

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why Collective Identity Matters: Constructivism and the Absence of ASEAN's Role in the Rohingya Crisis

Mohamad Rosyidin

Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia
mohamad.rosyidin@undip.ac.id

Abstract The debate over the gap between theory and practice in international relations has been neglected by the vast majority of scholars. This paper is aimed to examine whether or not constructivist consideration has a place within ASEAN policy-making process regarding the Rohingya crisis. The absence of ASEAN's role in managing Rohingya's refugee crisis post-sectarian conflict in Myanmar has raised criticism on its effectiveness in dealing with regional problems. Despite the fact that ASEAN has already had a number of human rights instruments such as the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights, the organization arguably, did not do much to intervene in and try to overcome the Rohingya crisis. This paper offers possible contributions of constructivism in diagnosing and providing policy recommendations for ASEAN to solve such problem. From the constructivists' standpoint, ASEAN did not do much intervention due to the lack of collective identity among its member states. As a consequence, there has not been enough "institutional commitment" to carry out collective action. Furthermore, constructivists' perspectives may also provide strategic measures by suggesting that all member states should give priority to the process of collective identity building before any institutional arrangements are made.

Keywords constructivism, theory and practice, ASEAN, collective identity, Rohingya crisis

One of the issues raised following the Rohingya crisis is the absence of ASEAN's role. As a regional organization, it was expected that ASEAN should have taken steps to take care of major interstate flow of refugees. ASEAN is held responsible because the organization has been known to uphold a strong commitment towards regional human rights enforcement as laid in the ASEAN Charter of 2008, in the establishment of ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009, and the declaration to support human rights in 2012. Instead of being carefully managed by the Association, the flow

of Rohingya refugees was taken over by host countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. ASEAN did not even discuss the issue at the 26th ASEAN Summit on 26-28 April 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Arakan Rohingya National Organization (2015) released a press statement asserting that "It is a disappointment that the Rohingya issue was not discussed in the recent 26th ASEAN Summit held between 26-28 April in Malaysia, although the issue is a regional issue since bulk of refugees had fled to Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia" (par. 4). The responsibility to resettle Rohingya refugees was

deemed at the disposal of individual members instead of the regional organization. Without intending to exaggerate and over-generalize, this is indicative of ASEAN's failure to create security, stability, and respect for human rights in Southeast Asia.

This fact demands an explanation from the field of international relations (IR). There are at least three approaches that can be employed to address ASEAN's failure in managing the Rohingya crisis—realism, institutionalism, and the English School. Realists are very skeptical of any form of cooperation aimed at the common good, let alone dealing with normative issues such as human rights. The premise that interstate relations based on self-help capacity is seen inappropriate to provide a solution to the problem of collective action. The anarchic structure of international politics, as well as the tendency of states to pursue national interests, are two main factors why realists tend to avoid talking about human rights (Dunne & Hanson, 2012, p. 63). Unlike realists, neo-liberal institutionalists argue that multilateral institutions are a solution to minimize the effects of international anarchy in which relations between countries are always suspicious and distrustful (see for example Keohane, 1984; Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Keohane & Martin, 1995). Neo-liberal institutionalists would assume that the failure of ASEAN is caused by the absence of international regimes that facilitate cooperation among states. This is supported by the fact that there have not been any regional regimes that specifically address the issue of refugee and asylum seekers in Southeast Asia. Instead, ASEAN puts refugees and asylum seekers into the human rights issue. Seeing this fact, neo-liberal institutionalists would suggest that ASEAN should establish a regime that specifically deals with the issue. Meanwhile, the adherents of the English School would argue that ASEAN's failure is a result of the norm of non-interference in order to preserve member state's national interests (see for example Narine, 2006). Southeast Asian countries have long adopted the Westphalian concept of sovereignty stressing state-centred diplomacy (Katsumata, 2009, p. 622). Intervening domestic matters of any member states would violate a long lasting principle called the "ASEAN Way." Like the realists who put a strong emphasis on sovereignty and national interest, the

English School cannot offer any specific policy recommendations.

None of these three approaches is appropriate to provide a strategic framework to help ASEAN in addressing the Rohingya crisis. Both realists and the English School tend to support ASEAN's reluctance in facing the issue. Suggestions provided by neo-liberal institutionalists—forming regional refugee regime—seems reasonable, but crafting an institutional arrangement like this would be challenged by all member states. Myanmar, as a country held responsible for the case of Rohingya, would definitely reject this proposal. Aside from this, ASEAN has the tendency to make an agreement but is reluctant to implement it.

In contrast to three approaches described before, this paper will analyze ASEAN's failure on Rohingya issue using constructivist approach. Existing literature from the perspective of constructivism tend to neglect how to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Most literature have tried to test constructivist logic to explain ASEAN as a regional actor as well as encompassing issues. For example, constructivism can be applied to understand security issues in Southeast Asia other than realism (Busse, 1999). Furthermore, Peou (2002) went further by arguing that constructivism is more insightful than realist balance of power in explaining security issues in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, with respect to ASEAN as a regional actor, Eaton and Stubbs (2006) had compared neo-realism and constructivism in explaining ASEAN's role in the region and beyond. They argued that while neo-realists are skeptical about the efficacy of the Association's role, constructivists are optimistic that ASEAN has a positive impact on the development of regional arrangements. The work of See Seng Tan (2006) criticized the constructivist explanation of Southeast Asian international relations. He entered deeply into the ontological foundation by arguing that constructivists are "granting ontological priority to states" that make it fails to keep its promise "to take us beyond the shortcomings of rationalism" (p. 254). Another work focuses on the issue of peace in the region such as an article written by Timo Kivimäki (2012) who argued that peaceful condition in Southeast Asia cannot be built on objective conditions but rather "imagined realities." Even though this article provides policy recommendation on how to create a long-lasting

peace in the region by using constructivist point of view, it tends to overlook the underlying factor that contributes to peace, for example, collective identity.

This paper seeks to fill the gap in existing literature by examining the contribution of constructivism in bridging the gap between theory and practice with regard to the absence of ASEAN's role in the Rohingya crisis. In IR academic circles, it is argued that constructivism is focused on the accumulation of knowledge—science for science—rather than how a body of knowledge has an implication to policy—science for practice (Rosyidin, 2015, p. 195). This paper argues that constructivism can bridge the gap between theory and practice that has long been debated among scholars. Using ASEAN's failure in addressing the Rohingya crisis as a test case, this paper will not only be able to analyze why ASEAN is incapable of dealing with the flow of refugees from Myanmar, but also to provide recommendations for decision makers. In other words, constructivism is not only capable of diagnosing fundamental problems that undermine ASEAN's effectiveness in managing the issue but also suggesting strategies regarding what action should be taken to overcome those problems.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the gap between theory and practice as one of the enduring debates in IR. The gap is there partly due to the fact that most academics dwell with theoretical debates while forgetting its implementations on the ground. They are working for their own interests but do not attempt to create theories that could be useful for decision makers. The second section deals with the policy-making dimension of constructivism. This claim is supported by the argument that constructivism is paying attention to ideas that explain the behavior of international actors, including international organizations. Constructivists believe that by manipulating this non-material dimension, international relations is actually a practical field that can be controlled. The third part is a test case of whether or not constructivism is able to prove its promise. This section analyzes two things: constructivism diagnostic capability to identify problems and strategic capability to offer a practical solution. The fourth part is conclusion and policy recommendation.

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice in IR

Despite efforts in making IR be more applicable for decision makers, there has been a wide gap between academics and practitioners in this field. Alexander George (1994, p. 149), American IR scholar who worked at the RAND Corporation and is known for his research on diplomacy and foreign policy, acknowledged that the gap between academics and practitioners in the field is rooted from divergent professional objectives; academics want to develop the base of knowledge while practitioners want to influence and control events that they face. The distinction between the “world of thought and the world of action” (Mahnken, 2008) is also unbridgeable because of differing perceptions of time. For academics, time does not really matter; what matters is the quality of research they are working on. On the contrary, time is very important for practitioners so that despite the quality of a report or research, they will be considered good enough and eventually used as the basis for the policy-making process by decision makers (Nye, 2008, p. 598).

The gap between theory and practice is not actually new in IR. Much earlier, leading realist scholar Hans Morgenthau was fully aware of this issue. In his book, Morgenthau (1946, p. 10) argued that “politics is an art and not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer, but the wisdom and the moral strength of the statesman.” Politics, including IR, requires practical skills rather than theoretical expertise. The ideal theory, he continued, is a theory that is not only useful to understand the world but also able to guide policy (Morgenthau, 1946, p. 40). Consequently, IR theories should provide applicable prescriptions for decision makers.

To understand the utility of a theory in a practical sense, we need to distinguish between policy-relevant theory and policy-orientated theory (Fox, as cited in Garnett, 1985, pp. 52-53). The policy-relevant theory is a theory useful for improving our understanding of phenomena in world politics. The term “relevant” means that it can help policymakers understand the problem they are facing before making any decisions. Thus, the utility of this type of theory is indirect. Most

IR theories are the policy-relevant theory. Meanwhile, a policy-orientated theory is a theory that is intended directly to provide input to governmental policies. Theories in the strategic studies are examples of this type of theory because they are more practical than analytical. Deterrence theory, for example, was developed by RAND Corporation to counter threats to the US national security since the Cold War to post-September 11 (Long, 2008).

In the same categorization, it is important to distinguish between instrumental and contextual theory (Leppgold & Nincic, 2001). The instrumental theory is akin to policy-oriented theory, while the contextual theory is similar to policy-relevant theory. With regard to our interest in the contribution of IR theories to policy, we need to focus on the second type theory. Contextual theory defined as a theory that provides the basis for policy implementation. If we expect our actions to conform to our goals then we need to know the extent to which our action might be successful. For example, imagine we expect social assistance we give to poor people to not lead to the culture of consumerism. To prevent this from occurring, we need to understand the mindset, habits, and culture of the target communities. Thus, before taking any decisions, we need to identify underlying factors that potentially distort our goals. In foreign policy, the government should consider factors that determine the effectiveness of diplomacy. Economic sanctions, for example, need to consider factors such as a country's level of dependence on imports from other countries, characters of the government and society, as well as the pattern of foreign relations so that sanctions can be effective in suppressing target states. It is the duty of foreign policy and IR specialists to understand these factors.

There are several conditions that bridge the gap between theory and policy (Walt, 2005). The first is the ability to diagnose. "Diagnosis is the ability of a theory to identify the problem or the root cause of a phenomenon. For instance, why does ethnic conflict occur? Why do states commit war crimes? Why do economic sanctions fail? Why can't democracy foster peace? Those are typical questions that require theoretical explanation. The second requirement is an ability to predict. The predictive capability plays a role as an anticipatory strategy against the impact of an event.

If it is said that war crimes occurred due to military cultures, then the government should undermine it in order to prevent violations of military personnel against the laws of war. The third requirement is the ability to provide prescriptive or policy recommendations. This provision has been described previously in the context of the deterrence theory. The fourth requirement is evaluative capacity; the ability of a theory to evaluate governmental policies. For example, the failure of economic sanctions might be due to the negligence of the government to consider domestic factors of the target state. All of those conditions are commonly found in most IR theories.

Constructivism as a Policy-Relevant Theory

A proponent of constructivism, Emanuel Adler (2002, p. 111) once suggested that "constructivism still needs to be bridged between metaphysics and social theory, between research and methodology, as well as between theory and practice." The task of bridging the gap between theory and practice in constructivism is not easy. This is due to constructivism's focus of analysis on theory and metatheory. Some of the issues that sparked heated debates among constructivist adherents are the epistemological debate between rationalism and interpretivism (see for example Adler, 1997), the relationship between constructivism and critical theory (see for example Price & Reus-Smit, 1998), the positivist method in constructivist research (see for example Dessler, 1999; Dessler & Owen, 2005), support for interpretive approach (see for example Guzzini, 2000), pros and cons regarding the creation of a "world state," and critics toward moderate constructivism strand (see for example Wendt, 2003; Shannon, 2005; Guzzini & Leander, 2006). Debates that lead to real policy-making process is quite rare. The only contribution constructivism made in practical terms is to carry the visions of ethical foreign policy and campaign on global ethics (see for example Price, 2008).

As explained before, for a theory to be able to contribute to a policy-making process, it has to have at least two things: the ability to diagnose problems and to prescribe policies. To meet the requirements,

constructivism must have a set of basic assumptions that can be used to understand world politics. Generally, constructivism contains two main premises: first, non-material elements that are more important than the material ones, and second, that the actions of international actors are determined by these non-material elements (see Wendt, 1999, p. 1). “Non-material elements” refer to ideas that shape identities and interests, norms, as well as languages that, in return, form social environments in which actors are embedded.

The rationalists, primarily consist of realists and liberals, have a strong belief in material conditions such as defense, military muscle, natural resources, population, geography, economic performance, and so on, to gain national interests. Conversely, constructivists argue that material conditions have no significant impact on state actions. Instead of stressing on the physical resources, constructivists look at the meaning behind it. For example, as Wendt (1995) illustrated, five North Korean nuclear weapons are quite frightening for the US than 500 British nuclear weapons because North Korea is (perceived) as an “enemy” while the UK is a “friend” (p. 73). Another example, the Iraq war in 2003 was not solely due to the existence of weapons of mass destruction that was objectively threatening the West but because Iraq was labeled as a “rogue state” and “sponsor of terrorism.” The meaning of “objective reality” determines state action. International politics is more about what is thought by the actors, rather than about what happens in real life.

From this understanding, we can conclude that non-material elements such as identity, norms, and language can be used to diagnose policy problems. We will test this argument by taking identity as an explanatory variable. “Identity” in constructivist terms is defined as “a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions” (Wendt, 1999, p. 224). The influence of identities on states policy is very crucial because identities will define goals and actions. In other words, identities shape national interests, which in turn shape policies. Thus, for constructivists, national interests are not taken for granted but constantly changing, depending on the nature of interactions.

Let us consider the role of identity in Indonesia’s foreign policy. Part of Indonesia’s national identity is “peacemaker” which shapes Indonesia’s national interest “to create and maintain world peace” in accordance with the constitutional mandate set out in Paragraph 4 of the 1945 Constitution (The 1945 Const. of the Republic of Indonesia, Par. 4). This interest, in turn prompts the government to send Garuda Troops to conflict-torn regions. Another example is Indonesia’s decision to abstain from the UN Security Council vote in 2008 to impose sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. From the constructivists’ lens, the decision reflects Indonesia’s identity as the “largest Muslim country in the world” leading to interest to “maintain solidarity with fellow Muslim countries” (see for example Gindarsah, 2012).

It is important to note that identity is not a single analytical framework. Conceptually, there are many kinds of identity. Constructivism distinguished four kinds of identity: corporate, type, role, and collective identity (Wendt, 1999, pp. 224-229). Corporate identity is physical attributes that characterize a country. For example, Indonesia is both a maritime country and an archipelagic state. Type identity refers to the typology—mainly political system—that defines a country. The political system of a country deemed to affect foreign policy style. For example, Indonesia is a democratic country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, Iran is a theocracy, and so on. Role identity is the social position of a country in the international environment. This identity is closely related to the obligation or responsibility of the state in international system. For example Indonesia’s role as a peacemaker, Japan’s role as a “stabilizer” in East Asia, Australia’s role as a “sheriff” in Asia Pacific, India’s role as a “bridge between civilizations”, and many others. Collective identity is synchronized thoughts and feelings between one country and another. Although proponents of realist theory believe that the state is selfish in nature, many states have shared feelings which created solidarity among them. Take for example the transatlantic relations between the US and the UK, which allow them to build a cohesive cooperation with each other in addressing international issues. The next discussion will focus on this type of identity.

Constructivist scholars argue that identity is a socially constructed entity. Using “looking glass self” theory borrowed from American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, constructivist asserted that identity is formed through a series of actions and reactions involving interpretation between actors (Wendt, 1992, pp. 404-406). Imagine State A and State B interacting with each other. State A’s action is a gesture that will be interpreted by State B and used to give response to State A. Conversely, a response from State B is a gesture that will be interpreted by State A. This action-interaction process occurs continuously and creates intersubjectivity between State A and State B, which in turn defines the nature of the relationship between them. For example, State A interprets the gesture of State B as hostile and vice versa. This would create animosity and perceived inimical identities between A and B. The question is: what if one of the parties interprets the action of its counterpart differently? The answer is there will be no intersubjectivity; there is only the subjectivity of each party. The term *inter*-subjectivity requires shared knowledge between actors involved. Without intersubjectivity, there is no meaningful interaction. Without meaningful interaction, there is no such thing as “international relations.” For example, a marriage will not be meaningful if the man does not consider the woman as wife and the woman does not consider the man as husband. Thus, identity shapes relationship and relationship shapes identity (mutually constituted).

Similarly, collective identity is formed through social processes. The similarity of perceptions and feelings among actors engender shared interests and actions. Wendt (1999, p. 343; see also Wendt, 1994) mentioned four variables that promote a collective identity among countries which he described as master variables; they are: interdependence, common perception, homogenization, and the principle of self-restraint. Interdependence is a mutual relationship between countries which commonly refers to economic partnerships. The higher the degree of interdependence, the stronger the collectivity that would occur between countries. Common perception will be clearly evident when a group of states is faced with threats. As an alliance, the security and survival of each party will be determined by the security and survival of

the alliance as a whole. Homogenizing factor refers to intrinsic similarities between countries such as ideology, socio-cultural characteristics, geography, and so on. Countries that have similarities in these aspects tend to be easier in establishing solidarity rather than with countries that do not have those traits. The last factor is the principle of self-restraint; non-use of force in managing interstate conflicts. It becomes a crucial factor to build a collective identity. In other words, interdependence, common perception, and homogeneity are necessary but not sufficient conditions for collective identity building. Without self-restraint, a group of states would not be successful in creating international solidarity.

This argument implies that IR are dynamic. Two or more states that have been hostile to each other can turn their relationship into a friendship and vice versa. The key is how states change their relationships from enmity into amity through the processes that have been mentioned before. To do so, the four conditions above are required. Interdependence alone cannot automatically create a friendship. The relationships between China and Japan are always filled with hostility though both are equally dependent in terms of economy and trade. Even Indonesia-Malaysia relations are complicated by enmity despite the fact that both are fairly dependent as well as culturally identical.

To build a collective identity, states need to undertake comprehensive strategies covering the four conditions above. Perhaps the difficult task is how to change homogeneity since it is a congenital factor instead of socially constructed entities. However, homogeneity is not only indicated by relatively stable conditions such as ethnic composition or geographic similarities but also other features like ideology or political principles. Japan and Australia may be culturally different but are friends since they equally embrace the liberal democratic system. Constructivists thus suggested that states focusing on this collective identity building would provide the foundation of international peace. Collective identity is not a goal in itself but a means to achieve stability and prosperity in an anarchic world.

The constructivist assumption that stresses on identity in analyzing cooperation within the region is relevant to provide policy framework in Southeast

Asia. With respect to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, constructivism offers different perspective compared to other theoretical lens, for example, realism and liberal-institutionalism. Constructivism would argue, as mentioned earlier, that the Rohingya issue cannot be explained solely by the traditional concept of national interest as well as the absence of regional institutional arrangement that facilitate cooperation. Instead, it reflects identity conflict and, in some occasions, regional norms. International community recognizes that the government of Myanmar has committed crimes against humanity due to the fact that the ethnic minority of Rohingya is not the Burmese; they are an outsider because of their origins and culture (see for example Biver, 2014; Boon, 2015; Jones, 2015). In addition, identity-driven foreign policy is also salient in the case of ASEAN member states assistance to the Rohingya people. For example, Indonesia's diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya people recently were influenced by the identity as a world largest Muslim country (see for example Satria & Jamaan, 2013; Rosyidin, 2016). Thus, the concept of identity can also be employed as a framework to formulate ASEAN policy in dealing with the Rohingya issue.

Constructivism in Practice: Strategies to Build ASEAN Collective Identity

The 26th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, held on 26-28 April 2015, was a very timely moment to address the Rohingya issue. It had been argued that the Rohingya issue has become a sort of "thorn in the flesh" to the regional stability. Therefore, the current ASEAN summit was a test case to prove whether ASEAN is able to deal with the issue. Unfortunately, the forum did not include the Rohingya issue into the meeting at all. ASEAN seemed to deliberately overlook non-traditional security issues such as refugees since Myanmar seemed hesitant to discuss the issue. The meeting had only produced declarations of cooperation among members, especially in economic issues. One declaration produced at the meeting was "Kuala Lumpur Declaration on a People-Oriented, People-Centered ASEAN." This declaration reflects the commitment of the member states to

strengthen the three pillars of the ASEAN Security Community, namely, political-security, economy, and socio-cultural. Ironically, despite the fact that the declaration asserts that the member states "... need to confront the challenges to promote peace, security and prosperity in Southeast Asia" (Vietnam Plus, 2015, par. 6), the content of the declaration does not contain the word "refugee" even if it intersects directly with the political-security pillar.

ASEAN's negligence towards the Rohingya issue shows the organization's failure as an instrument to create regional security and stability, as well as to uphold the ideals of ASEAN Community. The failure to take a responsible action towards the Rohingya issue will "undermine ASEAN's efforts towards integration by spoiling mutual trust and confidence in each other" (Kundu, 2015, par.11). The Kuala Lumpur Declaration's focus on "people" falls short in reality. ASEAN should have demonstrated its commitment to human rights in the region by taking the responsibility to help Rohingya refugees. Yet, as a former diplomat at the ASEAN, Secretariat Termsak Chalermpananupap acknowledged that the ASEAN has always faced the dilemma of being caught between national sovereignty and regional commitment. He asserted that when ASEAN sets new goals or higher aspirations, the member states will deal with a lot of domestic change while officials are reluctant "to do extra work just to fulfill regional commitments" (in Quayle, 2013, p. 68). In short, ASEAN passivism represents a "moral tragedy" for the institution itself (Davies, 2015).

The widely-perceived ASEAN's failure in enforcing respect for human rights at the regional level is not only about its negligence over the Rohingya issue but also due to its remissness to implement its existing human rights regimes. Aside from the fact that until now ASEAN has not had any special regime on refugees and asylum seekers, ASEAN has demonstrated its commitment to human rights issues as reflected in the ASEAN Charter, in the establishment of the AICHR, and ASEAN Human Rights Declaration. The ASEAN Charter which was signed in 2008 is an institutional framework which became the foundation of the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The declaration clearly stated that member states are committed to "respect for and protection of human

rights and fundamental freedom: (ASEAN, 2008, p. 2). Following this commitment, in 2009 ASEAN formed a special institution to deal with human rights issues, namely the AIHCR. AICHR is “The overarching body with a cross-cutting mandate that handles matters related to human rights cooperation with other ASEAN Bodies, external partners and stakeholders” (ASEAN, 2009, p. 1). When the Rohingya issue came up, AICHR could not do anything. A Western observer criticized the agency as being no more than “a toothless tiger” (Bowen, 2015).

The reflection of ASEAN human rights commitment culminated in 2012 when the organization signed the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in Phnom Penh. The declaration proves that ASEAN stepped forward to show their seriousness in upholding human rights. The Rohingya issue falls within the purview of the Article 28 of the declaration which states that:

Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living for himself or herself and his or her family including: a) The right to adequate and affordable food, freedom from hunger and access to safe and nutritious food; b) The right to clothing; c) The right to adequate and affordable housing; d) The right to medical care and social services necessary; e) The right to safe drinking water and sanitation; f) The right to a safe, clean and sustainable environment. (ASEAN, 2013, pp. 8-9)

Although it is quite obvious that everyone must be protected and guaranteed their rights, ASEAN does not undertake any concrete steps to prove it. The declaration seems to be no more than an exhortation and not a shared commitment between member states to respect human rights principles.

Why did ASEAN’s human rights institutions become ineffective in addressing the Rohingya issue? Why were there no efforts dedicated to establishing a regime that specifically addresses the issue of refugees and asylum seekers? The basic assumption of this article is that the absence of such efforts is due to the dearth of collective identity among ASEAN members has resulted in the lack of commitment to their own institution. Identity matters in regional cooperation because it plays a role as

a glue to consolidate action in a certain issue. The problem is, ASEAN has not achieved “the kind of regional identity that would last forever, but there has been a significant and self-conscious effort at regional identity-building” (Acharya, 2005, p. 104; see also Acharya, 1997). In other words, ASEAN has no pre-determined identity but “an identity in the making.” As a consequence, ASEAN member states cannot act collectively during this identity building process. Nevertheless, constructivists believe that the existence of collective identity is a precondition for collective actions. Conversely, collective actions will strengthen collective identity. If ASEAN states stop acting like a group which operates under a collective identity, then they will never be one. Thus, there is a reciprocity (mutually constituted relationships) between collective identity and its practices among ASEAN member states.

Collective identity creates solidarity or “community-region” (Adler, 2005, p. 181) where states in a region have the same perceptions and interests that underlie collective action. The collective action represents the “logic of community”, not “logic of anarchy” which reflects self-interested behavior (Adler & Barnett, 1998). The logic of community is related to a “commitment institution” (Matlii, 1999); the political will of the member states to implement institutional obligations. Simply put, in order to play its role in the region, ASEAN should first establish a collective identity.

Constructivists’ framework of collective identity formation can be used as a road map for ASEAN to build a long-term foundation of regional cooperation. As explained in the previous section, there are four variables that are required to do so: interdependence, common perception, homogeneity, and the principle of self-restraint. Let us start from interdependence. The level of interdependence among ASEAN members, especially in terms of economy and trade is quite high. Quantitative indicators such as trading volumes among fellow members of ASEAN is considered the biggest in the region. The top 10 ASEAN trading partners are dominated by the ASEAN countries themselves, followed by China, the EU, Japan, and the United States. Until August 2016, the total volume of export from ASEAN to its own members was US\$ 305,565,20

million or 25.9% of total export volume in a year. This number is more than twice the total volume of export from ASEAN to China that is only 11.3% (ASEAN, 2016). This shows that in terms of trade, ASEAN countries still rely on fellow members as the most important trading partners. Thus, ASEAN has met the first requirement to form a collective identity. ASEAN only needs to increase the frequency and intensity of interdependence among them in the future.

The second variable is common perception, especially perception of threat in the region. However, the perception of threat in Southeast Asia is yet to be fully formed. This is indicated by the existence of a strong distrust among ASEAN members on security issues. The context was completely different during ASEAN's early formation period, where the level of trust among member states was high. At that time, the threat of communism played a role as a glue to bind countries in the region and to build a sense of solidarity (see Acharya, 1998, 2001). In the post-Cold War era, ASEAN incorporated transnational crimes as a common threat resulted in the emergence of the Declaration on Transnational Crime in 1997. Then in 2001 when terrorists attacked US soil, terrorism soon became a common threat that must be confronted collectively. In addition to threatening world security, ASEAN also saw terrorism as "a direct challenge to the attainment of peace, progress, and prosperity of ASEAN and the realization of ASEAN Vision 2020" (Pushpanathan, 2003).

However, it seems that the perception of a common threat is limited to non-traditional issues. Traditional security issues originating from state actors remain unchanged. For example, the security issue in the South China Sea that weakens ASEAN as a regional organization. The main problem faced by ASEAN in the South China Sea issue concerns China's aggressive intention. ASEAN is divided in welcoming China in the region. Countries like Malaysia and Brunei welcome China's presence in the picture, while countries like Vietnam and the Philippines reject it. The Philippines' reservation further worsens the situation because it would automatically invite the US as an ally to intervene in the region. Needless to say, what would happen in the future if vital interests of two major powers collide in the region?

In addition, ASEAN is also divided in managing the South China Sea conflict. There is a thought that China should be involved in the formulation of the Code of Conduct while others, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines, firmly opposed the suggestion. According to Indonesian foreign policy expert Rizal Sukma, the failure of ASEAN to unite with regard to the South China Sea crisis "will weaken ASEAN's position and image" (Sukma, 2012). Hostilities and incidents can easily spark an arms race among ASEAN countries (Rosyidin, 2014). As a result, the level of distrust in the region is quite high. So it can be concluded that ASEAN has not had a common perception regarding traditional threats.

The third factor is homogeneity that is similarity of intrinsic elements that contribute to interstate relations. Although united by historical experience as a colony (Reid, 2010), Southeast Asian countries have a weak commitment to human rights and democracy. The commitment of Southeast Asian countries to human rights is characterized by an action-identity gap (Davies, 2013). ASEAN countries tend to preserve the rationalist's mindset that norms are only useful if it can be used to achieve political goals. This explains why human rights violations in Southeast Asia are still abundant. The UN Human Rights body, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported, "Although Southeast Asia is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the world, protection mechanisms are not in place to promote and protect the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples" (OHCHR, n.d.).

Similarly, ASEAN does not have any unified concept of democratic values. Although the vast majority of ASEAN countries had adopted the principles of democracy, ASEAN does not include liberal democratic values into it. As a consequence, ASEAN does not have a regional consensus regarding the fundamental principles of democracy such as respect for the rule of law and protection of human rights (Gomez & Ramcharan, 2014). With regard to the third requirement to establish a collective identity, it is clear that ASEAN is yet to fully adopt democratic principles. In short, there are no shared values among ASEAN members concerning democracy and human rights.

The final and considerably most crucial requirement is the principle of self-restraint. Compared with the two previous requirements—a common perception and shared values—Southeast Asian countries may be quite successful in preventing conflict escalation into an open confrontation that could lead to war. Acharya (1998, 2001) was correct when he argued that ASEAN member states have long been consistently applying dialogue and cooperation rather than the use of military force to resolve disputes or conflicts. The principle of non-use of force may be the only indicator of ASEAN as a security community in Deutsch-ian sense that “there is a real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle reviews their disputes in some other way” (Deutsch, 2003, p. 124). In the case of South China Sea disputes, for instance, ASEAN has long agreed to not use violent means and instead resort to dialogue in the Code of Conduct format. The agreement was set in 2002 and stated that,

The parties undertake to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle reviews their differences in a constructive manner. (ASEAN, 2002)

The fact that ASEAN member states tend to avoid the use of force in resolving conflicts shows that ASEAN has been successfully practicing the principle of self-restraint even though suspicion and distrust still pervade interstate relations in the region.

Unfortunately, the four variables are yet to be realized in Southeast Asia. Of the four factors mentioned above, only interdependence and the principle of self-restraint are present, while common perception and homogeneity of shared values are still absent in the region. It has been conveyed before that ASEAN has not been looking at the state as a common threat. Although traditional-militaristic threats are increasingly displaced by non-traditional threats such as terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental degradation, disease, and so forth, traditional threats

will not disappear as long as the state remains. One of the main obstacles to the formation of a common perception of traditional threats in the region is the band-wagoning of Malaysia and Brunei with China concerning the South China Sea. In addition, US involvement in the region complicates the picture. Changing perceptions and preferences of the foreign policy of the member states has never been easy. ASEAN countries should carefully re-consider their option to have the presence of superpowers in the region which ultimately poses a threat to all of them.

The second task is also hard to do. In terms of identity, Southeast Asia consists of a wide variety of cultural groups which make it hard to find any similarities. Nonetheless, the slogan of “unity in diversity” needs to be strengthened by means of the reconceptualization of democratic values and human rights. Theoretically, ASEAN has adopted these values, though there is no agreement on how to implement it at the practical level. As mentioned before, each country has its own definition and policy regarding democracy and human rights principles. Promoting democratic values and human rights as well as strengthening the institutional structures both at the domestic and regional levels should become ASEAN’s core agenda. Bali Democracy Forum is a step forward in this direction. Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles is how to persuade Myanmar to adopt these values. Just like the first task, uniting divided conceptions over democracy and human rights also takes time. ASEAN is presumably still facing internal problems in achieving this goal.

This raises a critical question—how can ASEAN’s collective identity solve the problem of the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar? The answer to this question requires further study since this article only focuses on the absence ASEAN’s role on the issue as well as how to build a sense of community among ASEAN members. The answer to that question is definitely counterfactual, which means to put forward an argument deriving from the “what if” question. As stated by methodological scholars, counterfactual method is important to make predictions, to answer the what if question, and estimate the causal impact (King & Zeng, 2007). In other words, the methodology of counterfactual is the “thought experiment” in which the researcher propose

the hypothetical argument because it is contrary to reality (see for example Fearon, 1991; Tetlock & Belkin, 1996).

Using the logic of counterfactual method, this paper argues that ASEAN collective identity could facilitate the settlement of communal conflict in Myanmar even if not a determining factor. If ASEAN had a robust collective identity, then ASEAN would have sufficient bargaining power to influence the government of Myanmar to stop the persecution of the Rohingya people. Given ASEAN still adheres to the principle of non-interference, ASEAN could socialize human rights norms in Myanmar. According to Acharya and Johnston (2007), international institutions can play a role as an agent of socialization for its members through delegates representing the country in a regional forum. Socialization itself is a process in which the actors are invited to internalize the values and norms in order to become part of a larger community. As demonstrated by Jeffrey T. Checkel (2005) in his study of the European Union, regional institution plays role as an agent of socialization that creates the sense of community for its members. Despite the prevailing norms in ASEAN are not human rights and democracy—in contrast to the European Union—but non-interference and regional autonomy (see Acharya, 2011), ASEAN could continuously be able to persuade Myanmar to resolve its domestic problems with a constructive approach without the need to involve external powers. Yet, playing role as an agent of socialization can only be done if ASEAN has a strong collective identity.

Conclusion

The absence of ASEAN's role in addressing the Rohingya issue is not only rooted in the norm of non-interference but also in the dearth of collective identity among ASEAN member states. The absence of collective identity led to national interest-oriented political processes rather than a regional-oriented one. Despite the fact that ASEAN has had several human rights regimes, member states seem reluctant to implement it. It is not surprising that ASEAN was unable to do anything because member states are lacking commitment to the institution they built.

Identifying the problem of inter-state cooperation is one of the major problems that has long been debated among IR scholars. The absence of shared commitment between members of a regional group is a classic problem known as the “logic of collective action” (Olson, 2002). In contrast to rationalists who assume that a major barrier to collective action is the principle of self-interested behavior reflected from the phenomenon of “free rider,” constructivists assume further that the main problem is the lack of “sense of community” among members. In other words, if the rationalists claim egotism as a state of nature which is given, the constructivists claim it as a result of a lack of shared understanding between countries. Thus, the constructivists view that the behavior of a country is dynamic that changes continuously.

This paper has shown that constructivism is able to identify problems that led to the absence of ASEAN's role in addressing the Rohingya issue. The lack of ASEAN solidarity due to the absence of collective identity may be the greatest obstacle to forming a community. For their long-term interests, ASEAN needs to focus more on how to build collective identity among themselves rather than on paper-signings at conference tables. Collective identity formation requires ASEAN to establish interdependence, common perception, homogeneity of shared values, as well as the principle of self-restraint. The most difficult task is uniting ASEAN perception towards the common enemy as well as the conception of democracy and human rights that, of course, compatible with the region. This is important to create a community that acts based on collectivity.

References

- Acharya, A. (1997). Ideas, identity, and institution-building: From the ‘ASEAN way’ to ‘Asia Pacific way’. *The Pacific Review*, 10(3), 319–346.
- Acharya, A. (1998). Collective identity and conflict management in Southeast Asia. In E. Adler & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Security communities* (pp. 198–227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Acharya, A. (2001). *Constructing security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order*. London: Routledge.

- Acharya, A. (2005). Do norms and identity matter? Community and power in Southeast Asia's regional order. *The Pacific Review*, 18(1), 95–118.
- Acharya, A. (2011). *Asian regional institutions and the possibilities for socializing the behavior of states* (ADB Working Paper No. 82). Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Acharya, A., & Johnston, A. I. (Eds.). (2007). *Crafting cooperation: Regional international institutions in comparative perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Adler, E. (1997). Seizing the middle ground: Constructivism in world politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(3), 319–363.
- Adler, E. (2002). Constructivism and international relations. In W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, & B. Simmons (Eds.), *Handbook of international relations* (pp. 95–118). London: SAGE Publication.
- Adler, E. (2005). *Communitarian international relations: The epistemic foundations of international relations*. London: Routledge.
- Adler, E., & Barnett, M. (1998). Security communities in theoretical perspectives. In E. Adler & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Security communities* (pp. 3–28). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arakan Rohingya National Organization. (2015). *Save Rohingyas from the hands of the human traffickers and greedy exploiters* [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.rohingya.org/portal/index.php/arno/arno-press-release/1099-press-release-save-rohingyas-from-the-hands-of-the-human-traffickers-and-greedy-exploiters.html>
- ASEAN. (2002). *Declaration on the conduct of parties in the South China Sea*. Retrieved from http://asean.org/?static_post=declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea-2
- ASEAN. (2008). *ASEAN charter*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.
- ASEAN. (2009). *AICHR: What you need to know*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.
- ASEAN. (2013). *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration* (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat).
- ASEAN. (2016). *Top ten ASEAN trade partner countries*. Retrieved from http://asean.org/storage/2016/06/table20_as-of-30-Aug-2016-2.pdf
- Axelrod, R., & Keohane, R. (1985). Achieving cooperation under anarchy: Strategies and institutions. *World Politics*, 38(1), 226–254.
- Biver, E. (2014). *Religious nationalism: Myanmar and the role of Buddhism in anti-Muslim narratives* (Unpublished masteral thesis). Lund University, Sweden.
- Boon, R. (2015). *Nationalism and the politicization of identity: The implications of Burmese nationalism for the Rohingya* (Unpublished undergraduate thesis). Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands.
- Bowen, J. (2015, May 15). Refugee crisis tests limits of Southeast Asian cooperation. *Global Observatory*. Retrieved from <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/05/asean-rohingya-refugees-myanmar/>
- Busse, N. (1999). Constructivism and Southeast Asian security. *The Pacific Review*, 12(1), 39–60.
- Checkel, J. T. (2005) International institutions and socialization in Europe. *International Organization*, 59(4), 801–826.
- Const. of the Republic of Indonesia (1945).
- Davies, M. (2013). ASEAN and human rights norms: Constructivism, rational choice, and the action-identity gap. *International Relations of the Asia Pacific*, 13, 207–231.
- Davies, M. (2015). *The Rohingya and regional failure*. Retrieved from <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/05/16/the-rohingya-and-regional-failure/>
- Dessler, D. (1999). Constructivism within a positivist social science. *Review of International Studies*, 25(1), 123–137.
- Dessler, D., & Owen, J. (2005). Constructivism and the problem of explanation. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(3), 597–610.
- Deutsch, K. (2003). Political community and the North Atlantic area. In B. Nelsen & A. Stubb (Eds.), *The European Union: Readings on the theory and practice of European integration* (3rd ed., pp. 121–143). Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner.
- Dunne, T., & Hanson, M. (2012). Human rights in international relations. In M. Goodhart (Ed.), *Human rights: Politics and practice* (pp. 61-76). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eaton, S., & Stubbs, R. (2006). Is ASEAN powerful? Neo-realist versus constructivist approaches to power in Southeast Asia. *The Pacific Review*, 19(2), 135–155.
- Fearon, J. D. (1991). Counterfactuals and hypothesis testing in political science. *World Politics*, 43(2), 169–195.
- Garnett, J. (1985). *Commonsense dan teori politik internasional [Commonsense and the theory of international politics]* (M. Marbun, Trans). Jakarta: Pustaka Abardin.
- George, A. (1994). The two cultures of academia and policy-making: Bridging the gap. *Political Psychology*, 15(1), 143–172.
- Gindarsah, I. (2012). Indonesia's democratic politics and foreign policy-making: A case study of Iranian nuclear issue, 2007-2008. *RSIS Working Paper*, No. 236.

- Gomez, J., & Ramcharan, R. (2014). Democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Current of Southeast Asian Affairs*, 33(3), 3–17.
- Guzzini, S. (2000). A reconstruction of constructivism in international relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 6(2), 147–182.
- Guzzini, S., & Leander, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Constructivism and international relations: Alexander Wendt and its critics*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, W. (2015). *Myanmar's Rohingya: Culture, violence, and human rights abuses*. Retrieved from <https://www.westeastinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/William-J.-Jones.pdf>
- Katsumata, H. (2009). ASEAN and human rights: Resisting Western pressure or emulating the West? *The Pacific Review*, 22(5), 619–637.
- Keohane, R. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Keohane, R., & Martin, L. (1995). The promise of institutionalist theory. *International Security*, 20(1), 39–51.
- King, G., & Zeng, L. (2007). When can history be our guide? The pitfalls of counterfactual inference. *International Studies Quarterly*, 51(1), 183–210.
- Kivimäki, T. (2012). Southeast Asia and conflict prevention: Is ASEAN running out of steam? *The Pacific Review*, 25(4), 403–427.
- Kundu, S. (2015). *The Rohingyas: Security implications for ASEAN and beyond*. Retrieved from http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/TheRohingyas_skundu_280515
- Lepgold, J., & Nincic, M. (2001). *Beyond the ivory tower: International relations theory and the issue of policy relevance*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Long, A. (2008). *Deterrence: From Cold War to long war*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Mahnken, T. (2008). Bridging the gap between the world of ideas and action. *Orbis*, 54(1), 4–13.
- Matlii, W. (1999). *The logic of regional integration: Europe and beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morgenthau, H. (1946). *Scientific man vs power politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Narine, S. (2006). The English School and ASEAN. *The Pacific Review*, 19(2), 199–218.
- Nye, J. (2008). Bridging the gap between theory and policy. *Political Psychology*, 29(4), 593–603.
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d). *Human rights context*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/SouthEastAsiaSummary0809.aspx>
- Olson, M. (2002). *The logic of collective action: Public groups and the theory of groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peou, S. (2002). Realism and constructivism in Southeast Asian security studies: A review essay. *The Pacific Review*, 15(1), 119–138.
- Price, R. (2008). *Moral limit and possibility in world politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, R., & Reus-Smit, C. (1998). Dangerous liaison? Critical international theory and constructivism. *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(3), 259–294.
- Pushpanathan, S. (2003). *ASEAN efforts to combat terrorism*. Retrieved from <http://www.asean.org/resources/item/asean-efforts-to-combat-terrorism-by-spushmanathan>
- Quayle, L. (2013). *Southeast Asia and the English school of international relations: A region-theory dialogue*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reid, A. (2010). *Imperial alchemy: Nationalism and political identity in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosyidin, M. (2014). *ASEAN in (security) community? Arms race and collective identity building in Southeast Asia*. Paper presented at the International Conference on ASEAN Studies (ICONAS), Yogyakarta, 1-2 October.
- Rosyidin, M. (2015). *The power of ideas: Konstruktivisme dalam Studi Hubungan Internasional*. Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana.
- Rosyidin, M. (2016). Etika Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia dalam Isu Rohingya [The ethics of Indonesia's foreign policy in the Rohingya issue]. *Analisis CSIS*, 44(2), 163–179.
- Satria, N., & Jamaan, A. (2013). Islam dan Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia: Peran Indonesia dalam Konflik di Rakhine, Myanmar [Islam and Indonesia's foreign policy: The role of Indonesia in the conflict in Rakhine, Myanmar]. *Jurnal Transnasional*, 5(1), 945–964.
- Shannon, V. (2005). Wendt's violations of the constructivist project: Agency and why a world state is not inevitable. *European Journal of International Relations* 11(4), 581–587.
- Sukma, R. (2012). *ASEAN dan sengketa Laut China Selatan [ASEAN and the South China Sea dispute]*. Retrieved from <http://internasional.kompas.com/read/2012/04/11/02542066/ASEAN.dan.Sengketa.Laut.China.Selatan>
- Tan, S. S. (2006). Rescuing constructivism from the constructivists: A critical reading of constructivist interventions in Southeast Asia. *The Pacific Review*, 19(2), 239–260.

- Tetlock, P. E., & Belkin, A. (Eds.). (1996). *Counterfactual thought experiments in world politics: Logical, methodological, and psychological perspectives*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Vietnam Plus. (2015). *Kuala Lumpur declaration on a people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN*. Retrieved from <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/kuala-lumpur-declaration-on-peopleoriented-peoplecentred-asean/75186.vnp>
- Walt, S. (2005). The relationship between theory and policy in international relations. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8, 23–48.
- Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391–425.
- Wendt, A. (1994). Collective identity formation and the international state. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2), 384–396.
- Wendt, A. (1995). Constructing international politics. *International Security*, 20(1), 71–81.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wendt, A. (2003). Why a world state is inevitable. *European Journal of International Relations* 9(4), 491-542.