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# Crossing boundaries: An exploration of how three Social Studies teachers understand and teach patriotism in Singapore

## **ABSTRACT**

*In 1965 Singapore became independent after a two-year merger with Malaysia and over 100 years of British colonization. Since then, the government has been inculcating patriotism in its citizens through educational policies such as the introduction of Social Studies at secondary school. This process of education for patriotism is interesting in the case of Singapore in two respects: how teachers understand the link between patriotism and loyalty to the government; and whether teachers dare to cross boundaries to engage students in discussions that may challenge pro-government views. This study explores the perceptions and practices of three Social Studies teachers to address two issues. First, how do Social Studies teachers understand 'patriotism'? Second, how do they teach it within or beyond boundaries? The findings show that teachers did not think that patriotism meant loyalty to the government; instead it meant loyalty to one another as Singapore citizens. Though the translation of teachers' understandings of patriotism into the classroom differed from teacher to teacher, in terms of helping students think critically, there were elements of crossing the boundaries set by the ruling party.*

## **KEYWORDS**

education for  
patriotism  
nationalistic education  
patriotism  
Singapore  
Social Studies  
teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial societies have one challenge: constructing and instilling patriotism amongst their people. One way by which governments have done this is through education (Kan 2012; Waghid 2009). This is no different for Singapore, which became a British colony in 1819 and grew as a thriving sea port, drawing people from various parts of the world to the island. In 1965 Singapore became independent and inherited the culturally heterogeneous population of 1.87 million, consisting mainly of migrants from China, Malaya and southern India (Department of Statistics 2014). They had little in common and had divided loyalties, many still attached to the land of their forefathers. Faced with a population of ethnically distinct groups and unintegrated individuals, the new independence government began the process of nation-building to develop a national identity as 'Singaporean' that would supersede all other ethnic and cultural identities (Chua 1995). Today, Singapore has a population of 5.5 million people, and patriotism is still being emphasized with reminders of the meaning of being Singaporean. In a recent university forum, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2014) defined the Singaporean as a person who owes loyalty to the country, has a sense of belonging, responsibility and rootedness to the nation, and is prepared to defend the nation.

The school has been a key vehicle in realizing the vision of the ideal patriotic Singaporean. Patriotism has been promoted largely through the National Education (NE) initiative introduced in 1997, which aimed to 'develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in the future' (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2013). Key to the NE policy is the instillation of a set of beliefs forming the core of each citizen, such as 'Singapore is our homeland; this is where we belong' and 'We must preserve racial and religious harmony'. The introduction of Social Studies in 2001 as a channel for NE signified a landmark in education for patriotism in Singapore. This is because, for the first time, a union was made between the development of political and critical thinking and instillation of patriotic values (SEAB 2013; Sim and Print 2005). There are, however, tensions and complications in the teaching of patriotism through Social Studies.

First, balancing critique of the nation with love for the nation is a challenge for some teachers (Zevin 1994). Second, the restrictive and illiberal political climate in Singapore, which discourages dissent and the discussion of controversial issues, marginalizes alternative perspectives in the classroom (Ho et al. 2014; Mutalib 2005). This has encouraged a climate of restraint and has created boundaries that teachers and students alike find difficult to cross (Baldon and Sim 2009; Ho 2010). Social Studies teachers in Singapore are therefore placed at the forefront of this dilemma, having to negotiate the tensions between developing a love for the nation and also the ability to critique it in the context of a restrictive and illiberal political climate. In what follows, using the case studies of three Social Studies teachers, this article examines how these teachers understand 'patriotism' and how they teach Social Studies for patriotism.

### ***Patriotism***

This article adopts a state-centric definition of patriotism defined as an allegiance to the nation state. The state is defined in educational literature as a body with political authority and power, typically involving the government (Peterson 2012). The nation is defined as a community of individuals who share certain aspects of culture, such as language, history and a sense of

destiny. This definition entails that citizens are expected to have basic loyalty to both the state and the community of citizens that form the nation. Peterson uses the terminology 'civic patriotism' to define patriotism that stresses both the relationship between citizens and the state and the relationship between citizens, involving 'a love for the republic *and* of one's fellow citizens' (2012: 14, original emphasis). This section outlines the theoretical perspectives on patriotism consisting of a discussion of the relationship between patriotism and citizenship, patriotism and political citizenship, teaching practices on patriotism, and the conceptual framework guiding the study.

### ***Patriotism and citizenship***

To some scholars, patriotism is integral to citizenship (Heater 1990; Lee and Fouts 2005). Heater (1990: 195), for example, describes patriotism as 'an essential ingredient' of good citizenship. Many teachers from Russia and China adopt this point of view. Russian teachers deem 'loyalty to country, in good times and bad ... as an essential element of good citizenship' (Ellis and Brown 2005: 203). One Russian teacher was reported saying 'a citizen is ... a synonym of being a patriot. Good citizenship is patriotism' (Ellis and Brown 2005: 203). Teachers from China similarly feel that patriotism was 'strongly tied' to good citizenship and that 'a good citizen should love his or her country and even make sacrifices for the good of the collective' (Lee 2005: 232). However, not all teachers agree with this. In some nations, patriotism is associated with negative characteristics like uncritical and extreme behaviours. Teachers from Australia and England, for example, strongly reject patriotism as a quality of good citizenship. Prior (2005) reported that teachers in Australia often saw patriotism negatively and were ambivalent towards it. In another study, a teacher from England 'expressed acute discomfort' at the thought of addressing patriotism in his history class as it 'reek[ed] of the old British Empire' (Hand and Pearce 2009: 461).

### ***Patriotism and political citizenship***

There is a close relationship between patriotism and the political dimension of citizenship. Scholars like Westheimer (2006) and Staub (2003) argue that the ability for a patriot to see himself as separate from the government is important to prevent an uncritical acceptance of its policies and practices. The patriot must retain capacity to oppose authority and take corrective actions when required. Patriots with this disposition are called democratic or constructive patriots. In contrast, authoritarian or blind patriots have unquestioning loyalty to a centralized leader or leading group, resulting in a tendency to avoid questioning or critiquing government policies (Staub 2003; Westheimer 2009). A Hong Kong study has found that some civic educators possess democratic and constructive dispositions. Such teachers distinguish between love for the nation and loyalty to the government (Yau 2009). They also explain to their students that being patriotic does not mean safeguarding the interest of a political party (Yuen and Byram 2007).

### ***The teaching of patriotism***

Westheimer (2009) has argued that Social Studies teachers in democratic nations are obligated to provide students with opportunities to think deeply about issues affecting the country. He also pointed out that 'a school

curriculum that teaches one unified, unquestioned version of “truth” is one of the hallmarks of authoritarian patriotism’ (2009: 317). In a survey conducted in Britain, Hand and Pearce (2009) found that teachers had differing views on how patriotism should be approached in citizenship and history classes, with the majority preferring to take a stance of neutrality and address patriotism as a controversial issue in the context of open discussion. The researchers, however, did not observe these teachers to ascertain the challenges in translating their preferred approach into the classroom context despite teachers having shared that it was a ‘difficult’ topic to teach (2009: 461). In another Hong Kong study, Leung (2007) observed that civic educators used a variety of approaches to teach patriotism. Some focused on developing cognitive skills and avoided talk on love for China, some balanced developing a love for China with critique of the nation, while others eschewed critical thinking and presented one-sided accounts to promote affection for China.

### ***Double-pronged challenge of education for patriotism***

Education for patriotism is a double-pronged challenge involving understandings of patriotism and its translation into the classroom. Scholarly understandings on patriotism differ, with some thinking it involves absolute loyalty to the government leaders and policies and others thinking it involves commitment to democratic ideals. In this article, we explore teachers’ understandings of patriotism at a conceptual level and also examine their practices. While teachers’ understandings of patriotism may reflect existing state and non-state definitions of patriotism, these understandings need not be reduced to existing official or academic definitions. As we will see in the empirical section, a common thread through the three teachers’ understanding of patriotism is that patriotism is not so much a loyalty to the government but a loyalty to fellow citizens. The translation of this understanding into practice may, however, differ among teachers. These differences in approach may result from differences in levels of experience, age and political convictions. As we will see in the empirical section, the teachers had differing abilities to translate their understandings of patriotism to their Social Studies lessons.

### **THE CONTEXT OF SINGAPORE**

The Singapore government has historically been described in many ways, including as an ‘authoritarian state’, a ‘police state’, ‘a managed democracy’ and an ‘illiberal democracy’ with a ‘culture of fear’ (Singh 2012: 200). These labels stem from the dominance of a single political party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), over Singapore in the last 50 years. It is difficult to distinguish between PAP as a political party and PAP as the government, as the Singapore government is essentially a creation of the PAP (Singh 2012). The government promotes patriotism and its education with the end goal of social cohesion and national progress. The ideal patriotic Singaporean is one whose national identity takes precedence over other ethnic and religious identities, who plays an active role in national development and stays rooted to defend the nation (MOE 2013). Patriotism is cultivated in citizens through a variety of means, such as the celebration of the National Day on the 9 of August. However, by far the most dominant mode for its inculcation is through compulsory mass education. Through carefully designed education policies, the PAP steers the actions of schools and teachers towards cultivating the patriotic citizen.

Similar to other nation states, schools are the PAP government's dominant ideological state apparatus in Singapore (Althusser 1971). In Singapore, the state has direct control over the education system and patriotism is instilled through the NE policy. NE is every teacher's responsibility and is infused throughout the curriculum to appeal to both hearts and minds (MOE 1997). The MOE adopts a two-pronged approach to cultivate patriotism in students: cognitive development through awareness of facts, circumstances and opportunities facing Singapore, and affective development by instilling a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation (MOE 2013). As part of NE, Social Studies was introduced in 2001 at the upper secondary level as another channel through which PAP's ideology is reproduced in citizens (Sim and Print 2005). The objective of the subject is to develop higher order thinking skills in students, such as evaluation of sources, inference of authors' motives, analysis and judgement. This reflected the desire of the state to develop skills necessary for citizens' thoughtful participation in the political process. However, this intention is hindered by the curriculum that singularly promotes the pro-government perspective (Chan 2007).

Yet, studies by Sim (2008) and Sim and Print (2009) have shown that, even in a centralized and tightly controlled education system like Singapore, teachers are 'curricular-instructional gatekeepers' (Thornton 2005) who conceptualize citizenship and enact the Social Studies curriculum differently from the prescribed curriculum. The onus is on the teachers to teach and help students develop a holistic outlook on the nation (Sim 2010). Clearly, the state's goal is to inculcate patriotism to ensure the continuity of Singaporeans who are inclined to make decisions beneficial for the nation. But how do teachers understand and teach patriotism in Social Studies?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is based on an interpretive paradigm in which 'reality is socially constructed and variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure' (Glesne 2011: 9). The central interest is 'in human meaning in social life and its elucidation and exposition by the researcher' (Erickson 1986: 119). We use the multiple qualitative case study design (Stake 1995; Yin 2014). The case study method invites an intensive examination of the Social Studies teachers' understandings of and practices in patriotism, and provides a foundation upon which description, induction and interpretation can be drawn. It sensitizes the researchers to an otherwise taken-for-granted world, such as the details and assumptions under which people operate (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). Three Social Studies teachers were purposively selected using this set of criteria: a range of disciplinary backgrounds, at least five years of teaching experience, of both genders and different ethnicities (Table 1). Each teacher in the study constitutes a case. While each case is unique with his or her own problems, relationships and stories to tell, the 'official interest' is in how teachers understand patriotism and put these understandings into practice in their classrooms (Stake 2005: vi).

The research site is Macaca Girls' High School, an independent school in Singapore for high-ability students. Macaca is one of the few schools where students do not take the high-stakes 'O' Level examinations. In addition, the Social Studies department has autonomy to design its own curriculum and assessments to maximize learning opportunities for students. Given this unique context of a non-examination culture, teachers were expected to

| Teacher | Teaching subject | Disciplinary background      | Years of experience | Ethnicity | Gender | Age |
|---------|------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------|-----|
| Visoth  | Social Studies   | Sociology, Political Science | 15                  | Chinese   | Male   | 44  |
| Faria   | Social Studies   | History, Geography           | 16                  | Malay     | Female | 41  |
| Harry   | Social Studies   | History                      | 8                   | Chinese   | Male   | 33  |

Table 1: Summary of teachers.

have less constraints and concerns enacting the curriculum according to their understandings.

Over one year, we obtained three sources of information from each teacher, including two semistructured interviews, at least six 60-minute lesson observations and documents including articles and worksheets given to students during the observations. The interviews took an average of an hour and were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then given to the participants for checking. Key questions asked to elicit teachers' understandings of patriotism and their teaching practices included the following: What is patriotism to you? Is it important for a good citizen to be patriotic? How do you teach patriotism?

During data analysis, transcripts were first freely coded using the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO10. Thereafter, codes were grouped into categories, which were subsequently refined into broad themes. This was done within cases and across cases to identify patterns, consistencies and meanings. Specifically, analytic induction was used to examine the data (Patton 2002: 493–94). In analytic induction, researchers develop rough hypotheses prior to data analysis, informed by hunches, assumptions and theory-derived concepts. During data analysis, hypotheses are revised to fit emerging interpretations of the data. Analytical induction is well-suited for enquiries involving the examination of propositions in different contexts. Methodological triangulation of the data from multiple sources, together with checking back with the participants, maintained the credibility of the findings (Stake 1995).

## FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two parts comprising the teachers' understanding of patriotism and how they teach patriotism in Social Studies.

### *Understandings of patriotism*

Two themes emerged from the data on teachers' understandings of patriotism. First, teachers did not understand patriotism as loyalty to the government; second, they understood it as loyalty to Singaporeans.

#### *Patriotism is not loyalty to the government*

Similar to civic educators in Hong Kong, the three teachers did not understand patriotism as loyalty to the government (Yuen and Byram 2007). Patriotism was not associated with the need to comply with the norms and decisions of the ruling government. Faria believed that one could be patriotic regardless of

the political party one supported, whether it was the PAP or opposition parties such as the Worker's Party (WP), which has in recent years risen in popularity as a watchdog of the ruling party. Faria shared that 'every government is a flawed government' and that citizens have a role to play to 'mitigate some of these flaws'. In addition, a patriot is not 'obligated to any political parties' but should act in a manner that he or she believes is in the best interest of the nation.

Visoth similarly shared that patriotism is not about defending a particular party and not a matter of being 'less or more white' (referring to the white uniform of the PAP) but rather it is about selecting the most capable people to govern the nation. He discerned differences between the state and the government and argued that the 'state is more important than the government'; 'the government changes in any case' but 'the state needs to be the one that survives'. Visoth believed that the survival of the state takes precedence over the 'acceptance of any authority'. Visoth also saw it as the 'constitutional right and duty' of every citizen who 'sees something wrong with the government, to do something about it'. Consequently, he equipped his students with 'the ability to make that judgment call, to accept the social contract as it is when it's proper, but when it's *not*, be able to rise up against it and say otherwise' (original emphasis).

Harry similarly argued for more room for dissent, rather than submission, as it is not possible for the government to 'try to keep a close eye on everything' especially when they have invested in 'an educated community and society'. He further explained that there ought to be 'constant interaction' between the government and the people and it did not mean that, because the people give the government power, the government 'makes all the decisions' for them. Instead, he stressed that when situations call for it the people 'can question' these decisions and the government is accountable to provide answers. While articulated differently, the three teachers saw their roles as Social Studies educators as being separate from the government. They certainly did not think that patriotism meant they had to be the government's mouthpieces.

### *Patriotism is loyalty to the people*

If patriotism is not loyalty to the government, then what is it? Teachers unanimously agreed that patriotism is loyalty to Singaporeans, expressed through love and commitment to fellow members of the nation state. Visoth explained that patriotism is 'the single belief that your roots ... family members ... what matters to you ... your life [are] here'. He elaborated that a patriot is simply one who loves the people in the nation.

Faria also understood patriotism as being loyal to Singaporeans, with a focus on advocacy. Patriotism is about 'honouring our relationship with others and the place we call home'. She explained that patriotism involves representing groups that are disadvantaged, disempowered, or discriminated against in society to help those 'lesser off than you get better' and make 'a positive impact to their lives'. In fact, for Faria, this relationship extends beyond national boundaries as she believed that patriots should also honour their relationship with the global fraternity.

Harry similarly understood patriotism as a 'passion to serve and help the community'. He described a patriot as one who bore the burdens of the community and persevered in bringing to fruition the aspirations of our forebears. In contrast, unpatriotic behaviour involved being on a 'self-preservation mode',

which meant 'looking to protect oneself first' and an over-reliance upon the government. Hence, the three teachers did not conceptualize patriotism as a narrowed loyalty to the ruling government but as a broad commitment to fellow Singaporeans.

### ***Practices in the Social Studies classroom***

Though all three teachers understood patriotism not as loyalty to the government but as loyalty to Singaporeans, their ability to enact this understanding in class, which involves questioning of government intentions and policies, differed from teacher to teacher.

#### *Faria*

Faria raised difficult questions about the Singapore government and was critical of their policies. She helped students do the same through the use of controversial issues and by playing the devil's advocate. Controversial issues are often used by teachers to 'jolt' students out of their 'comfort zones' and force them to 'think differently' about things they had taken for granted up to that point (Brookfield 2012: 71). In one of her lessons, Faria gave her students the opportunity to critique the policy that bans Muslim girls from wearing the *tudung*, the modesty headscarf, in national schools using a role-playing debate. Faria first introduced a controversial incident that took place in 2002 where four first-grade Malay Muslim girls were compelled to leave the school after repeated warnings to remove their *tudungs* went unheeded. Her students were then divided into groups, each of which was given a role: as parents, the society and the government. They were asked to debate from the position of each stakeholder, with, however, a change of context to the current socio-political setting that is more liberal than before. This debate exposed students to the complexities of policy-making and enabled them to participate in its process.

Faria was also observed to play the devil's advocate, taking an alternative position from the accepted norm, by asking thought-provoking questions (Brookfield 2012). She actively challenged students' simplistic views on complex issues. She once asked her students whether they would vote for a Malay Prime Minister. The Malays, being the ethnic minority in a predominantly Chinese population, have a marginalized position in the Singapore society (Rahim 2001). Faria, being herself Malay, questioned her class consisting mainly of Chinese students to consider the reasons why the Singapore government or populace might have reservations in voting a member of the minority race as the head of state. In the same class, she asked her students for the purpose of having schools in Singapore that focused on the Chinese language and culture. This special provision was available to the Chinese but not to other ethnicities. Her question provoked answers such as these schools were set up to ensure there would always be 'a pool of Chinese elites with the power to influence'. Faria provided many platforms in her lessons for students to be critical of the government and its policies, encouraging students to question accepted norms, with the goal of developing critical thinkers.

#### *Visoth*

Visoth's approach to the Singapore government and its policies was to first expose their weaknesses and later on to position them in a more positive light in view of the bigger picture. This 'balanced approach' involved creating a

comprehensive picture by exposing both the 'dark' and 'bright' sides of the nation (Leung 2007: 83). This approach was observed in two incidents. In the first incident, Visoth explored the reputation of the Singapore government as a police state with his students, before comparing Singapore to nations that were more liberal or oppressive. Visoth first introduced the concept of big and small governments to provide students with the language for discussion. He told them, 'A small government is one that is less intrusive. The big government is everywhere. You decide which one is Singapore'. Students were invited to share why they felt Singapore was a big government. This exposed the weaknesses of the Singapore government, which controls many aspects of public life, providing lesser room for citizens' participation in the political process. In the following lesson, the students' perception of Singapore as a big government was put into perspective in international terms. Together with his students, Visoth drew a table that explored the ideas commonly associated with big and small governments; the students associated 'USA', 'freedom', 'less governmental jurisdiction' with small governments and 'North Korea', 'oppressive regimes', 'corrupt and inefficient' with big governments. After this exploration, the students concluded on their own that, relative to these governments, Singapore required a new category of its own called 'medium government'.

In another lesson on how the government manages healthcare in Singapore, Visoth began the lesson discussing the high cost of medical fees in Singapore, a topic of perennial interest in Singapore, and asked them, 'Is it possible that we have a case that people cannot afford to pay their medical fees?'. After familiarizing his students to the high cost of healthcare in Singapore, he introduced the healthcare systems of the United Kingdom and the United States. He explained that the UK welfare state imposes high tax on its citizens to reduce the cost of public healthcare, in contrast to the US self-reliance system, which imposes lower taxes on citizens, leaving the responsibility of healthcare to the individual and insurance companies. He then asked the class, on the continuum between the UK and US systems, 'Where are we?'. The students decided that Singapore was somewhere in between but nearer to the US system. After this, Visoth proceeded to rationalize the 'Many Helping Hands' approach the government takes in managing healthcare in Singapore, in which the burden of healthcare is shared between the state, community, family and the individual. In both incidences, Visoth initially began with a dismal look at the Singapore system, and thereafter invited students to reassess the government in the light of more information. Visoth's approach involved exploring an issue from multiple perspectives and then allowing students to independently form their own conclusions.

### *Harry*

Harry's approach to teaching about the government was to avoid controversies and to present the political system as it is and to present policies as if they were fixed. While Faria and Visoth controversialized policies and invited their students to join the debate, Harry approached policies in a manner that appeared to deny they were controversial (Hess 2004). He was careful to avoid taking a 'side' but spoke the 'truth' from the borrowed authority of the government. Harry tended to structure his lessons following the content of the official textbook, even though Macaca's curriculum was not based on it. In the interview, Harry shared that he encouraged his students to question policies but to

also understand the perspective offered by the government. It became apparent over the course of observations that Harry in fact prioritized understanding the government's perspective over questioning it. Harry spent one lesson factually introducing the machinery of the Singapore government as consisting of the legislature, executive and judiciary. In another lesson, he introduced the Ethnic Integration Policy, which was implemented to ensure a balanced mix of ethnic groups in each public housing estate to prevent the formation of ethnic enclaves. However, rather than critiquing it, he asked students questions that validated the policy, such as 'What are the objectives of this policy?' and 'Why is there a need for this policy in Singapore?'. At times, students expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the policy. One student, for example, felt that the policy had limitations because putting people physically together did not imply they would understand one another. Harry, however, did not address these alternative views.

In another lesson, he introduced his students to four principles of good governance given in the official Social Studies textbook: 'leadership is key', 'anticipate change and stay relevant', 'reward for work and work for reward' and 'a stake for everyone, opportunities for all' (CPDD 2013: 34). Again, Harry introduced the principles matter of factly, as if they were 'truths'. Students were divided into groups, each taking one principle, and were asked to share how these principles were relevant to Singapore. There were times when students questioned the relevance of the principles, such as when a student brought up a limitation of the principle 'anticipate change, stay relevant', explaining that, while 'the strength of the principle is that it will keep us on track with other countries, to be on par or ahead in terms of economic growth', its limitation was in its manner of implementation, which tended to encourage unhealthy competition. This was an interesting alternative viewpoint. Harry, however, again did not pursue these interesting counter-perspectives raised by the students.

## **DISCUSSION**

The teachers' understandings of patriotism reflected a conceptual frame that aligned with Peterson's (2012) argument that patriotism was as much a relationship between citizens as it was a relationship between the state and the citizens. In fact, the need to ensure that each compatriot was well taken care of could motivate a patriot to question policies that disadvantaged certain groups. This was reflected in Faria who took social advocacy very seriously. There are differences and similarities in the understandings and methods of inculcation of patriotism in Singapore, compared with what has been observed in Hong Kong and England. These divergences and convergences can be observed along three key areas: loyalty to the government; operating in a climate of fear; and crossing boundaries.

Like teachers in Hong Kong, the three Singaporean teachers distinguished loyalty to the government from loyalty to the nation (Yau 2009). This appears to help them reconcile their need to at times stand apart from the political party, to question whether the policies are good and it gives them liberty to criticize policies. In the case of Hong Kong, that the nation, state and government were three independent entities was clear to its people. This is because Hong Kong people have been separated from China for over a century and indoctrinated by the British to embrace liberal democracy, apart from the communist ideals of China. When Hong Kong was returned to Chinese rule,

the liberalized Hong Kongers were determined to keep their civil liberties and rights, instead of submitting to Chinese communism. These factors caused Hong Kongers to be well aware of the need to stand apart from the Hong Kong government that was sanctioned by the Beijing government. This is not the case for Singapore, where the three have often been conflated and regarded as one and the same. For Singapore, it was the state that constructed the notion of one Singapore nation and the PAP government has been the ruling party since independence. Given these differences, it is significant that the teachers in this study were still able to maintain a critical distance from their political representatives and institutions and assess them rationally and objectively.

This ability to maintain a critical distance was, however, exercised at a price, for teachers felt that this ran against the grain of government expectations. A few statements made by Visoth and Faria are supported by Baildon and Sim's (2009) findings that the freedom to teach Social Studies using controversy was uncommon in Singapore. The teachers felt that their approach to Social Studies was unconventional in view of Social Studies teaching in Singapore. Interestingly, each of them had warned the researchers prior to lessons and interviews that they did not follow the official curriculum, approaching Social Studies more like an introduction to a Social Science course at the university level. Regarding their way of teaching Social Studies, Visoth mentioned that some people might accuse them of being unsupportive of the official line. Faria similarly shared that her mother disapproved of her teaching approaches, accusing her of being unpatriotic. It may not be surprising that in societies that are comparably more liberal, such as Hong Kong and Britain, teachers were able to help students question authority and debate controversies. But in an illiberal society like Singapore, it is doubly commendable that teachers like Visoth and Faria, despite their fears, had chosen to prioritize the development of critical thinking skills in their students.

The teachers were aware that, even though the curriculum provided them with freedom in terms of delivery and content, they were still teaching in a school that had national messages to deliver. Faria used the term 'ring fence' to illustrate that boundaries limiting what and how they teach existed. The teachers differed in their abilities to supersede perceived boundaries. Visoth and Faria defied the boundaries by exposing students to multiple perspectives, of which the government's perspective was just one of them. In contrast, Harry kept well within the boundaries by giving precedence to the government's perspective. Althusser (1971: 157) described teachers who 'teach against the ideology, the system and the practices in which they are trapped' as 'rare' and 'a kind of hero'. Why were Visoth and Faria able to transcend those boundaries and teach like heroes, but not Harry? A possible reason was Harry's lack of experience, having five years less experience than the others. In addition, Harry was the head of the department of character and citizenship education in the school. Character and Citizenship Education is the most recent citizenship education initiative introduced in 2012 by the MOE, under which NE became newly subsumed. Having the responsibility for the implementation of this initiative in Macaca might have possibly constrained Harry's ability to manoeuvre. This meant that he was possibly clearer than the others where the boundaries lay, and felt a stronger need to stay within them.

These findings have implications on education for patriotism and government policy on patriotism. First, having a certain understanding does not necessarily imply having the ability to translate that understanding into

practice, as illustrated through the example of Harry. What is distinct in Harry's case is the indirect or implied influence of a perceived conservative climate on curriculum and classroom practice (Cornbleth 2001). Over time, this has led to the internalization of constraint that caused him to self-censor his teaching, even in the absence of actual challenge. While this is a significant observation, its importance lies beyond the scope of this article, and may be explored separately. Second, the fact that the very people who are supposed to be teaching patriotism have fears and uncertainties in crossing boundaries, visible in all three teachers, even in a school context that encourages it, implies that the fear of having alternative viewpoints in a politically restrictive society is a real obstacle to effective Social Studies education. If teachers from an independent school without the constraints of high-stakes examination or state-sanctioned textbooks already experience these fears, how many more teachers in the mainstream schools? Greater efforts need to be taken to assist teachers in negotiating these tensions in schools. However, the fact that Visoth and Faria took risks and transcended these boundaries offers hope for teaching in a context of constraint.

## CONCLUSION

The government of Singapore is clear about the attributes the patriotic citizen should have, and has provided guidelines through educational policies to direct the process of education for patriotism. Inculcating patriotism through Social Studies is, however, challenging because of how teachers understand patriotism and how they convey it to their students through their practices, given the need to balance critique and love in a restrictive political climate. An examination of three cases of Social Studies teachers in an independent school in Singapore revealed that these teachers have similar understandings that patriotism does not mean loyalty to the government but rather loyalty to the Singaporean community who form the nation. They argue that being patriotic does not mean supporting the government regardless. However, the ability to translate these understandings into practice differed from teacher to teacher. Faria and Visoth were able to transcend the boundaries, engaging their students in a highly critical discourse about the nation state; Harry, however, remained within boundaries and propagated the government's narrative. Further research needs to be conducted to examine not just the factors constraining teacher practices but how teachers negotiate the climate of constraint in restrictive political contexts such as Singapore.

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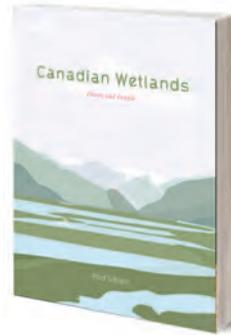
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