

An Invitation to the **Observatory of Political Alternatives in Southeast**

Asia: <https://altersea.hypotheses.org/>

ALTERSEA

OBSERVATORY OF POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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MAIN ARGUMENT

The Observatory of Political Alternatives in Southeast Asia is hosted by the [French Research Center on Southeast Asia](#) (CASE, Paris). The Observatory aims at exploring a diversity of individual or collective ideas and actions which express through social movements and social activism but also across less visible initiatives, outer or infra political forms of protest and resistance, and sometimes in articulation to conventional political processes. We share the idea expressed by Della Porta & Diani (2020: 3) that collective action does not always imply the formulation of political demands (through confrontational as well as conventional repertoires) and may also take the form of the direct production of collective goods, via a broad range of actions that stretch from the communitarian enactment of alternative lifestyles to various forms of mutual help and service delivery. Our project therefore ambitions to unveil social structures and functioning that enable forms of autonomy and emancipation that go beyond the borders of activism: local systems that foster social symbiosis between humans and other species in the use of environmental resources; religious ethics and norms that determine the possibility of collective mobilization; complexes of social hierarchies linked to specific territories, collective memory, ritual activity and group cohesion; arrangements for political participation based on interpersonal loyalty; non-commercial networks of goods transactions; civil strategies to overcome political subjugation. All of these embedded phenomena make for volatile group configurations and blur the borders between insiders and outsiders. This volatility can make individual trajectories seem contradictory, particularly when considering the coexistence of competing definitions of what is political, of what is a collective resource (e.g., the commons) and how does it fit into different scales (local, state, global) (for a detailed presentation on these issues).

Southeast Asia (SEA) shelters around 665 million inhabitants, in urban areas (55%), rural territories and peri-urban zones in rapid expansion. The political systems of the eleven modern states that compose the region go from flawed democratic to “liberal authoritarianism”, or “illiberal democratic” (Bourchier 2014), and absolute monarchy regimes. Historically, all these countries experienced a variety of colonial occupations or influences and after their independence, they were involved in the superpowers’

struggles for global influence that marked the Cold War era. The states were then supported by the non-communist bloc in their orientation to engage in developmental authoritarian policies (Ford 2013: 9) that resulted in the demise of the Left and of mass movements more generally (Rodan & Hewison 1996). The mid-1980s constituted a transition period, marked by the increasing integration of several countries into global production systems, which exposed the regimes in those countries to greater international scrutiny. Northern governments began to increasingly funnel international development assistance to NGOs rather than to governments (Edwards & Hulme 1996). Defining civil society along liberal lines and then in separation to the institutional system of the state, they encouraged it as an agent of democratization (on all these historical developments see Ford 2013, *op. cit.*: 7-11). However, the regional states tended to both accommodate and fragment these new social forces, through partial or total administrative and societal incorporation, pre-emption, co-option, and selective exclusion (Rodan 2013: 22-38).

The different regimes borrow on the idea that the supposed “Asian values” (initially formulated by Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia’s Prime Minister in 1981-2003; 2018-2020) require a link between strong state and economic growth (Cabasset & Tran 2019: 14) although there is great flexibility and consideration shown by ruling regimes towards the adoption and execution of policy options. This constructed Asian developmental state archetype intersects with the employment of neoliberal oriented policies, resulting in the privatisation of public services and their concentration in the hands of private individuals situated at the crossroads of public-private sectors, who seek capital accumulation through both agenda for deregulation and a firmer control over governmental decision processes.

This dominant type of development is competed by a myriad of antagonistic political formations and regimes of “social regulation” (Pannier 2015) which challenge it more or less formally, in daily social practices and on the political scene, through media, and via the counter-tendencies enacted in the course of the encounters between knowledge systems proper to the post-development era (Arce and Long 2000). Then, oppositional forces take variegated invisible, transversal, infra-, and outer, political forms. From the 1970s, many movements surfaced from so-called “civil society” to propose alternative political projects to those promoted by state and corporate development agencies. They were nevertheless limited by state-led development and crony capitalism, the working class-based organizations remained weak and the

independence of middle class-led organizations was restricted. At the end of the financial crisis of 1997, the trend of activism trans-nationalisation accelerated and a range of movements (Third World Network, Focus on the Global South, Asia Pacific Research Network, etc., see Caouette 2006) emerged by targeting neoliberal policies, perceived regionally as a form of governance and a cultural model imported or even imposed from western countries. Since the 2010s, these movements took part in the “third wave” of the global citizen mobilizations, marked by an emphasis on the demands of direct democracy and claims against austerity in front of increased social and economic polarization.

Southeast Asia is the most threatened region of the world by climate change, and it is exposed to the destruction of ecosystems, financial deregulation, as well as private monopolies exercised to the detriment of vulnerable segments of the population. All these factors contribute to the appropriation of universalist rhetoric, through demands for “global social justice” (Tsing 2005: 6). These claims are expressed on the basis of local political cultures (Parvanova & Pichler 2013: 6), even though privatized states, multinationals, and development agencies tend to depoliticize culture and to culturalise eminently political and socio-economic inequalities (Boccaro 2011, in Latin America).

To enlighten these phenomena we want to stress the rooting of the alterpolitical actors in the local political cultures while deconstructing the essentialisation discourses and incorporated institutional and social practices relating to them. To do so, our first aim will be to study the variety of scales within which the social groups are situated, by envisaging these scales as social productions, and then by concentrating our efforts to operate (intercultural) translations between these scales. Thus, we aim to converge the analysis of social movements apparently distant from each other, but that each strives to reformulate from below and in an alternative way the very meaning of politics, embodying what the anthropologists Stefano Boni and Riccardo Ciavolella (2014: 4) appoint “alterpolitics”. Mobilizing a minimal definition of alterpolitical experience and desire as a different way of thinking and living politically, these anthropologists have developed a reflection on a variety of alternative political projects and on the circularity of inspirations between anthropology, radical political theory, and social movements in envisioning and constructing alterpolitics. They argue that “the use of alterpolitics by contemporary social movements with regards to the organization of assemblies has been largely

practical rather than ideological and that it has generally refrained from an uncritical exoticism and essentialism, preferring a contextual use of various alterchronological and altergeographical insights” (*Ibid.*). They underline the complexity of the alterpolitical groups, that can both envision emancipation as autonomy from state and capital domination while producing hierarchies and new power relations, within a new political space. Also, while current convergences in social movements (which mostly refer to the tactical dimension of struggles and to the practical procedures of self-organization) touch on movements and struggles that have become extremely visible, the fragmented majority of the world population is expressing its desire for alterpolitics silently and in disguised forms, and especially inside a local and immediate horizon of interests and objectives. Both in the cases of convergence in struggles and of fragmentation in political subjectivities, the issue of “translatability” of these particular experiences remains crucial. What has long been considered “the exotic”, to be documented for a Western audience, is now crucially involved in processes of cultural translation in which agents generate their own representations, acting as both protagonists and audiences (*Ibid.* pp. 6-7).

Then we propose the following definition of alterpolitics as:

Individual or collective ideas and practices that formulate from below the conditions of cohabitation between social species, as an alternative to dominant political programs.

This very large definition enables to take into account the two main dimensions that we attach to the “alter” root-word, which are “alternative” and “alterity”.

First, “alterity” is emphasized since the alterpolitical actors propose an alternative to dominant modes of political organisation, where domination is understood as exclusionary from particular social components. Hence, our attention will not be priorly focused on exclusionary collective mobilizations, like identity based movements, in their ethnic, nationalist or religious forms.

Second, “alternative” means that reactions to dominant agendas will be our first consideration. Then, processes of incorporation and reproduction of neoliberal or capitalist agendas don’t enter in our definition, although we will be very attentive to the processes throughout which people go from passiveness to complaint, critics, and

mobilization, while often adopting more or less formally dominant schemes. These dynamics are evidenced in studies that point the “interruption” of politics (Li 2019) and also in approach about intersectionality that underline how certain modes of protest also reflect forms of incorporation, interiorizing assigned places and norms defined by dominant ideological systems.

While not restricting the scope of our research to social movements, and opening it to small-scale autonomous initiatives and infrapolitical contestations, the claims of the individuals and groups that we study are expressed and articulated through heterogeneous local meanings. Their perspectives are: spatial, linked to a requirement of both cohabitation and sovereignty; temporal, with a concern for memory and sustainability; spatial-temporal, with actions of both internal and external (generational and territorial) solidarity. These values are expressed in very diverse fields, such as modes of participation, deliberation, representation and decision; ecological and socio-economic development; the relationships between genders, generations and social groups. These values favour convergence in struggles. Convergences between social militant groups are a recent phenomenon in SEA, compared to other contexts such as Latin America. This late appearance is linked to the different management of “civil society” by the SEA states, between coercion and prescriptions (Formoso 2016), as well as to the territorial differentiations that the governments exercise within the national space (Ong 2002: 243-245). These management and their hierarchical props (religious frameworks, clientelist loyalties and normative pressures exerted by the groups to which they belong), in a weakly secularized context, are more and more bypassed or diverted by the development of new public spaces, diaspora and geographical mobilities, and the use of horizontal e-agera provided by the Internet (Sinpeng 2019).

The convergence between movements, the mobility of activists and, in some cases, the multi-positionality of the groups, are favoured by the plural and the systemic dimension of their demands (feminism, environmentalism, unioning, peasant sovereignties, rights of minorities known as “ethnic” or “traditional”, migrants’ rights). We observe these convergences, for example, with the aggregation of indigenous mobilisations to national citizen movements, present on the international stages. With the emergence of the convergences, the study of alter-policies aspires to a universal scope through comparison.

COMPARISON ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA

The synchronic study of groups situated at different scales aims at: discussing the conditions of convergence between the scales, since the continuities are frequently asserted by the militant groups; analysing the process of essentialisation of these groups and the differentiation between them, which is often operated through both democratic and authoritarian-style states' rhetoric; underlining the plurality and superposition between the different visions of the world incorporated by the groups; and thinking about the distinctive conceptions of politics, policies and the political.

Common Alternative Features

To research on political conflictual issues, propositional imaginations, invisible arrangements, and concrete alternatives, the mobilisations in the scope of ALTERSEA range from intermediary committees raised to protect the interests of local customary communities, to social movements engaged for the citizens' political aspirations at the national level, and transnational militant networks interconnected through a global agenda for ecological sustainability and social solidarity. Beyond the diversity of their modes of political organization, agendas and repertoires of action, these collective formations share common features in regard to:

- Sustainability: Through particular social organization the groups include human actions in an environment that is timely and spatially bigger than the individual destinies. This perspective leads to consider scales not as isolated configurations but as interdependent situated ensembles;
- Multi-Scalar Action: By defining scales, acting within these scales and relating these scales the groups defend their sovereignty and autonomy towards the use of the "commons", beyond the "uncommonalities" of definitions (Viveiros de Castro 2004 on equivocations; contested ecologies, Green 2013) and interests surrounding this notion (de la Cadena 2018: 54);
- Alterities: The social groups relate their vitality to openness to a wide range of otherness: human or non-human, endogenous or exogenous. Such alterities at the core of sociality are present in the concepts of heterogeneous origin held by many Southeast Asian communities, which define themselves as composed of both autochthonous and immigrant people (Sahlins 2008).

Coexistence of Multi Cosmo-Visions

Within the multi-cosmological societies (Long 2010) that compose Southeast Asia, the mobilized social groups in our scope seek specific modes of coexistence between the different bio-social entities that share the land and other common resources. Some of them consider that their identity is nurtured by a set of alterities encompassing humans, plants, animals, and in some cases other non-humans agents, like natural objects or artifacts, potent places, spirits or immanent life forces, as well as transcendent principles of the world religions. Besides their distinct cultural, religious and political backgrounds, these social groups develop different views in terms of:

- **Ontology:** the elements constituting the world are active, reactive, alive, and articulated. Then, matter-time-space are not pre-existent but re-configured through their intra-action (Barad 2014). Each social group and individual within the social group may have a distinctive conception about this configuration;
- **Cosmology:** how these elements enter in inter-action one with another and constitute the environment of collective individuals as well as institutions of meaning (Descombes 2014);
- **Ideology:** how these elements relate to the hierarchical values of a totality that the groups recognise as their collective identity.
- **Practice:** how concrete responses emerge in the situation, according to personal life histories and subjectivities. Collective logics of socialities shelter intern tensions and contradictions, pragmatismal arrangements, and heterogeneous imaginaries.

These modes of knowing the world and relating to it have different expressions:

-Ontology informs us on the relations that structure the world's elements: it corresponds to identification processes.

-Cosmology manifests how these elements are related between them and transformed through inter-relation: it corresponds to figuration modes.

-Ideology shows how relationship ensembles are linked, imbued with value and hierarchised: it entails representation modalities.

In addition to this diversity of world visions, the groups manifest very diverse conceptions about the political, and its position in the hierarchy of the power field.

Divergent Onto-Politics

The specific views and experiences of the world are at the core of particular onto-politics, in which political representation, authority status and potency agency order hierarchically, inform, exclude or ignore each other. These onto-politics are part of

the social groups' self-situating process and determine their visions of space and time:

-First, situated ontologies frame the conceptions about scales and scalar connections. The different views of what is the local, the state and the global pose the question of what is alternative to whom and how the scales are socially produced. It then interrogates the conditions of contact or conjunction between a variety of social norms, right regimes, and development projects for social change.

-Second, ontologies define the historical self-situation of the social groups (Blaser 2013). Small local societies' collective rituals are classically considered as perpetuating the vernacular socio-cosmic order; national-scale social movements may be related to historical revolutionary episodes; transnational militant networks are broadly identified, and often identify themselves, with the struggle for a global transition. However, the inside perspectives show that perpetuation, revolution or transition processes not always appear where we expect them: the small local societies' members often apprehend ritual enactment as a reframing of the world's order, generating a revolution within a cosmology in which place is simultaneously a temporal and spatial occurrence (Escobar 2008); many social movements suspiciously considered from an external viewpoint as revolutionary or "radical" envisage their struggle as a mere re-ordering of the society and state institutions, a process regarded as logical in the course of the diachronic humankind social evolution, posing that the ruling regime is the main provider of illegitimate violence; the global transition endeavoured by the alter-global organisations is not equal to the geo-constructivist visions which aim at the human reconstruction of earth (Neyrat 2016), by contrast, it leans on the local political know-how and it fosters the emergence of new initiatives through hospitality to, and encounter with, multiple alterities.

We aim at thinking collectively about these perspectives reversals and the possible dialogues between these reflection fields, by carrying out prospective research about the already existing programs and by envisaging new forms of theoretical convergence. To do so, we undertake three missions that we develop in six clusters, with the idea of encompassing the widest range of possible concrete inter-groups' connections.

MISSIONS

Our missions are to better identify the movements, the objects of their struggles, and the responses provided by the governments. Our program is based on fundamental research. We always define the subject, its problematic and the methodology ourselves. This methodology is based on the work in local languages, the attaching of great importance to the “inner” point of view and everyday situations, multiple checking and crossing of information received, and comparative perspective through collaboration. We can also carry out quantitative work, validate statistical data, assess the impacts of regulations, evaluate the pressures exerted by social and environmental changes, set up new measurement techniques and models for better understanding the trajectories of planned projects.

In conjunction with the production of scientific data, we provide access to the results to the wide audience and to the actors concerned. These actors can include the alter-political groups, the local populations, and the persons in charge of public policy. Regarding the relationship with development professionals and funding providers, we will particularly work with mediators situated at the crossroads of the development world and social sciences. These interactions (through brainstorming sessions, for example, or in establishing follow-up and feedback procedures) are particularly relevant to enable mutual collaboration between the two professions (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 212-215).

1. Researching on Multiple Political Definitions

Southeast Asian societies are characterized by a complex embedment and confrontations of world views and it is difficult to spot closed and fixed ontological types (for several propositions see Kaj Arhem and Guido Sprenger 2016: 16). Moreover, in each multi-scale process, multiple political ontologies enter in contact and by interconnecting through the difference, these frictions generate misunderstandings, unpredictable and creative movements, actions, and effects (Tsing 2005). However, besides the divergent ontologies and potential conflictual definitions of scale, these worlds formulate different conceptions of what is politics.

As an example, for animic-type societies like Kanekes of West Java, people and other entities come into being together, co-emerge through interaction and have relationally performed agencies: their world is more enacted than represented

(Verran 1998). One of the effects of the continuities between mind and body, personhood and collective organization, social group and the universe, and of the hierarchy between these relationships ensembles, is that the politician as a subject is subordinated to the authority provided collectively. This authority is often polysemic: it ranges from the faculty of authorship, which is linked to charisma, to the authorisation to represent the group, which is the minimal definition of what we call political leadership. This authority can be doubled by other sources of legitimacy, for example, potency. The person is then imbued with a particular concentration of what is vernacularly conceived as the flow of life, universe vibration, or divine energy; all contents that link the world's elements together and operate a hierarchy among them. Therefore, in contexts where power legitimacy is dominated by potency and authority, political representation is inherently relational.

In the course of onto-political encounters, we wonder how and why diversity, divergence and heterogeneity are essentialised as difference, that is to say interpreted separately from the other relational ensembles that compose their society (see Ales & Barraud 2001: 36). Oppositely, how is difference made invisible or singular? In between these processes, we observe the existence of crossroads: places where the worlds partially connect (Strathern 2004 [1991]) and participate in the social life construction in the same institutions, for example, those of the state.

2. Scaling the Programmes

To apprehend how do scales are defined, do ignore, include or exclude each other, intersect and enter into friction, are the arena of hegemony and resistance, the notion of scale requires an effort of definition. This work of defining scales is particularly delicate because of the difficulty of identifying discrete entities, the porosities existing between social groups, and the political issues surrounding the processes of normalization, legitimation, labelling, valuation, and exclusion. It will be a question of taking into account this lability of the groups by crossing points of views within the groups, to understand their logics and their strategies, to apprehend the socio-political and historical conditions of their development, and to probe the state and global frameworks that define their repertoires of action.

Then, we assume that scale is always a political construction. The definition of the local as a scale can be the object of controversies among people within a same social group, between elites, marginal members, or external individual and collective

agents. While the discourses of national development decision-makers are essentially state-centred, the projects actually implemented show a strong proliferation of supranational entities (NGOs, global development agencies such as USAID, the World Bank, the United Nations) and a very strong personalization in the implementation of projects at the local level, with the interference of established clientelist networks that concentrate the capture of funds, the collection of resources and the distribution of aid. Therefore, the state is in some cases personified by particular people, like leaders or political intermediaries, and the global is sometimes identified with elements from the state, for example, agents who act at the crossroads of public-private activities. This process of personification is one of the sources of clientelist practices, and it provides them with their functioning and legitimacy levers.

The social construction of scale traces the limits to multi-scale rhetoric. Anthropologists, particularly the current known as “nomadology”, developed by anthropologists with a libertarian inclination, have shown the interest and the limits that there may be in bringing together studies on small societies that practice modes of resistance and transnational social movements, such as those claiming to be anti-globalisationists. To qualify the idea that these societies would manifest an exit from the space of the state and globalization, representing a kind of “alterotopy”, Riccardo Ciavolella (2013) has shown through the ethnography of the Fulani of Mauritania that nomadic peoples had fully integrated “modernity”, while they strove to surpass or bypass their marginalization by developing new forms of political representation within existing institutions of power.

Finally, in addition to the multi-scale dimension of the common issues that compose the daily management of politics (think for example of supra-territorial ecological phenomena, like climate change), the political organization, public policies, and political action at the local scale are not *inherently* more likely to have a desired social and ecological effects than activities organized at other scales (Brown and Purcell 2005). Re-localisation and short circuits generally favour sustainability and popular sovereignty, but the unequal resources between the regions and the interdependence between scales may require forms of universal solidarity. Moreover, the conditions for sustainability don't automatically lie on nationalisation nor privatisation, but rather on socialisation of the common resources, eventually at the

transnational level. Then, we argue that it is often at the intersection of the different scales that sustainability is conditioned.

By observing the multi-scalar options embedded by a multitude of Southeast Asian social groups and by favouring a dialogue between them we hope to explore the possibilities for alternative programs of preservation, adaptation, or transformation. Given that these groups are also development entrepreneurs, their study can directly impact the development models implemented by States. To bring to light these potentialities we work on two concomitant plans. The first aims to shed light on the characteristics of groups hitherto barely visible: their political agency, their historicity, and the particular forms of sovereignty they exercise. These characteristics are levers of legitimacy for undertaking collective discussions on public policies. From these levers, we argue that the multi-scalar articulation deployed by the groups can enrich the action repertoire of development institutions, by promoting what can be called an “economy of sustainability”.

3. Ethnographing the alter-political fabric

The scale of the groups determines their modalities of action and construction. In the case of individuals delegated to the management of relations between small societies and exterior entities, one can observe the pre-eminence of complex internal codes and a statutory hierarchy, limiting any frontal discord and favouring accommodation. In the case of national militant movements, such as the Anarcho-syndicalists in Indonesia, we observe a strategy of confrontation developed around the violence/non-violence dialectic, intended to reach audiences of plural sensibilities (Facal & Estrelita 2020). Activists of these movements usually ambition to translate the desire for alter-politics felt by a fragmented majority of the population, who is expressed silently or in disguised forms. This translation is designed to produce common sense in order to make the projects of the social movements politically intelligible to a wide audience. Within transnational organizations, the activists intend to transform society from below, through education, training, and the transfer of practical knowledge.

The modes of organization and action of the movements are structured around political relations which are intended to be horizontal, or hierarchical but not stratified, based on popular and direct political participation. These forms of

participation enhance, and even build on, the individual experiences of members, leveraging the capacity for innovation and other personal resources that allow the group to acquire, preserve or reinforce rooting in society. The taking into account of subjectivities will be informed by the study of the emotions manifested in the course of militant action. These correspond to sensitivities forged throughout militant careers (punctuated by entries, attachments, retraining, and exits) but also during the social trajectory and emotional history (Traïni 2010), often more decisive for militant engagement than the individual utility or strategic springs.

Common mobilization transforms activists through ritualized engagement. This emphasis is reflected in the place given to events organized by the movements, whether they have a festive (concert and performances), formative (practice workshops) or protest (demonstrations and petitions) vocation. Risky forms of militancy, such as civil disobedience, help to strengthen the bonds of membership in the militant group, make disengagement complex, and in the long run nurture a culture of mobilization. For some religiously founded militant groups, the testing of activists in their commitments sometimes conceals a quasi-initiatory form, while helping to solidify ties to the group.

To study these phenomena, the classic tools of anthropology, interviews, and participant observation, are privileged modes of access to the different facets of mobilizations. But faced with a process that is being formulated, more open and engaged forms of investigation are needed.

4. Fostering collaborative Science

Our objective is to develop a dialogue between the populations, academia, public institutions, and development agencies which are interested in footbridges gathering contrasted cosmo-visions and plural relations to alterity. Based on qualitative ethnographic-style fieldwork led by a network of regional Work Groups, we develop a database on the alter-political groups, constituted by rough data, study notes, working papers, articles, yearbooks, online interviews, virtual and physical conferences. The observatory is then designed to serve both as a discussion platform and as a source for knowledge diffusion.

- The potential missions are defined jointly with the studied groups, case by case, with the following propositional order:

1. Collaborative road map: the legitimate resource actors for the social group are solicited in order to conduct interviews, the research methods are defined on the basis of reciprocal proposals, the guidelines are adjusted collectively at each stage of the survey (implementation of protocols, data collection, exploitation, and ownership of part of the results, public promotion, restitution to communities), the inaudible segments (women, young, elderly) are involved in collective discussions.
2. Impact study: on the basis of systematic qualitative and quantitative surveys and following their needs and demands we provide prospective and impact studies of the groups' actions. We take into account the following indicators, to be adjusted in consultation with the groups: robust monitoring carried out by the action committees, sustainability of the practices implemented, degree of emancipation achieved according to the groups' standards.
3. Diagnosis of projects: development of strengths, identification of obstacles encountered, possible solutions to explore collectively.
4. Analysis of the public policies framework: watch on current programs, link to the governments' political and economic guidelines, identification of decision-making levers, taking into consideration the clientelist networks determining the implementation of programs, consideration of the role played by para-, private or semi-private states.
5. Translation between the groups and development institutions: interviews with programs' representatives, presentation of surveys results, triangular discussions involving the groups.
6. Support for projects, if required by the groups: identification of vernacular know-how, translation and valorisation of the local projects, implementation of inclusionary solutions.
7. Citizen expertise and knowledge transfer: the framing of the projects is realized on the basis of public discussions (citizen consultations, round tables, forums), with platforms already mobilized by the groups themselves and targeting a variety of audiences. The role of partners like SEA Junction (Thailand), Pondok Perancis (Malaysia), the UNESCO chair on social practices in intercultural communication & Social Cohesion (UKM, KITA, Malaysia) and the NGO Institute for Research, Education and Information on Economy and Social Affairs (LP3ES, Jakarta, Indonesia) is decisive in mobilizing citizen interfaces. These platforms can intervene

at the various stages of the research projects. They are intended for a wide variety of audiences, with the possibility of online publication with regional publishers and in the vernacular languages. The training workshops for citizen scientific research has an interactive dimension, the theme of alter-politics being conducive to a cross-reflection on citizen sciences and commitment of the researchers.

8. Ethics: since the study cases may blur the frontier between humans, non-humans, and environments (ecological and technological), they lead to develop an embedded field of ethics that encompasses bio-ethics, geo-ethics and eco-ethics. A charter will be developed in the next future, in collaboration with the different interlocutors participating to the observatory.

5. Contributing to the epistemological reflection on alter-politics and social sciences

Examining the alternative movements to political projects conveyed by states, transnational agencies, and financial market actors, many works have brought about a circularity of values and programs between anthropology, radical political theory, and social movements in order to apprehend and construct other ways of thinking and doing politics. Reciprocal influences are reflected in the conceptualization of themes such as egalitarianism, deliberative assembly, consensus, and solidarity. The militant categories borrow from the social sciences, with the concepts of culture, hybridity, network, widely mobilized in the reflections of alter. In turn, inspired by the political anthropology of Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1956) or Pierre Clastres (1974), anarchist, libertarian and post-Marxist anthropologists such as James Ferguson (1985), James C. Scott (1998) and David Graeber (2007), mobilize pastoral, nomadic, acephalous or “against the state” societies as counter-examples of political modernity. In return, anthropological and sociological studies are used by alternative movements as levers of legitimacy and activist information tools, to supervise their activities, to challenge the public authorities, and even for political mobilization.

These dynamics converge with open science and participatory science projects, which increasingly influence conventional scientific practices (Guillaud et al. 2017). The intersections between social mobilizations and the epistemology of our discipline also resonate with the challenges faced by scientists to defend their professional interests in a context of increased political and institutional constraints, leading them on the

one hand to better promote their transfer activities (Gozlan 2015) but also to act to transform their concrete professional condition. More fundamentally still, some researchers are asking the question of whether the anthropology of alternative political forms should turn into anthropology *for* these alternative forms (Shear and Burke 2013) and thus take a militant position.

Therefore, the conditions for the application of research are related to the conditions of involvement for research. This articulation is endorsed by the social scientist as an interpret-translator. We mobilise this role at three levels: in a participatory research framework, drawing on the political knowledge and know-how of the social groups studied; in the course of a reflection on public policy models, without however engaging in action research; in the scientific restitution of the intelligibility of the actions and meanings studied, against the backdrop of the question of the conditions for involved anthropology. From the objectives of pooling knowledge and sharing know-how, the status of the social scientist as an interpreter will be put at the service of the emergence of new forms of political practice, which could give rise to reflection on the choice of layout and management. However, the operability objectives cited in this project will depend on the debates conducted with the alter-political groups and the populations themselves, their expectations, their resources and their mobilization capacities. Recognizing that the establishment of participatory mechanisms does not automatically amount to laying the foundations for sustainability and that the size of projects (Demeulenaere et al. 2017) and their form must be adapted to the situation, the research will ultimately aim at better knowledge populations, their relationship to themselves and to the world.

Moreover, participating in the transformation of the devices that it analyses, social science must necessarily undertake a reflective process, reveal its subjective biases and allow a contextualized analysis of its conclusions, in order to put in place the conditions for its autonomy vis-à-vis to the militant discourse. However, we are in favour of intervention-research, when social scientists become activists for the place of research within the social space and to contribute to a more just and sustainable society (Marcel and Pichon 2019: 89), implementing what some call “responsible scientific research” (Sciences Citoyennes 2015). On this condition, it acquires a double validity, scientific and social, that is to say, that it co-produces knowledge rooted in a place and at a particular moment in history.

CLUSTERS

We explore six fields of study that are interconnected by the concepts mobilized to analyse alter-politics, through transversal perspectives.

1. Environmentalism – Cosmo-Visions through Plural Ecologies & Multi-Sociologies

How societies experience and conceptualize human-environment interactions, human-non human interactions and human-human interactions? When is there a hierarchy between these relationship ensembles? What are the social organization modes that enact these relationships?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- COMMONS – Internal and external dialogues, arrangements, misunderstandings and conflicts around the management of the commons in the Anthro(-s)cene.
- DIVERSITY – Theories and practices of interconnections between biological diversity and social diversity.
- DOMESTICATION – Confrontational conceptions of the socio-symbiosis, the instrumentalization of nature and the domination between species (ideological classifications and practical instrumentalizations that configure humans as animals, animals as things, environment as objects).
- 1 & 2 – SUSTAINABILITY – When the protection of the socio-symbiosis systems intersects with a collective reflexivity on diachronic and territorial continuums.

2. Identity, Culture and Heritage – Commonalities & Alterities within Cosmopolitan & Historical Territories

How inter-gender, inter-generational, inter-individual and inter-social relations contribute to cohabitation and common futures? How space and time are embedded in a same place and contribute to personal experiences in collective motions or, at the contrary, are fragmented, essentialized and constitutive of reified identities in the terms of heritage, indigeneity and multiculturalism? How alterpolitical groups can contribute to counterbalance identity reactionary activism, sometimes state sponsored or instrumentalized by the governments? Why and how to foster

cosmopolitanism, intergenerational solidarities and above all, gender inclusiveness as assets for a common desirable and sustainable future?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- SCALES – Divergences in the definition of scales: what is the local, the state and the global and how do they embed and hierarchy?
- HISTORY – Conflictual, parallel, convergent and ignored Histories.
- FIGURES – Individual histories and collective History: how militants and authority figures become icons and how History is shaped by subjectivities-in-relation.
- EMANCIPATIONS – How individuals can emancipate themselves from normative frames and reciprocally, how collective action and organization can counter-balance, identity political discourses (for instance in terms of indigeneity and multiculturalism) anti-social political tendencies and individualist models of development?
- HABITATING – Shared world & fragmented map: approaching different perspectives on habitation and co-habitation.
- HERITAGE – Processes of terming, classing and fixing: heritagization, claims of identity, and multicultural policies.

3. Religiosities – Orders & Disorders between Immanent Life Forces & Transcendental Religions

The regional conceptions on the universe creation and stabilized order range from the transcendent principles of the transcultural religions and universalist thoughts to the immanence attributed to life forces. How these apprehensions of the universe's ordering principles affect the societies' conceptions of politics and policies? Do they constitute levers or restraints to political alternatives?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- ORDERS – Encounters between cosmo-visions that envisage a hierarchy between superior forces and the mundane world and naturalist and secular conceptions.
- VALUES – How do religious morality and ethics inflect the conceptions of life and live species, in the terms of religious ecologies?

- COLLECTIVENESS – How do religious institutions, norms and practices contribute to the structuration of social groups, their cohesion and their capacity to frame and be framed by their society’s political agenda?
- 3 & 4 – HIERARCHY – Do the social statutory hierarchies oppose or encourage political participation and shared use of the commons?

4. Political Participation – Geometries of Participation facing Neoliberal-influenced Authoritarianism

In the authoritarian-type-neoliberal-influenced regimes that prevail in SEA, how do different models of political participation interact, combine or exclude each other?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- MODELS – Analysing the co-existence of models, from customary triangular and circular social organizations, to representative bottom-up and top-down democracy, to self-organized and federative organization in the anarchist trend.
- STRATEGIES – Facing the renewal of government authoritarian strategies, how do the governed social groups do adapt their tactics, objectives and modes of action?
- DE-SUBJUGATION – How technologies of governmentality are hijacked and become tools for social emancipation?
- 4 & 1 – POLITICAL ECOLOGY – What kind of political systems foster the intersection between ecological means and social issues? Is the democratic model more prone to encourage sustainable development?

5. Objects and Transactions – Alternative Materialities & Non Merchant Circulation

How the transaction of objects is mediated by social organizations of regulation that compete, parallel or complement the model of capitalist accumulation? How are these organizations sustained by clientelist networks and mechanisms of interpersonal arrangements? What are the tools for government and management that contribute to regulation/deregulation of economics and politics and to the rights to use and share?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- RIGHTS – How commons are transformed as merchant goods (and vice-versa) and how norms of use overlap with rights of ownership?
- PROGRESS – Do new technologies of information, circulation and communication favour social emancipation?
- SOLIDARITIES – What happens when the circulation of goods is more oriented towards interlocal and intergenerational solidarities than by the desire for capitalization?
- 5 & 1 – PUBLIC/COMMONS – Are there common goods which are exclusive to a community and therefore do not meet a definition of the public good? It may be interesting to re-examine experiences of establishing “commons” at different spatial and temporal scales with regard to the notion of “public” (and vice versa) in order to enrich reciprocal interrogation of these two fields of research.

6. Subjects – Gender, Generation, Class & Race

In what conditions do inter-individual and inter-social relations contribute to cohabitation and equitability? How to foster cosmopolitanism, intergenerational solidarities, and gender inclusiveness as assets for a common desirable and sustainable future?

Possible & non-exhaustive ideas of topics:

- INTERSECTIONNALITY – In a classical way, we will reflect on how do gender, generation, race, and class, among other axes of power, intersect making some bodies more prone to experiencing discrimination?
- REFLEXIVITY – The dominant ideology of liberal economy and performance can have perverse effects when, to encourage autonomy of women, social minorities and poor segments of the population it formulates an injunction that feeds and freezes the assignment of roles attributed to each. In mirror, behind some postures of protest the mobilization of the concepts of gender, race and class can naturalize the realities to which they relate and therefore reinforce certain dominant logics. We will then describe the complexity of the situations to understand how certain modes of protest are also a reflection of a form of incorporation, interiorization of assigned places and norms defined by totalitarian systems.

- LIBERALIZATION or DISENGAGEMENT? –Through the promotion of individual responsibility liberal discourse and action can result in the resignation of the state to protect individuals. Within liberal ideology the individual is empowered to be the manager of himself, of his health, his career, his wealth, his sexuality and his gender. Still, does the system really change, reorganize hierarchies and provide individuals the possibility to emancipate from essentialized places?
- SUBJECTIVITY & SUBJUGATION – In some cases, the character of the foreigner feminized into a veiled foreigner, in a burqa, who must remain locked in his home so as not to disturb the indigenous public space. In other cases, women are exemplified while equalled with care and altruism. Pointing out anti models and normalizing identities can have similar effects: under the apparent emancipation of the selves they become subjugation tools that equalize particular genders with specific class and race and then foster inequalities and the control of social categories designed as strangers.

o. Transversal Themes – Translation, Participation, Scales & Engagement

Researching on alterpolitics leads to be confronted with recurrent theoretical questions and epistemological issues regarding the relation between the researcher and the groups under study, the co-construction of knowledge, the feasibility of the alterpolitical projects and the researcher's individual engagement.

A. Intercultural translation

The double approach we encourage, articulating immersion over the long term and diachronic and geographical comparison, makes it possible to identify the circulation of practices and ideas as well as to develop tools for intercultural translation. We can thus retrace the course of seemingly endogenous notions and show their persistence along the routes. Conversely, we can show that behind a priori uniform adoption of globally circulating notions exists processes of interpretation and appropriation. This decoding and translation work requires mastery of the language and socio-cultural codes but also a historical perspective and areal knowledge. This approach makes it possible to renew the meaning commonly attributed to certain social practices, such as endogenous political attitudes and know-how, often interpreted by the public authorities –and incorporated by the populations– under the prism of “cultural

heritage”. This comprehensive approach differs from expert and top-down postures, but at the same time, the former can be regarded as subjects of inquiry in their own right. As such, they can inform social scientists on the circulation of ideas, misunderstandings, and innovative concepts that emerge through phenomena of friction between different kinds of populations and multiple layers of actors in charge of institutional decisions.

In addition, societies implement processes of hybridisation of symbols, practices, and knowledge with those conveyed by development models, ideologies, and norms from outside as well as, to more or less direct means, with the knowledge produced by scientists. For example, the militant categories borrow from the social sciences, with the concepts of culture, hybridity, network, widely mobilised in the reflections of alterpolitical actors. Thus, it seems relevant to us to engage in a dialogue with the particular type of study subject, that is, alter-political groups, to better understand how the ideas and their meanings circulate and renew themselves.

B. Participatory approach in social science

A central question that arises for the majority of researchers working on alterpolitics concerns the limits of the participatory approach. Among the recurring questions, we wonder at what times citizen expertise can be encouraged and what are the limits of the co-construction of knowledge: what content do the populations wish to constitute, what is the minimum degree of consensus and what are the individuals legitimacies. We wonder how best to transfer/disseminate knowledge, whether or not involving citizen interfaces, or even governmental or private institutional relays. Thanks to the participatory support developed by our partners SEA-Junction and LP3ES, many concrete cases have already been tested regionally, making it possible to identify references and mobilise tools to be adapted in context. These partners offer arenas for discussion that are accessible and suitable for use by populations, professionals, users, and citizens.

Moreover, the participatory approach brings to light the asymmetries of power between the different interlocutors, the antagonistic expectations, even the effects of exclusion, the existence of controversies, and territorial conflicts. These questions shed light on the conditions for the appropriation of the debate by the various actors of the local population while questioning the legitimacy and (particularly legal) status of the knowledge produced. They also raise the complexity of the researcher's role,

who is in turn observer, expert, mediator, and arbitrator. The reflective work will, therefore, be reciprocal. For example, asking how the injunction to participate and being responsible can be transformed into a government or discipline technique. Finally, the ethical question is at the heart of our participatory approach, with the concern for an "ethics in context" articulating a normative, reflective, and political approach.

C. Scales

One of the conditions for the operationality of political projects, alternative or not, is their scalability, how local projects are linked to inter or supra-local programs, or, conversely, how state and international programs can be implemented locally. In these level games, the scale is always a political construction. The definition of the local as a scale can be the subject of controversy among people of the same social group, between elites, marginal members, or individual and collective external agents. On the other hand, while the speeches of national development decision-makers have an essential state dimension, the projects implemented show a strong proliferation of supranational entities and a robust personalisation in the implementation of projects at the local level, with the interference of established patronage networks that focus on capturing funds, raising resources and distributing aid. In this context, the state is in some cases personified by particular persons, such as leaders or political intermediaries, and the global is sometimes identified with elements of the state, for example, agents acting at the crossroads of public-private activities. This process of personification is one of the sources of patronage practices, providing them with resources for functioning and legitimacy. The scalar dimension of alterpolitical projects thus generates misunderstandings and gives rise to adjustments during programs' implementation. We hope to explore the possibilities of alternative programs of preservation, adaptation, or transformation from these benchmarks.

Since some of the alterpolitical groups are also development entrepreneurs, their study can directly impact states' development models. To highlight these potentialities, we are working on two concomitant levels. The first aims to shed light on the characteristics of groups that had hitherto been barely visible, such as their political action, their historicity, and the particular forms of sovereignty they exercise. These characteristics are levers of legitimacy to engage in collective discussions on public policies. From these levers, we argue that the multi-scalar articulation

deployed by groups can enrich the repertoire of development institutions' actions by promoting what can be called a "sustainability economy". This perspective will be enhanced by drafting policy papers by reversing the top-down approach generally adopted in this type of format.

D. Social researchers engagement

Examining alternative movements to political projects conveyed by States, transnational agencies, and financial market players, numerous works have brought about a circularity of values and programs between social science, radical political theory, and social movements to apprehend and build other ways of thinking and doing politics. Reciprocal influences are reflected in the conceptualisation of themes such as egalitarianism, deliberative assembly, consensus, and solidarity. Inspired by the political anthropology of Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1956) or Pierre Clastres (1974), anarchist, libertarian and post-Marxist anthropologists such as James Ferguson (1985), James C. Scott (1998), and David Graeber (2007) mobilise pastoral, nomadic, acephalic or "against the State" societies as counter-examples of political modernity. In return, anthropological and sociological studies are used by alternative movements as levers of legitimacy and activist information tools to supervise their activities, to challenge the public authorities, even for political mobilisation.

The intersections between social mobilisations and the epistemology of our discipline also resonate with the challenges encountered by scientists to defend their professional interests in a context of increased political and institutional constraints, leading them, on the one hand, to promote better their transfer activities (Gozlan 2015) but also to act to transform their concrete professional condition. More fundamentally still, some researchers question whether the social science research of alternative political forms should turn into research for these alternative forms and thus position themselves in a militant way.

Faced with these questions, participating in the transformation of the devices it analyses, anthropology must necessarily undertake a reflective process, reveal its subjective biases and allow a contextualised analysis of its conclusions to set up the conditions for its autonomy vis-à-vis the militant discourse. However, we are in favour of intervention research, when social scientists become activists for the place of research within the social space and to contribute to a more just and sustainable society (Marcel and Pichon 2019: 89), implementing what some call "responsible

scientific research” (Citizen Science 2015) or –why not go back to Sartre and Foucault for once– “intellectual engagement”. On this condition, it acquires a double validity, scientific and social, that is to say, that it co-produces knowledge rooted in a place and at a particular moment in history.

INITIAL ACTIVITIES

Our first priority is to connect those researchers interested in and working on the issues of alter-politics. This network will enable to collecting existing research, creating readers and a database, making what is known easier accessible. Having established the research community and collected existing knowledge, the focus will be on generating new knowledge and cover neglected areas through the promotion of research and educational collaboration, programs and projects.

Our concrete projects so far are as follows:

1. The constitution of a network of partners and members, who will be invited to constitute research groups within their home institution.
2. The development of a global network of resource people and interested researchers. To join the network, please email us at: altersearn@gmail.com.
3. The first main event is the *1st ALTERSEA Videoconference - From Social Regulation to Social Movements - Alterpolitical Engagements Across Southeast Asia* (July 7-8-9 2021).
4. Another event will be organised in 2022-2023, in the form of an international digital conference on the transversal themes addressed by WPO. The objective of this event is to gather researchers from different areas (including extra-SEAn areas) to reflect on the transversal themes through pluri-disciplinary approach.

FUTURE AGENDA

The future agenda will be defined in collaboration with the members of the research network. Some of our objectives are:

- Connecting planned individual research projects and establish new ones within a broad *Research Program* on Alter-politics in Southeast Asia.
- Organising *Research Summer Schools* for Master and Ph.D. students, giving courses and encouraging Ph.D. projects within the field of alter-politics.
- Publishing a *Yearbook* on Alter-politics in Southeast Asia mapping trends of alter-political forms and activities, through statistics, qualitative data, and theoretical analyses. We will apply for substantial funding, in order to conduct the research and evaluation of data from different sources.
- Creating a broad forum interlinking academics, artists, activists, journalists and other interested groups and professionals, developing various expressions of alter-politics, joint projects and interaction with the public, making the understanding of “alter-politics” and its broad spectra more known.
- Establishing a *Translation Desk* on Alter-politics in Southeast Asia, with the possibility of doing consulting work for e.g. aid agencies, sustainable development organs, in line with our ethical commitments.
- Developing comparative studies with extra-SEA contexts. Based on a thorough contextualization of the study cases in relation to subnational and national specificities (geographic, economic and political heterogeneity, the profusion of synthesized cultural and religious foundations), the interest of the comparison will be twofold: to specify the local dynamics and identify strong trends at the regional level. Internally within SEA, each of the envisaged scalar cases can provide distinct and complementary insights. As for openness with extra-SEA contexts, it can for example bring out the specificity of regional policies for multiculturalism and the treatment of cultural minorities, with the proliferation of new forms of social and legal regulation. In contrast, in Africa the concept of indigenesness contributes to the logic of exclusion (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000); in Latin America, social movements have not sought secession or racial exclusivism but rather have tried to

rethink state and social structures. Ultimately, we will also aim to develop a dialogue with researchers working on alter-policies in these regions.

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