

# Policing vaginas, virginity and the elusive hymen

## VIEW POINT



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Jamie McCartney is obsessed with vaginas. At least that is the impression given by his Great Wall of Vaginas (GWOV). Great Wall of whaaat!? Yep, you read right: vaginas.

Over a period of five years, McCartney, a British sculptor, created a nine meter polyptych: 10 panels made up of 40 plaster casts of women's vaginas.

Just check out the videos: women dropping their pants, opening their legs wide to have this Brighton-based sculptor slather blue alginate gloop on their nether regions to be made into casts.

The women, aged between 18 and 76, were all volunteers: mothers, daughters, twins, post-natal women and a woman pre- and post-labiaplasty, as well as transgender men and women. So don't be surprised to see the odd penis or two sticking out of the GWOV just to make the point (ahem!).

Talk about "in your face". As the GWOV cite states, "This is about grabbing attention, using humor and spectacle, and educating people about what normal women really look like."

OK, but what's the real idea be-

hind this somewhat freakish enterprise?

It seems that women have concerns about their vaginas just like men do about their penises.

If the fashion industry dictates an "ideal body" shape, pornography creates a notion of the vaginal aesthetic ideal.

This has made labiaplasty — a plastic surgery procedure for altering the inner and outer labia — a very popular procedure. While it's true that some women do it because of congenital or medical conditions, many are increasingly doing it for cosmetic purposes.

McCartney asks, "Why are women cutting off part of their genitals?" For him, it's a kind of female genital mutilation (FGM). That's why he created the GWOV, to make

women aware that "normal" falls within a very wide and diverse range. He hopes it will help women develop better body images and accept themselves as they are.

Recently, the Indonesian police were also involved in some attention-grabbing antics, which like McCartney's project, involved vaginas. But if the women who volunteered for the GWOV project offered their genitals willingly, that was hardly the case with the women in the police project.

What's the project? To raise the number of *polwan* (policewomen) in the Indonesian police to 5 percent of its 400,000-strong force by recruiting more women. All recruits — male and female — have to undergo a battery of tests but female recruits are made to undergo a virginity test.

Unlike the GWOV project, these tests are far from humorous or educative. If anything, the so called "two-finger test" to see if the hymen — that oh-so very unreliable "indicator" of virginity — is intact, is painful, embarrassing, humiliating and traumatic.

Imagine having it done in a room with 20 other recruits. Talk about

adding insult to injury.

The National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan), Human Rights Watch and other women's NGOs have all condemned these tests as discriminatory, cruel and degrading. They demand that they be stopped.

Nila Moeleok, the new health minister, has also expressed dismay at these tests. She has raised doubts over the police's method of assessing the cadet's virginity on the sole basis of rupture of the hymen, which can occur when engaging in sports, or through accidents and rape. And guess what? Some women are born without a hymen!

And what does virginity have to do with a policewoman's ability to perform effectively anyway?

According to Insp. Gen. Moechgiyanto, head of the legal division of the National Police, nothing really. That's right, it's just an "internal regulation" they have.

It's part of the general health exam, and if a recruit is found to not be a virgin (according to their criteria), it will be factored into the total score.

Moechgiyanto claims the aim is to safeguard the *polwans'* "moral-

ity". If a woman had been a sex worker, he said, how could she accepted into the police force? "It's not to do with gender [discrimination]", he claimed, "It's to do with morality."

The statement is very hard to accept given the police are one of the most corrupt institutions in the country. And it is exceedingly ironic since it is public knowledge that members of the police are involved at various levels in the prostitution industry. It's also a distraction from the recent conflict between officers of the police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) in Batam, Riau, and members of an Army infantry battalion.

It's an old story really, as the conflict between the two groups of combat troops stem from a kind of primordial "tribal" rivalry.

The military and police forces are supposed to be part of a modern state but their mentality is so hopelessly outdated. It's not surprising that their stand on virginity is what it is.

OK, so what's the real idea behind this archaic virginity test?

McCartney's GWOV tries to raise women's awareness about their body image. The police are also en-

gaged in image improvement — in this case, their own: trying to assert a self-proclaimed morality to counteract their terrible reputation. And as women have always been seen by societies as the repository of morality, they are an easy target. In fact, it is often true that the more corrupt someone is, the more moralistic they are.

Even the language as well as body language of Moechgiyanto so perfectly epitomizes the hypocrisy and arrogance of the police and patriarchal men in general. Check out his interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH7XJy-Q> (start at 5:40 mins).

Nov. 25 is commemorated each year as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It should remind us that police virginity tests do absolutely nothing useful — except abuse women and prove that we've got a very long way to go to change the abusively patriarchal mind-set that still permeates public life in Indonesia.

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# Regionalism, Asian style

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THE GLOBALIST/WASHINGTON DC

Despite its current problems, the EU is often considered to be the gold standard for countries working together for peace and prosperity. While there are many types of regionalism in the world — North America has NAFTA, South America has Mercosur, Australia and New Zealand have Closer Economic Relations — Asia is seen as a latecomer.

And yet, what is unique about Asian regionalism in a global context is that, unlike Europe's example, it has been substantially market-driven.

This move started in 1985, following the Plaza Agreement to re-value the yen, when many Japanese companies began offshoring labor-intensive manufacturing activities to lower-cost destinations, such as the ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia and China.

Soon after, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan followed suit in offshoring production. The region's value chains for electronics, automobiles, clothing and footwear and other products were thus gradually established.

In the first phase, the final products of these value chains were primarily sold to US, European and Japanese markets. However, ever since the 2008 Lehman shock and the subsequent financial crisis, there has been an acceleration of regional integration. China, in particular, became a more active trading and investment partner of all Asian countries.

With the rising purchasing power of Asia's middle class, Asia's value chains are now increasingly servicing Asian consumers. Today, some 40 percent of East Asian trade takes place within the region, compared with 30 percent two decades ago.

In Europe, the percentage of trade that is conducted within the region already amounts to 69 percent. The goal for East Asia should be to move dynamically into the same percentage range.

Given the current level, that would require at least a 50 percent increase in the share of regional trade. That seems entirely feasible, given the growth and population dynamics of the wider region. Consider also that this by no means implies any "decoupling" from other global markets, or specifically the US market.

It just foreshadows a trading world where Asia completes the process from initially being an outsourcing destination for multinational corporations to becoming the key growth driver of the global economy. Such a broadening of Asian nations' trade portfolio would be a win-win situation for Asia.

The European example shows that such an intensification of trade within the region also has important spillover effects into fields other than trade.

Doing business with each other ultimately is the best instrument with which to build what most of Asia seems to strive for — better neighborly relations.

Trade ultimately is the best

confidence-building measure.

Compared with the model Europe pursued, Asia has had the distinct advantage that it did not put the cart before the horse.

Its regionalism has been market-led — and thus started out with emphasizing the right path for creating the basis for shared prosperity in the region.

Unlike in Europe, Asian governments have arguably followed, rather than led, this process.

That does not mean, however, that governments don't have an important role to play. One concrete example where they can achieve something transformative is discussions of a possible FTA between China, Japan and Korea that have been underway for some time.

Another example concerns relations between South Korea and Vietnam. The two nations, very much on opposite ends militarily during the Vietnam War, are now slated to sign a bilateral free trade agreement by year's end.

That kind of forward-looking pragmatism should be an inspiration to other nations across Asia. A particularly crucial economic dimension where this should play out, given the size of both economies, is in the trade relationship between Japan and South Korea, two countries that have continue to see their difficult pasts haunt their future. Will Korea follow Vietnam in putting progress first?

The history-healing aspect aside, the cross-cultural understanding that trade connections foster are also pivotal for Asia's future.

Asia is undoubtedly more diverse than Europe — whether in terms of level of development (from rich Singapore to very poor Laos), politics (from democracy to dictatorship and everything between), economics (free markets to state capitalism and more) or religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Shintoism and more). In fact, diversity is the very definition of Asia.

But this diversity has not stopped Asian countries from working together for prosperity and peace. And over time, market-led regionalism has proven its value and is now progressively becoming more institutionalized.

The evidence to date suggests that Asia's experience in regionalism has been very successful. Almost seven decades ago, in the midst of the Cold War, no one could have imagined Asian countries working together as they are doing today.

Asia's regionalism is most certainly a work-in-progress, but step-by-step it is progressing.

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# ASEAN-Australia relations at 40: Rising strategic partners

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Australia has been trying to place ASEAN on the central stage of its foreign policy for the past four decades.

The first two decades were productive and meaningful because of the political transformation taking place in the region after the end of the Cold War. Canberra fittingly played the role of an effective mediator and peacemaker in Cambodia's 13-year civil war. Only Australia and selected ASEAN members — Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore — worked together to help freshly independent East Timor find its feet. ASEAN was not yet ready to render its flag for such a common endeavor.

It was the region's economic potential that got Australian enthralled. Without a strong push from Down Under, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC would not have been established back in 1989. The list continues and grows longer with other development assistance that would enhance the effectiveness of the Jakarta-based ASEAN Secretariat and economic integration in ASEAN.

Luckily, what Canberra accomplished during the Hawke-Keating years continued to serve as a strong foundation for its relations with ASEAN in the following two decades, which expanded to cover all multi-dimensional cooperation.

The recent barrage of controversies related to spying, asylum seekers and other headline-making shenanigans should have burned

relations to ashes. Indeed, without such a firm base, it would be difficult to view ASEAN-Australian relations as they stand today.

In recent years, asylum seekers have been the main issue poisoning ties with the grouping's largest member, Indonesia. Continued squabbling over the fate of these boat people further worsened relations and impeded regional efforts to help them. Past efforts had been focused on a comprehensive resolution to this sensitive issue without much progress, mainly due to a lack of political will from all concerned parties.

Somehow in recent days, ASEAN-Australia ties have continued to elude media attention Down Under. Reports and analysis are mainly focused on individual members of ASEAN countries rather than on a regional entity which could impact the future of Australia.

Before the launch of the Australia-China Free Trade Agreement recently, the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement was the country's biggest free trade event ever signed. Currently, Australia is the seventh largest investor in ASEAN and its two-way trade last year amounted to US\$68 billion.

In the decades to come, the quality and significance of ASEAN-Australia ties will depend much on better dialogue and communication at the top level as well as issue-specific cooperation. As widely noted, Australia was ASEAN's first dialogue partner — but still it does not have a stand-alone annual summit with ASEAN leaders.

In retrospect, ASEAN-Australia

relations could have been more strongly intertwined if former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, who met the ASEAN leaders in 1977 in Kuala Lumpur, had more faith in the young regional grouping and was more cooperative.

The same was true for former prime minister Kevin Rudd and his grand security community blueprint in Asia-Pacific. Given the proliferation of new ideas related to regional security architecture, Rudd was a bit ahead of his time. Between ASEAN and Australia, leadership rapport must be stronger and mutual consultations more frequent.

At last, after 37 years, on Nov. 13, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott met briefly — because of tight schedules — with the ASEAN leaders to commemorate their 40th anniversary of relations. They met in Naypyitaw instead of in his country, a break from previous similar gatherings. The leaders' rhetoric had changed, they were talking about shared destiny and working together.

Before that, ASEAN held three summits with Australia in 1997, 2004 and 2010. Only the 2010 meeting was exclusive and turned out to be the most substantive in setting forth future bilateral direction. With other major dialogue partners all enjoying the summitry, it is about time to institutionalize the ASEAN-Australia summit.

In August, both sides approved the most ambitious 113 action plans for the next five years (2015-2019) — to boost their multi-dimensional cooperation encompassing economics, security, science and technology, social and cultural fields. It

must be noted here that more than any dialogue partner, Australia has been supportive of functional assistance to ASEAN.

However, given the rapid shift of the regional and global environment, as well as growing integration and connectivity, ASEAN and Australia must think proactively and innovatively on how to engage and identify new priorities.

The launching of the New Colombo Plan late last year was a signature program that will keep present and future generations and their institutions working together.

Pressing non-traditional security issues these days — such as the Islamic State extremists, Ebola crisis and climate change — also demand closer consultation and cooperation at all levels between ASEAN and Australia. As the latest East Asia Summit manifested, at times of emergency and crises, only leaders can provide clear paths for multilateral cooperation.

Given the widespread use of cyber-space and dangers lurking beneath, both sides must think of ways to overcome their narrow national perspectives. They need to move into regional and international cooperation in the area of cyber security, which requires top-level clearance and highly sophisticated technical and data exchanges. Obviously, additional trust building is urgently needed to kick start cyber security cooperation.

Despite its Western roots, Australia is an Asian country. Its future is tied to Asia. Unmistakably ASEAN serves as an anchor for this vast nation to find security and prosperity in this part of the world.