provision of aesthetic elements, among others, are practically unknown to those outside the direct experience of such settings.¹³ And third, constructivists have neglected the systematic study of the *everyday practices* constitutive of international relations. This is a strong claim to make when one considers that most constructivist accounts invoke the term ‘practice’ in one way or another – as the ‘practice’ of diplomats and foreign ministers, the ‘practices’ of the ‘ASEAN Way,’ or simply something ‘in practice’ (as opposed to stated goals). The term is used in an accurate but minimal sense, more as a reference to activity rather than to a theoretically informed study of everyday practices through which the social and international are constituted, reproduced and recursively changed. As a result, constructivist studies have been primarily concerned with *a*) the *grand* acts, gestures, and outcomes of state interaction *b*) and have studied social phenomena *over time* (in the form of political and diplomatic histories that rely on process tracing techniques, archives and interviews) as opposed to studying actors and relations *in situ* and *in real time*.

¹³ In making this point I echo the arguments of the ‘aesthetic turn’ in IR. See, Bleiker, 2001.

1.4 Opening up the Secretariat and ASEAN's Diplomacy

There are some immediate grounds on which the Secretariat holds some appeal for study. In contrast to the multiple sites where activity fashioned under the 'ASEAN' sign is staged and performed over a day or week – the biannual Summits of political leaders and monarchs, the numerous meetings of diplomats and bureaucrats, and gatherings of Track Two and policy elites – the one site where ASEAN is produced and reproduced over the proverbial 365-days-a-year is at the brick and mortar structure of the ASEAN Secretariat in South Jakarta.

Scholars have pondered whether ASEAN can do anything *beyond* talk, summitry and meetings, but what is conceded by this popular line of critique is an acknowledgement of the remarkable salience of such regional *activity* (Ravenhill, 2009: 223; Beeson, 2009: 334) in the form of a burgeoning web of meetings, seminars, workshops, documents and training programs within and beyond Southeast Asia. This proliferation has continued to the point where one may ask – perhaps not unreasonably – whether there is *little else but such activity* in terms of the effects and consequences of this diplomatic project. The one site that organises some of this activity and coordinates *all* of it – the stuff that is indissolubly 'ASEAN' regardless of whether it is causally important or 'relevant' to the grand goals of regional peace and stability – is the ASEAN Secretariat.

Furthermore, if ASEAN is a project about imagining an arbitrary region around an identity, then *what*, if anything, is this distinct 'ASEAN identity' and *where* can it be found? Scholars have empirically tested claims to such a reified ASEAN identity by stubbornly fixing their gaze on the beliefs and practices of state leaders, bureaucrats

and foreign policy elites but appear to have missed out a site where this ‘ASEAN identity’ claims to manifest in its most precise and – notionally – ‘purest’ form, in that its staff and Secretary General are deemed by the Association’s Charter to perform “exclusively ASEAN responsibilities” (ASEAN, 2008:17). This *sui generis* site, where Donald Emmerson (2007: 428) notes, “unquestionably, tangibly, ASEAN exists,” is the ASEAN Secretariat.

The elisions and silences that have produced the ASEAN Secretariat’s invisibility offer an invitation not only to explicate the role of the Secretariat in ASEAN’s burgeoning diplomatic project, but also to examine a much wider universe of sites, subjects, relations and artefacts that also fall in the penumbra of IR’s intellectual attention. Indeed, for all the writings on the subject, ‘ASEAN’ itself remains enigmatic. Little is known about the everyday practices and bureaucratic performances that produce this inter-state diplomatic activity; the everyday labour nourishing its production; the sociological biographies of practitioners and the endowments of class, language and capital shaping their shared dispositions and life-chances; and the cultural idiom – a swirl of representations and embodied practices – in which this diplomatic practice is enacted and reproduced in routine form.

This thesis is an attempt to tackle these varied concerns all pivoting around the overarching question of *how is ASEAN’s diplomacy produced and performed?* It does so by pursuing a strategy of ethnographic immersion in a narrow and bounded site that has altogether escaped the intellectual curiosity and attention of students of Asian security. This is a site where something ‘ASEAN’ is being crafted and performed day in and day out in quotidian form, a site of ASEAN production *par*

excellence where the circuits of region-wide diplomatic activity congregate, if not course through on their way to the meeting rooms of various ministries and the pageantry of conference and hotel venues across Southeast and East Asia. This site is the compound of the ASEAN Secretariat in South Jakarta and the wider field of multilateral diplomacy clustered around it in a city that has laid claim to becoming no less than ASEAN's diplomatic capital (*'Ibukota diplomatik ASEAN'*).

While Jakarta has been the 'seat of the ASEAN Secretariat' for four decades, only recently has the city emerged as a field of multilateral diplomatic activity. The emergence and consolidation of this diplomatic field occurred in the context of the ASEAN Charter ratified in 2008 which created a new body of ASEAN diplomats stationed permanently in Jakarta called the Committee of Permanent Representatives or CPR. Also fueling the production of this field was the wider climate of geopolitical anxieties and economic uncertainties that raised the stakes for ten 'Great' and 'Major' foreign powers¹⁴ – referred to in ASEAN's official classification as 'Dialogue Partners' (DPs) – to deepen their engagement with ASEAN by appointing Ambassadors to ASEAN and opening Permanent Missions to ASEAN.¹⁵ Meanwhile, as many as 80 Ambassadors to Indonesia sought joint accreditation as Ambassadors to ASEAN. These new and concrete diplomatic investments from Southeast Asia and from far corners of the globe – in the form of new brick and mortar structures, diplomatic postings, office organigrams, car plates, office 'sign equipment', and a whole range of bureaucratic texts and performances – have magnetised a constellation of extant actors including multinational businesses mostly

¹⁴ See, Goh, 2007/08 on this usage.

¹⁵ ASEAN's 10 'Dialogue Partners' include the United States, China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, India, Canada and the European Union.

headquartered in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, foreign policy elites, NGO's and civil society actors, and journalists, to heighten their involvement, access, and affiliation with this band of actors in Jakarta, and concomitantly thicken the field of ASEAN based diplomatic activity.

Even as it transects with, and indeed issues from, varying configurations of local and international power, this diversely populated field of ASEAN diplomacy and its 'community of practice' (Adler, 2008) is a distinctly *diplomatic* one.¹⁶ It is diplomatic not merely by the sheer number of diplomats involved in the traditional trade of negotiating and information gathering (Wight, 1977: 113), but also because actors beyond the pale of diplomats – Secretariat staff, local foreign policy elites, development aid officials, business representatives, journalists – are “diplomatised” (Neumann, 177-182, 2012). Endowed with linguistic capital (specifically, a facility with the English language), cultural capital in the form of degrees from elite national and (often) Western universities, and social capital from their elite family backgrounds and persisting ties of patronage to the state, this constellation of globalised actors express a “cosmopolitan habitus of the type that has traditionally characterised the diplomat – available, mediating, eager to please” (Neumann, 2012: 182), besides engaging in work practices, performances, and knowledge production that are strikingly similar to ones that diplomats have traditionally sought to monopolise (ibid: 171).

¹⁶ I draw on several related definitions of diplomacy: as the “mediation of estrangement” (Der Derian, 1987a: 6); as “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states” (Satow, 1979 [1917]: 3); and as “negotiating between different positions held by different polities (Neumann, 2012a: 8).

1.5 Arguments

This thesis constructs two related arguments. It argues, first, that in contrast to pervasive understandings of its inconsequentiality, the ASEAN Secretariat plays a central role in sustaining ASEAN's burgeoning diplomatic project by coordinating and managing its apparatus of diplomatic interactions and activities, and by rendering its emotional labour to save the figurative and embodied 'face' of ASEAN's state representatives as they meet among themselves and with their vaunted foreign partners. Second, and by following the ethnographic dictum to 'go small to illuminate the large', this study on the practices of the Secretariat and the wider Jakarta diplomatic field argues that the ASEAN Way of diplomacy is performed in quotidian practice not by representations of the ASEAN Way as we find them in the extant literature but by a structured and generative diplomatic disposition or *habitus*. This habitus is organised around a perennial concern among ASEAN's elites to save the face of the state – instantiated by its representatives – to enable their performances of a mythic sovereign equality and satisfy their demands for mutual and external recognition.

1.5.1 *A Secretariat Producing and Performing ASEAN's Diplomacy*

Even though the Secretariat is – in a wider field of national and international bureaucracies – 'small', 'understaffed,' 'poorly funded,' and barely a locus of legal

authority, this thesis argues that it nonetheless plays a central role in sustaining and producing ASEAN's diplomatic project. It does so in two related ways.

First, the Secretariat is a key organisation involved in coordinating, managing and, in a qualified form, producing, the expanding apparatus of *interactions and activities* that give flesh to ASEAN's diplomatic enterprise. As I noted earlier, scholars are resigned to acknowledge the salience of ASEAN's unremitting and indeed expanding bundle of interactions and activities. The official count of ASEAN meetings, for instance, has grown exponentially from 286 meetings in 1994 to nearly 1400 in 2014,¹⁷ as has the volume of financial contributions from foreign partners into ASEAN's 'Trust Funds' managed by the Secretariat in funding these activities. If ASEAN is little else but these instantiations and productions, then the Secretariat's role in managing and producing them takes on an evident significance.

Second, the thesis explicates how the seemingly inconsequential Secretariat sustains a putatively 'ASEAN Way' of diplomacy. It does so by identifying the precise mechanisms by which the Secretariat expresses, nourishes and reproduces ASEAN's diplomatic habitus or disposition to uphold and save the face of state representatives to secure their performance of a mythic sovereign equality and satisfy their demands for recognition.

An entry point to discern the Secretariat's role in this regard is through a fine grained empirical study of the kinds of labour that the Secretariat – instantiated by generations of staff moving in and out of its precincts – must render in the successful

¹⁷ From 286 meetings in 1994 to 700 in 2008, 1100 in 2012 to 1400 by 2014. See respectively, Leahy 1996; Acharya 2000:66; Chalermphanupap, 2007:117; and Surin, 2011.

performance of their professional duties. Besides a host of administrative labour involving physical and mental capacities – from drafting papers, emailing, to preparing conference kits – staff must render what the sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) describes as ‘emotional labour,’ that is, labour “that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (ibid: 7). Studying flight attendants in the United States whose well trained and induced smiles were symbolic of the company’s own disposition – that its planes won’t crash, that they would depart and arrive on time, that the traveler’s status would be elevated – Hochschild captured a distinctive quality of post-Fordist capitalist labour, the significance of which has only grown with the expansion of the face-to-face service economy worldwide (Steinberg and Figart, 1999; Garey and Hansen, 2011; Hochschild, 2012). Just as flight attendants whose “emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself” (ibid: 5), staff at the ASEAN Secretariat must infuse their varied administrative labour with a tacit and practical knowledge (Pouliot, 2008) of managing their feelings and the feelings of ‘member states’ they serve.

While the competent flight attendant smiles, the competent staff at the ASEAN Secretariat must save and maintain the state’s ‘face’. To sustain the figurative and physical faces of representatives gold dusted with the force of the sovereign state, staff engage in what the sociologist Erving Goffman (1967) referred to as the practices of ‘face-work.’ Staff must deploy an attentive and exacting solicitousness to ensure that ASEAN’s representatives are not threatened with embarrassment and moments of awkwardness by which they may ‘lose face’, be ‘out of face’ or ‘shamefaced,’ especially as they converge in the company of each other as equals or

as they interact and seek recognition from ‘outsiders’ like representatives of Great and Major powers. This concern for the face of the state is not only at work in face-to-face interactions but also in their routine bureaucratic and textual productions, and indeed in the very constitution of their subjectivities as ‘servants’ of state. In sum, the Secretariat’s unremitting emotional labour rendered or coercively extracted is sluiced towards sustaining the ritual states of ASEAN’s representatives as they perform their sovereign equality in what is a decidedly unequal ASEAN diplomatic field and seek to be recognised – as equals, as subjects that matter, as ‘leaders’ – before their foreign partners.

1.5.2 The ASEAN Way

The role of the ASEAN Secretariat thus opens a window to understand and revisit extant understandings of ASEAN’s diplomatic practice, one that is referred to by the practitioners of this diplomacy as the ‘ASEAN Way’. Exercising the energy of great many scholars, the ASEAN Way is understood in the literature as consisting of a catalogue of “principles,” “norms,” and “procedures”: the respect for the sovereign equality of members; the non-interference of member states in the domestic affairs of one another; the abstention from the threat or use of force in inter-state relations; organisational minimalism; avoidance of legally binding frameworks; a preference for quiet, consultative, and backdoor diplomacy; the extensive use of feelers or go-betweens to produce consensus; the use of non-adversarial procedures (the avoidance of majoritarian voting, in particular); avoiding airing differences in public; and consigning sensitive matters to the bilateral as opposed to the multilateral context of

interaction (Haacke, 2003; Acharya, 2000; Johnston, 1999; Khong and Neesadurai, 2007; Caballero-Anthony, 1998; Tuan, 1996).

These understandings of the ‘ASEAN Way’ are not incorrect as much as they are inadequate. Contrast this catalogue of elements to how the practitioners of ASEAN’s diplomacy have sought to capture the term in the past: the former Foreign Minister of Malaysia and a leading figure of this diplomacy’s early years, Ghazalie Shafie, referred to this diplomacy as a “state of mind” (Ahmad, 1986: 192); the first Secretary General of ASEAN, Ajit Singh, reflected on the ASEAN Way as “an undefinable expression that readily comes to mind when we want to explain how and why we do the [sic] things the way we do” (Haacke, 2003: 6); the notorious Indonesian intelligence czar Ali Moertopo (Tanter, 1991: 248-265), who was part of an intimate coterie of ASEAN elites in its early years, traced the ASEAN Way to the “fact that most of the leaders representing the ASEAN member countries for the past seven years or more of its existence have mostly been old friends who know one another so well” (Acharya, 2000: 62). The frustrating “undefinability” of the ASEAN Way as a formal concept would crop up again in the numerous interactions with diplomats, bureaucrats and secretariat staff in Jakarta for whom formal concepts such as the ‘ASEAN Way,’ ‘ASEAN Community’ and indeed ‘ASEAN’ itself were deeply ambiguous but nonetheless a ‘working reality’ apprehended, experienced and sensible only through their quotidian routines and activities.

The argument being worked up here is that the “norms” and “principles” of the ASEAN Way are *representations* of the ASEAN Way. As representations, they need to be performed and produced (or indeed violated) in practice. Dissimulating the

representational character of extant understandings of the ASEAN Way and unwittingly mistaking these representations for practices – what Pierre Bourdieu would forewarn as slipping from “the model of reality to the reality of the model” (Bourdieu 1977: 29) – appears to have spawned a great many investigations into their routine violations, raising questions over the ‘emptiness’, ‘credibility’ and indeed the ‘reality’ of the ‘ASEAN Way’ itself (Jones and Smith, 2001, 2002, 2003), even as the practices constituting ASEAN’s diplomacy appear to blissfully produce, reproduce and indeed expand.

This thesis thus argues that the *habitus* of ASEAN’s diplomacy is central to grasping what the ASEAN Way is *in practice*. This diplomatic habitus is an embodied disposition, a practical knowledge of how to *do* this diplomacy, indeed a veritable *feel* for the diplomatic game. It is not rooted in essentialised understandings of culture but takes form through a *field* of historically ordered and sociologically churned power relations and resources. It is not a substance, a mental particulate matter, but an embodied mnemonic inscribed in the bodies and subjectivities of practitioners of this diplomacy and indeed traceable in and through the logic of practices they fashion in the immediacy of their professional and social lives.

Moving on from this preface – for most diplomacies may lay claim to their stabilised and generative dispositions –¹⁸ I argue that *ASEAN’s* diplomatic habitus is organised around a perennial concern to uphold and save the face of the state. A basis to suggest the resonance of this argument with practice may be made by noting how the vocabulary of ‘face’ operates as an *emic* or insider category among practitioners of

¹⁸ The few extant studies of diplomatic habitus’ have ranged from the EU (Adler-Nissen, 2013) to Omani diplomats (Jones and Ridout, 2012). Also see, Neumann, 2003.

this diplomacy, both past and present. Cataloguing the representations of the ASEAN Way, the former Secretary General Ajit Singh notes that “face is very important and every effort is made to ensure that no party feels hurt in an argument or a discussion” (Haacke, 2003:6). The Singapore diplomat Kishore Mahbubani observes more dramatically that “face is important, and conflict can break out when it is lost” (Mahbubani, 1995:117).¹⁹ Noting that “it takes an observer with acute infra-red vision” to understand the workings of ASEAN’s mostly *sub rosa* practices, the lawyer Walter Woon (2012: 1) notes that the first “essential aspect” to the ASEAN Way is “a desire not to lose face in public or to make other members lose face.” Likewise, the stability of ‘face’ – of ‘saving’ it and ensuring it is not ‘lost’ on the public stage of ritual activity – serves as a more diffuse and general guiding prism for some diplomats in the region more broadly, especially as they recount their careers in memoirs (Lee, 2009; Koh, 2009). The talk of ‘face’ goes right up too, with political leaders invoking the category to reflect on their practice in managing ASEAN’s politics (Razak, 2012). More importantly, these disparate invocations of ‘face’ stand alongside the more quotidian references to the category and the concerted force of its logic at work by practitioners – from diplomats of the CPR in Jakarta to staff of the ASEAN Secretariat – as they perform and produce this diplomacy in the pages to follow.

¹⁹ Cited in Haacke, 2003: 6-7. Both the interpersonal character of ASEAN’s diplomacy as well as the importance of saving ‘face’ in such interactions are recognised in the literature (See, *ibid* as well as Acharya 2000: 63-71). All the same, they are not studied through the lens of everyday face-work and diplomatic impression management (Adler-Nissen, 2012). That said, Haacke’s (2003) study of ASEAN’s “diplomatic and security culture” and his suggestion that this security culture operates as a *habitus* in regional diplomacy (2011: 63-65), are closest in its conceptual affinities to an approach that foregrounds everyday practice and face-work. For another brief reference to *habitus* in the ASEAN context, see, Collins (2013).

ASEAN's diplomatic habitus to maintain and save the face of the state may be resonant among its practitioners, but this ethnographic and sociological exposition of the concept breaks decisively with the casual usage among its practitioners who often fetishise it, that is, abstract it from the social bases and power relations that give the concept meaning, force and expression. It does so in two ways. First, to save face is not an end in itself and nor does it operate as a timeless sensibility. The concern for face among ASEAN's practitioners is geared towards securing two key *interests*: performing and sustaining a mythic sovereign equality among ASEAN's members as they instantiate their functional kinship,²⁰ and second, to satisfy, indeed underline, their demands for recognition and status. Jurgen Haacke (2003), drawing on Axel Honneth, has demonstrated the historical salience of struggles for recognition in structuring the "moral grammar" of relations among Southeast Asia's foreign policy elites,²¹ a grammar appreciated and accounted for by English School realists like Michael Leifer as well (Leifer, 1967, 2000; Haacke 2005). While demands for mutual recognition among ASEAN's elites (and the regimes and states they represent) have abated since the embittered formative context in which this diplomacy emerged in the 1960s, the claims to sovereign equality remain tortured by the sheer depth of inequalities among them. To 'save face' and ensure no one 'loses face' as a basis to perform sovereign equality thus remains a salient concern among ASEAN's bureaucratic and diplomatic family as they converge with each other. Meanwhile, the demand for recognition acquires salience in the interactions of ASEAN's elites with the outside (relational) world. This desire for recognition is rooted not only in what Clifford Geertz (1973a: 258) noted as the aspiration of newly

²⁰ On studies of *functional* diplomatic kinship (as opposed to *biological* kinship) see, Neumann, 2012b. For kinship in ancient diplomacies see, Jones 1999.

²¹ Haacke defines this as the desire "to be respected as persons and as representatives of their political systems" alongside other identity claims including a sense of entitlement drawn from historical experiences and narratives (2003: 11-13).

decolonised states “to be recognised as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions ‘matter’... a social assertion of the self as ‘being somebody in the world’”. It is also directly connected to the legitimacy and sustainability of ASEAN’s contemporary post-Cold War claims to be in the “driver’s seat” of Asian security architecture building (Khong, 2004), to exercise ‘leadership’ in setting the form and agenda of these interactional forums (Jones, 2010; Beeson and Stone, 2014; Stubbs, 2014), and maintain its “centrality” in organising the overlapping networks of Asian security (Cabellero-Anthony, 2014).²²

Second, this diplomatic habitus does not arise from essentialised cultural templates and ‘mentalities’. The habitus is a relational structure, it takes form and force only from a wider field of relations. “To talk of habitus without field,” Karl Maton argues, is to “fetishise habitus, abstracting it from the very contexts which give it meaning and in which it works” (2008: 61). The concern for face in ASEAN’s diplomacy must thus be situated in the broader social orders that this diplomacy expresses, sustains and reproduces, a task I will attend to shortly.

The real import of the two points I have offered up so far is to underscore that the talk of ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus to save and uphold the face of the state, and the practices that are fashioned through its dispositional prism, are *a*) intimately related to the (oftentimes gritty) pursuit of interests, and *b*) that far from obscuring the workings of power, ‘face’ is an *idiom* in which power struggles are apprehended, experienced and waged in the banality of everyday life.

²² For broader arguments on the role of recognition in IR, see Ringmar, 2012.

A final point must be added here to address a pressing concern: what precisely is unique about the ASEAN Way? Indeed, it is worth reflecting upon how unexceptional the argument above appears. The disposition to save the face of others, and the accompanying practices of face-work, are immanent and universal to social interaction. Indeed, these imperatives are only heightened in diplomacy where, as Goffman (1967:13) intimates us, actors representing polities and lineages are “gambling with a face to which the feelings of many are attached” and thus bring a great deal of “perceptiveness” and skill in their arts of face work. Be it the ASEAN field in Jakarta, the UN in New York or the EU in Brussels, the disposition to save face and practices of face work – expressing a commitment to respect the faces and feelings of others in face-to-face or mediated interactions – are vital in the performance of their diplomacies. Regardless of where diplomacy is sited, concern for the face of oneself and of others provides the basic interactional wherewithal *through which* the politics of the interactions – specific policy discussions, the pursuit of ‘national interests’, and disagreements – may be pursued and accomplished.

Claims to the *uniqueness* of the “ASEAN Way” drawing on its concern for face must then be necessarily circumscribed. Instead, it is more fruitful to conceive of the ASEAN Way, and indeed its generative diplomatic habitus as a *particular* expression of the *general*. The particularity of this diplomacy must be situated in the *social orders* and the constellations of interests they express and reproduce, and also by relating these wider social orders to the micro-social *interactional orders* of embodied face-to-face interaction where its representatives congregate. As they engage in these interactional orders not only do they bring to bear the specific

configurations of their social orders that may establish the social code of the group – whose feelings must be cared for, how and how much – but also a shared repertoire of practices for face-work using varied stock of discursive, linguistic and gestural materials. This inextricable link between social orders and interaction orders, the local and the international, agents and their structures, is at the heart of this thesis.

1.5.3 *Limits*

It is ironic to have started this Introduction to a thesis on habitual dispositions and practices of ASEAN's diplomacy by recounting a moment of rupture and breakdown in Phnom Penh. This is useful insofar as it expressly lays bare the limits to my claims and relatedly forces some clarifications to allow for a more precise reading of my arguments. *First*, this study does not aim to show that the dispositions and practices of the ASEAN Way are what *hold* the Association together. When the ten member states of ASEAN meet under the props and sign equipment declaring 'One Vision, One Identity and One Community' to perform ASEAN, they are driven by far wider and deeper configurations of 'national' and geopolitical interests that sustain their regimes and changing social orders. What it *does* argue is that when states – as notional entities expressing social orders – yield to their involvement in this diplomacy then they participate in and through these dispositions, practices and the moral grammar patterning their relations. *Second*, it unabashedly admits the malleability and potential attenuation of these integrative and generative dispositions. ASEAN's social orders are a great deal more diverse since the mid-century counterrevolutions that gave it birth: from a mostly male dominated 'gentleman's club' of diplomats building rapport over games of golf in the 1980s, to an ASEAN

with a larger and diverse membership, with a growing salience of women and non-diplomats, socialising over golf but equally over coffee breaks, and with shifts to domestic social orders raising perennial questions over the vitality of their continued engagement (democratising Indonesia being a case in point [Connelly, 2015]). These dispositions arguably have attenuated and diffused, but they, as this thesis empirically demonstrates for the ASEAN field in Jakarta, are still generative and intact. And *third*, the disposition explicated here is a decidedly diplomatic disposition, and one in play in *ASEAN's* diplomatic performances, and it is not claimed here that these may be rooted in or conflated with dispositions of individual state bureaucracies in Southeast Asia.

1.6 Key Concepts

1.6.1 Emotional Labour

Never mentioned in job adverts but imperative for building a successful career at the Secretariat, an appreciation for rendering emotional labour is learned on the job. This learning occurs most powerfully from the process of subject formation that staff must surrender to as they learn the ropes of 'servicing member states'. Learning to service states, and indeed to be an ideal servant, involves apprehending and *internalising* a symbolic space of positions cast deep and wide over the office rooms, corridors, meetings rooms and the normative terrain within the Secretariat, a space inscribed by the dispositions of the 'ASEAN Way' with its underlying concern for the figurative equality and stability of 'face'.

The internalisation of this space of positions occurs when staff successfully fashion a way of talking, a way of listening, a way of suggesting, a way of writing, and a way of presenting themselves in their routine interactions with states. The servant sculpted out of these operations on the ‘body and soul’ may turn out to be ‘to the letter’ in the form of the vapid servant or indeed may emerge more expansive and empowered by performing the script of a tactical and ‘intelligent’ servant. Regardless of the form, these performances must nonetheless be hoisted upon the extension of ritual deference and solicitousness to state representatives, and must thus respect the grammar structuring the relationship between the state and the secretariat. Furthermore, it is this internalisation of the script of the servant that legitimates and naturalises state prerogative, and produces the warrant for staff to both render their emotional labour as they service states but also yield to and acquiesce to its coercive extraction when circumstances arise, consigning their grievances and trauma – indeed their own ‘loss of face’ – firmly to the shared spaces of the backstage.

A clarificatory point about the normative warrant for examining emotional labour in this study is necessary. First, there is nothing exceptional about the Secretariat’s emotional labour. Given that most jobs and professions in contemporary capitalism involve dealing with the feelings of others, “we are all” – as Hochschild (1983: 11) quips – “partly flight attendants.” Second, and insofar as the desire for courtesy and recognition constitute the fabric of social life, there is nothing inherently wrong about the demands for emotional labour. That said, and third, it becomes necessary to investigate the demands for emotional labour when it becomes exploitative. Besides often being a hidden form of labour – as exemplified by the Secretariat – this form of labour, just as with manual industrial labour, comes with a similar cost: of the

estrangement or alienation of an aspect of the self that is employed at work (ibid: 7). It is when demands for emotional labour may become exploitative that it arouses moral concern. As Hochschild (1983:12) notes

In any system, exploitation depends on the actual distribution of many kinds of profits – money, authority, status, honor, well-being. It is not emotional labour itself, therefore, but the underlying system of recompense that raises the question of what the cost of it is.

1.6.2 ASEAN's Diplomatic Habitus

The concept of habitus, that is, embodied dispositions produced by class and group socialisation that generate tastes, perceptions and practices that correspond with past experiences of socialisation and dispose actors to act in certain ways (“structured structures” and “structuring structures” as Pierre Bourdieu [1990:53] has it), suggests the force of history in the constitution of the present and in the patterning of unfolding social practices in a way well beyond what a lay rendering of ‘disposition’ may suggest.²³

One way of situating ASEAN's diplomatic habitus, and concomitantly teasing out the particularity of the ‘ASEAN Way’ itself, is by historicising the social orders that have produced and sustained this diplomacy. It is possible to mark out these social orders along a few interrelated registers. First, ASEAN started out firmly as a band of five firmly anti-communist regimes in Southeast Asia. Indeed, the Association would

²³ For a succinct introduction to habitus, see Swartz, 2002.

not have been established in the first place had political winds in these new (Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia) and old (Thailand and Philippines) states in the context of decolonisation and the Cold War not blown in the direction of the Right (Hamilton-Hart, 2012; Jones, 2012; Haacke, 2003: 21-31). When five foreign ministers converged in a resort in Bangsaen, Thailand, in 1967 to work out the modalities and the name of this diplomatic mechanism, the very possibility of their physical co-presence and attempts to forge sociability over golf had been enabled by the successful capture of the state apparatus by their right wing regimes, often with American and British support, and on the back of the emasculation and, at times, physical destruction of the political Left in their respective states (Roosa, 2006; Boudreau 2004; Anderson, 1993; Hewison and Rodan 1996).

A second related register to situate these states, regimes and the social orders they express, consists of how each of them, in varying ways and at varying proximate points, were assiduously constructing what the political scientist Dan Slater (2010) refers to as ‘Authoritarian Leviathans.’ In other words, the anti-communist and counterrevolutionary order that ASEAN expressed at the inter-state level was enabled by, and arguably reinforced, similar patterns in domestic political order building where elite coalitions buttressing authoritarian regimes emerged to suppress postwar contentious politics based on class and communal unrest (ibid: 115-196). Even though the elite pacts underpinning these authoritarianisms have been of varying forms (elite pacts based on ‘protection’ from threats of economic redistribution and communal violence – in Malaysia, Singapore, and (initially) Indonesia – or on the ‘provision’ of largesse as in the Philippines and Thailand), and

have been marked by differing levels of strength and durability, they have been salient and recurrent in the political history of postwar Southeast Asia.

A third register along which one may situate these social orders relates to how their elites have grappled with the pressures of wider international forces impinging their quest for political and economic sovereignty in the context of the Cold War. John Sidel (2012:116) underlines the challenge that political leaderships of the states of Southeast Asia – both before and after the spate of revolutions and counterrevolutions – faced in “reintegrating former colonial economies and state structures within the world capitalist economy and Cold War political order on the basis of national independence.” The options available were stark: a “neo-colonial” trajectory that opened doors to western capital along with British and American security relationships (Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia); an “anti-imperialist” pathway that entailed the nationalisation of the economy and alignment with the Soviet bloc (a course charted by Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia); and the ultimately ill fated option of neutrality that ended in its more radical forms with the displacement of Sukarno (Indonesia), U Nu (Burma) and Sihanouk (Cambodia) from the circuits of political power. Quite apparently, ASEAN’s founding regimes were placed decisively on the ‘Western’ axes of international economic and geopolitical integration, with communist states joining the club within a decade after the end of the Cold War.²⁴

The preceding point touches upon a fourth and final register along which ASEAN’s elites and their social orders may be situated: their position as particular kinds of

²⁴ And indeed using their membership to ASEAN as a stepping stone for deeper reintegration into the world economy (OECD, 2013).

postcolonial elites. They are postcolonials in the broad sense that their histories and lifeworlds have been shaped by the legacies of various European (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British, French), Japanese and American colonialisms; have continued to grapple with the varied invasive neocolonial entanglements following formal independence; and as ‘postcolonials’ have been subject to the psychological scars and symbolic violence of colonialism as well as that paradoxical “relationship of reciprocal antagonism and *desire* between coloniser and colonised” that expresses the “postcolonial condition” (Gandhi, 1998:4. Emphasis mine).²⁵

These general features aside, the band of postcolonial elites comingling and producing ASEAN represent something narrower and more restrictive than what an older form of diplomacy – prior to the tumult of revolutions and counterrevolutions – stood for and expressed. The reference here is to the history of diplomacy embodied in the Bandung conference of 1955 which preceded ASEAN, a diplomacy that was more international in its reach, cosmopolitan in outlook, and approachable in its practice: the former expressed in the novelty of the dialogic encounter it expressed (Chakrabarty, 2010) and the latter evident in how the *people* of Bandung were intimately involved in organising and indeed participating as audiences in staging the diplomatic event (Shimazu, 2014: 238-239, 244). Bandung, as Anthony Reid (2008) points out, was in fact a rival to the ‘regional’ idea: Sukarno’s investments in the internationalist and anti-colonial aspirations of Bandung were accompanied with

²⁵ A few clarifications: I use ‘postcolonialism’ without the hyphen marking a temporal break to emphasise the “long [and unfolding] history of colonial consequences (Gandhi, 1998:3). Further, postcolonialism – as a ‘condition’ – is not reducible to Third World anti-colonialism alone (Young 2011, Gandhi 1998, Chakrabarty, 2010). By way of a definition, I understand postcolonialism as involving a “political analysis of the cultural history of colonialism [that] investigates its contemporary effects in western and tricontinental cultures, making connections between that past and the politics of the present.” (Young, 2011: 6; also, Young 2012).

‘disdain’ for the more narrow and tepid regionalism advanced by Malaysia’s Tunku with the Association for Southeast Asia (ASA) in 1959. While the diplomacy of Bandung would unravel under the weight of its contradictions and the politics of the Cold War (Lee, 2010), its demise was secured with the counterrevolutionary upheaval in Indonesia that would birth a more boundaried, defensive and distant diplomatic project in the form of ASEAN in 1967.

These various registers along which one may situate the anti-communist, frequently authoritarian, pro-West, ‘neo-Third-Worldist’ (Hadiz 2004; Berger, 2004) postcolonial orders that describe ASEAN, offers a basis to understand the sociological and historical fields in which ASEAN’s diplomacy shaped up. First, the alignment of ASEAN’s elites with the ‘symbolic order’ of the West directly inform the past and present valorisation of western cultural, social, and linguistic capital among its practitioners along with a receptivity to liberal economic ideology pursued under conservative political arrangements. In a rare study of “ASEAN decision makers” from the early 1980s, Zakaria Haji Ahmad (1986) notes how these diplomats and bureaucrats, mostly “trained in local but Western style tertiary institutions” in the social sciences, liberal arts and law, expressed “a shared ideology of modernisation, an aversion to politics, a belief in the free enterprise system and yet a need for government planning, an elitist view of society and a commitment to development” (ibid: 201). They were, he continues, “conservative in that they do not see their roles as the initiators of social change in their own countries or in the region” (ibid: 202). Even though a new generation of decision makers and practitioners have come to inhabit the wider ASEAN field more broadly (Hamilton Hart, 2012: 143-189), with some now stationed in Jakarta, there remains a striking

similarity in their sociological profiles as well as the dispositions they bring to their practice of diplomacy.

Second, this backdrop also offers a suggestive case for why the generic dispositions and practices to save face may have acquired special salience among these diplomatic and bureaucratic elites. A more substantive case for anchoring this disposition can be found in Jurgen Haacke's (2003: 32-51) account of the origins of the ASEAN Way, where he traces the struggles for recognition and respect among ASEAN's elites to the formative experiences of disrespect and discrimination under colonial rule that informed their anti-colonial and nationalist struggles, and, following independence and counterrevolutions, in the efforts by elites to seek reconciliation among each other. It was in this process of seeking reconciliation and accommodation that many of the early practices and sociabilities of this diplomacy took shape: 'golf diplomacy' (starting with the Tunku and Thai foreign minister Thanat Khoman); a quieter tone of diplomacy (exemplified by post-Sukarno Indonesia); the insulation of ASEAN from fractious bilateral disputes (starting with Manila's agreement to not raise the Sabah dispute with Malaysia in ASEAN); and the respect for sovereign equality, a preference for private meetings and a tight control of the local press (each warranted and strengthened following the acrimonious ejection of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 and the 1969 race riots in Malaysia and Singapore).

1.6.3. *'Face' and 'Face-work'*

Studying 'face' involves wading into dangerous conceptual and political waters. Invocations of 'face' are remarkably salient in the world views and representations of social actors producing and performing ASEAN's diplomacy, and indeed diplomacy in Asia more broadly. At the same time, in how they are constructed and expressed, these representations of 'face' are often unmistakably essentialist, primordialist and indeed orientalist as well. The discourse on 'Asian values' championed by no less than Southeast Asia's (and ASEAN's) band of 'strongmen' through the triumphal era of export-oriented industrialisation is emblematic of this point (Thompson 2001, 2007). Perhaps this partly explains why a great deal of scholarship on ASEAN and Asian diplomacy have broached the category ever so tentatively, under-theoretically, and possibly even reluctantly, just so as to convey a passing acknowledgement of a category doing much conceptual and practical work in the lives of the actors they study.

It is instructive, then, to explicitly spell out how this exercise in studying face is different. First, this study conceives 'face' and 'face-work' in sociological and symbolic-interactionist terms as phenomena that suffuses the realm of everyday interactions in social life. 'Face' is understood as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes," which is in play when a person comes into face-to-face or mediated contact with others (Goffman, 1967: 5). Meanwhile, "face-work" refers to the repertoire of practices by which one's practices are rendered consistent with one's face in an interaction (ibid: 12). Second, there is nothing provincial about a concern for engaging in face-work to maintain or save one's own face and those of

others. A concern for ‘face’ and face-work are *universal* and immanent in all social interaction. The ethnographies and studies by the Chicago school sociologist Erving Goffman, which explicate the domain of everyday face-work *par excellence*, were in fact expressly studies of face-work in “Anglo-American society” (ibid: 9). Studies of face and ‘face-work’ span the gamut of asylums in America (Goffman, 1961), Shetland crofters (Goffman, 1957); dueling *contrasto* singers in Tuscany (Pagliai, 2010), everyday unmarked racism in Italy (Pagliai, 2011); and to the meeting rooms of the Danish foreign ministry (Adler-Nissen, 2012). Third, while the practices of face-work are common and indeed universal, they are not homogenous. As Goffman (1967: 13) observes, “each culture, subculture and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices. It is to this repertoire that people partly refer to when they ask what a person or culture is ‘really’ like.”

1.7 Thesis Structure

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In the next chapter – *Theory and Method* – I outline the theoretical and methodological scaffolding for this thesis by discussing the possibilities and limits of theories of practice and of an ethnographic methodology. This methodology is *put in play* and substantiated in Chapter 3 – *Fieldwork in a Diplomatic Field* – where I offer a reflexive analysis of 13 months of fieldwork in Jakarta, and examine how these research practices offered an entry point to apprehend the built spaces, the valued species of capital, and the texture of power relations in this diplomatic field. In Chapter 4 *Becoming an ASEAN Secretariat*, I

focus on the symbolic core of this diplomatic field – the Secretariat in South Jakarta – and trace its constitution in historical, sociological and quotidian terms.

I zoom out of the Secretariat to examine the wider field of ASEAN diplomacy in Jakarta in Chapter 5 – *The Diplomatic Field in Jakarta*. I examine the wider international and proximate local forces fueling the growth of this diplomatic field, and the local politics and power struggles between its new and old institutions as this field annealed and consolidated. I extend the study of this diplomatic field in Chapter 6 – *The Diplomatic Game in Jakarta* – with a focus on the practices and performances of ASEAN’s foreign partners in the city as they do diplomacy in this economy of symbolic exchanges with its own currencies and rates of exchange. The broad lens over the Jakarta diplomatic field in the preceding two chapters is retracted and refocused on the meeting rooms, office cubicles, corridors and symbolic terrain of the Secretariat in Chapter 7 – *Controlling the Secretariat* – to ask how ASEAN’s states control the Secretariat in everyday life. The bleak picture of state control from this Chapter is revisited to render a wholly different account in Chapter 8 *Power in Docility: the Art of Servicing*. Like the preceding Chapter, the focus is on the relationship between states and the Secretariat, but less on what states agents do than on what certain types of servants at the Secretariat do as they go about their quotidian tasks of ‘servicing member states.’ The Chapter asks whether the Secretariat – instantiated by its staff– can lay claim to power, and answers by explicating the backstage *art* of servicing. In the concluding chapter I revisit the main arguments of this thesis by horizontally linking the empirical studies of this ethnography and suggest how these may contribute to the study of ASEAN’s diplomacy and International Relations more widely.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

The ambition to situate the ASEAN Secretariat as a participant in a wider field of practices that make up the international relations of Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific entails certain departures. One has to depart not only from the extant modes in which one studies multilateral institutions but perhaps from International Relations – as a field of extant intellectual practices with its *doxic* or commonsensical presuppositions of who and what must be privileged in analytic enquiry – as well. Importantly, the object of departing from ‘IR’ is only to return to ‘ir’ armed with theories and methods that may allow for a different kind of knowledge about institutions, diplomacy and power.

This chapter is about such departures and of the possibilities and challenges that follow from making them. I begin by marking my first point of departure from dominant theories of IR by suggesting the usefulness of ‘theories of practice’ that offer a different ontological starting point for social analysis and provide a provisional way out of the dichotomies of idealism and materialism, objectivism and subjectivism, and agency and structure, that have bedeviled IR theories in general, and those current in the study of Asian security, in particular.

Second, I depart from the dominant research methods employed in IR by choosing an ethnographic method for the study of everyday practices. I discuss what ethnography is about, its potential to contribute to the study of power and politics, and also reflect on its many problems – a theme well trodden in its ‘mother’ discipline of anthropology. Having made these departures, in the third section, I will locate this project within a small but growing niche of scholars in IR who have sought to draw in the ontological positions and epistemological reflexivity of anthropology (and sociology) to study the practices of international relations. I also discuss here the particular kinds of challenges of using an ethnographic approach in IR.

2.2 Theories of Practice

There is certainly nothing novel in the ambition to foreground the study of practice, and arguably far less of a departure, when one considers the frequent references to ‘practice’ in the works of constructivists in IR. Other than betraying an implicit commitment to practice as the basic and generic “social stuff”, these constructivist works in IR are bereft of the theoretical and empirical richness that describe the intellectual roots from which they first drew inspiration – the works of symbolic interactionists (Blumer), Nietzschean theorists of power (Foucault), hermeneutics (Gadamer), structurationists (Giddens) and other theorists of practice (Bourdieu and De Certeau). More precisely, constructivism has ignored how practices are *everyday*, ordinary and mundane, and how their ontological primacy (that half-realised starting

point) is derived from their ubiquity in everyday life that makes them constitutive of social reality.

My ambition to study practice is thus a more specific one. Let me clarify my conception and use of practice by addressing two questions: what are practices? And why do I privilege them?

2.2.1 *What is Practice?*

At its most basic, practice may refer to routinised and provisionally stabilised ways of doing and saying things. Reducible to neither subjects nor objects, practice offers itself as an elementary unit of analysis that allows for a different conception of social phenomena and its analysis. As Schatzki (2001: 10) puts it, besides ‘structures’, ‘systems’, ‘meanings’, ‘life world’, ‘events’ and actions’, the category of ‘practice’ has increasingly come to occupy that much vaunted pedestal in contemporary social theory of being the “primary general social thing”.

The presumption of the above as a ‘most basic’ definition or conception of practice belies the heterogeneity of the forms in which it has been historically conceived and articulated: Marx (1998[1845]), in his *Thesis on Feuerbach*, critiqued materialism for grasping social reality in terms of objects and institutions rather than practice or “concrete human activity”; Giddens (1984) identified practice in habits and routines; Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach and Scott’s (1985; 1990) theatrical metaphors invoked practice in terms of everyday performances; Foucault’s (1991) “governmentality” operated in and through disciplinary practices; De Certeau (1984: 6-9) conceived of practice as “ways of operating”, as quotidian “ways of using” and

“making do” (*bricolage*) that allow consumers to reclaim their agency by appropriating and manipulating representations handed down to them by powers that organise the space of social-cultural production. Meanwhile, Bourdieu (1977: 78-87) theorised practice as emergent in the encounter of embodied dispositions or *habitus* with a broader *field* or social game structured by varied kinds of economic and symbolic *capital* (also see, Swartz, 2008: 47).

Teasing out the attributes of practice, Schatzki (1996: 89), among other recent scholars (Warde, 2005:134), conceives practice as including both “coordinated entities” and “performances”, where the former refers to a “temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of saying and doings...[such as] cooking practices, voting practices, and industrial practices,” while the latter refers to how performing these sayings and doings “actualises and sustains” practice. Lisa Wedeen (2009: 87-90), using Judith Butler, fleshes out this point further by arguing that practices are performative, in that the “iterative character of speech and bodily practices constitute individuals as particular kinds of social beings or subjects”. Thus, categories like ‘national citizen’, or indeed ‘ASEAN Secretariat’ and ‘professional staff’, are realised by being performed in practice – that is, being enacted in combinations of doings and sayings, as practical activity and also its representations.

What we have here, then, is something of a Wittgensteinian family resemblance among several formulations of practice, and while ‘practice’ is invoked to refer to some kinds of activity – discursive or non-conceptual, embodied or cognitive, reflexive or unreflexive – it should not be conflated with the universe of actions. I argue that practices are a little more specific than all forms of ‘doings or ‘activity’

because *a)* practices have *meanings* as they are intelligible in specific social contexts; *b)* they are *strategic* in that they direct action towards some end, though this ‘directing’ is not always reflexive but can be habitual and unreflexive (Bourdieu, 1977); and *c)* they are *political* in that they express inequalities and relations of power.²⁶ The distinction of a twitch from a wink, to take liberty with Ryle’s example made famous by Geertz (1973c: 6-9), illustrates the difference between involuntary muscular action and social action (turned into practice), with the variety of meanings, ends and power relations (of gender, for instance) expressed and reproduced by the latter.

2.2.2 *Why Privilege Practice?*

There is much to be gained from an account that conceives of and studies social phenomena in terms of everyday practices. Perhaps the most significant advantage of a practice-based approach can be traced to the intellectual struggles in the context of which it was conceived as a middle path, or alternative, to the polar choices of methodological individualism and methodological holism: the idea that social phenomenon should be explained with reference to individuals or social structures, respectively. Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), for example, emerged as a response to the objectivism and subjectivism that dominated French intellectual thought after the Second World War, most notably under the influence of Levi-Strauss and Sartre, respectively (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 5). Theories of practice provide an ontological starting point and an epistemological basis to tackle

²⁶My thanks to Dr. Nilotpal Kumar for clarifying my understanding of practices. This understanding of practice draws from but is also distinct from other conceptualisations, notably, Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 6-12.

this particularly divisive dichotomy of social theory, one that has been coupled to the dichotomies of structuralism and voluntarism, and materialism and idealism.

In discussing this metatheoretical point my object is not simply to suggest, at an abstract level, the significance of practice approaches in enabling a move away from the classic antinomies of social theory. Instead, I contend it is *necessary* to take this ‘turn’ in the context of the current landscape of IR theories, and even more urgently in light of the theoretical projects that govern the production of knowledge about the international relations of the Asia-Pacific.

As things stand, dominant theories in IR – neo-realism, neoliberalism and constructivism – as well as more critical minded “radical constructivist” approaches find themselves fractured precisely along the poles of structure and agency, and materialism and idealism that had prompted the articulation of practice approaches in the social sciences in the middle of the 20th century. Constructivism in IR, explicated by Wendt (1999) in an account inspired by Giddens, was poised to foreground practice and move away from a dichotomised representation of international political life. In how it shaped up, however, Wendtian constructivism and the constructivist research program that emerged over the decades, put aside the study of *everyday* practices, perhaps the fundament of social constructivism, and has been co-opted by the causal preoccupations of dominant theories to which they had emerged in response. Thus, in rejecting the explicit structuralism and materialism of neo-realism and neoliberal institutionalism, constructivism sought to rehabilitate agents and their ideas in ways that eventually privilege individualism and (especially) idealism. Far from moving away from these dichotomies, constructivism contributed to the construction of this polarised field of IR theorising, a move only aggravated by its

ambition to serve as a *via media* between positivism and postmodernism by taking a qualified rationalist turn (Fearon and Wendt, 2002).

The maladies of these divisions are perhaps most fully borne out in the study of international relations in the Asia Pacific, and specifically in the debates between realists and constructivists, over whether institutions are adjuncts to the balance of power or vehicles to build regional order and socialise states, and whether regional identity is a chimera as opposed to being already realised in nascent forms by way of a “security community” (Acharya, 2000). The self-conscious move by which constructivism emerged as a response to the dominance of realism, as evidenced by its leading proponent Amitav Acharya’s (2005: 96-98) rejection of “structural and material determinants of regionalism” in realist accounts, has produced a research program that seeks to rehabilitate abject Southeast Asian states hitherto subordinate to the dictates of systemic notions of the balance of power, by foregrounding their norms, beliefs and identities and the role of institutions like ASEAN and the ARF as the cauldron where these identities and values change and transform (for the better). The study of ASEAN and the ‘ASEAN Way’ thus emerged from this reconfiguration of key positions in social theory.

There have, however, been several problems with this strand of constructivism. Three in particular stand out. First, in recovering the agency of actors, constructivist studies have been largely unclear about how exactly agents *relate* to the structures they are located within. Agents and structures are treated as analytically distinct subjects and objects of study. The implication then is that constructivist studies often make claims about changes and transformations of agent identities in isolation from the *experience of objective social structures* that agents possess of the social world

around them, and which structure their cognitive and corporeal dispositions. This inability to formulate a *mechanism* of how agents relate to structures has meant that constructivists have often studied these related dimensions separately, and, in doing so, often frame agents as acting voluntarily over and above the structures that may constrain them. Take, for instance, Acharya's (2009: 21-23; 69-107) explicit attempt to provide a mechanism to relate agents to structures by developing the concept of a "cognitive prior".²⁷ Developed as part of a broader argument on how Southeast Asian elites were not passive recipients of internationally diffused norms but were active participants through a process of norm localisation, the "cognitive prior" serves as an ideational and cultural template internal to Southeast Asian elites (as opposed to external norms imposed by cosmopolitan norm diffusers), which has influenced generations of diplomats and regional political leaders. Remarkably, the "cognitive prior" effects a new kind of structuralism: agents that had just been empowered from the hold of cosmopolitan norm diffusers become hostage to an idealist and static "cognitive prior" with no mechanisms of inscription and transmission.²⁸

A second problem with constructivist approaches, and one that follows from the first, is that agents and ideas come to stand more sharply in distinction to, and indeed acquire ontological primacy over, the materiality of social life.²⁹ Thus, if notions and feelings of mutual trust, understanding and empathy creep into the process of regional identity formation among actors in regional organisations, then

²⁷ Acharya defines the cognitive prior as a "set of ideas, belief systems, and norms which determine and condition an individual or social group's receptivity to new norms" (Acharya, 2009:21).

²⁸ Acharya's (2009: 35-37; 60-61) argument about the norm of non-interference "appropriated" and "localised" by postcolonial Asian elites expresses another such voluntarist and idealist formulation.

²⁹ See Alice Ba (2008: 24) for instance, where this position is justified by the argument that "ideas underlie definitions of material interests and are thus prior to material".

constructivist studies often frame them in *distance* from actors' other beliefs of what they conceive to be the objective material structures that constrain the scope of their action, such as schemas holding and generating understandings about *material* capabilities like the balance of power rooted in military hardware and statistically measurable national economic wealth, among others. In other words, agents appear to interact, build trust and see themselves differently via social interaction in institutions without consideration for their understandings of objective and material structures around them, and a concern for which may have been nurtured in their socialisation in bounded national bureaucratic communities such as a Foreign Affairs or Defence Ministry.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, by constructing themselves in opposition to rationalist theories, constructivist approaches have increasingly expunged from their conceptual vocabulary the lexicon of self-interests, power, strategy and struggle. This, as Michael Williams (2007: 22) points out for IR constructivism at large, has been the unsurprising consequence of the identification of power with military and material capabilities, and the identification of strategy and strategic interests with narrow instrumentalism which takes as given both the identity of actors and their rationality. The implication of doing so, however, has been to concede the potential significance of strategic action, self-interest and power to approaches like realism and neo-realism, and to leave these conceptions uncontested and confined to the way they have been narrowly framed by these theories. This inability to account for the ubiquity and mechanisms of power has resulted in scholars of ASEAN framing institutions as vehicles for building a regional identity, one that is unable to account for the empirical findings that go against this grain (China's 'behaviour' in the South

China Sea, in particular, casting doubts on such ‘socialisation’ arguments). More perniciously, some of these accounts impose on the social actors they study (state elites) a peculiar form of *disinterestedness*, where they seem to practice ASEAN diplomacy out of a ‘cooperation for cooperation’s sake’ akin to a disinterested “art for arts sake” in the field of artistic production (Bourdieu, 1984) that dissimulates the game being played, the interests at stake, and the varied kinds of capital over which contests take place.³⁰

2.2.3 *Theories of practice in this study: Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman*

To address these metatheoretical configurations in IR, and the problems they have apparently given rise to, this study of ASEAN’s diplomacy turns to the wider theories of practice, and to the conceptual ‘tool kits’ of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in particular. In tackling the long standing antimonies of social theory (inherited and sharpened by IR theories), and in engaging in a project of knowledge production that is sensitive to metatheory but remains deeply committed to the primacy of contextual and empirical study, Bourdieu’s theory of practice is a unique epistemological contribution to the study of society. The conceptual tool kits from Bourdieu’s oeuvre offer productive ways to deal with the problems of IR theories noted earlier by *a)* relating agents to structures through everyday practices, *b)* overcoming the unhelpful antinomy of idealism and materialism, *c)* offering a theory

³⁰ For examples of this disinterestedness, see Eaton and Stubbs (2009: 20) who argue that ASEAN is ‘powerful’ not because it can coerce but because of its “ability to act” and because to be proficient at doing things in the world is “inherently satisfying”. Similarly, Katsumata’s arguments on the founding of the ARF (underplaying elite anxieties about new structural and international uncertainties and insisting on the desire of ASEAN states to extend their model of security cooperation) as well arguments on ASEAN’s isomorphism and legitimacy, where symbolic power, international pressures and motives are elided (2009; 2011).

of action that accounts for tacit and practical knowledge, and *d*) rehabilitating and indeed foregrounding the study of power and interest in social life. They do so in the following ways.

First, Bourdieu's sociology offers a distinctive approach to mediate the antinomy of agency and structure by foregrounding the human body and its embodied dispositions or *habitus* which is, at once, a *site* where social structures inscribe themselves on human experience and serve as a generator of improvised practices that reproduce and inflect social structures. This concept draws from the insight that the individual is a "socialised body": the body does not stand outside society but is a "form of its [society's] existence" (Swartz, 1997: 96). Agents' comprehension of social structures and orientation towards them is thus always mediated by their internalised habitus or structured dispositions which are a "product of structures, producer of practices and reproducer of structures" (ibid: 101). Importantly, the habitus is not simply a Cartesian mental particulate matter or something that resides within the mind and which – like meditational epistemologies tell us – relate to an outside (Taylor, 2005). Rather, the habitus is cognitive and *embodied*. Dispositions are not just a state of the mind but more like a state of the body, of being.

The sociologist David Swartz highlights two aspects of Bourdieu's definition of the habitus as "structured and structuring structure" (1994:170). First, the idea that the habitus is an *internal structure* that emerges from socialisation, such as class based socialisation in Bourdieu's study of the French working class, professionals and bourgeoisie, which appeared to explain the *regularities* of judgments in tastes over food, dressing and sports (Bourdieu, 1984). It is via such socialisation, then, that external structures get internalised into individual and groups dispositions and set

limits over the scope of possible action. This first aspect represented the “structured structures” in Bourdieu’s definition of the concept. The second idea, is that of habitus as a *propensity*, a strategy generating principle, which generates perceptions and appreciations that correspond with the experiences of socialisation and dispose actors to act in certain ways. This second idea represents the dynamic feature of the habitus as “structuring structures”.

It is important to note, however, that the habitus is not confined to the level of the individual alone. Bourdieu refers to a collective habitus as well, one that is enabled by the occupation of a similar social position by actors, which exposes them to common experiences of socialisation and results in the internalisation of similar (though never identical) dispositions that lead them to act in regular ways. Bourdieu’s work on the collective habitus of the French working classes have been extended by practice theorists in International Relations as well, where the diplomatic habitus is identified on the basis of the common social position and socialising experiences of diplomats – the training in courtesy and etiquette, in ‘strategy,’ and the pursuit of national interests – which set them apart from actors in other Ministries like Defense and Home Affairs (Jackson, 2008; Neumann 2008).

Also vital to Bourdieu’s analysis of the habitus is a reformulation of the idea of structure itself from being a static construct to a more dynamic conception of a *field*. As a *structure of practices*, the field serves as an “arena for the struggle for control over valued resources or capital” (Swartz, 1997: 122), with ‘capital’ understood not simply in its material economic form but also conceived in terms of symbolic and cultural resources that confer legitimacy. Bourdieu conceived of fields as a social

game thus highlighting its character as a competitive arena where players (agents) compete for power and advantage (Thomson, 2008). Swartz (1997: 125) notes how a field “imposes on actors specific forms of struggle”: it involves the tacit acceptance of the rules of the game which indicates that the game is worth fighting for, establishes the hierarchies of the dominant and dominated, and imparts the game its character, structure and internal logic. It is this tacit acceptance of the stakes of the struggle which constitutes the deep structure of the field, that is, the *doxa* or commonsense which conceals relations of the dominant and the dominated, and gets expressed via a highly euphemised discourse that projects distance from self-interest and crude gains. As a result, fields – echoing Gramscian false consciousness – produce a type of *illusio* or misrecognition which conceals the arbitrary nature of hierarchies and facilitates an acceptance of the game.

This elaboration of Bourdieu’s key concepts brings me to the second merit of his broader approach: Bourdieu’s theory of action. Bourdieu argues that agents are not merely followers of rules and norms but are strategic improvisers. Noting that actors are “strategists who respond through time” (Swartz, 1997: 99), Bourdieu put forth a theory of human action which replaced rules and norms with strategic action. The conceptualisation of strategy is key here, since Bourdieu critiqued theories about utilitarian and conscious rational choice calculation by foregrounding the importance of pre-reflexive, semi-conscious, and tacit know how – the practical knowledge – of actors as they come to grips with the world. That said, he does not reject the role of rules and norm-based action as much as clarify their limits. In the case of rules, for instance, Bourdieu notes how any social game – the bounded football field being a useful metaphor – can function only if it is constituted by rules. However, the rules of the game do not determine the flow or the outcome of the game. In order to exist,

a game also depends on the practices of players, their practical knowledge and “their practical relation to rules” that produces their feel for the game and an appreciation of the broader field (Williams, 2007: 27). Similarly, by inserting the play of *time* into social action, Bourdieu notes the uncertainty latent in normative situations where outcomes may appear unclear to actors involved. The role of strategic action in normative contexts is perhaps best illustrated by Bourdieu in his study of gift-giving in the Kabyle society, where the act of gift-giving and the counter-gift were not described by simple and direct normative reciprocity, but were marked by deferral, difference, denial, riposte, and challenge. The gift and the counter-gift, then, were strategic moves played out in time (Bourdieu, 1977: 5-15).

This brings me to the third and final reason why Bourdieu’s framework holds much promise: Bourdieu’s work provides a theoretical basis to recover the concepts of power and interest from realist and rationalist approaches. Power suffuses the triad of habitus, field and capital. Take the social field, for instance. The fields in which social games are played and performed – be it the bureaucratic field, the educational field, the political field or the field of artistic production – are not flat and even but are lumpy, stony, rocky, potholed, and craggy. These are marks of the fields’ historical constitution by which inequalities and asymmetries are built into it, and which pattern a space of positions that actors come to inherit from birth (the working class family and the bourgeoisie family, for instance) or assume through their movements (nouveau rich business elites with high economic and low cultural capital, for instance). Actors positioned varyingly across this symbolic field are differentiated by the embodied dispositions or habitus that both express their position and also enables them – through a universe of sayings and doings – to acquiesce to

the field (as a symbolic field and social order) as legitimate and natural (the refrain of French working class families that university education – offered by the state free of cost – is ‘not for the likes of us’ [Bourdieu, 1984: 473; Bourdieu, 1985: 728]). They are also differentiated by their endowments of, and opportunities to access, different kinds of capital. Unwilling to concede the play of social transactions (of everyday forms of social reciprocity and exchange) to crudely economistic ones alone, Bourdieu – following Max Weber – discerns a wider economy of symbolic exchanges, where actors seek varied species of capital: economic (money), cultural (educational degrees, tastes in cinema, literature, and music), social (the networks and associations of people), linguistic (dominant languages but with necessary flair and enunciation) and of broader symbolic forms of capital that may be any of the above but are cloaked by their necessary air of disinterestedness and denial (honour, prestige). Social games within boundaried fields, the struggles for capital and advantage, and struggles to monopolise symbolic violence (that is, the power to create and impose classifications on the mind and body, the power to adjudicate the sacred from the profane – in speech, eating habits, clothing, tastes), are all evocative and illustrative of the workings of power in quotidian life.

In the chapters to follow, I will demonstrate how such a Bourdieuan mode for studying power can be discerned in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, just as they have enabled the study of class and social taste in postwar French society. These concepts will do a great deal of theoretical work in this thesis: from understanding how the fieldworker’s endowments of cultural capital sustained his field relationships with interlocutors; the sociological biographies of staff entering and building careers at the Secretariat and the implications of these

endowments on their practices of ‘servicing’ states; to the quotidian workings of the wider ASEAN diplomatic field in Jakarta as a (geo-strategic) ‘space of positions’ with a symbolic economy of exchanges and the varying currencies (of cultural, social and linguistic capital) in which it is denominated. In using Bourdieu’s tool kits, it must be emphasised, the aim is not for an uncritical appropriation and scholastic imposition of his concepts as much as to use them as heuristics, as ‘thinking tools’ that enable empirical investigation. Cognisant of the limits and proclivities of Bourdieuan analysis – the risk of structuralism, and its limits in explaining change (Jenkins, 1992) – I approach and use these concepts as a ‘sympathetic critic’ (Swartz, 1997).

While Bourdieu’s sociology enables empirical investigations that are at once wide angled (social fields) and micro-social (society inscribed on the body with a way of talking, a way of dressing, an air of entitlement), there is nonetheless a more intimate realm of practices where the powers of its theoretical purchase and vocabulary wane. This is the domain of face-to-face interactions, where I draw on the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman and his studies on face-work and impression management in everyday life.

Building on his early classics *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and *Asylums* (1961), Goffman served up a focused study of ‘small’ face-to-face behaviour in *Interaction Ritual* (1967) with the express aim to understand the normative and “behavioral order found in all peopled places” (Goffman, 1967:1). Face and face-work are key concepts in Goffman’s study of the ‘interaction order’: that is, an order produced in the realm of face-to-face interactions where the “ultimate behavioural materials are the glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal

statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not” (ibid). Goffman defines face as “an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes,” (ibid: 5) which comes into play when a person comes into face-to-face or mediated contact with others. A person experiences an emotional response to his or her face before others – “feelings become attached to it” (ibid: 6). Thus, if the social encounter sustains an image of the self then one “will have few feelings about the matter”. If events in the encounter produce a face better than expected then one ‘feels good’, and when these expectations are denied one feels ‘bad’ or ‘hurt’. It is this emotional attachment to the face of self and the face of others that makes a social encounter a ‘commitment’: one fears the loss of face in an interaction not only with a view of one’s place in the world beyond the interaction itself, but also to ensure that she deserves respect and her feelings will be considered in the future as well.

Just as a member of a group must express self-respect – for countenancing the loss of one’s face risks the impression of being ‘shameless’ – s/he needs to convey considerateness for the face and feelings of others. It is when one is willing to see the defacement and humiliation of another that society describes him as ‘heartless.’ Similarly, one may be said to be in the ‘wrong face’, ‘out of face’ and indeed ‘shamefaced’ when events in an interaction make it unable for one to sustain the image of self projected into the interaction, where one’s social worth is under doubt, and when efforts to rehabilitate the line have failed. The ‘confidence’ and ‘assuredness’ one experiences while being ‘in face’ is then matched equally with the trauma of ‘shame’ and ‘inferiority’ when one ‘loses face’. Meanwhile, saving face “refers to the process by which one sustains an impression for others that he has not lost face.” In the same vein, “to give face” – or indeed save face for others – means

“to arrange for another to take a better line than he might have been able to take” (ibid: 7-9). It is to the wide repertoire of practices by which one’s practices are rendered consistent with one’s face that is referred to as ‘face-work’ (ibid: 12).

Besides enabling an empirical study of the “basic units” of everyday interaction, the study of face and face-work also enables investigations sensitive to longstanding dualisms in social theory: of agency and structure/ individual and society/ emic and etic/ the experienced and the analytic (Scheff, 2006). The category of face is *figurative* and *abstract* in how it becomes attached to notional entities like states but is also *literal* and *experiential* in expressing the face of an embodied subject in interaction. Goffman is at pains to insist this link between society and the individual when he writes that the study of interaction is “not about the individual and his psychology” as much as the “syntactical relations among the acts of different person mutually present to one another” (ibid: 2). One’s face, he continues, may be the most personal of possessions but is on “loan” from society. In this manner, “approved [social] attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell” (ibid: 10).

In sum, while Bourdieu enables a study of the *social orders* (and the dispositions and practices they give rise to) of ASEAN’s diplomacy, Goffman provides a basis to examine the *interaction order* in which ASEAN diplomacy is sited and performed. Despite their differences, what binds these sociologists and their empirical studies is an interest to understand what the philosopher Ian Hacking (2011) refers to as the ‘making up of the people’. While Bourdieu does so from above (and indeed from

below with the habitus), Goffman does so avowedly from below with the basic units of face-to face social interaction.³¹

2.3 An Ethnographic Methodology

My plan to study practices using an ethnographic approach – both as a method and interpretive sensibility – constitutes my second broader point of departure from extant IR scholarship as I go about studying ASEAN’s diplomatic practice in Jakarta.

2.3.1 What is Ethnography?

Ethnography, as the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo puts it, is an exercise in “deep hanging out” (cited in Clifford, 1997:56). Research that is *ethnographic* involves two distinct kinds of activity. It involves a particular method of “participant observation” – deemed as the *sine qua non* of this approach – that produces *immersion* “in other’s worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995: 2). The ethnographer thus “participates overtly or covertly in the daily lives of people, watching what they do, listening to what they say, and asking questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1). Besides participating and observing, ethnography involves the production of written accounts or *fieldnotes* that “inscribe” (Geertz, 1973c: 19) or “transcribe” (Clifford, 1990: 57) these participatory experiences, and enable a researcher to interpret and construct the social

³¹ For studies in IR using Goffman, see Adler-Nissen, 2012 and Schimmelfennig, 2002.

world s/he inhabits (Emerson et al. 1995: 1-16). In this sense, ethnography is not just one but several activities arising from immersion and transcription of experience, and not one but a cluster of methods that involves participant observation combined with semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis, archival work and even, at times, surveys. All the same, ethnography is not reducible to its methods. As Kubik notes, interpretive ethnographic works exist that do not involve participant observation, for instance, Bonnell's study of Soviet era posters or Petersens's "ethnohistorical" study of mobilisation in Lithuania against the Nazi's in the 1940s (Kubik, 2009:29-31). Ethnography, then, also refers to a distinct "sensitivity" that seeks to "glean the meanings that actors under study attribute to their social and political reality" (Schatz, 2009a: 5). The aim of a type of social research like ethnography is thus to understand the "routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 2).

While ethnography in various fields – from the "mother" field of social and cultural anthropology, to sociology, management science (Neyland, 2008; Schwartzman, 1993) and even political science (Schatz, 2009) – share these ideas of ethnographic research as a practical activity and research sensibility, they are also described by important divergences along ontological and epistemological lines. These divergences, captured in the three traditions of positivist, interpretivist and postmodern ethnography, are fundamentally concerned with what kind of 'science' ethnography can enable: a positive science based on a naturalist ontology that seeks to "peel the onion of reality" in search of the truth value of testimonies and adjudicate between competing truth claims (Allina-Pisano, 2009); an interpretive science of meanings and "webs of significations" (Geertz, 1973c: 5) that is

concerned less with establishing the veracity of truth claims than with explicating how truth claims *operate* (Gusterson, 1996: 222; Wedeen, 2009: 77; Scott, 1985: 42-46); or indeed an ethnography that rejects the claim to science in favour of radical perspectivism, foregrounding the ethnographer, her writing, and reflexivity in the research process (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

These three traditions, ushered in by the seminal works of Malinowski (1922), Geertz (1973) and Clifford and Marcus (1986), respectively, have been widely debated in the discipline of anthropology. It is intriguing that while the debates between positivism, social constructivism and postmodernism have produced segregation and deadlock in disciplines like Political Science, and particularly in the field of IR, debates among these traditions have resulted in a more fertile dialogue in the discipline of anthropology, and within the community of ethnographers across disciplines, where contemporary ethnography is *de rigueur* constructivist, and where the radical insights of postmodernism are incorporated by a thorough consideration of epistemological reflexivity on the part of the researcher that precludes moving in the direction of epistemological relativism (Schatz, 2009a: 22; Kubik, 2009: 38)

2.3.2 *Why Ethnography?*

There are three reasons why I am drawn to ethnography for the purposes of my research. First, and more broadly, ethnography marks itself off other methods in suggesting a different understanding of what social knowledge is and how it can be produced. In other words, ethnography engages in “position taking” (Bourdieu, 1984) in a wider field of positions on knowledge production, and in doing so it is political. That ethnography stands in opposition to positivist theories and methods

that draw inspiration from the natural sciences is both well known and also a very basic ground for its appeal. Social science and IR specifically have travelled some distance from the behaviouralism of the 1950s and most IR scholars would have no problem acknowledging the different ontologies of the natural and social world, and may eschew the ambition of discovering nomothetic laws via methods modeled on the natural sciences. Acknowledgment of this difference in social ontologies has, however, not meant that scholars have readily abandoned their commitment to particular kinds of ‘scientific’ research, and this is quite evident in the salience and valorisation of rationalist epistemologies in IR research spanning not only neorealist and liberal institutionalists but even the dominant strand of constructivism.

The absence of crude or naïve positivism should, however, not obscure the operation of positivist tenets in more subtle ways, especially in how a rationalist epistemology (of stronger and weaker shades) aspires to provide for objectivity in the study of the social world. Arriving at objectivity often involves two related moves. One, the notion that scientific theories must be founded on a neutral observational language, that is, descriptions and facts that correspond with reality and are not coloured by biases and theoretical assumptions. Both facts and the methods used to uncover them should thus be theory neutral. Two, the removal of bias makes it necessary to obscure – if not eliminate – the effects and role of the observer by employing explicit standardised procedures for data elicitation. This then makes it possible to establish causal relationships by testing scientific theories and their hypotheses by controlling for variables. The idea, in some types of experimental and survey research, has been to narrow down the precise words used in statements and questionnaires so that survey respondents and experimental subjects will respond with the same stimuli (for

an influential critique, see Burawoy, 1998; also, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 3-12).

The set of qualitative methods that are often used for ethnographic research – participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and historical analysis – eschew both the notion of theory neutral social facts and the idea that the observer can or indeed should be obscured. They point out instead to how people don't respond to stimuli as much as they *interpret* stimuli, and how the researcher as an observer occupies a particular vantage point and social space that does colour her/his representation of other people's meanings. Indeed, an ethnographic approach precludes the fieldworker from taking a neutral or detached stance. If immersion involves “subjecting yourself, your own body, your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals” then such immersion is bound to result in the “resocialisation” of the researcher (Goffman, cited in Emerson et al., 1995: 2). By participating and observing daily routines, the researcher begins to “enter into the matrix of meanings of the researched, to participate in their system of organised activities, and to feel subjected to their code of moral regulation” (Wax, 1980: 272-73).

Second, even as it may shine the critical spotlight on social elites (Shore and Nugent, 2002), ethnographies do not lose their potency when studying the experience of ordinary actors. By highlighting how power and responsibility are exercised, ethnographies demonstrate how the subalterns who lurk in the shadow of grand activity get marginalised and the process by which this takes place. Besides ordinary actors, ethnography also allows for the analysis of actions and routines that may

appear irrelevant or too ordinary to warrant any attention. Wedeen (2010: 262) offers two such examples: quotidian social gatherings in authoritarian political contexts that can become a form of democratic practice (Wedeen 2008) or foot-dragging, pilfering and off stage talk (gossip, insults and slander) that become a form of everyday peasant resistance (Scott, 1985, 1990).

A third reason why I am drawn to ethnographic methods relates to an assessment of the current state of the field of IR studies, where ‘thick’ and analytically descriptive empirical work has been meager. Take, for instance, the case of constructivists in IR at large, who have relied on a few standard methods to make their arguments – interview data, statistical studies, archives, content analysis and discourse analysis (Checkel, 1998: 334). Even though their works have made important critiques of neorealist and neoliberal hypotheses, they have been concerned primarily with making a case for how norms and identities matter at the macro level of states and international organisations. For empirical substantiation, however, they have often poached into the detailed fieldwork accounts of other scholars (including ethnographic accounts) rather than engage in immersion and long-term fieldwork.

2.3.3 *Tensions*

Ethnography is not short of tensions. It is worth focusing on three specific problems here. The tension between *emic* and *etic*, insider and outsider knowledge, is a salient concern for all ethnographic works. Reflecting on this point, Schatz (2009a: 6-8) notes that this dichotomy may be potentially misleading in that “most people tend to be insiders or outsider by degrees”, and the researcher’s use of categories to classify

and make sense of them must guard from the tendency to exaggerate their stability and from attributing them essential properties. Instead, such categories should be used for “representational convenience”. Nonetheless, he notes that the category of an “insider” has “heuristic value” since “in any given time and place, there are those who could be provisionally called ‘insiders’ if their status is stable enough to generate durable meanings.” (Also see Pelto and Pelto, 1978).

Second, for an approach that grants descriptive and explanatory priority to insider meanings, a fundamental problem arises with how to how to treat the testimonies of people being studied, given that testimonies can be idealised representations of the self. Ethnography mitigates this problem partially by studying how testimonies relate to practice. Nonetheless, rather than accepting the testimony of informants and interlocutors at face value, it is instructive to use Paul Ricoeur’s “hermeneutic of suspicion” which, as Schatz notes, begins with the basic assumption that immersion generates information, and that it is the scholar’s task to make sense of what is said by the informant as she presents self and fact in her presentation (Schatz 2009a: 7).

Finally, in the absence of a transcendent objectivity, there are no ironclad yardsticks with which to probe the validity of ethnographic findings. This, however, does not make ethnographic work unreliable (Wedeen, 2010: 260). The ambition here is to produce a “plausible account” (Scott, 1985: 47) that is recognisable by the social actors who inhabit the world it interprets and constructs, and to produce an interpretation that is both theoretically armed but also “skeptical of its explanatory efficacy” (Wedeen, 2010: 264). Scott addresses this point eloquently when he says, “as an interpretation, it [the ethnography] has to be judged by the standards of its logic, its economy, and its consistency with other social facts” (1985: 46). There

exist no standardised solutions to any of the tensions involved in ethnography, tensions which, it must be added, inhere in nearly all forms of social research, but which get acknowledged, reflected upon, and provisionally dealt with in ethnography by the skill and – perhaps most importantly – the self-reflexive writing of the ethnographer.

2.4 Ethnography in International Relations

While an interpretivist sensibility operationalised by constructivism is not new to the field of IR, ethnography – that espouses and practices interpretivism *both* epistemologically and methodologically – remains something of an unruly and eccentric child on the large dinner table of the political science and IR family (Pachirat, cited in Wedeen, 2010). The marginal status of ethnography in contemporary IR is interlinked with the broader relationship between political science and anthropology, where once a dialogue existed via the scholarship of Clifford Geertz. This was in large part because Geertz “named what he did science” (Wedeen, 2010). This dialogue suffered once Anthropology embarked on its “reflexive turn” in the 1980s and 90s, ushered in most powerfully with the publication of seminal texts such as *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus (1986) that renounced generality, emphasised specificity, and reinserted the researchers reflectivity in radical and novel ways. As anthropology moved away from the structural functionalism of its founding fathers (Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown) and from the interpretive critiques of it (Geertz), political science moved from

behaviouralism to rational choice theory (Wedeen, 2010: 259). At the heart of these divergent trajectories was the question of science: the former repudiated it while the latter espoused it with greater ambition. Ethnography thus remained an outcast in most fields of political science, except in comparative politics where the tradition of long-term fieldwork ensured that ethnography was either actively embraced by scholars, worked into relations of “complimentarity” with rational choice theories by scholars like David Laitin (Hopf, 2006), or brought within the rubric of “mixed methods”, though this “mixing” has not been without its critics (Wedeen, 2010; Schatz, 2009b).

Ethnographic works in IR have been few and far between, but the few that exist have contributed in novel ways to studying the practices and worldviews of social actors doing and making the ‘international’. Early works in IR that practiced immersion and engaged with anthropological theory include Hugh Gusterson’s study (1998) of the rituals and Foucauldian “regimes of truth” constructed by nuclear weapons scientists and anti-nuclear activists around the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Laboratory in the United States during the Cold War; Carol Cohn’s (1987) study of nuclear weapons strategists to grasp military thinking during the Cold War; and Michael Barnett’s study (1997) of the UN Secretariat during the unfolding genocide in Rwanda.

Over the past decade, however, there has been a more systematic interest in ethnography in IR, attributable, in part, to the frustration expressed by the *Perestroika* movement, and to the inspiration drawn from the writings of James C. Scott that straddle both political science and anthropology. These include studies based on participant observation, such as Iver Neumann’s (2012) work on the ties of kinship and everyday practices that constitute the world of diplomats, and Stephen

Hopgood's (2006) study of Amnesty International and human rights, as well as works espousing an ethnographic sensibility while eschewing participant observation and immersion, such as Vincent Pouliot's (2010) and Michael William's (2007) Bourdieu-inspired accounts on the symbolic power struggles that describe NATO-Russian diplomacy.

These varied attempts at using ethnography – as a method and/or sensibility – by feminists and constructivists in IR have been assessed by Wanda Vrasti who observes that the “ethnographic turn” in the field makes use of a “selective, instrumental and somewhat timid understanding of what ethnography is and does” (Vrasti, 2008: 280). Arguing that ethnography gets used either as a means for positivist data-collection informed by naturalist notions of a researcher accessing an unmediated reality, as a literary genre, or as a “theoretical sensibility” that pays attention to practice over discourse, she calls for greater attention to the radical impulses of ‘critical ethnography’ which IR has missed out by not engaging with the debates of the “reflexive turn” inaugurated by critical anthropology in the 1980s. In urging IR scholars to engage more directly with anthropological theory “post-Geertz”, Vrasti's arguments have been important and timely. However, her critique smuggles in the notion of a “pure ethnography” (Rancatore, 2010), and, paradoxically, does not engage with more recent anthropological theory annealed by the epistemological interrogation of the discipline by the debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Noting how “radical perspectivism” has been critiqued by recent anthropological theory for “closing off interpretation”, and abdicating theoretical responsibility, Lisa Wedeen urges scholars to “chug ahead to the anthropology of the 2000s” which incorporates the lessons from *Writing Culture*, but has formulated

different strategies for producing empirically minded and theoretically armed research (2010: 264).

Perhaps a final point can be made here about a concern that partly explains why ethnography has been rare in IR compared to other fields, and thus also speaks to the very identity of IR as a field of study. This is the concern about ethnographic access. The point could be made that ethnographic research is a particularly ill-suited and impractical strategy for studying IR since the access required for participant observation – the *sine qua non* of this approach – is encumbered by a “unique aura of secrecy” (Pouliot, 2010: 83) that shrouds political leaders, governments, and their bureaucracies. This is a valid concern in that the meetings, routines and conversations of several actors performing “high politics” *in situ* and in real time – political leaders, diplomats, ministers, international and national bureaucrats – are almost always beyond the reach of the researcher. The point of secrecy should, however, not be overstated. Even the ethnographer in sociology who must seek information from families about a spate of village suicides, and the ethnographer in management studies working on staff and board relations in a corporation, face analogous barriers to becoming insiders to sensitive contexts of social interaction marked by highly guarded forms of information. Rather than closing off ethnography altogether, the problem of access raises two questions: first, are there alternative strategies by which *immersion* can be achieved? Second, and more fundamentally, is IR the preserve of “high politics” alone?

There have been some innovative and fruitful solutions to the problem of secrecy and access. Gusterson’s work (1996) on nuclear scientists is an important example (also

see Gusterson 2008, for a reflection on his experience). Unable to undertake traditional participant observation at a Nuclear Weapons Laboratory, he sought out alternative venues to ‘hang out’ with weapons scientists he wanted to study – by moving into flat shares with employees, going to church, participating in sports, informal events of the organisation such as Friday drinks, all of which provided him a wide base of contacts that included weapons scientists and their wives, church leaders, and journalists. Gusterson’s work demonstrates that immersion is possible even without traditional kinds of participant observation. Thus, as Schatz points out, when access to a setting is denied, the ethnographer should strive for the “nearest possible vantage point” rather than abandoning the ethnographic endeavour altogether (Schatz, 2009b: 307). This provides an answer for the second question: even if IR is to be conflated with high politics alone and the actors that perform it then it is still possible to study their world by seeking the closest vantage point to the physical and social spaces in which they move about. If, however, IR is concerned with the practices through which the international is produced then ethnography serves as a vehicle to expand its horizons beyond high politics, for ethnography’s gaze on how power operates in everyday practice undermines the distinctions between the local and global and indeed ‘high politics’ and ‘low politics’. Gusterson’s work on how nuclear weapons scientists rationalise and defend their work may have been concerned with ‘low politics’ far removed from the Pentagon, but it discloses the construction and workings of the ideological edifice for the arms race and deterrence during the Cold War.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a framework – a theoretical and methodological scaffolding – that would hold up *and* regulate a study of the ASEAN Secretariat and the diplomatic field in Jakarta. My decision to depart from the dominant theories and methods of IR is at one level *intellectual* in that these theories and methods are complicit in rendering the Secretariat obscure, but it is also *personal* in that the particular form these departures take are shaped by the metatheoretical preferences of the researcher. These departures from IR are intended not to mark a flight away from the field as much as to return to the practices that constitute international relations with theories and methods that have a long pedigree in the cognate disciplines of anthropology and sociology. I have argued that the interventions that follow these departures are not merely indulgent but speak to some pressing concerns in IR, and in the study of the international relations of the Asia Pacific especially, where foregrounding everyday practice provides a way to break out of the deadlock of structural and voluntarist accounts that dominate this field and where interpretive ethnography holds the possibility for empirically rich and descriptive study of practices constitutive at once of the local and international.

CHAPTER 3

FIELDWORK IN A DIPLOMATIC FIELD

3.1 Introduction: Arriving at the Secretariat

“Open for Public” is a special status reserved for only one space within the precincts of the ASEAN Secretariat in South Jakarta. Nestled in its *belly* – used here literally to suggest a circuitous, descending passage from an elevated lobby, and also metaphorically for a backstage distant from the performances of ritualised activity – this is the Secretariat’s library. To be sure, this is a ‘dressed up’ backstage: from an ageing blue board at the entrance announcing the ‘ASEAN 2020 Vision’ to a musty carpeted corridor on the one side of which are the framed photo portraits of the eight erstwhile Secretaries General – a movement from black-and-white to colour – while on the other wall is a built-in mahogany display cabinet replete with diplomatic gifts – from precious Vietnamese ceramics to Kelantan silverware – accreted at the Secretariat over the decades. The climax to this progression of visual markers is a large antique frame with an enlarged photo of that moment from 1967 in Bangkok when Thailand’s Thanat Khoman, Singapore’s S. Rajaretnam, Indonesia’s Adam Malik, the Philippines’ Narciso Ramos, and Malaysia’s Tun Abdul Razak Hussein – all bespectacled, all dressed in suits – were busy signing away ASEAN into existence.³²

³² The “ASEAN Declaration” also known as “Bangkok Declaration” of 1967.

For a librarian – and thus a gatekeeper of a defined space – Basuki was unusually uninquisitive and unobtrusive. It was my third visit to the library but Basuki, clad in a beige polyester shirt and faded black trousers, had not initiated any queries about me, perhaps satisfied with the “Visitors” badge I dutifully wore during my first visit or registering the specific sartorial mode of my presence – in a white basketweave cotton shirt and silk blue tie – which posed particular obstructions to his ability to engage with me in English. But there was more to his uninquiring ways, which, though welcome to an anxious researcher, was more unsettling: his steadfast refusal to meet the eye. For me, Basuki was becoming what the ‘Balinese’ had been to Geertz: studiously indifferent, looking past, busy with the mores of everyday work “while one drifts around feeling vaguely disembodied” like a “cloud or a gust of wind” (1973b: 413). Seated alone on a stacked metal chair reading a copy of the “Anthology of ASEAN Literatures” I decided to initiate a chat and force upon Basuki both my presence and acquaintance. I walked to the librarian’s desk where Basuki sat gazing into his desktop computer screen, unperturbed by my arrival till I asked:

“Halo Pak, kapan penutupan perpustakaan?”

“Jam lima.”

Basuki conveyed dourly that the library was to close at 5 p.m., and in the immediacy of the chat I queried something for which I already had an answer from the Secretariat’s website: that borrowing services are not extended to “the public”. Nonetheless.

“Pak, bisa saya pinjam buku dari sini?”

“Staf?”

“Tidak.” ‘No’ I wasn’t a staff at the Secretariat, I replied with unease. But I persisted.

“Tapi saya mahasiswa dan peneliti di CSIS di Jakarta.”

Presenting myself as a university student but also deploying my specific designation within Jakarta – as a researcher at a well-known research institute – I sought to fix my identity in a manner familiar to him and establish some ground for being trusted with borrowing a book. Basuki, however, remained unconvinced. He looked again at his computer screen, absorbed in thought, till he finally asked

“Orang ASEAN?”

Given that this interaction had been strategised as a way to be known, be liked, possibly be welcomed – all instrumentally geared towards fostering that “mysterious necessity of anthropological fieldwork, rapport” (Geertz, 1973b: 416) – the unexpected turn of dialogue had rendered this interaction unfavourable. A bit flustered, I said:

“Tidak Pak. Saya orang India.” I paused. *“Tapi saya telah bekerja di kawasan ASEAN. India adalah Dialogue Partner juga!”*

While I was not an “*Orang ASEAN*,” that is, an ‘ASEAN person’ or ‘ASEAN national’ in a space unmistakably fashioned by ‘ASEAN,’ I conveyed that I was from India and proceeded to submit meekly that India happened to be a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Basuki looked at me; a faint smile growing on his strong jaw.

“Maaf, tak bisa.” Sorry I can’t, he concluded.

“Tidak ada masalah, Pak” “No problem”, I said with an apologetic smile, and retired to my stacked metal chair in a cloud of heightened uncertainty.

The sociological and praxeological dimensions of this brief, banal exchange were instructive: for one, it illuminated the everyday production and performance of ‘ASEAN’ for, pray, at which bureaucratic setting in Southeast Asia or beyond would “*Orang ASEAN*” be articulated as a formulation for personhood,³³ and deployed as a meaningful criterion for issuing and borrowing books or any form of material exchange? Second, in his willingness to circumvent a stated rule by searching for an alternative normative criterion, Basuki’s invocation of “*Orang ASEAN*” was suggestive of the informality of practice within this space, an informality driven by the impulse to help, to save my face, or both, and would serve as an early lead to probe such improvisations within the Secretariat. As I sat discomfited over the plywood table at the Secretariat’s library, however, these simple insights were not apparent. Not only had the invocation of “*Orang ASEAN*” raised doubts over the legitimate basis of my ambiguous presence in this space for the one year of fieldwork to come but “*Orang ASEAN?*” had also struck a raw nerve, one that had nettled a longer backstory to my access to this organisation and would continue to animate the challenges to my fieldwork in Jakarta.

In fleshing out this scene I have sought to deploy two tropes of ethnographic writing: the trope of the outsider seeking to be an insider and, more obliquely, the trope of arrival. As this encounter in the Secretariat’s library during my first month in Jakarta suggests, the arrival wasn’t the enchanted utopian encounter of anthropological tales of yore (*a la* Firth or Bouganville, see Pratt, 1986: 36-38) and, more importantly, the

³³ *Orang* in Bahasa Indonesia can refer to ‘person,’ ‘individual’ and even ‘soul’. Its usage is diverse. It can denote ‘natives’ (*Orang asli*), geographic communities such as sea people (*Orang laut*) and also nationality – an Indian is *Orang India* while an Englishman is *Orang Inggris*.

formal categories of exclusion that policed the borderlines of this organisation and community of ASEAN practitioners in Jakarta – staff/non-staff, ASEAN/non-ASEAN, and indeed state/non-state – would have to be eroded if not circumvented in order to undertake this fieldwork. Tropes are not merely literary conventions. They endure as recurrent modes of narration and reflection precisely because they capture the circumstances under which ‘data’ is generated, interpreted and selected (Rumsey, 2004: 268). The trope of the ‘outsider’ becoming an ‘insider’ is arguably the spine of experiential fieldwork, for it is central to the quality of the data that is privileged in an ethnographic text, and has important implications for establishing the sources and limits of ethnographic authority. In this chapter I shall provide a reflexive analysis of this fieldwork experience – of how fieldwork was both designed and *practiced*. I shall begin by tracing the twists and turns of early attempts at seeking official access to the ASEAN Secretariat (also referred to as ‘ASEC’), a process described by rejection, momentary success and a final breakdown; the formulation, out of this rupture, of a new research strategy that would fix my gaze on new questions and relations; and a detailed analysis of the arc of fieldwork spanning 13 months: from the varied practices of reaching out, the strategies of impression management, the cultivation of relations with interlocutors in the field, the specific methods of data generation, to the practices by which ethical concerns were reflected upon and dealt with.

3.2 Seeking Access

Even as the practice of ethnographic enquiry requires “the exercise of judgment in context” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 23) and involves being responsive to serendipity, such research requires a well-developed research design from the outset.

Key elements of this design include identifying a setting or “focal area” for immersion (Neyland, 2008: 32), developing research problems, and factoring into account the pragmatic considerations of duration and funding. Unlike cases where the researcher begins with a particular problem – of social deviance, for instance – and proceeds to identify a suitable site for research, this study came under a class of projects where “the setting itself comes first” and where “foreshadowed problems” (Malinowski, 1922: 8-9) emerged from the nature of the setting (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 36). Thus, in this instance, the issue of *selecting* a setting did not arise as both the research problems and the setting were bound closely to one other. Equipped with a preliminary proposal designed along these lines, I started enquiries about access to the ASEAN Secretariat by email, followed by a pilot trip in Fall 2011 to Jakarta and Singapore to interview and formally introduce myself to gatekeepers at the organisation.

3.2.1 *Official Access*

At first, the goal was to seek official institutional access even though such a strategy came with certain risks: of the management refusing to cooperate or, worse, obstruct employees from participating; of cooperating but on terms that would make them direct the research by suggesting topics and supplying select staff for interviews (akin to Gusterson’s [1997: 35] predicament). Nonetheless, unwilling to preempt the Secretariat’s response, I chose to pursue this line of access. In doing so, I was guided by two understandings: first, that the criteria of being an “ASEAN national”, that is, a citizen of an ASEAN member state, operates as a stated rule in staff recruitments though it has exceptions. As a former Secretariat staff I liaised with noted “we have

consultants galore” from overseas “who traipse the portals of the Secretariat for studies on strengthening the Secretariat”.³⁴ Second, that I was well-positioned to work around this formal rule on account of my ties of professional kinship with networks of policy makers and academics who fly about Southeast Asian capitals engaging in the talk about ASEAN in conferences and workshops.³⁵

This professional background and accompanying web of contacts were useful insofar as I could invoke them in my first encounters with gatekeepers at the Secretariat and position myself as a quasi-insider within the community of researchers studying ASEAN. I presented myself as a PhD student interested in studying the Secretariat’s history, of how it produces something regional in routine work, and whether it exercises power despite the widely held notion of its inconsequentiality. As these interviews progressed it became apparent that any discussion of the Secretariat – its work, its role, its power – was immediately tied to power struggles *within* the Secretariat and *between* Secretariat staff and the diplomats of the CPR, who had been settling in Jakarta since 2009. While officials I met were candid in their off-stage talk, the sensitivity of these issues – expressed by the impressions they “gave off” (Goffman, 1959) by way of change in tone, anxiety of body gesture and the requests issued mid-way through interviews to turn off the audio recorder – brought home the point that this strained context would have a bearing on how my research interests would be perceived and entertained.

Upon returning to London I re-established communication and submitted an application for an internship at the Secretariat. Within a month, however, I was

³⁴ Email correspondence with former Secretariat staff, 31 October 2011.

³⁵ A kinship forged by working at a prominent research institution in Southeast Asia for four years (2006-2010).

informed that my application had been rejected as “this opportunity [for internships] is only provided to ASEAN nationals”.³⁶ Discussing this outcome over a phone call to Jakarta, an officer who had supported my application expressed his surprise with the rule on nationality and reiterated his eagerness in having an “outsider’s perspective” on the division’s work, adding that he was “pretty short, you know, on active support”.³⁷ Within a week, the officer came up with an alternative arrangement whereby I would be an intern for a research institute with an annex office inside the Secretariat. This was the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), a Japan funded and Jakarta based research institute set up under the firmly inter-governmental aegis of the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit. With India as a member of the East Asia Summit, for once, I was able to cross organisational borders shaped by national affiliation. Accordingly, a formal letter from ERIA was received by post, signed, and returned.

Nearly two months later, an email received in the wee hours of a cold London morning informed me that this arrangement had unraveled. ERIA was unable to assist me in my application for a Research Permit in Indonesia while the Secretariat could not extend its “protocol services to non-ASEC staff as interns are considered third party.” “Aside from the administrative aspect,” it continued, a new Deputy Secretary General had taken office and “all things considered, he had reservations about a non-ASEAN intern being assigned at ASEC.”³⁸ Over a phone call to Jakarta later in the day, I made a final, possibly importunate, pitch: I emphasised the professional experience and value I would bring to the internship and reiterated my lack of interest in any classified documents, if that had been a concern. While the

³⁶ Email from Secretariat official, 7 February 2012.

³⁷ Interview with official at ASEAN Secretariat, 7 December 2011.

³⁸ Email communication, 31 May 2012.

official sympathetically took note of this, he sought greater clarity on the “main findings of my research” and underlined that I could not write anything “detrimental” to the organisation’s image. This would be our final conversation. By now, the improbability of officially sanctioned access and the implausibility of undertaking critically minded research through this route had become apparent.

3.2.2 Knowledge of the Setting

These experiences over access were suggestive of a few things. First, it confirmed the observation handed down to me of the Secretariat as a highly understaffed entity in dire need of administrative and research support. Second, and more importantly, the experience disclosed ambiguities over who exactly held the keys to final decisions within the organisation. As a former Secretariat employee abreast of my access negotiations observed, access would have been far easier if the final chain of command ended with the Secretary General (as it apparently did in the pre-Charter past) but in this uncertain post-Charter context, he continued, “I don’t think ASEC guys are going to break this requirement, as they are answerable to the CPR, which has oversight of all matters in the Secretariat.” Staff wariness towards the CPR had likely resulted in the strategic deployment of my nationality as a ground for closure, he (and indeed others in the loop)³⁹ surmised. This search for access thus gave me a preliminary insight into the sort of post-ASEAN Charter power shifts underway in Jakarta and served as a specific illustration of a point by Hammersley and Atkinson

³⁹ Interview with foreign development consultant in Jakarta, 23 December 2011.

(1995: 64) that “knowing who has the power to open up or block off access...is an important aspect of the sociological knowledge about the setting.”

3.3 A New Plan

3.3.1 Studying Up

The unraveling of access negotiations that spanned seven months was a simple illustration of the challenges of ‘studying up’ – that is, of an ethnographic endeavour that inverts its gaze from the village, poor, disadvantaged, foreign and ‘exotic’ to the middle and upper echelons of social hierarchies, influence, wealth, and domination in increasingly capitalist, rationalised and bureaucratic societies (See Nader, 1972, for programmatic introduction). Studying up, then, raises profound methodological challenges. As Gusterson acutely notes, “participant observation is a research technique that does not travel well up the social structure” (Gusterson, 1997: 115). The ASEAN Secretariat may well be old and run down, understaffed and underpaid, yet it remains a site of elite presence and activity: from a compound with gates, guards, security checks, and a reception lobby all vested with the sacral force of immunities and privileges to being inhabited by a cadre of staff who not only enjoy these diplomatic privileges and immunities but also draw on US dollar salaries, travel overseas on ‘missions,’ rack-up air miles, and reside in executive apartments and condominiums in South and Central Jakarta. Moreover, as a transit on the highway of elite political and diplomatic activity in Southeast Asia, the Secretariat – lusterless on its own – shines in the glitter of elite bureaucratic, political and diplomatic networks that routinely converge within its premises.

3.3.2 *Immersion by Other Means*

Given that a simple desk, chair, and institutional affiliation within the ASEAN Secretariat were no longer possible, how was this ethnography to proceed? It would have to press on by mining a conception of ethnography wedded less to the singular method of participant observation than to the creative deployment of varied research techniques to achieve *immersion*: from in-depth semi-structured interviews; ‘hanging out’ with interlocutors at lunches, coffee-breaks, dinners, drinks, clubs, sporting events and movies; limited participant observation of events and seminars at the Secretariat and Jakarta’s hotels; scouring newspaper archives; browsing publicly available ASEAN documents; as well as a virtual ethnography of online spaces where people and institutions within this field interact.⁴⁰ In doing so, this project would draw on the debates within the discipline of anthropology where scholars respectful of the richness of Malinowskian single-sited participant observation have nonetheless critiqued the “mystique” (Nader, 1972: 306) and “fetishistic obsession” (Gusterson, 1997: 116) with this method in the wider repertoire of ethnographic research techniques (see also, Pissaro, 1997; Des Chenes, 1997), and have raised questions about its usefulness as a privileged method – explicated in the early twentieth century to study immobile and small face-to-face communities – for an “interconnected world in which people, objects, and ideas are rapidly shifting and refusing to stay in place” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a: 4; also, Appadurai, 1991).

The implication of constructing a new research strategy of immersion entailed two practical intellectual shifts. First, no longer moored exclusively to an office space at the Secretariat, the contours and scope of the ‘field’ were now revised profoundly.

⁴⁰ ‘Immersion’ understood as “approaches that rely centrally on person-to-person contact as a way to elicit insider perspectives and meanings” (Schatz, 2007: 2).

Rather than focus primarily on the compound and inhabitants of the Secretariat, I could now cast my intellectual net over a wider relational space of actors and institutions in which the Secretariat was ensconced.

This came with a second implication: that I could now lay claim to different kinds of questions. Rather than ask how a document is produced by the Secretariat's bureaucracy (*a' la* Neumann, 2007) or trace 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995) via internal email correspondence and chatter, I could ask questions about the practices that animate this 'Jakarta scene' of ASEAN diplomacy organised around the Secretariat. The gaze on the Secretariat was not to be diffuse as much as different: rather than studying it from the inside (covertly, if it had to be done at all) I would probe its history, routine work, and power by building relationships with its staff in their social and professional spaces, and also with the diplomats and policy makers whose practices had a bearing on the organisations' fate. This diverse body of interlocutors also provided a polyvocal pool from which I could triangulate narratives for thick and thin claims and representations.

Unbeknown to me then, this strategy had certain strengths that would become apparent only during fieldwork. One, an official affiliation with the Secretariat would have encumbered the depth of my interaction with ASEAN diplomats from the CPR and 'foreign' diplomats from Dialogue Partners states. It was a tacit norm among most Secretariat staff – especially during the troubled formative period of this field since 2009 – to not cultivate friendships with DP and (especially) CPR diplomats. As Gloria, a staff at the Secretariat, remarked during one of our late night conversations by the dancing water fountain of Plaza Senayan Mall, "we don't seek out CPR or DPs [diplomats] for after-work drinks or bonding. Not sure why. It's just not done. I

guess we don't see the CPR as friends".⁴¹ And second, that an internship would not have opened the floodgates of spatial and informational intimacy that it may have promised at first. Two interns – both 'ASEAN nationals' – who I stumbled upon and befriended at the Secretariat frequently lamented the lack of access to what they saw as the most banal of files and meeting reports which were closed off as 'sensitive' and 'confidential' by the middle management at the Secretariat.

3.3.3 *Local affiliation*

It was not possible to simply land up in Jakarta and begin fieldwork. To operationalise this research strategy I required a local research institute to serve as a host institution, not only to provide organisational backing for a research permit but also for a local affiliation that could position me favourably within this field of ASEAN diplomacy in Jakarta. This support came from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a prominent think tank with deep roots, first, in Indonesia's political history where it once thrived as a key and conservative channel of domestic and foreign policy advice to the New Order regime under General Suharto, and second, as a leading 'Track Two' institution organising – since 1979 – policy and quasi-academic gatherings – seminars, workshops, conferences, and roundtables – on ASEAN and "institution building in East Asia" (Wanandi, 2012: 253).

CSIS' accumulated historical weight gave it a unique position in Jakarta. On the one hand, its renewed ties with governments in the post-Suharto era – and especially the

⁴¹ Fieldnotes, 19 July 2013.

foreign ministry – enabled it to contribute to a domestic discourse on foreign policy articulated intimately in Bahasa Indonesia. On the other hand, its long role in organising foreign policy gatherings on Indonesia’s bilateral relationships and ASEAN came with the cultivation of an outward looking profile: of an all-Indonesian workforce of political scientists, foreign policy analysts, economists, mostly trained overseas, comfortable with English, and confident in their embodied interactions with local and international elites, who routinely sought them for briefings. In this way, CSIS’ position in Jakarta was finely attuned to the needs of my own research: legible at once to my landlord who had read about election surveys by CSIS in his local newspaper, and to diplomats and Secretariat staff who would read into my affiliation with CSIS a conferral of local legitimacy.

3.4 Constructing a Field

For all the ambivalences that plague the intellectual construction of a *field* and the professional practice of *fieldwork* – its historical ties to naturalism (finding research subjects in their ‘natural setting’), its valorisation of exotic spaces and worlds (difference being ‘out there’ as someplace non-industrialised and non-Western) and an enervating complicity in colonialism and contemporary neocolonial entanglements (the power of the male, often white fieldworker from a Western university) – both *field* and *fieldwork* nonetheless endure through reflexive interrogation as privileged modes for explicating something ethnographic about the world (Clifford, 1997; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a; Geertz, 1995: 127-133).

Armed less with the “archetype” of Malinowski as a lone fieldworker with his pitched tent in the Trobriand Islands (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a: 11) or the “mental image” of Margaret Mead leaning into a Balinese mother and child (Clifford, 1997: 187), I traveled to Jakarta inspired by the image of the roving fieldworker grappling with distended spaces and scattered interlocutors spooled together by coherent borders of membership so evocatively exemplified by Gusterson (1996) in his ethnography of nuclear weapons scientists and anti-nuclear activists in the town of Livermore, California.

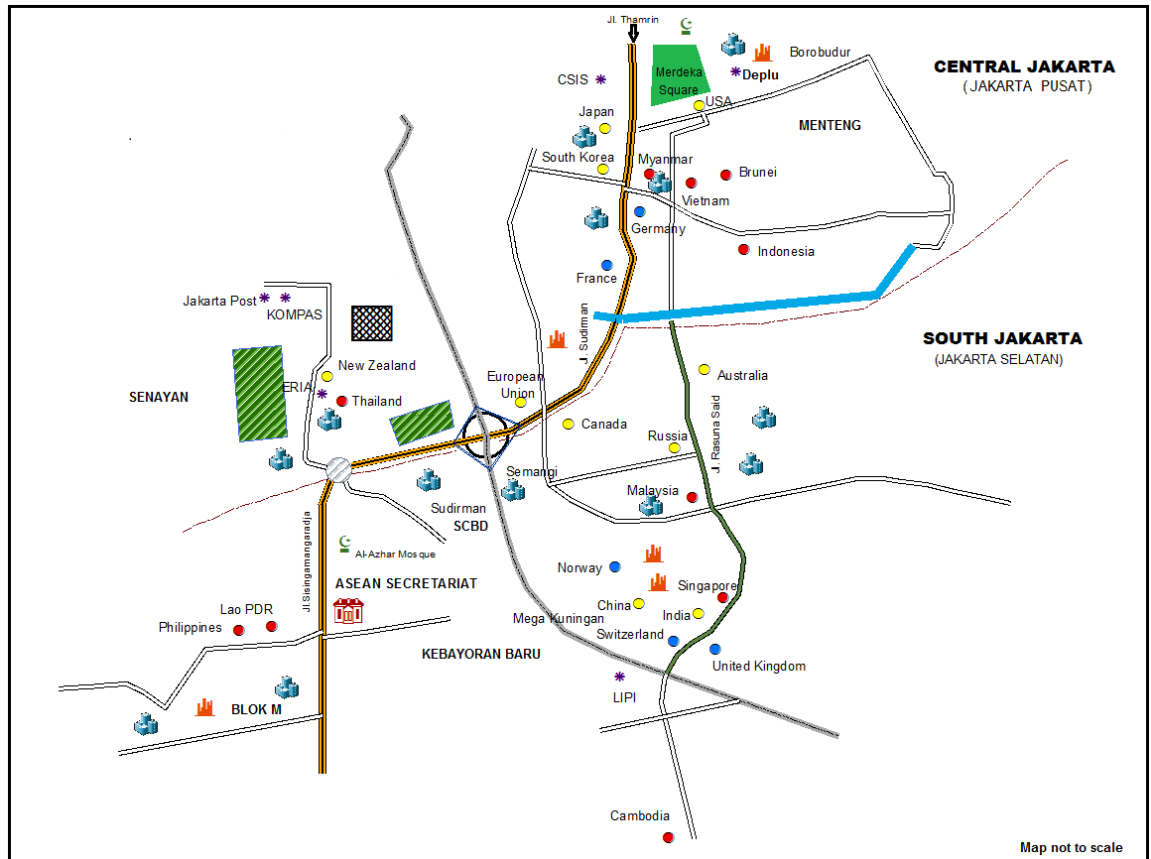
Arriving in Jakarta I took residence in one of the city’s proliferating *kos kosan* or boarding houses designed for a floating, often young, often unmarried, population of migrant workers and students alike. To be sure, this was an “executive *kos*” located in the midst of a soaring skyline of skyscrapers, whose selection had been conspired by Indonesian friends in London who had observed that this would be ‘suitable’ for a foreigner in their country. I would realise in due course that by residing in Kuningan, amidst the spires of Southeast Asia’s largest metropolis, I had taken residence, unwittingly but not coincidentally, in the heart of Jakarta’s amorphous ‘diplomatic zone’. A zone discernable less by borders, barricades and police check points than by the unmistakable built structures of state power and high capitalism accessible to, and in the service of, growing gradations of middle and upper class Indonesians and a well established expatriate community in the city. This amorphous zone was in full view from my sixth floor room: shimmering glass curtain-walled office towers, government buildings housed in whitewashed colonial era structures, high-rise condominiums, luxury malls, all buffered, all interpellated, by the indefatigable sprawl of – no longer thatched but, in so central a location, concrete and tiled – *kampung*. As Jakarta’s “internal other,” (Kusno, 2000: 144-146) the *kampung* or

urban village supplies the cheap labour to sustain the formal sector operating from the (commanding) heights of office towers, malls and elevated highways that constitute the built spaces in which practitioners of this diplomacy move about.

As the anthropologist James Clifford (1997: 186) – following De Certeau – notes, a field is not simply a physical clearing. In order to be meaningful, it must be a *social space* “practiced by people’s active occupation, their movements through and around it.” The field, then, was not a pre-given category I arrived with. Instead, it had to be experienced, worked up and plotted by accounting for the corporeal and discursive practices of those inhabiting it, the researcher included. Over the months, as I attended ASEAN events in the city, visited diplomatic missions for interviews, hung out with a growing base of secretariat staff and diplomats at cafes, pubs, restaurants, shopping malls, cinema theatres and sporting events, and, in doing so, grasped the class driven arrays of their professional and social movements within the city and beyond, a certain consolidated view of social space, of a field with arbitrary yet plausible borders, became apparent.

A useful point to pivot a representation of this field is that surfaced, asphalted site with some symbolic weight in Indonesia’s post-independence history – from being the country’s first modern highway built in the 1960s, to expressing a dramatic aesthetic realisation of Sukarno’s vision for a modern Jakarta in a decolonising world of New Emerging Forces, to the site of a student massacre in 1998 that precipitated the downfall of Suharto and the New Order. This is the Semanggi interchange, shaped – like the Malay name suggests – as a four-leaved cloverleaf, buzzing with Jakarta’s undiminishable *macet* (traffic). Radiating out of Semanggi at a length of merely five kilometers – as the crow flies – a circle obtains that covers parts of

Central and South Jakarta, the two most prominent hubs of commercial, political, and diplomatic activity in the special province of Jakarta (see Map 3).



Map 3: Situating ASEAN Diplomacy in Jakarta

At its northernmost, this circle reaches over a dense cluster of iconic national monuments, state offices, and diplomatic spaces. This includes the Dutch built, Sukarno augmented, open-air trapezoid called Merdeka Square (Freedom Square) with a phallic obelisk shaped to the dimensions of Indonesia's date of independence. Along the trapezoid's periphery is the bunker style US Embassy, and, to its right on Jalan Pejambon, is Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs housed in the neo-classical Gedung Pancasila. Snaking up north from Semanggi Interchange to Merdeka Square is the great thoroughfare of Jalan Sudirman, which, at the roundabout of the old and celebrated Hotel Indonesia, takes the name of the city's most famous *orang Betawi* (ethnic Jakartan) Husin Thamrin until it reaches the wide grounds of Merdeka Square.

Along these *macet* clogged thoroughfares of Jalan Sudirman and Thamrin are the dazzling corporate office towers that expressed "the opening act of the New Order economic miracle" in the 1980s (Silver, 2008: 6); some of the city's most famous luxury shopping malls, notably, Grand Indonesia and Plaza Indonesia; landmarks such as the Sarinah Department Store invoked by Barack Obama to capture the old Jakarta of his childhood (The White House, 2011); luxury hotel chains like Grand Hyatt, Mandarin Oriental and Le Méridien; and a string of downtown embassies and missions including the Permanent Mission of Korea to ASEAN, the German embassy, and the bunker embassy of Japan with its Mission to ASEAN nestled within its ash-gray compound.

A kilometer south of Medan Merdeka is the leafy and unaffordable neighbourhood of Menteng, a suburb of bungalows and lawns built for Europeans in the early twentieth century which, as with similar colonial built spaces in cities of great anti-colonial

resistance, retain their intimate ties to power by housing government offices, Embassies, Permanent Missions to ASEAN (Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam, Myanmar), and also the dwellings of local elites and ambassadors, including, it should be added, the bungalow of the Secretary General of ASEAN with an ASEAN flag fluttering above its fenced lawn.

Moving clock wise along this heuristic circle, one comes upon Jakarta's 'Golden Triangle' – a dense agglomeration of corporate offices and embassies – bounded by the three prominent thoroughfares of Jalan Sudirman, Jalan Rasuna Said, and Jalan Gatot Subroto at its base. Once heavily populated by *kampungs*, it was Jakarta's long-serving charismatic Governor Ali Sadikin who carved out Jalan Rasuna Said in the 1970s as a commercial avenue to connect Menteng with South Jakarta and relieve the pressure off Merdeka Square where embassies had been cramped in temporary structures and could now relocate to a spacious setting (Silver, 2008: 190). This is evidenced by the wide gated compounds of several embassies lined along Jalan Rasuna Said: the conical embassy of India, the embassy of Poland with a wide gray columned facade, the densely fenced embassy of Netherlands, the Swiss embassy with its arresting modern bay windows, the Embassy of Singapore (and its Permanent Mission to ASEAN) housed in a spacious complex of yellow sandstone, the UK Embassy styled as a bunker facility, the embassy of Malaysia with its imposing portico embossed with its national coat of arms, the large art deco embassy of Russia built during the Cold War, and the embassy of Australia (with its Mission to ASEAN) in an unflattering white block structure that bore the brunt of a dramatic bombing in 2004. Embassies are also located in office towers within this triangle: the European Union Delegation housed high up on Initland Towers in Kuningan, and

diagonal to it, the Canadian Embassy in the once lofty but now eclipsed World Trade Centre of the 1980s.

Adjacent to Jalan Rasuna Said is Mega Kuningan, a striking commercial development of inner city Jakarta that replaced decades of mid-level residential housing built during the 1950s and 1970s. Laid out in concentric circles, Mega Kuningan boasts luxury residences, office towers, international five star chains like JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton (both frequently used by US embassy diplomats), and expatriate supermarkets. On the outermost concentric circle of Mega Kuningan is the embassy of China with its upward curling roof ridges, the Royal Embassy of Thailand in spotless white, and, in office towers within Mega Kuningan are the embassies of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, among others. Dotted along these streets of the Golden Triangle are Jakarta's ubiquitous malls (Van Leeuwen, 2011) – Kuningan City, Epicentrum, Plaza Festival, and Setiabudi One – where many an hour would be spent chatting about ASEAN.

Pushing southwards, the circle approaches the ASEAN Secretariat at Kebayoran Baru. Conceived in 1948 by the Dutch after their post-War reoccupation of the Indies, Kebayoran Baru was where nearly 6000 houses were built for civil servants burgeoning the ranks of the new government once sovereignty was transferred in 1950. In due course, Kebayoran Baru, as Jakarta's historian Susan Abeysekare (1987: 158) notes, "proved to be another Menteng".

Running southwards from the Semanggi Interchange to the Secretariat is the same North-South Corridor of Jalan Sudirman. Along the final stretch of Sudirman one finds the Sudirman Central Business District (SCBD), which, like nearby Mega Kuningan, is yet another central business district in inner city Jakarta. Besides more

multi-storied glass curtain office towers in neo-modern style (perched on the 45th floor of one such scraper was the budget airline Air Asia's 'ASEAN' office), top-end dining and drinking outlets, it is home to Pacific Place, one of Jakarta's most upscale malls where diplomats and Secretariat staff routinely socialise and where the United States' first new generation public diplomacy centre in the world was set up (Onishi, 2011). Further down Sudirman is FX mall, an old, cramped mall frequented more casually by the Secretariat's professional and local staff. From here, Jalan Sudirman disappears quietly at its confluence at a roundabout with Jalan Sisingamanagaraja. It is further down this road, following Jakarta's famous Al-Azhar mosque, that one arrives at the ASEAN Secretariat. While to the West of the Secretariat are the streets of Martinbang and Sinabung – feeble reminders of great Javanese volcanoes they borrow names from – where several professionally recruited Secretariat staff reside in executive apartments, to the South of the Secretariat is a prominent middle income residential and market area known as 'Block M' that enjoys a muddled reputation with shopping malls and restaurants frequented by Secretariat staff but also a number of seamy night clubs or '*ayam* bars'. Further down the Secretariat, well past Block M, is Kemang, an erstwhile *Betawi kampung* that was gentrified during the New Order and is home today to a growing expatriate community that includes several diplomats. Kemang is *the* hub of Jakarta's very active nightlife and boasts an array of stand-alone clubs, bars, and restaurants.

Finally, as the radial line pushes west, the circles hovers over the Soviet funded Gelora Bung Karno Sports Complex built to showcase Sukarno's Jakarta at the 1962 Asian Games. Besides a massive ring-roofed stadium hosting football matches, rock concerts and political gatherings, the complex has smaller stadiums where tennis tournaments, Badminton Super Series championships and ASEAN Basketball

League matches are held. Also nearby are a golf course and a driving range where diplomats and Secretariat staff often run into each other. Adjacent to the Stadium is the prime commercial development of Senayan Square that includes the two marble tiled luxury malls of Plaza Senayan and Senayan City – affably known to young Jakartans as “PS” and “Senci”. Besides being an important socialising space for Secretariat staff – who visit the malls for its popular food courts, restaurants, and multiplex cinemas – they are also frequented by ASEAN and Dialogue Partner diplomats who entertain visitors from their capitals at high-end restaurants and clubs. Adjacent to these luxury malls are two 28-storied office towers of Sentral Senayan with emerald windows set in cream where the embassy of New Zealand, the Permanent Mission of Thailand to ASEAN, and the Japan funded ERIA are located. Further down Senayan Square, along Jalan Asia Afrika is Indonesia’s Parliament, and beyond that, in the sub-district of Palmerah, are the offices of the Jakarta Post – Indonesia’s leading English daily – and *Kompas* – the largest circulation Bahasa Indonesia paper in the country. Moving further east, and closing the circle back to where it started at the vast and windy Merdeka Square, is the sub-district of Tanah Abang where ‘ASEAN’ is remembered, praised and criticised in the conference and seminar rooms of the reconfigured (from New Order to post-Suharto Indonesia), rebranded, and indeed refurbished compound of CSIS where I operated in and out of an office room.

The attempt here has been to plot and historicise a distinctive built space close to the forces of capital and state power where the professional and social experiences of those working on ASEAN are played out. In doing so, two caveats are in order, both of which don’t undermine this ‘field’ as much as expose its arbitrariness. The first

caveat, posed sharply by my interlocutors, questions how ‘fieldlike’ this non-exotic field and ensuing fieldwork was at all. One such instance was when Sushamitra, a former development consultant now working at the Secretariat, and Amina, her former colleague from those days, gravely stoked my doubts about the ‘field’ as we sat down for dinner at Senayan City Mall after watching the rousing antebellum Western *Django Unchained*. A Javanese who speaks Dutch with her octogenarian parents, Amina spoke vividly about the trials and excitements of her job with USAID, narrating at great length her life threatening encounters doing development work “in the field” amidst communal strife in Sulawesi. Curious about what I was doing, and puzzled by my own invocations of “fieldwork” – live at that very moment, it should be noted – she remarked with a laugh “so you are doing fieldwork in Jakarta’s malls?” As I pressed about ‘studying up’ and the changing face of fieldwork and ethnography it was Sushamitra who promptly joined in: “Deepak. You are *not* doing Fieldwork. You are doing *Reeseearch!*”⁴² Similar invocations of exotic fieldwork wedded to a ‘field’ far away from the heady urbanism of Jakarta – in Kalimantan, East Timor and Papua – came from other staff at the Secretariat who had worked as consultants in the past for international development agencies in Indonesia.

The second caveat argues against the domestication and idealisation of the field by suppressing the varied “travel practices” and “cosmopolitan experiences” (Clifford: 207) of those under study. Both Secretariat staff and diplomats (of the CPR and Dialogue Partners) are an immensely mobile lot. While the former frequently jet-set to cities all over Southeast Asia to ‘service’ ASEAN meetings, the latter traverse the region to parley and plan projects with the Foreign and Trade Ministries of various

⁴² Fieldnotes, 1st March 2013.

ASEAN member states, especially to the country holding ASEAN's rotating Chairmanship. In other words, the 'field' for a staff at the Secretariat or a diplomat at a Mission could well be the urban built spaces of Southeast Asia *in toto*. As they live out such mobile careers, however, it is their offices, residences, and social hangouts in Jakarta that *anchor* their professional and personal lives, and it is in this sense that this *peta* or map of spaces filled with routines, experiences and emotions was plausible as a basis to build relations and make claims about them.

3.5 Reaching Out

Given that this field of ASEAN diplomacy in Jakarta was peopled by Indonesians, Singaporeans, Malaysians, Filipinos, Thais, Bruneians, Cambodians, Burmese, Vietnamese, Laotians, Japanese, Americans, Canadians, Europeans, Russians, Australians, New Zealanders, Chinese, Indians, and Koreans, the tactics of reaching out could not have been tailored to the specificities of national affiliation, even though they – as varying ritual standards for face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 1967: 17), as bearers of varying historical alignments to colonial, international capitalist, Cold War, and post-Cold War geopolitical orders (Sidel, 2012), and as behavioural stereotypes – loomed pervasively in shaping interaction on a case by case basis.⁴³ A more stable basis of hypothesising about research relations, and broadly correlated by research practice, was to follow the primary group affiliation of members who belonged *either* to the Secretariat, the CPR or the Dialogue Partner community and whose routine practices were shaped in distinct ways by living out these professional categories.

⁴³ And indeed, in shaping practices and perceptions among members themselves.

3.5.1 A Sliding Scale of Access and Anxiety

The practice of reaching out – by cold emails, introductions by mutual contacts or by face-to-face introductions at ASEAN events in the city – were all shaped by a sliding scale of access that was coterminous at once with a sliding scale of the power of these three groups in Jakarta and also with a sliding scale of anxiety on the part of the fieldworker operating with rudimentary understandings about social relations in the field.

I worked from the bottom up, reaching out first to junior and middle ranked officers of the Secretariat, some of whom I had met during a pilot trip a year earlier, while a stock of personal contacts – from scholars working on ASEAN to development consultants in International Organisations – made introductions on my behalf to their friends at the Secretariat and former Secretariat employees living in Jakarta. Face-to-face introductions were made with diplomats from Dialogue Partner states, journalists, scholars and businessmen at lunch and coffee breaks during symposia and seminars at the Secretariat. Adventitious seating, a polite smile, a nod of acknowledgement, in short, the great force of co-presence, bubbled up into an exchange of business cards, brief conversations and, in some instances, inaugurated relationships that would straddle the fraught domains of fieldwork friendships. Once these initial embodied interactions were completed, I would follow up once again with an email to express my thanks to the Secretariat official for sparing some time, or a note to the foreign diplomat to observe the pleasant happenstance of meeting over lunch and enquire if s/he was keen to meet up again for a chat.

As for the CPR – the seeming kingpins of the Jakarta scene, and the alleged ‘bullies’ of the Secretariat – I held an exaggerated, subaltern view of their power. Besides being more powerful, indeed as a consequence of it, the CPR also appeared less approachable: one found them frequently seated in the front rows of ASEAN seminars, huddled among themselves at lunch tables, or breaking for coffee and catered snacks outside the Secretariat’s meeting rooms rather than convene in its canteen. It was only at fortuitous gatherings and encounters that ties with members of the CPR were forged: first, during a closed door event attended by the CPR where I was a note-taker; second, by accidentally running into their diplomats at restaurants and sports venues that allowed for face-to-face introductions and initiated some productive field relationships; and third, and only half way through fieldwork, by requesting interviews with senior diplomats by a formal letter or email.

3.5.2 Openness to Social Research

Besides growing understandings of who had the power to obstruct, reaching out was also shaped by understandings about the openness to social research by members of these groups in Jakarta. Though not hard and fast, the degree of openness appeared to be moulded by three kinds of considerations.

First, openness was contingent on overcoming initial suspicions about the status of the fieldworker itself. Depending on the specific configuration of the field the researcher may be varyingly perceived as a missionary, a government official, or – as in my case, maneuvering in a field of decidedly diplomatic activity – a spy. While uncertainty about the findings of my research were recurrent, apprehensions about

my status posed an immediate barrier, especially for the diplomats I sought access to. Despite embellishing face-to-face introductions with my University and local affiliations, certain diplomats from the CPR would – in a moment of awkwardness unmatched during fieldwork – refuse to reciprocate the exchange of business cards, signaling closure by withdrawing from the most basic ritual of professional intercourse.

Meanwhile, emails sent out in the cold to CPR diplomats would go unanswered for months, and it would take another email with a detailed copy of my curriculum vitae to coax them to reply. Once replies were forthcoming, so were the caveats: that “the Permanent Mission mainly handles ASEAN functional cooperation and issues under the CPR and our conversation should be limited to such areas” as one diplomat put it.⁴⁴ When appointments with this uncertain fieldworker were finally set up, the final message from the CPR or Dialogue Partner diplomat came with the spectre of new controls to undermine fieldwork intimacy, just in the event the ‘fieldworker’ was in the pursuit of something more than research: that s/he would meet me at the designated café accompanied by another colleague for this discussion. Never though did this colleague materialise. This concern – stressful and disruptive – was broached openly, and expectedly in humour and repartee, in my last meeting with Gary, a middle-aged diplomat from an ASEAN Mission. Slouched comfortably in his chair and wagging his finger at me he remarked dramatically “Are you a secret agent working for RAW?⁴⁵ You know, I’m *veaarrry* careful about that! I always think about that first when I meet someone like you.” Blushing and self-conscious, my

⁴⁴ Email correspondence, 6 July 2013.

⁴⁵ The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is India’s external intelligence agency.

only retort was to ask him why anyone would *bother* spying on ASEAN, one that evoked some laughter and concluded the exchange.⁴⁶

A second consideration that moulded openness was the nature of the bureaucracies I was dealing with – the length of careers to be made within them, the depth of socialisation among its cadres, and their working ideology. Secretariat staff worked for a decade or less on average, were socialised more diffusely into their bureaucracy (a two day or three day seminar for the new recruit) and were more outward looking as they linked up with a broad web of stakeholders including ‘civil society’ and scholars. This was in contrast to members of the CPR who were socialised more firmly into their bureaucracies through exams and training, made long-lasting careers and were more circumspect by linking mainly with fellow government representatives for their work on ASEAN.

Besides shaping the *stakes* each group had in engaging with a researcher, differences in the bureaucratic form of the Secretariat and the CPR had a direct impact on how certain techniques of research would shape up. Snowballing, the researcher’s ramifying reach over a community of members through their mutual acquaintance and friendships, was a case in point. While Secretariat staff were willing to make verbal or written (email) introductions on my behalf to their colleagues, this was never the case with diplomats from the CPR. Despite their ties of familiarity through routine work and social interactions as a group in Jakarta, the CPR was ultimately a patchwork of ten distinct foreign policy bureaucracies socialised in their pursuit of ‘national interests’. While CPR diplomats made suggestions about other CPR members I could contact, they did not make informal verbal introductions nor write

⁴⁶ Fieldnotes, 10 July 2013.

an introductory email on my behalf. Snowballing among the CPR, then, was a powerful expression of the boundaries CPR diplomats maintained among themselves and, crucially, undermined the monolithic representations of the CPR that were pervasive among other actors in the field.

Adding texture to these general bureaucratic portraits was another factor that shaped the character of the *national* foreign policy bureaucracies of the CPR and Dialogue Partners, and which, more than often, correlated with their openness to the researcher: specifically, how hinged they were to the official ‘line’ issued by their capitals, and, more broadly, to the political regimes in their states. On the one hand were the Indonesian diplomats – at the Foreign Ministry and the Permanent Mission to ASEAN – approachable, easy to speak with, and frequently invoking Indonesia’s democratisation and embrace of a ‘people centered’ cosmopolitan agenda for ASEAN as they spoke routinely to journalists and scholars. With a similar self-image, but more experienced and jaded, were the Filipino and Thai diplomats, while diplomats from Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei spoke with a self-assuredness that drew less from their political regimes than from their highly professionalised and English trained foreign policy bureaucracies. At the other end were the diplomats from the Southeast Asian mainland, tied more firmly to their capitals for decisions and who brought with them to Jakarta the skills for reticence that made them survivors in long bureaucratic careers back home. The same variation held among the Dialogue Partners: the United States, Australia, Canada and the EU on the one hand, self-assured in their engagement of a researcher as a legible and relatively legitimate entity in their midst; India, Japan and South Korea, open but in need of some nudging; and finally, Russia and China, where the realisation of the researcher’s presence evoked smiles and mutual glances among two Russian diplomats at a

Cocktail Reception (including an “I’m new, and I don’t know much” response by one)⁴⁷ or an anxious ‘interview’ that descended into an elaborate face-saving chat with a Chinese embassy official who, compelled to meet me after a Secretariat official made my introduction, spoke at length – through silences and suppressed smiles as s/he toed the ‘line’– on ASEAN’s importance to China in a local scene clouded by the routine chatter over the latest skirmishes in the South China Sea.⁴⁸

A third consideration, and one that qualifies the preceding point, pertains to the ability of the members to cope with the presence of a fieldworker in their midst. For many members across the groups were not simply automatons constrained by national scripts inherited from macro-historical social forces shaping their societies. It became increasingly apparent from my practice of reaching out that the openness to social research also depended on the ability of members to set their terms of engagement, one that drew on their knowledge of and comfort with research practices, their tact in covering their backs, and their linguistic competence to humour the researcher, play to his gambit, and, when required, tackle his subversions (Crapanzano, 1986), symbolic violence (Rabinow, 1977: 129-130) and demands for more information.

Take Gloria, for instance, an openly-recruited Secretariat officer who became a key interlocutor as the months rolled by, offering sharp and critical insights on the state of affairs, even though in our first email correspondence she presented herself as a “regional integration enthusiast”. Reflecting on this one night as we strolled about

⁴⁷ Fieldnotes, 18 July 2013.

⁴⁸ Fieldnotes, May 2013

Menteng in a whimsical search for the Secretary General's upscale residence, she explained, after giggles and all, that "I had to be sure about you."⁴⁹ Some senior officers at the Secretariat would respond to my requests by making the affair as obligatory and impersonal as possible – doing away with customary niceties or even my name in the header – and by copying their secretaries to fix a time and date. This impersonality would evaporate once I was inside their offices for relaxed discussions that would be repeated outside in more social settings. And then, in those instances where diplomats from tight-lipped national bureaucracies chose to meet me, what was unmistakable was their competence in English relative to their national peers, and their connections to domestic elite networks that seemed to buffer them from everyday office scrutiny, if not endow them with a broader sense of entitlement.

3.5.3 *Impression Management*

Seeking routine access and initiating field relationships also involved a reflexive management of the impressions one gave off in manner and appearance (Goffman, 1957: 34-35), as well as a grasp of the varying ways in which the fixed attributes of the personal front – race, gender and nationality – were carving out access.

A vital item of sign equipment I carried around in Jakarta was a stack of freshly printed business cards that established my status as a graduate student at the LSE. These were presented at various sites of co-presence: in the first moments of an interview, over coffee breaks at seminars, or distributed around a lunch table during Secretariat events, with fingers clasped on the card and a half realised bow to mimic

⁴⁹ Fieldnotes 19 July 2013.

a common ritual pose of deference. A close reading of the card would elicit an “Oh! LSE” or an incredulous “you came all the way just for this event?”⁵⁰

Dressing was an important site of impression management as clothes operate not only as sign vehicles of class, location and cultural distinction but also because they express the depth of a member’s social learning and ease within a specific field of activity. Sartorial choices at an ASEAN meeting or event were shaped by the Euro-American-international – the western business suit or skirt suit as the exemplary and homogenising raiment of the diplomat’s carriage – and the local – the *batik* shirt, and, more rarely, the *kebaya* and *sarong* deployed as appropriate forms of self-presentation. Meanwhile, the ritual states of such white-collar interactions were always signified by the codes of “formal”, “business casual” and “smart casual”. Grasping what these categories stood for in practice was, however, a source of some confusion and much anxiety, especially for a fieldworker keen to not stand out but blend in as a “marginal acceptable member” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 68).

This uncertainty was borne out by invitations to events and receptions at the Secretariat where a “business casual” dress code elicited a range of expressions: CPR diplomats mostly in formal lounge suits – overwhelmingly single breasted, in notch lapels and conservative shades of blacks, grays, blues and browns – accessorised with striped or plain neckties; Dialogue Partner diplomats also in lounge suits but often in worsted fabrics, pin-striped with pocket squares, an occasional bowtie, and sometimes in lustrous full-sleeve *batik* shirts in silk; Secretariat staff donning anything from bespoke to off-the rack business suits with ties, with a *batik* option exercised more cautiously; while local participants from Indonesian ministries and

⁵⁰ Fieldnotes, 17 September, 2012.

think tanks expressed a wider range of options – from suits worn with or without ties, a shirt and tie combination alone, and a greater proclivity for full sleeve and half sleeve cotton or silk *batiks*. The range was similarly diverse for female participants – from skirt or trouser suits for diplomats to trouser and *batik* tops for some Indonesians in *hijab*.

What was notable in the midst of this modest diversity was the overwhelming association, for Secretariat staff and diplomats, between work and a specific mode of formal Western clothing, which meant that the presentation of the fieldworker's self in routine life involved operating within these parameters as well. A pin-striped lounge suit and a pair of pointed toe shoes were deployed for ASEAN events, while a collection of shirts in Oxford pinpoint weave, formal and khakhi trousers, and moccasins were reserved for interviews and social interactions with interlocutors. This estrangement from typical student clothing would be noted by a fellow researcher on a visit to Jakarta who observed wryly that I was “dressed like a PhD student for sure!”⁵¹

Clothing as a component of impression management was of some significance. It was deployed to foster the impression of social class, more specifically, of a certain distance from necessity so that potential interlocutors would be encouraged to interact socially with a student without the obligation of undertaking pecuniary burdens on his behalf. Further, just as dressing up was designed to foster greater interaction, *dressing down* was also pursued on occasions where the fieldworker sought obscurity, notably, during smaller gatherings of diplomats where I wore a plain khaki trouser and a dull cotton shirt, without a tie or jacket, and hung out in the

⁵¹ Fieldnotes, 1 March 2013.

alcove of the seminar room chatting mostly with photographers and caterers to establish a backstage profile for my presence.

There were, however, aspects of the personal front that were not manipulable and had direct effects on the lines of access that opened up. One such concrete effect was enabled by interpretations of my ‘race’ – as ‘Malay’, ‘Batak’ and ‘Malaysian Indian’ – by diplomats as well as security guards, secretaries, and officers at the Secretariat. On a couple of occasions ‘looking Malay’, and the attendant unobtrusiveness it conferred, was invoked by my interlocutors as they admitted me while excluding ‘*bule*’ or Caucasian researchers in Jakarta to closed-door events that included ASEAN diplomats.

3.6 Building Relationships

As reaching out intensified, interactions with members moved from official to social spaces: to food courts, restaurants, shopping malls, café’s, bars, movie theatres and sporting venues. Interactions, then, became both *iterative* and also more *personal*, where the fieldworker and the research subject now brought to bear in moments of co-presence an ever growing horizon of their idiosyncratic yet historically situated biographies, and would have to deal with each other as fully realised individuals with distinct temperaments rather than passing by entities. In other words, new field relationships – indeed, friendships (Beech *et al.*, 2009) – were forged; interlocutors – indeed, active collaborators – were acquired; and a terrain of problems concerning ethics – and complicity (Marcus, 1997) – were broached. Why did these relationships emerge? And how were they sustained?

3.6.1 *Reciprocity and Exchange*

An unsurprising but important implication of ‘studying up’ a field of social equals and superiors is that interlocutors – those prized sources of steady ethnographic data – cannot be sought by entering into relations of simple monetary exchange. Rather than negotiate, hire and draw up contracts with interlocutors caught up in contexts of chronic underemployment – a Malik or an Ali in Paul Rabinow’s classic account of fieldwork in Morocco (Rabinow, 1977: 33, 104) – the fieldworker studying middle and upper class social networks has to cultivate field relations that are driven by subtler and varied forms of exchange. It is, of course, difficult to impose motivations on the part of members who chose to share their time, slot me in their ever so mobile professional and personal schedules, and even made emotional investments in our relationships. At the outset, then, and in the absence of any data to prove so otherwise, the word ‘generosity’ remains an important signifier, *experientially* anyways, for a host of incalculable accommodations and inexplicable openings on the part of interlocutors, even if it remains philosophically questionable whether a “disinterested act is possible” (Bourdieu, 1998). As Wax (1980: 273) reminds us, fieldwork, as a bundle of emergent and developmental relationships, is “constructed in a process of give-and-take (or exchange and reciprocity)”, and while in many cases these exchanges were of the most ephemeral kind, sliding heavily in favour of the fieldworker’s interest, in some instances, the logic of exchange – inserted not crudely but gently, amiably, reasonably, and also disinterestedly – were key to driving key long-term relationships.

A striking example in this sense was my relationship with Jacob, a mid-career Southeast Asian diplomat and an energetic figure of the Jakarta scene. Meeting at one of the Secretariat's events, and registering my university affiliation following an exchange of business cards, he proceeded to evince his interest in applying for academic programs overseas and suggested that we "meet up for beers and talk."⁵² In the many meetings that would follow over the course of the year, substantive conversations about applications for graduate study and the politics of the Jakarta scene were traded with both sides drawing tacit lines of engagement. In debating his research ideas and simultaneously fleshing out mine, in introducing him to research methods and ethnography, of the practices of writing fieldnotes and anonymising interlocutors, I was fulfilling my share of a delicate bargain while also rendering my own exercise more transparent, allowing him to peek into the intimate spaces of my fieldwork about him and his ilk. At the same time, it was not lost upon me that I was quietly training and socialising the interlocutor into becoming one of my kind – a curious modern form of that old anthropological anxiety over the destruction of the 'native', where the fieldworker's gifts, ideas, and writings, contributed to the effacement of the far-away, pre-modern subject (Pratt, 1986: 38).

That five more long-term interlocutors, besides a host of members I was casually acquainted to, would pepper our interactions with queries about how to apply for a terminal masters or doctoral program to Western universities, ponder on the value of such a degree for their careers, or make queries on behalf of their children, was an insight into the character of the field being studied up: of the valorisation of such cultural capital within its social schemas and hiring practices, and indeed of

⁵² Fieldnotes, October 31, 2012.

members' subjective expectations of objective life chances (Bourdieu, 1984) as they aspired to such assets.⁵³

Cultural capital presented the fieldworker favourably and protected him – by virtue of its ties to locations of intellectual hegemony – from ritual indecencies, but for field relationships to grow, it had to fasten to concrete considerations that mattered for interlocutors. Thus, besides those driven or intrigued by the search for the same capital – Jacob *et al.* – field relations emerged with those who were unmarried and keen to kill the time, as was often the case with young and middle aged, male *and* female, staff at Secretariat; with those away from their families, as with few ASEAN and Dialogue Partner diplomats; with those nursing resentments and frustrations, as with Secretariat staff on their way out of the organisation; with those yearning to reflect on their early careers as ‘pioneer batch’ of the Secretariat, and, dismayed by the Secretariat’s contemporary predicaments, keen that I “write it all in the thesis”,⁵⁴ and with those for whom meeting the fieldworker over an interview was itself a data point in their professional work, as with members keen to have me attend their events to “make the numbers” and, most startlingly, when a photographer swung into action mid-way through an interview at the ASEAN Foundation for their latest Facebook status update.⁵⁵

⁵³ My cultural capital was resonant among Jakarta’s foreign policy elites given the list of prominent LSE alumni in Indonesia, including the then foreign minister Dr. Marty Natalegawa; Juwono Sudarsono, a former Defence Minister; Rizal Sukma, the Executive Director of CSIS, among others.

⁵⁴ Interview with former Secretariat Staff, 7 June 2013.

⁵⁵ Fieldnotes, 17 April 2013.

3.6.2 *Interaction Embodied and Disembodied*

For a mode of research that is necessarily embodied it is worth noting the role of disembodied circuits of electronic communication in both initiating preliminary contact and in sustaining relationships in a field of mobile bureaucracies. This was a highly wired community of diplomats and bureaucrats, chatting and negotiating through the ennui of work meetings and the long hours of Jakarta *macet* by email, Facebook, Yahoo messenger, WhatsApp and Blackberry. Developing relations in this field thus involved accessing these channels of communication to mediate distances (Pink: 2000).

A thickening of field relations – in rapport and familiarity – was expressed by email exchanges relaxed in their hitherto formal modes of expression; ‘friend’ requests on Facebook that initiated a new line of entry into the social lives of interlocutors; and rapid short service messaging through cost-free messaging applications like WhatsApp that allowed for “expressive interaction” of the “affective” and “ludic” kind (Moise: 149-153). Communication by emails, social networking sites, and mobile texting were disembodied insofar as they did not involve physical co-presence, but these devices were used to “*embody* particular thoughts, feelings and meaningful events” (Berg, Taylor, Harper, 2003: 434). Through the stream of to-and-fro virtual communication, members and interlocutors conveyed their movements in the region, alluded to events they attended and meetings they serviced, sent photographs of events and spaces at the Secretariat I had no access to, and, importantly, forwarded details of upcoming events at the Secretariat which they sensed I could attend as a student.

3.6.3 *Becoming an Insider*

Perhaps the defining research principle in the practice of ethnographic fieldwork is to *straddle*: meanings *emic* and *etic*; flows local and transnational; practices of ‘hanging out’ and jotting; experiences of the field and their translation into fieldnotes; and knowledge that is practical (in the field) and theoretical (from the academy). This raises vexing problems about what it means to be an ‘insider’ to a community of members. Unsurprisingly, the fieldworker must straddle his position in the field too, between being an *insider* – anything falling short of ‘going native’ that entails the abandonment of field research techniques (fieldnotes) and epistemic stance (estrangement) – and being *marginal*, that is, outside the spaces and relations of work and affect with members of the field. Being an insider, then, is concomitant with marginality, in lived experience and epistemic stance, and this balance – a general equivocation, an occasional vacillation – is a necessary dialectic for the fieldworker to reckon with.

In what ways, and when, did I ‘become’ an insider? One way would be to compare the scale and quality of interactions as fieldwork matured. Take, for instance, two fieldnote entries five months apart (Annexure 1) that disclose how interactions changed from sparse and shifty to dense and confident, infused with varying kinds of personal knowledge (work, hobbies, travels, physical comportment), and suggest how the graduate student, the fieldworker, had become in due course a legible and acceptable entity in the midst of this community of practitioners.

That said, a merely heightened density of interactions with members alone did not constitute the bases of being an ‘insider’. The experience of *becoming* an insider –

never total, always provisional – was gleaned more powerfully at moments when members drew me into their professional, personal and ethical entanglements and tested the fieldworker’s detached and “professional habitus” (Clifford, 1997: 205). This occurred, for instance, when a disgruntled staff on his way out of the organisation sought my “advice” on whether he should air his grievances by emailing a note, short of a poison pen letter, to all staff at the Secretariat;⁵⁶ when another staff sought my suggestion for an appropriate speaker at his event at the Secretariat;⁵⁷ when a Dialogue Partner diplomat drew me over dinner to brainstorm his initiatives for cooperation with the CPR – a seminar on transnational crime? A travel junket for the CPR? – to fill up his Work Plan Document;⁵⁸ when invitations were finally received to attend Cocktail Receptions held by Dialogue Partners; when Secretariat staff invited me to meet their families; and when, towards the very end of fieldwork, consultants on an official ASEAN ‘mid-term review’ project sought me out for an informal interview to discuss “the implementation hurdles relating to ASEAN cooperation,” learning of my presence through the “echo-chamber” (Gusterson, 2008) of current and former Secretariat staff in Jakarta.⁵⁹

3.7 Being Ethical

Building relationships and winning trust forced the fieldworker to exercise another crucial aspect of his professional habitus: of recognising ethical problems raised by these entanglements, employing prescribed research guidelines to bear on emergent

⁵⁶ Fieldnotes, 14 February 2013.

⁵⁷ Fieldnotes and emails, 15 February 2013.

⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, 13 February 2013.

⁵⁹ In July 2013.

ethical fault lines, and, in intricate moments of co-presence, exercising judgment in context and *in concert* with interlocutors.⁶⁰

3.7.1 *The Overt Fieldworker*

Unlike interactions where the intention to do research is completely concealed, as with Holdway's study of the police or Donald Roy's study of work group relations by working covertly as "one of the boys" in a machine shop in Chicago,⁶¹ this fieldwork was overt. All members who engaged with the fieldworker were informed – over e-mails or face-to-face introductions – that I was a doctoral student expressly interested in studying how something 'ASEAN' was produced and experienced by staff at the Secretariat and the diplomats of the CPR and Dialogue Partners in Jakarta. That said, there is something in the very intricacy of field interactions that unwittingly undermine the scope for being overt, of engaging in something of a 'full disclosure' as it were.

The first such inadvertent undermining of the overt bases of research came with the varying interpretations evoked by my stated research line. Pitched accurately at its broadest – a study of the Jakarta field of ASEAN diplomacy – and couching it in its specific sites – the Secretariat and the Diplomatic Missions – the topic was accurate but also vague in what it summoned to members positioned varyingly across the

⁶⁰ Fieldwork was carried under the ethical guidelines and codes prescribed by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA). For the ASA's detailed ethical guidelines see < <http://www.theasa.org/ethics.shtml> > [Last accessed, April 2015].

⁶¹ Holdway and Roy's works are discussed in Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 62, and Schwartzman, 1993: 58, respectively.

field. In such instances, where interactions were of a limited kind – with those highly ranked (an ambassador or a DSG) and lasting for an hour or two at the most, matters banal and ‘sensitive’ were broached in their ‘fullness’ only through the questions embedded in an interview interaction, where it was left to the member to disclose their views with a “don’t attribute it to me” request, an “off the record” qualifier, and, rarely, in evasions.

A second – and intentional, it must be noted – erosion of the overtness of the research was effected in the presence of superordinate power relations in the field, where research concerns were not concealed as much as euphemised or sequenced towards the end of an interview in order to avoid disrupting the candour of the conversation and also to protect the identity of subordinate interlocutors closely involved in particular events and disruptions (see Fine and Shulman, 2009: 187, on ‘role conflict’). It was a classic instance of the fact that even while operating overtly, ethnographers “rarely tell *all* the people they are studying *everything* about the research (Hammersley and Atkinson: 265, emphasis original). Third, and more fundamentally, the notion of a ‘full disclosure’, especially at the outset, was problematic as it entailed prejudging one’s research and ignoring both the complexity of fieldwork in undermining pre-fieldwork suppositions and in re-drawing the contours of inchoate hypotheses and findings emergent in the field.

Moreover, when narratives of conflicts were broached – on the Secretariat’s micro-management by the CPR, to take one example – interlocutors from varied groups *heightened* their involvement with the researcher in putting across their grievances (Secretariat), dissatisfactions (Dialogue Partners) and rationalisations (CPR). In this

manner, broaching emergent but sensitive themes became key to deepening these relationships as well.

3.7.2 *Informed Consent*

The elicitation of informed consent – a frequently overdetermined ethical tenet in fieldwork prescriptions – was both explicit and, at times, *necessarily* implicit. It was sought through an explicit ritual during all semi-structured interviews, which, at once, disarmed members and also heightened the professional front of my research. The ritual involved a statement in two parts where I conveyed my ability to anonymise part or the entire interview and requested for permission to record the conversation. In such formal interactions consent was also always oral and not written, a preference arising from the prevailing practices of the field itself where diplomats and mid-level Secretariat staff routinely meet with journalists and scholars to offer interviews and the like, but do so often on the condition of anonymity and without signing documents.

Seeking informed consent was necessarily *implicit* as one moved away from an interview setting to more free flowing and iterative interactions at malls, cafes, museums, and restaurants with interlocutors. Even as these relations were being propelled by familiarity and comfort, it was important to underline the inherently *interested* nature of the fieldworker's continued involvement with them. While it would have been socially inept and indeed disruptive to deliver the two-part ethics statement during dinner, movies, drinks or shopping, other tactics had to be employed. Questions about my personal well being and the pace of my research, for

instance, were opportunities where I would frequently convey my exhaustion with writing field notes after hanging out with a Secretariat or CPR diplomat the previous night. At times when conversations were thick and substantive I would explicitly remark “I’m definitely going to use that!” reminding them of the interested nature of my presence.

It would be presumptuous to think that only the fieldworker was concerned with questions of ethics and consent. Often enough, interlocutors were acutely conscious of their involvement with an actor outside normal affiliations who was interacting informally with a host of other members from their professional circles. Their own watchfulness was a sign to the fieldworker of their cognisance of the interested bases of our interactions. A frequently devised strategy in this instance was for interlocutors and members to ask, “so whom all have you met so far”? To this I would respond with an apologetic smile and note that my practice of research ethics entailed not taking names of the people I had met. Often enough the conversation would move on but on some occasions a member would respond with an impish smile and a “good!” to suggest that the query had doubled up as a test.⁶² The tenacity with which I held to this practice was occasionally a source of resentment – Gloria’s sulking rant “you tell me nothing!” – but also a measure of some confidence in the fieldworker as a responsible member of the field. Interlocutors exercised watchfulness in the midst of a conversation too: having drawn the fieldworker deep into an episode, the interlocutor would frequently reach a certain limit and declare “that’s all I can tell you!” or “I can’t take names.” Again, opening my interlocutors to private aspects of my craft was also a way of implicitly yet powerfully reinforcing

⁶² Fieldnotes, 19 June 2013.

the interested *research* character of our interaction, one expressed most by our often well-humoured chats over their preferred pseudonyms for the fictive personages they would become in my pages.

3.8 Methods, In Sum

Finally, and briefly, a consolidated summation of the sample of members and specific methods used in this study are in order.

Over the course of fieldwork, I personally interacted with over a 115 members of the Jakarta based community of practitioners involved in producing and performing ASEAN diplomacy in varying capacities. This included those working inside the ASEAN Secretariat, namely, its international staff hired from across Southeast Asia, its locally recruited staff (of junior project officers, security guards, gardeners, drivers and secretaries), and foreign development consultants; a host of former Secretariat employees scattered across Jakarta, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur; and five former Secretary Generals. Beyond the Secretariat, I interacted with Ambassadors, middle and junior ranked diplomats of the CPR; the diplomats and local staff of the Dialogue Partner countries in Jakarta; diplomats from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Indonesian and foreign journalists and businessmen participating in ASEAN events; and finally, Indonesian scholars and policy analysts.

In all, I conducted 103 semi-structured interviews with 85 members: all sit-down affairs, some held more than once, and most recorded in audio. Equally important

were research interactions in the form of ‘hanging out’ with interlocutors in their social and professional spaces, lasting anywhere between a couple of hours to six hours at a time. As measurable and discrete episodes, I participated in 94 instances of ‘hanging out’, and here a distinction must be made between cases that involved an element of prior planning – over emails, text message or calls – to meet up at a restaurant, food court, café, or mall, and unplanned instances where hanging out occurred on the sides of seminars over a lunch table or coffee break. Importantly, semi-structured interviews and hanging out – a cumulative of 197 coherent and inscribed research interactions – do not include the numerous unrecorded instances of running into members, a brief ‘hello’ or a handshake, casual chats about life and sundry, all of which were crucial in lubricating our familiarity over the period of a year, turning acquaintances into interlocutors, and wearing down the wary.

Of course, interviews and hanging out would mean little without their inscription from momentary passing events to written accounts conveying the immediacy of an interaction; its concrete details; its lush visual, olfactory, auditory and kinetic images; and concomitantly, the ethnographer’s analytical reflections and enduring estrangement from the field (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995: 69; also, Sanjek, 1990). The daily production of ethnographic *fieldnotes* coupled with transcriptions of recorded and unrecorded interviews – cumulatively running into 1300 A4 pages – undergird this study.

Opportunities for observation were offered by nearly twenty day-long symposia, workshops and seminars organised by the ASEAN Secretariat, Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, think tanks like CSIS and ERIA, public diplomacy outfits like

‘@america’, and cocktail receptions organised by Dialogue Partners in Jakarta. Participant observation of the more classic kind was possible at a few events which have to be anonymised as my entry was enabled by my institutional role as a note-taker for certain institutions and actors. Besides attending these formal events, I would hang out at the Secretariat’s library once a week, scouring their public collection but in the process observing the humdrum of everyday organisational life.

Documentary sources were the toughest to secure in this study. All minutes of ASEAN meetings and reports on strengthening the Secretariat stored at the Secretariat’s archives are open for Secretariat staff only. While requesting for any document perceived to be sensitive – on, say, strengthening the Secretariat – was difficult, requests for even historical documents – deliberations regarding the ASEAN logo, for instance – were denied. Interlocutors were non-committal about making queries on my behalf and sensing their apprehension I did not press them either. They were, however, willing to part with documents that were already in their possession. Given the secrecy of diplomatic missions and embassies, I made no requests to diplomats for in-house reports about their offices and activities. Besides examining a fairly large corpus of publicly available ASEAN studies and reports, I tapped into the newspaper archives of leading Southeast Asian English dailies to piece together the Secretariat’s past and its presence in Jakarta since the 1980s. Finally, it is worth adding that an element of cyber or ‘virtual’ ethnography (Hine, 2000) was also employed during fieldwork. The ASEAN Secretariat, certain CPR missions and several Dialogue Partners maintain an active presence on Facebook using institutional accounts, frequently posting status updates and pictures of recent meetings and gatherings.

As per ethnographic convention (Gusterson 1996, xvii-xviii), all interlocutors who flit in and out of this ethnography have been anonymised and given pseudonyms. In some measure, this has been easy given the sheer diversity of this multi-national diplomatic field. I have thus often rearranged and ‘restructured’ their identities by changing their nationalities, and at times, gender, but always keeping intact their group affiliation (as Secretariat staff, ex-staff, CPR diplomats or DP diplomat). Real names are used for those making remarks on public record such as in newspaper op-eds and public reports.

3.9 Conclusion: ‘Noise’ as Data

Often regarded as ‘noise,’ the cluster of designed and improvised practices that make up fieldwork can be a rich source of data. Social phenomena are not simply excavated through a set of fixed tools of data collection in the field, rather, as is demonstrated here, social phenomenon were apprehended, discerned, and substantively pursued *in and through* the practices of fieldwork (see, Neumann and Neumann, 2015).

It was, then, through the difficulties of seeking access and reaching out that the bases of membership and exclusion – along the axes of ‘staff’, ‘*Orang ASEAN*’, and government affiliation – were realised and negotiated; it was the fieldworker’s cultural capital that sustained certain field relationships and his fixed attributes of ‘race’ and ethnicity that opened up particular lines of observation and analysis; it was in the pursuit of practitioners in their social and professional spaces that an arbitrary

yet plausible field of ASEAN activity was mapped out; it was by hanging out with members at sites and spaces in South and Central Jakarta, dispersed yet contained within the rarefied built spaces of capital and state power, that the privileged moorings of ASEAN's everyday workings was apprehended with force and detail; and, more substantively, it was in the unanticipated workings of techniques like snowballing that received wisdoms of the field were tested and qualified, such as with monolithic representations of the CPR.

In short, in disclosing how the research experience was data in its own right, and in how the embodied fieldworker became – in a qualified sense – his own informant, this survey of the practice of fieldwork should have disclosed the perspectivism of this study and of its significance in shaping the various themes in the chapters to follow.

CHAPTER 4

BECOMING AN ASEAN SECRETARIAT

4.1 Introduction: A ‘Banal’ Regionalism

To a passerby on the road, the tapering seven-storied building clad in white ceramic tiles at the junction of Jalan Sisingamangaradja can be an enigma. Bedecked with outdoors flags, large metal letters spread across its façade proclaiming a certain ‘Association of Southeast Asian Nations,’ and an abstruse bronze sculpture raised upon a spruced garden claiming to be a ‘Symbol of ASEAN Unity,’ the pretensions of this space are less legible than the seedy excitements of the shopping and drinking quarter of ‘Block M’ to its immediate south and the pious airs of the renowned Al-Azhar Mosque barely a few feet to its north.

While this building and fenced compound are unmarked and uninterrogated blips along the daily journeys of *orang* Jakarta coursing back and forth the North-South artery of Jakarta’s traffic, they are more meaningful for those with the license to enter and professionally interact within this space. Arriving by self-owned cars, carpools, embassy cars (with diplomatic car plates and car-flags), taxis, *ojeks*, motorbikes, and even by foot, people streaming in and out of this space engage in a routine experience of spatial and semiotic sense making. The experience may begin from distant views of the structure from the road but it takes concrete interactional form when one enters the gates of the compound. Dressed in brown or gray safari suits with tiny lapel pins of the ASEAN emblem on their pockets, security guards (all Indonesian) may evince a smile and nod of recognition or pose a stern question, with

these variant responses depending on the interactants' professional status (staff, diplomat or visitor) and sartorial modes of self-presentation, besides, of course, an air of entitlement.

From the gates of the compound, following the 'security theatre' of car bonnet scans and bag checks, one is directed towards a short tar road leading to the lobby. This passage is flanked, on the one side, by spindly palm trees and a manicured garden and, on the other, by an outcrop of the building's ceramic tiled wall covered by a blown up poster of the "Peoples of ASEAN"— a colourful montage of 'people' young and old, smiling, dancing, parading and trading from across the ten states of Southeast Asia. Outdoor flags fluttering on metal poles abound: upon a ceremonial platform near the gated entrance, along the fence of the garden, and along the tar road leading to the lobby. Arranged from right-to-left in strict alphabetical order, these flags are of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and, at the very end, of 'ASEAN'. Set in dark blue, the 'ASEAN Flag' is emblazoned at its centre with the red and gold 'ASEAN emblem' – an ideogram of ten *padi* (rice) stalks bunched together and encircled in unity.

The deployment of flags in setting the scene continues unabated as one steps into the lobby where lifeless room flags affixed to wooden flag poles run along its perimeter. A comprehensive exercise in expressing global affiliations, the flags include those of ASEAN's 10 member states and of all its 17 foreign partners, from wealthy and powerful tier-one Dialogue Partners like the United States and China to its tier-two partners like Mongolia and North Korea. The lobby carries the load of the

Secretariat's front stage ritual activity. It is to this setting where visiting state dignitaries first step into (to the applause of staff), are photographed, and called upon to sign the Secretariat's guestbook. This is also where the Secretary General of ASEAN – standing before a large burnished insignia of the ASEAN emblem, speaking over a lectern embossed with the ASEAN emblem, and flanked by an ASEAN flag – performs his⁶³ role during ritualised events such as visits of foreign dignitaries, 'ASEAN Day' celebrations, and press briefings.

The symbology of ASEAN climaxes at the foreground of the lobby but it does not end here. To the lobby's left, next to a biometric time clock that staff must register their diurnal movements into, is a small gift shop selling merchandise ranging from pens, bags, water bottles and gift wrapping paper carrying the ASEAN emblem. To the lobby's right is an escalator leading to the mezzanine floor where one finds both the 'ASEAN Gallery' showcasing crafts and antiques gifted by member states, and the large 'ASEAN Hall' with a seating capacity of 200 that serves as the chief venue for seminars, symposia and receptions at the Secretariat. Ascending this escalator to the ASEAN Hall, one invariably sets eyes on a tubular protrusion carrying a message in English "May Peace Prevail On Earth" with its translations in Bahasa Indonesia (*semoga damai di dunia*), Tagalog, Thai, Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese, and Burmese filling up the panels on its four sides.

Right and left, front and centre, 'ASEAN' also diffuses vertically above. Two elevators that shuttle staff between the seven floors of the Secretariat are paneled with mirrors watermarked with the ASEAN emblem, and open on each floor to a

⁶³ To date, all SG's have been men.

small foyer where one finds boards carrying the latest newspaper clippings about the Secretary-General and the occasional op-ed by senior staff at the Secretariat. Along the narrow and stooped corridors of this structure from the early 1980s – built almost entirely in bricks and concrete as opposed to newer and lighter materials like gypsum – one finds the ASEAN emblem on stickers posted on the doors of office rooms and cubicles, on lapel pins, business cards, letter heads, and a variety of material that constitute the “sign equipment” (Goffman, 1959: 32-40) of Secretariat staff as they interact with varied actors from Jakarta and beyond busy doing and making ASEAN.

It is this agglomeration of material and symbolic artefacts that makes this compound in South Jakarta a site – to build on Michael Billig’s (2009) studies on nationalism – of banal regionalism, that is, a space where a host of “unnamed” and “unnoticed” signifiers, from material artefacts to categories of meaning (‘ASEAN staff’, ‘professionalism’, ‘regionality’) produce and naturalise a certain translocal, international and avowedly ‘regional’ identity in the humdrum of everyday life. It is this very empirical existence of ASEAN at this site, in the swathe of long running and wide ranging ambiguities about what an ‘ASEAN identity’ is and whether it even exists, that has compelled one scholar to summarily remark

Zoom down to Indonesia; then to Jakarta; then to zip code 12110 in Kebayoran; then to a street named Sisingamangaraja after an ethnic-Batak hero who died 70 years ago, long before ASEAN was even a gleam in Thanat Khoman’s eye; and finally to the alphanumeric address 70-A. There, in the building that houses its Secretariat, unquestionably, tangibly, ASEAN exists. But with all due respect, where else in Southeast Asia is its presence so directly evident? (Emmerson, 2007: 428.)

In this Chapter I will ask how a three and half acre compound in South Jakarta became both an international Secretariat moulded by the principles and categories of international administration and civil service, and concomitantly, a site for the production and instantiation of something ‘ASEAN’. In other words, how did this compound in South Jakarta become an ‘ASEAN’ Secretariat? I will do so in two parts. First, I will examine the macro historical junctures at which a Secretariat and an international civil service were imagined and fashioned. Second, I will examine the basis of social integration at the Secretariat, starting sociologically by tracing the people entering and exiting the Secretariat on the conveyer belts of class and capital that shape their professional dispositions and sociabilities, and, more micro sociologically, through the everyday practices and embodied operations by which a shared identity has been apprehended and produced at the Secretariat over the years. This is an identity that is representationally referred to as an ‘exclusively ASEAN’ identity in the organisation’s Charter (ASEAN, 2008:17).

4.2 From National to Regional: A History of ASEAN through its Secretariat

When ASEAN was founded in 1967, the Secretariat in Jakarta did not exist. In its first decade, ASEAN was nestled in the National Secretariats of the five founding members – Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines – whose foreign ministers met at annual ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM). Indeed, there was no talk of a central Secretariat in ASEAN’s early years, a choice shaped by the embittered historical context in which the Association had been established. Uncertainties over how to accommodate post-*Konfrontasi* Indonesia’s dominance

and “sense of entitlement” within Southeast Asia while concomitantly binding it in a framework of regular interaction (Leifer, 1983); the breakdown of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Malaysia over the former’s claim to Sabah; Malaysia’s eviction of Singapore in 1965; and Singapore’s execution of two Indonesian marines in 1965 as an act of sovereign assertion, described a landscape of turbulent inter-state interaction. In this historical context, the issue of establishing a central Secretariat would have “sparked off a ruinous struggle for competition over its location”, as a Thai diplomat present at the founding of ASEAN in 1967 recalled (Severino, 2006: 20).

By the 1970s, less out of desirability than the necessity to manage the growing network of meetings and activities, the idea of a more centralised arrangement gained traction. ASEAN’s political leaders came to envision a central and permanent Secretariat “to put ASEAN on a more practical and organised basis” (Malaysia’s Tunku Abdul Rahman quoted in Severino, 2006: 19) and, in 1973, National Secretariats were tasked to study the matter. After three years of discussions, it was at the very first Summit meeting of ASEAN’s political leaders in Bali in 1976 that an agreement over a central Secretariat was given formal expression. Adding urgency to this decision was the anxiety among ASEAN’s elites following Communist victories in Indochina in 1975 which, as more than few scholars note, “shocked ASEAN into action” to project corporate unity. The performance of unity, in this instance, involved holding a Summit, formulating plans for economic cooperation, and establishing a body like a central Secretariat to coordinate activities (Fortuna Anwar, 1995: 66; Weatherbee, 2009: 101).

Even before it was established, the Secretariat's location had been a point of some contention. Indonesia's proposal in 1973 offering Jakarta as the site for the Secretariat was met with a counter offer by the Philippines. An energetic champion for a more centralised and legalised ASEAN at that point in time, the Philippines offered to build the Secretariat on land facing the Manila Bay with the promise to cover construction costs and operational expenses for two years. Viewed by the Indonesians as a "ploy" by Manila to push for a Filipino as the first Secretary General,⁶⁴ the impasse over the Secretariat was resolved only by the direct intervention of President Suharto to press Indonesia's case and by his indirect support for Manila's desire to be the first in line to nominate a Secretary General (Indorf: 66-67). The Philippines, however, failed to host the Secretariat or nominate a Secretary General. Despite Indonesian support, other members of the Association insisted on the selection of the Secretary General by alphabetical sequence, which placed Indonesia ahead of all the others for the position. Withdrawing its proposal to host the Secretariat upon "sensing the strength of their feelings," as Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo would note, and apparently robbed of the chance to have its candidate head the Secretariat, the Philippines' enthusiasm for the organisation, Hans Indorf observes, would "never be the same since this incident" (ibid: 67).

⁶⁴ By no less than Adam Malik, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, in a meeting with a US embassy official in Jakarta (US Cable: 1974a). The logic of this trade off was also expressed earlier, in reverse, by Carlos Romulo's remarks to US Ambassador; see, (US Cable, 1974b).

4.2.1 1970s and 80s: “Post Office” Years

When established in 1976, the new Secretariat was endowed with an “extremely modest” structure (Severino, 2006: 20). It was headed by a Secretary General *of the ASEAN Secretariat* nominated by member states and appointed by foreign ministers for a term of two years. The Secretary General was assisted by seven staff members *seconded* by member states on alphabetical rotation for a three-year term, and by as many locally recruited staff for clerical and office duties.

A formative event in the Secretariat’s infant years – and arguably its most disruptive to date – concerned the fate of its first Secretary General. Housed initially at the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta and headed by an Indonesian, the Secretariat’s early years transected directly and deeply with the politics of the postcolonial Indonesian state. It had been a little more than a decade since President Sukarno’s fragile pirouette balanced by the opposing ideological forces of a right wing military and an ascendant and strident left wing Communist Party of Indonesia had come crashing down with explosive effects. Following a failed *coup* attempt allegedly masterminded by the Communists on 30 September 1965, the Army took over with General Suharto spearheading a swift, calculated and comprehensive reaction that ranged from the immense genocidal bloodshed of suspected members and supporters of the Communist Party of Indonesia to the phased emasculation of Sukarno from power (Ricklefs, 2001). The ‘New Order’ of General (and subsequently, President) Suharto was an apparatus where the Army had captured the commanding heights of the armed forces, state and society (Sidel, 1998: 162). Unsurprisingly, then, power in the New Order coursed through military dominated

circuits of loyalty, affiliation and patronage; circuits that were kept robust and supple by the calculated practice of retiring military officers by the age of 55 to comfortable civilian postings and by ejecting restive generals by sending them to far away diplomatic postings (ibid: 162-63).

When he took office as the first Secretary General in 1976, Lieutenant-General Hartono Dharsono had behind him a vaunted history as a military figure who had participated in the early years of the Indonesian revolution and had risen the ranks to become the chief of the Siliwangi Division of the Indonesian army. In the uncertain days following the abortive 1965 coup, Dharsono had played a key role in shoring up Suharto's position by summoning a civilian coalition against Sukarno (Hefner, 2000: 67-70). This early support for Suharto notwithstanding, Dharsono was among a small band of military figures who advocated a "progressive or reformist paradigm" for the New Order regime (Elson, 2001: 146). Given his military and political role, Dharsono had enjoyed an audible – even if not influential – voice in early deliberations over the form and shape of the New Order. His proposal to dissolve civilian political parties in favour of 'non ideological' programmatic groups dedicated to modernisation and development, and his efforts to impose this unilaterally in West Java in 1969 strained his relationship with Suharto and he was eased out of the military with an ambassadorship to Thailand. Returning to Jakarta in 1975, Dharsono was an advisor to foreign minister Adam Malik when he was selected for the post of Secretary General (Anwar, 1995: 113). Still a commanding figure, Dharsono's appointment dovetailed with Indonesia's early efforts to strengthen the Secretariat, but a proposal to this end championed by Adam Malik in 1976 (including a recommendation to extend Dharsono's term by another two years)

was scuttled by other members – notably, the Philippines – who viewed in this drive Indonesia’s desire to dominate and shape the organisation (US Cable, 1977).

Thin on staff, resources and a substantial role, the Secretariat was inadequate to consume the attentions and energies of the dynamic Lt-General. The decisive conjuncture arrived in the months leading to the 1978 presidential elections in Indonesia when Suharto watched with anxiety the growing disquiet in college campuses in Jakarta – soon spilling into street protests – against inflation, political restrictions and corruption in his regime. More worryingly for Suharto, these student protests had won the sympathies of former military generals such as Dharsono, who, as one vivid report on the affair noted, addressed a gathering of students and declared that the “regime had ‘lost sight’ of its original goals and needed redirection” (Willey and Came, 1978). Refusing to retract his remarks and emerging ever so loudly as a vocal critic of Suharto, Indonesia’s foreign ministry swiftly moved in to sack Dharsono. While other members of the Association “quietly but strongly objected” to such a step in view of the damage it would do to the Association’s image, Indonesia’s intent was made explicit by Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumatmadja’s travels to all four capitals to press the case (Indorf, 1984: 68). Eventually, after delays and misgivings, members came around, and Dharsono resigned in February 1978 in the presence of ASEAN’s ambassadors, using the occasion to once again criticise Suharto’s crackdown on domestic dissent (World News Digest, 1978).

After his exit from the Secretariat, Dharsono went on to become one of the most influential domestic critics of Suharto. By the end of the decade he was attached to a group of retired military officers studying the problems of the New Order who, as

Robert Cribb (1986:4) notes, had not been the most enthusiastic supporters of democracy in their early careers but “their concern over the state of the New Order led them to propose greater democratisation as a solution to the problem of military dominance.” As a leading dissident with nationalist and military credentials, Dharsono was finally picked on and persecuted by the New Order in the aftermath of the Tanjung Priok riots in Jakarta in September 1984 – an incident that symbolised both the excesses of the regime as well as the perceived victimisation of political Islam by the state. Arrested in 1984 for signing a ‘white paper’ that contradicted the government’s account of the riots (and the official death toll), Dharsono’s rousing public trial spanning over four months became a platform where diverse kinds of anti-New Order dissent (military and Islamist) found expression (Cribb, 1986; Elson, 2001: 238). Convicted for subversion in 1985 for 10 years, and released in 1990 after a reduced term of five years, Dharsono briefly resumed his political activism by launching a pro-democracy forum on the eve of Presidential elections in 1992. Upon his death in 1995 at the age of 70, Dharsono was denied burial in the heroes cemetery in West Java despite his service medals and stature as a veteran of the Indonesian freedom movement. It was only three years later, when the ‘New Order’ he once shored up had cracked and crumbled, that Dharsono was rehabilitated and restored in the nationalist narrative by a Presidential decree issued by the B.J. Habibie in August 1998 (Anwar, 2010: 105).

Even though the short twenty month stint with ASEAN was only a footnote in the illustrious military and political life of Lt-Gen Dharsono, the symbolic stature of the office clung to him as he was frequently identified and reported about in the international press as the “ex-asean chief”, “ASEAN envoy” and “former ASEAN

boss” who had taken a lead role in expressing dissent in New Order Indonesia.⁶⁵ Besides standing as a lingering memory of contention, the Dharsono experience had some important effects for the fate of the Secretariat. First, given that Indonesia had only recently advocated a stronger Secretariat with an empowered incumbent, its lead role in sacking Dharsono instantly undermined this ongoing initiative. Second, ASEAN’s diplomatic elites were now more careful about whom they chose for this office. While Dharsono had been a political appointment – “an achiever with no ASEAN experience” as his successor would remark (Indorf, 1984: 68) – the Secretaries General over the next three decades were traditional bureaucrats – especially career diplomats – with varying degrees of experience in ASEAN bureaucratic work, often with Western academic degrees and training, and situated at the end of their long serving careers in the ministry (see Annexure 2). This pattern would change only in 2008, when generational change coupled with a unique conjuncture in Thai politics would throw up the unlikely nomination of the charismatic Thai politician Surin Pitsuwan to the office, inaugurating a period of contention that would once again end with the reassertion of ASEAN’s preference for the career diplomat at the Secretariat.

Partly because of how it was designed, and in part because of the cautionary lessons from the Dharsono experience, the Secretariat was kept firmly under check and its mandate and role were limited to serving as a regional “post office” (Severino, 2006:20) facilitating intra-ASEAN communication and safekeeping reports of

⁶⁵ Especially during the coverage of his trials and subsequent conviction, see, *The Times* (London), 1985a; *The Times* 1985b; Hail, 1985; *The Guardian*, 1985.

official meetings (Luhulima, 1987: 175). Its top officer enjoyed “no executive or policy role” other than to “keep the paperwork flowing” (Weatherbee, 2009: 101).⁶⁶

4.2.2 1990s: Reinvention and Reaction

The mould in which the Secretariat had been cast changed dramatically in 1992, a year that has become an key reference point in the self-image of present day Secretariat officials who trace the Secretariat’s ‘professionalisation’ to this date.

Once again, the organisational developments of 1992 were rooted in the broader political and strategic context to which Southeast Asian elites found themselves responding to: the end of the Cold War and the uncertainty arising from the partial withdrawal of US presence in the region (Khong, 2004); the move towards greater trade liberalisation in North America and a common market in Europe; the emergence of alternative frameworks for regional multilateralism, notably, the Australian proposal for APEC in 1989 which evoked fears about ASEAN’s marginalisation in the region (Stubbs, 2014: 530); and fears over the diversion of foreign investments to rapidly developing China (Khong and Nesadurai, 2007). The response by Southeast Asian political leaders to these challenges was to articulate a discourse of ‘strengthening ASEAN’ by way of creating an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and a new pan-Asian mechanism to engage Great Powers (notably, the ARF). The Secretariat, then, was restructured with a view to coordinate the ARF, but

⁶⁶ The Secretariat did gain a certain symbolic space through the SG’s overseas speaking engagements. See, reports of the ASEAN Standing Committee, 1982-83: 74; 1985-86: 102; 1988-89: 177; and 1989-90: 173.

especially the AFTA.⁶⁷ A meeting of ASEAN's foreign ministers in 1990 agreed to set up a 'Panel of Five Eminent Persons' to study and recommend changes to the structure of the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEAN, 1990). Funded by the United National Development Programme (UNDP), the 'Eminent Five' produced a 39-page report that was submitted to and subsequently approved by the ASEAN leaders at the Singapore Summit in 1992 (ASEAN, 1992: 121).

In 1992, the 'Secretary General of the ASEAN Secretariat' – effectively, the chief administrative officer of the compound at Jalan Sisingamangaraja – was now designated as the 'Secretary General of ASEAN.' The SG's tenure was raised from three to five years, could be *renewed* for a second term, and was endowed with ministerial status. In terms of mandate, the office of the SG was now invested with the power to "initiate, advise, coordinate and implement ASEAN's activities" (ASEAN, 1992b: Article 3). Ajit Singh, the Malaysian representative to the ASEAN Standing Committee stood for the office alongside a candidate from the Philippines. His appointment as the first Secretary General of ASEAN at the Ministerial Meeting in 1992 was colored by the familiar and uncontentious diplomatic practices of ASEAN.

There were two of us, but typical of ASEAN, the ASEAN Way, the [Foreign] Ministers didn't want to take any show of hands or vote. So they asked the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee to do a straw poll, that is, approach his colleagues informally to see which candidate they supported and to report this back to the foreign ministers. So the Chairman came back and noted that

⁶⁷ See the Joint Communiqué of 1991 AMM with a summary of Mahathir Mohamad's opening address, (ASEAN, 1991: point 8).

Malaysia's candidate Ajit has got the support without saying anything about numbers. So, in good old ASEAN fashion, they told the Philippines to withdraw, so that I could be voted unanimously.⁶⁸

Importantly, secondments to the Secretariat were abolished and *all* official positions below the SG, including the one Deputy Secretary General (DSG), were selected by a process of open recruitment. This meant that positions were now advertised “through a process of public announcement” in the member states and were “open to all qualified citizens of ASEAN”.⁶⁹ (See Annexure 3)

It was the introduction of open recruitment that gave substance to the “restructuring” of the Secretariat. With it, new circuits were installed and plugged in the Secretariat as national bureaucrats gave way to a diverse cohort of journalists, development consultants, think tank researchers and government officers who resigned from their home ministries. Meanwhile, old existing circuits were rewired, as informal channels of staff loyalty were routed away from national ministry cohorts and superiors and formally laid in the direction of the SG's office. Moreover, running through the circuits of the restructured Secretariat was a new kind of energy. With staff hired not on the basis of national affiliation but by their claims to professional experience acquired at newspapers, think tanks, ministries and at prestigious international organisations (United Nations offices in New York and Bangkok), and by the value of cultural capital they had acquired in the form of Masters and PhD degrees from Western universities and liberal arts colleges, the Secretariat was powered by a rudimentary motor of Weberian ‘legitimate power’ (Mathaison, 2007: 16). With

⁶⁸ Interview with Tan Sri Ajit Singh, Kuala Lumpur, 13 June 2013.

⁶⁹ This is the definition of “open recruitment” found in the latest Staff Regulations (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013: 4).

openly recruited professionals enjoying diplomatic immunities and privileges, drawing on US dollar salaries and benefits comparable to UN pay scales of the time, and governed by clauses and principles on loyalty, political neutrality and impartiality drawn verbatim from the Staff Regulations of the League of Nations and the Charter of the United Nations (Young 1958; Mathiason, 2007), the Secretariat in Jakarta was becoming an international secretariat organised around the principles of Euro-American international civil service that were formulated and fine-tuned over the twentieth century.

Table 1. Staff Size at the ASEAN Secretariat (1976-2013)

Year	Core Staff ‡	Locally Recruited Staff	Total
1976	1	2	3
1981	7	8	15
1983	14	NA	-
1993	24	NA	-
1997	35	26*	-
1999	41	55*	-
2007	60	160[∞]	220
2013	98	188[∞]	304

‡ Includes Secretary General, Seconded and Openly Recruited Officers

* TAs and TOs, excluding General Staff

∞ TAs TOs and General Staff

Source: Authors figures compiled from ASEAN Secretariat Documents.

By the end of the 1990s, however, the ideal of a ‘professionalised’ Secretariat had reached and passed its apotheosis. This happened even as the Secretariat grew in size

and resources in absolute terms through the decade. Four developments in particular are worth noting. First, the office of the DSG was drawn out of the ambit of open recruitment with a Protocol in 1997 that raised the number of DSG positions to two but restored them both to government nomination. Second, and by dint of *informal* understanding rather than formal amendment, the SG's position was rendered non-renewable. The prospect of contention arising from the process of renewal had become apparent during Ajit Singh's bid for reappointment in 1997. Even as Singh lobbied among ASEAN's Director Generals and Ministers, unbeknown to him at the time, his bid was thwarted by an informal understanding between Malaysia and the Philippines back in 1992 to take turns at supporting each other's candidates for the office of the SG.⁷⁰

Third, even though the professionalisation of the Secretariat rested on the entry of officers insulated from national affiliations, member-states found their way back into the Secretariat by actively brokering deals and passively applying pressure through the design requirement that there be an "equitable representation" of all nationalities at the Secretariat (ASEAN 1992, Article 4, no. 4). The more *active* of these strategies was, in a manner akin to the deal over the SG's term, achieved *informally* among ASEAN's foreign ministers. With the entry of Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar (CLMV) into the Association between 1997 and 1999, officials from these lesser developed countries requested that they be allowed to nominate two officers on secondment to the Secretariat for a term of three years, arguing that their poor 'human resource capacities' would disadvantage them in an open recruitment process. There were, however, more political concerns too: Vietnam, for instance,

⁷⁰ Interview with Tan Sri Ajit Singh, Kuala Lumpur, 13 June 2013.

was anxious about candidates from its diaspora securing a position via open recruitment who most likely “would not be willing to sing Communist Vietnam’s tunes,” as a Secretariat officer from that time put it.⁷¹ While the practice of secondment was agreed as a one-time arrangement, member states arrived at an “informal understanding” by which they continued to second officers from their foreign ministries to the Secretariat despite attempts by the former Secretary General Rodolfo Severino to end this practice. Reflecting on this, Severino remarks “while politically convenient, this is a most unsatisfactory arrangement from the point of view of developing an independent, competent and professional Secretariat” (Severino, 2006: 22).

More *passively*, the principle of equitable geographical representation of staff – a challenge for other international secretariats too (Young, 1958: 89-110) – posed a problem for the Secretariat’s management who were mindful of the difficulty of CLMV candidates succeeding in an open recruitment process, not least because of their poor command of English. A way out for the Secretariat’s management was to use their personal rapport with Ministers of CLMV states to request them to “send their best man” from the ministry, most often on leave without pay.⁷² In this manner, an additional layer of quasi-secondments (of staff on pay without leave) entered the Secretariat.

And fourth, while the restructured Secretariat and its cadre of well-heeled civil servants were buttressed by an enlarged operational budget in 1992, the principle of equal contributions by member states was left stubbornly untouched. This meant that

⁷¹ Interview with former staff, Singapore, 7 December 2011.

⁷² Interview with Ong Keng Yong, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

annual increments and revisions to the budget as well as staff salaries were held hostage to what the least willing member could offer. The maladies of this arrangement would become apparent in a long-drawn out manner when the salaries and benefits of Secretariat staff would significantly shrink in value over the next two decades, producing chronic turnover accompanied by vacancies unfilled for extended periods at the Secretariat.

In sum, in piecemeal and mostly uncoordinated ways the forces of state reaction had set in by the end of the 1990s. The new and restructured secretariat at Jakarta designed along the lines of an Euro-American international Secretariat was *reined in* by the whims, demands and anxieties of the ten member political and diplomatic community it was designed by and devised for. As the informal deal between Malaysia and the Philippines over the appointment of the Secretary General, and the informal agreement among foreign ministers over the secondments of CLMV staff to the Secretariat demonstrate, the model of the professional international secretariat was modified in the intimacy of informal practice to support the ideological and practical modus operandi of ASEAN's diplomacy wedded to the comfort and prerogative of state agents. Moreover, the Secretariat's new possessions – words endowing mandate (to “initiate, advice, facilitate, monitor compliance”), new categories (open recruitment and professionalism) and practices (of hiring, staffing, reporting) – were allowed to take concrete everyday form only within the comfort zone of state agents zealous about the performance of their sovereign prerogative over the Secretariat (Chapter 7).

The significance of the 1992 restructuring is often downplayed in the literature as it did not result in an “EU-style bureaucracy with supranational decision making authority” (Acharya, 2000: 66). What *was* significant about the changes of 1992, however, was that it lay the scaffolding for a new self-image and identity at the Secretariat. The “Secretary General of ASEAN” possessed a mandate no longer confined to the precincts of a building at Jalan Sisingamangaradja but now stood for and spoke to ‘ASEAN.’ The ambiguity of this title would be crucial in opening new roles and spaces for action for the SG over time, with Ajit Singh (1993-97), Rodolfo Severino (1998-2002), Ong Keng Yong (2003-07) and Surin Pitsuwan (2008-12) framing themselves, in varyingly minimalist and maximalist terms, as spokesmen of ASEAN the region and its ‘people,’ and deploying this symbolic position in their struggles with member states. Likewise, the restructuring resulted in the entry of a host of new individuals whose professional roles and identities within the Secretariat were structured by the *representations* of ‘merit’, ‘open recruitment’ and ‘professionalism’ on the basis of which they had been hired. In short, the changes of 1992 would become, over the coming years, the primary basis for the Secretariat to carve out a discrete symbolic space for itself in its claims for continuity, resources and distance from member states.

4.2.3 2000s: *Expansion and Erosion*

The status of Secretariat was once again reconsidered in the first years of the new millennium. Like before in 1976 and 1992, this impetus stemmed from a context of anxiety and crisis experienced by ASEAN’s political, diplomatic and business elites. The inadequacy of ASEAN’s schemes for coping with the effects of the 1997 Asian

financial crisis, not to mention the flurry of self-help dealings with international lenders that sharply undercut the claim to ASEAN solidarity; ASEAN's stubborn decision to admit Myanmar in 1997 that distanced it from its Western Dialogue Partners; ASEAN's inability to construct and project a corporate strategic view during the "war on terrorism" that had driven wedges among its members; and a "leadership void" within the Association with Indonesia – its "natural leader" – grappling with domestic political change after the fall of Suharto in 1998, were some of the chief factors that had apparently weakened the Association (Weatherbee, 2009:103-104; Sukma, 2014).

'Strengthening ASEAN,' on this occasion, took the form of an elaborate rebranding exercise which involved, first, claims to fashion the region into a regional 'Community' and, second, endowing legal personality on the Association with the adoption of a Charter.⁷³ Unlike the restructuring of 1992, the rebranding exercise expressed by 'Community' and the Charter ushered very few concrete changes to the internal designs of the Secretariat. What they collectively accomplished, instead, was to expand the contours of contention over the Secretariat. More precisely, the chatter in the conference circuit and analysis in papers and commentary in the build up to the Charter and its ratification in 2008 often foregrounded the status of the Secretariat, and produced a range of arguments in favour of a 'stronger' Secretariat (with the "ability to propose intellectual positions" [Severino, 2007: 420-421]) and a bigger Secretariat to prosecute ASEAN's Community goals and appear "credible" on the

⁷³ On the process and politics leading up to the ASEAN Charter, see, Emmerson, 2008; Sukma, 2012; Cheepenook, 2013; Koh, Manalo and Woon, 2009. On arguments that the proposal for an ASEAN Charter sprang from the perceived pressure to reform ASEAN's "institutional base" for building this regional community, see Weatherbee, 2009: 107; Chalermpananupap, 2008: 101; and Emmerson, 2008:25. On the form both these plans took, apparently mimicking from a wider field of organisational forms like the UN and EU, see Jetschke and Ruland, 2009; and Katsumata, 2011.

international stage (Chalermphanupap, 2008:117-122; Emmerson, 2007; Sukma, 2008: 146-49).

In the context of these raised expectations, the Charter's implications for the Secretariat were few and mixed. On the one hand it expanded the bases of the Secretariat's symbolic position by underlining and recognising for the very first time the "exclusively ASEAN character" of the SG and staff, and by adding a directive pioneered by Article 100 in the UN Charter that calls upon states to not "seek to influence [the SG and staff] in the discharge of their responsibilities (Young, 1958:44-45). At the same time, the Charter undercut the professional bases of the Secretariat in three ways. First, it formally rendered the SG's post as non-renewable and went on to demote the symbolic capital of the office by foregrounding not the capacity to "initiate, advise, coordinate and implement ASEAN activities" but the SG's role as the "Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the body."⁷⁴ Second, it struck a compromise on the status of DSG's by allowing for two openly recruited and two political appointments. And third, a silent coup was staged, one where the Secretariat's modest yet secure rug of *discrete* legal personality under Indonesian law was deftly pulled from under its feet. 75

⁷⁴ Even though the mandate of 1992 was not disavowed or annulled in the Charter, it was relegated in the eyes of former SGs. Interview, Ajit Singh, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

⁷⁵ For several policy analysts, scholars, staff and even the Secretaries Generals of the time (Ong Keng Yong who pushed for the Charter, and Surin who bore the brunt of its effects) there was a sense that ASEAN's new legal personality would dust off on – if not partly settle over – the Secretariat as a central organ of the Association. In how 'legal personality' was fleshed out through supplementary protocols (ASEAN Privileges & Immunities, 2009), however, it became clear that the Charter had endowed legal personality on ASEAN *in toto*. With this move, the Secretariat had lost its once secure rug of *discrete* legal personality under domestic Indonesian law, and was now to draw its legal personality entirely from something larger and indivisible called 'ASEAN'. For a clear exposition see Juwana and Aziz, 2010.

*Table 2: Grade of Offices at the ASEAN Secretariat, October 2014.*⁷⁶

Position	Numbers
Political Appointments	
Secretary General of ASEAN	1
Deputy Secretary General (Political appointments)	2
'Openly Recruited' Staff	
Deputy Secretary General	2
Director	10
Assistant Director (ADR)	29
Senior Officer (SO)	54
Locally Recruited Staff	
Technical Officers (TOs) and Technical Assistants (TAs)	108
General Administrative Staff	80
Total Staff	304

Above all, and in a mode not entirely anticipated or foreseen in its precise effects, the Charter brought ASEAN's zealous wielders of state prerogative to the Secretariat's doorstep in Jakarta. The symbolic demotion of the office of the SG and the loss of a discrete legal personality could not in themselves have changed the Secretariat's *de facto* practice and space vis-a-vis states. These two elements, however, needed a vital third

⁷⁶ Source: Author's figures compiled from ASEAN Secretariat documents.

ingredient to catalyse the decisive subordination of the Secretariat. The arrival of the CPR in Jakarta provided the embodied and everyday mode by which the symbolic content of these demotions and silent coups were operationalised to limit substantive lines of space and action. Not only did heightened state presence impinge on the lower and middle ranks of the Secretariat – in the form of “bullying” and “micromanaging” – but also constrained the top echelons of the organisation, with SG Surin Pitsuwan frequently reminded that “the Secretariat cannot sign an MoU without *our* permission,” and that, in tense meetings at the ASEAN Hall, “our term of reference is to *supervise* you.”⁷⁷

It was thus in this historical context, a distinct post ASEAN Charter conjuncture – when a politician had taken over the mantle of the Secretariat for the first time since the days of Lieutenant-General Dharsono; when long standing design features were effecting their cumulative force by way of a meager budget and stagnant salary structure; when the ‘professional’ bases of the Secretariat were plagued by ambivalences and perceived violations; and when the panoptic presence and surveillance of ASEAN’s diplomats had become intense as never before – that the Secretariat had entered a period marked, on the one hand, by the unprecedented expansion of its symbolic position as an exclusive and *sui generis* ASEAN in the eyes of international actors (scholars, journalists, think tanks) and, on the other hand, by a period of severe employee turnover and institutional erosion.

This history of the ASEAN Secretariat spanning nearly four decades illuminates two processes. First, it tells us how a compound in South Jakarta emerged as an

⁷⁷ In making this claim, the CPR invoked their mandate from the ‘Terms of Reference’ (ToR) drafted by SOM leaders in 2008.

international Secretariat with a rather peculiar kind of bureaucracy. A bureaucracy that must, as one early twentieth century study of the subject argued, “not belong to any state administration, must not be nominated by any state, paid by any state or possess the particular character of any state’s civil service” (Bastid, 1931: 29; also see Tien-Cheng Young (1958:13). Second, this history also tells us how the Secretariat’s organisational identity – a particular form of ‘ASEAN’ identity – motored by the representations of ‘impartiality’, ‘open recruitment,’ ‘professionalism’ – have come to constitute a supple *normative terrain* that sets out, in ideal-typical terms, the norms and representations around which appropriate behaviour among staff and, more broadly, between staff and states representatives, must be patterned and conducted.

4.3 Becoming ‘ASEAN’ at the Secretariat

This history of the ASEAN Secretariat – a history of *representations* of the Secretariat (‘post office,’ ‘restructured,’ ‘post-Charter’, and the like) – tells us about the changing symbolic and organisational architecture of the Secretariat by which it journeyed from – or with, as it will become apparent – the national to the international as it became an ‘ASEAN Secretariat’. What, however, are the precise *mechanisms* of social integration and stabilisation by which the compound at 70-A became and indeed continues to be ‘international’ and ‘regional’? In other words, how do people claiming a diversity of national affiliations (Cambodians, Bruneians, Malaysians, Indonesians, Filipinos, Myanmarese, Vietnamese, Singaporeans, Laotians and Thais); with variations in linguistic, class and educational endowments; with a host of political, racial, religious, dietary, and sartorial preferences; and

moulded by the histories of Euro-American and Japanese colonialism, and by the trajectories of postcolonial state formation, come to collectively cohere in the intimacy of everyday working life under the rubric of ‘ASEAN Secretariat’?

It is to the broader sociological patterns coupled with the primary experience of quotidian everyday practices by which 70-A became and continues to be – in an interminable act of becoming – an ‘ASEAN Secretariat,’ that I shall now turn to.

4.3.1 *Class and Capital: The ‘Conductorless Orchestration’ of Cohesion*⁷⁸

It is possible to tease out the bases of convergence and integration at the Secretariat by examining the social backgrounds of those arriving, staying and exiting the precincts of this compound. The first and arguably most necessary commonality among those working at the Secretariat is their facility with the English language. This facility is warranted and remuneratively rewarded in an ascending order, with openly recruited international staff at the apex of this linguistic pyramid and the locally recruited ‘general’ workforce at its least exacting base. As the “working language of ASEAN” (ASEAN, 2008: Article 34), English is the *lingua franca* enabling conversations, relationships and activities spanning the ASEAN field in a region otherwise described by diverse linguistic markets of national and regional languages.

From learning about job vacancies at the Secretariat through adverts published in English broadsheets and websites in their home countries or by word of mouth from

⁷⁸ ‘Conductorless orchestration’ is one of what ways in which Bourdieu (1990: 59) describes habitus to suggest the principle that gives “regularity, unity and systematicity to practices even in the absence of any spontaneous or imposed organisation of individual projects.”

the social networks they move about, to submitting a competent application, and finally clearing an interview with senior staff at the Secretariat in Jakarta, the successful applicant to the Secretariat arrives with a predictable sociological biography. With English as an increasingly dominant currency of mobility in the linguistic economies of most states, staffs' competence and facility in English is *suggestive* of the dominant positions they occupy across other fields of social power within their states and societies. Thus, concomitant to the possession of a very specific kind of *linguistic capital* (English) is the possession of *cultural capital*, especially in the form of degrees from Western universities and colleges, and equally, of *social capital* in the form of elite family backgrounds and affiliations they draw upon and reproduce. These social endowments, often working collectively, have historically informed the bases of social integration as well as difference at the Secretariat.

This predictable biography expressing a convergence of class and social standing was perhaps most pronounced during the 1990s, when the Secretariat was restructured and the 'professionals' who streamed in via open-recruitment drew on salaries, perks and privileges commensurable to UN pay grades of the day. *Some* of the 24 openly recruited officers who made the 'pioneer batch' came from modest diplomatic, military, political and bureaucratic families. *Several* hailed from a diversity of fields and occupations — journalists, think tank analysts, development consultants, UN officers with experience in New York or Bangkok, and senior government officials – with the Secretariat's package representing a remunerative and prestigious career advancement across various fields. Nearly *all* staff, however, came with cultural capital in the form of a Masters and PhD degree from a host of

Western universities and liberal arts colleges – from the universities of Wisconsin-Madison, Carnegie-Mellon, Brandeis, Louisiana and Oregon in the United States to the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, the University of Sydney and Queensland in Australia to the University of Ghent in Belgium. The possession of such specific kinds of linguistic (English) and cultural (Western degrees) capital was enabled by the extent to which local postcolonial elite networks had integrated with Western liberal economic and political orders during the Cold War.

Brought by their elite bearers, the steadily accumulating stock of capital at the Secretariat was generative of a distinct cosmopolitan habitus structured around the common referents of language, university education, travel experiences, ideological inclinations (a general faith in liberal peace and open markets), and class shaped modes of sociality (most notably, after-work drinks and parties at upmarket bars and international clubs in Jakarta). The convergence enabled by the pronounced possession of such kinds of cultural, linguistic and social capital constituted a necessary – even if not sufficient – base along which a strong *esprit de corps* among these ‘pioneer batch’ emerged during these years.⁷⁹

The strength of the Secretariat’s pay structure, the prestige it afforded as an international secretariat in the region, and the opportunity for professional experience in multilateral diplomacy, sustained the channels of elite entry and social integration among the openly recruited staff for nearly a decade. By the turn of the millennium, however, things would begin to change. With barely any revisions to its pay

⁷⁹ An *esprit de corps* that is revisited and relived through reunions organised at upscale bars and restaurants every few years around the birthday of Tan Sri Ajit Singh, the restructured Secretariat’s first Secretary General and the ‘fatherly’ diplomat-boss to the Secretariat’s pioneer batch.

structure, the rise of middle class incomes and pay structures in the wider corporate and service economy, and with rising pay scales in other international organisation offices in Jakarta and in the region, the remunerative and symbolic appeal of the Secretariat began to wane. This waning had a direct effect on the quality of capital coursing through the Secretariat: newer recruits came with tenuous and erratic links to elite networks, and while most still carried international educational degrees these social assets were secured from nearby centres of learning in Singapore (notably, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University), Australia (from Monash, New South Wales, and Wollongong), and New Zealand (Massey University, for instance). Meanwhile, most ‘pioneer batch’ staff had reached the limits to their contract-terms, while several had paradoxically reached the ceiling of their service through swift promotions up the organisational ladder. With persistent job insecurity, several ‘pioneer’ staff, with their high cultural and social net worth, orbited out into the more remunerative and high-profile positions in international organisations based overseas or to major newspaper editorships in the region. With expansion in staff size, and with greater diversity in the social biographies of new staff, an important role in sustaining organisational *esprit de corps* during this period was accomplished by the managerial practices of the Secretary General Ong Keng Yong (see Chapter 8).

By the time the Secretariat came under the shadow of the ASEAN Charter in 2008, staff biographies once again began to grow more alike and predictable, but with less integrative prospects for internal cohesion. The twin forces of an ossified salary structure coupled with the exactions and privations of heightened state surveillance (with the CPR) applied its cumulative force over the Secretariat during these years.

The effect of the former was directly felt in the recruitment of staff holding degrees from their countries rather than any translocal Western markers of cultural capital. A number of openly recruited staff, especially from the founding five member states, now came from elite and mid-level national universities ranging from the University of Malaya, Bandung Institute of Technology, University of Indonesia, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Technological University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, University of Santo Tomas, and so on. These more local kinds of cultural capital were now supplemented with years – if not decades – of experience of working in national bureaucracies, with some staff arriving directly from the ASEAN desks of their home ministries.

The effect of the latter – the arrival of the CPR – was understood to have fuelled the recruitment of former national civil servants at the Secretariat. The CPR's embodied and everyday assertions appeared to grate more acutely on staff with backgrounds in development consultancy, academia and journalism, and were among the quickest to exit the Secretariat when presented with a better opportunity elsewhere. Thus, in contrast to the great diversity of professional backgrounds during the 'pioneer' years, staff at the Secretariat not only looked more alike with growing numbers of ex-government officers but were also perceived to embody and reproduce subjectivities and dispositions more pliant and amenable to the power relations that member states, and especially the CPR, wished to impose over the Secretariat.

That said, not all forms of cultural and social capital had drained out of the Secretariat during the years of depreciation and denudation. Three distinct channels of elite entry have continued to persist at the Secretariat, and while a host of

individual concerns animate their operation, there is nonetheless a pattern to their assembly and circulation.

First, the Secretariat presents an attractive bureaucratic career for a variety of individuals reeling under constrictions and unfavourable alignments with their nationally coloured bureaucracies. Notable in this regard are the Malaysian staff at the Secretariat, who are overwhelmingly Malaysian Indian and Malaysian Chinese in their minority 'racial' (and political) affiliations. Educated in English medium schools in Malaysia, followed by graduate degrees from Western universities (the School of Asian and African Studies; Kings College, London; the University of Essex, among others), these individuals either lacked the linguistic proficiency to crack national civil service examinations conducted in Malay or were disinclined to build careers in its Malay dominated bureaucracy (Lim, 2007; Sanusi, Mansor, Ahmad (eds.) 2003).

A second and arguably more robust channel of elite entry at the Secretariat comes from the newer and poorer CLMV members of the Association. Arrivals from these countries occur mostly through two schemes. First, those 'informal' secondments agreed by ASEAN foreign ministers in 1997 that continue to this day and through which a string of mid-career and senior diplomats from CLMV countries (2 or 3, at any given time) have entered on unpaid leave from their home ministries. Second, an Attachment Officers or 'AO' program generously funded by Japan under which junior diplomats from CLMV countries (as many as 12 a year) live in Jakarta for a one-year stint at the Secretariat. Both 'seconded' officers and junior 'AO' officers are nominated and selected not by the Secretariat but by their home ministries,

allowing for elite capture by dint of the varyingly patrimonial character of their bureaucracies operating under authoritarian umbrellas of various one-party, ex-socialist and military types.

For both grade of staff, the stint at the Secretariat remains immensely attractive on numerous counts, two of which are worth noting. One, these postings are highly remunerative. The junior 'AO', just a year or two out of university, earns more than twenty times her basic home salary, besides expatriate housing in Jakarta and funds for attending ASEAN seminars in the region and to Japan.⁸⁰ Similarly, mid-career diplomats seconded to Assistant Director or Director level positions draw on salaries more than 30 times those of their home ministries. Two, the Secretariat has become a site of diplomatic training and grooming for the foreign ministries of the CLMV countries, and an assignment at the Secretariat has emerged as a key vehicle for career advancement. In 2012, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to ASEAN in Jakarta, the Permanent Secretary and SOM leader for ASEAN (the most senior bureaucrat in the Foreign Ministry), and the Director General for International Organisations at the Foreign Ministry had all once been Attachment Officers at the Secretariat. Similarly, mid-career officers seconded to the Secretariat, including those nominated to top positions like Deputy Secretary Generals, would go on rejoin their Foreign Ministries with high profile postings as ambassadors to prominent Western capitals as well as Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in Geneva and New York. The Secretariat, then, is a site where elite networks from CLMV states both converge and steadily circulate outward as well. Even though the linguistic and

⁸⁰ One Attachment Officer noted that in contrast to his home salary of \$150 per month he was paid a stipend of nearly \$3000 a month in Jakarta, besides executive housing and perks. Fieldnotes, 27 June 2013.

cultural capital they carry may be of a muddled kind⁸¹ and their linguistic endowments are marked by considerable variation,⁸² they are nonetheless highly connected social elites from their countries and are, to varying degrees, exposed to and moulded by international educational and travel experiences.

For some staff from CLMV states, however, the Secretariat is not simply a transit point for elite circulation but can also be a space of self imposed exile from – or a springboard to orbit out of – politically and symbolically coercive bureaucracies. This holds not only for officers seconded to the Secretariat, but also for the small but growing numbers of CLMV candidates entering through the openly recruited process, some of whom choose to resign from their home ministries to seek longer contracts and careers at the Secretariat.

A third and growing channel of elite entry and circulation at the Secretariat – in a way entirely unforeseen when the Secretariat was established – occurs at the locally recruited base of the Secretariat’s employee structure. Local hires – more than half of the Secretariat’s total workforce – comprise of ‘general staff’ engaged in secretarial, cleaning, gardening and security services, and a growing component of ‘professional’ local staff supporting their ‘openly recruited’ bosses. It was Secretary General Ong Keng Yong – constrained by the eroding value of openly recruited positions, and cognisant of the social capital of some of the locally recruited staff – who offered them a more substantive professional role. In the space of a decade since Ong Keng

⁸¹ Often an undergraduate degree in the 1980s from former socialist bloc state universities in Cuba, Soviet Union and the Czech Republic followed by a Masters or PhD degree in the 1990s from Australian and Singaporean universities.

⁸² Those from diplomat families and a life of overseas education speaking fluent English and French but most others constrained by halting speech and marked accents.

Yong left in 2007, the distinctions *within* this grade of local professional staff have grown sharper.

On the one hand are local recruits often less than thirty years of age, recently out of university, hailing – in some instances – from diplomatic and politically connected families, fluent in English and often with limited proficiency in French or Italian, and with undergraduate academic degrees from a host of elite Indonesian universities (Universitas Indonesia, Institute of Technology Bandung, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Pelita Harapan) followed by graduate degrees from Australian, French, and British Universities (ANU, New South Wales, Queensland, SOAS, LSE, Queen’s University Belfast, Exeter, Glasgow, Université Robert Schuman, etc.). These young ‘local’ professionals work at the Secretariat anywhere between one to five years before moving to more remunerative positions at other International Organisations, foreign embassies and diplomatic missions in Jakarta, if not being selected by international scholarship bodies (Chevening or Fulbright) for degrees in diplomacy and public policy at Western universities.

The remaining locally recruited professional staff are inversely related to their elite counterparts on each of these axes. They hail from smaller Indonesian universities, speak English less fluently, are much older in age, stay for a decade and longer at the Secretariat, and are described by the all too familiar marks of what Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 63) refers to as the “subjective expectations of objective probabilities” (and, one might add, life chances): they rarely initiate a conversation with openly recruited international staff, socially keep among themselves, and are more reluctant to apply for openly recruited vacancies than their younger and better endowed colleagues.

In sum, the Secretariat in the era of the ASEAN Charter and the CPR, has been marked by a sharpening contrast between, on the one hand, newer staff with tenuous links to local elite networks, lower cultural capital, and long backgrounds in government service, and, on the other hand, by lingering channels of staff well connected to elite networks, endowed with higher grades of cultural and social capital, and with their attendant experiences of international travel and education. The bases of convergence at the Secretariat are thus more muddled and less integrative.

The trajectories of class and capital flows have a direct bearing on the Secretariat in two respects. One, and as already alluded to, they foster different modes of sociality at the workspace. In contrast to the shared modes of sociality among the smaller and more alike cohort of the ‘pioneer batch’ (gatherings involving male *and* female staff at bars and high end restaurants over alcoholic drinks and non-alcoholic beverages; an occasional ‘pool party’; karaoke nights, and so on), the modes of sociality at the Secretariat have become more variegated in quality (older drinking traditions increasingly supplanted by lunches and dinners at food courts and restaurants) and are also perceived to be more exclusive in their membership, with parties and karaoke nights held mostly among national groups and cliques. Talking to me over beers by the poolside of an international club in Jakarta, four veteran staff working at the Secretariat – all groomed by bosses from the ‘pioneer’ batch and sharing their backgrounds and sociabilities – mulled over these changes at the Secretariat. Dressed in his usual brogues and contrast collar shirt, Mochtar observed with an air of seriousness “we have had some difficulty in...in...what’s the word” (Mongkut seated

besides him blurts out “interacting!” and scoffs) “yes *interacting* with some of the other staff. They are quite different.”⁸³

The second consequence of these variegated flows of class and capital has been more substantive in shaping the very interpretations and practice of *servicing* states. With higher cultural, social and linguistic capital, staff from an older generation (and their lingering protégés) were most adept at fashioning an *art* of servicing, one where they unambiguously and meticulously performed the script of servants with an eye to win trust from state agents and thus carve out spaces for action and professional self-esteem. In doing so, not only did they bring their linguistic and cultural capital (as sources of credibility and competence) but also, and quite crucially, their social capital inherited from elite family backgrounds or elite connections forged during professional experiences. This background of social capital provided them with *a*) an embodied ease of interacting with social elites from member states that empowered them to manoeuvre diplomatic interactions in their favour and *b*) an emotional and professional stake in enriching and expanding their own cache of social capital as they serviced and built relations with often powerful state officials from across the ten countries (more in Chapter 8). Staff from less elite backgrounds, for the most part, have been perceived to be diffident in their ability to reach out, coax and build relations with state agents, less adept at fashioning the art form of servicing, and also more yielding to the script of the simple as opposed to the tactical and imaginative servant that the ‘pioneer’ batch and their protégés had crafted.

⁸³ Fieldnotes, 18 July 2013.

4.3.2 *Performing Impartiality*

Broad sociological currents structuring movements into and outside the Secretariat act as a basic scaffolding within which social integration may take form at the Secretariat. The task of cohesion and integration, however, requires great many active and unremitting operations on the mind and body in the realm of quotidian work life. Unlike the varied state agents they routinely interact with and who are moored to the pursuit of ‘national’ interests, Secretariat staff are differentiated as well as united by the pressures brought upon them by the formal warrant to be impartial in their professional conduct. Staffs’ collective experiences of *grasping* and *performing* impartiality – rarely by conceptual reflection and often by tacit learning and practical knowledge – generates lines of cohesion within the Secretariat.

Impartiality is performed, first, when newly recruited staff members pledge their allegiance to ASEAN broadly, and to the ASEAN Secretariat more narrowly, by taking an oath traceable almost to the word from the very first formulation of international loyalty by the League of Nations in 1932 (Young, 1958: 20). The oath reads as such,

I solemnly undertake to carry out with loyalty, discretion and good conscience the functions entrusted to me as a staff member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and to discharge these functions and regulate my conduct in the utmost interest of ASEAN, and not seek or accept instructions in regard to the performance of my duties from any organization or other authority external to the ASEAN Secretariat.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Attached as an “Appendix B” in job contracts that must be signed by both staff and the SG.

The ritual aspects of taking the oath vary across the internal hierarchy of the organisation. While the oath taking of a Deputy Secretary General is held with some ceremony – flanked by the ASEAN flag, in the presence of the Secretary General and other top officials of the Secretariat, and with a verbal reading of the oath – these ritual aspects are relaxed considerably for Directors, Assistant Directors and Senior Officers, most of whom participate in a collective oath taking event in the presence of the Secretary General, or, as it appears to happen often, simply sign a sheet carrying the oath as an appendix to their new or renewed contracts.

More than the ritual of oath taking, however, the principle of impartiality is actualised by a range of informal practices that emerge from the subtle and pervasive modes of *self-monitoring* and *mutual surveillance* among staff at the Secretariat. Subianto, a former Indonesian employee at the Secretariat notes

In meetings when we had drinks after work, I only go to the Indonesian delegation to say ‘hello...aa ..hello’ [with a contrived smile and an outstretched palm to suggest amiable interaction but one at arms length]. But I *made sure* that I stayed longer in other delegations so that they would feel comfortable. Because if I keep on being seen to be going to the Indonesians then whatever I suggest in meetings, they will think, oh ‘he is carrying an Indonesian agenda,’ and I think I was quite successful in that...When ideas came from me, Member States did not identify it with Indonesia.⁸⁵

Learning to monitor the impressions one fosters in a diplomatic interaction is sometimes learned by staff at formative moments of their careers, and indeed at times

⁸⁵ Interview, 6 December 2012, Jakarta.

aided by state agents themselves. Adil, a Malaysian staff from the Secretariat's pioneer batch recalls

I learnt this actually at my first meeting, [chuckles] just a week after I came to the Secretariat. And the Malaysian officer there was a trained diplomat...Very seasoned. And when we had a break, of course you know...naively I walked to him and said, "Oh, where are you from?" and this and that. And he was trying to push me away. And then I realised that actually I was being naïve, you know. He didn't want to engage too well, he was being polite, he was keeping a distance, and then I realised absolutely this is it...I learnt a lot from just that instance and I then realised that I *cannot* try to be too friendly. I can just be polite and I should show that to everyone. Basic! I should *not go and sit* at lunch with the Malaysian delegation. [Raises voice] Anyone but the Malaysians!⁸⁶

At times, such impression management would draw trouble from covetous state agents from staff's home countries. But that, as Subianto says, "was the sacrifice I was willing to make for my professionalism...The Indonesians didn't like me because they thought I wasn't helping them enough." Likewise, Adil recalls an instance where delegates from his home country sought his support for pushing a project proposal but his apparent response was to assert that "I'm sorry. I am from Malaysia, you are Malaysian, but this, I'm working for ASEAN."

Impartiality is also enforced by mutual surveillance at various levels, including through the disciplining gaze of the Secretary General. Wardi, an Indonesian staff who worked at the Secretariat for nearly two decades enacts an instance when the

⁸⁶ Interview, 8 May 2013, Jakarta.

former Singaporean Secretary General Ong Keng Yong probed him over his recent informal interactions with Indonesian officials:

Ong: Ey!...what messages are you getting from your government?

Wardi: Why sir?

Ong: Yah you were hanging out with all those...your *countrymen*.

Wardi: Oh no sir!

Episodes such as this, it appears, had wider effects in energising the principle of impartiality “so, once Mr. Ong says that then everyone knows right... ‘hey, watch out, the boss takes this seriously’” he adds.⁸⁷

The performance of impartiality is also woven into the practices of work. For most staff, to be impartial is to not to be seen to take sides in the many reports and papers they routinely produce. It also informs the creative mode of servicing states fashioned by veteran staff of the pioneer batch, an art form where the meticulous and faithful servant was adept at cultivating godfathers, crafting alliances and building coalitions to pursue particular lines of action with the consent of the Secretary General. As Budiarto, an Indonesian veteran, says

If we need to *warn* Indonesia before they make a decision, it’s not me who goes to them. I will ask my Malaysian Indian friend to tell them to watch out about this thing and they would trust us. So I make sure it’s not the same countrymen. So, then it creates the notion that Indonesia will trust my Malaysian staff, so they will also divulge certain things. And then

⁸⁷ 8 June 2013, Jakarta.

Cambodians will also be able to tell their own wishes to my Philippines staff. It's quite delicate.⁸⁸

There were several other ways by which staff expressed their impartiality in their work life. It involved “proactively praising a country or agreeing to comments made by countries other than ours.” For staff that yielded easily to pressures from their home states for favours (writing proposals or draft speeches), being impartial meant “taking orders from countries other than ours as well.” These practices forged a new kind of subjectivity in the most casual of interactions when staff occasionally disavowed their national affiliations to express their status as veritable *Orang ASEAN* or ‘ASEAN nationals.’ Take, Subianto, who recounts a chat with the Secretary General of his day

He [SG] always forgets that I'm an Indonesian. So, he would sometimes talk bad things about them [enacts conversation excitedly] “These Indons you know...that stupid guy” and then [realising that he's speaking to Subianto, the SG's tone turns contrite] “ohh! sorry Subhi...” [Subianto chuckles] That to me is a good test. So, I'm neutral, I'm non-country, I'm ASEAN. So, I always say [enacts stoically] “Sir. No problem. I'm ASEAN.” If people can talk bad things about my country that means they really don't see that I'm Indonesian. That's the standard.⁸⁹

Such disavowals and suppressions of avowedly national identities are also performed by staff in more casual backstage contexts when they find their countries delaying or foot-dragging over projects. In such instances, staff, mindful of their multi-national

⁸⁸ Interview, Jakarta, 7 May 2013.

⁸⁹ Interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2012

cohort and restrained in criticising other countries, express with emphatic exasperation before their colleagues with sayings such as “what’s wrong with my country!”⁹⁰

As this overview of the practices of impartiality and loyalty demonstrate, the putatively ‘regional’ is generated in and through performative practices where the spectre of the ‘national’ is not effaced or transcended but remains essential to its constitution. The national, in other words, may be distanced, actively deployed, or suppressed and disavowed by subjects as they articulate and perform the ‘regional’, all with a feel for the shifting and unstable contexts (and politics) of their quotidian interactions.

Such an approach to identity differs markedly from how scholars in the field conceptualise and study ‘regional’ identity in the context of ASEAN – be it among diplomats and bureaucrats or among ‘people’. In all such studies, scholars seem to search for a ‘regional’ identity as *a)* a stable and authentic essence that *b)* must transcend the ‘national’ and *c)* is lodged and excavated from the Cartesian realm of beliefs and representations. This produces unsurprisingly polarised and irreconcilable positions: while constructivists working on norms and identity see proof of a putative regional ‘ASEAN identity’ in the claims to consultation and consensus among state elites (Acharya, 2000, 2005a, 2009a; Easton and Stubbs, 2009; and Ba, 2009a), others seem hard pressed at finding any evidence of a ‘real’ ASEAN identity and its location, noting routine contraventions to expressions of regional unity that render such a claim questionable (Roberts 2007, 87-88; Ravenhill 2008, 2009, 2010;

⁹⁰ Fieldnotes, 4 October 2012; 9 February 2013.

Emmerson, 2005; Nischalke, 2002), if not altogether spurious (Jones and Smith, 2007). Such an approach to study an ‘authentic’ identity is unable to grapple with the profound difficulties of delineating how a putatively regional identity coexists with national identity, of when this regional identity is ‘turned on’ and ‘switched off,’ and what – more puzzlingly – are the boundaries between the ‘national’ and ‘regional’ among social actors that claim both in their professional and personal practice.

As the dialectic of the national and regional in a setting like the Secretariat – notionally, the site of an ‘exclusive’ ASEAN – demonstrates, a ‘regional,’ ‘ASEAN identity’, is not an essence that can ‘possessed’, ‘owned’, turned on and switched off by pre-determined sovereign subjects. Instead, it is more productive to conceive of such an identity – and indeed identity in general – in the way anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997b: 12-14) suggest it to be: as “a mobile, often unstable relation of difference.” This dialectic of the putatively ‘national’ and the ‘regional’ – a dialectic of unremitting co-constitution and difference – is at play in the production and performance of a ‘regional sensibility’ as well, as I shall demonstrate below.

4.3.3 Regional Sensibility

A host of work practices and experiences generate diffuse conceptions of the inter-state and international, in this instance, distilled into the narrower cartography of the ‘regional’. Incessant and iterative air travel to service ASEAN meetings – anywhere between two to five times a month – to the capital cities of Bangkok, Manila,

Singapore, Nay Pi Taw, Bandar Seri Begawan, Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Hanoi or to a range of prime tourist destinations spanning the region – Chiang Mai, Bali, Hua Hin, Yogyakarta – are distinct in their form and experiential consequences. Compared to other expatriate communities in Jakarta whose movements straddle between the more local (intra-archipelagic travels within Indonesia for work and holiday mostly undertaken by national diplomatic corps) or the more intercontinental (spanning Indonesia, East Asia, Europe and America by business elites) the journeys of Secretariat staff concentrate over a bounded intermediate geography that becomes the space to apprehend and experience something putatively ‘regional’.

Besides being a source of handsome per diems, travel experiences feed into the professional esteem of staff who routinely publicise their mobility to their kin and peers on social media. Apsara, for instance, has woven a small ritual around her travels, posting on her Facebook account a picture of the view from her hotel along with the caption “Hello Hanoi!” “Hello Siem Reap!” or “Hello KL!” upon landing in the city.⁹¹ Similarly, Bhima posts about his travels on Facebook before departing with a hurried and excited: “Off to Manila!” or an “Off to Singapore!” with his admiring circle of friends and family posting “going places!” “seeing the region” or “high flyer” in return.⁹² Over the long run, however, incessant travel becomes a source of personal concern in the more general form of travel fatigue or in the more specific gendered effects it has for female staff at the Secretariat for whom repeated

⁹¹ Fieldnotes, 16 July 2013.

⁹² Fieldnotes, 15 February 2013.

overseas Missions is reported to have a bearing on their family lives and has fostered the impression that the “Secretariat is best suited for single women only.”⁹³

More profoundly, perhaps, travel experiences allow for conversations and ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995) often of a comparative kind that reinforce or revise national stereotypes: on airport facilities (and the best duty free offers), city-based taxi services (Bangkok’s “rude” cab service contrasted to Jakarta’s “smiling” cabbies);⁹⁴ favorite cities and their night lives (Brunei’s capital least-liked on this count);⁹⁵ urban high rise architecture or the lack of it (feeding into assessments of GDP oriented economic dynamism or stagnation);⁹⁶ the pace of city life (Singapore contrasted to “sleepy” Vientiane and “relaxed” Phnom Penh);⁹⁷ and so on.

Journeys are meaning making experiences. The creole functionaries of colonial administrative units of 19th century Spanish America that Benedict Anderson writes about apprehended and experienced discrimination by Spain in and through the journeys they could and could not make. They were debarred, on the one hand, from making the vertical ‘secular pilgrimage’ to the European metropole and, on the other hand, from lateral movement to neighbouring colonial administrative units. The experiences of these bounded journeys and their encounters with fellow functionaries along the way proved to be decisive in the eventual rise of Creole-led nationalism in South America at the turn of the 19th century (Anderson, 1983: 50-58). While far less grandiose in their historical scale and consequences, these bounded and recurrent travel experiences have a salient impact on the self-definition of the only full-time

⁹³ Fieldnotes, 22 June 2013; 23 June 2013.

⁹⁴ Fieldnotes, 22 June 2013.

⁹⁵ Fieldnotes, 8 February 2013; 16 May 2013; 2 July 2013; 16 June.

⁹⁶ Fieldnotes, 27 April in Bogor; Fieldnotes, 30 June.

⁹⁷ Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

functionaries of an ‘exclusive’ ASEAN. Functionaries, it is worth noting, who feel chased, if not perennially besieged, by the shadow of the powerful state agents they serve. Noting the impact of his travels, Chanathip, a veteran, says “It gives a sense of ownership. We meet people, we meet locals. We see new places... [pauses] I think we are the true ASEAN citizens.”⁹⁸

Besides travel experiences, a regional sensibility has been fostered historically through the Secretariat’s work practices. Indeed, the prodromes of a regional ego emerged back in the 1980s when the tiny cadre of seconded staff took the first steps towards designing new ‘regional’ activities in the form of work plans. Wary of the risk of being “reprimanded” by states for taking decisions and making policy – roles they were used to back in their home ministries – these senior bureaucrats alleviated the boredom of their new ‘secretarial’ roles by chalking out composite regional activities and plans in ‘functional’ areas of work. Thus, the production of a regional view in a domain of activity – say, Science and Technology – involved, first, identifying what individual member states were doing in this field, knowing their positions and sensitivities, and comparing their activities. An ‘ASEAN Science and Technology Plan’, then, was built on such *identifying, comparing* and “*summing up*” of each member’s activities.⁹⁹

When the Secretariat was professionalised in 1992, this regional ego was heightened under the energy and mandate of the ‘pioneer’ batch. Recognising that the Secretariat’s task was not to implement or engage in ‘service delivery’ (this being the responsibility of the individual ministries of member states), staff conceived the

⁹⁸ Interview, Singapore, 5 August 2013.

⁹⁹ Interview, Jakarta, 12 December 2012.

Secretariat's role as one "to guide countries into talking about and moving to the direction of that added value and the comparative advantage of region-ality over and above what countries were already doing."¹⁰⁰ In a sector like 'health' for instance, staff would deploy their regional knowledge and regional view by encouraging states to converse about their experiences in procuring patented and expensive pharmaceutical drugs, suggesting them to negotiate a fair price for drugs together as a group, and by sharing knowledge on how to invoke the health safeguards under the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) against the strength of pharmaceutical companies. Similarly, a regional view would be deployed in assisting, if not persuading, state agents to conceive of issues in transboundary terms – the movement of labour, health pandemics, and environmental hazards, to name a few.¹⁰¹

'Thinking regional' has also been fostered by staffs' efforts at clarifying and consolidating the format under which activities of inter-state collaboration could be hoisted upon and performed. They did so by moving regional cooperative activities away from disparate and ad hoc "projects" to a more elaborate "programme" format, and concomitantly, lengthening the time scale of such programmes from three to six years. Carried forward by state agents, this new format found expression in the very first 'Work Plan' of ASEAN issued by state leaders in 1997 under the six-year Hanoi Plan of Action (1999-2004), followed by the Vientiane Action Programme (2004-2009) and, following that, the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015). These three successive texts would serve, as one veteran put it, as the "Bibles" for Secretariat staff and state officials as they conceived and expanded regional

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Jakarta, 26 July 2013.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Jakarta, 28 November, 2012.

activity.¹⁰² Replete with ‘action lines’ (convene conferences, workshops, seminars, training programmes, organise exchanges, conduct joint research projects, voluntary briefings, share best practices, harmonise regulations, etc.) and a distinctive vocabulary (‘ASEAN’ and ‘regional’), these textual productions listed the nitty-gritty schemes by which overarching aspirations (an ‘ASEAN 2020 Vision’ and presently an ‘ASEAN Community,’ etc.) were to be pitched to and assessed.

Moreover, these textual productions – printed as a brochure or a booklet – would serve as the templates which ASEAN’s members as well as eager foreign partners could study and peruse in order to formulate new activities for ‘ASEAN’ or multilateral level cooperation. Finally, they offered categories and classifications by which actors in the ASEAN field – staff, ASEAN officials, foreign diplomats – could differentiate between bilateral projects and ‘regional’ or ‘ASEAN projects’ by aligning and hooking their proposals and activities – imbued with ‘national’ concerns and interests – to a language of regional benefits.

Unsurprisingly, it is the Secretariat staff – possessing knowledge of all ten country positions and lexical command of the appropriate signifiers – who could be depended upon to “cook up”¹⁰³ nationally worded proposals from ASEAN’s members as well as foreign partners into ‘regional’ ones by tweaking the rationales of a project (its “contribution to ASEAN community building”), by inserting appropriate categories (‘ASEAN connectivity’), and nesting initiatives under established textual orders (Section A. 7., point 38, action line vii in the ‘ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint’). The Secretariat also keeps watch over this conceptual terrain through its

¹⁰² Interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2013.

¹⁰³ Interview, Jakarta, 7 May 2013.

division evaluating project proposals coming from ASEAN's members and foreign partners, asking each application to explicitly spell out the "regionality" of a proposed project (ASEAN Secretariat, 2014).

Besides travel and work, to think and feel 'regional' is also fostered in other ways at the Secretariat. It is inscribed in institutional terms in the Performance Appraisal Review of staff who are assessed for promotion and bonuses on, among other elements, their "regional vision" at work.¹⁰⁴ It is fostered in more quotidian ways in how staff are mindful of the dietary cleavages of Southeast Asia at large (riven between halal and non-halal/ beef and pork) as they strike compromises and accommodations at their in-house events and outside socialising with colleagues from the Secretariat.¹⁰⁵ It is similarly produced in the humour running through its corridors and canteen; humour intelligible and emotionally resonant only to those steeped in this community of practitioners. Jokes often revolve around the creative re-enactments of casual "boo boos" at in-house functions – an MC at the Secretariat asking the audience "to please stand up for the ASEAN *national* anthem,"¹⁰⁶ a senior staff on the podium inviting the Australian Ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta as the "ASEAN Ambassador from Australia".¹⁰⁷ But humour also involves the creative rendering of dominant fissures of ASEAN's politics. The haze billowing from the island of Sumatra and choking Singapore and parts of Malaysia, to take just one case, featured relentlessly in my interactions in the month of June 2013, with staff quick to quip how the annual saga of Sumatran haze was a shining example of "borderless

¹⁰⁴ Fieldnotes, 7 June 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Jakarta, 4 October 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Fieldnotes, 3 November 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Fieldnotes, 7 June, 19 June, 23 June 2013.

travel!”, “zero tariff barriers!”, the “free movement of goods!” and “ASEAN integration!” writ large.¹⁰⁸

4.3.4 *The Central Axiom:*¹⁰⁹ ‘*Servicing Member States*’

Perhaps the most salient commonality shared by *all* staff at the ASEAN Secretariat is the simple expression that they are there to *serve* member states. ‘Professional’ staff at the Secretariat – both local and international – routinely jet setting to destinations across Southeast Asia are directly involved in sustaining and reproducing the apparatus of meetings through which ASEAN’s diplomatic activity is produced and performed. Assigned to a specific division at the Secretariat to serve one among the 37 ‘sectoral’ bodies (on health, transnational crime, agriculture, defence, immigration, etc.), a professional staff interacts with state officials across the hierarchy of the state bureaucracy – from mid-level bureaucrats congregating at Working Group meetings, top bureaucrats at the Senior Official meetings, to Ministers at Ministerial Meetings of the respective body. A professional staff is involved in every step of this process that climaxes with the ASEAN meeting and deploys administrative and emotional labour to this end, as I will elaborate in Chapter 8.

¹⁰⁸ Fieldnotes, 22 June 2013;

¹⁰⁹ Used by Hugh Gusterson in his ethnography of nuclear weapons scientists who, through immersion in work practices, come to express a commitment for the “central axiom” of laboratory life – that “the laboratory designs nuclear weapons to ensure, in a world stabilised by nuclear deterrence, that nuclear weapons will never be used.” (Gusterson, 1996:56)

Table 3: Servicing ASEAN Meetings

Representing the State	Name of Interaction
Heads of Government (Political Leaders, Generals, Monarchs)	ASEAN Summits
Ministers Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Trade, 37 bodies in all)	Ministerial Meetings
Top civil servants Permanent Secretaries and Director Generals or equivalent rank	Senior Official Meetings (SOM)
Mid-ranked civil servants Deputy Director Generals, etc.	Working Group Meetings

Given the growing spatial breadth and temporal depth of such interactions with states, ‘to service’ member states – and its verb form ‘*servicing*’ – operate as *emic* or folk categories that Secretariat staff routinely invoke to describe what they do. This casual usage, however, conceals its profoundly polyvalent character. To begin with, and as already suggested, servicing summons in shorthand a whole array of work activities. Second, servicing prescribes a highly precise relationship of power, insofar as it is undergirded by a notion of differentially placed subjects rendering or receiving such service. Third, ‘servicing’ – as bundle of work practices geared to facilitate and lubricate the interactions of member states and also as a representation of an asymmetric social relationship – is inscribed as a disposition, less in terms of Cartesian beliefs and ideas and more along the lines of what Raymond Williams (1977) refers to as “structures of feelings.”

To service, then, is not only to comprehend a professional practice and a power relationship, it is also to *embody* it. Every newly arrived staff must engage – if not surrender – to a process of self-formation in order to thrive in an environment where one’s professional esteem, reputation, bonuses and promotions, are all centrally linked and evaluated to their skill in servicing member states. To learn and perform servicing involves a process of self-formation or “subjectification,” by which staff apprehend and internalise a set of work practices as well as a social script of being ‘servants’ through a variety of “operations” on their “bodies, on their souls, on their thoughts, [and] on their conduct (Rabinow, 1984: 11).” Servicing, then, is a way of presenting oneself before states in everyday life, a way of talking, a way of listening, a way of writing, indeed – and in its apotheosis – a way of *being*. Having spent nearly two decades at the Secretariat, Chanathip, for instance, had come to embody the Secretariat in the wider field of practitioners involved in ASEAN activity. Lore about him often refer to his ability to recall arcane dates and facts on ASEAN’s meetings and agreements; to conversations with him where booklets and documents would be effortlessly produced in the midst of running conversations to substantiate a point; to the great trust he enjoyed among state agents before whom he performed the script of the able and meticulous servant with impeccability; and indeed to tales of his travels to ASEAN meetings and academic conferences with a trolley bag of documents that would be sifted through and selected at a moments notice to marshal a point on ASEAN.¹¹⁰

To service member states is a central axiom not merely because it is a self-evident verity for nearly all staff at the Secretariat. It is both *central* and *axiomatic* because it

¹¹⁰ Fieldnotes, 22 July 2013.

has profound ideological and structuring effects both within and outside the Secretariat. On the one hand, it structures the Secretariat's social and professional interactions outside its precincts (chiefly, with state agents) by naturalising and legitimising the Secretariat's subordination to states by a host of sayings ('we only service states,' 'we are servants,' 'we are nobody!') and doings (the performance of the meticulous, faithful and trusted servant).

On the other hand, it structures the space *within* the Secretariat too. *Servicing* casts a fine lexical and normative mesh within the corridors and offices of the Secretariat where quotidian battles over work, turf, and ego are articulated and fused with more abstract questions over the Secretariat's purpose, value and role in the practice of ASEAN diplomacy. *Servicing*, thus, provides a vocabulary to make assessments of one's professional self-worth ("I never had complaints from member states, they respected me");¹¹¹ to build reputations and craft archetypes (*a la* Chanathip); to appraise, assess and traduce colleagues ("he doesn't know how to service, he was a *researcher* through and through);¹¹² and also in historicising the Secretariat's efficacy over the decades (a veteran from the 'pioneer' batch criticises the contemporary post-Charter Secretariat by asking if there is "a cohort of people who are servicing the right way?").¹¹³ Lastly, it is instructive to note that while the Secretariat's formal and informal *raison d'être* to service member states offers a basis for social integration within the Secretariat, such cohesion occurs only when understandings about servicing converge among the cadre of staff. Indeed, the axiom of servicing states can be fairly disruptive when these understandings (on how to

¹¹¹ Interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2012.

¹¹² Interview, Jakarta, 26 July, 2013.

¹¹³ Interview, Jakarta, 8 May 2013.

service and to what end) are a point of dispute and schism. Given its profound generative and structuring effects, various aspects of servicing will reappear and be elaborated in the chapters to come.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to, first, historicise ASEAN's diplomacy and dispositions as they operate over its four decade old Secretariat in Jakarta. Second, it opened up the ASEAN *field* in sociological terms through the Secretariat by identifying the *kind of people* who have historically arrived, stayed and exited this space and the practices by which they produce, support and perform this diplomatic project. It demonstrates how circulations of class and capital profoundly shape not only the bases of convergence and divergence within the Secretariat, but also the dispositions that staff bring to bear as they service this diplomacy. Third, this chapter has sought to study identity. Even though ASEAN is produced and performed at various sites (at national secretariats, foreign ministries etc.), this explication of the practices generating a putatively 'exclusive' identity at its Secretariat is suggestive of *a*) a mode of conceiving identity not as a fixed essence that can be possessed as much as an unstable and shifting relation of difference, and *b*) a mode for studying identity that is not anchored solely in *representations* of identity invoked, claimed and deployed by those fashioning them as much as in the generation of identity through a multitude of everyday professional and social *practices*.

CHAPTER 5

THE DIPLOMATIC FIELD IN JAKARTA

5.1 Introduction: *Ibukota Diplomatik ASEAN?*

In early 2010 a top Indonesian official at the ASEAN Secretariat wrote an op-ed in *The Jakarta Post*, Indonesia's leading English broadsheet which, with a print run of nearly 40,000 papers a day in a country of nearly 260 million, is perused daily by business, diplomatic, and English speaking echelons of the elite in Jakarta. Titled "Will Jakarta become the Brussels of the East?" (Hapsoro, 2010) the officer teased his select readers with the prospect of a tantalising vision for Indonesia's capital city. While this attempt at fashioning Jakarta's – and metonymically, Indonesia's – image echoed the ambition of similar branding exercises from the past, notably during the fervently anti-colonial years of the Indonesian revolution and the heady Third World internationalist ones under Sukarno,¹¹⁴ the coordinates of this latest branding exercise were more tepid and parochial.

Praising Suharto's "foresight" in establishing the Secretariat in Jakarta, noting the flurry of freshly appointed ambassadors and diplomatic missions to ASEAN in Jakarta since the ratification of the ASEAN Charter in 2008, and highlighting the

¹¹⁴ During the tumultuous years of the Indonesian revolution (1945-49), the fledgling Republican government projected Jakarta as the city for diplomacy and negotiation (*kota diplomasi*) as opposed to *pemuda*-led armed struggle (*perjuangan*). As Abeysekere notes "the Republican leaders were constrained by the usual preoccupation of rulers of Jakarta that the city's appearance should convince foreigners that Indonesia was a well-run state." During the post-independence years of parliamentary democracy and the subsequent era of "Guided Democracy," Jakarta became the "vehicle" for Sukarno's revolutionary and internationalist ambitions: with large monuments and bold statuary the city was designed to project Indonesia's leadership of the New Emerging Forces (Abeyasekare, 1987: 151-57; 167-171). Also see, Cribb, 1981.

potential financial benefits of such international activity for Jakarta in the way Brussels, Washington, Geneva, New York and Nairobi had prospered as host cities to international organisations,¹¹⁵ the author argued that these developments would “benefit ASEAN’s centrality and Indonesia’s role as a member and host of ASEAN.” The writer thus pitched ASEAN’s core aspiration for “centrality” in steering regional diplomacy, the future of Indonesia’s “leadership” in the region, and Jakarta’s prospects for prosperity to a fourth coordinate: the resources and role of the ASEAN Secretariat. Calling for a “fresh look at how we can accommodate those ASEAN and non-ASEAN citizens who work to sustain the centrality of ASEAN” and for “innovative strategies” to support the Secretariat with “resources, diplomatic and fiscal facilitation,” he concluded that “the presence of a strong and effective ASEAN Secretariat will revitalise Jakarta, pressure its government and people to improve living conditions, and attract the investments that will serve Indonesia’s own interests in the world” (Hapsoro, 2010).

Appealing to several constituencies at once, this act of framing found resonance among various kinds of actors in Jakarta who would appropriate, deploy and embellish this vision for the city as they carried it forward. In the year following the op-eds publication, this vision was both rearticulated and amplified as Indonesia took over ASEAN’s Chairmanship in 2011. Before an audience of nearly a thousand international delegates and press at the close of an ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia’s foreign minister Marty Natalegawa, flanked by Indonesia’s President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jakarta’s Governor Fauzi Bowo, handed over the keys of an abandoned building adjoining the ASEAN Secretariat to Secretary

¹¹⁵ For a study of Washington as a “Global Political City” see Calder, 2014.

General Surin Pitsuwan. Marty took this opportunity to point out to his audience that this gesture reflected the “importance the Government of Indonesia attaches to the role of the ASEAN Secretariat” and also its “commitment to make Jakarta the *diplomatic capital of the region*.”¹¹⁶

Soon enough, Jakarta’s governors were drawn into the ambit of this budding discourse. Socialised coterminously by Secretariat staff who reiterated the benefits of an expanded Secretariat for Jakarta during courtesy visits to the Governor’s office,¹¹⁷ and by the Indonesian Foreign Ministry which organised seminars on this theme with the Governor in attendance,¹¹⁸ a string of Jakarta’s prominent Governors – from Fauzi Bowo to (current President) Joko Widodo and subsequently Basuki Tjahaja Purnama – joined the act, referring to Jakarta as a “diplomatic city”, “diplomatic capital of Southeast Asia” (*Ibukota diplomatik Asia Tenggara*) and “diplomatic capital of ASEAN” (*Ibukota diplomatik ASEAN*).¹¹⁹ In doing so, they were attracted not only to the international profile these representations brought to their city and office, but also to the small-scale ammunition it offered them in framing – with an air of urgency, given ASEAN’s 2015 ‘economic community’ deadline – the dire implications of a broken public transport infrastructure for Jakarta’s international profile.¹²⁰ These circulating representations also forced their way into deliberations over the Jakarta Master Plan 2030, and suggestions of a ‘Diplomatic Zone’ centered

¹¹⁶ Emphasis mine. This claim would be reiterated by Marty and his foreign ministry colleagues on several other occasions, see, ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011a; Deplu, 2012; Deplu, 2014; *Tempo*, 2010; *Kompas*, 2013; *Antaraneews.com*, 2012.

¹¹⁷ On the Secretariat’s courtesy calls to Fauzi Bowo and Joko Widodo, respectively, see ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011b; *Jakarta Globe*, 2012.

¹¹⁸ See Deplu, 2013.

¹¹⁹ ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011c; ASEAN Secretariat News, 2012a.

¹²⁰ Among others, see *Liputan6*, 2014. Also see, *Kompas*, 2014; *Detiknews*, 2013.

around the Secretariat in Kebayoran Baru made a fleeting appearance in the papers.¹²¹

Meanwhile, the diplomatic corps based in Jakarta upon whom these representations had been hoisted were reticent to either support or subvert them in public, though sympathetic qualifications, sharp criticisms, carps and deprecations were abundant in their backstage chatter. Criticisms were arrayed along several lines. Foreign diplomats were quick to point out that Jakarta was no “Brussels of the East” in either quantitative or qualitative terms: National Delegations in Brussels of each of the 28 members of the European Union (EU) numbered in the hundreds, the office of the Permanent Representative to the EU was a prized posting in home bureaucracies, and the bilateral diplomatic corps for Belgium was secondary to the multilateral corps of COREPER and NATO diplomats based in Brussels, all in contrast to the size and prestige of still nascent diplomatic missions to ASEAN in Jakarta. A more common line of critique, shared by foreign and CPR diplomats, concerned the capacity of the Jakarta administration and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry to realise such a vision, given the numerous delays diplomats had experienced in securing tax exemption cards, diplomatic privileges, customs clearances at Indonesian ports and even appropriate car plates for their ASEAN missions in Jakarta. Indeed, for all the show of handing over the symbolic keys of the abandoned South Jakarta Mayor’s office to the Secretariat in 2011, the sun-bleached building stayed in desuetude well into 2014 as a stalemate ensued between the Jakarta administration and the Foreign Ministry, with the former keen to swap the vacated building for a part of the Foreign Ministry’s training centre in the prized neighbourhood of Senayan’s luxury shopping malls.

¹²¹ *The Jakarta Post*, 2012a. Also, Interview with a senior official from the Jakarta Spatial Planning Division, 30 July, 2013; and interview with official from *Ikatan Ahli Perencana* (Indonesian Association of Urban and Regional Planners), 5 July 2013.

A third line of criticism was the experience of dwelling in the metropolis of Jakarta, where the vexations of ‘*macet, hujan, banjir*’ (traffic jams, tropical downpour and floods) and a litany of concerns typifying the expatriate sensibility – air pollution, low faith in hospital facilities, rising top-end office and housing rentals, and even cries of the ubiquitous neighbourhood mosque – competed with the appeal of working in a city that was professionally rewarding insofar as it was the political and diplomatic hive of the region’s largest democracy.¹²²

A fourth line of criticism, one deployed specifically by ASEAN diplomats in the CPR, was to undermine the claims to regional leadership implied by the discourse. Take Gary, for instance, whose immediate response to my use of the phrase “diplomatic capital of ASEAN” during one of our coffee meet-ups at Kuningan City Mall was to interrupt me sharply and ask – with feigned incredulity and a playful smile – “Who says that?” underscoring the absence of consultations with, or indeed *consensus* among, ASEAN’s members on this expression. CPR diplomats, it appeared, let the discourse pass because they viewed in this city-based intensification the prospect of their own rise vis-a-vis masters in national capitals, and because

¹²² ASEAN and foreign diplomats are members of the wider expatriate community in Jakarta but with important variations. While most ASEAN diplomats make do with hospitals and clinics in Jakarta, diplomats from wealthier foreign countries enjoy medical coverage to fly to Singapore for basic medical treatments. As public sector expatriates, they have felt the pinch of rising office and housing rentals in South and Central Jakarta – among the highest in Southeast Asia (see, “Jakarta Office Rent Highest in ASEAN,” *Tempo*, 3 June 2014). The problem of rising rentals in downtown Jakarta operates in tandem with, and is heightened by, the problem of Jakarta’s *macet*. In an “age of austerity”, as one Western diplomat put it, diplomats are put up in condominiums and executive apartments farther away from their embassies located in Jakarta’s main thoroughfares and commercial zones (fieldnotes, 20 November 2012). While significantly more cosmopolitan (from wearing *batiks* to learning basic Bahasa Indonesia) than the hard-edged characters one finds in existing studies of mostly corporate Euro-American expatriates in Jakarta (Fetcher, 2007), these diplomats – both Western and wealthier Asians – nonetheless engage in the practices of boundary making – from their “dwelling habits,” and “movement strategies” to the tropes of everyday conversation – that have defined expatriate communities from colonial to postcolonial times (ibid: 59-81).

Indonesia was after all, as Gary would put it, a “*Bapak* country,” the big man in a black *peci* in the region.¹²³

For all these qualifications and critiques, there was something unmistakable and undeniable about the dynamic that had undergirded those representations sketched at first by the article in *The Jakarta Post* and subsequently rearticulated by other actors in Jakarta. This dynamic, this budding and diffuse *energy* experienced and apprehended by practitioners in the growing busyness of their work – meetings, receptions, travels, workshops, more meetings – and indeed, explained for some their very arrival and subsistence in Jakarta, was the emergence and consolidation of a field of diplomatic activity in Jakarta that was producing and performing something ‘ASEAN.’

In contrast to the sleepier decades of the past when the Secretariat in South Jakarta scarcely aroused the covetous attention of its host country and stood at the fringes of diplomatic life in the city, the Secretariat, in the space of merely five years, became the symbolic core around which a field of multilateral diplomacy would come to settle about. Since 2008, all ten members of ASEAN established their Permanent Missions to ASEAN and appointed Permanent Representatives and staff who convened at the Secretariat as the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR). With both the Secretariat and CPR in town, all Dialogue Partners of ASEAN – a group of ten Great and Middle Powers – appointed Ambassadors to ASEAN, while some, in a domino-effect mode, opened Permanent Missions to ASEAN with resident diplomats who now made their way to CPR Missions and the Secretariat to

¹²³ Fieldnotes, 13 March 2013.

liaise and lobby. Concomitantly, as many as 80 Ambassadors of various countries based in Jakarta were accredited as “Ambassadors to ASEAN,” many of whom gathered for receptions in the city and attended the Secretary General’s post-Summit briefings at the Secretariat.

Meanwhile, the growing ‘regional’ quality of this space was both expressed and reinforced when some countries began to use their Jakarta embassies and ASEAN Missions as sites for in-house gatherings of their ambassadors from Southeast Asia.¹²⁴ Besides embassies, some cultural foundations and development aid offices based in Jakarta too came to acquire the informal status of being ‘regional headquarters’ to their sister branches in Southeast Asia.¹²⁵ Companies keen to acquire a regional brand sought a hook in this scene of activity, with banks, credit rating agencies, insurance companies appointing ASEAN specific executives (wielding “CEO for ASEAN” business cards), some of whom jetted out of their offices in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to attend and speak at events at the Secretariat in Jakarta.¹²⁶ Some, like the low-cost airline Air Asia, went a step further and opened an “ASEAN office” in Jakarta’s plush SCBD downtown, a couple of kilometers away from the Secretariat.

¹²⁴ By the South Korean Mission to ASEAN (see, ROK Mission to ASEAN, 2013) and the Canadian embassy in Jakarta, Fieldnotes, 2012.

¹²⁵ Especially, the Jakarta office of Germany’s aid agency GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; see GIZ “Indonesia”), Japan’s aid agency (JICA), the ‘Japan Foundation’ in Jakarta, while officials from America’s USAID and Australia’s AusAID headquartered in Bangkok, make more frequent visits to Jakarta (Fieldnotes, 1 June 2013).

¹²⁶ A number of multinational companies based in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and occasionally in Sydney, have created ‘ASEAN’ titled positions to seek greater access to elite bureaucratic and political networks in the region. These include the American behemoth General Electric, the credit ratings agency Standards and Poor, Standard Chartered Bank, HSBC, Volkswagen, JP Morgan, Barclays, Morgan Stanley, among others. Some of them (From GE, S&P and Air Asia) were speakers at the Secretariat’s workshops. Fieldnotes, 19 September 2012; 18 March 2013; 19 April 2013.

Interacting at meetings, lunches, cocktail receptions and ‘cultural’ events (national day celebrations, dance shows, and art exhibits, all of the avowedly essentialist kind showcasing ‘national culture’), this numerically growing community of diplomats, Secretariat staff, development consultants, businessmen, ‘civil society’ actors, and Indonesian policy-makers, swapped cards, built networks, and had their photos clicked in the inimitable ‘ASEAN Way’ handshake of plaited, interlaced hands that were promptly posted on the official websites, Facebook pages and twitter feeds of the ASEAN Secretariat and diplomatic missions in the city.

In this chapter I plan to study this Jakarta centered field of ASEAN diplomacy, and I do so in three ways. I will build on this *first* section in the pages to come by further fleshing out the actors, institutions, interests and practices animating this budding diplomatic field. Second, I will explain why and how the Jakarta field emerged by contextualising the regional and international forces that allowed it to take shape. And third, I will examine the ‘local’ politics of this international diplomatic field, of how power was ordered and tacit hierarchies were negotiated as this field cohered as a site for doing ASEAN diplomacy.

5.2 The Emergence of the Jakarta Diplomatic Field

5.2.1 A Diplomatic Field in the Postcolony

It is perhaps useful to clarify what is implied and also theoretically productive about thinking of Jakarta as a *field* of diplomatic activity. As the everyday use of the word suggests, a field is an empirical plotting of spaces, institutions, agents and their practices, and to that extent it is a heuristic, a scholastic abstraction and indeed a

representation. But when situated in the *in actu* mode of everyday life, a field is a structure, an *experienced structure* that is internalised into the embodied and cognitive dispositions of actors who both apprehend and reproduce the logic of field in their everyday practice. In just the way “the scientist is the scientific field made flesh,” the diplomat too is an embodiment of the diplomatic field “whose cognitive structures are homologous with the structure of the field, and as a consequence, constantly adjusted to the expectations inscribed in the field” (Bourdieu, 2004: 41). The bounded field thus operates as a *force field*, where social agents have stakes in a competitive social game to which they bring to play their historically endowed and cultivated stock of discursive and practical knowledge – a cache of linguistic competence, bodily gestures, aesthetic taste, *savoir faire*, all constituting a *feel for the game* – to better their position by acquiring the species of capital valued in their field in order to claim dominant positions to define what is legitimate and deviant, sacred and profane (Bourdieu, 1984; Thomson, 2008: 67-75; Swartz, 1997: 96-101; Swartz 2008; Adler-Nissen, 2011; Moore, 2008: 101-118). Evidently, then, the field is a *field of combat*, a *le champ* as Pierre Bourdieu would have it, or indeed a dusty *maidan* or *padang* in the postcolony, where the struggles for material and symbolic power are waged in the banality of everyday life.

The ‘diplomatic field’ conceived along such Bourdieuan terms is distinct from other social fields especially in its relationship to the state – the veritable “central bank for symbolic credit” that holds sway over the legitimate classifications and meanings circulating in the numerous fields under its territory and jurisdiction (Bourdieu, 1994). As a quintessentially ‘international’ practice, diplomacy cannot be captured by or reduced to the state alone, not least because its “anthropologically primitive”

tribe of diplomats stand beyond the jurisdiction of local courts, are secured from the fate of a “lawless community were it not for its self-imposed ethics and rules which comprise protocol,” and are protected by diplomatic immunities and privileges agreed under international law (Thayer, 1960: 224).

This distinction should not be overstated, however. The diplomatic field is similar to other fields – the academic field, the bureaucratic field, or the field of artistic production – in that it is semi-autonomous in its operation with its own world of sayings and doings and categories of appreciation and discrimination that constitute its taken for granted commonsense (*doxa*). Similarly, the diplomatic field overlaps with and is homologous to other fields. Even as it operates as an archetype, the representation of the ‘ideal diplomat’ – an embodied repository of linguistic, cultural, sartorial and aesthetic competence nourished by life-long socialisation at home, the university or training academy – expresses the great convergence of dominant poles from across fields (academic, cultural and bureaucratic, to suggest one permutation) that betrays how diplomacy draws from and reinforces the hierarchies of other social fields.

Like other social fields, then, the diplomatic field transects with the “meta-field” of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 111) that is, the overarching terrain of grand historical struggles that determines what stuff the field is made up of, the game to be played, the rules of the game, and the prizes at stake. The diplomatic field in Jakarta, and indeed anywhere else in the decolonised world, is thus profoundly shaped by diplomacy’s European aristocratic and subsequently bourgeoisie heritage (Neumann, 2012: 304-310); by the histories of empire, racial prejudice and neo-colonial

domination that have been carried forward, resisted, reformed, or reinvented as Euro-American diplomacy expanded over the international states system in the 20th century; and by postcolonial trajectories of state formation (socialist Cold War-era Vietnam versus authoritarian and open market New Order Indonesia, for instance) that have structured this field.

The investigation into the emergence of the Jakarta scene must be prefaced by such an analysis of the diplomatic field because it conveys something about the general and immanent properties of the field – the rules of the game, the stakes involved, the distribution of capital, the inherited inequalities – that structure and dispose the field *even before* it takes form in a specific location and under a more immediate conjecture of circumstances. By way of illustration, one could suggest that ASEAN’s diplomats may be seated around the meeting table as representatives of sovereign equals at any site in Southeast Asia but, the performance of equality notwithstanding, the Cambodian diplomat’s halting speech in English read from a sheet of paper, the Filipino diplomat’s arguments delivered with force and an occasional American lilt, the impressions “given off” about individual, bureaucratic and indeed national capacity from sartorial choices (the weave and fitting of the Singaporean diplomat’s business suit with a pocket square at variance from the baggy trousers and shoulder divots on the Myanmar diplomat’s jacket), and differences in their ease of interaction with foreign diplomats on account of their life-histories of travel and acquisition of degrees from American, British and nearby Australian universities, are all embodied expressions of the histories and inequalities built into the diplomatic field as it takes root in any site of the postcolony.

A survey of the more immediate causes for the rise of the Jakarta scene is in order, and three factors are worth highlighting in this regard.

5.2.2 *The ASEAN Charter: A New Brand, A New Impetus*

Ratified in late 2008, the Charter was a re-branding exercise by ASEAN's elites which, with its unprecedented inclusion of the categories of democracy, good governance and human rights, was construed to bolster the legitimacy of the organisation (Koh, Manalo and Woon 2009; Cheeppensook, 2013). The Charter was thus a symbol of ASEAN's intent to reframe itself, quite regardless of whether any of this was toothless or had some bite. As a Western diplomat in Jakarta observed, in contrast to the founding anti-communist ethos of the 1960s and the post-Cold War economic and free trade motivations of 1990s, the "more ambitious" Charter of 2008 was "about the place of this region in a world with superpowers flanked to the East and the West...about 600 million people in the region and what they can be."¹²⁷ The Charter, then, provided a new symbolic terrain of ideas and motivations that actors in Southeast Asia and abroad could latch on to rationalise their personal support for the organisation and also invoke before domestic constituencies for heightened diplomatic engagement with ASEAN.

Besides being read off as a symbol of renovation, the Charter also came up with a slew of institutional changes, one of which would profoundly contribute to the emergence of the Jakarta scene. This was the establishment of the CPR comprised of "Permanent Representatives with the rank of Ambassador based in Jakarta"

¹²⁷ Interview, 15 February, 2013.

(ASEAN, 2008: 17). Starting from 2009, PRs trickled into Jakarta and inaugurated a process of far-reaching organisational consolidation and growth beyond the sparse words that summoned them into existence.

5.2.3 Arrivals from Afar in the Shadow of Great Power Politics

A second factor that contributed to the emergence of this diplomatic field in Jakarta was the unprecedented arrival of foreign diplomats to the city to work with ASEAN's diplomats and practitioners on an everyday basis. It is instructive to consider both the proximate and broader geopolitical forces that guided this development. The ASEAN Charter allowed for the formal accreditation of "Ambassadors to ASEAN" from non-member states. This allowed, at the minimum, for a host of Ambassadors to Indonesia resident in Jakarta to seek joint accreditation as Ambassadors to ASEAN, with the monitoring of day to day ASEAN affairs mostly delegated to a First or Second Secretary within the embassy set-up. Had this practice subsisted and standardised, the Jakarta scene would perhaps not have materialised or certainly not shaped up the way it did.

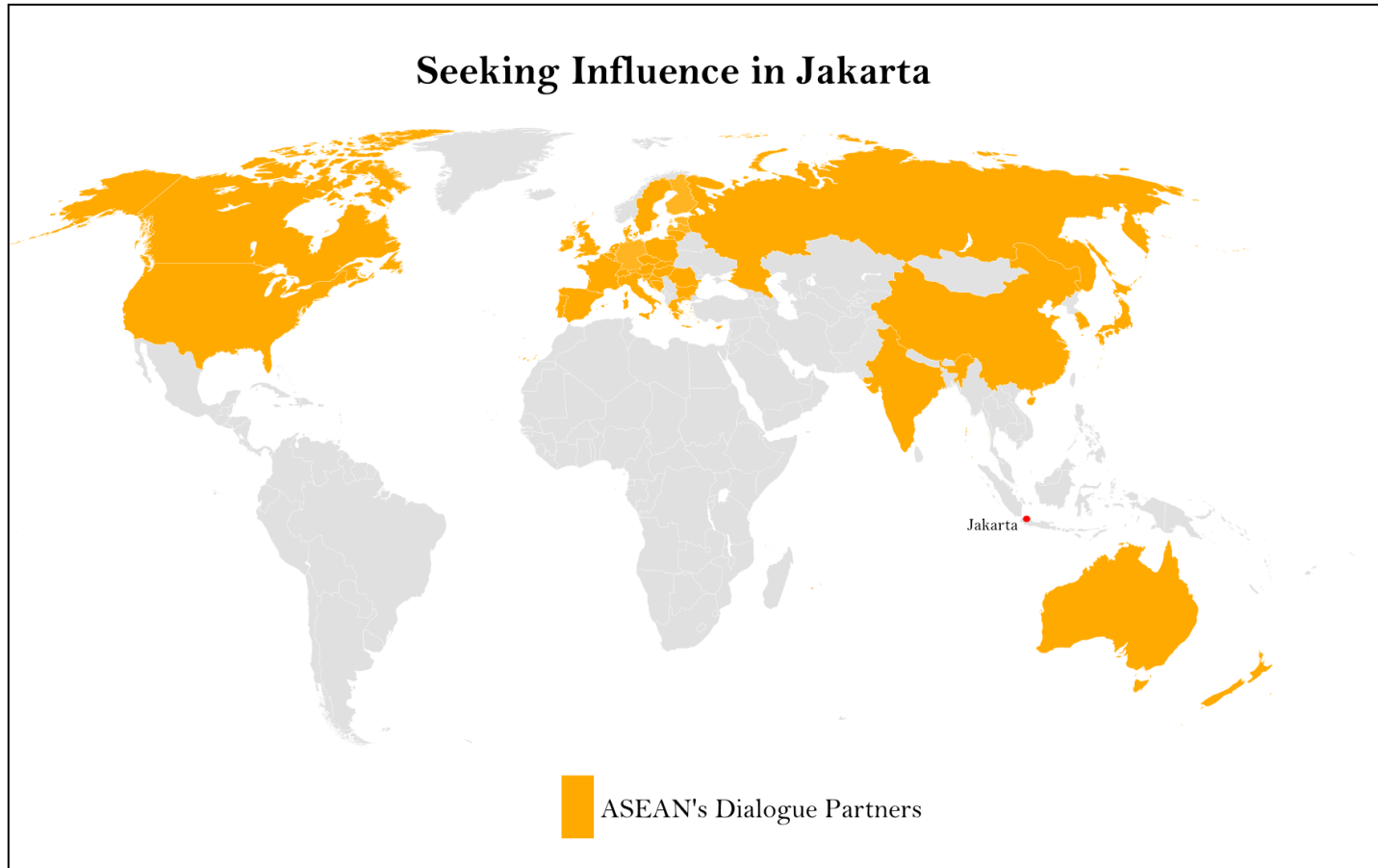
The decisive development in the production of an ASEAN centered diplomatic field was the opening of Permanent Diplomatic Missions to ASEAN by Great and Middle powers, a development that owed itself singularly to the geopolitical space occupied by Southeast Asia – a space not simply of expanding markets, of littoral and continental geographies yoking transcontinental circuits of maritime trade, but also a space of representations of a region historically susceptible to great power depredations – in an increasingly post-unipolar decade of the twenty first century.

This geopolitical space was bookended on the one side by representations on the ‘rise’ and ‘threat’ of China that were continually summoned and tested in relation to its territorial assertions over a string of islets, islands and atolls dotting the South China Sea claimed by as many as four Southeast Asian states, some more trenchantly than others. Even though the spike in maritime skirmishes starting from 2009 were the latest in an older historical pattern of assertion and quiescence in the South China Sea (Fravel, 2011), these assertions – by way of cartographic posturing, diplomatic and military declarations and a host of run-ins among opposing naval, commercial and civil maritime law enforcement vessels (Storey, 2013a, 2013b; Franck and Benatar, 2012; Holmes 2014) – were received with heightened anxiety by Southeast Asian states on account of the second flank of this geopolitical landscape: representations forewarning, debunking, elegising or celebrating the economic and strategic decline of the United States and its commitment to uphold the post-war web of security alliances that had undergirded its hegemonic presence in Asia (Cox 2012; Joffe, 2014; Schweller and Pu, 2011; Wallerstein 2003; Mahbubani, 2008; Zakaria, 2008; Ikenberry, 1998/99 and 2011)

It was in this context, in 2008, the same year as the obscure ASEAN Charter entered into force, that Barack Obama was elected as the President of the United States and embarked on a significant rebranding, if not reorientation, of American foreign policy. Declaring himself as “America’s first Pacific President” on his tour to Japan in 2009 (The White House, 2009), Obama’s government turned the rudder of America’s diplomatic, military, political and economic engagement away from Europe and its debacles in Afghanistan and Iraq, towards Asia, in a policy that would be formally memorialised in 2011 – in a carefully crafted manifesto by the US

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – as America’s “pivot to Asia” (Clinton, 2011). The ‘pivot’ has been an assortment of varied discursive, representational and material practices – from the firm handshakes and bold speech acts issued from atop a naval warship in the Manila Bay (Whaley, 2011) and the dais of a Presidential joint press conference in Tokyo (*The Guardian*, 2014), to the steely stride of US combat ships sailing into Asian ports (Oi, 2013), and the circulation of US marines through Australian and Philippine military bases (BBC 2013; Watson, 2014).

Seeking Influence in Jakarta



Map 4: Seeking Influence in Jakarta: ASEAN's Dialogue Partners

While various aspects of the ‘pivot’ – subsequently renamed as “rebalance” to Asia – have been contentious among Asian, American and Australian foreign policy elites (Bisley and Phillips, 2013; Zhang, 2015; Scappatura, 2014; Browne, 2013; Moss, 2013), it has been least contentious and arguably most successful in raising America’s presence in the multilateral diplomacy of the region. While the US was the first non-ASEAN country to appoint a non-resident ambassador to ASEAN in 2008 (followed closely by China), it was under Obama’s signature ‘pacific’ and ‘pivot’ policy that a decision was made to open a *permanent* diplomatic mission to ASEAN with a *resident* Ambassador to ASEAN. Issued and publicised at the highest levels – by Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 2009 and Barack Obama at the ASEAN-US Leaders Meeting in November the same year – a “Resident Representative” of the Ambassador arrived in Jakarta in January 2010 to open the Mission, while a new Ambassador was sworn in by Obama in March 2011 and arrived in Jakarta a month later to present his credentials to Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan at the Secretariat.

As the first ‘non-ASEAN’ state to open a Permanent Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, the US both expressed the ‘pivot’ in tangible terms and raised the stakes of the diplomatic game in the city. The opening of a Permanent Mission was not simply about enhancing day-to-day cooperation and lobbying – for such an outcome was not guaranteed at the start – it was also a performance of commitment, and would become the new gold standard for states to perform their dedication to ASEAN. Unsurprisingly, the opening of the US mission to ASEAN set a precedent that would trigger similar performances and ‘position takings’ by geostrategic actors in the city, with several Dialogue Partners appointing Resident Ambassadors and opening

Permanent Missions, occasionally with the gentle prodding of allied partners (Hillary Clinton's call to her South Korean counterparts to open a mission to ASEAN in Jakarta being a case in point [Chongkittavorn, 2011]), but mostly out of an appreciation of the new stakes of the diplomatic game underway. One after the other, and in ceremonies featuring a range of local and Western rituals – from cutting a string of jasmine flowers to unveiling curtains off a ceremonial plaque in spotless white formal dress gloves – ASEAN's Dialogue Partners opened their Permanent Missions to ASEAN: Japan in 2011, Korea and China in 2012, Australia in 2013, India and Canada in 2014, with remaining Dialogue Partners mulling similar upgrades. Soon enough, the event would be commemorated and profiled on official websites, press releases and brochures, where the logic of this geo-strategic position taking would be justified by referring to growing 'regional' trade and investment figures and by the pithy happenstance that Jakarta, after all, was the "seat of the ASEAN Secretariat."¹²⁸

5.2.4 *A New Helmsman at the Secretariat*

The third factor behind the emergence of the Jakarta scene was the more agential but nonetheless pivotal role of ASEAN's 12th Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan. 'Surin' (as he was referred to in this diplomatic scene) was cut out from a very different cloth than his bureaucratic predecessors. Not only was he a long-time politician from the pro-market and royalist-conservative Democrat Party in Thailand, he had also been Thailand's Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2001 including the year when

¹²⁸ Often on the "Ambassador's message" on official websites of several missions. For reference to the Secretariat, see the brochure "EU-ASEAN: Natural Partners," *EU Delegation Jakarta*, January 2013 (6th edition).

Thailand served as ASEAN's Chairman. As the Foreign Minister who had once driven the high politics of ASEAN diplomacy – especially in issuing the call for “flexible engagement” in the internal affairs of member states (Haacke 2003: 200-203) – Surin brought with him an internationally recognised stature, abundant social capital comprised of personal relationships with international political and diplomatic elites, as well as the cultural capital of a Harvard PhD degree. It was thus unsurprising that Surin had at first been apprehensive about taking office. However, with the prospect of his candidacy to run for the United Nation's Secretary General office denied by the Thaksin government in 2005, his domestic political ambitions immobilised by the Thai coup of 2006, and with the air busy with talk of the SG's ‘empowerment’ under the ASEAN Charter, Surin accepted the appointment – with the persuasion by no less than the retired Thai general and then Prime Minister General Surayud Chulanont – and arrived in Jakarta in early 2008. Given the Dharsono experience of the past, the (anomalous) appointment of a politician to the office had resulted from generational change, the prerogative of the nominating state to appoint its chosen candidate, and from a specific conjuncture in Thai politics that had led Surin to orbit out of the circuits of power in Bangkok. While Thailand's prerogative to appoint its chosen candidate could not be questioned by other member states, the talk (and subsequent confirmation) of Surin's selection as Thailand's candidate had dovetailed with the final stages of discussions among top bureaucrats drafting the ASEAN Charter. In the view of some interlocutors, the proposal to establish a CPR in Jakarta – an idea floating about ever since the restructuring of 1992 – acquired significant traction in the wake of Surin's appointment among some states anxious of an expansive Secretariat under his watch.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Interview, Jakarta 6 December 2012; Singapore, 15 January 2013.

Grappling with the ambiguities (that would soon sour into disappointments) of the ASEAN Charter, Surin emerged as a key entrepreneur in Jakarta, fashioning ASEAN in ways that spoke to his political biography and doubled up as struggles to secure space for himself and the Secretariat. As Donald Emmerson (2008: 48) noted when Surin took office, if there ever was an SG who could turn his office into a “bully pulpit for security, democracy and regionalism,” it was Surin Pitsuwan. In eloquent and rousing speeches delivered extempore and with the gestural economy of the politician, Surin spoke of “bringing ASEAN down to the people”, and of the role of a “networked Secretariat” that would reach out to “as many entities out there in the ASEAN landscape,” not just ASEAN’s foreign government partners “but also the private sector and civil society in the region and globally.”¹³⁰ While Surin’s vision for the Secretariat disquieted ASEAN’s diplomats, not to mention long-serving Secretariat staff as well (Chapter 8), it became the main organising frame for his tenure, pursued openly in his early years but more implicitly once state reaction against him intensified.

During his five year tenure, Surin emerged as the most public Secretary General in the Secretariat’s history, interviewed, written about, and photographed as he went for speaking engagements in Jakarta and overseas to a diverse audience of think tanks, ‘civil society’ organisations, international businessmen assembled at five star hotels by their national Chambers of Commerce or Business Councils,¹³¹ students at university halls, academics at ASEAN themed workshops, Western journalists in

¹³⁰ See, Pitsuwan, 2008.

¹³¹ Business bodies that ramped up their interaction in ASEAN circuits during Surin’s tenure included the Federation of Japanese Chambers of Commerce and Industry in ASEAN (FJCCIA), US-ASEAN Business Council, EU-ASEAN Business Council, the Canada-ASEAN Business Council, among others.

television interviews, and policy makers at prestigious elites gatherings from New York to Davos. At each of these performances, Surin, like his predecessors, ‘flew the ASEAN flag’ by projecting ASEAN – conflated and interchangeable with ‘Southeast Asia’ – as a region of 600 million people with a combined GDP of 2 trillion US dollars, as a region of expanding middle classes and rising growth rates, and as a region that was keeping the peace in Asia through its diplomacy. Surin was able to raise the visibility of ASEAN as a multilateral body and – through his embodied performances – of his office and the Secretariat as well, creating pressure on international political and diplomatic elites to join the ‘game’ of ASEAN level cooperation unfolding in Jakarta. Surin also raised the pressure on ASEAN’s foreign policy elites to increase their diplomatic investments in Jakarta given that Permanent Missions of ASEAN members were understaffed and often smaller than the expanding missions of Dialogue Partners in the city.¹³²

Table 4: Number of Visitors to the Secretariat during the Surin Years¹³³

Year	Approximate No. of Visitors	% Change (2007 as base year)
2007	1215	n/a
2008	2813	132%
2009	1984	63%
2010	3032	150%
2011 (as of September 2011)	2920	140%

¹³² Staff size in ASEAN Missions ranged from 4 to 20 full-time staff. While Indonesia had more than 20 staff in 2012, Brunei and Cambodia were the most sparsely staffed missions in Jakarta.

¹³³ Source: Pitsuwan, 2011: 26

Besides fostering such general international pressures that fuelled the growing diplomatic investments in Jakarta, Surin – in the little time he actually spent at the Secretariat – also contributed to this thickening ‘ASEAN’ scene with a series of more local strategies. In the immediate months after the Charter’s ratification, Surin was pivotal in persuading external partners to appoint their Ambassadors to ASEAN, a process that simultaneously buttressed the Secretariat’s position as the growing legion of Ambassadors had to present their credentials to him at a heavily photographed and publicised visit to the Secretariat.

Third, and in a manner that marked him decisively away from the mould of his predecessors, Surin forged links between a range of actors and interests – ‘civil society’ organisations, Jakarta think-tanks, Western embassies, Euro-American foundations with project funds, and multi-national business groups – some of which took concrete material and symbolic form in Jakarta: from the office of “Air Asia ASEAN” in Jakarta, the “ASEAN Today” show anchored and telecast from the lobby of the Secretariat,¹³⁴ to the annual Swiss funded “Informal Jakarta Dialogue” involving Surin and representatives of regional civil society groups. It was in creating these new permutations that Surin became, as he put it, the player of an “ASEAN jigsaw.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Hosted by the former CNN anchor Dalton Tanonaka. Monthly episodes available on YouTube on <<https://www.youtube.com/user/AseanTodayTV?spfreload=10>>.

¹³⁵ Interview, Oxford, 19 October, 2014.

In sum, a new and distinct field of ASEAN diplomacy had taken root in Jakarta. This diplomatic field was anchored in the city by the symbolic presence of the Secretariat, stimulated by the steady arrivals of full-time Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to ASEAN with their phalanx of diplomats housed in Permanent Missions to ASEAN, and thickened by the constellation of extant actors – from ambassadors jointly accredited to Indonesia and ASEAN, Jakarta think tanks, ‘civil society’ actors, representatives of multinational businesses, and a ‘regional’ press – that were magnetised by the new diplomatic resources mobilised from afar to produce ‘ASEAN’ in the city.

5.3 The ‘Local’ Politics of the Jakarta Diplomatic Field

As new actors arrived and institutions were set up a, a new realm of politics was inaugurated, a politics local enough to be self-contained, everyday and obscure, and yet *not* ‘local’ enough in that it was rooted less in the economic and political circuits of power in Jakarta than it was in the meso-level interactions between emergent groups and institutions whose *dramatis personae* had arrived from a multitude of bureaucratic localities and social spaces from across Southeast Asia and beyond to produce ASEAN. In this section I will follow the spine of the CPR’s experience that offers a vantage point from which to observe the drama – with its unscripted plot, unforeseen alliances and unanticipated twists – that were unfolding as power was ordered in this nascent diplomatic field.

5.3.1 Jakarta in the Jakarta Diplomatic Field

Nonetheless, it is imperative that I begin by accounting for the Jakarta anchored constellation of actors and influences that transect with the wider and decidedly multi-national ASEAN diplomatic scene in the city. The key Indonesian influence in the Jakarta field is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Deplu,¹³⁶ which, with a rejuvenated cadre of career diplomats, and a stronger voice in articulating Indonesia's soft power as the world's largest Muslim democracy (Sukma, 2012), was reaping the benefits of a decade of organisational reforms and "self-improvement" (*proses benah-diri*) – from weeding out generals to introducing an encrypted communications system – initiated by the former foreign minister Hasan Wirajuda (Nabbs-Keller, 2013). Even though Indonesia was widely perceived as a laggard – if not a delinquent – in implementing ASEAN agreements on lowering non-tariff barriers to trade, it was perceived by foreign diplomats and Secretariat staff as *the* leader of ASEAN's 'political-security' deliberations and initiatives, from steering the Association towards the language of democracy and human rights in the Charter,¹³⁷ to keeping a "radar view"¹³⁸ on 'strategic' issues like the balancing practices of Great Powers over the South China Sea, and also fire fighting at times of crisis, most recently in the form of Marty Natalegawa's "shuttle diplomacy" following the rupture at Phnom Penh. In short, Deplu is the key bureaucratic agency that prosecutes on a routine basis what Michael Leifer (1983) referred to as Indonesia's

¹³⁶ Or *Departmen Luar Negeri*. The 'department' was renamed as 'ministry' (*Kementerian Luar Negeri*) but the old name fondly sticks among Indonesian diplomats.

¹³⁷ Emmerson, 2008: 54

¹³⁸ Interview with Secretariat staff, 8 March 2013.

“sense of regional entitlement.” In prosecuting this entitlement and exercising leadership, Deplu’s diplomatic practice is coloured by the oft-repeated Javanese representation of “leading from behind” (*tut wuri handayani*), one that translates in practice (and without being representationally invoked) into the myriad forms of diplomatic face-work by which Indonesia’s diplomats claim to extend equality to fellow ASEAN diplomats and assiduously build “comfort” among them for their ideas and agendas.

Besides fashioning Jakarta as “Ibukota Diplomati ASEAN”, Deplu, and the ASEAN Directorate within it, maintain intimate ties with a tiny elite network of foreign policy intellectuals and university scholars situated in organisations where diverse and opposing networks (*jaringan*) of elite influence have historically converged and circulated (Sidel, 1998). These include, most notably, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that nestled the *jaringan* of Catholic and Chinese elite interests which, through its links to leading New Order military and intelligence operatives, profoundly influenced the politics of New Order Indonesia (Tanter, 1991) besides playing a role in fleshing out the modalities of ASEAN in 1967. While the influence of CSIS in the politics of the Indonesian state diminished after falling out of favour with Suharto in the 1990s, it has, following a phase of re-branding and reorientation in the post-Suharto era, come to once again enjoy intimate access to the corridors of Deplu as both a source of foreign policy advice and as a ‘track two’ conduit to disseminate and publicise the foreign ministry’s concerns.

Besides CSIS, the Habibie Centre is an active organiser of workshops on Deplu’s pet ASEAN concerns, and also sends its researchers to participate at ASEAN seminars and symposia at the Secretariat. The Centre is where another *jaringan* of modernist

Muslim elites converged during the New Order years. Though oppositional, these *jaringans* – one Chinese and Catholic, one Muslim and modernist – have historically served as vehicles of elite circulation and influence. As John Sidel (2006: 129) notes, both were “profoundly socialised and deeply absorbed within the secular circuitries of the modern Indonesian state.” While the bases of their convergence had grown towards the end of the New Order, this convergence has only increased in the post-Suharto era where they have come to stand together under Deplu’s umbrella of patronage to collectively advance a Deplu-driven foreign policy discourse on human rights and democratisation in ASEAN.¹³⁹

While visible and active, this small local constellation of Jakarta actors are not the protagonists of the Jakarta scene. While they shape the ideas and practice of Indonesia’s foreign policy through their intimate ties with diplomats in Deplu, their links with ASEAN institutions like the Secretariat, CPR as well as the new Permanent Missions to ASEAN are limited. While CSIS collaborated actively over research projects with the Secretariat during the New Order years, this relationship weakened once it went out of favour with the regime. In the post-ASEAN Charter era, such was CSIS’ distance from new ASEAN institutions in the city that its first formal sit-down interaction with the CPR would take place only in 2013, five years after the latter had set shop in the city.

¹³⁹ On the role of these think tanks in Deplu’s foreign policy making see *The Jakarta Post*, 15 September 2011. These points also draw from field interviews with Indonesian foreign policy actors and intellectuals based at LIPI (11 October 2012, 16 October 2012, 23 May 2013), CSIS (11 December 2012, 15 February 2013), a former Head of Habibie Centre (24 April 2013); *The Jakarta Post* (9th October 2012, 5 July 2013) and Deplu (19 April 2012, 18 July 2013).

The bitter struggles for local standing in the Jakarta scene were thus being waged not between these Indonesian actors but between the Secretariat, CPR and foreign partners new to the city. It is to this politics that I shall turn to.

5.3.2 The CPR's Early Days: Battling Frailty and Stigma

The first years of the CPR – a period starting with the arrival of the ‘first generation’ of Permanent Representatives and junior diplomats in Jakarta in 2009 to the phased entry of a ‘second generation’ of diplomats by 2012 – were beset with problems. Even though the CPR was to mimic the name and founding principle of their counterparts at the UN and the EU (Ludlow, 2008), it was born toothless. The drafters of the ASEAN Charter – a band of top civil servants or ‘Senior Officials’ – had denied them any plenipotentiary powers. Evidently, these Permanent Secretaries were keen to pull the strings of ASEAN’s high politics from their capitals.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the idea of moving to Jakarta did not appeal to the Director Generals (DGs) of ASEAN divisions at the MFA’s – hitherto members of the Standing Committee – as they wished to stay close to their ministers in the capital, and were unwilling to give up their “empires” back home where as many as thirty to fifty staff could be employed in their division as opposed to the five to six staff (including a driver) who serviced the Permanent Representative in Jakarta.¹⁴¹ The CPR, then, was born with the stigma of being perceived as an additional layer of bureaucracy ultimately dependent on instructions from their respective capitals. Moreover, it had birthed as a full-time body in Jakarta unsure of how it was to operationalise its mandate given that superordinates in the foreign ministry continued to control the

¹⁴⁰ To be sure, this had been a matter of concern for some drafters of the Charter, see Osman Patra, 2009: 13-14.

¹⁴¹ Interview with former Secretariat staff, 6 December 2012. In the case of Indonesia and Myanmar, the Director General was also a member of SOM.

drafting of ASEAN documents and kept watch over cooperation projects with ASEAN’s wealthy foreign partners.

Table 5: ASEAN at the Foreign Ministry

Foreign Ministers (Based in capitals)	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting ASEAN Coordinating Council
Permanent Secretaries (Based in capitals)	SOM Meetings
Director Generals (Based in capitals)	National Secretariats/ ASEAN Departments in MFA
Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (Jakarta)	CPR
CPR Working Group (Jakarta)	CPR Working Group Meetings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deputy Permanent Representative 2. First Secretary 3. Second Secretary 4. Third Secretary 5. Attaché 	

5.3.3 *CPR vs. the Secretariat: Imposing Hierarchy*

At the ASEAN Secretariat, the mood among staff about the impending arrival of the CPR ranged from indifference for some to a heightened sense of “alertness” for most.¹⁴² As the Ambassadors and diplomats of the CPR arrived in Jakarta, drove frequently into the compound of the Secretariat, walked about the lobby and corridors, and routinely convened within its office spaces, there was, as one staff noted, a sense that “we are being watched”. Adding to these anxieties was the question of the formal relationship between the Secretariat and the new CPR, given that the Charter had

¹⁴² Fieldnotes, 14 February 2013.

mandated the latter to “liaise” with the Secretary General of ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat on all subjects relevant to its work” (ASEAN, 2008: 18). The ambiguous parity, if not equality, suggested by this formulation would soon be put to test.

Seeking to figure their role, the CPR honed in on the one part of their mandate that was immediately available for their intervention: the Secretariat and its internal management where they caught the whiff of alleged financial mismanagement besides a host of informal work practices accreted over the years that had allegedly heightened under Surin’s entrepreneurial management style. The impression of an allegedly ‘mismanaged’ Secretariat, of recalcitrant Secretariat staff unwilling to share information or yield deference, and the everyday, face-to-face mode of interaction by which egocentric aspects of the personal front were exaggerated and responded to more casually, resulted in the breakdown of relations between the CPR and the Secretariat. This breakdown would find its most mythic expression in a budget meeting of the Secretariat in 2011 that lasted four days and spilled well into the early hours of a Sunday morning.

It was in the context of heightened control by the CPR that a supple discourse on the “micromanagement” of the Secretariat took root. In their backstage conversations, Secretariat staff pointed to the influence of the CPR in varied aspects of the Secretariat’s everyday work – from auditing large and petty expenses, the issuing of tenders, recruitments, to prolonged work updates (described as “congressional hearings” and “parliamentary committees”).¹⁴³ As an officer from the Corporate Affairs division observed “I think they [CPR] see the Secretariat as competitors because they are new here. So much of our time is spent in supporting the CPR. We

¹⁴³ Fieldnotes, 13 May 2013; Fieldnotes, 12 July 2013.

have to give them information like HR [he points to the telephone to his left] They know all our phone numbers, even better than the SG now.”¹⁴⁴ Another Secretariat employee noted “these guys [CPR] are breathing down our necks all the time. Basically you have now a Board of Governors sitting here full time and it will be very difficult to work if you have to entertain your board members all the time.”¹⁴⁵

Besides extending the state’s control into the far reaches of the corridors and cubicles of the Secretariat, the CPR’s arrival also clipped the wings of its most public Secretary General and neutralised his initiatives. For a full year before the CPR arrived, the Secretariat in Jakarta presented an “open field” for Surin, whose entrepreneurial style, rooted in his expansive, liberal cosmopolitan habitus sharpened by his struggles to gain profile and influence in the post-Charter ASEAN field, was at odds with ASEAN’s long-standing diplomatic and bureaucratic habitus that came to be expressed by the CPR. The case of the low cost airline Air Asia, which went farther than most businesses in fashioning an ‘ASEAN’ regional brand for itself, serves as a case in point.

Attracted to the immense business opportunities of the booming low-cost air travel market in Indonesia, drawing upon ties of mutual acquaintance between its top management and Surin, and finding a hook for its disarmingly plebian “everyone can fly” pledge (Osman, 2012) with Surin’s ambition for a “people centered” ASEAN, Air Asia formally acquired permission from the Secretariat for the use ‘ASEAN’ in its branding exercise in 2008. With an Airbus A320 emblazoned in the ASEAN livery, flight attendants brought in from all 10 member countries, and with a

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Secretariat staff, Jakarta, 13 December 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with former Secretariat staff, Singapore, 07 December 2011.

passenger manifest boasting of diplomats, businessmen, journalists, policy figures and bloggers, Air Asia tied up with Surin and the Secretariat to celebrate ‘ASEAN Day’ in 2009 with a three city bash that involved breakfast in Jakarta, lunch in Kuala Lumpur and a sumptuous dinner hosted by the Thai Prime Minister (and Democrat Party leader) Abhisit Vejjajiva in Bangkok.¹⁴⁶

Such a public celebration, and indeed exhibition – of ASEAN’s symbols and of a proactive Secretary General – was not to everyone’s appetite, however. With the CPR just settling into Jakarta in 2009, questions came thick and fast about why a commercial business was interested in working with ASEAN and whether the Secretariat had the authority at all to grant permission for ASEAN’s seemingly sacred symbols. With the CPR diplomats placated – only after wresting control over the use of ASEAN’s symbols from the Secretariat, and after corporate presentations by Air Asia’s executives – the airline went a step further in 2012 by establishing its “regional” “Air Asia ASEAN” office in Jakarta. Staving off criticisms – especially in Malaysia where it was perceived as a blow to Kuala Lumpur’s ambition to be a low cost carrier hub in the region – Air Asia’s CEO explained that the move to Jakarta, near the Secretariat, was to “ensure that our voice, our concerns and our appeals are heard much more clearly on the corridors of power within ASEAN,” especially in pressing ASEAN to implement the Open Skies agreement envisaged under its economic community blueprint (*The Jakarta Post*, 2012b).

¹⁴⁶ For a detailed account of this event see the blog post “On a High with ASEAN and Air Asia” by “Maverick,” 10 August 2009, < <http://maverick.co.id/on-a-high-with-asean-and-air-asia/>>. [Accessed 20 June 2014]

With Surin's departure from the Secretariat in 2012, with the lack of interest evinced by the new Vietnamese career-diplomat turned Secretary General closer in style to ASEAN's habitus, and with concerns conveyed hushly by state bureaucrats that the branding gave off the "wrong message" that "ASEAN is low cost" and that national carriers were more appropriately "ASEAN airlines," the Air Asia ASEAN office wound up in less than two years, with its top executives returning to Malaysia and the office perched on the dizzying heights of Jakarta's downtown relocated to Air Asia's Indonesia headquarters near the city's airport in far away Tangerang.¹⁴⁷ In thwarting this alliance between a commercial entity and the Secretariat, ASEAN's diplomatic habitus – an obsession with status concerns (in this instance, keeping symbols sacred and not profane), its inveterate preference for official definitions (national carriers as more 'ASEAN' than an enterprising commercial one), and a zealous guard over state prerogative – had asserted itself.

5.3.4 The CPR Ascends: Status, New Roles, and Functional Kinship

Even though the CPR had succeeded in imposing its authority over the Secretariat, the first two years were a period of demoralisation and disenchantment among its ranks. CPR diplomats were reeling under a fairly difficult relationship with their capitals. Not only were they dependent on instructions from their DGs and Permanent Secretaries in their cushy offices in Manila, Bangkok or Hanoi, these superordinates also sought to "hive off administrative work to the CPR while keeping sexy things to themselves" as Gary, a senior CPR diplomat put it.¹⁴⁸ The Charter had

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Air Asia officials, 4 July 2013. Also see, Leong, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with CPR diplomat, Jakarta, 10 July 2013.

mandated the CPR to “facilitate ASEAN cooperation with external partners” (ASEAN, 2008: 18) but for the first few years, the CPR barely had diplomatic counterparts from Dialogue Partner countries in Jakarta with whom they could hold regularised meetings and formulate activities. Importantly, the drudgery of ‘overseeing’ the Secretariat – the boredom of interminable meetings over the purchase of computer equipment, office stationary, ventilation, and indeed catering expenses, all a far cry from what Iver Neumann (2005) refers to as the “heroic script” of the field diplomat – had worn down several diplomats in the CPR.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, interpersonal relations among the members of this group who met as often as twice or thrice a week (the Working Group) or two to four times a month (the PRs), with numerous formal receptions thrown in, were inchoate and prone to misunderstandings and flare-ups. Recalling the ennui of meetings, the barbs traded among each other across the meeting table, and the breakdown of their professional and social ties with the Secretariat, Adik, a veteran of the first generation, summed up the general sentiment that “it was a time of confusion for everyone.”¹⁵⁰

For all its early troubles, however, the CPR began to consolidate from 2011. It is possible to point to three mutually reinforcing processes that enabled the CPR’s consolidation and ascendance in Jakarta.

¹⁴⁹ Especially among the more ‘intellectual’ senior CPR diplomats who would often preface a semi-structured interview with a broad sweep discussion of the Cold War and of the intricacies of International Relations theory, only to lament, when asked about their daily work, that “ASEAN is, it’s a *very borrrring* meeting, all the ASEAN meetings. We spend nights and nights talking about five computers, during the meeting. *FIVE* computers only. And it’s only 700 dollars!” Interview with CPR diplomat, 30 July 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with CPR diplomat, 28 June 2013.

First, and attesting to the relational quality of this emergent local field, the CPR were assiduously propped up by ASEAN's Dialogue Partners, most notably by Western diplomatic missions in the city. Gerard, a European diplomat in Jakarta, recalls

By early 2009 the PRs started arriving here, finding their feet. And I felt from the beginning, that this [CPR] was the *key group in town*, in ASEAN...And so, we met them on a courtesy visit the moment they arrived in Jakarta. Then, the year after, we planned to bring them to Brussels to see the engine room of integration. The CPR visit was initially planned together with Surin who would accompany them for half of the trip. A week before the CPR was to fly out I got an SMS "any problems with the volcano?" And I thought 'Oh my god, some volcano is going off again in Indonesia' and then I learned it was the volcano in Iceland [Eyjafjallajökull eruption, 2010]. So the trip had to be cancelled. I spent the next week rescheduling because I thought let's keep the momentum going. The CPR came back with a new date, but to get Surin on board we would have to wait for three more months. At that time, Brussels wanted to wait for Surin because it was still in 'Surin-mode' – he was the big show in town, everybody wanted to see him, because he was a fantastic, elegant man, brilliant thoughts ... But I tried to discourage that [Pauses] I told Brussels let's have it now without Surin because I felt CPR people were key, and that's what happened.¹⁵¹

While EU diplomats were among the first to "spot the CPR," the Americans would take the lead in reaching out and buttressing them. US' comprehension of the emerging Jakarta field, and an assessment of its potential role, was indicated as early as 2010 in a cable sent by its ASEAN Mission to the State Department.¹⁵² Discerning

¹⁵¹ Interview, Jakarta, 2nd July 2013.

¹⁵² See, US Cable, 2010.

a “three way battle for authority” among the CPR, ASEC and the ASEAN capitals,” US Mission officials observed that the resolution of this battle would have implications not only for the “efficacy and efficiency of US engagement with ASEAN” but also for ASEAN’s prospect for “preeminence in Asia’s emerging regional architecture.” Noting the CPR’s desire for a more policy oriented as opposed to facilitative role, cognisant of an overworked Secretariat “chastened” by the CPR’s arrival, and also “impressed” by the “apparent seriousness of purpose” expressed by the new PRs, the memo observed that the “strengthening of CPR decision-making authority” – so they may not have to consult capitals to draft documents with Dialogue Partners – would “concentrate an important ASEAN programmatic component in Jakarta” and would also “dovetail with our own efforts to push out ASEAN-specific work out to the region”. It argued, in conclusion, that the US should support Surin as a “champion of both ASEAN centrality and the ‘ASEAN brand’” and also “bolster CPR authority vis-a-vis ASEAN capitals.”

That this thinking would shape practice became evident once David Carden, a political appointee personally known to Obama, took office as the resident Ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta. Under Carden, not only did the US Mission expand its tray of ‘ASEAN-US’ projects, it also showered its attentions on the CPR with a host of status conferring practices. In doing so, the US ambassador was assisted in no small measure by his “bigger budget”, “nicer residence” and more space for action from his capital, as other Western diplomats were quick to point out. In the view of one diplomat in the city, “David ...he’s proud that he has a special big table built in his house, and he makes it a point that every, more or less, important

American visiting Indonesia will meet at that table with the CPR.”¹⁵³ In this way, a number of prominent figures – from leading State Department officials to the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command – were persuaded to take a few hours out of their bilateral trips to Indonesia to visit the Secretariat and, more importantly, meet with the CPR formally or informally over a meal. Regina, a mid-career female and western diplomat in the city, remarked

So, David is friends with Obama, and when Obama came for his first East Asia Summit in Bali [2011], David arranged for a picture of the CPRs, as a group, with Obama. Even for a good friend of Obama it is not easy to catch him, and some of the CPRs told me how they were kept waiting. But in the end there is this picture, and many of them have it on their desks! So of course, they [CPR] appreciate it, and they pay back. I mean if you get attention then you give attention back.¹⁵⁴

These varied status conferring practices – photo ops of the CPR with state leaders (Obama, twice in 2012 and 2013) and top State Department officials (Hillary Clinton and John Kerry); visits and tours to the USS Blue Ridge docked in Jakarta;¹⁵⁵ meals and meetings with visiting State Department and Department of Defense functionaries –¹⁵⁶ were key in raising the visibility and profile of the CPR not only within the Jakarta field but also to a broader international audience of ASEAN watchers as well, thanks to the stealth and social savvy of the photographers and

¹⁵³ Interview with a Western diplomat, Jakarta, 2nd July 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with a Western diplomat, Jakarta, 20 November, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ For a report of this interaction with pictures see, US Mission to ASEAN, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ For instance, the US Mission organised a dinner between then Deputy Secretary of Defense (and presently US Secretary of Defense) Ashton B. Carter with the CPR in March 2013, and with the Undersecretary of Political Affairs Wendy Sherman in May 2013, among others.

social media strategists of the US Mission who publicised these interactions on the U.S. Mission’s website, Facebook, Flickr account, and twitter feed.

Other Dialogue Partners played their roles too. Many of them swiftly appropriated these status conferring practices – most notably, drawing in their top visiting state functionaries and Ministers on bilateral visits to Indonesia to meet with the CPR– while some fashioned new practices of their own. The EU and Japan, for instance, were among the first to make the CPR visit their capitals starting from 2010. This practice was soon picked up by South Korea, China, India, and the US, and it was only a matter of time before those sitting on the fence about funding “junket trips” – as some Secretariat staff sarcastically called them–¹⁵⁷ followed suit and organised such trips as well, notably New Zealand in 2013 and Australia in 2014. Besides conferring status, these visits were also about introducing the CPR to local think tanks, business councils, foreign and trade ministry bureaucrats and a slew of policy makers in Washington, Tokyo, New Delhi, Beijing and Canberra as the new ASEAN body to target and influence.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, a signal moment that expressed the new standing of the CPR in Jakarta was when the Japan Mission in Jakarta arranged a meeting between Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe and the CPR during the former’s visit to Indonesia in January 2013. Even though the meeting was cancelled with Abe’s abrupt return to Japan to handle the hostage crisis in Algeria involving Japanese citizens, the gesture had left an impression. Joseph, a Western diplomat who had faced difficulties lately in getting his ideas through to the CPR, didn’t hold back as we hung out over coffee in the upmarket Pacific Place mall “Abe was scheduled to

¹⁵⁷ Fieldnotes, 24 June 2013.

¹⁵⁸ See reports of these trips, see ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011d; 2012b; 2012c; 2013; 2014. For pictures, see, Secretariat’s flickr account: <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/65679481@N07/sets/72157631681830009/>>. [Accessed 15 June 2014].

meet with the CPR. Can you believe that! A one-on-one meeting with Abe. And these guys are a *bunch of ambassadors!*”¹⁵⁹

A second process that contributed to the CPR’s ascendance was its new role and its growing body of responsibilities in Jakarta. While the first two years were spent in interminable meetings about the Secretariat’s nitty-gritty expenses and affairs, by 2011, the CPR began to hone in on its mandate to manage relations with ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners. In doing so, they were assuming the Director-General level function of managing ‘development cooperation’ with external partners, and were simultaneously carving out a role closer to the script and professional esteem of the field diplomat.¹⁶⁰ Expectedly, this reconfiguration required the consent of superordinates in the capitals – the DGs and, especially, Senior Officials – who were now pressured to pass work to the CPR on account of the growing presence of ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners in Jakarta and were, moreover, comfortable with letting the CPR work on a raft of ‘regional documents’ in preparation for Ministerial and Summit level meetings, while keeping close control on policy decisions and high politics (paragraphs on the South China Sea disputes, for instance). “It was just practical” Gary says, “to put more work and resources here because of the growing speed of work, the pressure of work, which meant that the chain of command to the capital and back wasn’t feasible.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Fieldnotes, 13 February 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Operative was how this budding interaction was phrased by CPR diplomats: dealing with DPs is “one of the most important things we do”, that “this is where the fun is, actually,” that working with DPs is “sexy and exciting.” Fieldnotes, 21st May 2013, 28 June 2013, 23 July 2013.

¹⁶¹ Fieldnotes, 10 July. Also, Interview with CPR diplomat, 29 July 2013.

Finally, a third factor was at play in the ascendance of the CPR in Jakarta, one that was expressed when these diplomats were found huddled together at large diplomatic receptions in the city, were spotted sharing a lunch table at meetings and workshops attended by foreign diplomats, or when they were seen lingering about after a symposium at the Secretariat in small groups chatting about work or making plans for the next day. Key to the CPR's rise, then, was a certain stabilisation of internal group practices that allowed them to project themselves as a corporate multi-national 'ASEAN' body in Jakarta to foreign diplomats and the Secretariat staff alike.

Composed of two distinct groups – of junior and mid-level diplomats comprising the CPR 'Working Group' and of older ambassadors convening as 'Permanent Representatives' – social interaction within the CPR was organised around the coordinates of age and rank. As noted earlier, CPR diplomats in the early years had to reconcile to the very fact of their almost everyday co-presence in Jakarta – *unprecedented* in ASEAN's diplomatic history – without an antecedent base of socialising practices to settle them in the city. It was thus no surprise that the first batch of CPR diplomats left the enduring impression of being "tough", as some of the later CPR diplomats recall, who "used to bring it up [negotiation] to a personal level"¹⁶² or as "troublemakers" who imposed the CPR's oversight on the Secretariat, as staff warily recount.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, Permanent Representatives too were caught up in the highly "personality based" dynamics of routine weekly interactions, where, as one long-serving PR recalled, "at meetings, people read from the script, and nobody was going to veer from their position."¹⁶⁴ Occasionally, news of heated arguments

¹⁶² Interview with CPR diplomat, 7 May 2013.

¹⁶³ Interviews with Secretariat staff 7 July 2013; 7 August 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with a Permanent Representative to ASEAN, 5 June 2013.

among PRs across the meeting table, sometimes in the presence of foreign diplomats (a grave violation of the ASEAN performance of unity), also made the rounds in the early years of the Jakarta scene.¹⁶⁵

With the passing of time and the infusion of a new batch of diplomats by 2011, however, the social dynamics within the CPR began to settle down. Routine work interactions among Working Group diplomats – ranked from DPR to Attaché and approximately 50 in number by 2013– soon spilled over into more casual social engagement at movies, cafes, restaurants, ‘ASEAN Basketball League’ matches, and bars. The 10 Permanent Representatives – hitherto occupied with opening their missions – took more interest in organising lunches, dinners and golf sessions, besides flying overseas and sight-seeing cities together during numerous Dialogue Partner funded trips.

Crucially, the effects of increasingly dense professional and social interactions were kept in check: younger diplomats learned to relax their professional fronts in social settings but were mindful not to cross certain red lines, for instance, remark too casually about the domestic politics of a country or, more tellingly, engage in and contribute to in-house banter involving ethnic or racial stereotypes (the repartee between a Malaysian Indian with a Malaysian Malay diplomat, or between Singaporean Chinese with a Singaporean Indian diplomat, for instance). Likewise, the personal familiarity notwithstanding, they were careful not to obviate the hierarchy structuring formal settings where the colleague known by a first name at

¹⁶⁵ As recounted by a foreign consultant, Interview, Jakarta, 23 December 2012.

the café would still be addressed by country name – “Vietnam” or Philippines” – or by rank – “DPR” or “senior colleagues” – inside the meeting room.¹⁶⁶

Even as banter and jokes were often traded among PRs in official and social settings – especially among male PRs – an even higher ritual state was constantly maintained among them. Socialising, then, was not carried along openly on the lines of smaller cliques and personal friendships (as with the more relaxed Working Group diplomats texting and chatting to each other on WhatsApp) but involved extending invitations to *all* PRs for every informal gathering, because – as one diplomat put it – “you cannot afford to alienate anyone in ASEAN.”¹⁶⁷ Over time, an ‘informal dinner’ among PRs would do away with the use of name plates and seating arrangement (as it involved at first), and smaller groups and friendships were invariably forged – “smokers will be sitting in one corner, the ladies in another” as one diplomat observed.¹⁶⁸

It is worth noting, however, that the stabilisation of relations did not entail a suppression of disagreement. “Personality”, as the mid-ranked CPR diplomat Aroon noted, was still critical in everyday work: “If X doesn’t like you then he will sit on a proposal or decision and only at the last moment will he convey the agreement from his PR.”¹⁶⁹ Other ways of “giving grief” persisted: “jamming proposals” by claiming that one’s “capital hasn’t gotten back yet” and deferring issues to the next meeting, being the chief tactics at play. What the new informal and almost everyday modes of social interaction enabled, rather, was a way to defuse the disruptive effects of

¹⁶⁶ Fieldnotes, 21 May 2013; 7 May, 2013; 28 June 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Fieldnotes, December 13, 2012.

¹⁶⁸ Fieldnotes, 9 November 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Fieldnotes, 10 July 2013.

disagreements, and also allow for an embodied and experienced basis upon which one could hoist notions of functional kinship. As Aroon went on to describe

On Saturday I could be out with you at the movies watching ‘*Despicable Me*’ and on Monday if you haven’t done your homework then I can hammer you [The ‘homework’ involves knowing the national positions of ASEAN states, of consulting diplomats informally in advance, and of “knowing your stuff”]. At meetings we fill our guns with bullets, and *lash* our whips [he laughs]. That’s how it might get some times at meetings. But in ASEAN we are blood brothers. You can fight with brother but at the end you just have to make up. We have to meet and after all work with each other so often, so we take it easy on each other too.

Besides the density of social interactions, functional kinship was being fostered through the shared experience of a daily roster of meetings and official receptions; through specific work practices, most notably, the quintessential closed door meeting among CPR diplomats before they met ‘outsiders’ like a Dialogue Partner; and through the growing “sense” of how they were to work together as a group producing ‘ASEAN’. As national diplomats doing ‘ASEAN’ they were guided less by formal invocations of unity than by what one PR described as an imprecise and shifting ‘ASEAN component’ in their work.

Uhh...In-variiiiiaabbly during discussions, this whole issue of ASEAN centrality, ASEAN unity will always feature, *ya*. And in more cases than not, it is quite *obvious* what the ASEAN interest is, right? On some specific issues, certain countries will go one way or another because of their bilaterals – their separate understandings. But the ASEAN component is always there. You can see that

playing out. So [pause] *difficult to, difficult tooo...uhhh convey in words*, [says this slowly and softly] but [pauses] there is a certain process in which all these things are thrashed out. So, [pauses] but there is always this element of whether this is good for ASEAN or it is not good for ASEAN. Sometimes within ASEAN you can tell, certain countries are not comfortable. So, 'let's not, let's stop it,' if it is, let's say, initiative that comes from one of our external parties. So, there will always be a *sensing* of the comfort level on any particular issue. No country will say, 'I want this, and I will have my way'. There is a certain consensus of sort ...on getting a consensus. And to reach that consensus, the party who has got the most concern would have to buy in or will have to yield. Otherwise it won't happen.

Similarly, CPR diplomats also came to cultivate tacit understandings of formal concepts like "ASEAN unity" and "ASEAN centrality" peppering their formal performances (texts, speeches, presentations) not through belaboured conceptual reflection but again but often through tacit understandings and practical work. As another PR remarked with a sharp laugh "ASEAN unity is simple, sink or swim together!" Likewise, another CPR diplomat noted how the grasp of concepts was expressed above all through practice.

I don't think we will spend hours to define integration, connectivity [laughs] You are wasting time sitting down and talking about it. So long as they [CPR colleagues] understand the concept they are trying to achieve, that's good, go and do it. The moment you can't do it means you can't understand the concept. And you can tell, because you are running around half-cock not really knowing what you are supposed to be doing.

There was yet another source of functional kinship that came from breaking sacred taboos in the comfort of the backstage. This happened, most often, by trading jokes about neutered representations of ‘ASEAN-speak’ and of ASEAN’s anodyne ‘Community’ rhetoric. A field note excerpt from a hanging out session with CPR diplomats is instructive.

After the event, we drove to an upscale restaurant in Kebayoran Baru done up in retro Victorian interiors (it was sharp both to the eye and to my wallet). Seated opposite me were Trunodongso, Ramli and Alex, while seated to my side was Zikri, a long-serving CPR diplomat whom I had been introduced to recently. We had placed our orders and were working up an appetite with a long, chatty session. Zikri regaled us with his recent experiences at the ASEAN Summit in Brunei (all “off the record,” he forewarns me, to some laughter around the table), while others chat about the relative social weight of the diplomatic passport in the West as opposed to their home countries (“you show your passport at Soekarno-Hatta and they ask you to proceed instantly, no questions asked”, Trunodongso claims). A few desultory moments and conversations later, Alex asks Zikri, “So, where is your family?” (I learn later that they were away on a holiday).

Zikri straightens his back and his face assumes a dramatic seriousness.

“Everywhere!” he declares.

Trunodongso and Alex are nonplussed, as am I.

Zikri jabs his finger at Trunodongso and says “You are my *brutthurr*”. He swiftly looks to Alex “You are my *brutthurr* too.”

(It dawns upon us that this is a skit, and we break into smiles and chuckles.)

“All ASEAN is my family!” he insists with a flourish.

Zikri's crooked finger moves towards me. Registering that I'm an Indian citizen and a 'Dialogue Partner country', he says

"Well...you could be family too!"

We are in peals of laughter by now.

Zikri plays on this tune for a bit longer till we settle down. Trunodongso promptly recounts with incredulity an incident at a 'civil society' seminar where participants began to introduce themselves by saying "My name is so-and-so and *I am from ASEAN.*" We laugh out loud again. He adds, "first time it seemed like a joke, then one after the other people began to say this!" He laughs and cringes.¹⁷⁰

By trading jokes about ASEAN, these CPR diplomats – instantiating their multinational diplomatic groupness at that very moment – were not dismissing ASEAN as a diplomatic practice, a practice, which, to them anyways, is firmly grounded in the pursuit of 'national' interests and in some notion of solidarity against the outside 'other'. Instead, they were reconciling, in the comfort of their backstage, with the ambiguity, vacuousness and the banality of sanitised representations that have come to constitute "community-speak" in ASEAN's discourse.

The process of internal stabilisation and consolidation, to add a final few points, also involved new work practices common in the diplomatic trade. PR's, for instance, began to increasingly delegate much of the backroom work – such as preliminary negotiations (over documents) and the drudgery of nuts and bolts Secretariat oversight – to the CPR Working Group, a move motivated not just by their increasing workload but also by a desire to preclude standoffs at the level of ambassadors who maintained a higher ritual state compared to their junior

¹⁷⁰ Fieldnotes, 8 March 2013.

colleagues. Likewise, diplomats within ASEAN missions began to record and share negotiating tactics with new entrants to their missions. As Jia Hui, a mid-career diplomat from an ASEAN Mission, explains: “So I bring them [new diplomats] up to speed not only on issues but also on ways and means to achieve those goals. So-and-so country, you have to approach this way, and so-and-so country, another way. Target this man, not that man. Don’t touch upon these issues. So, not just positions but also strategy, things that won’t be written down in the report.”¹⁷¹

Besides these more general strategies of diplomatic work, they also began to intensify diplomatic face-work fashioned around a putative ‘ASEAN Way’. As they met more frequently, there was a growing stability in the practices of face work deployed and recognition of the relevant repertoire of practices – sayings, doings, along with gestural and postural components – in play. Even though several diplomats from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam struggled with proposing and clarifying their ideas in English, diplomats from Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia were nonetheless careful to give them ‘face’ on the table. Jose, a mid-career diplomat, observes that “when Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines speaks, everybody listens, because they know there is facility for language. If our friends and colleagues from the CLMV speak, we have to work at being attentive to follow and digest what they are saying.”¹⁷² Likewise, Arianna, a CPR diplomat, notes

In the UN system or the Western Way, we tell them like it is. Here, I think we need to be more *subtle* ummm...So, a person may really not talk much in terms of sense, but we still take our own time listening and then politely intervene and

¹⁷¹ Interview with CPR diplomat, 28 June 2013.

¹⁷² Interview with CPR diplomat, Jakarta, 23 July 2013.

say we disagree, that sort of thing. Face is important, I think that's the Asian way...even among us, Singaporean and Malaysian diplomats, we can be direct with each other, but with the CLMV you tend to be more careful because of the language. This group [CPR] is OK because most of them are quite proficient [in English] but sometimes we find that you say something, and then they come out with something else, and you know that they couldn't understand it. So we are just a bit more careful and what we do is we take more time to explain what we are doing.¹⁷³

Likewise, even as a country pitched a proposal to its interests, much effort was made to perform and produce “ownership” among all by convincing fence-sitters and detractors about the benefits of a proposed project for their countries ten years down the line (unlike, as one diplomat claimed, in the UN where “if you're not interested you don't say anything and let it pass”).¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, disagreements were rarely expressed by disruptive arguments and more often by the careful deployment of *silence* on the meeting floor towards a proposal (as opposed to active argumentation), a cue to the participants that the matter had to be dropped for now in deference to seeking consensus in the backstage.

5.3.5 *Winners and Losers*

A hierarchy had thus emerged in the five years during which the Jakarta scene took root and consolidated, a hierarchy with the CPR at the apex of local power. While the CPR had imposed its will over the Secretariat, it also came to exercise a subtle

¹⁷³ Interview with CPR diplomat, Jakarta, 28 July 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with CPR diplomat, 7 May 2013.

standing over the same foreign diplomats and missions that had shored them up through a raft of status conferring practices. Coming into their own, the CPR began to draw confidence from the structure of their relations as *one* corporate body dealing with *ten* wealthy Dialogue Partners and other foreign partners in Jakarta that were keen to lobby and impress them.

This confidence and standing was expressed in how the CPR began to exercise their power to approve or delay projects proposed by Dialogue Partners, by adjudicating over the definition of an “ASEAN project” (Chapter 6), and by their growing ability to say ‘no’ to proposals by Dialogue Partners. An especially acute way in which foreign diplomats experienced the growing latitude of the CPR was in the perceived nonchalance, if not indifference, of the CPR in organising collective donor coordination meetings with them, a practice warranted by the OECD backed Paris Declaration of 2005 under which donees must coordinate aid with all donors to avoid duplication.¹⁷⁵ Devoting much time to crafting and monitoring such projects, foreign diplomats were fatigued by the pattern of overlaps and repetition among them in their individual trays of projects with ASEAN. The problem, as one Western development consultant put it, was that “the Secretariat and CPR, didn’t want the donors, the Dialogue Partners, to be meeting together...they prefer to play them off as different groups and not have to face them with one consolidated agenda. So, they weren’t very encouraging, in fact, in the ASEAN sort of way, without saying ‘No, you can’t do that,’ just kind of not supportive of it.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, available at [www.oecd.org http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf). [Accessed 15 June 2014].

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Western development consultant, Jakarta, 8 July 2013.

If the CPR were the decisive winners of the political contests in the Jakarta scene, the Secretariat was its clear loser. Besides being brought under the everyday surveillance of the CPR, the Secretariat also bore the brunt of organisational pressures emanating from the growing density of diplomatic activity in the city.¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the role of Dialogue Partners in the Jakarta field had muddled and conflicting results for the Secretariat. On the one hand, they had strengthened the CPR's hand in managing ASEAN's 'external relations' with them on the ground and had unwittingly eaten into an area of work that had hitherto been a source of attention and esteem to officers at the Secretariat. On the other hand, foreign partners simultaneously singled out the Secretariat as a site of intervention, arguing that chronic staffing issues and the lack of resources were debilitating both their efforts to push out projects for ASEAN cooperation, and, more symbolically, ASEAN's capacity to claim credible leadership of multilateral diplomacy in the region. As a result, and especially with calls for support by Surin starting from 2007, foreign partners raised their support to the Secretariat in a variety of ways: from revamping the Secretariat's website (US); crafting a new corporate design for letterheads and business cards (Germany); offering money for computers, carpets and building renovations (China); and organising a range of workshops to raise staff's expertise in matters ranging from statistics, project proposal writing, project implementation, project management, and more niche training in competition policy, international law, product quality control, disaster management, to name just a few (Australia, Japan, US, Germany, New Zealand, EU). These 'capacity building' exercises to buttress the Secretariat were soon taken a step further – and deeper – when Dialogue Partners stationed their

¹⁷⁷ Interview with ASEAN Secretariat staff, Jakarta, 8 March 2013.

development consultants within the Secretariat,¹⁷⁸ and, more remarkably, by funding core staff positions (Technical Officers and Senior Officers) within the Secretariat on short-term contracts,¹⁷⁹ a development that was met with dismay by some Secretariat staff who viewed this practice as an *ad hoc* palliative, as detrimental to the material and symbolic bases of the Secretariat's impartiality, and more tellingly, as emblematic of the myopia of ASEAN's member states to address long-term staffing problems at the Secretariat.

The inflow of Dialogue Partner resources to bolster the Secretariat were, however, undercut by the cumulative effects of the CPR's micromanagement and by the eroding value of an already stagnant salary structure which resulted in an exacerbating problem of turnover at the Secretariat. This was especially acute among the locally recruited professional staff who used the Secretariat as a springboard to jump to the more remunerative job market of private companies, international agencies, and, occasionally, the small 'ASEAN' job market of high paying consultancies funded by Dialogue Partners and their development contractors in Jakarta.¹⁸⁰

Besides investing in the Secretariat's 'capacity', ASEAN's Dialogue Partners also became the new and most influential singers of a growing chorus on 'strengthening the Secretariat,' expressing their dissatisfaction with the Secretariat's resources and staffing to the CPR at official meetings, and conveying the effects of the Secretariat's

¹⁷⁸ As management teams funded by USAID, AusAID, GIZ and Japan's ASEAN Integration Fund.

¹⁷⁹ Funded by the EU under the 'ARISE' project ('ASEAN Regional Integration Support From the EU 2013-2016); while Australia has provided funding for staff in the Secretariat's legal division.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Dialogue Partner diplomat, 30 May 2013.

problems on the speed and efficacy of their work over informal conversations at several gatherings in Jakarta.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explicate the form and politics of a distinct field of multilateral diplomacy centered upon a city that has been ambitiously fashioned as the “diplomatic capital of ASEAN.” I began by fleshing out this diplomatic field in terms of the actors, institutions, and practices that animate and shape it. I then accounted for the emergence of this diplomatic field by examining the proximate and wider international forces – ranging from the consequences of the ASEAN Charter, the pressures exerted by a new Secretary General at the Secretariat, to the symbolic and material effects of wide ranging geopolitical shifts and reorientations – that were animating the movement of people (diplomats), offices (Permanent Missions) and resources (money and projects) from far corners of the globe to Jakarta. Third, and finally, I examined the ‘local’ politics of the Jakarta diplomatic field, a self-contained drama where new actors jostled with the old for recognition and authority and where, ultimately, victors emerged and losers grudgingly reconciled. This local politics of the Jakarta field is a study also of the fate of the Secretariat in the new era of the CPR and the Charter.

That power struggles would ensue in this nascent diplomatic field is unsurprising and indeed expected. What is worth noting, however, is the idiom in which these power struggles were waged and resolved, and which shed light on the workings of ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus in the following three ways. First, it fleshes out the accent of this habitus on guarding state power and prerogative over ASEAN’s diplomatic project. This assertion of state power was expressed in decisive ways by

the CPR's imposition of authority over the Secretariat and its new expansive Secretary General working with understandings and styles at variance from ASEAN's traditional habitus. Even though the Charter mandated the CPR to "liaise" with the SG and the Secretariat, a hierarchy in *favour* of state power was imposed by the CPR in Jakarta. Second, ASEAN's diplomatic habitus is illuminated through the experience of the CPR as an institution both unprecedented and *sui generis* in ASEAN's diplomatic history. The CPR's journey from obscurity to prestige discloses the role of foreign partners in shaping ASEAN's diplomatic project and the salience of status conferring practices as an idiom in which the CPR's ascendance was both apprehended and enabled. Third, the CPR's journey from disarray to stabilisation and consolidation illuminates how a repertoire of dispositions (to uphold and save the state's face), practices (of face-work and impression management), and the underlying moral grammar of relations (of performing equality and recognition) were put in play to generate functional diplomatic kinship among ASEAN's newest body of diplomats.

CHAPTER 6

THE DIPLOMATIC GAME IN JAKARTA

6.1 Introduction

Just as actors and institutions in Jakarta were finding their feet and negotiating new hierarchies in the field, a diplomatic game in Jakarta was consolidating under the weight of work practices generated by the logic immanent to the diplomatic field, propelled by the pressures of wider geopolitical forces, and fashioned by the signs and styles of doing diplomacy with ASEAN. In this Chapter I will flesh out the game-like quality of this diplomatic field and its economy of symbolic exchanges, from the vantage point of foreign diplomats as they engage with and indeed produce ASEAN's diplomacy.

This Chapter will demonstrate how the diplomatic field in Jakarta has emerged *a)* as a site where a distinct 'ASEAN level of cooperation' is being instituted and codified through an array of work practices straddling diplomacy and international development, *b)* as a symbolic space to demonstrate commitment to ASEAN and be seen as a "player" in the game of Asian security, and *c)* as a site where geopolitical anxieties are apprehended in routine practices and where representations of international power are both generated and relayed to wider discursive and bureaucratic circuitries of balancing in Asian security. I argue that the diplomatic game in Jakarta offers insights into the workings of ASEAN's diplomatic habitus,

most saliently in the work practices and style of diplomacy learned, practiced and performed by foreign diplomats in Jakarta.

6.2 The Jakarta Field as a Site, Funnel and Symbol for ‘ASEAN-Level Cooperation’

With the growing size of the Jakarta scene, a certain pattern had emerged in the practice of carving out and sustaining multilateral relations with ASEAN. The circuitries that had historically produced ‘ASEAN’ multilateral activity – running through official ‘ASEAN’ meetings strewn across Southeast Asia – were now being rewired and rerouted through the people, mechanisms and institutions based full-time in Jakarta. To get a grip on this point it is instructive to comprehend what official ‘ASEAN’ activity includes as well as the apparatus that produces it.

Starting out as a staunchly anti-Communist and pro-market band of states during the Cold War, ASEAN secured the diplomatic attention of a host of Western countries that supported the Association not only by diplomatic engagement forged through Post-Ministerial Conferences (Severino, 2006, 3-4; Antolik, 1990: 71-73) but also by that novel tool of twentieth century diplomacy – foreign aid (Lancaster, 2007:1-24). For over three decades, the Secretariat became the conduit through which industrialised countries channeled resources to a sprawling web of bureaucratic networks spanning ASEAN’s rich and poor, mainland and littoral, and older and newer, members. In contrast to bilateral development aid programs geared primarily to poverty alleviation and hands-on service delivery (building roads and schools, for instance), the aid sluiced towards the multilateral track to ASEAN has been

historically and overwhelmingly devoted to raising the capacity and skills of the region's bureaucrats across all kinds of national ministries and agencies.

To do diplomacy with ASEAN, then, involved not simply signing up to diplomatic treaties¹⁸¹ and agreements, attending high level meetings with appropriate diplomatic and political representation, and inking flexible free trade deals. It also entailed 'deepening' relations by establishing a 'Trust Fund' at the Secretariat, devising new projects for cooperation, and plugging into these circuits of aid delivery and distribution to the region's bureaucrats and ministries in the name of supporting 'ASEAN' and – in its most recent formulation – 'ASEAN Community building'.

With the arrival of the CPR in Jakarta, this apparatus of ASEAN activity – consisting of both diplomatic interaction (negotiations to draft documents) and also the record-keeping of development cooperation financed by foreign donors – was being slowly, but steadily, channeled through the Jakarta field. This was on account of three reasons.

First, several documents that formed the very basis of 'ASEAN' and multilateral cooperation with a foreign partner were now being fleshed out in minute detail by the CPR in Jakarta. Guided by an overarching agreement signed at the Summit level, these more operational documents – referred to as a Plan of Action or a Work Plan – sought to translate the intent of leaders and ministers into concrete activities like workshops and seminars on transnational crime, pandemics preparedness, disaster management, intellectual property and the like.

¹⁸¹ Especially the 1976 'Treaty of Amity and Cooperation' (TAC).

Second, the CPR began to clarify and rein in ad hoc arrangements worked out between the Secretariat and foreign partners over the past years by deliberating upon the criteria for an ‘ASEAN’ project. While disagreements existed within the CPR on important grounds – on whether an ‘ASEAN’ and ‘regional’ project must necessarily benefit at least two, four, or all ten members – there were two key points of convergence. One, that an ‘ASEAN’ project must be funded not out of donors’ bilateral funds but from an altogether separate pot of resources established as a ‘Trust Fund’ and parked at the Secretariat or a contractor in Jakarta. Two, and with an eye to their own longevity and relevance, the CPR began to enforce to Dialogue Partners that a project was ‘ASEAN’ as opposed to ‘bilateral’ only if it had been routed and stamped by the CPR. Only then, the CPR conveyed, would projects be listed and the dollars counted in their ledger books on “Total Dialogue Partner contributions to ASEAN” (See Annexure 4).

A third factor that added momentum to this rerouting and rewiring came from the more general pressures produced by the presence of the CPR, the Secretariat and Dialogue Partners in Jakarta. The growing spate of meetings and informal breakfasts and dinners between CPR diplomats and officials visiting Jakarta served as a trigger for the generation of more ASEAN-themed work. Such meetings became venues to tease out areas for cooperation, and a mention here and there – “oh, *by the way*, we don’t have much coordination on issue X”¹⁸² – served as a starting point to propose a workshop (that is, a “project”), which in turn produced a new cycle of meetings and workshops to formalise guidelines, roles, and documents for future interaction.¹⁸³ Meanwhile, Dialogue Partner diplomats in the city became an interface between

¹⁸² Interview with CPR diplomat, 28 June 2013.

¹⁸³ Fieldnotes, 11 May 2013.

ASEAN's bodies in Southeast Asia and their departments and agencies back home, linking the two sides with greater ease and speed and suggesting ideas for crafting projects and activities for cooperation.¹⁸⁴

It is worth emphasising that these numerous meetings and projects designed by Mission diplomats alongside their foreign aid counterparts in Jakarta (from AusAID, USAID, GIZ, CIDA, among others) were performative practices with underlying symbolic import. It was in and through the production and enactment of these documents and projects that the representation of 'ASEAN cooperation' was – in a veritable substantialist vein – given meat and flesh. Lifting a copy of a 10 page 'Plan of Action' (PoA) that he painstakingly negotiated with the CPR over the past seven months, Sebastian remarked “when my [Foreign] Minister returns this year and meets with [ASEAN] officials he can publicly refer to this and say ‘Look, last year I came and said we are committed to working with ASEAN, and here’s what we have done – one, two, three.’”¹⁸⁵

In sum, the increase in the volume of 'ASEAN' work flowing through, and occasionally created in, the Jakarta scene was raising the 'regional' quality of this space and firming up its reputation as a site for foreign partners to engage in the game of multilateral 'ASEAN level' cooperation.

¹⁸⁴ Fieldnotes, 24 October 2012.

¹⁸⁵ A PoA with more than 80 bullet points memorialising a series of intentions, dialogue mechanisms and activities. Fieldnotes, 13 February 2013.

6.3 The Jakarta Diplomatic Field as Symbolic Theatre

With the growing consolidation of ASEAN work in and through Jakarta, the city was also becoming the stage for a variety of symbolic practices, especially by foreign partners who had come from far and away to buy an entry ticket, if not pay their annual dues, for membership to the game of Asian security managed by ASEAN. Indeed, it is precisely through these symbolic practices – that is, practices important mainly for what they represented and implied – that the built-in competitive logic and ‘game’-like quality of this diplomatic field structured at once by the traditional goals of diplomatic work (to gather information and build influence) and by the geopolitical anxieties specific to this landscape (the US ‘pivot’, contention in the South China Sea, ASEAN’s ‘centrality’, and the like) was being apprehended by its performers and disclosed to its audience.

6.3.1 Staging Performances in Jakarta

A practice with considerable symbolic heft was that of staging visits to the ASEAN Secretariat. For nearly three decades, the Secretariat at Jalan Sisingamangaradja had rarely shone in the glitter of high-level diplomatic and political presence within its precincts. To be sure, some of ASEAN’s political leaders had occasionally made visits in the pre-Charter past – Suharto in 1981, Chuan Leekpai in 1992, Gloria Arroyo in 2002, and Thaksin Sinawatra in 2002. But besides featuring primarily regional elites, these ceremonial visits were also motivated by less pressing concerns: to inaugurate the building (Suharto, 1981) or to pat on the back of the Secretary General nominated from their country (Arroyo, 2002). From 2008 onwards, however, high-profile visits to the ASEAN Secretariat became more frequent, drew in a host of

international political and diplomatic elites, and were generated by the concerns and anxieties more typical to the trade of diplomatic lobbying and impression management.

While the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the German foreign minister were among the first to visit the Secretariat in 2008, the signal moment to electrify and enliven the Jakarta scene as a realm of “optics” and “gestures”¹⁸⁶ was Hillary Clinton’s visit to the Secretariat in February 2009, as part of her stop in Indonesia during her first overseas trip as the US Secretary of State. Dressed in her trademark pantsuit in cobalt blue, with the burnished ASEAN logo in the background, Clinton announced from the Secretariat’s lobby that the US was initiating an inter-agency process to accede to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and conveyed her intent to attend – with a clear view to remedy an erratic record of diplomatic participation during the George W. Bush years – the ASEAN Regional Forum five months later.¹⁸⁷ The visit made an impression: in a meeting with Scott Marciel, the then US ambassador to ASEAN, Singapore’s veteran diplomat Tommy Koh praised “Clinton’s visit to Indonesia, and, in particular, to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta,” noting that “the visit to the ASEAN Secretariat served to mollify Southeast Asian countries not on the Secretary’s itinerary...by placing a regional stamp on the trip” (US Cable, 2009).

¹⁸⁶ “Optics” and “gestures” were the terms used by practitioners in Jakarta. Interview with Dialogue partner diplomat, 5 February 2013; with Secretariat staff, 7 May 2013, with CPR diplomat, 10 July 2013.

¹⁸⁷ The decision by Condoleezza Rice to skip the ARF Meeting twice, and George Bush’s decision to postpone the 30th anniversary celebrations of ASEAN-US partnership were held as emblematic of America’s indifference to Southeast Asia and ASEAN, and also fuelled disappointment among foreign policy elites in the region. On the importance of diplomatic representation and an overview of US-ASEAN ties during the Bush years see, Wesley, 2006; Pempel, 2008: 78-81; and Haacke 2010.

With Clinton's visit, the potential of the Secretariat's ageing compound as a site to perform commitment and loyalty to ASEAN was established, and has since been harvested richly by diplomatic missions to ASEAN and foreign embassies that have routinely slotted a stop at the Secretariat in their visiting dignitary's schedule. Since 2009, a string of "VIPs" have made such symbolic visits to the Secretariat, including Dai Bingguo, the State Councillor of the People's Republic of China (2010); Takeaki Matsumoto, the Foreign Minister of Japan (2011); Xanana Gusmao, the Prime Minister of Timor Leste in 2011; Hillary Clinton (again in 2012, to much fanfare and claps at the Secretariat lobby, followed by a closed door meeting with Surin and the CPR where she emphatically urged that 'this [Secretariat] should be a place for policy');¹⁸⁸ Haakon Magnus, the Crown Prince of Norway (2012); Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of China (2013); Laurent Fabius, the Foreign Minister of France (2013); Samuel Locklear, the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (2013, and 2014); Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2013); Frans Timmermans, the Dutch Foreign Minister (2013); John Kerry, the (new) US Secretary of State (2014); and John Baird, Canada's Foreign Minister (2014), alongside a growing number of foreign ministers, Presidents and Prime Ministers from ASEAN member states.

Not only were these symbolic visits to the Secretariat effective in signaling commitment to the band of ASEAN diplomats stationed at the Permanent Missions to ASEAN and embassies to Indonesia in Jakarta, they were also closely watched by fellow foreign diplomats in the city as they made sense of their relative standing in this space of positions. Meeting me a few days after the Foreign Minister of China

¹⁸⁸ Interviews with Western diplomats on 20 November 2012 and 15 February 2013.

and a Japanese politician made visits to the Secretariat,¹⁸⁹ Francesca, a diplomat in the EU Delegation in Jakarta, talked about the woes of her Mission in catching up to what other Missions in Jakarta had become increasingly adept at doing.

You saw? The Chinese foreign Minister was here and he sees the ASEAN Secretariat. There have been two occasions of great frustration where high officials did not find it necessary to visit the ASEAN Secretariat. We were here when Hillary Clinton visited ASEC and there was celebrations because it was such a sign of recognition of the staff working here but also of ASEAN. The Swedish Foreign Minister [holding EU Presidency] was here later in 2009 to sign a partnership of cooperation with Indonesia. Our staff worked behind the scenes and lobbied with the Ministry that being in town he should seize this opportunity and have a meeting with Dr. Surin at the Secretariat. Didn't happen. Then last year Catherine Ashton was in Brunei, and the SG's people came to my bosses – because they know us – with the idea of a bilateral consultation with the minister. [Richard pauses, then blows air from his mouth in apparent frustration] Our reaction was of course, we will make it happen and at the end it did not happen. Apparently it was not considered important enough to take out half an hour for the meeting. It was such a missed opportunity.¹⁹⁰

Ashton would eventually visit the Secretariat in late 2013, but, as another Western diplomat sizing up his EU colleagues noted, the “trick is to understand that here, you are either the first, or maximum the second...if you postpone [opening a mission to ASEAN; visiting the Secretariat, etc.] for a long period of time then you miss the opportunity. You have to be the first or second to give them recognition because in

¹⁸⁹ Visit by Wang Yi on 2 May 2013, followed by a courtesy call from Akira Matsu, member of the Upper House of the National Diet of Japan, on 6 May 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with European diplomat, 6 May 2013.

fact this is what they are looking for – recognition as an institution.”¹⁹¹

6.3.2 “Branding and Visibility”

Just like courtesy visits to the Secretariat, the burgeoning tray of development projects proposed, crafted or approved in Jakarta were both performative and mired in the politics of amiable yet unmistakable diplomatic contest. Indeed, and to varying degrees, these projects were being churned out on account of this contest, even though the logic of this international competition was perennially suppressed and euphemised. As one Australian consultant involved in crafting an Australian development project for the Secretariat argued, “our concern was never who is doing what – ‘Oh you know, Japan is doing this, China is doing this’ – it’s about ‘we want to be seen to be a player.’”¹⁹²

Besides establishing oneself as a ‘player,’ foreign partners were highly concerned about whether their projects were being exhibited, noticed and talked about in this market of symbolic exchanges. It was in this regard that “branding and visibility” – to use their terms of choice – were uppermost in the minds of foreign partners as they jostled their pushcarts and peddled their wares before ASEAN diplomats in the city and beyond. Reflecting on his year of work in Jakarta as a foreign diplomat, Sebastian observed

No matter what you do, you can spend a billion dollars, but [without publicity] nobody knows about it; it never happened. Yes, implementing work with ASEAN and strategic aspects of our relationship with them, it is important. But it's *more*

¹⁹¹ Fieldnotes, 30 October 2012; Interview with Western diplomat, Jakarta, 30 May 2013.

¹⁹² Interview, 8 July 2013.

important that they *know it* and they *see [Country Z]* all the time. That CPR *hears Z*, the CPR *sees Z*. You're *planning* strategically every month to have somebody implementing a project to come here and we *use* that person to say, [enacts] 'Heyyyy! CPR!' – especially the CPR – '*Here we are!* We're doing this, we're doing that, what do you think? Let's get your feedback. We'll consult you. You like that? Okay.' So we have to constantly push.¹⁹³

The publicity of projects and diplomatic interactions – a workshop, training seminar at a hotel, cultural events, a high ranking visit to the Secretariat, and so on – involved the quick production of 'press releases' that were posted on the foreign Mission's website, shared as 'status updates' on its official Facebook pages (sometimes of the ASEAN Secretariat too), and as 'tweets' on Twitter, often with a catchy headline and a link to an album of pictures uploaded on Flickr. These press releases were also routinely sent to and occasionally picked up by newspapers and online news websites in Jakarta and in the region. While publicity on a range of social platforms was aimed to generate awareness and "show off" initiatives to fellow foreign colleagues and Indonesian actors in the Jakarta field, these initiatives were publicised to CPR diplomats, as Sebastian suggested above, in a more concerted, one-to one manner at official meetings, opening ceremonies for workshops at upscale Jakarta hotels or at book launches held at the Secretariat. These activities processed and channeled through Jakarta were also publicised by Dialogue Partners – in the form of book launches or the ceremonial release of DVDs – at the sidelines of Summits and Ministerial meetings outside Jakarta, where "high level officials become your captive audience," even though permission to hold such events was harder to come by.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Interview, Jakarta, 15 July 2013.

¹⁹⁴ As remarked by a Secretariat staff, Fieldnotes, 24 June 2013.

That said, not all players were equally good at this game. As a former Secretariat staff working as a Dialogue Partner consultant in Jakarta observed wryly “Sometimes people have the ability to give 1 cent but broadcast it as a dollar. Some people put a dollar but their PR is *so* hopeless that maybe it will be worth only 1 cent!”¹⁹⁵ The contrast he was referring to – and instantly recognisable to an insider in this field – was of the contrasting fortunes of the US and Japan in how they had fared as salesmen in Jakarta. With catchy and swift press releases sent to *The Jakarta Post* and *Kompas*, a well crafted and up-to-date website, and an active presence on social media platforms, the US was the undisputed winner in the game of publicity and branding in Jakarta, even though it was only the fifth largest donor to ASEAN. Such was its success that it had aroused the envy of its Anglophone cousins in Jakarta as well. As one diplomat put it “My ambassador was saying [enacts] “You know that thing the US did and you hear about it all the time? [Pauses for effect] It was like *10,000 bucks!!* And they keep blabbing about it. It was like *manna* from heaven!”¹⁹⁶ Japan, meanwhile, was the largest donor to ASEAN, outpacing US contributions by more than four times at \$452 million dollars.¹⁹⁷ Yet, despite the highly social energies of its Ambassador and its Mission staff in Jakarta, its ability to make an impact in this space of optics was widely seen as wanting.

These contrasts had less to do with the panache of Ambassadors and Mission staff than with the built-in structure of the field (English being the working language) as well as the specific ways their foreign ministry bureaucracies had been wired. As one consultant at the Japan Management Team at the Secretariat lamented, a draft press

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Jakarta, 7 May 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Fieldnotes, 15 July 2013.

¹⁹⁷ Total historical contributions from the US to ASEAN amounted to \$100,243,579.00, while Japan’s contributions were – to the precise cent – \$452,151,861.42. Figures from ASEAN Secretariat, 2013. (See Annexure 4).

release in English had to be sent to Tokyo, translated into Japanese, sifted through various desks of the Southeast Asia division, approved, sent back to Jakarta and then translated again in English before it could be published.

6.3.3 A Matter of Style: Apprehending and Practicing an 'ASEAN Way' of Diplomacy

Arguably more important than the dollars committed, the number of development projects agreed, and the frequency of symbolic visits made to the Secretariat, was the style, temper and tone of doing diplomacy in Jakarta. In this sense, the Jakarta scene, as a site of everyday ASEAN diplomacy, was an important learning ground for foreign diplomats to apprehend, cultivate and deploy a particular style and *savoir faire* that sought to satisfy ASEAN elites' perennial demands for recognition and simultaneously enable foreign partners to pursue their specific national and geopolitical interests.

Through their daily experience of working with CPR diplomats, seasoned foreign diplomats in Jakarta had come to possess a repertoire of representations to describe and prescribe the keys to successful diplomacy with ASEAN. Principal elements to this style and strategy involved to be “humble”; to “understand them without showing that you want to control them or can control them”; to “seek their views on an issue without telling what [your project] its all about; to “prepare the ground” and “sound them out” and not “shock them” by suggesting something formally [at a

meeting] without building their comfort; to respect their “slow pace” and “start early instead of putting pressure at the end,” and so on.¹⁹⁸

In sketching these representations, foreign diplomats would make use of essentialised representations of their own ‘cultures’ and bureaucratic work styles. One European diplomat argued that to work with ASEAN one needs “imagination, dynamism, a proactive, personal approach” which, in his view, was in “big contradiction with the Euro-bureaucratic approach in which you need to follow the rules”.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, another Western diplomat, accounting for the very apparent successes of the US mission in cultivating ties with the CPR, remarked

[The US Ambassador] he’s coming from the private sector, and with him for the first time they [US] changed their approach. Because he’s not coming and saying in the classic *American Way* [claps his thick palms] ‘this is it: take it or leave it!’ Instead, it’s ‘what can I offer?’ And this is also my approach in dealing with them [CPR]. Better not to push, you know, just ask them what they want, what they would like. Of course at the end of the day, I bring them what I want, but it’s how you start and then you say [enacts dialogue] ‘*Yeah!* It’s exactly what I was thinking of, it’s exactly what I was trying to work on’...in most cases they receive what the Dialogue Partners or donors wanted to offer them, not what they needed. Of course its cooperation but it’s what they need in *your* perspective.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Fieldnotes, 20 November 2012; 2 July 2013; 15 July 2013; and Interview in Jakarta, 30 May 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Fieldnotes, 23 April 2013.

²⁰⁰ Interview with a Western diplomat, Jakarta, 30 May 2013.

The performance of recognition and equality towards ASEAN diplomats did not entail the disappearance of hard-fisted work strategies aimed to pressure ASEAN. While it was imperative for the foreign ambassador to maintain a front immune to the rough and tumble of routine project work negotiations and follow-ups, the burden of pressurising was left to the tact of senior and mid-level Mission diplomats while dealing with the CPR and Secretariat. Equally, if not more important, was the labour of local Indonesian staff at the foreign diplomatic Mission who were tasked with sending endless, “nagging” emails to the junior Indonesian staff at the Secretariat which would have been viewed as “annoying” were it not for the fact that, as Sumeru, a local staff with a Dialogue Partner observed, “I can speak to them in Indonesian and it won’t be seen as that annoying.”²⁰¹

These prescriptive representations on how to do diplomacy with ASEAN were equally sharpened and crystalised by extant diplomatic practices and styles that were seen to be counter-productive in the field. Two cases are worth noting. Diplomats from European countries with long postings in Jakarta were highly critical of the style and approach by which the EU had made a case for its membership to the East Asia Summit (more on the EAS to come). Recalling an ill-tempered meeting of EU and ASEAN ministers where the former “shouted” and demanded entry to the EAS, one European diplomat in Jakarta argued

We shouldn’t hammer on the door [taps his knuckles on the table thrice] ‘We want to become member of the club’. I compare this to a case of a man going out with a woman or the other way round, and all the time saying “can we go to your place

²⁰¹ Fieldnotes, January 31, 2013.

tonight?” [Smiles] You should, you should, offer nice lunch, nice dinner, you should be sweet, such that you are invited! This was our message to the EU Delegation here and to Brussels – stop talking about it! Stop saying we want to have sex and let’s make ourselves attractive.²⁰²

To be “attractive,” as some European diplomats suggested, involved advertising the EU Delegation’s work in the region more effectively, and ensuring that *appropriately ranked individuals were brought from Brussels* – Leaders, Ministers or Commissioners – for meetings with their ASEAN counterparts, a practice that had been followed poorly thus far to the chagrin of ASEAN elites, and one that reflected the perceived indifference of senior bureaucrats and politicians in Brussels towards ASEAN.

A second, and more Jakarta specific, case here was of a certain Northeast Asian country ‘X’ (but, it is worth noting, *not* China), whose diplomats and numerous visiting officials were seen to be “pushy,” “impatient”, “standoffish”, prone to “complaining” about the pace of project approval,²⁰³ and were, crucially, given to betraying their specific national interests as their management consultants made presentations before the CPR for a project or when their diplomats negotiated with the CPR over a document. The last point is particularly important, as the *performance* of disinterest – that is, the absence of projection of an interest (Bourdieu, 1984; Swedberg, 2005: 382-383) – was key to the cultivation of a preferred diplomatic style. As one Secretariat staff noted

²⁰² Interview with a European diplomat, Jakarta, 10 November 2012.

²⁰³ Interview, 8 July 2013; Fieldnotes, 13 May 2013.

It's just a sales method. When you see X you feel they are biased, they are just trying to do this for their gain. Australia, US, EU, it seems that they don't mind losing some money for an initiative they don't benefit from in the short term but in the long term they will reap some results. They are doing a lot of support activities that might not be in their own interest. Maybe, Westerners, you know, they are very good in making presentations and stuff like that...they will present things more like "we are trying to help". The US is doing the Trans-Pacific Partnership and there is intellectual property in it and of course a lot of ASEAN countries would find it hard to do it. So they [US] make seminars, and they also teach how the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) should advocate for that. So...you know...they are trying to push this concept but no, they say "we are trying to *empower you*" "we are not trying to push our values, we are trying to *empower SMEs* in their projects".²⁰⁴

In sum, the conferral of status, recognition, and the performance of disinterest, was central to the style of doing diplomacy with ASEAN. As Richard put it "It is a matter of recognition. They are very proud to be treated like that, for them it's very important...more important than what you are doing for them is *how you are doing* it for them."²⁰⁵ And this was true insofar as CPR in their own representations emphasised the illusion of equality with Dialogue Partners, notwithstanding the deep asymmetries in their wealth, trading relations and military power. As one Permanent Representative to ASEAN was at pains to emphasise

[Our relationship] is no longer based on the old paradigm official development assistance (ODA) where people are begging and people are giving. And where

²⁰⁴ Interview, 7 July 2013.

²⁰⁵ Interview with a Western diplomat, 30 May 2013.

people who is giving will have terms and conditions and we just accept. So this is not the case. We see this [sharpens voice and says quick] as a partnership. We are at the same level, we are on an equal footing, and how we are able to complement each other. And that is what we are trying to emphasise in our cooperation with Dialogue Partners.²⁰⁶

6.3.4 The Exchange Rate of Practices in the Symbolic Economy of the Jakarta Field

The motivation for everyday diplomatic work for foreign diplomats – frequent travels, long and dull ASEAN meetings, and the arc of “ASEAN Plus days” and “ASEAN Minus days,”²⁰⁷ as some quipped – was supplied by an informal and unregulated exchange rate of return on their everyday and multifaceted investments in Jakarta.

Nearly all foreign partners looked forward to certain generic and predictable fruits of diplomatic labour – demonstrate the growth and strength of multilateral ties to domestic constituents at home and to the weight-watchers of international influence in the press and foreign policy think-tanks; acquire social capital from personal links with regional bureaucratic and political elites; create platforms (business councils, and the like) for home companies to partake in the acquisition of precious social capital and gain access to local partners; and win enough influence to push through pet-projects that would advantage home businesses and firms.

²⁰⁶ Interview with a Permanent Representative to ASEAN, Jakarta, 21 June 2013.

²⁰⁷ Interview, 6 May 2013.

But besides these ‘low hanging fruits’, as it were, there were returns that were never quite so predictable or guaranteed: secure an entry ticket to ASEAN’s varied, coveted, pan-Asian frameworks for Asian security diplomacy, such as the ARF, EAS, ADMM-Plus, and the EAMF;²⁰⁸ secure ‘trust’ and ‘weight’ to move from technical cooperation and “push open the steel gate of ASEAN Political Security community” where projects of a higher valuation in security and defense cooperation could be forged;²⁰⁹ be entitled to ASEAN’s latest brands and banners for describing cooperation – from “Comprehensive Partnership” to “Strategic Partnership” being the latest label that Dialogue Partner’s have coveted, if not occasionally scrambled over, ever since China acquired it with ASEAN in 2003. In order to examine the politics underpinning this indeterminate exchange rate it is instructive to narrow down to a specific illustration from the Jakarta scene.

Established in 2005 during Malaysia’s chairmanship of ASEAN, the East Asia Summit or EAS began as a pan-Asian Summit that would bring together the political leaders of ASEAN’s 10 members along with the heads of six Dialogue Partners. In the form it took, the EAS was a highly visible product of balancing practices underway in Asian security (Tanaka, 2007: 65-68; Terada, 2010: 71; Breslin, 2007; Nair, 2009). Originally meant to have been a re-branded version of the older framework of 13 states called the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) established in 1997 (that is, the APT was to have ‘transformed’ with a new title into the EAS), the discussions leading up to this re-branding resulted in the creation of an altogether

²⁰⁸ On the ARF see Leifer, 1996; and Khong 1997. On the new defence diplomacy of the ADMM-Plus see Capie, 2013.

²⁰⁹ Fieldnotes, 13 May 2013.

new framework. As it emerged, members within ASEAN – Singapore and Indonesia, in particular – lobbied hard and succeeded in securing new members with a view to check Chinese influence in the APT framework. Thus, with the entry of India, Australia and New Zealand, the EAS emerged as a grouping of sixteen states designed by the practices and rituals of ASEAN diplomacy. As the only pan-‘Asian’ Leader’s Summit of its kind, the EAS has emerged since 2005 as a highly visible event in the annual calendar of ASEAN’s diplomatic pageantry. Assuaged by the US’ ‘return’ to the region with its pivot policy, and with US accession to the TAC in 2009, ASEAN’s elites decided to invite the US – but also Russia – to become the seventh and eighth Dialogue Partner’s to join to the EAS in 2011.

What this meant, to return to Jakarta, was that by 2012 only two Dialogue Partners of ASEAN – the European Union and Canada – were outside the fray of ASEAN’s most vaunted club. For diplomats from both countries, then, the key point of professional dissatisfaction and also a key goal of their postings in Jakarta was to build the ground to effect the sort of change that could win them an entry ticket into the EAS. Building the ground, from their micro-level dome of operations, involved increasing projects for cooperation, engaging in aggressive branding, urging top state officials from home (bureaucrats and ministers) to visit the Secretariat and the CPR in Jakarta, and pressure policy actors in their capitals to establish Trust Funds and open a Permanent Mission to ASEAN.

Despite building the ground, the return – specifically, and explicitly, of entry into the EAS – was difficult to come by and hard to estimate. As the case of the EU and Canada disclose, the economy of symbolic gift exchange in ASEAN – of gift giving,

receiving and return – was governed not only by the way the game was played (volume of resources, branding of projects, *savoir faire*) but also by geopolitical factors structuring the broader game itself. EU diplomats, for instance, were cognisant of their failures in the style of reaching out to ASEAN’s diplomats, the limited visibility of their work, and bemoaned a long history of inappropriate diplomatic and political representation at ASEAN-EU Summits and Ministerial meetings that had violated ASEAN elite’s claims to recognition and had come to symbolise the EU’s lack of “commitment”. Crucially, however, European diplomats were aware – more debilitatingly perhaps – of the desire of ASEAN’s elites to keep the EAS a club for sovereign states and their leaders.

Canadian development aid officials and diplomats would reckon with a raft of strategically deployed *insinuations* by the CPR (“you do things bilaterally, but where is your work with ASEAN?”), *belittlements* (a brusque reference by a senior ASEAN diplomat who put Canada and the sluggish – if not indifferent – Russia in the same sentence on their scale of Jakarta activity), and *ambiguities* (“it is not yet clear if you will be participating in that meeting”), to conclude ruefully that “ASEAN has long memories.” Specifically, Canadian diplomats had to fend off the impression that Canada had been dismissive of the EAS in the past (as yet another “talk shop”) and had just joined the ASEAN game (Harper made a request to join EAS in 2012) only once ASEAN and the region was “sexy” in post-Charter, post-financial crisis, ‘pivot’ to Asia, era.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ As recounted by Western diplomats intimately abreast of the predicaments faced by their Canadian colleagues in Jakarta. Fieldnotes 30 October, 2012; 14 February 2013; Interview, Jakarta, 16 July 2013.

While Canada and the EU grappled with the unpredictable rate of diplomatic returns, they pointed with some resentment to Russia's seat on the EAS table despite being behind the game in Jakarta. Indeed, Russia's entry was also made sense of and explained by reference to the logic of this market. On the one hand, its entry was an act of balancing US' entry to the EAS – "I asked them all and they don't say no", one European diplomat deduced from his interaction with ASEAN diplomats, besides noting "when you talk security it makes sense because they have battleships."²¹¹ On the other hand, Russia's lack of enthusiasm for activities, projects or opening a Permanent Mission to Jakarta was because the Russians had "a different axe to grind" with ASEAN – namely, that they had been kept waiting for too long before joining the EAS alongside the US.²¹²

6.4. Jakarta and the Production of Geopolitical Anxiety

If all politics is local – not simply as Tip O'Neill's (1994) aphorism about US electoral politics, but in a more ontological sense of the tapering minutia of spaces and everyday practices that agglomerate with Brownian cohesion to give rise to the high and mighty of national, regional and international politics – then the Jakarta field can be construed as a site where those grand abstractions of 'Asian security,' 'architecture building' (Bisley, 2009) and the 'balance of influence' (Ciorciari, 2009; Goh 2008/09), were being instantiated and nourished in everyday life. Unsurprisingly, the routine work practices in this field, at times, became sources of anxiety and apprehension that would congeal into circulating representations of power and intent not only within Jakarta but also get transmitted to far away capitals

²¹¹ Interview with a European diplomat, 6 May 2013.

²¹² Fieldnotes, 10 October 2012; 20 November 2012; 18 July 2013.

and sites of geopolitical deliberation by way of diplomatic cables, phone calls and video conferences from Jakarta based missions. In this way, the Jakarta scene was also a site for the production of national stereotypes, suspicions and geopolitical anxiety, and to that extent, it constituted a site, one among many, where the necessary – though not sufficient – conditions for balancing practices (Nexon, 2009) of Asian security were being produced.

The role of the Jakarta scene in producing a swirl of geopolitical representations and anxieties is evidenced most by a quotidian work practice among foreign diplomats that emerged less out of an impulse to balance than out of deep frustration with the Secretariat's capacity and CPR's delays in decision making. Concerned about overlaps and repetitions in their cooperation projects, Dialogue Partners created an informal coordination meeting on their own, a practice that opened up new modes of mutual help, tactical cooperation over projects, and also of sociality and professional friendships. In how the practice has been embraced and fleshed out, however, it explicitly expresses the cleavages of post-Cold War 'Asian security order' (Alagappa, 2003), with the US and its allies (Japan, Australia, South Korea) and partners (EU, New Zealand) being the informal mechanism's most ardent supporters, hosting meetings in their embassies, and offering advice to new entrants in the field. Meanwhile, China, despite having the largest foreign Permanent Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta (with nearly 20 staff), has carefully stayed out of this informal mechanism, sending its Mission diplomats to events only where a formal invitation was issued by the Secretariat. China's absence and unwillingness to partake in what is an act of mutual solidarity and support among foreign partners in Jakarta has been seized upon by several foreign diplomats in the city and is taken as a prime symbol of inter-personal distance, institutional detachment and strategic ambiguity. As Sebastian,

mirroring a view expressed by other Western and Northeast Asian diplomats, observed:

My office used to invite people from the China Mission to attend our small gatherings. But they never showed up. After a point we just stopped inviting. DPs like the US, EU, Japan, us, we share similar goals – we want a stable region, economic integration, a stronger Secretariat, a united ASEAN...[pauses] but maybe China doesn't share these things. They don't want a united ASEAN, especially with the South China Sea where they have an interest in dealing with ASEAN states bilaterally instead of multilaterally.²¹³

While Marcel Mauss' (2002 [1925]: 4) insight from nearly a century ago that a gift is “only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit” is abundantly, even if tacitly, understood by actors within the Jakarta scene, the problem of ‘the Gift’ takes on a different texture when it comes from China. A gesture that became a symbol and source of ambiguity and apprehension was a “gift” of nearly USD \$500,000 by a visiting Chinese dignitary to SG Surin as part of the ASEAN-China Fund, well before the CPR's arrival in Jakarta in 2009. It was not long before the gift became the source of much conversation in the scene: Dialogue Partner diplomats and staff at the Secretariat noted that the gift was not for raising the Secretariat's ‘human resource’ capacity but for procuring carpets, chairs, laptops, and iPads for each division. Some Secretariat staff perceived it “like a “bribe,” given that it had “no audit under its guidelines.”²¹⁴ Meanwhile, diplomats and aid officials used this

²¹³ Interview with Western diplomat, 13 February 2013. Similar accounts from interviews and hanging out with other diplomats, including, a Northeast Asian diplomat (20 July 2013), CPR diplomat (21 May 2013), and several secretariat staff.

²¹⁴ Fieldnotes, July 7, 2013.

gesture to articulate a wider attack against China's aid policy unhinged, as it was, from OECD norms and regulations. The gift also became a point of some internal contention: the CPR were miffed as they were allegedly kept unaware of it for long, heightening their perceived mistrust towards Surin, while the Secretariat under a new SG and management in 2012 were said to be apprehensive about using whatever was left of the fund. Eventually, it was agreed in 2013 to use a substantial part of the fund to renovate the Secretariat's wood paneled and overworked 'ASEAN Hall.' Unsurprisingly, with memories of the Chinese funded Cambodian 'Peace Palace' constituting a recent backdrop and precedent of Chinese influence (Perlez, 2012), the decision to use the fund provoked more aspersions. An Indonesian development consultant working for a Dialogue Partner, observed:

Here, *Mas*, only one factor that looms large is China and particularly because of the South China Sea. If we ask China, they can easily give you, I don't know, two million, three million. But ... uhhh people are worried, maybe China will ask... to name it [the Hall] China's '*Spratly Island Hall*' or whatever [scoffs at his exaggeration]. If it is from Germany, maybe you won't have that worries so much. You won't have that concept. Japan in a sense is also neutral, Korea is neutral, US is not always neutral and more explicit which is actually easier rather than you try to *not* say but yet you have *that* ...[pauses] But *China* – that factor is, is, is, *large*... [Moments later, he qualifies] I think most of the perception is because *we assume* [emphasises slowly]. Because we have the thinking that the Chinese may have some ulterior motive, *maybe they don't*. Actually, that is a pre-judgment on our part, and actually – if you ask the Chinese ambassador – she will be very helping and she doesn't have any condition, she will not be

explicit and she may *not* have any message. But the *interpretation* [eyes lit up] of certain people or certain quarters or the media is there.²¹⁵

Meanwhile, the effects of skirmishes between small naval and fishing vessels in the South China Sea, the diplomatic breakdown at Phnom Penh in 2012, and the Philippines' decision to submit the dispute for arbitration to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea in 2012 was beginning to have an impact on everyday working relations in Jakarta. The rather public fall out between the foreign policy bureaucracies of the Philippines and Cambodia – prosecuted publicity over acidic and accusatory newspaper commentaries – rubbed off on the CPR in Jakarta, where the PRs from the two countries were locked in a frosty and uncommunicative relationship till one of them retired in a year. At the Secretariat, Filipino staff, acting out of their own apprehensions as much as of the Chinese diplomats they more readily blamed, spoke of the “awkwardness” of running into them at events in the city, where a brief introduction would die down once business cards were exchanged and nationalities disclosed. A more concrete effect, and one that chagrined Filipino staff at the Secretariat, was of having to undertake “extra steps”, including an interview, to secure a visa to travel for business to China. With the additional time and effort involved (using embassy connections to ease the process), the administration at the Secretariat began to “rethink the composition and replace the Filipino staff if s/he wasn't essential for the Mission.”²¹⁶

Besides being apprehended and experienced in daily professional lives, geopolitical concerns were also sharpening the tensions built into the practices and ideology of

²¹⁵ Interview, 20 June 2013, Jakarta.

²¹⁶ Fieldnotes, 1 June and 24 June; follow-up correspondence with Secretariat staff in April 2014.

development cooperation activity in Jakarta. Development cooperation in a multilateral context generates tension from the very outset – as alluded to earlier, the aid was directed less towards the construction of schools, roads and clinics, and more to ASEAN’s bureaucracies for ‘sharing skills and technical knowledge’ to facilitate goals such as an ‘ASEAN Economic Community’. It was, however, precisely in this *distance* – from national to regional, from poor communities to elite bureaucratic networks, from building schools to funding per diems and hotel accommodation for training workshops – that the ambivalences and tensions about addressing poverty alleviation, and sustaining the disinterested bases of development aid (Kowalski 2011), an aid for an aid’s sake, were sharpening. Thus, some Western consultants were conscious that their development programme based at the Secretariat “had a political angle to it,” as the program not only provided high level engagement between their foreign ministries and the Secretariat but also because “it makes sense to have money involved on a aid programme, in terms of helping them, assisting them, and having influence”, though this, of course, was “not always stated up front.”²¹⁷

Besides these general tensions, the competitive logic of the diplomatic field meant that the disinterested bases of aid were coming under growing strain. This was apparent most in the increasing blur between projects framed as development cooperation that, in the view of practitioners, however, were clear expressions of “political cooperation.” Take for instance, a seminar on maritime cooperation organised by a Dialogue Partner where experts from their home country and ASEAN countries were brought to share past experiences in settling borders and sharing

²¹⁷ Interview with a Western development consultant, Jakarta, 8 July 2013.

maritime resources, or trips of members of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) to foreign countries for socialisation workshops. As Richard emphasised “it’s from our money, and it’s strictly speaking, development. Yes, but how to put it, it’s a clear political cooperation. It’s a political aim we have.” A more notable instance where the political bases of “development cooperation” were clearly at work was in the efforts of a few foreign partners – Germany, the United States and Japan, in particular – in supporting Myanmar’s foreign policy bureaucracy with training, exposure as well as brick and mortar infrastructure (conventions and conference facilities) as Myanmar played host to ASEAN and foreign diplomats for innumerable meetings and pageants during its debut as ASEAN’s Chairman in 2014.

An important Jakarta based initiative in this regard was the visit of nearly fifteen senior Myanmar bureaucrats (most from the MFA and a few from the Ministries of Trade, Information, and Human Resources) for workshops and seminars with staff at the ASEAN Secretariat, Deplu, the European Delegation and think tanks in Jakarta. While the initiative – funded by the German Foreign Ministry – was projected as a case of development cooperation by way of ‘capacity building’ to support ASEAN, its underlying aim was to buttress Myanmar’s bureaucratic capacity to ensure that Myanmar’s bureaucrats would be schooled in the practice of the Chair’s neutrality so as to avoid – by the accident of under capacity, if not the design of outside pressure – the prospect of Chinese influence as had occurred in Phnom Penh in 2012.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how a diplomatic game in Jakarta – driven by the logic immanent to the diplomatic field and heightened by the great power plays of the time – has taken form. This game is discerned in three ways by which this field operates. First, the Jakarta field has become a funnel and site for the production of ‘ASEAN’ activity – drafting documents and crafting development projects – and has become a key site for the production of ‘ASEAN level cooperation’. These work practices are, however, multivalent, standing for more than instrumental techniques to ‘create’ or ‘build’ diplomatic relations. They are also symbols of commitment and deference to ASEAN in a wider competitive drama of international influence. Second, the Jakarta scene has emerged as a symbolic theatre, where the volume of money committed for development cooperation, visits to the Secretariat, the branding and visibility of projects, the level of diplomatic representation, and the styles of everyday diplomacy are the varied tokens of currency in a symbolic economy of exchanges. Finally, the Jakarta scene is a space where geopolitical anxieties and representations of Great Power rivalries are apprehended, circulated and reproduced through the humdrum of routine work.

Besides illuminating the dynamics animating the contemporary production of ASEAN’s diplomacy at a site of ASEAN production *sui generis*, this study of the diplomatic game also elucidates the workings of ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus from the vantage point of foreign diplomats. Engaging in the standard practices and performances of diplomatic work, what is striking here is the idiom in and through which work was being fashioned and produced, one where the logic of practices has been geared to synch with and satiate the demands for recognition among ASEAN’s elites.

CHAPTER 7

CONTROLLING THE SECRETARIAT

7.1 Introduction: Institutional Design in Lived Experience

7.1.1 *The Lotus Room*

The flower of the *Nelumbo nucifera*, commonly known as the Lotus, gives its name to an irregular pentagonal room on the second floor of the ASEAN Secretariat in South Jakarta. The ‘Lotus Room’, as it is called, is one among the ten designated rooms at the Secretariat that carry the names of the consecrated ‘national flowers’ of the ten member states of ASEAN. Small and uneven, the room does not suggest the size and symmetry of the famous hydrophyte. Nor, with its musty carpet and unembellished décor, is it fragrant and showy as the flower of the *Nelumbo*. The Lotus Room, like the flower, is nonetheless heavy on symbolic meaning.

As *the* site where diplomats from ASEAN’s member states meet Secretariat staff twice, thrice or four times a week to conduct ASEAN’s work, the Lotus Room serves as a concrete realisation of the presence – or intrusion, as some would have it – of national representatives within an exclusively regional compound fashioned by the signs and symbols of ‘ASEAN’. As an interactional site where a specific kind of embodied face-to-face encounter is routinely played out between individuals gold dusted with the force of the state and individuals bereft of such endowments, the routine courtesies, slights and skirmishes within its (five) walls become widely shared and digested symbols of the contemporary status of a ‘professional’

Secretariat in the wider international project of ASEAN. Finally, and insofar as it is named after a flower which, in its irreducible biological sense is, after all, *reproductive* in function, the Lotus Room is also a fecund space where those abstract categories of ‘member state’, ‘sovereignty’, and ‘professionalism’ are summoned and experienced.

The Lotus Room, in short, stands for more than simply a meeting space, and it might be useful to arrest this exercise in floriography by putting forth a sketch of some everyday encounters with the state (Gupta, 2006) to illuminate what ‘institutional design’ looks like in everyday practice.²¹⁸

7.1.2 *Encounters with the State: Three Sketches*

THE JOB OF DRAFTING a ‘live’ document on the five LCD screens lined along the u-shaped conference table of the Lotus Room is not for the faint hearted. The possibilities of being “slapped by member states” are numerous: from displeasure at not capturing a word in the free-flowing discussions – “Secretariat, why is this missing?” – to not typing fast enough – “Why is this so late! – conveyed by diplomats often over the microphone, expressing the precise quality of their control over the public stage. Kommer was well aware of these risks as he took his place on

²¹⁸ Acharya and Johnston (2007:15-16) define institutional designs as “those formal and informal rules and organizational features that constitute the institution and that function as either the constraints on actor choice or the bare bones of the social environment within which agents interact, or both.” As I will implicitly suggest in the pages to come, the study of designs themselves (and their experiences over historical time scales) does not offer an adequate answer to how states control secretariats and IOs they create. Missing in these studies of constructivists as well as rationalists and contractualists (Aggarwal, 1998; Koremenos, Lipson, Snidal 2001) is an account of how design features must be ultimately deployed and resisted through embodied and everyday practices to produce power relationships.

the “hot seat” – the chair immediately to the right of the ASEAN Chairman. Seated around the table were the nearly thirty diplomats from the Working Group of the CPR, a band of mostly middle aged and young diplomats from the Permanent Missions of ASEAN member states in Jakarta ranked all the way from Attaché to Third, Second and First Secretaries to the Deputy Permanent Representatives. They were gathered today for the usual business of preparing for the fortnightly meeting of their bosses – the Permanent Representatives to ASEAN – held at the larger and more expansive ASEAN Hall a floor below them at the Secretariat. Dressed in skirt suits and lounge suits, the diplomats sat in black executive armchairs over a standard arrangement of table top microphones, bottles of mineral water, water goblets secured by crisp paper covers, and table flags of the country they represented, the latter signaling both their immediate physical location and providing the material props for their performance as states.²¹⁹ Today, the job of drafting would throw up its latest provocation.

“Sekkkretariat!” a diplomat with a heavy mainland Southeast Asian accent called out, “can you scrrroll down to para 3-B on food securiteee, second line, and change the word to ‘arise’.” ‘ARISE’ is the name for a project funded by the European Union at the Secretariat and Kommer, a bit puzzled by the dissonant syntax, inserts the acronym. Instantly, the diplomat responds, politely at first, “No, it’s *araaaise*”. Nonplussed, his fingers hovering over the keyboard, his eyes alert to the heightened gaze on him, Kommer asks cautiously “you mean ... ‘ a raise’ or ‘arise’?” The diplomat’s tone begins to fray, “I am saying ‘*araaiise*.” Kommer’s boss seated beside him swiftly steps in and inserts ‘a rise’ into the document, familiar as he is with the diplomat’s heavy accent from his many years at the Secretariat. “When you

²¹⁹ On the ‘sitedness’ of diplomacy in banal spaces and places, see Neumann 2012c, and Shimazu, 2012.

are drafting a document”, Kommer reflects a day after the meeting to me, “you have to deal with the intonation and pronunciation of member states. They are not good in English either but they act as though they are and won’t stand it if you correct them. This is what makes people uncomfortable about meeting the CPR because they don’t treat us like professionals, they see us as...their slaves, probably”.

“WELL, THE FACT that CPR meetings are, erm, *dreadful*?” Ruhaiza let her words hang in the air uncertainly, thinking of a way to answer my query about her experience of working with the CPR. The dread began well in advance: “each time you get an email from the office handling the CPR you get a notification of the agenda for the week. You open the agenda and you’re like ‘Oh please don’t let topic X be there’ because if that topic is listed then you know you have to go down and sit there.” But even on weeks when her division had been let off, the dread hovered over her office telephone. “You see there is this tricky little business of ‘Any Other Business’ on the agenda and if a diplomat woke up that morning inspired about my division or if the CPR want to conveniently slip in topics they don’t want to give you a heads up on, then, at the last minute, I’d get a call from the Lotus Room or the ASEAN Hall saying ‘They have a question about this, can you come down. *Nnnnow.*’ When you get that phone call, you *just drop everything.*”

Having left the Secretariat a few years ago for greener (and more remunerative) pastures, Ruhaiza offered up an encounter played out routinely on that occasion of interminable apprehension for a Secretariat staff: the Secretariat’s budget meetings presided over by the CPR. “I sat through an annual budget meeting where my colleague in charge of administration proposed that her division was going to buy a certain number of printing cartridges. A diplomat from the CPR responded ‘Well the

amount you have proposed is quite high. I don't think computer cartridges are that expensive in Jakarta. It's lunchtime now, and we are going for lunch. By the time I *come back* from lunch I want you to give me three quotations from different computer shops with the best price you can find.” Ruhaiza sympathised with her colleague because “she could not go for lunch and instead had to immediately call up computer shops and get the three cheapest quotations either to prove that she was wrong or she was right.” Ruefully she adds, “They question everything! So, sometimes people call things differently, right? Sometimes you call it a ‘folder’, sometimes you call it a ‘file’, so another lady from administration at the same meeting suggested that we buy folder dividers, you know, the one with a tab at the sides. But she gave it a different name, and the CPR asked ‘Okay, what is this? I've never heard of it. Can you explain? Can you show me?’ So she had to go up to her room and bring it down and show “*This is a divider. This is what I want to buy.*”

KHAMSONE FOUND himself at the Lotus Room for the second time this week. Arrayed around him were his Secretariat bosses, diplomats from the CPR Working Group, and a team of foreign ‘experts’ for a project they had convened today to review. The meeting proceeded uneventfully till the point when a Deputy Permanent Representative (DPR), quiet for most of this meeting, leaned into the tabletop microphone to remark on the project report prepared by the Secretariat and external consultants. “I am *surprised* that the Secretariat has ignored the contributions of Z [her country] when we have agreed in principle to undertake many more action lines for this project.” The sharp accusatory tone ringing in her voice makes it clear to Khamsoné that this is only the overture to a lengthy “attack” on the Secretariat. He was, however, mystified by the precise grounds of the broadside. “There was a

common understanding,” he reflects to me over dinner the same night, “that we would include only those actions that were ‘implemented’ by member states and not those ‘committed’. She is new in Jakarta and she clearly didn’t do her homework!” The diplomat’s remarks come to an end, and Khamson looks to his division’s Director – an ex-government officer who joined the Secretariat and shares a diplomatic rank equal to the DPR – for making a clarification. The Director leans into the microphone, his voice soft and mollifying “the Secretariat takes note of your corrections and we will ask the experts to accommodate them in the review”. Khamson is taken aback. He scribbles a note to a senior colleague seated next to him “*Really?*” A scrawl is gently pushed back to him. “Let it go”. As an interlocutor who had gradually opened up to the fieldworker after several months of acquaintance, and who saw in this fieldwork friendship a means to reflect and “not go native on my ASEAN experience,” Khamson asked me, with unusual disquiet but with usual forthrightness “you know, when this happens...it’s like...*emasculating*. It makes me wonder, am I going to get dumber doing this job? Won’t this have some effect on a my confidence, on my mental health?”²²⁰

7.1.3 *A Puzzle*

These sketches are selective in how they frame this routine encounter, incomplete by foregrounding only one venue of state-secretariat interaction and indeed unexceptional in how they express power laden encounters endemic to most organisations. For all these qualifications, however, they offer up something quite extraordinary when juxtaposed with a little clause on page 18 of the ASEAN Charter

²²⁰ From fieldnotes, 13 May 2013, 7 August 2013, 9 June 2013, 25 February 2014.

– the organisation’s supreme policy and design document – which mandates the CPR to “*liaise* with the Secretary General of ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat on all subjects relevant to its work” (ASEAN, 2008:18. Emphasis mine). Given that the CPR not only commands the public stage of embodied interaction – as amply suggested by these recurrently enacted and triangulated sketches at the Lotus Room – but also takes an active interest in its internal management – from its finances, tenders, audits, to even recruitments – when and precisely how does “*liaise*” turn into “micromanaging,” “bullying” or, to use a term of choice for CPR diplomats themselves, “oversight”? It is worth noting at the outset, even as this awaits explication in the pages to come, that this puzzle hoisted on the specific relationship between the Secretariat and the CPR speaks to a wider relationship between the state and the Secretariat, given that the diplomats of the CPR apprehend their relationship with the Secretariat by drawing on a sovereign prerogative that has been historically produced, widely diffused across state bureaucracies, and imbricated – even if invoked inconsistently – in each of the states’ interactions with the Secretariat.

This Chapter will proceed in the following manner. *First*, it will tease out how the ASEAN Way of diplomacy generates the ideological basis for states to draw a sense of entitlement (that is, a prerogative) over the Secretariat and will explore how this prerogative has been inscribed over the Secretariat in terms of its varied design features. Arguing that design features are only the opening act of a much longer account of state control, the paper will examine, *second*, the everyday effects of these design features in the life of the Secretariat. It will demonstrate how design features generate fault lines and anxieties that unfold as ‘authorless strategies’ that undercut the bases of social integration within the Secretariat and soften it up to the exercise of state prerogative. The Chapter will then examine a *third* and decisive mode by which

states control the Secretariat: the embodied assertion of prerogative at varied sites and banal moments of co-presence and interaction. It will examine this embodied dimension of state power by foregrounding the relationship of the Secretariat with bodies mandated to serve as its ‘watchdogs’, beginning (briefly) with the peripatetic and distant ASEAN Standing Committee that was replaced in 2008 by the proximate and panoptic CPR in Jakarta. These three modes by which states control the Secretariat – design features, authorless strategies and the embodied assertion of superordination – are reinforced from below, as it were, by the ideology of ‘servicing’ passed through generations at the Secretariat by which state prerogative is internalised and naturalised in the bodies and subjectivities of staff socialised as ‘servants’ of states. It is at this corporeal site that the state’s power – built not merely on domination but on varying degrees of consent and acquiescence – is *generated* at its potent best. Understanding how states control the Secretariat tells us how states succeed in making prerogative demands not only of staff’s administrative labour but also their emotional labour with staff willingly rendering it through ritual deference or resigned to its coercive extraction when required.

7.2 Inscribing Prerogative: A Secretariat Designed in the ‘ASEAN Way’

The ASEAN Secretariat is a material and symbolic space that is *inscribed* by ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus governed by the disposition to save the face of state representatives in order to secure their claims to sovereign equality and demands for recognition. In upholding the performance of *sovereign equality* – to be sure, a myth of equality – the dispositions and practices of the ASEAN Way deny any one sovereign state from exercising prerogative over another in the performance of

‘ASEAN’. At the same time, equality among sovereigns finds expression in the Secretariat in three ways. First, the Secretariat must be *designed* organisationally to express the mutual equality of sovereigns, notably by rules on equal contributions to the Secretariat’s budget, the rotation of politically appointed officers by alphabetical order, and a balance of national representation among its staff. Second, the role of the Secretariat staff must be *structured* in its ideal typical form to be guardians of the principle of equality, ensuring impartiality as they service meetings, or serve as diplomatic levelers preparing Information Papers, managing the neutral running of a meeting, or preparing presentations for poorer and lesser endowed state representatives. And third, the Secretariat must be *enfeebled* to the extent that it may not embarrass the face of a state representative in the company of its equals and, at the same time, be willing to undertake face-work to save the face of state representatives, even if that entails taking on embarrassment or blame on itself. As a senior staff put it piquantly: “one third of our work is actual, another third is to save face, and the rest is to be a punching face and scapegoat.”²²¹

Contained here, then, is a double move: the denial of prerogative among states exists with the ideological foundations for the *exercise* of prerogative by states over the Secretariat. It is this prerogative that provides state agents a template of representations by which they may design a Secretariat along their preferred terms; offers them the power to underplay or ignore the everyday effects of their design features over the organisation; and supplies them with a stock of unassailable words and sentences they may invoke in moments of co-presence (a budget meeting or a public seminar) to justify their control over the Secretariat.

²²¹ Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

Design features enshrined in Treaties, Declarations and Agreements, express how superordinates seek to organise and *discipline* a material and symbolic space to their changing requirements and anxieties, and offer a useful entry point to study how the Secretariat is controlled by its creators. While several aspects of the Secretariat's design features have been fleshed out in the discussion of its history (Chapter 4) it is worth recapitulating in chronological order the key changes to its designs along five axes: the character of offices (seconded and open recruitment); its mandate; the tenure of its bureaucracy; and its operational budget, with a detailed discussion of the last.

When established, the Secretariat's *mandate* was to serve as "a central administrative organ to provide for greater efficiency in the coordination of ASEAN organs and for more effective implementation of ASEAN projects and activities" (ASEAN, 1976). Its executive head was the Secretary General of the Secretariat and was designated as its chief administrative officer. In terms of *size*, it was a rather tiny outfit. When the Secretariat moved to its permanent home in Jalan Sisingamangaradja in 1981 there were only 15 people to house the newly built seven-storied structure. In terms of the *character of the offices*, while the Secretary General was nominated by member states and appointed by the foreign ministers, the seven officers were institutionally moored to their states as they were seconded from various government ministries. The seven seconded staff were also accorded diplomatic ranks ranging from Counselor to First Secretary to smoothen their interactions with diplomats and ministers of member states (Article 4, ASEAN 1976). This new bureaucracy was, however, not a space to build careers: the *tenure* of the SG was fixed at two years,

while those of the staff were fixed at three years which, only under “special circumstances” could be extended by a maximum three years by the SG upon approval of the member states in the Standing Committee (ASEAN 1976, article 3). In 1976 the Foreign Ministers agreed to apply the principle of equal contributions to the *operational budget* of the new Secretariat (Chalermpanupap, 2007). On the eve of moving into its new residence in 1981, the Secretariat’s budget amounted to \$635,548 (ASEAN Standing Committee, 1980-81: 84). Other than minor modifications, the design of the Secretariat stayed more or less the same as the 1980s rolled by.

The Secretariat’s designs changed significantly with the “restructuring” of 1992. Endowed with a ministerial rank and “an enlarged mandate to initiate, advise, coordinate and implement ASEAN activities,” the office of the Secretary General of ASEAN was raised in profile (ASEAN 1992, article 13). Even though the term of office was extended to five years, and notably, could be renewed for a second term, the appointment to the office was still strictly based on government nomination by alphabetical rotation. Meanwhile, the *character of offices* changed drastically: *all* offices at the Secretariat below the SG, including the DSG, were ‘professionalised’ through open recruitment. The tenure of the openly recruited staff was fixed at three years but could be renewed in the same position for another three by the Secretary General alone without the approval of member states in the Standing Committee. Further, the new professionalised Secretariat was also bigger: from 14 seconded staff in 1989 to 24 openly recruited professional staff in 1993.

Despite the changes, some key designs of the Secretariat had stubbornly survived this restructuring exercise: its *operational budget* was raised but still met by equal contributions by member states; and while staff *tenure* on average lasted for 6 years in one position and 18 years in total (rising up the ladder from SO to ADR to Director), they would rarely stay beyond two decades at the Secretariat. Moreover, changes to the Secretariat were reined in by the end of the 1990s: the SG's position was informally rendered non-renewable, a new layer of quasi-secondments were introduced from CLMV countries, and the office of the DSG was taken out of open recruitment to political appointment by alphabetical rotation. Meanwhile, the *size* of Secretariat was raised to manage the growing workload. States increased two ranks of officers at the Secretariat: openly recruited 'Senior Officers' (SO) and locally recruited Technical officers (TO). In numbers, staff size grew from 35 openly recruited staff and 26 locally recruited 'professional staff'²²² in 1997 to 41 openly recruited staff and 55 locally recruited staff in 1999.

Contrary to expectations, the ASEAN Charter of 2008 did not usher significant changes to the Secretariat's designs. In the few changes it did introduce, the Charter undercut the *mandate* of the SG's office by formally rendering it as non-renewable and went on to demote the symbolic capital of the office. Second, it struck a compromise on the status of DSG's by allowing for two openly recruited and two political appointments. Third, and as noted in Chapter 4, it ushered in immense ambiguities about the Secretariat's legal personality.

²²² The grade of TOs and TA's are included in the official category of 'Professional Staff'. Remaining local staff include "Specialised Staff "(Finance assistants and Secretaries) and "General staff" (receptionists, drivers, guards etc.). See ASSR, 2012, p. 31.

The Charter did result in a further expansion of the Secretariat's *size*. Staff size grew from 188 in 2006 to nearly 300 staff by 2013 (ADBI, 2012: 77). As did the Secretariat's budget: from \$9.05 million in 2007 on the cusp of the Charter to \$14.3 million in 2010. Since then, the budget has increased at a rate varying from 3% to 10% per annum to stand at \$20 million in 2014. While the Secretariat's budget has increased in absolute terms, the principle of equal contributions governing its growth remains firmly intact. It is worth delving into some detail on the Secretariat's budget, which has remained a point of mounting criticism by the Secretariat's supporters including former staff, journalists, academics and, at times, state agents too.

*Table 6. The Secretariat's Operational Budget (2006-2014)*²²³

Year	Budget (USD millions)
2006	8.49
2007	9.68
2008	7.83
2009	14.35
2010	14.33
2011	15.76
2013	16.23
2014	20

The first line of criticism has been with the volume of the Secretariat's budget, with analysts noting its paltry size compared to the budgets of not only international but also other Third World regional arrangements (Bower, 2010; Poole, 2010). At 1.62 million per country, the level of contribution is perceived to be too low, even by

²²³ Source: Pitsuwan, 2011: 34.

some state leaders and diplomats.²²⁴ A second line of critique, arguably the most sustained, has been with the design principle that governs its growth: the principle of equal contributions by member states which, as Chalermpanupap (2008: 122) notes, expresses the “principle of equal rights and equal obligations” of the member states but in practical terms means that the Secretariat’s budget will “effectively remain hostage to whatever the least able or least willing member is able or willing to pay”. Numerous proposals and recommendations to change this principle were offered in the course of the past decade. A memorandum submitted by a Track Two group of regional think-tanks proposed that contributions be weighted by a ratio of 6:4:2:1, and pegged the minimum contribution to 0.025% of a government’s revenue (Poole, 2010: 8). Suggestions for a new budget formula have also been made by prominent figures within the Jakarta scene who have argued that ASEAN move from ‘equal to equitable contributions’.²²⁵ Severino notes that “polite suggestions” for a change to the budget formula were also made by ASEAN’s newer and poorer members in the past, but they were met with counter proposals by wealthier members for weighted voting that would give them greater influence (Severino 2006: 33-34).

The latter point in particular raises the question of why wealthier member states are unwilling to submit to assessed contributions for an equal vote, when they do so at the United Nations anyway. When questioned, a CPR diplomat from an original founding member state replied with laconic and self-evident ease: “Well, the Secretariat is an ASEAN entity,”²²⁶ suggesting not only the limited political will to push for larger contributions, but also that the deleterious effects of a smaller budget

²²⁴ By, for instance, the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak. See, Razak, 2014.

²²⁵ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, speaking at the EU ASEAN Forum, Jakarta, 18 April 2013. See also, Rizal Sukma (ERIA paper, 2013).

²²⁶ Interview with CPR diplomat, Jakarta, 31st July 2013.

could be tolerated. Given the intractability of the equal contributions principle, Secretariat staff during the pre-Charter era put forward alternatives to raise supplementary income including a “Support ASEAN” Fund charging \$1 per air ticket (Chalermphanupap, 2008: 122) and a tax on commercial transactions under AFTA. None, however, were “taken seriously” (Severino, 2006: 33).

The third line of criticism of the Secretariat’s budget would make the pleas for a higher contribution or alternative funding somewhat fanciful. Through the decades, the Secretariat has had to work hard to ensure that member states paid up their share of the Secretariat’s budget in a timely manner. While one or two of the wealthier members would pay in lump sum, most members paid in two or three installments. This was because of two reasons. One, some members followed contrasting time-frames for their financial year which meant they paid a proportion of the ASEAN budget from one year’s budget and remitted the other half from the new budget cycle. (Secretariat staff had to be watchful if, in this process, a member’s annual contribution straddled two budget years of the Secretariat.) Second, even when the ASEAN department in a country’s MFA received money lump sum from their finance ministry, they preferred to deposit the amount in two or three parts at local banks from which an interest could be accrued to supplement their official expenses. As one veteran staff put it “they [member states] profit out of it too, out of ASEAN money”.²²⁷

²²⁷ Interview with former Secretariat staff, Singapore, 5 August 2013.

7.3 A Prerogative Masked and Resonant: ‘Authorless Strategies’ of Control

Design documents, however, constitute only the opening act of a much longer and subtler exercise of state control. The second movement in this symphony of state control, one that plays out in *adagio*, is made of the everyday effects of design features that produce fault lines and anxieties *within* the organisation, and soften it up for the more direct assertion of prerogative by states.

7.3.1 “Political guys” vs. “Professional” Staff

As noted earlier, the ideal of the professional Secretariat epitomised by the restructuring of 1992 has been reigned in, if not captured, by overt and informal agreements by states. The perceived manipulation of the procedure of ‘open recruitment,’ the informal practice of quasi-secondments, and the long-standing informal rule that there be an “equitable distribution of positions among nationals of ASEAN member states” (ASSR, 2013: 4, B.3.5) among the Secretariat’s professional ranks, animate a lively discourse among openly recruited officers about how these practices undercut a ‘professional’ and ‘strong’ Secretariat.

The salience and intensity of these critiques cannot be underestimated. Arguing that ASEAN needs “strong institutions” and especially a “central empowered body,” an openly recruited Deputy Secretary General noted that while he “focused on the results”, politically appointed DSGs “focused on the process,” and that while his “loyalty” was towards ASEAN, this was not clearly the case with the “political guys” who would have to return home. He further observed that “ASEAN has to decide whether it wants more process or results,” given its plans for economic integration and the challenge of staying relevant in a competitive economic neighbourhood of

China and India.²²⁸ A senior officer at the Corporate Affairs division emphatically argued that in order to achieve ASEAN's 'community building' goals "you need a professional Secretariat, without that it's nonsense! [you need] a group of people with high credibility and integrity that can run this process...not a collection of political people. You cannot play politics here. They have to be professional." At stake with the representation of professionalism is not only a struggle for a certain self-image structured along the coordinates of open recruitment, impartiality and technocratic goal accomplishment, but also of the legitimate bases of power. 'Professionalisation,' as DiMaggio and Powell (1983:152) argue, refers to the "collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work" with a view to "establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy." The struggle for power, then, is built into the very definition and historical impetus for professionalisation, and is invoked by openly recruited staff at the Secretariat who view 'political guys' as antithetical to their claims to power. Besides expressing their critique with the drama of a siege and often in the backstage of their workspaces, what aggravates the sense of personal slight for professional staff is the precise *style* by which the 'professional' bases of the Secretariat are undermined. As illustrated by the case of CLMV secondments to the Secretariat and the scuttling of Ajit Singh's bid for reappointment, decisions over the Secretariat have often been struck among state agents through informal agreements and private deals, with the Secretariat rarely, if ever, party to deliberations over its fate, expressing thus the precise *prerogative* quality of state power at work.

²²⁸ Interview with a DSG, ASEAN Secretariat, 13 December 2011.

As a “hidden transcript” (Scott, 1990) of critique and resistance directed obliquely towards the abstraction that is ‘states’ but more concertedly to insinuate and undermine the seconded colleague next door or the politically appointed DSG in the spacious rooms of the first floor below, the fault line of *political* and *professional* undercuts the lines of social cohesion within the Secretariat.

7.3.2 *Resentment in the Stables: Senior Officers versus Technical Officers*

All kinds of labour goes into running the ASEAN Secretariat – from ‘LRS’ (or locally recruited staff) drawing on salaries in Indonesian Rupiah to the upwardly mobile body of ‘ORS’ (‘openly recruited staff’) hired from across the region and living out expatriate lives with US dollar salaries and benefits. The divide between the LRS and ORS then serves as an important form of social stratification within the Secretariat, akin and homologous to the ‘caste’ divide between the physicists in a nuclear weapons laboratory and the technicians and clerical staff that assist them (Gusterson, 1997: 27), to the ‘front office’ of Wall Street investment banks of mostly white, male, Ivy league educated investment bankers operating in physical and social distance from the ‘back office’ of mostly female and coloured staff (Ho, 2008: 78-79) , or indeed between the researchers protecting the moral and intellectual authority of an international human rights organisation and the administrative staff whose priorities and plans could be overturned at a moments’ notice to support them (Hopgood, 2006: 86).

Operating at the precise boundary between the LRS and the ORS are two grades of officers that have emerged as the workhorses of the Secretariat: ‘Technical Officers’ (TO) at the apex of the locally recruited staff, and ‘Senior Officers’ (SO), at the bottom of the openly recruited pyramid. When the ASEAN Standing Committee decided to increase the number of locally recruited ‘professional’ staff in 1999, it did so on the express grounds to “free senior officers’ time from administrative and secretariat tasks, enabling grater [sic] focus on strategic and substantive matters” (ASEAN Secretariat [undated]: point 9) Over the years, however, the distinction between these two categories, and between the neat social stratification they expressed, would rapidly blur, creating an important source of everyday friction at the Secretariat.

There were two reasons for this growing parity. First, these TOs have often been endowed with one or several kinds of assets: cultural capital (degrees from western universities), linguistic capital (fluency in English and sometimes other European languages), and, in several instances, social capital too through their links to local political, diplomatic and military elites. Second, the recognition by the Secretariat’s management – especially under SG Ong Keng Yong – that highly qualified and well-connected local staff could be groomed and elevated to the front stage of the Secretariat’s work.

Even while the gap between the TOs and SOs was shrinking in substantive work, the difference in remuneration has remained stark. While an SO has a starting monthly pay of US\$2900 that may rise in increments to a maximum of \$3800, besides a host

of housing and educational benefits, a TO draws a salary anywhere between \$440 to \$1700 per month.²²⁹

With growing overlaps in their professional roles, fewer differentials in cultural and social capital, and the context of severe salary differentials, the politics of resentment and low-level symbolic insubordination has followed. Sushamitra, an Indonesian Senior Officer at the Secretariat, enjoys a unique vantage point in comprehending the politics along this fault line: As a ‘local’ she has access to the hidden transcripts of TOs in Bahasa Indonesia, and as an ORS she is aligned to the material benefits and status of the position she shares with the Secretariat’s international staff. Flitting across varied social circles – ‘local’ TOs, ‘international’ SO’s, ADRs and Directors – she laments the gap in salaries between the locally and openly recruited staff at large. Shocked that a local female staff at the Secretariat’s gift shop earned only \$170 a month – lower than even the Jakarta minimum wage –²³⁰ she issues a critique drawing from ASEAN’s own lofty vision: “how can you talk about ‘Narrowing Development Gaps’ in ASEAN when you don’t do anything about these gaps within the organisation!”.

Soon enough, though, her sympathies for the cause run into tension with her experiences of dealing with slights and symbolic insubordination by her TOs. “They resent us,” Sushamitra says, as she recalls an instance when a TO threw down the gauntlet over lunch, saying, “We could do your job.” Adding that she has frequently

²²⁹ An SO also enjoys a variety of perks out of bounds for a TO: a housing allowance (\$1100), a one-off outfit allowance (\$965),²²⁹ and a substantial – and highly prized – educational subsidy of up to 85% for up to three children at Jakarta’s International Schools, see ASSR, 2012: Annex 5.

²³⁰ Jakarta’s minimum wage in 2013 was 2.2 million IDR or \$195. This was raised to 2.4 million or \$213 in 2014 (USD 1 = 11,267 IDR as on 1 November 2013). See *Jakarta Globe*, 2013.

overheard “TOs speak behind the backs of their SOs”, Sushamitra notes that this resentment is especially acute when a new SO arrives in a division of long-serving TOs, with the latter offering assistance laced with resentment “well, you’re the SO, you should know!” she enacts. Meanwhile, SOs are equally aware of these tensions: meeting informally over lunches, they would remark in jest and seriousness “hey, they are after our jobs.”²³¹

While the parity in work and disparity in pay fosters this fault line, the potential for insubordination is profoundly influenced by the mode of co-presence in which SOs and TOs operate at work. Unlike ADRs and Directors who often have separate office rooms to themselves, Senior Officers work cheek and jowl with their TOs and TAs in often cramped open plan office cubicles, placing their capabilities and managerial styles under sustained scrutiny, and also enabling the relaxation of hierarchy and deference in everyday life.

7.3.3 Insecurity and Disenchantment

Designed to preclude a long-term bureaucracy, the Secretariat has been a site of chronic job insecurity. This is especially true for openly recruited staff hired on a contract basis for an average of 6 years in one position till they are promoted to a higher position for a new contract lasting another 6 years. Dissatisfaction with the contract system has been a perennial point of discussion, traceable from the ‘pioneer batch’ of 1992 – many of whom indeed bore the brunt of the insecurity it engendered – to the more recent crop of staff who attribute their departures and disillusionment

²³¹ Fieldnotes, 9 February 2013.

with ASEAN to what they view as the myopia of this long-running arrangement. Cognisant of this insecurity, some CPR diplomats recognise the need for a better incentive structure at the Secretariat,²³² while other diplomats insist on its continuation to ensure that at the Secretariat “people don’t get cosy in their positions,”²³³ in complete contrast, it could be noted, to the stability they derive from their permanent jobs and pensions from their home bureaucracies.²³⁴

While the everyday effect of this rule is to remind staff of their dispensability, over the long term it is perceived to produce institutional weakness. The experience of Budiarto is instructive. A staff from the ‘pioneer batch’ of 1992, Budiarto enjoyed the best of both: the benefits of the Secretariat’s 1992 job package as well as the *esprit de corps* and enthusiasm for servicing states that described this batch of officers. Riding on his strong performance, he climbed the ladder of the openly-recruited pyramid at the Secretariat – from Senior Officer, to Assistant Director and, finally, Director of his division – within a decade, as opposed to a natural progression of 18 years. Paradoxically, his climb up the ladder also brought him closer to the ceiling of his career at the Secretariat.

So I told myself: ‘after 6 years what do I do?’ I didn’t want to be told by the SG ‘Sorry, you have reached your limit. Time to go.’ And *oh yes* they enforce it. The DSG in my time was one of these old style bureaucrats [he enacts] ‘Budi! You *know* it already. Six years. So, don’t wait until we have to tell you. Go! Look for opportunities.’ I said [in a tone heavy hearted but stoic] ‘Of course, thank you sir.

²³² Interview with a Permanent Representative to ASEAN, Jakarta, 5 June 2013.

²³³ Dinner with a CPR diplomat. Fieldnotes, 29th July.

²³⁴ Instead of pensions, staff are paid a gratuity that is payable to them upon the end of their contract. The gratuity is pegged to 5% of annual salary for LRS and 17% of annual salary for ORS. See ASEAN Secretariat Staff Regulations (ASSR, 2012, Annex14).

I will'. So I had to look elsewhere because I have a family and your dignity tells you that you don't wait until the last moment when people will make decisions for you. People don't even *care* if you are losing a cadre of people who think they are pioneers and who can work and shape things. It's sad, isn't it? But maybe we shouldn't expect too much from ASEAN and people who work for it shouldn't be too committed. I told myself after a while [enacts] 'don't be stupid. You have to take care of yourself.' That's exactly what I did.

It was not long before Budiarto was offered a core position at a prestigious international organisation in the United States, but "frankly I pined for my old job," he reflected, in view of the compact but influential cadre the pioneer batch had been. Despite his cache of advanced academic degrees (from Western universities), Budiarto was a firm believer that at the Secretariat "knowledge generation happens on the job" and that the ejection of experienced staff was detrimental to the capacity of the body.

Budiarto's experience is mirrored in the experience of numerous other staff from the 'pioneer batch' who had to exit the Secretariat with a wealth of professional relationships, institutional memory and the practical knowledge of servicing, only to be swiftly absorbed by Dialogue Partners and international development agencies based in Jakarta, giving the latter an edge as they advanced their interests vis-a-vis ASEAN member states and the Secretariat.

7.3.4 *Rich Servants, Poor Bosses, and the Ensuing Structure of Conflict*

Anxieties in the everyday professional lives of Secretariat staff also stem from tensions that inhere in the very structure of the relationship they share with their superordinates – that is, the diplomats and bureaucrats from a band of mostly low and middle-income states of Southeast Asia. This relationship consists, on the one hand, of ASEAN’s diplomats bound together by their shared experience of exercising the state’s prerogative over the Secretariat but differentiated internally by varying endowments of cultural, linguistic and economic capital, and, on the other hand, by a cadre of Secretariat staff hired precisely on account of their endowments of linguistic and cultural capital and drawing on US dollar salaries anywhere between two to ten times the salary of the superordinates they service. What arises, then, is a situation where the veritable ‘board of trustees’ are often poorer and less endowed but are nonetheless entrusted with the professional welfare and development of a group of ‘servants’ that are better paid.

The complications arising from the unusual asymmetry of this relationship have had some direct effects on the Secretariat. First, the inequality between ‘bosses’ and ‘servants’ dyes the very fabric of embodied and routine interactions between them as the disparity heightens the stakes and emotions involved in the performance of state superordination. “They resented that we were there and got those salaries,” Adil recalls from his decade at the Secretariat. Noting that this disparity was at its highest in 1992 – when staff salaries were yet to erode – he recalls an episode from 1993 that would become a widely shared expression of this resentment

Ajit Singh [the SG] had just come in and at one informal gathering he said to

some of the DGs, [enacts conversation] ‘You know, I’m *very* frustrated dealing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [of Indonesia] for all the privileges. I want my staff to get their diplomatic passes and the permits so that they can import their cars here and drive to work and all that [import duties were a substantial 200%]...but they don’t seem to move.’ So, he said ‘I want you to push the Indonesian DG.’ What did the DGs say? [enacts] ‘*Excuse me*, if your staff can’t get their new cars, I suggest they take the buses here. There are lots of buses in Jakarta.’ *Use public transport!* [says softly with incredulity] You know how bad the buses are here. So that was them being sarcastic, telling us – who the *hell* are you people? Who do you think you are?’²³⁵

Second, this resentment would colour the stance of state agents towards the question of salary increments at the Secretariat. In more than two decades after the professionalisation of 1992, the salary structure of the openly recruited staff has barely changed; indeed, they have eroded by an average of 5% per annum just as the pay scales of international organisations as well as the corporate sector in the regions’ metropolises have shot up. State agents routinely defend their reluctance to raise salaries for professional staff by pointing to the absence of consensus among member states on this matter, with poorer members unwilling to raise staff salaries. The reluctance, more tellingly, is justified on the grounds that “their Minister, Prime Minister, President, are paid less than what we at the Secretariat are getting,” as a veteran staff with a long history of attending budget meetings put it.²³⁶

The eroding value of the Secretariat’s salary structure has been gradual. From those heady days in the 1990s when a vacancy drew hundreds – if not thousands – of

²³⁵ Interview, Jakarta, 8 May 2013.

²³⁶ Interview, Singapore, 5 August 2013.

applicants including the ‘best and brightest’ from national civil services, the package rapidly diminished in value as the 2000s rolled by. Perhaps the most direct effect of the stunted salary structure has been in affecting the kind of staff coming in and exiting the Secretariat (discussed in Chapter 4).

Emblematic of both the physical weakening of the Secretariat – by way of rising turnover of staff coupled with longer unfilled vacancies – and the perceived indifference of member states towards staff welfare and institutional rejuvenation, was the knotty and somewhat macabre phenomena that one could refer to as institutional cannibalism that started with the CPR’s arrival in 2009. The knot was intricate: on the one hand were calls from Secretariat staff and its champions to raise the operational budget of the Secretariat and drastically revise the salary structure, on the other hand was the sharp retort by Permanent Representatives – issued at budget meetings as well as public seminars in Jakarta – that there was no need to raise the Secretariat’s budget when even the seemingly meager \$16 million a year (in 2012) was going unspent, primarily because a quarter of all openly recruited positions at the Secretariat – from SO to ADR and Director levels – had been vacant for periods of up to a year. Besides pointing to this ‘surplus’ to suggest that the Secretariat was under-spending,²³⁷ some CPR diplomats – more tentatively – questioned if the vacant positions were required at all, given that the work targets were being met, even though the invisible labour of (unpaid) overtime and chronic complaints of overwork expressed in the backstage by Secretariat staff were not audible to them.²³⁸ More remarkably, member states would recoup this unspent budget, parceling it into equal

²³⁷ Interview with a Permanent Representative, Jakarta. 21 June 2013. This point would be emphasised by another PR at a public seminar at Hotel Aryaduta, Jakarta, on 29 July 2013 where questions were asked about the Secretariat’s stagnant salary structure.

²³⁸ Interview with CPR diplomat, 10 July 2013; Fieldnotes on staff overtime work, 15 December 2012; 29 March, 31 May, 21 April 2013.

parts and return it to the finance divisions in their foreign ministry, rather than, say, pool it in a fund. While diplomats in the city referred to this as a “ping pong” between the Secretariat and the CPR,²³⁹ at work here was a paradoxical misrecognition – willful or unapprehended – by which one ‘organ’ of the ASEAN machinery was nibbling at another.

7.3.5 The Personalisation of Discipline Management and Grievance Redressal

States have designed the Secretariat in a way that concentrates the power to adjudicate the disciplinary conduct of staff as well as their grievances in the hands of the Secretariat’s ‘Management’, that is, the tapering apex of a small pyramid comprising the SG, four DSGs and occasionally a Director or two.

Staff may be subject to disciplinary action if found to engage in a range of major and minor offences. This action is coursed through various steps – from counseling, a letter of warning, to a final Disciplinary Board – but the decision makers at each step consist of the top Management.²⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the only mechanism for grievance redressal for a staff at the Secretariat is to submit them to the SG in writing, who may review the matter independently or, if required, constitute a committee of three staff members to review the matter before responding to the submission within 15 working days.

²³⁹ Interview with a western diplomat, 2 July 2013.

²⁴⁰ ASSR, 2012: 21-25.

While this arrangement may have worked well when an SG was perceived to be proactive about the welfare of their staff – notably, during Ajit Singh and Ong Keng Yong’s tenure – these mechanisms were perceived to inspire less confidence at other times. Furthermore, the personalisation of such mechanisms entails that decisions over staff may *a)* come to rely exceedingly on individual understandings of acceptable social etiquette and behavior and, *b)* may be shaped more profoundly by the pressures of how member states may perceive or stand to ‘lose face’ in light of such a decision. An episode that disclosed the drawbacks of these arrangements, where personal attitudes of the management conjoined with concerns over the practices of states in their home bureaucracies, concerned the denial of maternity benefits for an unmarried female staff at the Secretariat, an episode that generated much disagreement and dissatisfaction.²⁴¹

Perhaps what is even more important in the context of staff rights is the complete absence of that one vital institution that could serve as a check against the excesses of state prerogative as well as caprices of a top management: a staff union. While it should be unsurprising that a staff union was never envisaged in the designs handed down to the organisation by ASEAN’s historically counterrevolutionary elites, what evokes some surprise is that the Secretariat’s staff themselves failed to push for such a mechanism, even though they inhabit a wider field of intergovernmental organisations where staff unions are a legitimate mechanism for staff welfare. The matter was broached a few times during the Secretariat’s numerous restructuring and

²⁴¹ Owing to space limits it is not been possible to elucidate this incident and how it reverberated among female staff at the Secretariat. Fieldnotes, 15 December 2012; 9 February, 17 March, 16 July 2013.

review exercises. One such occasion was in the late 1990s, when, as Budiarto recounts

Of course we didn't dare to use the word 'Union,' you know. Instead, it was a 'Staff Welfare Association.' We said, 'No, no, this is not to negotiate salaries or to organise activities for staff, it's more to take care and counsel staff, do some staff welfare.' Nobody bought it [with a wry smile] the SG, the Director, they shot it down even before it saw the light of day.²⁴²

A decade later, the idea was mooted again but as Chanvatey, another veteran at the Secretariat, recalls "There was not much enthusiasm for the idea from the Management."²⁴³

Before essentialist arguments make their way, it is worth noting that strong staff unions and associations operate out of the *Jakarta* offices of the ILO and UNDP, and that a 'staff union' operates even at the Asian Development Bank in Manila. The trepidation with establishing a staff union, then, has less to do with anything 'Asian' than with the 'ASEAN Way' itself.

7.3.6 *Everyday Effects as 'Authorless Strategies' of Control*

In sum, design features in the form of rules and procedures are important techniques of state control insofar as they pitch the poles of state entitlement and influence over a material and symbolic terrain. However, it is in the everyday effects of these design

²⁴² Interview, Jakarta, 26 July 2013.

²⁴³ Interview, Singapore, 15 January 2013.

features, specifically in animating fault lines and in generating anxieties experienced by flesh and blood actors that these design features acquire their potency. Importantly, and to avoid a functionalist rendering of the process, these effects are often unintended and unanticipated in the precise forms they take. Instead, they unfold, and are *allowed to* bloom with all their sting and dysfunction, as long as they sustain a broad status quo that protect the preferences of superordinates.

Besides operating in unanticipated ways, these everyday effects are even more remarkable in how they operate as “authorless strategies” (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 13) that may, to varying degrees, dissimulate the birthmarks of arbitrary state prerogative that produce them in the first place. Even though staff may recognise the workings of state prerogative in the spider web of fault lines they are caught up in, this recognition may be blurred by how these fault lines fuse with egotistic conflicts over personality and turf in the immediacy of their office spaces and everyday work lives. In this manner, these fault lines pit colleague against colleague within the organisation: ‘political guys’ versus ‘professional’ staff, TO’s vs SO’s, ‘local’ staff versus ‘openly recruited’ staff, and ‘Management’ versus the rest. By undercutting the lines of internal solidarity and coherence, these everyday effects of design features soften up the organisation, making its staff more readily yield to the demands for emotional labour by state agents and indeed make them more vulnerable (in the absence of staff unions) from resisting the extraction of emotional labour as well.

7.4. The Embodied Assertion of State Prerogative

While the formulation of design features and their wide-ranging unanticipated everyday effects secures a normative and disciplinary milieu for the exercise of state control, it is in the embodied performance of prerogative that an asymmetric social relationship is apprehended, performed and reproduced.

7.4.1 The Wielders of State Prerogative

Given that ASEAN has been historically nested in the foreign ministries of member states, it is ASEAN's diplomats who have, from the very beginning, served as the watchdogs of the Secretariat and have been the most zealous wielders of state prerogative.

7.4.1.1 A Gaze from the Distance: The ASC

For the first three decades of its existence – from 1976 to 2008 – the Secretariat was placed under the watch of the ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) composed of the Director Generals of ASEAN departments from each foreign ministry who met between four to six times a year in Jakarta or in the capital of the country holding ASEAN's chairmanship.

As interactions that were compact and infrequent, they maintained a level of formality and courtesy typical of the diplomatic trade, though this was occasionally relaxed to convey to the SG and Secretariat lessons about their station. A Secretary General of the Secretariat from the 1980s recalls an “embarrassing incident” during

his visit with the DGs to Australia. All was well until the hosts began to treat the SG on par with the DGs – expressed in practice by the order of seating, and in offering him the opportunity to speak at the meeting – to which a few DGs openly clarified to the hosts that he was only the *SG of the Secretariat*. “I didn’t take it personally,” he reflected “but it is not good when such things happen publicly.”²⁴⁴

The ASC’s role in enforcing state prerogative was illustrated more sharply following the restructuring of 1992 when Ajit Singh, as the new SG, was elevated from the rank of an ambassador to a Minister. The elevation, however, did not clarify the terms of interaction between a highly ranked SG and the ambassador level DGs at the Standing Committee whom he still had to consult and attend to. As a staff from the ‘pioneer batch’ of 1992 recalls

Tan Sri Ajit came from that group of DGs of ambassadorial rank. But as SG he thought that because of his new mandate he should act like a Minister. So he talked down to them in the first year. Then *boy!* They came back with a stick. They reminded him that they don’t *care* who he is...[enacts with stern voice and finger pointed to his chest] ‘we are member countries, *sovereign* countries, we tell you what we want’. He never forgot that. By the second year he became more realistic.²⁴⁵

Ajit Singh’s first steps at grasping what a ministerial rank as a non-sovereign representative really meant – a grasping that was forged in the experience of embodied encounters – would be a necessary learning curve for all the Secretaries

²⁴⁴ Interview with a former Secretary General of ASEAN Secretariat, Singapore, 16 January 2013.

²⁴⁵ Interview with former Secretariat staff, Jakarta, 23 November 2013.

Generals of ASEAN to come. As a former Permanent Secretary of the Singapore Foreign Ministry observed “the Secretary General has to have something of a split personality because he has to wear three hats – one for the political leaders, one for the ministers, and one for the ambassadors like the permanent secretaries and the DGs. It’s a very tough job!” The job is *tough* precisely because the possession of a ministerial rank does not bring with it the certainty of being treated as an equal in encounters with the agents of the state.²⁴⁶

7.4.1.2 Member States Come to Town: The CPR in Jakarta

With the ratification of the ASEAN Charter in 2008, and the establishment of the CPR in 2009, the gaze of the state over the Secretariat was no longer distant and diffuse. Stationed permanently in Jakarta, CPR diplomats drew on their corporeal proximity and vastly enlarged opportunities for face-to-face interaction with Secretariat staff to convey the states’ prerogative in everyday and banal terms.

Even though the Charter was ambiguous about the precise hierarchy in the relationship between the Secretariat and the CPR – “liaise” suggesting an undefined equality, if anything – a hierarchy in favour of state power was accomplished within the space of a few years.

In the first two years since the arrival of the CPR in 2009, the perceived ‘micro-management’ of the Secretariat operated like an in-house secret in Jakarta. In careful and calibrated ways, however, the discourse soon found modest public expression,

²⁴⁶ Conversation with a former Permanent Secretary and SOM leader of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, 18 January 2013.

notably in newspaper op-eds written by a former Secretariat staff with the blessings of Surin (Chongkittavorn, 2012 a 2012 b; Lee, 2011). Significantly, the CPR was not indifferent to how they were being framed. Whenever the spectre of the Secretariat's station reared its head in private discussions or at seminars and workshops,²⁴⁷ CPR diplomats fended off criticisms by furnishing a range of rationalisations, three of which were recurrent. First, and most unassailably, that the Secretariat was funded by equal contributions from the ten member states and thus each state had a right to know how their money was being spent. Second, that with the Charter, ASEAN was moving away from being a gentleman's club of the past to a new "rules based organisation", and thus the Secretariat must be "rules based" too. And third, that the Secretariat, in the view of several CPR diplomats, had been "mismanaged".

State 'oversight' of the Secretariat is arguably not unwarranted and nor is it unexceptional²⁴⁸ but what makes it problematic is the form in which it is exercised, one that grates on the everyday experience of social actors subject to its control and excesses. "Painful budget meetings" that run into hours scrutinising petty expenses by Secretariat staff,²⁴⁹ instances where "a Permanent Representative, no less than an ambassador!" personally accompanied a staff member to verify whether a carpet in the Secretariat deserved to be changed as per the Secretariat's request;²⁵⁰ and face-to-face interactions infused with the latent possibility of slights, become shared symbols of the states' power and concomitantly of the Secretariat's station.

²⁴⁷ Often during events at the Secretariat, such as the EU ASEAN Forum on 18 April 2013; and more substantially during the "ASEAN Integration Through Law" Plenary at Hotel Aryaduta, Jakarta, on 29 July 2013.

²⁴⁸ In the UN context see, Stanley Foundation, 1997.

²⁴⁹ See Chalermpanupap, 2007:130; interview with former Secretariat staff, Singapore, 7 August 2013.

²⁵⁰ Fieldnotes and interview, 6 December 2011.

Importantly, this is a point recognised by diplomats within the CPR as well, though they apprehend this as a “working-method problem,” rooted less in the social bases of their superordination than in the egocentric and capricious exertions of the personal front. Agung, a middle aged CPR diplomat, reflects

Some countries are fixated on rules with the Secretariat and will pick on small things ‘why are you flying with Singapore Airlines when you should be flying Garuda because it’s the cheaper option?’ ‘Why this hotel which is too expensive’ or ‘Isn’t this perk out of rank for the staff on mission?’ Our PR wants things to be more relaxed... on small things some space should be allowed as long as there is no mismanagement. Then there is a difference in style. Some go like [thumps his hand on the table] ‘we want it like *this, this this*’. A few countries do this, but because of them we all get a bad name.”²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Fieldnotes, 7 May 2013.

Table 7. Workload at the ASEAN Secretariat Before and After the 2008 ASEAN Charter²⁵²

Year	No. of ASEAN Meetings at ASEC	Total no. of Meetings at ASEC	Total no. of Meetings in ASEAN and ASEC	Change in the no. of Meetings in ASEAN and ASEC (%)	Change in the no. of Meetings with 2006 as the base year (%)	No. of ASEC staff [including LRS]	Increase in staff (%)	Change in No. of Staff with 2006 as the base year (%)	ASEC Budget (USD millions)	Change in budget (%)
2006	738	n/a	738	n/a	0	200	n/a	0%	8.49	0
2007	688	n/a	688	-7	-7	205	3%	3	9.68	14.02
2008	438	350	788	15	7	234	14%	17	7.83	-19.11
2009	619	577	1196	52	62	262	12%	31	14.35	83.27
2010	702	522	1224	2	66	229	-13%	15	14.33	0.14

²⁵² Source: Pitsuwan, 2011: 26.

Table 8. ASC and CPR Meetings at ASEAN Secretariat²⁵³

Year	No. Meetings	No. of Professional Staff from the unit servicing the CPR meetings
ASEAN Standing Committee (1976-2008)		
2007	4	3
2008	4	2
CPR in Jakarta (2009-present)		
2009	21	Up to 4
2010	38	Up to 4
2011	50	Up to 4

7.4.1.3 A State Prerogative

While the diplomats in the ASC, and subsequently the CPR, have been the most proximate and trenchant wielders of the state's prerogative, they are not alone. Indeed, what makes this prerogative a *state* prerogative is that the logic of entitlement imbricates each and every interaction of the secretariat staff with state agents, well beyond the confines of the Lotus Room or the ASEAN Hall in Jakarta.

This state prerogative is at work in a much larger domain of state-secretariat interactions when staff service ASEAN's numerous sectoral body meetings across the region. In contrast to their relationship with a 'watchdog' institution like the CPR, the ties that bind Secretariat staff with other state agents are profoundly inflected by three factors: first, these interactions are time-bound and limited as most sectoral meetings are held two to four times a year and often away from Jakarta;

²⁵³Source: Pitsuwan, 2011: 27.

second, for these state agents, ASEAN work is a side affair to their national burdens; and third – and as a consequence – they are far more dependent on the assistance and institutional memory of Secretariat staff.

Even though this domain of interactions has been a space for empowerment of Secretariat staff (Chapter 8), the operation of the state's prerogative is nonetheless well and alive. The prerogative is expressed by the very fact that the Secretariat staff must shine without outshining the state, and must extend the expected ritual deference (in talking, comportment and gesture) to earn the trust of state agents. That this *is* a prerogative is conveyed most coercively when a failure to perform the script and engage in face-work endangers the staff to indecencies and retaliation, often in the form of castigation at meetings and, in some cases, written complaints by sectoral bodies to the DSG or the SG at the Secretariat.

Having surveyed the agents who wield this prerogative and exercise control, it is instructive to examine the array of embodied practices by which superordination is asserted and claimed.

7.4.2 Commanding and Exacting Ritual Deference

There is a particular kind of self that must be cultivated and presented by the professional Secretariat staff in everyday encounters with the state. While clothing within the Secretariat is always within the ambiguous parameters of 'business casual,' staff ensure that the 'business' aspects of the personal front are heightened for any meeting with state agents, from CPR to foreign diplomats. Sleeves are rolled

down and a jacket or tie kept handy in the office is promptly made use of, while women staff add a blazer to their dresses as they head into a meeting at the Lotus Room or at the ASEAN Hall.

The presentation of self also concerns a particular way of talking, one that is coloured by the practices of the diplomatic field and by cultural understandings of hierarchy. Sushamitra, a staff who joined the Secretariat after years in the development sector, put this succinctly

I once went into a meeting with the CPR Working Group not knowing the protocols. Usually ASEC staff would go in and say [in a deferential tone] ‘Thank you *Chayyer* [Chair]. Thank you for giving me the floor.’ Yeah, It’s very dry! [laughs] So I come in, and guess what do I say? “Hello everyone!” Seriously, some of them looked up to see whom it was! But some of them were nice, they smiled. I didn’t realise then that a Secretariat staff was behind the room to see how I was handling my first meeting. So she met me next day and said:

‘Hey! Oh my god! You were just...the way you met the CPR!’

I guess since then I’m a little more careful and I do thank the Chair at the start and whoever has to be *thanked is thanked*.²⁵⁴

Duc, a professional staff who previously worked as a policy researcher, had been alert about the need to be “diplomatic” before the CPR but realised the parameters of this performance were slimmer than she had imagined. A few months into her appointment she found herself in a meeting with the CPR Working Group along with her boss. The meeting had gone well and she was enjoying the opportunity to speak

²⁵⁴ Fieldnotes, 21 November 2012.

until she took liberty of her growing comfort to single out a country in her criticism of a project, closing with a “but we are not talking about the elephant in the room!” She recalled how her boss, seated beside her, stiffened but did not intrude. He let her have her say. “The CPR were polite about it, maybe they sensed that I was new. But for months they didn’t approach or route questions through me but went directly to my boss. It took a while to make them trust me. In this job there is a level of self censoring, of imbibing red-lines.”²⁵⁵

In an immaculate contrast collar shirt and spotless brogues, Syed, a seasoned staff renowned for his strong relations with the CPR and his sectoral bodies, conveys the importance of tact and restraint in putting forward views to agents of the state. “We can’t ask member states to sign this or that, they will not accept it. You can’t say countries in South America have done this so ASEAN should also do this. *Cannot!* They will ask ‘Why is Secretariat saying this?’ On more sensitive issues they will straight away say ‘Ok, Secretariat, don’t go ahead of yourself.’”²⁵⁶

Secretariat staff, then, must devise a different vocabulary and tone when they disagree with states: “These are the facts and figures and given this situation member states may want to *relook* this position” as Syed would enact, or as Duc would learn to say along the way “Thank you Chairman. We appreciate the proposal from country X but we would like to remind you in these circumstances there are certain constraints that are worth considering” or as Pitchol would phrase his proposal to states “is this paper worth looking at?”

²⁵⁵ Fieldnotes, 16 June 2013.

²⁵⁶ Interview, Jakarta, 8 February 2013.

Reflecting on this practice, Pitchol concludes that “this is very much an Asian organisation, one has to accept that. It is not a condescending view, it’s a reality”.²⁵⁷

Syed reflects

It takes time...to know what they expect of you, what they don’t expect of you, what they want you to do, how to behave in the meetings. It takes a little bit of nuance, some sensitivity. You may be right in your view but you have to think twice because there will be times when what you say or write *may put a particular member state in a difficult position* [emphasis mine]. And then they can castigate, scold, and it can get ugly, you know. You can get disheartened and dispirited. So we have to be a bit level headed. I recall this advice given to me by a senior when I joined: ‘don’t lower your standards but lower your expectations.’²⁵⁸

The attentiveness of Secretariat staff to the intricacies of their banal interactions with states contrasts with the absence of any such solicitude among state representatives towards the former. Indeed, the provision of ritual deference occurs strictly over a one-way lane. The face-work that ASEAN member states undertake towards each other at the microcosm of the CPR meeting table may be fruitfully compared to the ritual etiquette – or the lack of it – towards the Secretariat staff at that very setting. Gloria recalls sitting along the perimeter of the Lotus Room listening to a session before her.

So another staff was sitting with them on the table and they could have asked the question more professionally or civilly but this PR asked [enacts] “I just

²⁵⁷ Interview, Jakarta, 21 March 2013.

²⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, 21 November 2012.

don't see the *point* of that sentence in that paragraph. Can ASEC *explain* where that sentence came from?" If you are talking to someone of the same level then you will just not talk like that...if the same thing had to be asked to a country then they would usually say [spoken with a crisp, pleasing tone] "Can you *refresh* my mind why the sentence is there in the paragraph" or "what's the *background* to this sentence" or "why did *we* decide to put that sentence in there?" So it will be polite and civil. [As the full force of her point dawns on her, Gloria speaks rapidly and agitatedly] It's *amazing*, it's amazing how rude they can be.²⁵⁹

Again, ritual deference is exacted and commanded across state agents, not just by diplomats but by bureaucrats in varied national ministries too. The failure by a Secretariat staff to extend such deference in a consistent manner, and the frayed interactions that follow, may result in complaints from sectoral officials to the SG where the Secretariat staff may be accused of being "unprofessional" and of pushing a "private agenda." Of particular notoriety was the experience of Clara, a Senior Officer at the Secretariat whose contract was not renewed following complaints from officials in the sectoral body she serviced. Renowned at the Secretariat for both her competence and quick temper, Clara had worked for nearly five years servicing a specialised trade meeting of ASEAN officials. Clara's problems arose on two counts: first, her growing technical expertise in a specialised domain of activity over the years that gave her the confidence to express her views at these meetings and press member states for "results", and second, her egotistic clashes with some state representatives who, in her view, were frustrated with Clara's command of English that enabled her to thwart their 'national' agendas. The following conveys just one of

²⁵⁹ Interview with Secretariat staff, Jakarta, 26 April 2013.

Clara's many skirmishes around an oval shaped meeting table, microphones, table top flags, name cards, and all:

Indonesia had not prepared a presentation for a meeting but their accusation was 'ASEAN Secretariat sent us the invitation letter very late, only three weeks before the meeting, and we are not happy with that because we are not able to prepare our delegation.'

That was a false accusation, because Thailand was hosting the meeting and until I don't receive the invitation letter from them I cannot send it to anyone. So I kept urging Thailand to send it. So I responded

'Madam Chairman, according to the procedure, the host country sends the invitation letter.'

I just *pointed* my finger at Thailand and asked

'Thailand, would you like to respond to Indonesia on why the letter was late because this is not our fault.'

[Clara swiftly slips into a couplet]

Thailand will not argue with me *lah*.

Thailand will not speak English *lah*,

Thailand will have to formulate their thoughts *lah*,

And by that time its too late *lah*.

So Indonesia...they just kept quiet. And then I broke the silence.

'Indonesia, you mentioned that you did not receive the invitation but may I also remind you that there has been a constant change in your mailing list and you had not updated us that you are the new Head of Delegation but your staff sitting behind you was in the mailing list and he should have updated you on

this. So this is where internal coordination is also very important for Member States.’

She wasn’t going to be happy now was she? [Clara laughs]. I rarely got along with Singapore and soon he joined in

‘We should refine the role of the ASEAN Secretariat and list out what they should do and not do.’

Malaysia tried to calm things down, and he said

‘I don’t think we should be doing this.’ But I shot back [in a slow, defiant voice]

‘No Malaysia, I want it listed, I want everyone to know what is our role, so we have a common understanding on expectations.’

There was break soon *lah*, and you know I came out of the room knowing everyone was attacking me. It was *HORR-i-ble*. Then Vietnam came to me and I had helped him many times in the past with presentations and papers so he knew me well, and said ‘I don’t think they should have treated you this way.’ So I asked him ‘But would you stand up and fight for me? You wouldn’t, right? All he could say was ‘It’s difficult.’ [she pauses] But at least they knew it was not right *yah*.²⁶⁰

Clara’s run-ins with member states are instructive in that they show how awry state-secretariat relations can get when egotistic aspects of the personal front fuse with the tensions built into this relationship. A relationship where a subordinate with higher linguistic capital, technical knowledge, and a drive to push for ‘results’ seeks an equal face in the company of superordinates who, on accord of their functional kinship, will willingly or reluctantly gang up if and when the face of a sovereign equal is under threat.

²⁶⁰ Interview, Jakarta, 2 July 2013; fieldnotes, 22 June 2013.

7.4.3 *Blurring Lines of Authority*

The ASEAN Secretariat Staff Regulations (ASSR) drafted by the CPR is emphatic in making the point that the staff of the Secretariat are “subject to the authority of the SG ...and are responsible only to him/her in the performance of their duties”. (ASSR, 2012: 7, C.4). In doing so, it inserts in an operational document a principle enshrined in the Charter that “each ASEAN Member State undertakes to respect the exclusively ASEAN character of the responsibilities of the SG and the staff, and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities” (ASEAN, 2008: 17).

“But the SG is only the supreme Secretary and member states are his bosses too!” Mongkut piquantly notes as he explains the routine ways in which member states – in the everyday form of the CPR in Jakarta and also states convening in his sectoral meetings – ask Secretariat staff to do tasks for them, in a move that both contravenes their performance of impartiality and the spirit of the Charter. “When you are preparing an Information Paper or a guideline, sometimes one country will come to you and ask you to insert their country position ‘Ok Secretariat I want you to propose this’.” Mongkut points his finger to an imaginary document on the table. “It’s not the Secretariat, actually *it is them who are proposing* because they don’t *want to be seen* proposing! So, on the one hand you can’t do it, but then how to tell them that?” Colorful in his enactments, Mongkut proceeds with a touch of incredulity “and then in some cases they prepare something which they don’t fully understand. Secretariat circulates that paper at the meeting and the Chair country will suddenly ask [enacts

the state in a heavy baritone voice] ‘Secretariat, what is this? Can you clarify?’ and I want to look at them and say [in a rising falsetto voice] “Same here! *I don’t understand too! What is this?!*”²⁶¹

For Khairul the experience was of a more persistent kind “We actually write speeches for Cambodia! [exclaims with frustration] The PR will assign his deputy to prepare something, and then that person will say [in a pleading tone] ‘Khairul, will you please help us in writing this speech?’ We give them some pointers but then they will ask if we can give them more. And then we know that they just want a full speech. So it’s ASEAN Secretariat speaking! We know they are weak and don’t have human resources and so this is like *helping* a member state, but it’s really inappropriate that this is happening. And we can’t say no to them because it will be difficult to work with them.”²⁶²

The questions of the lines of authority within the Secretariat are further complicated by the newer practices that have crept into the CPR’s repertoire of control. CPR diplomats are seen walking into the office rooms of the Secretariat staff to ask questions or express dissatisfaction, a practice where they are nonetheless careful to follow rank. “They can walk into anyone’s office and ask questions” Kommer observes, “the first Secretary, *even* the Second Secretary, they can walk into the Assistant Directors office and say ‘No! We don’t want that’”.²⁶³ Meanwhile, the DPR or the PR make their unannounced visits to the Director’s office at the Secretariat to convey that “ASEAN Secretariat need not pursue this”, especially when they wish to

²⁶¹ Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

²⁶² Interview, Jakarta, 1 June 2013.

²⁶³ Fieldnotes, 13 May 2013; 29 July 2013.

pursue a national position but are hesitant to express their views in a formal meeting with other members. The practice extends into the meeting rooms of the Secretariat as well, where it is known for PRs to approach a Director during meeting breaks to express their disapproval for an idea proposed by another state but one they don't wish to openly disagree with in the meeting. "I don't think ASEAN should get too deeply involved in this" as one Director would recall being told.

7.4.4 'Testing'

An experience that newly arrived professional staff at the Secretariat face is of getting tested by diplomats from their home countries in the CPR. Somchai's experience of being tested is particular in its specificities but general in how it mirrors the experience of other – mostly younger and junior – professional staff at the Secretariat. It was her first month at the Secretariat as a Senior Officer and she had to liaise over email on behalf of her division with a Permanent Mission of the ASEAN state she happened to be a citizen of. "I had a big email episode with Aroon. He was really *testing* me", she begins

I sent him an update on a project and he replied 'Why are you saying this?' and I rephrased and clarified my position on the matter. But he replied back asking more fiercely about what I had written previously 'But why did you say that?' he was demanding. So I had to ask my boss Widya 'I've already explained this, how many more times do I have to explain?' His advice was 'no, normally no need to reply. But he is testing you. Just keep replying... If you stop then he will take it that you can buckle. But of course it's up to you...you are a professional here.' And so the email exchange went back and forth till Aroon stopped. "This was in August. Then the next month, it was September, there was an event at the Secretariat and I

bumped into Aroon. He went like ‘ohhh so you are Somchai! Care for a glass of wine?’ I was taken aback. I chose some white but he insisted ‘no this red is better.’ Soon after I met his wife, his children and things were okay. And then a TO joined my division and he was at her again, testing her over email. I was like ‘man, what’s your problem?’²⁶⁴

The practice of testing operates as a form of initiation ritual for some staff, one comprised of a challenge and, if passed with flying colours, producing ties of affect and protection from ritual indecencies. As Somchai elaborates “Once it was over they are sort of protective towards you. In the sense that ...it’s a feeling. In a meeting you sense that they are more attentive towards you. And of course you know it’s because of the substance of what you are saying but partly you can sense that they are a little bit more...I can’t express. They won’t come down hard on you in the meeting and won’t join in if others are attacking.”

The origins of the practice of testing – imbibed in their foreign policy bureaucracies or plucked from their personal life worlds – is not of concern here than what it expresses about the nature the prerogative at work. A prerogative is not merely an entitlement but also carries with it the idea of license, of impunity. What was striking about the practice of testing to Somchai – and indeed to other younger officers like her at the Secretariat– was how easy it was for CPR diplomats “to get away with it.”

²⁶⁴ Fieldnotes, 23 June 2013; 4 August 2013.

7.4.5 'Imposing' a 'Culture'

There is another form in which the CPR's everyday interactions with the Secretariat is seen to be affecting the organisation: the refrain that the "CPR are imposing their culture on us". Kommer, who joined the Secretariat in 2009, just as the CPR were finding their bearings in Jakarta, conveys what this has meant in and through embodied encounters.

I've heard stories of the old ASEC and the new ASEC. And then I saw it for myself. The CPR were introducing this very bureaucratic nature of foreign affairs ministries to ASEC. A lot of hierarchy basically, and that's why many ASEC staff didn't take it too well because, you know, we have more collegial relations with each other and with our bosses. Even with my boss Pak Rama, I can step into his office and ask questions without any problem. I don't have to *bow* in front of him, you know!"²⁶⁵

The "bow" that Kommer mocks here is not a full-bodied movement but a subtler and quicker arching of the head that serves as a commonly used form of ritual etiquette among Indonesians, and Javanese in particular, to express courtesy and respect. While such an embodied gesture is unnecessary in his interactions with superordinates at his office "the CPR people expect something like that ...some *extra* respect." The demands for such respect are tacitly sought from the "higher ups" – the

²⁶⁵ 'Pak' or 'Bapak' literally "Mr." is the formal Indonesian prefix to express respect for an elder or professional senior.

PRs, the DPRs and sometimes the first Secretaries as well. “You know, it’s like in their foreign ministries, they are used to it and expect it from us”.²⁶⁶

7.5 Domination, Consent and a Secretariat that Stays Afloat

The cumulative effects of design, dissension and diktat, heightened with the arrival of the CPR in Jakarta, have had some unsurprising effects.

For one, they have spawned a catalogue of everyday forms of resistance at the Secretariat. Professional staff are known to often time their overseas missions to coincide with CPR meetings, while some choose to attend training workshops organised by Dialogue Partners or arrange meetings with foreign diplomats to avoid facing the CPR. When faced with an unanticipated call from the Lotus Room or the ASEAN Hall summoning them under “any other business,” some officers seek to evade the encounter, telling their secretaries that “I’m stepping out”.²⁶⁷ Mindful that all tenders for projects and office equipment above USD 20,000 must be approved by the CPR,²⁶⁸ staff devise budgets and seek equipment lower than the stipulated sum to escape a potentially “painful” exercise of offering justifications, suppressing, in that process, considerations about the quality of their products – of brochures, banners, and office equipment.

²⁶⁶ Interview, 13 May 2013; Fieldnotes, 7 July 2013.

²⁶⁷ Fieldnotes, 02 May 2013.

²⁶⁸ This was the rule in 2011. By 2012 it appears that tenders of all amounts have to be passed to the CPR.

When confronted by a displeased CPR diplomat posing questions about work – at a meeting or at their office cubicles at the Secretariat – some officers choose to “play it stupid” and disown knowledge of the inner workings of projects they run at the sectoral level to avoid questions from a body of diplomats not known for their proficiency in technical matters.²⁶⁹ And then there is that old and timeless strategy of flight. Since the arrival of the CPR in 2009, the Secretariat has faced an annual turnover rate of nearly 20%, a large bulk of these consisting of aspirational locally recruited officers keen to orbit out into the wider market of intergovernmental bodies in Jakarta, as well as openly recruited officers – quite often former development consultants and journalists– less yielding to state exactions of emotional labour. Each flight expresses a culmination of the effects of the states’ prerogative expressed on paper and deployed in practice.

Why, one may ask, does the Secretariat, in the midst of such depredations and assertions, continue to survive? Why do some staff at the receiving end of slights and insecurity persist in their aspiration for longer, stable and rewarding careers at the Secretariat? How, indeed, can state power exercised through designs, dissension and diktat be sustained given that the Secretariat, with its channels for exits and opt-outs, is not a ‘total institution’ (Goffman, 1961) where power can be secured by domination alone.

These questions suggest the operation of two kinds of pressures acting upon the Secretariat. On the one hand are the perennial forces undercutting a ‘strong’ secretariat – from design features to the indifference of state agents towards their

²⁶⁹ Fieldnotes, 13 May 2013.

everyday and unfolding pathologies. Yet, another set of pressures appears to hold the Secretariat above water, and counter the prospects of unmitigated staff exodus, of institutional ennui and paralysis altogether. This second countervailing force is rooted in the symbolic and ideological scaffold of what the Secretariat is and should be, that is a servant to states. It is the ideology of servicing that expresses and reproduces a social relationship where staff come to acquiesce – in a variety of ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ ways – to their subordination to states. Whether it is the staff who merely “absorbs instructions” and performs servility, or the staff who brings creativity and tact to the craft of servicing to carve out lines of action, empowerment and personal esteem, the possibilities of self-esteem and the latent threat of castigation all vitally depend on the embodied performance of subordination. It is because of the internalisation of this relation, and its expression in a universe of sayings – “the Secretariat is a nobody,” “member states are the bosses” – that the exactions of state superordination may be rationalised to varying degrees as legitimate or tolerable, even when a host of more idiosyncratic and suppressed concerns may be at work – from the enduring attraction of a US dollar salary, of supplementary income from per diems from incessant overseas travels, or a hefty education subsidy at Jakarta’s premier international schools for those with children.

7.6 Conclusion

It has been the contention of this Chapter that states control a Secretariat not only through design features in consecrated sheets of paper but also through the *everyday effects* of design features and the *embodied assertion* of prerogative in banal moments of co-presence, all of which are enabled and sustained by state prerogative produced by (and performed in) the ‘ASEAN Way’. Moreover, it demonstrates how state control over the Secretariat is not merely exercised, it is also *generated* through varying levels of acquiescence and consent on those it seeks to impose its will.

In answering the question – *how states control a Secretariat?* (in this instance, the ASEAN Secretariat) – the Chapter seeks to ‘service’ the principal arguments of this thesis on the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus in some crucial ways. This account offers an insight into how the Secretariat is a symbolic space inscribed by ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus, with its overriding regard for the performance of the sovereign equality of its states. The Secretariat is thus designed in a way that expresses the equality of its members. This inscription is also performative in that state representatives *apprehend* their equality through the designs of the Secretariat. The inscription of sovereign equality over the Secretariat is accompanied with (arguably buttressed by) the equal *capacity* of states to make prerogative claims – without being checked by a fellow member state – on the labours of staff at the Secretariat.

Besides being inscribed over the symbolic architecture of the Secretariat, ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus also inscribes itself over a corporeal site – the body and subjectivity of the staff building a career at the Secretariat. Staff come to acquiesce –

to varying degrees and in varying ways – to state control through their internalisation of the symbolic net cast over the Secretariat, a net woven taut by ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus. By being constituted as particular kinds of subjects – as ‘servants’ – staff are readied to extend their administrative and emotional labour as they service states and sustain their performances of equality. The emotional labour rendered in this Chapter, it is worth noting, are of a specific kind: at once necessary (a threshold of routine ritual deference), more defensive (borne out of the need to avoid castigation and demoralisation), and also yielding (it may be extracted coercively when required). A different account of how another type of emotional labour – one that is extended more willingly, imaginatively, and is paradoxically more empowering – is developed in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 8

THE ART OF ‘SERVICING’: POWER IN DOCILITY

Kitakan cuma babunya untuk member states (We are only coolies for member states).

Senior Officer, ASEAN Secretariat²⁷⁰

Hey, we are nobody! We are nobody! We sit in the meetings. But do we own it? No. Do we fund it? No. Do we...uhh... implement it? No. It's the countries.

Assistant Director, ASEAN Secretariat²⁷¹

Does it [Secretariat] have any power? [Sighs heavily] Well, you can ask the alternative, does it have no power? Because, you can't deny it has some influence, right?

Western diplomat in Jakarta²⁷²

We are servants and *yet* [his voice grows serious] I could play the role of a leader, in a way that you might say totally went against sovereignty. They were willing to be led somehow, but they didn't see themselves as being led! How is that possible?

Former Director ('pioneer' batch),

ASEAN Secretariat²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Fieldnotes, 17 March 2013.

²⁷¹ Interview, Jakarta, 9 December 2011.

²⁷² Interview, Jakarta, 8 July 2013.

²⁷³ Interview, Jakarta, 23 November 2012.

Whatever you do, you must not forget that power is everything. And nobody will give ASEAN Secretary General or ASEAN secretariat staff the power. But you can always borrow other people's power.

Ong Keng Yong

Secretary General of ASEAN (2003-07)²⁷⁴

8.1 Introduction

The quintet of quotes above offer a spectrum of responses – in an ascending order of possibilities – to a question at the heart of this chapter: Does the ASEAN Secretariat have power? Given that the referent here is the ‘Secretariat’ as an organisation, and the task is to ascertain if it ‘has’ and ‘possesses’ an energy that, for the moment, may be referred to as ‘power,’ a straightforward mode of probing this question would be to pore over the representations of the Secretariat in the consecrated documents – Declarations, Host Country Agreements, and Protocols – by which it is constituted and designed by its sovereign creators. As the preceding chapter has demonstrated in some detail, the ASEAN Secretariat is weak on account of design principles that limit its mandate, constrict the growth of its operational budget, and render its legal status ambiguous. Moreover, episodic exercises to ‘strengthen’ the organisation have been swiftly reined in through informal deals struck *among* ASEAN’s diplomats or in the intimacy of everyday social encounters *between* state representatives and Secretariat staff where a hierarchy in favour of state power and preferences are produced and reproduced.

²⁷⁴ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

A second and possibly more productive strategy is to examine the domain of public representations about the Secretariat in newspaper commentary, policy reports and scholarly writings. Doing so, one is bound to take note of the occasional appearance of the Secretary General – almost always in cameo roles – at key moments and conjunctures of the Association’s unfolding dramas. What becomes apparent from this perusal is the growing symbolic space of the Secretary General as an “ASEAN Chief” (BBC News, 2012) as “South East Asia’s top diplomat” (Bigg, 2012), and even as a “‘foreign minister’ of ASEAN” (Arya Brata, 2013). The ‘power’ of the Secretariat might then be deduced in qualified forms from the apparent ‘successes’ of its top officer, be it in Ajit Singh’s reported role in facilitating the entry of Vietnam into ASEAN, Rodolfo Severino’s success in issuing the call for ‘economic integration’ in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis (The Nation, 1998), Ong Keng Yong’s role in pushing for the ASEAN Charter (Emmerson; 2008) and, perhaps most conspicuously, Surin Pitsuwan’s entrepreneurial role in coaxing a reclusive regime in Myanmar to open its doors to humanitarian relief in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis (Haacke, 2009:171; Emmerson, 2008).

Appealing as it may be, this strategy – based on evaluations of ‘successes’ – must reckon with a range of problems that stem from ASEAN’s own diplomatic practice. First, any claims of the Secretary General and staff’s proprietorial role in facilitating particular outcomes may be undercut by the obscured role of state agents who may have been keen to *not be seen* as pushing for specific initiatives (as is often the case with Indonesia as the Association’s largest member and Singapore as its smallest, mindful not to be perceived as ‘throwing about’ or ‘punching above’ their ‘weights’, respectively). Second, it could be argued that the Secretariat officers’ success in

advancing a concept or mechanism in ASEAN occurred only because the context was right (a long mulled mechanism on disaster management taking form only after the 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami, for instance, [Guillox, 2009]). Third, and perhaps most importantly, that the data about the Secretariat's power in the public stage would be incomplete in that the Secretariat's anonymity and relative invisibility is in fact *a necessary condition of its effective practice*. In other words, the Secretariat cannot be seen to outshine states.

The sparse, selective, and incomplete material on the Secretariat's role in the public domain and in official transcripts suggests a certain presumption (even insolence) in posing questions about the Secretariat's 'power'. Can, then, one talk of 'power' in the context of a stiflingly designed Secretariat peopled by staff who internalise and reproduce state prerogative through their self-image as servants of member states? That we can do so, in fact, is the argument I will make in this chapter.

In order to do so, however, the question posed at the outset warrants reconsideration and revision on two counts. Rather than focus on the Secretariat in abstract terms, I shall turn the spotlight on the host of international and local staff who *instantiate* the Secretariat as they go about their multitude of professional and social performances of 'servicing' member states. Concomitantly, rather than ask whether the Secretariat 'has,' 'owns' or 'possesses' power – a substantialist conception that forecloses other relational modes of conceiving the production and transmission of social energy (Emirbayer, 1997; Tilly, 1995) – I shall enquire whether the Secretariat staff (and notionally the 'Secretariat') *harness, channel and enjoy* power. Instead of looking for 'power' in its observable exercise or in its presence as a potential that is activated –

conceptions drawn from a long standing intellectual history spanning from Locke and Hume to Descartes – I shall conceive power in the mode suggested by Steven Lukes (2005: 69-74): as a *capacity* which need not be actualised to be effective, a *power to* instead of a *power over*, with the former a necessary basis for the latter.

Armed with these twin reconfigurations, I will make the argument that in contrast to their highly constricted roles on paper, staff at the Secretariat carve out spaces of action and empowerment by bringing skill and creativity to the banality of their work practices of ‘servicing’ states. This is an *art* of servicing where the generation of power – from moulding the agenda and policy emanating from a meeting to managing the procedure, flow and politics of a diplomatic interaction itself – arises from performing as a faithful, meticulous and ‘intelligent’ servant.

The paper consists of three parts. First, I will flesh out the various practices that constitute staffs’ professional (and social) task of ‘servicing’ member states. Second, I will flesh out the mode by which these practices and the emotional labour that undergird them – of solicitousness and deference – conceal a more crafty strategy at play. This is when staff elevate their practice of servicing into an art form. Third and finally, I will historicise this practice over the spine of the Secretariat’s history, noting how different conceptions of servicing have been at the heart of contestations about its role and purpose in ASEAN’s diplomatic project, and indeed in the very prospect of ASEAN’s appeal and cohesion in the future as well.

8.2. ‘Servicing’ States

To grasp what ‘servicing states’ looks like in practice it is instructive to examine the performance of servicing *in and around* that quintessential site where ASEAN as a inter-state, international, experienced and embodied diplomatic practice takes places: the ASEAN meeting. These meetings are interactional encounters etched into time and space, with each of them sited in overseas locations and (occasionally) at the Secretariat, and lasting anywhere between a couple of hours or up to 5 days (the latter an ‘interactional mastodon’ as Goffman [1967: 1] would put it). As they engage in and around the meeting, interactants bring to bear their situated sociological and historical biographies along with egocentric aspects of their personal front, both of which must be grasped and reckoned with by staff whose first responsibility is to “know your officials well.”²⁷⁵

Given the number of these meetings – up to 1400 in 2014 – it is worth clarifying their type and frequency. As noted in Chapter 4, all professional officers at the Secretariat (except in the Public Outreach division) serve as ‘Desk Officers’ for a domain of inter-state bureaucratic activity: trade, defence, health, immigration, infrastructure, finance, with 37 such ‘sectors’ in all. Desk Officers for the ‘health’ sector coordinate *all* meetings held among officials from the health ministries of the ten member states spanning the hierarchy of the state’s bureaucracy – from ‘Working Group’ meetings among junior and mid-level bureaucrats, to ‘Senior Official’ meetings among top bureaucrats, and finally meetings among Ministers. Temporally, these meetings may be interspersed through the year or held back-to-back.

²⁷⁵ Fieldnotes, 20 January 2013.

The trajectory of a typical ASEAN meeting plays out over three distinct time periods: before, at, and after the meeting.

8.2.1 Preparing for an ASEAN Meeting

In the weeks leading up to an ASEAN meeting, Secretariat staff focus on preparing the meeting's Agenda. Often a one or two page document, the Agenda structures the embodied interaction to ensue at the impending meeting. At the preparatory stage, the Secretariat works with the representative holding ASEAN's rotating Chairmanship to finalise the Agenda. Often enough, items from the previous meeting are reinserted or rehashed into the new Agenda, and protocol requires that the Chair country circulate the document by email (with documents in PDF) to the nine other representatives. Following receipt, member states can suggest ideas, proposals and initiatives they would like to raise at the meeting. When such comments are received, a revised Agenda is circulated. In 'lax' sectoral bodies, the Secretariat emails the Agenda as well as the official invitation letter on behalf host country or the Chair.²⁷⁶

Once the Agenda is formalised, Secretariat staff write papers to substantiate each of the Agenda Items. These papers, varying anywhere between 2 to 8 pages in length, are known by different names: 'Information Papers', 'Discussion Papers', and 'Concept Notes.' While these classifications are often used interchangeably, the Discussion Paper is seen to have a "higher value as it focuses on a specific issue, identifies challenges and offers recommendations on how to address those challenges," as one staff described it. Once prepared, these papers are circulated by

²⁷⁶ Fieldnotes, 16 July 2013

the Secretariat to state representatives nearly two weeks before the meeting and “if member states find something controversial they will come back and tell us ‘please insert this and this’ or ‘please don’t include this paragraph.’ But in most cases they don’t.”²⁷⁷ As they email state agents, Secretariat staff are guided by a long-standing practice that if member states do not respond by a given date (stated explicitly in the email) then their silence will be deemed to signal provisional agreement to the draft.

While Secretariat staff sort out the paperwork, the logistics for the meeting – hotel bookings, meeting venue, menu for lunches and dinners, welcome reception, sightseeing excursions, and so on – are often worked out by the relevant ministry of the member state hosting the ASEAN meeting. At times, though, Secretariat staff will be asked to assist with the logistics from afar as well.

On the eve of departure, staff print all the documentation – agenda, papers, reports, annexures – and assemble them in ‘conference kits’. Much care is taken to format documents and assemble them in a way that is amenable and pleasing to state agents.

Antara, an Indonesian professional staff at the Secretariat recounts

In servicing, we have to do a lot of photocopying, binding documents, making sure that they are in order, you know. In [SG] Ong Keng Yong's time, even the way you staple your papers, he had his own way. And sometimes member states can be very meticulous about...for example when you make papers, you make sure that there's no new section hanging at the end of the page, that's called recklessness too. So if at the end of the page there is just a title of a sub-section and nothing below, you could have just moved that new sub-section to the next

²⁷⁷ Interview with Secretariat staff, Jakarta, 6 December 2012.

page. So, member states don't like that, and some senior leadership at ASEC [Secretariat] do pay attention on that stuff.²⁷⁸

Meanwhile, staff sign and submit a form to the Travel Unit at the Corporate Affairs Directorate and tickets are purchased for 3 to 4 staff – often the Assistant Director, a Senior Officer and Technical Officers – to travel to the meeting being hosted in one of the capitals or tourist destinations in the ten states of the Association or beyond.

8.2.2 *'On Mission': At the ASEAN Meeting*

Once the Secretariat staff make their way through the *macet* clogged Jakarta highways to Sukarno-Hatta airport and take a flight – often Singapore Airlines with a transit in Singapore's Changi airport – to their destination, they are deemed to be 'on Mission'. Among their first tasks upon arrival is to scrutinise the venue where the ASEAN meeting will begin the next morning. Of specific concern is the correct arrangement of indoor flags, tabletop flags, the order of name cards and seating that constitute the primary props of the setting. Complications on this front can be of various kinds, especially when officials from the host country – from ministries other than the foreign ministry and rarely schooled in diplomatic protocol – ask hotel staff to arrange the setting. "But, you see!" as one staff laments "the hotel guy doesn't know what ASEAN is!"²⁷⁹ Staff must therefore pay close attention to whether flags are placed in the right alphabetical order starting with Brunei and ending with the ASEAN flag.

²⁷⁸ Interview with former Secretariat staff, 26 September 2013

²⁷⁹ Interview with former Secretariat staff, Kuala Lumpur, 12 June 2013.

Besides being arranged in random order, flags and seating around the table may also be found arranged in an anti-clockwise direction in the Arabic alphabet, especially when the hosts are Brunei, Indonesia, and occasionally, Malaysia. In such instances, staff must rearrange the setting in accordance with the clockwise cadence of the Roman alphabet in English – ASEAN’s indispensable *lingua franca*. Occasionally, errors in setting the scene can have potentially invidious effects. On the eve of an ASEAN Plus Three meeting – consisting of the 10 ASEAN member states and the three often fractious Northeast Asian states of Japan, China and South Korea – flags of ‘ASEAN’ and the ‘Plus Three,’ 13 states in all, were found arranged in a single line in alphabetical order which meant that the third flag in this arrangement, after Brunei and Cambodia, was of the People’s Republic of China, standing well within the ranks of ASEAN’s inner familial core. This was in deviance to the diplomatic protocol of arranging the flags of ASEAN member states on a flag pedestal to the right, and of the ‘Plus Three’ – China, Japan and Korea – on a separate flag pedestal to the left. Even though the error was on the part of the organisers, staff were mindful of how the presentation of flags – as a grouping of 13 as opposed to two bounded groups – could evoke memories of the politics of representation surrounding the China driven ASEAN Plus Three framework, where the enduring references in official Chinese documents and newspapers to the framework as ‘10+3’ as opposed to ‘ASEAN Plus Three’ was construed by some ASEAN insiders as belittling the functional kinship of ASEAN.²⁸⁰

On the day of the meeting, delegations from all ten member states and the Secretariat take their place along the meeting table. From atop, the conference table offers a

²⁸⁰ Fieldnotes, 24 June 2013. On China’s role in the APT, see Tanaka 2007:65-68; Hund, 2003; Stubbs, 2002; and Terada, 2010.

tapering view of bodies and papers: seated on the table are the Heads of Delegation of member-states along with the senior most officer from the Secretariat who are often the only people to speak over the tabletop microphones. Seated behind them, and in broadening files of seats as one reaches the perimeter of the room, are other lower-ranked representatives of member states busy listening, taking notes, and feeding information and papers to the front. While ASEAN's (annually rotating) Chair presides at the head of the table, the Secretariat officer is seated – always – to the Chair's immediate right.

The meeting gets underway with the *enactment* of the Agenda. Consisting of nearly eight to nine discrete points, these 'Agenda items' call forth a range of bureaucratic performances. The first three items invariably include 'Welcome or Opening remarks', followed by the 'Adoption of the Agenda' and 'Business Arrangements,' the latter bringing forth a discussion of the logistical arrangements for the meeting. The subsequent three or four Agenda items establish the main themes of deliberation at the meeting and may include 'progress reports' by member states on particular projects; the presentation of Information Papers and Discussion Papers by the Secretariat (the Chair always asks the Secretariat to present them); 'status updates' of ongoing studies and projects; and a review of the implementation of projects ('action plans' or 'work plans'). In this phase, the Chair may ask member states for their comments and the Secretariat, if and when asked, may have to explain the information it put forth in the papers. Any document presented at the meeting by the Chair, another member or the Secretariat, must elicit a formal response by all member state delegates who must either note the document's existence – a *dour*

“*nottuudd*”, as staff would often re-enact²⁸¹ – or must offer their endorsement. It is when a document secures the endorsement of all state delegates – with a speech act that John Austin (1962) would refer to as a “performative utterance” – that it becomes an ‘ASEAN document’ and an ‘ASEAN issue’.

As the ASEAN meeting unfolds, Secretariat staff must undertake a range of duties to document the meeting. First, junior staff are tasked with taking lengthy transcriptions of the discussion at the meeting, besides recording the session with an audio recorder. Meanwhile, the Senior Officer or Assistant Director may steal moments from listening and tending to the requests of member states on the table to make “smart notes”.²⁸² These notes are then fed into the first draft of the Meeting Report – the document that memorialises the decisions and discussions of the meeting – which the staff presents to the meeting delegates on the penultimate day of the meeting. The meeting report, also referred to as a “Summary of Discussion,” a “Summary of Decisions” or “Summary of Record” is put on an LCD screen and is pored over line by line by the delegates. An important labour of the Secretariat staff at this point is to edit the live document on the spot by shifting the cursor, highlighting the relevant sentence in yellow before moving on to the next sentence, and inserting changes and comments by member states as they come.

When the report is adopted and the meeting is concluded, member state delegations are entertained by the host country to dinner and sightseeing, while Secretariat staff return to the Secretariat’s delegation room (at the hotel, ministry or convention centre) and work late into the night printing and making copies of the report, agenda

²⁸¹ Fieldnotes, 1 June 2013.

²⁸² Fieldnotes, 1 June 2012.

and the various annexes that must accompany them. These are stapled, assembled in order, and put into conference folders for member state delegations to carry with them back home.

8.2.3 *The 'Inter-Sessional': After the ASEAN Meeting (And Before the Next Meeting)*

Upon their return to Jakarta, staff must prepare and file a 'Mission Report' for the Secretary General. Staff must then follow up on 'actions' for cooperation that were endorsed at the meeting. An important role of staff in this context is to reach out to foreign donors and diplomats in Jakarta (in particular) to secure funds for projects and programs (a workshop on capacity building, a seminar for specialist training, and so on) that were agreed upon by member state delegates at the meeting. With an eye to this end, staff not only gather information about different donor programs (from USAID, AUSAID, CIDA, GIZ, etc.) but also build social capital and devote 'face time' to foreign diplomats and development consultants based in Jakarta at formally arranged meetings, on the side of events at the Secretariat, or even through professional socialising over lunches and dinners.²⁸³

Having serviced an ASEAN meeting, staff attend to a host of duties other than servicing states²⁸⁴ but it is *servicing* ASEAN's meetings that constitutes the bulk of a typical Secretariat staff's professional workload. Moreover, it is the reputation for competence and skill in servicing these meetings that often determines one's career

²⁸³ Fieldnotes, 25 February 2013.

²⁸⁴ Routine requests to prepare 'briefing notes' and 'talking points' for the Secretary General or Division bosses, for example.

progression at the Secretariat. Given the stakes involved as well as the quantum of work – from two to four overseas missions a month coupled with the unrelenting emotional labour of servicing states – some staff are known to experience “burnouts” in the form of travel fatigue and, occasionally, psychosomatic illnesses as well.²⁸⁵ The experience of jet setting outside and returning also makes the experience of staff – especially the openly recruited staff – more fragmentary and solitary unlike the more sedentary locally recruited staff in Jakarta. Openly recruited staff are known to cope with the banality and exactions of servicing by making the most of their airport transits at Changi, shopping, taking a massage, and often enough socialising with their preferred colleagues in Jakarta or by running into them (as well as ASEAN diplomats) at airports.

8.3 The Art of Servicing

From inspecting the arrangement of flags, writing papers, serving as a ‘resource person’ at the beck and call of member states, to printing, photocopying, stapling and assembling papers into conference kits, the Secretariat staff must serve like the ideal servant – “silent, obsequious, and omnipresent” (Lethbridge, 2013). This description may indeed capture the experience of some Secretariat staff but there exist a class of staff – across the Secretariat’s four decades, across national affiliations, and indeed across the grade of ranks at the Secretariat – for whom such a description of their professional lives would be immensely reductive, if not an affront altogether.

²⁸⁵ Interview with former staff, Singapore, 22 December 2011; Fieldnotes, 16 June 2013.

These are practitioners who have fashioned an *art* of servicing, where they bring to play a certain skill and imagination to the banality of their work of servicing states.²⁸⁶ This art involves the embodied performance of servicing which *acquiesces* to a script of subordination and is expressed through a way of talking, a way of listening, of engaging in skillful face-work on the meeting table, all geared to please the agents of the state. At the same time, this performance stands out as *impeccable* by recalling past decisions and dates, marshaling facts and figures, that is, by embodying institutional memory that earns the respect of state agents. It is an embodied and tacit practice of *shining at work without outshining the state*, one that disarms the agents of the state and enables Secretariat staff to build trust, carve out spaces of action and also draw their professional self-worth.

In order to grasp this practice-turned-to-art form, I shall examine in some detail the vital aspects of this performance.

8.3.1 *The Faithful Servant*

As alluded to earlier, there is a process of self-formation that Secretariat staff must initiate and surrender to as they build a career at the Secretariat. Through the everyday practices and ideology of servicing, staff acquiesce to the formal hierarchy of their relationship to states and come to conceive the state's prerogatives over them as natural and even legitimate. This acquiescence must not be effected merely in the realm of one's ideas or personal beliefs alone, they must be *performed* in professional practice. Take Teerpat, for instance, a legendary veteran of the

²⁸⁶ By 'banality' I wish to foreground the predictability and repetition of a practice that may render it unoriginal or 'boring.'

Secretariat who worked for two decades in the fire-ring of ASEAN's political and security meetings. Budiarto, his colleague from those days, recalls "He was a Director. But he would go and photocopy the decisions and bring it to the member states delegates. He will sit there and draft something and put it on the power point so that they can see what they have decided. *That* is what builds trust you know."²⁸⁷ The art of servicing begins, indeed is vitally premised on, the assiduous display of one's cognisance and performance of this social relationship.

The performance of being a good servant involves several finely interrelated elements. It involves, for instance, upholding the principles that structure the role of an international civil servant, specifically, the performance of impartiality. "The moment they see you taking sides," Syed warns, "they [member states] will straight away bracket you neatly into a category and will not entertain you."²⁸⁸ Concomitant to practicing impartiality is the performance of loyalty to ASEAN. Teerapat notes "We have to show them [member states] that we advance and defend ASEAN interests. I never defend, never serve just my country, and that's always important because [otherwise] it will erode and destroy [your] credibility. You have *to be seen* to work for ASEAN's common interests."²⁸⁹

Besides the tactful performance of impartiality and ASEAN loyalty, a skillful staff has a deep grasp of the ASEAN style of diplomacy, a practice structured and organised around an exacting concern for face-work and impression management geared to maintain, uphold and save the face of the state representatives in a

²⁸⁷ Interview, Jakarta, 23 November 2012.

²⁸⁸ Fieldnotes, 17 July 2013.

²⁸⁹ Interview with former staff, Singapore, 15 January 2013.

diplomatic interaction. A successful staff begins by mastering the comprehension and use of an ‘ASEAN language,’ which, as one veteran staff describes in its broadest and most unexceptional terms, is “a polite and diplomatic language.”²⁹⁰ That said, this is a diplomatic language organised around some tenets. It includes, first, “not saying anything bad about anyone,” as Teerpat observes, “for even when we have disagreement [among member states], we just say ‘for further consideration.’”²⁹¹ Budiarto raises a second key tenet, which, in his view, is “even more important: you *cannot* contradict a country directly. You have to defer to a country and countries. Even if we know it’s wrong, I don’t think we will stick our neck out to contradict. Contradicting and putting any member state on the spot in a public meeting – that’s something we will never do.”²⁹² Third, staff must never single out or point fingers at a state representative around the table. And fourth, as another veteran Wardi points out, “in how you work with them don’t criticise, don’t overtly find fault or tell them they’re talking nonsense.” Underlining the specificity of this interaction context and its demands for face-work, Wardi adds (and scoffs) “*It’s not an academic meeting!*”²⁹³

The ‘ASEAN language,’ then, structures how staff may speak at the meeting table. Emphasising that the ASEAN meeting – however small its size – is a diplomatic forum, a veteran staff asserts the importance to guard against the use of casual forms of speech

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Interview, Singapore, 5 August 2013.

²⁹² Interview, Jakarta, 23 November 2013.

²⁹³ Interview, Jakarta, 8 May 2013.

You never say “*oh no*”! No! You cannot say that. There was a complaint against a staff here, you see. She just said [in a meeting] “*Whoa no...ohhh.*” You are talking to government officers, man, sometimes Senior Officials, and the Secretary General! They are *Permanent Secretaries*, you see...you *have* to be semi-diplomatic every time.²⁹⁴

Another staff adds

You *never* use the word, “*You*”. Member states can say that. So they say [enacts] “ASEAN Secretariat, can *you* brief us on this subject matter, yeah?” But you only say “It’s up to the *Meeting*.” With Ministers, Senior Officials, you have to say, [enacts] “*Excellencies, Sir*, it’s up to the decision of the Meeting.” You cannot say, “*Oh*, it’s up to *you*. And you definitely cannot say “It’s up to *Thailand!*” [Single out a country].²⁹⁵

The ASEAN Way style of diplomacy also generates the imperatives for the Secretariat staff, the servant, to engage in the varied alert and solicitous arts of face-work, all geared to maintain the equilibrium of face around the diplomatic meeting table and thus enable the performance of sovereign equality. A skilled staff, first, ensures that the lost or discredited face of a sovereign representative is *rehabilitated* in the midst of their mutual interactions. Second, a skilled Secretariat staff is alert to the need to *maintain and extend face* to those without the adequate linguistic and cultural wherewithal to perform equality around the meeting table. This may involve practices such as preparing a power point presentation, writing a paper, and even

²⁹⁴ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 12 June 2013.

²⁹⁵ Interview, Jakarta, 7 December 2012.

verbally delivering it at the meeting table on behalf of an official with halting English, and poor grasp of technical matters, all shot through with the anxiety of under confidence and stage fright.

Staff's practices of face-work acquire salience in the context of ASEAN's growing interactions with outsiders, especially its ten vaunted Dialogue Partners. Prior to such meetings, ASEAN's ten members along with the Secretariat staff meet in a preliminary meeting to iron out differences and work out a common ASEAN position vis-à-vis the 'outsider'. As detailed in Chapters 5 and 6, cooperation between ASEAN and its foreign partners takes the form of 'projects' for technical and development cooperation. Unsurprisingly, these 'projects' – mirroring the politics of foreign aid more broadly – have had a history of being *interested* (and not disinterested) in character. When a project from an outsider is deemed by ASEAN's members to be unpalatable – because it carries a commercial interest (port capacity building project but with their national companies lined behind them for contracts), a normative political interest (a strongly worded proposal on human rights), or implicit national security goals (a project on sea bed mapping, for instance) – then ASEAN's representatives find themselves in a position where they must say 'no' but are often unwilling to say so out of a sense of obligation to generous outsiders supporting ASEAN with development funds²⁹⁶ but also to avoid any ill-will being attached to their bilateral equations with the Dialogue Partner. In such instances, the Secretariat may be tasked with the business of saying 'no'. Huong Min, a veteran in handling the Secretariat's 'external relations' division, recalls:

²⁹⁶ Interview with staff, Jakarta, 17 July 2013.

In many cases, when there is something very sensitive with the Dialogue Partner, they will tell the Secretariat to say it. In a pre-meeting, they will convey ‘Secretariat, why don’t you tell the Dialogue Partner that our position is this, this this’...instead of the Chair [officially tasked to convey this] in front of everyone. So at the meeting, the Secretariat will have to diplomatically explain to the DP that actually the Committee is not really interested in the project. Sometimes the Secretariat has to argue for each and every article, each and every provision, and say ‘no’. So we save the face of the Member States!” You see... that’s always the way. That’s the dynamic. That’s why we get the trust!²⁹⁷

This concern to save face must extend well into the depths of the actual meeting with an external partner, where a skilled staff must be ever so alert to the possibility of awkwardness and embarrassment for ASEAN’s representatives. Huong Min continues,

Sometimes in the meetings when we hear that the Chairman is hesitating in answering a sensitive matter, we jump in ‘ohh maybe this can be considered later’...just to avoid the awkwardness, you know. Because most of the sectoral bodies are not diplomats, so they don’t know how to say it. One time, we were talking about disaster management and this X [representative from a Major power] came with a stupid idea of selling a water bomber. We are talking about technical assistance and this guy wants to sell. We don’t even have the money! Showing this video about how effective this bomber is for forest fires. So the Chairman looks to me [enacts a quick gesture with the eye] to cut the pitch.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2012.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

These tenets also inform the tone, temper, and style of the Secretariat's textual productions (from an Information Paper to a Meeting Report) where staff must exercise great care about the sensitivities of state representatives by not including the names of individual states with whom particular views and positions are attached. They must be careful to title them all as "confidential" and out of bounds for public consumption.

Evidently, then, the ASEAN Way style of diplomacy not only structures a way of talking, writing and interacting, it also operates as an embodied disposition and sensibility that the skilled servant brings to bear in the practice of servicing. Ratna, a young Indonesian officer at the Secretariat, betrays the solicitousness that suffuses her concrete labour when she notes that good servicing is about "making life easier for member states."²⁹⁹ Adil, a long serving officer at the Secretariat, emphasises the personal and professional qualities that go towards the making of a skillful Secretariat staff when he says, "You need to have a certain sense of, how to say, not being too egoistic or narcissistic. Just being able to connect with people and respect people and know your place here."³⁰⁰ Chen, another veteran, emphasises the importance of being 'sensitive': "Because ...you are talking with 10 member states who come from varied backgrounds, various political historical baggage, so try to understand from their perspective, and when you try to sell anything to them try to keep that into account."³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Fieldnotes, 9 February 2013.

³⁰⁰ Interview, 8 February 2013.

³⁰¹ Interview, 7 May 2013.

This cluster of virtues – of listening, being respectful, sensitive and empathetic – is brought together by Budiarto, a staff from the pioneer batch who moved on to a career at a prestigious Western international organisation. Reflecting on these two professional experiences, he foregrounds the importance of interpersonal relations in ASEAN and underlines these qualities in sustaining these relations.

Actually the *glue* that holds it [ASEAN] together somehow are the embodied actual personal relationships...embedded in networks of people, how we work, the style, being able to listen. I think *listening* is so important, listening to what people say. You know, being in here [Western IGO 'X']...you find that in X, you have people from the First World. They come in, the cognitive set is *veeaary* [very] different. When they hear people, local people talk, they look for faults [enacts] “This is not human rights consistent,” “this is a cop out,” “This is corruption,” “this is that”. They don’t try to understand what people are trying to do in a world which is structured *against* them from taking those kinds of opinions that they want them to have. In other words, you don’t understand where people are coming from. [Taps the table gently]. But if you do listen and you do appreciate the context, there is a trajectory of *change* that is possible which is not immediately apparent. If you start charging, *you write them off!* [enacts] “This guy is feudal lord! I don’t want to deal with that.” Then you’ve lost them. But life is not like this – black and white. And they can be your *ally*. You can *build an alliance* [speaks softly]...It doesn’t mean you have to be *friends*. You can build a connection. There’s something that you share in common: an interpretation of this and that. That holds you and takes you forward. [Budiarto shifts this analogy to an ASEAN meeting with 10 representatives of democratic and mostly non-democratic regimes of various stripes] You have an ally who can do things for

you, host a meeting, take initiatives. Wow. Fantastic. And this is exactly what happens. You know we also have to motivate people to do things for us and because they are not getting rich doing it. So, it's *so* important that you cultivate a relationship, take it forward. And that is fantastic, it's the most rewarding thing. It's easy to get burned out if you don't have that. [He speaks with the pace and urgency of an epiphany] It's the *drudgery* of meetings after meetings, more reports. And without that human dimension, that *embeddedness* in friendships and alliances and connections, you can't survive.³⁰²

A faithful servant, then, is not only at ease in the company of state agents, is engaged in building relationships with them, but also empathises (if not sympathises) with them and their life worlds.

8.3.2 *The Meticulous Servant*

Besides knowing one's social station, the skilled Secretariat staff is also the one to apply great effort and seriousness to the banal practices of servicing. Illuminating this point are the practices of Migoy, a retired veteran who not only lingers as an archetype in the memories of Secretariat staff, but would also become an embodied text of instruction from whom lessons about "servicing the right way" would diffuse across the generations in that his protégés from the 'pioneer' batch would go to mentor staff decades later. With a PhD from a prestigious American university and with experience in senior positions in the Philippines government, Migoy, as one pioneer batch officer who worked under him observed, "knew what the government wants. He was on the other side of the fence where he was the boss. He knew when

³⁰² Interview, Jakarta, 8 May 2013.

the Secretariat was performing or not performing. *Fantastic* guy, because he *knew the game*.” Migoy’s method— exacting in its details and in the labour it would demand — is offered up in this sketch by Alex, who too served under him in the pioneer batch.

In any meeting we went to, he would *sit down* with us. He’ll go through the Agenda.
[Alex looks down an imaginary sheet of paper and enacts Migoy]

“OK, Opening Remarks, who is talking?”

Then we say, “ The minister will do this...You are supposed to give short remarks too.”

He says, “OK, prepare something for me. I want it to focus on this theme, that theme.”

He leaves no stone unturned. And then we’ll go through it — the election of Chairman. “Tell me, who is the Chair now? [the individual] What are the terms of Chairmanship? OK, settled.”

He would say “Your value add is this: You should go into this meeting *10 times* more prepared than your country counterparts. Only then will they work with you.”

He would caution us “During the meeting, I am the only one who is to speak. And I want you all to be next to me, so you can give me background notes or whatever.”

Totally prepared. You couldn’t fault him. In the meeting, if the Chair says, “This decision doesn’t sound right. There was a history behind this. ASEAN Secretariat, can you explain?” Straightaway, he’s ready: “In this meeting, we all made this decision. The follow-through was not quite perfect, so we have this gap to look into. And this is exactly what we’re asking you to do.”

Nothing more or less. That’s what they [member states] want to hear because you are the institutional memory. You are the one who should have prepared. *Don’t* come

into a meeting and say [Alex enacts in a meek voice] “Sorry Madam Chairman, I couldn’t do because there is no report and I don’t know what happened in the last meeting.” Or worse still, “I’m new here. I’ve no idea. I didn’t attend the last meeting.” [His tone grows brusque] You better *make it your business* and know what the last meeting was about even if you are new here. So, he taught us that ethic of – how to say – *impeccability*.

At the end of the meeting, he already has a draft of some major decisions. And he’d say that we are not going anywhere until we finish the report, if it was due the next morning. Usually that’s what we did. I hear they are not doing that anymore. And that’s a problem because when they don’t prepare the report they can get caught up in all kinds of disputations about what actually transpired. The rapporteur is the *most* important person in the meeting.

So, the night before, usually the host country will take people out to dinner and tour, we would stay behind. We would come back to the Secretariat room and start working on the report. And Migoy would sit with us even though he was a Director and former Secretary General at [a state] ministry. He would *sit with us* until we finished. Many Directors don’t care, they just tell you to do it. But he will sit with us and go through *every* single line, every action line about who does what, no stone unturned. The next morning, he would sit with the Chair to go through it *line by line*. So, that was amazing because it earned us *instant credibility*. I have a lot of respect for him. He was a control freak, but he did it in a good way. I used to tell him, [enacts] “Sir, I feel like I went through finishing school here, with you.”³⁰³

The skillful secretariat staff, the good servant to states, is thus one to play to the script of the solicitous servant who also prosecutes banal work tasks with care and

³⁰³ Interview, Jakarta, 23 November 2013.

seriousness. There was a critical reward for all this cumulative bodily and emotional labour expended over a period anywhere between two to four years of servicing: the trust of member states. “The moment you gain their trust,” Alex argues, “you become *organically* part of them and they will *listen* to you!”

In sum, it is by assiduously performing a social relationship, by absorbing and performing the ASEAN Way of practice, that the skillful staff earns the respect and trust of states. But is this performance of the ever so attentive, yielding, and meticulous servant an end in itself?

8.3.3 *A Tactician and Bricoleur: The Smart Servant*

The skilled servant does not merely absorb a social relationship, perform it meticulously, and fashion a relationship with superordinates. S/he is also a *player* with a finely tuned appreciation for the asymmetries and hierarchies structuring a wider field of relations and a keen practical sense of the immanent constraints and opportunities that arise thereof. It is this unceasing engagement, a consuming and enlivening state of play, that makes the skilled servant a crafty tactician chancing upon latent possibilities and a master *bricoleur* ‘making do’ with the scraps of capacity that are rummaged and found. The skilled Secretariat staff thus grasps, calibrates and seizes on the opportunities generated by the peculiarities of the ASEAN diplomatic field to secure a modicum of control over the play of interactions, and equally, derive personal esteem and satisfaction. Such staff become, in the words of Michel De Certeau (1984:34), “unrecognised producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality.” To

comprehend the elevation of the banal to the art form, it is instructive to examine in some detail the asymmetries and interstices ordering this field of activity, as well as the delicate conjunctures that produce unanticipated and undocumented capacities for staff to leverage over their state bosses.

8.3.3.1 An Embodiment of Knowledge and Memory

Staff at the Secretariat draw capacity from the information they accumulate as well as from their asymmetrical access to information from states.³⁰⁴ While state agents working on ASEAN – at National Directorates housed in Foreign Ministries, at Permanent Missions in Jakarta – arrive and depart on the conveyor belt of diplomatic postings and assignments, it is the Desk Officer at the Secretariat servicing ASEAN meetings for years at end who carry a record of the history of the meetings, offer continuity in procedure and protocol, and may even socialise new entrants into the practical imperative of face-work and rituals of the ASEAN meeting.

Secretariat staff, moreover, may often be in possession of information that at times is not accessible to state agents themselves. As Teerpat notes

MFA [Foreign Affairs] people always want to know what's happening in finance, in the economic side. When they cannot get ASEAN reports from colleagues at home, they get from us. That's just how compartmentalised some ASEAN governments are. So that's how we can make ourselves useful by being a source of information, as an institutional memory, and when they need information we can at least guide them to where it can be found. That is our strength that we have

³⁰⁴ This may be typical and endemic to other inter-governmental bureaucracies.

to continue to develop.³⁰⁵

As embodiments of institutional memory – knowledge of protocols, procedures, dates, decisions, national positions – skilled staff enjoy a certain hold over affairs.

Budiarto notes

It was a captive audience. They came very unprepared for anything...the member states. I was in the social cultural [division] and basically we did our homework and walked into a meeting more prepared than any of them could be. And we remembered decisions that they even don't remember. So that was a context to push for initiatives. And because we have information from other meetings, mandates that were given by the Summits, we would report that [to them] and say 'something has to be done'.³⁰⁶

With this cache of knowledge and memory, staff become key persons socialising newer generations of state representatives into the practices and dispositions of this diplomacy. They may do so explicitly, such as when new members join the Association, when new 'sectoral' bodies spooling different bureaucracies are brought into the ASEAN circuit or when a state takes on Chairmanship roles for the first time. On the latter occasions, staff are tasked with giving briefings and holding workshops for national bureaucrats, explaining, among other things, that "in ASEAN, we don't argue".³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Interview, Singapore, 15 January 2015.

³⁰⁶ Interview, Jakarta, 26 July 2013.

³⁰⁷ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 12 July 2013.

All the same, the process of teaching occurs more profoundly by the sheer performance of the skilled staff as an embodiment of institutional memory and practices. Through their performances of the meticulous servant expressing a command over procedures, decisions and the appropriate signifiers of ASEAN language and activity, staff become an embodied resource for novice state representatives to draw lessons on a wide repertoire of sayings and doings that are at play in this game of interaction.

8.3.3.2 Leveraging on Endowments of Capital

There is a profound paradox at the heart of the state-secretariat relationship in the ASEAN context, one that turns the trope of the master and servant on its head: the fact that staff at the Secretariat have greater facility in English, richer cosmopolitan experiences from overseas western education, and are paid anywhere between twice to ten times the salary of comparable national bureaucrats in Southeast Asia (except for Singapore and Brunei). In other words, professional Secretariat staff are often better endowed with linguistic, cultural and economic capital than the masters they serve.

As I discussed in detail in Chapter 4, the lustre of staffs' sociological biographies have waned since the 'pioneer' days under the effects of a stagnant salary structure. Nonetheless, the Secretariat remains a site where cultural, linguistic and social capital have continued to course through and converge. From the 'pioneer' days until the present, these endowments have allowed staff to foster and cultivate self-understandings – ranging from the cautious and limited to the expansive – about their status and position vis-a-vis states. More precisely, it has meant that while staff may

unconditionally accept and *perform their subordination* to state representatives, they are unwilling to see themselves as *inferior* to them. Farish, a staff from the pioneer batch who worked for nearly two decades, and who held unequivocally subscribed to the Secretariat's script as a 'servant' to states, expresses this hidden sensibility at work. As he observed

Sometimes, the *blind* type [of staff], who *shy* away, they refuse to be ... Most of the times, they just stay in the Secretariat role because they are scared to [pauses] but those who work with me, I always told them, [enacts] "No, this is the *time* for you to gather the knowledge and *experience*. *Be there*, learn *new* things. I don't want you to be photocopying. Get the local support staff helping there. I want you to be *there* to reason, to discuss." During my time, I always assigned my staff to carry the agenda. Because you know, some of them were young people, scared and you can't blame them. *Don't* treat your own self as, [enacts] "Whoa, I'm here just to write report, coordinate meetings." [Starts to speak excitedly] *No, no*. You go *there*, you are *part* of the *delegation*. And in *fact*, ASEAN Secretariat is a *delegation*. ASEAN is not just someone who goes there to take care of logistics or write reports. *No, no*. You are the *one* to provide the *information*. Actually, ASEAN's Secretariat is actually the co-pilot, the co-Chairman for many meetings!³⁰⁸

In urging his junior staff to pluck courage, and in expressing an expansive sense of self in interactions with state agents, a veteran like Farish appeals to a profoundly basic and corporeal ground of commonality that exposes the arbitrariness of the hierarchical state-secretariat relationship. As he points out "They are human beings

³⁰⁸ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 12 July 2013.

just like us! They happen to be Senior officials, Ministers but they would refer to you because sometimes they do not know.” In the same vein, Budiarto adds, “the Chair is often intimidated by the whole process and oftentimes they are not very sure how to conduct the proceedings.” Indeed, the wise Chair of an ASEAN Meeting is the one to “learn quickly” and willingly let the Secretariat do his or her bidding on the table. Indeed, veteran staff encourage and “prime” state representatives to indulge them to “run the show” as long as the underlying social relationship of subordination and deference are upheld and adhered to in the performance of servicing.

8.3.3.3 Seizing on the Diplomatic Practice of the ‘ASEAN Way’

Inasmuch the ASEAN Way constrains the formal role and exacts considerable emotional labour from Secretariat staff, it also offers a web of representations that the skilled staff may seize upon and even manipulate in the business of servicing. In *using* the ASEAN Way to expand their roles, staff bring to bear their practical knowledge of its governing dispositions and practices coupled with a finely tuned grasp of the asymmetries structuring the ASEAN diplomatic field. Ratus, a staff who joined on the heels of the pioneer batch and worked for a decade, highlights how trusted and respected Secretariat veterans would deploy their embodied ease and confidence not only to muster their junior staff but, extraordinarily, even to make state representatives realise who they are and what roles they must play at an ASEAN meeting.

Sometimes the expert group [junior national bureaucrats] they’re not *sure* [emphasises]. They thought it’s just another professional meeting. *No*, this is ASEAN Meeting, diplomatic forum! So, if they are not sure, they think you have

to call back your boss [for decisions]. Or that they can just come here and keep quiet. *No!* When I *briefed* before the meeting, I *told* them informally about their mandate. ‘You are here, you carry the mandate of your country or at least your office. So, *don’t* be shy to say anything.’ That’s why when I *Chair* or when I coordinate, I always... because ASEAN Way is to make sure everybody has equal share. So, we always start with Brunei first, [enacts conversation] “Ok Brunei, any comments?” Sometimes, they *have* something to say, but this is the first time here and they’re too shy to say, or not so sure about what to say. So, I *encourage* them. [enacts conversation] “Let’s go round the table”, I said, “can we *start* with Brunei first?” Laos is there, although very quiet guy, not so good English, but must say something, isn’t it? So, you *encourage them*.³⁰⁹

Importantly, such an expansive expression of confidence did not go entirely unnoticed. In Ratus’ case it was a colleague who expressed his surprise at seeing him prod member states to speak. Here, Ratus couches – indeed, reinforces – his practice within the parameters of deference commanded by the ASEAN Way.

So, he came to me, ‘Ratus, you know, I thought the way you are handling, I dare not do that because they might say we are *rude* asking them to comment.’ But ‘*No, this is the ASEAN way!*’ I said. *ASEAN way!* You have to *invite them*. Sometimes, you know, he or she must have something to say, but too shy, for the first time and maybe the person was not good in English. But the moment you *invite*, they will say something. So, finally it becomes lively.³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 22 June 2013.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The ASEAN Way, and its practical thrust on ensuring that state representatives don't lose face on the meeting table, also generates backstage roles for the trusted Secretariat staff. Ghazali, a veteran staff from the pioneer batch who spent more than a decade at the Secretariat discloses this role,

Sometimes we even *did* the negotiation part, you know. For example, there's one time in a Ministers' meeting. Sometimes, one country just did not *agree*, have some reservations. It's ASEAN Secretariat, we did the negotiation, [we] act as the middleman. In ASEAN, the *trick* is that, or the *principle* is that ASEAN *never* argue at a meeting table. *That* is the trick. And then they *never* formalise conflicts. Of course on big scale, of course there is the ASEAN High Council, supposed to be comprised of Foreign Ministers to settle disputes, you see, but it has *never* been convened for all these, how many, almost 50 years. Before they used to say "Golf Diplomacy", now it's more at coffee breaks. One time at the economic ministers meeting at Phuket, when they cannot finish it in a meeting, they finish during coffee break. They *agree* informally because nobody is to lose face when you do it informally, you see. [When] you *do* it in a meeting table, then someone tends to lose face, if you *exceed* who you are. You just have to *agree*, although you don't like, you don't agree, but you have to agree, because other members are around. It's the ASEAN way, you see. The ASEAN way of solving dispute or handling problems, *that's* the way. *Never* in the meeting. The moment, let's say, the moment they come to sort of, what you call, difference [of position], one country *just keep quiet sometime* [in hushed tone]. The Chairman, whoever chairs, says [enacts] "OK. We'll *leave this* and let's move to the next agenda item." And *that* particular agenda, they'll bring it to the coffee table. Sometimes, when it's a bit *too much*, then they use the

ASEAN Secretariat. [Enacts] “Ghazali *yah*, can you do something?” Then, you have to go. Sometimes, during coffee break, have to go to the other Minister or the other SOM leader, just talk. And then finally after coffee, they can meet again, [enacts] OK, this one is *solved*. The ASEAN Secretariat will become the, what you call, *runner* from here to there, asking, you know, finding everybody.³¹¹

8.3.3.4 “Whispering,” Cultivating “Godfathers” and Building “Coalitions of the Willing”

Given that the Secretariat does not possess the *right* to speak on the table, how can its ideas, its tactics, its moves and initiatives find voice and momentum on the diplomatic table? The skilled servant is the one who excels in the art of building coalitions and alliances around the meeting table through the backstage. Indeed, the directive to “know your officials” was crucial for staff in order to assess the caliber and sensibilities of the participants they serviced and also to generate the necessary social knowledge with which they could plot out coalitions, alliances and manoeuvres. A former Secretary General recounts

We had a team of rather good professional guys from the Secretariat, who knew how *to whisper* to officials in the respective member countries. Not to take over their authority to make decisions, but to say, “Hey, X [state official] this is a good idea, right? Why don't you go along with the guy from the other country, and then, if you can *agree*, we at the Secretariat will prepare a paper for you, and put it up to the minister for decision.” And that's what we did. So *we* maintained our role as what we call ‘resource person,’ to the letter and the spirit.

³¹¹ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 13 June 2013.

And during my tenure, we did a lot of paper writing. Some people [state representatives] would come to us and say, “*Ehhh* [Hey], this is a good idea. But if *we promote* it as Singapore, it would be rejected. If we promote it as Indonesia, people will think that Indonesia is a big country, and so on, so you guys [Secretariat] see whether you can help us.”³¹²

Staff with strong social capital could also depend on these personal ties to maneuver and control the character of interaction in the meeting. Rasool recalls

If you find that somebody is egregiously being *stupid* and bringing up an issue that is just totally unwarranted and will get us nowhere and confuse people, you quietly work with others that you *know* are already thinking that – countries themselves. *Prime them*. Work with them. Let them speak and *kill* the proposal. There are ways to do this because you don’t need to be alone and to be the point person, you know. You can manoeuvre and try and find ways to get around it without coming to conflict directly. But countries can do it! [Ascending] They have the right to speak! Directly.³¹³

Using states as opposed to “coming into conflict directly” is not advisable because the rupture it may cause to the formal hierarchy structuring the setting carries the risk of castigation and retaliation. Bopha notes

Although the Charter gives us the authority to initiate, but with member states, if you initiate something sensitive you get slapped. Unless you initiate something you feel is very, very important and you are confident then you can

³¹² Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

³¹³ Interview, Jakarta, 26 July 2013.

put it out as a paper. So it's more tactful to go to member states and build support because they can push it...*all the way*.

Equally important, veteran staff at the Secretariat have often drawn upon their personal affiliations and links with state agents to seek out and cultivate a patron. While this would appear – from the outside – as a violation of the principle of impartiality, what precludes this from being so is that the practice is pursued with the blessings if not encouragement of the top bosses at the Secretariat. A Secretary General recalls

Whatever you do, you must have one good buddy. One good godfather among the ten ASEAN member countries. So, my Indonesian staff they make friends, and have Indonesian Foreign Minister as their godfather. And they will quietly slip through you see [and forewarn him] “Sir, so this issue *ah*, this country, that country is going to override.” So they do this not cynically and secretly, but they always do it with my blessings, in the sense that they will tell me. So they will say, “Secretary General, I think for this issue we should keep the Indonesians posted *ya?*” I said: “OK. Do that.” [Serious tone]. Another guy would come and tell me, “Oh this economic integration issues, I think the only guy who will support this will be the free traders like Singapore. So keep the Singaporeans posted?” “Ya, I say, OK”. [Pauses in reflection] I think to do all this require a lot of personal management by the Secretary General.³¹⁴

Skilled staff were also adept at expanding the influence of specific state patrons – often senior and elder figures – they trusted and depended on at the meeting table,

³¹⁴ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 13 June 2013.

and they did so using whatever material and symbolic resources were at their disposal. The example of Farish is instructive. With ASEAN's alphabetical rotation around the meeting table conspiring to position Farish's patron opposite him for a year of meetings, a relationship built on an economy of gestural exchanges and glances developed. Farish recounts

When there is something [disagreement] on issues they [meeting] are talking, I *always* look at him because he's very senior leadership, he *knows his* stuff. Sometimes, what I said out, was actually based on his, what you call, his *reaction*. When an issue was discussed I *looked* at him and he conveyed that it's OK. Then I said, [enacts conversation to the meeting] "I think it's OK." [chuckles]³¹⁵

8.3.4 *What Drives the Art Form?*

These various forms and intricacies of the art of servicing beckon the question of why staff were driven in investing their professional and emotional energy to its articulation? Three reasons may be suggested. First, winning the trust of member states was key to foster respect before them and derive professional and personal self worth. Despite occasional 'scoldings', staff from the pioneer batch were used to the extension of courtesy by the state bodies they serviced, often conveyed orally with a note of thanks at the end of the meeting, as well as by the titles of endearment they enjoyed – "they called me Pak Wardi (in the Malay states) and in Thailand they called me Khun Wardi."³¹⁶ Second, seasoned staff – often individuals with high cultural, linguistic and social capital – were also driven by a deep feel for the game

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Fieldnotes, 6 December 2013.

they were engaged in. The art of servicing afforded them both a challenge and also a source of realising self-efficacy and control. As Wardi remembers:

It's very difficult to please 10 countries, so you need to manoeuvre and think on the feet. You cannot go this way [he uses his hands to indicate a straight line] you have to go this way [his hands go zigzag] It's amazing but its fun...you get *hyped up* before a meeting because you imagine... 'ohh this country for sure will be against this [a proposal], that country will be pro this. This country has more power than those countries on this issue, those countries will just follow. So you need to know this. And you lobby them first 'eh by the way, can we propose this?...Does this make sense to you?' before we table it. So a lot of negotiations, lobbying. If you just give it on the table then they will get angry yeah! 'Where did you get this idea?'³¹⁷

Third, staff were driven by a certain excitement in their proximity and access to state power. This 'high' of proximity was produced, in the first instance, by the sheer compactness of the Secretariat's bureaucracy which enabled them – through their tactics – to articulate and give form to ideas and documents that would soon reach the upper echelons of the states they served. Chen recalls

You feel good you know...because you sleep knowing that I did this thing and now it's adopted by leaders in ASEAN!" [He laughs] Fantastic. And things go up very fast. Our paragraphs are read letter by letter by the leaders ...you feel good man!³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Interview, Jakarta, 7 June 2013.

³¹⁸ Interview, Jakarta, 8 May 2013.

This 'high' was also experienced in the form of the ever widening and enriching social capital of the staff as s/he went about servicing and cultivating close ties with powerful officials from various ministries from all over the region. While veterans would often remark about their candid interactions with top police, trade, immigration and foreign ministry officials over the many coffee breaks and lunches of the meetings they partook in,³¹⁹ younger staff would regale others in their social ambit with snippets of their growing familiarity with state officials that had resulted, among other things, in the extension of 'friend requests' on social networking sites like Facebook.³²⁰

The third force driving the informal and improvised art form was paradoxically to enhance the efficiency of their (and the Secretariat's) work. Supriyo notes

The Secretariat doesn't create the bureaucracy, it is the member states. But the Secretariat can overcome the bureaucracy if it is trusted by the member states. You know, we could call a Director General 'Dir-Jen, Japan here is asking for such and such, if I send you this paper will you approve?' We call them first before we send the letter, and they appreciate that. And the DG will say 'ok Supriyo, go ahead I will send it back immediately.' We had that kind of rapport because we had their trust.³²¹

³¹⁹ Fieldnotes, 1 August 2013.

³²⁰ Fieldnotes, 23 June 2013.

³²¹ Interview, Jakarta, 25 September 2013.

Thus, rapport with state officials often enabled the seasoned staff to cut through the wider ASEAN bureaucracy (spanning the ministries and bureaus of the ten countries), reducing a layer of work and time.³²²

8.4 Servicing for Power: Two Models

Even as the art of servicing – that is, work practices performed with solicitousness and deference, an embodied flair, and a tacit theory of harnessing power – is a deeply intimate affair fashioned by an individual staff in moments of co-presence with state agents, these practices of servicing agglomerate under watchful leaderships to offer wider possibilities and models of organisational power. It is precisely in this conjoining of the isolated and individual staff with the collective representation of the ‘Secretariat’ that the practice of servicing becomes instructive for further examination.

In order to do so, I shall delineate and contrast two models of servicing over the Secretariat’s history. These ‘models’ – to be sure, analytic contrivances that only approximate the improvisations, play, equivocations, protensions and unintended conjunctures immanent to the unfolding drama of goal directed strategy – were fostered under specific leaderships, engendered distinct performances of servicing,

³²² A brief methodological point is in order. In piecing together this art form I have drawn principally from the testimonies of ‘pioneer’ staff who are both distant (from the everyday work they once performed) and possibly even selective about what they wished to tell the fieldworker. While I approached these testimonies with a necessary ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, the account of this art form (as memories among newer staff about times past, and among protégés of pioneer staff), emerged as recurrent and stable accounts about the practice of servicing. It is with thorough triangulation, then, that this account has been constructed.

and concomitantly, offered differing possibilities for the Secretariat's power and purpose in ASEAN's diplomatic project.

8.4.1 Harnessing Power with a Patrimonial Bureaucracy

One such model of servicing can be located under the five-year tenure (2003-2007) of Ong Keng Yong, a Singaporean diplomat who served as the Press Secretary to then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong when he was nominated as Singapore's choice for the rotating office of Secretary General. The style of servicing that characterised the Secretariat under Ong closely resembles the account of the art of servicing presented so far: of the Secretariat as a faithful, meticulous and intelligent servant. This model, to be sure, was neither invented under Ong's tenure nor was it exceptional to the Secretariat of his time. Indeed, it was fostered a decade earlier under the "paternal"³²³ leadership of the Association's first Secretary General Tan Sri Ajit Singh and continued under his Filipino successor Rodolfo Severino, both career diplomats as well. Even though the Secretariat was "professionalised" in 1992 along the lines of a Euro-American international civil service, this newly formed bureaucracy – a Weberian bureaucracy of a kind, to be sure – was swiftly reined in through changes to designs and with states "coming with a stick" in moments of co-presence to express their continued superordination (as discussed earlier in Chapters 4 and 7). With meager resources for marshaling rational-legal power, and with an even weaker normative and discursive milieu to invoke such claims, the Secretariat under these career diplomats swiftly nurtured the art form of servicing as a practice fine tuned at once to the sensibilities of ASEAN's diplomatic practice, and equally,

³²³ Interview 'pioneer' staff, 6 December 2012.

as a strategy for empowerment and professional esteem.

While nurtured under Singh and Severino, the Secretariat under Ong evinces interest on its own accord too. It was a time by when the art form had been tested and distilled in the hands of professionals servicing for a decade or more since the Secretariat's professionalisation in 1992. Moreover, it expressed a state of affairs that would be soon challenged when a politician would take over the office in 2008 and the turbid waves of the ASEAN Charter would roll over the Secretariat by 2009.

The quip that "I am more Secretary than General" deployed by Ong Keng Yong serves as a useful entry point to discern his understanding of the office of Secretary General.³²⁴ On the one hand, Ong was cognisant of the symbolic significance of the office. As he put it "In the *whole* of South East Asia, there is *only one guy*. That is you, the Secretary General. In that respect, your job is to defend ASEAN, to uphold the ASEAN ego."³²⁵ That said, Ong's understanding of his mandate was bound by his conception of 'ASEAN' as the consensual decisions, sensibilities and preferences of the ten *member states* that constituted the Association.

Key for Ong was *to be seen* to be both cognisant and demonstrative of his social station as more Secretary than General of the Association. Even as he enjoyed ministerial status and the mandate of 1992 "to initiate, advise, facilitate and implement ASEAN activities", his professional performances disclosed a close reading and grasp of the demands for deference by state agents engaged in ASEAN diplomacy. Besides maintaining an uncontentious profile at international meetings, Ong demonstrated deference by administering the Secretariat within a moral and

³²⁴ This self-deprecatory quip is also noted by Emmerson, 2008: 48.

³²⁵ Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

symbolic grammar amiable and solicitous to the concerns of state superordinates. This involved, for instance, an exceptional care in handling the Secretariat's discretionary expenses, especially the Secretary General's (significant) travel budget, where he forsake First Class for Business on long-haul flights and Business for Economy class on short haul 'regional' flights, ensuring that no additional requests for travel allowances were advanced before state bosses.

Similarly, Ong stayed away from bitter battles over the quantum of contributions to the Secretariat's operational budget, instead pressing states to maintain equal contributions (countering pleas and grumbles of newer and poorer members) and ensuring that states paid their arrears in time. On staffing problems within the Secretariat too Ong chose to *make do* rather than demand greater resources. It was during his tenure that a number of locally recruited Indonesian officers with high linguistic, cultural and social capital were spotted, groomed and elevated up the organisation's ladder, relieving stress on the Secretariat's budget and forestalling a perennial point of friction in budget discussions with state agents. Making do in these varied ways was aimed to "impress" state agents who "appreciated it" and, as Ong put it, recognised that "I was not a spendthrift."³²⁶ These performances of impression management were thus geared to the various related ends of winning trust and yielding to the expected social script.

That said, these performances were generative of a range of empowering roles and spaces that were necessarily conceived and plotted in the backstage, oftentimes with the involvement of state agents themselves. Ong, echoing the words of Ajit Singh a decade earlier, urged his professional staff to "push the envelope as far as we can."

³²⁶ Interview with Ong Keng Yong, Kuala Lumpur, 14 June 2013.

Staff were advised to build familiarity with the state officials they served, regularly report problems back to the Secretary General, and were given the signal directive to “*not to be seen* to be making decisions or taking over the role of member states.”³²⁷

Staff were encouraged to ‘whisper’ to state officials they knew, to cultivate ‘godfathers’ to push for particular ideas deemed to carry a regional vision, and were primed to build ‘coalitions’ and alliances, all pursued with the blessings of the Secretary General himself. Indeed, there were times when the Secretariat’s professional staff had taken over the running of issues at meetings but key for Ong was whether this was done with adequate tact and with the tacit consent of the Chair.

As one veteran staff recalls

At the end of the day, some professional staff had taken over the running of the issues on behalf of the Cambodian or Laos Chair of a committee. I think member countries tend to let the Secretariat staff run it [committee] in their name. But, because it was understood to be done in a very professional way, Ong Keng Yong did not intervene. As long as the senior officials from a particular country are *happy* with what the Secretariat was doing, OK. If they complained, then Ong would follow up and say, ‘OK, my friend, I think you have overstepped.’³²⁸

Under Ong, the art form found a salubrious environment in two ways. By unambiguously acquiescing to the social relationship of deference to states, Ong’s leadership both mirrored and encouraged the isolated performances of the art form by seasoned staff as they serviced meetings. More distinctly, though, Ong brought to the table a host of managerial practices that allowed these distinct fashionings to concatenate in the pursuit of broader goals and legacies. Regular office meetings – in

³²⁷ Emphasis mine. Ong interview.

³²⁸ Interview with a ‘pioneer batch’ staff, 6 December 2012.

large town hall format or with discrete divisions and attended by *both* international and local professional staff – spurred staff collaboration to maneuver tricky projects, enabled the exchange of information over the positions and sensitivities of member states, the sharing of staff’s personal links to state agents and patrons, and disclosed tactics on approaching foreign donors. Ong’s management walkabouts at the office, his close gaze on the dynamics of staff interactions with each other (restless national cliques floating within the Secretariat) as well as with their member state acquaintances kept the principle of staff impartiality in check, while his involvement in quality control by zealously flicking through staffs’ Mission Reports, and a widely recognised talent for memorising staff names – from senior to the junior, veteran to a day old novice – produced organisational coherence within the roughly 200 personnel strong Secretariat. In this manner, the Secretary General’s overarching script of deference to states and, concomitantly, the empowering tactics of the art servicing, were diffused and absorbed.

When required, these isolated performances were geared collectively for pushing new platforms and mechanisms for inter-state interaction under the personal watch of the Secretary General. Take, for instance, the ASEAN Charter, for which Ong cultivated a champion in Malaysia (selling it as a prestige project for their year of Chairmanship in 2005) and simultaneously instructed his team of professionals to quietly “propagate” the idea at ASEAN meetings such that discussions over the Charter swiftly moved up from Agenda item 10 to Item 1 at these meetings. Similarly, on the movement of unskilled labour, Ong found a champion in the Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (again, another incoming ASEAN Chairman in 2006) and advised his staff to reassure state agents from Labour and Manpower ministries that the initiative was concerned less with “human rights” than

with proposing a “decent approach” to the movement of labour in the region. Although this model enabled empowerment in the backstage of diplomacy, its accent on minimising friction in the state-secretariat relationship – indeed, going *beyond* by embracing mild forms of self-mortification to “impress” and perform solicitousness – also ensured that tensions in the structure of this relationship would be rarely broached, if not suppressed with palliatives like ‘make do’ strategies.

In sum, under a string of career diplomats, the Secretariat’s bureaucracy had taken the character and disposition of a patrimonial bureaucracy, one that – as Max Weber reminds us – depends “upon piety toward a personal lord and master who is defined by an ordered tradition” (Gerth and Mills, 1978: 299). Busy cultivating state patrons, whispering, assiduously performing a social script, and harnessing power in the backstage of diplomacy, the Secretariat was operating well within the grammar of a servant inscribed by and nourishing ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus.

8.4.2 *Aspiring as a Locus of Power with a Rational-Legal Bureaucracy*

Interpretations of what practices must constitute servicing states (merely ‘record keeping’ or ‘offering advise’) and how it must be performed (with consistent emotional labour and expression of deference), were at the core of the drama that would unfold at the Secretariat and wider ASEAN field during the tenure of Surin Pitsuwan as the Secretary General of ASEAN from 2007 to 2012. Contestations over how the Secretariat must service states drew from a model of organisational power that relied on a conception of the Secretariat as a potential locus of power in managing ASEAN’s diplomatic project.

This challenge was foreshadowed by the very character of Surin's appointment. As a politician and former foreign minister, he was used to the ritual extension of status on the public stage. As an inveterate framer of big ideas he was also less enthralled by the nitty-gritty dynamics of staff management.³²⁹ Moreover, with the Secretariat beginning to bear the full brunt of stagnant salaries, job insecurity and high staff turnover, the *benign* foundations for acquiescing to a patrimonial bureaucratic model had come under strain. The arrival of Surin in this context, coupled with a biography that did not comport with the obscurity and solicitousness demanded under a patrimonial framework, set the stage for advancing the hitherto latent and corroded rational-legal elements of the Secretariat's bureaucracy. In advancing the Secretariat's need for legal personality, a larger budget, and in reproaching zealous state intervention over the Secretariat on the public stage, these actions and sensibilities were nourishing a vision of the Secretariat with a 'will to power' to chart its own space. Surin desired the Secretariat to be "a central mechanism with its own space... serving member states but with a mandate that is ASEAN."³³⁰ His close aides would put this vision more starkly by calling for an "independent, autonomous institution that serves the member states, governments *and the people*."³³¹ The desire was not to be "supranational" as much as move out of a patrimonial bureaucratic form. The call, then, was for accentuating the rational-legal bases of the Secretariat's status and authority, one where the Secretariat could be, in a qualified form, a locus of power, and where authority would be "based upon an impersonal bond to the generally defined and functional 'duty of office'" (Gerth and Mills, 1978: 299).

³²⁹ This was borne out most clearly by Surin's recommendation in his report 'ASEAN's Challenge' that a 'Chief-of-Staff' should be responsible for managing the Secretariat's internal affairs thus freeing up the SG for wider public interaction and travel. See, Surin (2011): 11; also, interview with a Surin aide, Singapore, 6 August 2013.

³³⁰ Interview, Oxford, 19 October 2013.

³³¹ Emphasis mine. Interview, Singapore, 6 August 2013.

Surin's break with tradition was immediate. As discussed in Chapter 5, upon his arrival in Jakarta, Surin enunciated a vision for a "networked Secretariat" and created novel linkages between varied actors in the ASEAN field. In doing so, he drew on an expansive understanding of his office as the Secretary General of ASEAN, with 'ASEAN' conceived not merely as member states but also as an imagined 'region' of '600 million people.'

Surin's maximalist conception of his mandate as well as his daring to foreground the servant – i.e. the Secretariat – under a new 'networked' banner, would first run into rough weather not with state agents but with mid-ranked and senior veterans at the Secretariat disquieted by the changing symbolic terrain that had hitherto structured their identities and roles. Veterans found themselves discouraging and cautioning Surin on a variety of his moves: from signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with foreign parties without the prior agreement of member states, on mulling a 'fact finding mission' to a latest humanitarian flashpoint in the region,³³² his desire for autonomy in the use of ASEAN's Trust Funds managed by the Secretariat,³³³ his heightened engagement with NGOs, foreign charities and multinational businesses to fund Secretariat driven projects,³³⁴ to, more internally, embarking on a major reshuffle of staff across divisions and bringing in new staff and aides into the Secretariat, some of whom were funded from outside the Secretariat's budget.³³⁵

³³² Especially for the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. Interview with staff, Jakarta, 9 February 2013.

³³³ Interview with staff, Jakarta, 2 July 2013.

³³⁴ A grant of nearly US\$5 million from the Nippon Foundation to fund five 'people-centered' projects (on leprosy, disability, traditional medicine, etc.); an ASEAN Women's Wing, among others. Interview with a Surin aide, 6 August 2013.

³³⁵ Notably, a 'special advisor' who worked within the Secretariat under a capacity building project funded by a foreign country.

Surin's arrival had effected a hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1984; Hardy, 2008): a cognitive and embodied dissonance to identities and roles structured by a field of relations and nurtured by a commonsense and world of sayings that had hitherto naturalised state superordination and fashioned a solicitous disposition towards them. Soon enough, some veterans fell out of favour and were phased out, while others made efforts to adapt, even as they grew aloof with the new leadership. Meanwhile, new staff handpicked by Surin came to enjoy privileged access to his office and were often called upon – out of rank and over protocol – to offer advise to the SG. Not only did these staff see themselves as a new breed of 'experts,' 'professionals,' and 'regional bureaucrats' seemingly empowered by the ASEAN Charter, they were also united in their shared disdain for veterans and their performance as servants to states. As one such officer recalls

I think the Secretariat has a long history of how it was started, so you change the nature of that organism and there is lack of clarity, and this lack of clarity comes from a different kind of worldview these people [veterans] had of their role in the Secretariat, so there was a lot of confusion... So when you do your job these people will say 'you cannot do this, because we do not do this, this is not our role' (laughs). And then you say, bluntly and matter of factly, 'well, it's in the Charter. This is what I'm recruited to do, I am an expert, I know these things.' And this is where the conflict comes in.³³⁶

Veterans would hit back saying that the Secretariat did not need "thinkers" with PhDs but quick thinking footmen; not elaborate research papers but succinct briefs

³³⁶ Interview, Singapore, 14 January 2013.

that would be read by policy makers on the move.³³⁷ Moreover, veterans – most endowed with high cultural capital including PhD’s degrees and stints at prestigious IGOs – saw themselves as ‘experts,’ ‘professionals’ and ‘regional bureaucrats’ too. The key difference between the two camps, then, was in their conception and performance of the state-secretariat relationship. For veterans, their professional roles began with an unequivocal acceptance of the social contract between states and the Secretariat, and in the skillful performance of the script of the servant in order to carve out space, respect and capacity.

In contrast, Surin, his team, and the sensibilities engendered under his leadership, did not seek to transgress this hierarchy but nonetheless suggested the bases for its relaxation. This sensibility was expressed from the top by the Secretary General voicing his concerns on ASEAN’s high politics, meeting prominent opposition figures of member states, and issuing appeals to member states on the *public stage* (through a release on the Secretariat website to interviews to the press).³³⁸ Meanwhile new staff were reportedly keen to “give advice” as opposed to “take notes” at meetings³³⁹ and were courageous to counter the predatory assertions of state prerogatives (from skipping “needless” meetings to spurning informal work favours) by politely emphasising that requests to them should be routed through the Secretary General who, after all, was their boss.³⁴⁰ Moreover, they were also selective about

³³⁷ Interviews in Jakarta, 6 December 2012, 8 March 2013, 7 May 2013; Fieldnotes, 17 July 2013.

³³⁸ Notably, Surin’s remarks on the South China Sea turning into the next ‘Palestine of Asia’ (Bland, 2012); his meeting and joint press conference with Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar in February 2012 (ASEAN Secretariat News, 2012); and his appeals to strengthen the Secretariat (Singapore Straits Times online, 2012). The meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, in particular, caused disquiet among some Secretariat staff and CPR diplomats who argued that the Secretariat’s allegiance was to the *governments* of the member states. Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

³³⁹ Interviews with former staff, Jakarta, 23 November 2012; Singapore, 17 January 2013.

³⁴⁰ Interviews with staff, Singapore, 17 January 2013; Jakarta, 13 December 2011.

whom to extend their ritual deference to, with some giving short shrift to the CPR in Jakarta while actively rendering their emotional labour in interactions with powerful Senior Officials. Evidently, the understandings and practices undergirding the hitherto stable state secretariat relationship were under strain.³⁴¹

Swift and decisive state reaction to Surin's expansive style soon followed. Taking great issue with Surin's signing of MoUs with external parties,³⁴² his initiation of activities without the imprimatur of state agents, and his use of Dialogue Partner funds at the Secretariat, the CPR – at often acerbic interactions in the meeting room – “folded their arms” to stall Surin's initiatives. Simultaneously, the CPR's diplomats engaged in a host of quotidian practices of micro-management³⁴³ to reassert sovereign prerogative and state superordination over the Secretariat's staff. Once an “open field” for Surin, the Secretariat had become cramped and stifling. It was in this context that he realised that “if I confine myself to this office then I would lose the opportunity to bring ASEAN out to the world.”³⁴⁴ Surin's response to state reaction, then, was to orbit out of the Secretariat and embrace the life of the jet-setting and roving Secretary General³⁴⁵ who traveled extensively and with much success in publicising and branding ASEAN on the international conference circuit.

The profound consequences of this chain of developments was borne ultimately by the staff at the Secretariat, who were at once rudderless and also rendered more vulnerable to the exactions and infractions of mistrustful state agents in everyday

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Most contentiously, MoUs signed between the Secretariat with Guangdong province in China in September 2008. These were rendered inactive over time.

³⁴³ For Surin's own take on such ‘micro-management,’ see Surin, 2011: 22-23.

³⁴⁴ Interview, Oxford, 19 October 2013.

³⁴⁵ Interviewed at the end of his term, Surin responded to a question about whether he had liked living in Jakarta, saying, “I haven't lived there too much. I spend most of the time in the air on the plane” (Harvard Asia Quarterly, 2012: 4).

work life. Moreover, in the growing absence of the SG's personal management and disciplining gaze, the forces of social integration within the Secretariat came under severe strain: national cliques were seen to gain salience; aspersions were more freely cast on staff loyalties and impartiality; the Secretariat's restructured divisions (and their respective staff) were seen to work more disparately; staff welfare was deemed to have been neglected; and the very core ideas about how to service were subject to dispute and schism. "The nerve centre," as one staff quipped, had turned into a "nervous centre."³⁴⁶

Under such disarray, the art of servicing would suffer: not only did its practice become more fragmentary, pursued by staff individually with long-standing relationships with the state bodies, it also threatened to become an arcane art with its oldest practitioners phased out or demoted within the Secretariat and with new hires rarely staying long enough – owing to a poor salary structure – to learn and carry the craft into the future.

That said, the model under Surin yielded an unprecedented expansion of the Secretariat and the SG's symbolic profile in international diplomacy, a profile not merely evidenced by the glitter of dignitaries arriving and speaking at the Secretariat, but also by the rather extraordinary inclusion of his office – now occupied by the accomplished but unassuming Vietnamese career diplomat Le Luong Minh – on a list of the "500 most powerful people on the planet" by a leading American foreign policy magazine (Wittmeyer, 2013).

More potent perhaps might be Surin's legacy in fostering a discursive and normative milieu where the Secretariat of the future can stake its claims and aspirations to

³⁴⁶ Fieldnotes, 2 July 2013.

become a locus of power grounded on rational-legal principles, quite regardless of its effects on, and agreeability to, ASEAN's diplomatic practice. Under Surin, this milieu was stirred up in two ways. First, towards the end of his tenure, Surin embarked on a comprehensive effort at memorialising the grievances and problems faced by the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Secretariat's staff at large, with a detailed confidential report titled "ASEAN's Challenge" that he submitted – despite the best efforts of the CPR – directly to ASEAN's foreign ministers. Second, Surin's embrace of civil society, academia, media, and business actors with whom he shared extensive and often personal rapport with, energised a wider constituency of actors who raised the clamour for a "strong" and "empowered" Secretariat as the elixir for ASEAN's apparent woes.³⁴⁷

In both the official report prepared by Surin (Pitsuwan, 2011), and in the unofficial discursive realm of think tank papers and newspaper commentary, a heady pattern was at work where the Secretariat's status was being tied to the very *fate* of ASEAN's diplomacy in the future. Sure enough, the context etched was foreboding. Observing that the "rivalry among the major powers in East Asia has intensified" with "forces" such as China, India and the United States "aspiring for influence and

³⁴⁷ This took three forms besides the advocacy of Surin and his chosen Secretariat colleagues (ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011; Hapsoro, 2011). First, it emerged as a theme in workshops of non-ASEAN actors, most concertedly in a two-day symposium at Jakarta in 2011 organised by ERIA, Harvard University and Deplu. Leading figures from CSIS, Habibie centre, the Asian Development Bank, and the Indonesian government called for strengthening the Secretariat (Anjaiah, 2011). It was also expressed as a sub-theme at the seminars and workshops held within the Secretariat from 2009 onwards (Fieldnotes, September 2012, October 2012, May 2013). Second, the Secretariat's 'capacity' became a key point debated in the reports and working papers of numerous policy think tanks such as Asian Development Bank Institute (ADB, 2012; Capanelli and Tan, 2012), ERIA (Sukma, 2014), the Council on Foreign Relations (Kurlantzick, 2012), the CIMB ASEAN Research Institute (Dosch 2013), the Centre for International Law (at National University of Singapore) report on Privileges and Immunities (CIL-NUS, 2010), among others. Third, and more copiously, is the commentary in newspapers and online that made express calls along these lines. See, Chongkittavorn (2012a, 2012b); (ASEAN Secretariat News, 2011e); Acharya (2012); Rüländ 2011; Hapsoro 2011; Luhulima 2011; Arya Brata 2013, among others.

leadership” and competing “for ASEAN’s potential and resources,” Surin warned that “our own solidarity remains vulnerable” and that “we cannot realise the ASEAN Community unless we take constructive efforts that are commensurate with the dangers that threaten it.” It was in this context that the Secretariat was foregrounded as “the heart of these [ASEAN] organs,” the strengthening of which would be “the key to constructing a new and better ASEAN which can raise our profile, retain the region’s independence, promote progressive values, and secure economic prosperity for our peoples” (Pitsuwan, 2011:5-7).

The implications of this ongoing tussle of what kind of bureaucracy the Secretariat can and must be will be broached in the next, concluding chapter.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter advances an argument about the Secretariat’s power in supporting and managing ASEAN’s diplomacy. Widely seen as inconsequential and ‘powerless’, the Secretariat apparently harnesses and enjoys power as a capacity in the backstage of its quotidian practice of servicing states. This capacity emerges when the skillful Secretariat staff assiduously performs the script of the servant to disarm state representatives, renders his or her administrative *and* emotional labour willingly and imaginatively, earns the trust of state agents, and thus carves out spaces for action and control over the structure and politics of the diplomatic interaction staged under the props of ASEAN. This is an *art* of servicing, where staff bring to bear a grasp of the asymmetries of the ASEAN diplomatic field coupled with a practical knowledge of how to ‘shine without outshining states’. The focus here is not on specific cases and outcomes, which are episodic, erratic and indeed untraceable insofar as the Secretariat’s obscurity is in fact a necessary condition of its competent practice.

Instead, the attention is on power as a capacity; on the *power to*, as opposed to *power over*, the latter being a sub-set to the former.

Historicising the understandings and practices of servicing over the Secretariat's history, the Chapter goes on to identify two distinct models of servicing fashioned under two leaderships, evaluates their successes and limits in enabling a 'strong secretariat', and teases out a wider point about how their form and possibilities have had to reckon with the dispositions and practices of ASEAN's diplomatic habitus.

Besides studying power, this chapter also illuminates what Secretariat staff *do* for the bulk of their professional lives – that is, servicing states. It also empirically fleshes out the quotidian practices by which the ASEAN meeting – the quintessential node in ASEAN's growing apparatus of diplomatic interactions – is produced and performed.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: A SECRETARIAT AND THE FATE OF A DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE

9.1 Revisiting the Research Question

This thesis began by surveying the landscape of theories, research programmes and research questions that have organised and dominated the study of ASEAN's diplomatic practice in the International Relations of the Asia Pacific. Despite the fecundity of writings on ASEAN and the pan-Asian multilateral gatherings it manages, designs and oversees, its four decades old Secretariat has scarcely aroused the attention of students of this diplomacy. The obscurity of the Secretariat, I argued, was both surprising and unsurprising: the former insofar as not a single academic title has sought to theoretically engage with and empirically elaborate its role and position in ASEAN's diplomatic project, the latter in that there exist shared and tacit understandings of "what counts as relevant" for the study of international relations, especially in the context of Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific.

An interrogation of these shared understandings disclosed the configuration of privileged actors, questions and temporalities that have allowed the obscurity of the Secretariat, and indeed of a wider universe of subjects, objects and relations that fall in the shadow of IR's intellectual attentions but are nonetheless ensnared in the swirl of practices producing and reproducing international politics. The overarching

question to emerge from this problematisation is – *how is ASEAN’s diplomacy produced and performed?* This thesis has sought to answer this question by pursuing a strategy of ethnographic immersion in a multilateral diplomatic field clustered around the compound of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia. In asking questions about the production and performance of ASEAN’s diplomacy, this thesis speaks to the wider question about the very *constitution* of international relations in and through everyday practices, a concern widely shared in the academic field (especially by constructivists in the Anglo-American IR field and also those studying Southeast Asia) but to which answers appear to be inadequate.

9.2 Arguments

This ethnography constructs two related arguments that offer an immersive – but not exhaustive – answer to the overarching question mentioned above. One, it explicates the role of the ASEAN Secretariat in producing and performing ASEAN’s diplomatic project. Second, and indeed through this exercise, it offers an argument about how ASEAN’s diplomatic practice is performed more broadly.

9.2.1 A Secretariat Producing and Performing ASEAN’s Diplomacy

The thesis demonstrates the Secretariat’s central role in coordinating and, to varying degrees, managing and producing the growing apparatus of ASEAN’s interactions (official meetings) and activities (seminars, workshops, exchanges, table top-exercises, and their accompanying textual and discursive productions). This occurs in two ways. First, the ‘professional’ grade of staff at the Secretariat are responsible for

organising and staging what is arguably the quintessential event gridding ASEAN's instantiation as a multilateral diplomatic practice: the 'ASEAN meeting,' where representatives of *all* ten member states carrying the badge of the sovereign state converge under the props and banner of 'ASEAN' around a meeting table with a Secretariat staff *always* in attendance. It is at the ASEAN meeting where the alienation of polities is experienced, estrangement is mediated (Der Derian, 1987a: 6) and 'cooperation' is produced and performed. 'Servicing' numerous meetings for 37 'sectoral bodies' – spooling together state officials from varied bureaucracies from across the ten states in Southeast Asia (and beyond) – staff are intimately involved in each step along the way. They assist the Chair or Host Country in preparing the Agenda for the meeting, write Information Papers and Concept Notes, and help out with logistical matters in the *build up* to the meeting. Staff take notes, transcribe discussions and assist with the preparation of a concluding report *during* the meeting. And they *follow up* the meeting by seeking out foreign donors in Jakarta to fund the slew of projects (workshops, seminars, exchanges) agreed upon by ASEAN's officials at these meetings, alongside maintaining communications till the next cycle of meetings begin. In managing both this apparatus of interactions as well as the activities that issue from them, Secretariat staff supply their institutional memory – dates, past decisions, agreements, knowledge of state positions and sensitivities – and also their lexical command of the appropriate signifiers with which to 'cook up' initiatives in the language of regional benefits.

This leads me to a second role of the Secretariat, one that is subtler, concealed, and arguably more profound. This is the Secretariat's role in sustaining the dispositions or habitus of ASEAN's diplomacy for saving the physical and figurative 'face' of

representatives instantiating sovereign states to secure their mythic equality and demands for recognition as they interact with each other and their foreign partners. As several chapters in this thesis demonstrate, the Secretariat and its staff are intimately involved in sustaining this diplomatic habitus. The necessary conditions for the Secretariat to play this role arise from how it is *a)* designed as a symbolic space expressing states' sovereign equality and concomitantly as a site for the equal exercise of sovereign prerogatives and *b)* in how its staff are constituted as 'servants'. In Chapters 4 and 7, I studied the former by fleshing out how sovereign equality is inscribed over the organisational design features of the Secretariat, specifically over the character of its offices (political appointments by alphabetical rotation) and its operational budget (based on equal contributions). The Secretariat has thus historically served as a concrete site embodying and expressing the sovereign equality of states.

Beyond just formal design features, the Secretariat has also served as a site for state agents to apprehend their equality through their equal capacities to exercise prerogative over its space and staff. This is expressed in how design innovations in the past aimed at fashioning this bureaucracy along the lines of an Euro-American international civil service – from a ministerial rank for the Secretary General, the SG's renewable tenure, more words strung by way of the SG's mandate, the 'open recruitment' of all professional grade staff, the sheen of once UN-pegged salary packages, the open recruitment of DSGs – were reined in and captured by ASEAN's state elites in the intimacy of their interactions to satisfy their informal bargains (on the SG's term), requests (CLMV states to ASEAN-6 for secondments), besides their perennial anxieties about an expansive Secretariat veering away from the script of a

servant in embodied interactions (from “coming with a stick” to SG Ajit Singh in the year after the restructuring in 1992 to the many beatings during the Surin years). As Chapter 7 showed, this sense of entitlement is apprehended by state agents and staff in more quotidian ways too: from how the diplomats of the CPR summon Secretariat staff for their meetings at the Lotus Room, walk into their office rooms (but follow diplomatic rank) to express displeasure and disagreement, task staff to write speeches or undertake sundry tasks on their behalf, and to expressing and at times justifying their indifference to the pathologies fostered by design features which undercut social integration at the Secretariat.

Besides inscribing itself over this built and symbolic site, ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus to save the state’s face to secure equality and recognition is inscribed over a corporeal site too – the bodies and subjectivities of those entering and building careers at the Secretariat. To earn professional satisfaction and esteem, or, at the very minimum, escape castigation and demoralisation, staff at the ASEAN Secretariat must grasp and internalise this symbolic space inscribed by state prerogative, the power relationship it expresses, and the script of serving states as ‘servants’. As I discussed in detail over Chapters 4, 7 and 8, to be a good servant involves embodying this social field into second nature: from fashioning a way of talking (“don’t contradict”, “don’t argue”, “don’t put member states on the spot”); a way of writing (“don’t name member states” and their positions in meeting reports and papers); a way of presenting themselves in their everyday interactions with states (the requisite extension of ritual etiquette and deference); a way of rationalising their subordination with a universe of folk sayings (“We are servants”, “We are nobody”, “Don’t lower your standards but lower your expectations”); and a way of carving out

empowered roles by *shining without outshining states* and couching these expansive practices in the grammar of a dutiful servant (“It’s the ASEAN Way, you *invite* them [to speak],” “Be sensitive,” “Don’t be narcissistic”, “Know your place.”).

It is through these unremitting operations on their body and subjectivities under the spectre of the sovereign’s physical and figurative ‘face’ that staff are *constituted* as ‘servants’ and become willing to extend not only their physical and cognitive labor (for numerous administrative tasks of servicing states) but also their emotional labour in their work. Staff deploy this labour towards enabling the practices and representations of the ASEAN Way of diplomacy. Take, for instance, the administrative and emotional labour they expend in securing the sovereign *equality* of member states on the ASEAN meeting table. Staff do so, *first*, by ensuring that the principle of equality is inscribed into the settings and props under which this inter-state interaction is staged: the order of seating, the arrangement of national flags along with the ASEAN flag, the placement of name cards, all in correct alphabetical order (and in the English alphabet), such that no one state enjoys an undue advantage.

Second, staff serve – in tacit and unanticipated ways – as diplomatic levelers in what is a markedly unequal ASEAN diplomatic field, where representatives hailing from states with some of the highest per capita incomes in the world (Singapore, Brunei) sit together as equals with some of the poorest (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia) on the ASEAN meeting table. While this inequality in the diplomatic field is alleviated by the penetration (if not capture) of the diplomatic field by social elites from the poorer states, the varying quality of their endowments enfeeble their claims to equality:

variations in the fluency of the English language – the “working language” of this postcolonial project – limiting the ability of representatives to eloquently advance their arguments and positions; the muddled quality of cultural capital they possess shaping the ease of their interactions with foreign diplomats; and the drastic variations in their possession of economic capital shaping their cosmopolitan travel experiences, sociabilities and sartorial modes of self-presentation. Secretariat staff, hired and remunerated on account of their high linguistic and cultural capital, must extend their labour to level this field when meetings and sectoral bodies are chaired by countries from poorer member states: from preparing Powerpoint presentations, writing proposals and speeches, presenting a concept note on behalf of a nervous representative, and, at times, running the whole show but *without being seen* to do so. By propping up the capacities and positions of lesser-endowed figures they supply them with the material to sustain their performance of equality and their claims for recognition as equal partners in this diplomatic project.

Third, staff seek to maintain an equilibrium of ‘face’ among sovereigns. They do so with a general solicitousness in their prosecution of administrative tasks (formatting a paper the right way; writing a paper mindful of red-lines) and also a *heightened* solicitousness to ‘save face’ of state representatives caught up in awkward or embarrassing moments in their interactions with vaunted foreign partners. Besides willingly extending this emotional labour to sustain the state’s ‘face’, staff may also have to acquiesce to its coercive extraction by state agents when required. This occurs when state agents seek to sustain their ritual states and performances of equality (by blaming or ‘scapegoating’ staff for the slippages of fellow states); to buffer power plays among each other (by asking staff to insert their national

positions into papers because they don't wish to be seen doing so); or to deflect unfavourable performances before their foreign partners (by asking staff to say 'no' to a Dialogue Partner's proposals on behalf of ASEAN representatives). As one veteran staff summed it up "one third of our work is actual, another third is to save face, and the rest is to be a punching face and scapegoat."³⁴⁸

Just as they enable the performances of sovereign equality, Secretariat staff enable the practice of consensual and consultative work style of the 'ASEAN Way.' They do so by serving, when required, as a "go between" and "runner" in informal spaces arranged around the ritualised front stage of the meeting table – notably, at coffee breaks or between meetings – to share information and strike compromises among state delegations, ensuring that no one 'loses face' and disagreements are not formalised on the high table of diplomacy.

In enabling this diplomacy some staff may also play a role in making state representatives *realise* who they are. Keen to ensure the play of impartiality and equality on the ASEAN meeting table, a skilled Secretariat staff may seek comments around the table in alphabetical order as a way to "invite" shy and timid state representatives to speak up and engage fully as equals in discussions and preclude some states from dominating the diplomatic interaction. Meanwhile, veteran Secretariat officers with a standing of their own are known to foster and *remind* state representatives of who they are by emphasising that they are meeting at a 'diplomatic forum,' that they carry the *mandate* of their states, and that they ought to speak more freely without calling their bosses in national capitals.

³⁴⁸ Fieldnotes, 16 May 2013.

Finally, a point may be offered in just how the Secretariat also enables the production of diplomatic kinship among ASEAN's state representatives, often in invidious ways. As a servant in a club of seemingly equal masters, a non-state in the company of states, and – in the parlance of ASEAN's official speak – as a “non-contracting party” in a gathering of “contracting parties,” the Secretariat and its staff are the looming ‘other’ against which states come to apprehend and perform their kinship. As the sketches, scenes and recollections from Chapter 7 suggest, they do so by countering symbolic insubordination of a staff by actively or reluctantly ‘ganging up’ against her, and indeed, by calibrating the quality of face-work and solicitousness they must undertake towards each other by implicitly distinguishing it from what they extend to the Secretariat staff in their midst. It is only when staff earn the trust of state agents through their performance of the faithful, meticulous and deferential servant that they may “organically become part of them” (Chapter 8).

9.2.2 Performing ASEAN's Diplomacy

In enabling and sustaining the interactions, dispositions, and practices of the ASEAN Way, the Secretariat also serves as a conduit through which extant understandings about this diplomatic practice may be critiqued, reappraised and reformulated. As I noted in Chapter 1, the ‘ASEAN Way’ – a moniker fashioned by practitioners and scholars to describe this diplomatic practice – has been delineated and studied in often representational terms, that is, abstracted from its quotidian practice and tacit knowledge. In existing understandings, the ASEAN Way denotes a diplomacy distinguished by the “norms” and principles” of non-interference in the affairs of

each other, respect for sovereign equality, restraint, consensual decision making, backstage and quiet diplomacy, among others. There is nothing inherently incorrect about these “principles” and “norms.” What is problematic is to dissimulate their representational quality and to mistake them for the quotidian practices by which these representations may be performed or indeed violated.

A basis to clarify this point is to recognise that as state representatives and Secretariat staff converge from their varied bureaucratic localities to perform ASEAN, they rarely bring to these performances the explicit recounting and listing of these representations. While arguably these representations *may* have been explicitly invoked in some form as rookies were initiated into this diplomacy (at their national ASEAN desks or in informal confabulations), when they come to practice and perform this diplomacy year after year at meetings, coffee breaks, emails and textual productions, they draw from a subtler reserve of tacit and practical knowledge about the rules of game; the asymmetries of power and capital structuring the field; of the stakes involved; the varied species of capital to secure; and an immanent and unceasing *feel* for the game. Participants in this diplomacy may be producing these representations (for the scholastic observer) but they are apprehending and producing their work through routines and practices. When Ajit Singh recounts the process of his selection to the office of the Secretary General he does not do so in the vocabulary of “consensus” or “backdoor diplomacy” as much as the practices by which this occurred – a straw poll, the Chair’s informal approach to other delegations for their preferred candidate, the suppression of numbers to avoid embarrassing the losing delegation, and asking the other candidate to withdraw in the backstage to enable a unanimous selection on the front stage of ritual activity. Likewise,

Secretariat staff holding seminars to socialise bureaucrats from new member states need not invoke “non-interference,” “sovereign equality” or “restraint” in their monologues as much as summon them all in the pithy reference to the practice that “in ASEAN, we don’t argue.” This resonates with the point by the pioneering organisational ethnographer Helen Schwartzman (1993: 39) that social actors apprehend social reality in terms of everyday routines and meaningful activities rather than formal concepts like “class” “hierarchy” or “monopoly capitalism.”

In order to account for this lived and experienced dimension of diplomacy, I have fleshed out its operative habitus or disposition, an embodied mnemonic both structured by the practices of the past and generative of unfolding practices and regularities of the present. ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus, I have argued, is geared to uphold and save the face of sovereign representatives in order to secure their demands for sovereign equality and recognition. While this disposition is generic to human social interaction, and heightened in most – if not all – diplomatic interactions, it appears to wield an intricate force in the context of ASEAN’s diplomacy, as evidenced by the sheer frequency in which it operates as an *emic* or insider category for practitioners of this diplomacy and fashions their routine practices.

The conceptualisation and uses of this disposition must be clarified a final time. *First*, the disposition does not exist in and of itself. The disposition emerges and is sustained to secure the sovereign equality of member states participating in this diplomacy and also their demands for recognition. While demands for mutual recognition among ASEAN’s states have abated since the embittered formative

context in which this diplomacy emerged in the 1960, the claims to sovereign equality remain tortured by the sheer depth of inequalities among them. To ‘save face’ and ensure no one ‘loses face’ to express and instantiate sovereign equality is thus a salient concern among ASEAN’s bureaucratic and diplomatic family as they interact with each other. Meanwhile, the demand for recognition acquires salience in the interactions of ASEAN’s elites with the outside (relational) world. This desire for recognition is rooted not only in the aspiration of newly decolonised states “to be recognised as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes, and opinions ‘matter’... a social assertion of the self as ‘being somebody in the world,’” as Clifford Geertz (1973: 258) noted. It is also deeply connected to the legitimacy and sustainability of ASEAN’s contemporary claims to be a leader and secure its ‘centrality’ in managing Asian security (Jones, 2010; Beeson and Stone, 2014; Stubbs, 2014).

Second, rather than situating this disposition in essentialised cultural mentalities, I have foregrounded the specific social orders – the constellation of local and geopolitical power that secured and sustain them – as well as the formative historical context of the 1960s and 1970s in which this disposition found its early expression by way of practices and sociabilities. *Third*, this disposition does not subsist as a cognitive and transhistorical cloud wielding force over those under its spell. Instead, the accent has been to relate this disposition, and indeed locate its operation, to the array of *practices* that have been fashioned and organised under its generative watch. As I have demonstrated through the Chapters of this thesis, the spectre of the state’s face has organised a host of practices within the Secretariat (of fashioning a self in Chapters 4 and 7; and of ‘servicing’ states in Chapter 8); in the practices of ASEAN’s diplomats stationed in Jakarta as they waged a bitter battle to ascendancy

in the early years of this diplomatic field and concomitantly consolidated through varied practices to perform and produce functional kinship (Chapter 5); and in the practices of foreign diplomats engaging in standard diplomatic lobbying and impression management but doing so by fashioning practices in synch with this disposition of ASEAN's elites by conferring them with status (Chapter 5) and satisfying their demands for recognition (Chapter 6).

9.2.3. *Scope of the Argument*

This explication of ASEAN's diplomatic habitus, and the practices it gives rise to, does not claim to explain why ASEAN's diplomacy holds together or why states choose to participate in this diplomatic project. Forces far more structural and geopolitical – indeed, subjective understandings of objective 'structural' and 'geopolitical' forces apprehended through the schemas and dispositions of state elites – must be accounted for to explain why states continue to partake in this project. The accent in this thesis has been on fleshing out the forms and terms of this diplomatic participation, the basic dispositions, interactional wherewithal and performative practices which states *must yield to* in varying ways and to varying degrees in order to participate and sustain their interactions under the ASEAN sign even as they pursue a variety of interests. The significance of this interactional and performative wherewithal should not, however, be underestimated. One may argue, in fact, that these acquire an even greater importance with the post-Cold War expansion of ASEAN's membership. The Singapore lawyer Walter Woon (2012: 6) notes

At the S. Rajaratnam Lecture 2011 Singapore's former Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng recounted how ASEAN diplomats had worked closely together for over a decade to deny international recognition of the Cambodian government installed by the Vietnamese after the invasion in 1978. At the end of the lecture the Cambodian ambassador stood up to make the point that the Vietnamese had not invaded Cambodia but had instead liberated the Cambodian people from the horrors of the Pol Pot regime. This lack of a shared narrative is a fault line that separates the CLMV countries from the ASEAN-6. In many ways they still remain outsiders. The process of building trust still remains a challenge.

To take this point further, one may argue that in the midst of these changes to ASEAN, and in the prospect of greater divergences in social and geopolitical orders, these dispositions (to uphold and save the state's face), practices (of face-work) and an appreciation of the underlying moral grammar of these relations (of respecting equality and recognition) *may be all* that these states have to sustain this diplomatic project in times of crisis and rupture.

Similarly, the argument about ASEAN's diplomatic habitus and the practices fashioned under its generative watch does not account for the sources and variety of the repertoire of face-work and the varying stock of gestural and linguistic material that are brought into play to perform these practices. This question has been beyond the excavatory energies of this project, and is a question that warrants further study.

Third, the diplomatic habitus studied here is distinctly *ASEAN's* diplomatic habitus and it has not been the aim here to trace them to or indeed conflate them with

bureaucratic dispositions one may argue are at work in the bureaucracies of individual member states of ASEAN. While a case may be made for such dispositions (at MFAs, for instance), their construction must be sensitive to the configuration of local and international power that buttress their specific social and interactional orders.

9.3 The Secretariat and ASEAN's Diplomacy: A View Ahead

Returning to that din of prognoses and prescriptions that arose following the diplomatic breakdown at Phnom Penh, it is worth reflecting on how this exposition on the Secretariat's role and ASEAN's diplomatic habitus – an exposition bound by the limits of its own perspectivism – speaks to efforts underway to avowedly “strengthen” the Secretariat as ASEAN concludes its fifth decade.

ASEAN's leaders acknowledged Surin Pitsuwan's Report on the Secretariat in 2013 as they “agreed to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat and review the various ASEAN Organs, its processes and institutions in *ensuring ASEAN's centrality* in the evolving regional architecture” (ASEAN, 2013: 5; emphasis mine). A ‘High Level Task Force’ of mostly foreign ministry bureaucrats studied Surin's Report over eight meetings spread over 2014 and their recommendations were endorsed in a “Declaration on Strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat and Reviewing the ASEAN Organs” issued by state leaders at the ASEAN Summit in Myanmar the same year. There is little dramatic about this Declaration other than its issuance from the apex of ASEAN's hierarchy. The agreement, it turns out, is over ensuring the Secretariat has “adequate financial resources and competent manpower” than any tinkering with the

longstanding design features (on mandate or budget) that have structured its social position for decades.

It appears, then, that the tussle between the patrimonial and rational-legal models of bureaucracy that have described the Secretariat's history is set to continue. It is not the object here to forecast the direction in which the Secretariat's organisational and symbolic elaboration will move towards: a bureaucracy with accentuated rational-legal sensibilities and practices, or a retrenched patrimonialism sustained under the gaze of state watchdogs and the benign leadership of low-key career diplomats (the latter is both more likely and also apparently at work since Surin's departure). Instead, the value of this study to ongoing debates may be in highlighting two concerns. One, that proposals for changes to the Secretariat must first reckon with the question of the kind of bureaucracy that is *permissible* under the aegis of ASEAN's diplomatic practice and dispositions (who, pray, will render ASEAN's diplomacy with the requisite emotional labour?). And second, suggestions that the rational legal model alone offer a mode for the Secretariat's 'empowerment' in managing ASEAN's diplomacy may be problematic, even though the problems and pathologies concomitant to a patrimonial model are apparent.

A second related question may be briefly broached here: Will ASEAN's diplomatic habitus persist for the foreseeable future? By nesting this diplomatic habitus in the social orders that give it expression, the argument here explicitly links the prospects of its continuity and adaptation to *fundamental* changes in how power is ordered in and across its states. In making this point, I wish to implicitly and perhaps tentatively suggest a point about the strength of these dispositions: that changes to its form and

force will require more than ruptures that are subsequently sutured and touched up, be it a breakdown at Phnom Penh or a skirmish across the Thai and Cambodian border. As this thesis has demonstrated, despite shifts and changes to ASEAN's social orders over the decades in terms of its leaderships (from the band of 'strongmen' like, Suharto, Lee and Mahathir to a new generation of leaders); in the composition of its practitioners (from mostly men to rising numbers of women diplomats); in its sociabilities (from golf to coffee breaks); and organising banners (from anti-communist consolidation of the 1960s to claims of "centrality" in 2015), ASEAN's diplomatic habitus is still doing much work in organising and fashioning the practices of this diplomacy. These shifts have no doubt contributed to growing fissures since the Post-Cold War period: from demands among some elites to reform 'non-interference' by urging 'flexible intervention' in the domestic affairs of each other (swiftly captured into 'constructive engagement'); instances of military skirmishes along the border (Thailand and Cambodia, most notably); and the formulation of an ASEAN-x decision making procedure to revise consensus decision making practices to speed up economic cooperation (though, as one Secretariat staff notes, the 'x' countries *still* attend all these meetings and may even comment and have a say in the proceedings).³⁴⁹ Through all these apparent reforms and revisions, the symbolic and material scaffolding of the Secretariat has expressed exceptional consistency and resilience, either through the sustained force of its design principles or in how it has been recurrently reined in by ASEAN's state agents. Even though the Secretariat – as a symbolic space (of designs) and corporeal instantiation (servants) – is merely one site where ASEAN's habitus finds expression, it is nonetheless a site

³⁴⁹ Fieldnotes, 30 March, 2013.

sui generis where the force of claimed and proposed changes to the ‘ASEAN Way’ of diplomacy must be situated and indeed ‘tested’.

There is, then, some credence after all to how the discourse on “strengthening” the Secretariat has linked the future of this diplomacy to the status of its Secretariat. The credence lies not in the certainties of a rational-legal Secretariat enabling an ‘efficient’ ASEAN performing “centrality” in Asian security. Rather, the credence is in the framing itself: a different Secretariat unshackled by the gaze and force of ASEAN’s diplomatic habitus as we know it (and as explicated in this thesis), and one fortified from the onslaught of subsequent state capture and retrenchment, would spell a different ASEAN diplomacy indeed.

9.4 Contributions

As the sections above indicate, the core contribution of this thesis is to the study of the international relations of Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific where ASEAN’s institutions and diplomatic practice have figured prominently as a point of debate among its supporters and detractors. Besides providing a comprehensive study of the ASEAN Secretariat, the thesis offers an immersive (but not exhaustive) study of the production and performance of ASEAN’s diplomacy from the vantage point of its practitioners in Jakarta. It does so by explicating the everyday practices that constitute this diplomatic project (of ‘servicing’ by staff at the Secretariat and of ‘diplomacy’ straddling impression management and international development among various actors in Jakarta); the various kinds of administrative and emotional labour that nourish its production; the macro-sociological currents and the

sociological biographies of people producing it (especially those arriving and building careers at the Secretariat as they ‘service member states’); and, through the explication of its diplomatic habitus, of the logic and embodied style in which this diplomacy is produced and performed.

It is instructive, however, to step back from the specificity of this empirical context to tease out how this thesis may modestly speak to wider bodies of knowledge in International Relations. I shall do so by, first, surveying how the empirical studies in this thesis contribute to the study of formal concepts and theories that are salient in International Relations across spatial and political contexts. Second, I will examine the contributions the thesis makes to those wider theoretical and methodological moves that both enabled this project but hopefully also buttress their import for the study of IR.

The study of *identity* took the centre stage in Chapter 4 *Becoming ASEAN Secretariat*, where I critiqued the long-standing search for an authentic ‘regional’ identity by examining quotidian practices at a site that lays claim to expressing such an identity in its most ‘exclusive’ form. These practices (of impartiality and ‘regionality’) conveyed the limits of approaches that have studied identity as *a*) a stable and fixed essence *b*) that must necessarily transcend an oppositional other (in this case, the ‘national’) *c*) and may be excavated from a Cartesian realm of ideas and beliefs. Instead, the practices and performances by which Secretariat staff fashioned their putatively ‘exclusive’ and ‘regional’ identity disclosed how the shadow of the ‘national’ was not effaced or transcended but remained essential to its constitution. The national was distanced, actively deployed, or suppressed and disavowed by

subjects as they performed the ‘regional’ in practice, with each variation informed by their feel for the shifting and unstable contexts (and politics) of their quotidian interactions. The performances of ‘national’ and ‘regional’ identities at the Secretariat illuminate and reinforce anthropological understandings of the concept, where identity is conceived as an unstable and shifting relation of *difference*. This imminent instability and mobility of identity calls for a greater and more sensitive consideration of power than is allowed for in current studies – often by constructivists – where identity is often studied through expressions of affect and affiliation gleaned and collated through interviews and surveys.

A theoretically sensitive study of *diplomacy* in the Third World was foregrounded in Chapters 5 and 6 on *The Jakarta Field of Diplomacy* and *The Diplomatic Game in Jakarta*, respectively. Even though diplomacy is regarded as a “master institution” (Wight, 1978:113) of International Relations, it has often escaped the theoretically minded energies of the political science and IR academy (Der Derian, 1987b; Johnson and Hall, 2005: 1-6). Taking inspiration from a small band of scholars of diplomacy (notably, Neumann 2012; Adler-Nissen, 2012; Jonsson and Hall, 2005), this thesis theorises diplomacy by using the ‘tool kits’ of Pierre Bourdieu to plot and study ASEAN’s diplomatic field in Jakarta: from the asymmetries of economic, linguistic and cultural capital structuring this field; its operation (and apprehension) as a space of positions marked by geostrategic ‘position takings’; as a space of tastes and distinction expressed in speech, dressing and styles of work; and the symbolic economy of exchanges in Jakarta with an indeterminate exchange rate of return for diplomatic labour. A host of concepts in diplomacy are also illuminated: from the explication of a built and experienced *diplomatic field* over South and Central Jakarta

(see Adler-Nissen, 2008 for the EU in Brussels); on its character as a ‘*diplomatised*’ field with overlapping actors and institutions expressing a cosmopolitan habitus and modes of knowledge production akin to diplomats; to the logic of practice organised by ASEAN’s *diplomatic habitus*. Moreover, by contributing to ongoing efforts to recover diplomacy for theoretical study, this thesis seeks to add texture to this body of knowledge – couched often in Euro-American contexts – by foregrounding the experience of diplomacy in postcolonial Third World Asia.

Chapter 7 *Controlling the Secretariat* stands as a critique of current modes of studying of *Institutional Design* in IR. It offers an insight into the quality of State-Secretariat and state–IO relations that is markedly different from extant approaches in IR and Political Science – mostly dominated by rationalist and contractualist approaches – to study this relationship (Agarwal, 1998; Koremenos, Lipson, Snidal, 2001). It demonstrates how states exercise control over a Secretariat not only by formulating sets of rules, procedures and norms in consecrated sheets of paper – a Charter, a Treaty, a Host Country Agreement or Protocol – but by a myriad of ultimately embodied and everyday practices by which design features expressing the state’s prerogative are deployed by flesh and blood actors seeking to impose, resist and mediate the terms of their subordination or superordination. To the wider body of scholarship studying institutions, it highlights the importance of formal designs as a starting point for understanding the *social* relations between ‘Principals’ and ‘Agents’, that is, states and the organisations they create and oversee.

The study of *power* is foregrounded in Chapter 8, *Power in Docility: the Art of Servicing*. The role of IOs in world politics – a role blunted and hindered under neorealism till the 1990s – has been impressively recovered and foregrounded by

constructivists contributions in IR (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). The task of recovery, however, has involved theorising about the ‘power’ of IOs in their large Weberian bureaucracies, their cache of expert knowledge, mandates, budgets and legal capacities that appear to give them leverage over their state principals as they draft legislation, shape norms, values and discourses. This model of IO power – notably rooted in an Euro-American experience of IOs – has come to shape wider disciplinary understandings of the role and possibilities of IOs, understandings that in fact have directly fed into the obscurity of the ASEAN Secretariat. Noting how the Secretariat is ‘powerless’ along these various registers of IO power, this empirical study offers a conclusion that is counter intuitive: that despite their highly restrictive roles on the front stage, the Secretariat instantiated by its staff are not ‘powerless’. Instead, staff – riding on endowments of class and capital and nurtured under certain leaderships – have historically enjoyed the *capacity to harness* and channel power. This power may be in managing the structure of the diplomatic interaction; funneling and lubricating the politics of the interactions (by whispering and cultivating godfathers); to occasionally nudging and moulding the agenda of this diplomacy. Crucially, this capacity is enjoyed in the backstage, and not the front stage of diplomacy, one that is rooted in the Secretariat’s character as a patrimonial bureaucracy serving this diplomacy. This empirical study seeks to add greater diversity to how power may be productively conceived in IR and adds texture to the study of the roles and possibilities of organisations in international politics.

These empirical studies, and the theoretical and conceptual insights they have generated, were enabled by two underlying moves. The first move, a theoretical one,

involved studying and using theories of practice, and the second move, a methodological one, entailed the use of an ethnographic methodology.

This thesis finds an intellectual home in the broad efforts underway to foreground the bewildering array of practices by which the ‘international’ is being produced, performed and reproduced in everyday life. Referred to by some as the ‘practice turn’ in IR (Adler and Pouliot, 2011, for a programmatic introduction) and in social theory more broadly (Scahtzki, 1996; 2001), this thesis has sought to demonstrate the robustness of conceiving practices as the ‘basic ontological stuff’ with which to understand and explain the production of (international) society. In how this thesis has described and studied practices in Jakarta and beyond, it has aimed to illuminate some of the chief metatheoretical concerns that inspired this IR turn to practice: from demonstrating how practices are the *mechanism* to relate agency to structure and ideas to matter; the importance of strategic action drawing on tacit and practical knowledge; and, especially, the *centrality* of power in the production of practices (from the power of states to constitute staff as ‘servants’, the struggles for status and authority in Jakarta, the symbolic performances in Jakarta; and to the very the idiom of face and face-work where understandings abound about whose faces and feelings must be saved, how, and how much).

Finally, it is worth closing with what is arguably the most recognisable contribution this thesis makes to the study of International Relations of the Asia-Pacific and indeed to International Relations at large: its use and exploration of an ethnographic methodology. This thesis stands as an expression of what it means to do ethnography, indeed an instance of what ethnography looks like, in a diplomatic

field. In doing so, it adds diversity to extant efforts and concerns recognised within disciplines like Anthropology where ‘studying up’ and the challenges and limits of participant observation as a method of ethnographic enquiry in a world that is moving and shifting have been salient concerns, and to which this research experience speaks to and illustrates.

At the same time, this thesis presses for a greater recognition in the IR field for the use of an ethnographic methodology. The call is not presumptuous but self-reflexive in that it acknowledges the limits of such a methodology to pursue the wide range of intellectual concerns that animate the interests of scholars in the field, notably those seeking to make explicitly causal claims by offering alternative hypothesis and testing variables. Instead, the call is to highlight the strengths of this methodology to enrich the study of the ‘international’: from enabling richer accounts that tell us about the constitution and production of the international; producing knowledge that is at once deeply empirical but governed and regulated by tacking back and forth to metatheoretical concerns; to producing knowledge that is self-reflexive by recognising the indeterminacy of the knowledge it generates and the claims it makes about ‘truth’.

While I have reflected on these limits and promises in much detail in Chapters 2 and 3, I shall close with what is arguably one of the most potent strengths of an ethnographic research strategy: its capacity to *explicate the small and specific in order to illuminate the broad and general*. Jim Scott’s ethnographic study of everyday class relations in a small Malay village of seventy families amounting to 370 people (Scott, 1985: 41) allowed for the explication of certain forms of peasant

resistance that problematised, if not gravely undermined, Gramscian notions of hegemony (1985: 39). Similarly, in his “sociological-pugilistic *Bildungsroman*” *Body & Soul*, Loic Wacquant engaged in long term immersion in a “little boxing gym” and in its everyday activities to “reconstruct root and branch my understanding of what a ghetto is in general, and my analysis of the structure and functioning of Chicago’s black ghetto in post-Fordist and post-Keynesian America at the end of the twentieth century”(Wacquant, 2003: x-xi). Likewise, Pachirat’s (2009) insights on everyday power relations, labour and hierarchy from his immersion in the kill floor of an industrial slaughterhouse in the American Midwest; Michael Burawoy’s study (1985) of industrial workplaces at various countries that have illuminated the nature of capitalism and socialism; and Karen Ho’s study (2009) of the culture of Wall Street investment banks that explicates the cycles of financial boom and busts, are important demonstrations of the conceptual innovation that ethnography allows for. By venturing into that faded white tile compound on 70-A Jalan Sisingamangaraja – from the library nested in its belly, to its office cubicles, canteen, the Lotus Room, lunch tables in the Hibiscus Room, the performances at its ASEAN Hall, and further beyond, to a wider space of shopping malls, conference venues, cineplexes, hotels, bars and restaurants spread over South and Central Jakarta – this study of a Secretariat and a growing ASEAN diplomatic field in Jakarta has sought to offer an argument about ASEAN’s diplomacy and diplomatic habitus more widely, and in doing so it has been both inspired and driven by the ethnographic ambition to go small to say something large and meaningful about the world.

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Annexures

Annexure 1

Becoming an ‘Insider’: Two Fieldnotes

This Annexure elaborates a point made in Chapter 3 (Section 3.6.3). It is concerned with the question of how the fieldworker operating within a diplomatic and ‘diplomatised’ field became – or sought to be – an insider. Discerning one’s status as a “marginal acceptable member” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 68) within the field came with reflecting upon the density and quality of social interactions in the field, especially as they became apparent through the writing and production of ethnographic fieldnotes (Sanjek, 1990). Presented here are excerpts from two such entries, five months apart, registering the growing bases of familiarity but also the enduring bases of the fieldworker’s marginality. While such familiarity within the field is necessary, it is not enough in itself to ‘become’ an insider. As I proceed to argue in Chapter 3, claims to fieldworker’s status as a provisional insider may be made when such familiarity is coupled with the quality of the fieldworker’s entanglements in the lives of members and interlocutors.

October 2012

The session ended after two hours and an Indonesian Secretariat staff fronting as the Master of Ceremonies announced in an overdone American accent that lunch would be served in the Secretariat’s Hibiscus room on the ground floor. The Deputy Secretary General (DSG) presented the six panelists with bright yellow gift bags with the ASEAN logo embossed in gold. Gift-giving poses were struck and photographs were clicked. Meanwhile, the fifty or so attendees at the ASEAN hall broke into small groups. Some raced to the restrooms while others staggered chatting down to the ground floor. I looked around for _____ and seeing him busy with one such group I felt some anxiety about not knowing anyone else here. There was a limit to waiting

about and looking awkward so I decided to ditch this space and step out for a cigarette.

I entered the Hibiscus room with my conference bag – in royal blue with the ASEAN logo embossed in gold – and surveyed around quickly. The buffet was lined up on one side and some eight round tables were spread over the room, with chairs draped in white linen covers. There seemed to be an unspoken pattern to how people had gathered around tables. One table was occupied by a group of Western diplomats from Dialogue Partner countries and their consultants based at the Secretariat. Another table, far into the room, was occupied by the DSG along with paper presenters and ambassadors. Right next to the bustle of the entrance was a table crowded with Secretariat staff organizing the event: the MC in a white skirt suit, ladies from the registration desk including a couple in *hijab*, male staff manning the projector and mobile microphones in a half sleeve *batik*. At a corner was a table less defined and less peopled: a young man in a black suit whom I had observed yawning away through the last session, and a couple of Indonesians in shirt and tie. I hastily gather some food from the buffet and make my way there. Introducing myself to them, I learn that the man in suit is from the CPR, specifically, from Vietnam’s Permanent Mission to ASEAN, while the Indonesian men are lawyers, whom, as I learn later, were a bit unsure about why they had been sent to attend this event. The diplomat is seated to my right and we make some small talk: that he’s been in Jakarta for ____ years, is working on the ____ affairs at the Vietnam Mission to ASEAN, and so on, but all this punctuated by spells of eating and quiet. This is until a Caucasian man asks “can I join you all”? Unlike the rest of us, he’s using chopsticks for his assortment of sushi and fried noodles. He takes the seat to my right, and introduces himself as ____ from the US Mission to ASEAN. That this was some cause of unspoken excitement cannot be denied: potential access to a member endowed with historical-geopolitical heft. We go around the table making introductions again and cards are exchanged. He wants to know more about what I’m doing in Jakarta but the Vietnamese diplomat leans forward and initiates a conversation.

V: “How big is your mission now?”

US: We are 12 people now. It was 6 before but we have recruited recently.

V: Oh that’s big.

US: How about yours?

V: We are 6 people now. So you are looking into ____ affairs?

US: Well, no. So the Mission has its work divided into three departments: political security, economic and socio-cultural, but they overlap a great deal and since some of us have to travel we officers back up each other. There is so much travelling to do!

V: (Nods with smile.)

US: Yeah, our Ambassador [to ASEAN] was in Jakarta for five days last month! Hotels in Bangkok know him by his first name! [He laughs mildly]

And so this conversation continued unabated between two diplomats, with the fieldworker seated between them, eating lunch, following the two and fro of words and faces like a spectator, softening the noise of his cutlery, self-conscious in his passivity, indeed, almost guilty that the two diplomats had to lean forward over this physical encumbrance to talk clearly to each other. That the Vietnamese diplomat had woken up to a conversation and that my own conversations had not lasted for more than a couple of minutes in contrast to their steady dialogue was a reminder of my place in this space of positions, of being someone who could not share information of much interest to the actors here – the size of their missions, the tasks that kept them busy, and their shared experience of ASEAN work. But I had to assert myself, or so I felt. As much as this chat was interesting, I needed to make contacts. Indeed, as it progressed, I ended up in a tacit but gentle competition with the young Vietnamese diplomat as I weaned the US diplomat away from their conversation to my work and interests, to which he reciprocated out of politeness but also because he had studied International Relations.

April 2013

The session at the ASEAN hall ended and the MC in a heavy Indonesian accent announced that lunch would be served at the Hibiscus room. The hall was abuzz as she spoke. There was much meeting, greeting and surveying. As I suspected, this “European Union-ASEAN Forum” was very well attended – nearly a 100 people in attendance – partly as it was advertised in the *Jakarta Post*. As I gather my conference bag – a blue cloth bag printed with ASEAN and EU logos – a hand lands on my shoulder. I look back and smile in delight – it’s Alex and Sutrisno, the former a young intern attached to a Western embassy and the latter a local Indonesia staff at a

Dialogue Partner Embassy. I introduced them at an ASEAN event at *Le Meridien* a few months back and they have struck a rapport since. With a grin, Alex says “We were just saying...we were pretty sure...Deepak will be here if he is in Jakarta.”

As we three walk towards the ground floor, Jacob, in a gray suit and red striped tie, pats me on the back to say a hurried hello and apologises for not having replied to my email. Says “we should meet soon”. The Hibiscus room is a hive of chatter and the queue for the buffet is long. We find seats on a table with some Indonesian students studying International Relations at the University of Indonesia (UI). They turn out to be students of a veteran of the Secretariat who teaches “regional integration” at UI, and whom I interviewed a few weeks back. As I get up for the buffet queue I run into Kabir, a South Asian diplomat, approaching with a plate of food. He seems to avoid my eye at first but I wish him anyways. He smiles warily and says, a bit mockingly I sense, “so you are still attending these things?” “Yes!” I say with a deprecating laugh, and ask how he has been. “What’s your research again?” I give him my brief on the ‘Jakarta scene’ and a smile breaks on his face. “Let’s meet up sometime”, he says and heads to his table. Barnardus, a former secretariat staff now hired by a Dialogue Partner, is standing in the queue. Impassive and distant, he surprises me by extending his hand out to say “hi”. I join the tail of the queue and find myself behind Fifi, an Indonesian civil society activist who collaborates with Western Dialogue Partners for ASEAN human rights seminars. She smiles warmly and tells me about the fate of a report I wrote for a seminar she organized with a foreign embassy. Waiting in the queue I see a number of Secretariat staff I’m acquainted with – Bhima, Sushamitra, Jason, Gloria, Suwitro and Subiyanto; I exchange a nod and smile as a couple of them notice me from their tables. Mid-way through lunch I see Joshua, a foreign consultant at the Secretariat, stealthily negotiating the cramped tables on his way out. We notice each other and he comes around my chair. I stand up to shake hands and we chat briefly about his recent travels and he tells me about his plans for trekking in Sabah next week.

Lunch over, I walk to get some coffee from an adjoining room. Gary, standing in the middle of the queue is busy talking to young woman in a gray trouser suit. He catches me from the corner of his eye and exclaims “you’re back!” I tell him about my weekend in Yogyakarta and he soon draws me into his jocular ways by asking me to guess the nationality of a lady he was speaking to. “Surely not Indian”, I say, despite

her ethnic South Indian looks. “Since this must be a trick question, right?” He breaks the suspense “she’s French!” and introduces me to her cordially. A short update follows and he says we should meet soon; I don’t press him for a specific date though. I find Laksmana, a young CPR diplomat of my age, standing to the side having coffee with his colleague and I head towards him. “Hey duude!” he says and reaches out for my hand. It’s been a month since I met him and he appears a bit pudgy. I (unwisely?) joke about this, and he tucks his tummy in for effect. We laugh.

The afternoon session has begun and, gathering Alex and Sutrisno, I return to the ASEAN Hall upstairs. Just as I was about to enter the Hall, Gloria, with whom I had hung out the previous night over dinner, rushes towards me and asks if I could part with my conference kit because they ran out of their printed materials. She needs to give it to a guest urgently and I am flattered that she chose to confide this slippage to me and approach me for help. I part obligingly. In a few moments though, I wonder if she could have made the same request if I were an older Secretariat colleague, a diplomat, or a government functionary, like most people in the Hall. I wonder, then, if this was also a reflection of my marginality in this field of relations.

These two excerpts express continuities and contrasts. The continuities are subtle: the Vietnamese and American diplomat’s chat over the fieldworker on a lunch table, Kabir’s remark which could *not* have been deployed towards someone with a legitimate stake in the field (a staff of the Secretariat or a representative of a government whose *job* it was to be here), and Gloria’s double-edged request enabled by both trust in the fieldworker and an appreciation of his free floating, quasi-formal status, were all suggestive of the fieldworker’s enduring marginality, where “non-staff” and “non-ASEAN national” was complimented by a third and equally enduring source of exclusion: of being *non-governmental*, of not instantiating the sovereign state in a field of primarily inter-governmental activity. All the same, the contrasts are apparent too: from sparse and shifty to dense and confident interactions spread widely across actors that partake in routine ASEAN Hall theatre, and infused with varying kinds of personal knowledge (work, hobbies, travels, physical comportment). The graduate student, the fieldworker, had become a legible and acceptable entity in their midst.

Annexure 2

ASEAN's Secretaries-Generals³⁵⁰

Name	Nationality	Tenure	Education	Background notes
Lt-Gen Hartono Dharsono	Indonesia	1976 to February 1978 (Forced to resign)	Technische Hogeschool (precursor to the Bandung Institute of Technology)	Military and political figure. Former chief of the Siliwangi division in the Indonesian Army. Sacked from Secretary General office in 1978 and subsequently became a leading critic of Suharto's New Order.
Umarjadi Notowijono	Indonesia	February to June 1978	—	Career diplomat who replaces Dharsono as Indonesian holder of the SG office. Prior to appointment, served as Director General of ASEAN National Secretariat in the Foreign Ministry of Indonesia (Deplu).

³⁵⁰ Includes both Secretary General of ASEAN Secretariat (1976 to 1992) and the current elevated office of Secretary General of ASEAN (1993 to present).

Datuk Ali Bin Abdullah	Malaysia	1978-1980	—	A senior Malaysian career diplomat.
Narciso G. Reyes	Philippines	1980-1982	University of Santo Tomas, Manila.	Career diplomat with early stints in journalism. Served as ambassador to Burma, Indonesia, United Kingdom, China and the as Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.
Chan Kai Yau	Singapore	1982-1984	University of Malaya (among the first Chinese school students to gain admission to the University of Malaya. (Mathematics)	Educationist. Director of Education in the Ministry of Education, Singapore.
Phan Wanamathee	Thailand	1984-1986	Oberlin College, USA (AB, International Relations)	Career diplomat and a member of the <i>Seri Thai</i> or Free Thai Movement during the Second World War. After ASEAN stint, served as secretary-general of the Thai Red Cross Society and as president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

Roderick Yong	Brunei	1986-1989 (First three year term)	Singapore Teachers Training College; University of Sydney (course on teaching of English as a foreign language).	Director of the Inspectorate of Schools and subsequently transferred to ASEAN Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brunei
Rusli Noor	Indonesia	1989-1992	Columbia University (MA Political Science)	Career diplomat. Indonesia's Ambassador to Norway and Denmark. After ASEAN tenure, was appointed as the first Executive Director of APEC Secretariat in Singapore in 1994.
Ajit Singh	Malaysia	1993-1997 (First Secretary General of ASEAN on a five year term and with rank of Minister)	University of Malaya (BA History)	Career diplomat. Director General of ASEAN Division at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, and member of ASEAN Standing Committee before appointment to SG office.
Rodolfo Severino	Philippines	1998-2002	John Hopkins University, USA (MA, International Studies); Ateneo de Manila University (BA, Humanities)	Career diplomat. First Secretary in Philippines Embassy USA; Charge De Affairs, Philippines Embassy Beijing; and Ambassador to Malaysia

				(1989-1992). Served as the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs (1992-97) and ASEAN Senior Official for the Philippines before appointment as SG of ASEAN.
Ong Keng Yong	Singapore	2003-2007	Georgetown University, MA Arab Studies; National University of Singapore (LLB [Hons])	Career diplomat. High Commission of Singapore to India and Nepal. Press Secretary to former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (1998-2002). After ASEAN tenure, served as Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia (2011-14).
Surin Pitsuwan	Thailand	2008-2012	Harvard University (PhD in Political Science); Claremont McKenna College, USA (BA Political Science); Thammasat University, Thailand.	Politician with the Democrat Party and former Foreign Minister of Thailand (1997-2001). Served as Chair of ASEAN Ministerial Meetings and ARF during Thailand's Chairmanship of ASEAN (1999-2000).

<p>Le Luong Minh</p>	<p>Vietnam</p>	<p>2013-2017</p>	<p>Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (Linguistics and English Literature); Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam</p>	<p>Career diplomat since 1975. Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the United Nations in Geneva (1995-1997) and then New York (2004-2011). Concurrently, served as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vietnam (2008-2011).</p>
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Annexure 3

Protocol Amending The Agreement On The Establishment Of The ASEAN Secretariat Manila, Philippines, 22 July 1992³⁵¹

The Governments of Brunei Darussalam, the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore and the Kingdom of Thailand:

DESIRING to amend the Agreement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat in order to enable the restructuring of the ASEAN Secretariat in accordance with the Singapore Declaration of 1992:

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

ARTICLE 1

Article 2 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

ARTICLE 2

Composition

The Secretariat shall comprise the Head of the Secretariat, who shall be known as the Secretary-General of ASEAN, hereinafter referred to as the "Secretary-General", Openly Recruited Professional Staff and Locally Recruited Staff."

ARTICLE 2

Article 3 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

³⁵¹ Source: ASEAN Secretariat (1992) *Basic Documents*. Available at: <http://www.asean.org/asean/asean-secretariat/basic-documents> [Last accessed 15 April 2015].

"ARTICLE 3 SECRETARY-GENERAL

Appointment

1. The Secretary-General, who shall be accorded Ministerial status, shall be selected by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and appointed by the Heads of Government on the basis of merit. The tenure of office shall be 5 years, provided that the Heads of Government, upon recommendation of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, may extend the term of the appointment.

Functions and Powers

The Secretary-General shall:

- (1) Be responsible to the Heads of Government Meeting and to all Meetings of ASEAN Ministers when they are in session and to the Chairman of the Standing Committee at all other times.
- (2) Take charge of the Secretariat and be responsible for the discharge of all the duties and responsibilities entrusted to the Secretary-General by the Heads of Government Meeting, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and the Standing Committee.
- (3) Have the authority to address communications directly to the Contracting Parties.
- (4) Initiate, advise, co-ordinate and implement ASEAN activities.
 - a) Develop and provide the regional perspective on subjects and issues before ASEAN.
 - b) Prepare the ASEAN 3 year Plan of Co-operation for submission to appropriate ASEAN Bodies and final approval by the Heads of Governments.
 - c) Monitor the implementation of the approved ASEAN 3-year Plan and submit recommendations as and when necessary to the ASEAN Standing Committee.
 - d) Conduct, and collaborate in, research activities and convene meetings of officials and experts as required.
 - e) Plan, programme, coordinate, harmonize and manage all approved technical co-operation activities.
- (5)
 - a) Serve as spokesman and representative of ASEAN on all matters, in the absence of any decision to the contrary in respect of a specific subject by the Chairman of the Standing
 - b) Conduct consultations with the Contracting Parties, the private sector, the Non-Governmental Organizations and other constituencies of ASEAN.
 - c) Coordinate ASEAN dialogues with international and regional organizations and with any dialogue country that may be assigned to him.

- (6) a) Be in attendance at all Heads of Government Meetings.
 - b) Be the Secretary to all the Meetings of ASEAN Ministers.
 - c) Address the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on all aspects of regional co-operation and offer assessments and recommendations on ASEAN's external relations.
 - d) Participate in and provide technical support to all Meetings of the Standing Committee and chair, on behalf of the Chairman of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, all Meetings of the Standing Committee except the first and last.
 - e) To participate and provide technical support for the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting.
 - f) Participate and provide the technical support for the Senior Officials Meeting, the Senior Economic Officials Meeting, other ASEAN Committees, and the Chairmen of task forces and working groups set up within the framework of ASEAN as necessary.
 - g) Attend or designate representatives to attend and participate as a member in the Meetings of all ASEAN Committees and other similar bodies.
 - h) Monitor the implementation of the Agreement on the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), serve as a member of, and provide support to the Ministerial-level Council set up to supervise, coordinate and review the implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area.
- (7) a) Ensure that the ASEAN Committees and other similar bodies are informed of the directives of the Standing Committee and on relevant current developments in the activities of ASEAN;
 - b) Act as the channel for formal communications between:
 - (i) ASEAN Committees, and other ASEAN bodies and the Standing Committee; and
 - (ii) The Secretariat and other international organizations and Governments.
- (8) Administer funds established for ASEAN cooperation.
 - (9) Ensure organizational discipline in the Secretariat and have authority to recruit, terminate or promote staff under the provisions of this Agreement and such other Rules and Regulations as may hereafter come into effect.
 - (10) Exercise the administrative and financial powers vested in the Secretary-General under the provisions of this Agreement and such other Rules and Regulations as may hereafter come into effect.
 - (11) Prepare the Annual Budget Estimates of the Secretariat for the approval of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.
 - (12) Act as custodian of all ASEAN documents.
 - (13) Be responsible for the Secretariat's security.
 - (14) Prepare an Annual Report for submission to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

3. The Secretary-General shall present drafts of Staff Regulations, Financial Regulations and Security Regulations for the Secretariat to the Standing Committee for its approval and shall apply and carry out the same from such date as it may specify.
4. The Secretary-General may propose amendments to such Regulations for the approval of the Standing Committee and such amendments shall come into force from such date as it may specify".

ARTICLE 3

Article 4 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 4 STAFF OF SECRETARIAT Composition and Appointment

1. The Openly Recruited Professional Staff of the Secretariat shall comprise of:
 - a) A Deputy Secretary-General
 - b) Four Bureau Directors
 - c) Eleven Assistant Directors
 - d) Eight Senior officers
 - e) Any additional Openly Recruited Professional Staff as the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting may deem necessary.
2. The Deputy Secretary-General shall be appointed by the Secretary-General, following open recruitment and selection by a panel, comprising of representatives of the Contracting Parties, under the Chairmanship of the Secretary-General. The tenure of office shall be three years provided that the Secretary-General may extend the term of the appointment for a period not exceeding three years. The Deputy Secretary-General shall be accorded a rank which will be equivalent to Minister or Minister-Counsellor or equivalent rank.
3. The Bureau Directors shall be accorded a rank which will be equivalent to the rank of Counsellor, the Assistant Directors shall be accorded a rank equivalent to the rank of First Secretary and the Senior Officers shall be accorded a rank equivalent to the rank of Second Secretary. They shall be appointed by the Secretary-General through open recruitment. The tenure of office shall be for an initial period of up to three years. The Secretary-General can approve an extension not exceeding three years on the basis of efficient and effective performance as well as the revisions of this Agreement and such other Rules and equations as may hereafter come into effect.
4. The principal considerations in such appointments, through open recruitment, shall be the highest standards of professional efficiency, competence, integrity and

equitable distribution of posts among nationals of the Contracting Parties.

5. The Deputy Secretary-General, Bureau Directors and Assistant Directors who have acted in the capacities nominated by their respective Governments and approved by the Standing Committee prior to the entry into force of this Protocol shall continue to carry their respective post designations for the remaining tenure of their current appointments, provided that they also be subjected to such other Rules and Regulations as may hereafter come into effect following the restructuring as envisaged in this Protocol.

6. The functions and duties of all the Staff of the Secretariat shall be set out in the Position Descriptions to be prepared by the Secretary-General and approved by the Standing Committee".

ARTICLE 4

Article 5 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 5

DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL AND BUREAU DIRECTORS

1. The Deputy Secretary-General shall:

- a) Assist the Secretary-General in the performance of the Secretary-General's duties;
- b) Identify strategies on issues requiring attention by the appropriate ASEAN bodies;
- c) Assume the functions of the Secretary-General in his absence, subject to the prior authorization by the Chairman of the Standing Committee;
- d) Attend meetings upon the instruction of the Secretary-General;
- e) Coordinate the research activities of the ASEAN Secretariat
- f) Handle matters pertaining to affiliated ASEAN Non-Governmental Organizations;
- g) Perform such other duties as directed by the Secretary-General.

2. The Bureau Directors shall within the purview of their respective responsibilities:

- a) Manage and coordinate the activities of their respective Bureaus;
- b) Monitor developments on ASEAN co-operation and activities within their respective purviews and keep the Office of -the Secretary-General informed of the developments thereof to facilitate their respective areas of work;
- c) Prepare briefs, papers and various reports on matters within their respective purviews for purposes of information, discussions and making recommendations;
- d) Participate in ASEAN and other meetings and act as resource persons at relevant ASEAN meetings as decided by the Secretary-General;
- e) Supervise and direct the work of the Assistant Directors and other staff of their respective Bureaus; and
- f) Perform any other functions as directed by the Secretary-General.

3. The activities of ASEAN committees, and other ASEAN bodies in so far as they relate to the activities of the Bureaus referred to in paragraph 2 above shall also come within the purview of the respective Bureaus.

4. If for any reason the Secretary-General is unable temporarily to perform his

functions, the Chairman of the Standing Committee shall appoint the Deputy Secretary-General as Acting Secretary-General. If for any reason the Deputy Secretary-General could not act as Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Standing Committee shall appoint the most senior Bureau Director as Officer-in-Charge.

5. If for any reason the Deputy Secretary-General is unable temporarily to perform his functions, the Secretary-General shall appoint the most senior Bureau Director to act as Deputy Secretary-General."

ARTICLE 5

Article 7 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 7 SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES

The salaries and allowances of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the Bureau Directors, the Assistant Directors, Senior Officers and such other Officers as the Standing Committee may deem necessary shall be determined by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting which shall, from time to time, on the recommendation of the Secretary-General, review such salaries and allowances.

ARTICLE 6

Article 8 of the Agreement shall be amended to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 8 STAFF REGULATIONS

Subject to the other provisions of this Agreement, the terms and conditions of employment of the members of the Openly Recruited Professional Staff and of the Locally Recruited Staff of the Secretariat shall be set out in the Staff Regulations."

ARTICLE 7

1. This Protocol shall enter into force on 8 August 1992.
2. This Agreement shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of ASEAN, who shall likewise promptly furnish a certified copy thereof to each Member State.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, being duly authorized thereto by their respective Governments, have signed this Protocol.

DONE at Manila, this Twenty-Second day of July, year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Two, in a single copy in the English language.

For the Government of Brunei Darussalam :
HRH PRINCE MOHAMED BOLKIAH
Minister of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of the Republic of Indonesia
ALI ALATAS
Minister of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of Malaysia
DATUK ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI
Minister of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of the Republic of the Philippines:
RAUL S. MANGLAPUS
Secretary of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of the Republic of Singapore:
WONG KAN SENG
Minister of Foreign Affairs

For the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand:
ARSA SARASIN
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Annexure 4

Total Dialogue Partner Contributions³⁵²

SUMMARY OF FUNDING TO PROGRAMMES/PROJECTS/ACTIVITIES BY ASEAN DIALOGUE AND NON-DIALOGUE PARTNERS (AS OF 29 OCTOBER 2013)						
DIALOGUE AND NON-DIALOGUE PARTNERS	APSC (USD)	AEC (USD)	ASCC (USD)	IAI (USD)	GENERAL	TOTAL
Australia	90,759,190	91,263,085	7,362,401	971,849	8,288,429	198,644,953.71
Canada	2,722,720	-	12,641,200	-	976,294	16,340,214
China	378,909	1,100,470	2,228,500	-	91,606	3,799,483.75
European Union*	6,722,081	30,025,174	2,667,566	-	14,316,946	53,731,767.00
India	1,160,213	1,782,832	14,371,104	332,440	-	17,646,588.35
Japan	5,341,146	23,533,357	362,437,413	53,550,190	7,289,756	452,151,861.42
Republic of Korea	2,434,611	3,913,265	11,390,659	646,720	-	18,385,255.15
New Zealand	4,457,095	1,307,130	42,917,360	4,220,211	-	52,901,795.81
Russia	765,788	153,657	1,211,291	-	-	2,130,736.04
United States	26,476,637	46,707,687	5,278,614	-	21,780,641	100,243,579.00
Pakistan	-	-	59,774	-	-	59,774.00
Germany	-	15,645,540	9,956,250	-	10,615,690	36,217,480.00
ASEAN Plus Three	960,001	30,000	1,003,595	-	-	1,993,596.16
United Nations and Bodies	-	-	430,000	-	-	430,000.00
Other International Organisations	-	250,000	47,000	-	-	297,000.00
TOTAL	142,178,390	215,712,196	474,002,726	59,721,410	63,359,362	954,974,084.39

³⁵² Figures from Dialogue Partners and Secretariat staff.

Annexure 5

Members of ASEAN's Pan-Asian Forums

			North Korea
			Bangladesh
			Mongolia
			Pakistan
			Papua New Guinea
			Sri Lanka
			Timor-Leste
		United States	United States
		Russia	Russia
		India	India
		Australia	Australia
		New Zealand	New Zealand
	China	China	China
	Japan	Japan	Japan
	South Korea	South Korea	South Korea
Brunei	Brunei	Brunei	Brunei
Cambodia	Cambodia	Cambodia	Cambodia
Indonesia	Indonesia	Indonesia	Indonesia
Laos	Laos	Laos	Laos
Malaysia	Malaysia	Malaysia	Malaysia
Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar
Philippines	Philippines	Philippines	Philippines
Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore
Thailand	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand
Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam
ASEAN	ASEAN Plus 3 (APT)	East Asia Summit	ASEAN Regional Forum