

Rethinking critical patriotism: a case of constructive patriotism in Social Studies teachers in Singapore

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ABSTRACT

Critical patriotism is an ideal in many liberal Western nations. Few studies, however, explore how teachers understand and teach critical patriotism and the possible tensions arising from its adoption, especially in non-Western contexts. This qualitative case study explores the understandings and practices of two Social Studies teachers from an elite girls' school in Singapore to understand how they negotiate the tensions that arise when critical thinking and patriotism meet. The findings show that the teachers perceive little contradiction between patriotism and critical thinking and, hence, generally taught in line with democratic citizenship education. They encouraged students to discuss controversial policies, brought in diverse perspectives and challenged the status quo. However, sensitive to the socio-political context in Singapore, they sought consensus instead of contestation, gradual change instead of radical change, in contrast to the spirit of critical patriotism. These findings suggest that in Singapore, where communitarian values are promoted, critical patriotism was expressed differently. Constructive patriotism may be a better term to describe the type of patriotism observed in the teachers.

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Patriotism or love for one's country, involves a "special concern" for one's country and compatriots (Primoratz, 2002, p. 10). While patriotism certainly involves beliefs about and feelings for one's country, the touchstone of one's patriotism is what one is prepared to do for it (Primoratz, 2002). Likewise, Ladson-Billings (2007, p. 19) argues, "Patriotism is not what you say; patriotism is what you do". Over the years, patriotism took on meanings beyond an allegiance to a specific locality to the abstract idea of a polity or nation-state. Hence, the "patria" to which the patriot is committed is not only geographical but also a political entity (Dietz, 2002). This commitment involves active participation in the political life of one's country, in which the common good is expressed and promoted. Unavoidably, patriotism is a political concept and one would not describe an apolitical person as a patriot (Primoratz, 2002). This article focuses on critical patriotism, its close association to democratic citizenship education and examines the understandings and practices of two teachers from a secondary school in Singapore.

Critical patriotism is argued to be superior over blind forms of patriotism (Merry, 2009). Critical patriotism (vs loyal patriotism) has its variants in the form of constructive patriotism (vs blind patriotism) (Staub, 2003) and democratic patriotism (vs authoritarian patriotism) (Westheimer, 2009). In this article we extract the common features of these variants to construct the concept of critical patriotism, noting that there are subtle differences in emphasis between them. Critical patriotism manifests in a

capacity to think critically about one's attachment to the nation and to express dissent and moral outrage when a set of principles or values derived from distinctive political traditions of the nation have been undermined. In contrast, loyal patriotism often manifests in blind obedience and unconditional support for the government in authority. Many scholars condemn loyal patriotism; but recommend critical patriotism as compatible with democratic citizenship education.

The goal of democratic citizenship education is the development of students who are committed to democratic principles – fairness, equity, freedom, and justice (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). This entails that the student is not merely educated in the sense of classical “good citizenship” in which they are patriotic, loyal and obedient to the state, but they are also educated to be critics of the state, able and willing to participate in its improvement. Democratic citizenship education helps students acquire the knowledge and skills needed for open discussions, and gives them opportunities to participate politically in the construction of the nation. Such active participation requires students to judge the credibility of various truth claims and to exercise independent judgement on political and social issues. Students are taught to “be skilled critics of the society rather than unquestioning citizen-soldiers” (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p. 11), to see social problems from the broadest perspectives, and “to seek rational and political, as opposed to arbitrary and military, solutions to problems” (p. 12). Notwithstanding that schools also want to nurture patriots, democratic citizenship education therefore requires teachers to “achieve both conservation and reform at one and the same time” (p. 15). In other words, teachers have to reconcile the patriot and critic within their students, developing affections for the nation and critical capabilities simultaneously.

Western perspectives dominate literature on critical patriotism. Even the few articles written for non-Western contexts hold their teachers accountable to concepts derived from Western tradition (Leung, 2004). Imposing a well-established theory on developing inquiry may provide a neat framework for one's study, but it may also prematurely shut down avenues of meaningful questioning or prevent one from seeing events and relationships that do not fit the theory (Schram, 2006). One gap we have observed in the literature on critical patriotism is the lack of empirical studies of its enactment in classrooms, with a sensitivity to multi-layered contexts. Most studies are either theoretical or apply theory rigidly without carefully considering contexts. Hence, in this study we re-define “critical patriotism” with a Singapore flavour, by exploring teachers' practices, their beliefs and backgrounds, the type of school they teach in, and the political culture of the country. With regards to the political system in Singapore, contrary to what many think, Singapore practises democracy and it is an ideal stated in the National Pledge.

The goal of this article is to explore how two teachers from a secondary school in Singapore negotiated the tensions between patriotism and critical thinking through exploring their conceptions on critical patriotism, and how they enact it in the classroom. These two teachers were specially chosen because they were among the rare few who not only articulated a vision for critical patriotism but also adopted pedagogies consistent with their educational ideals. This article answers these questions: What does critical patriotism look like in a Singaporean classroom? What are some tensions facing teachers as they pursue critical patriotism in their Social Studies lessons?

Literature review

Epistemological tradition of “critical”

Before describing the features of critical patriotism, we first discuss the epistemological roots of the term “critical” that should go with “patriotism” in “critical patriotism”. Some scholars have argued that critical patriotism is an oxymoron and not realistically possible to achieve. Indeed, there appears to be an incompatibility between the logic of criticality and the subjectivity of patriotism. This tension is also experienced in practice when teachers struggle to integrate the affective and cognitive missions of citizenship education (Leung, 2003).

Inherent incompatibility

Critical patriotism is an oxymoron to those who associate good thinking with logical thinking (Walters, 1994). They argue that critical thinking, defined by the principles of objectivity, abstraction, and universality, is antagonistic to the subjective, concrete, and particular nature of patriotism. Good thinking in the traditional sense demands that the thinker adopts an “impersonal” relationship to the topic at hand, through the suspension of “theoretical and normative presuppositions” and “affective responses”, in order to take an objective stance (p. 7). It requires fair-mindedness and impartiality, qualities indispensable for clear analysis. This presupposes that good thinkers stress “objective reality”, yet it is debatable whether such a thing as objective reality exists in social life. Stemming from this worldview, Hand (2011) argues that patriotic attachment obstructs citizens from “the discharge of their duties by clouding their judgment about what they ought to do” (p. 341). He claims that patriotism impedes people’s civic and political judgments, hindering them from assessing political representative, institutions and policies “rationally and objectively” (p. 341). This view is shared by some teachers in Hong Kong who believed that a subject like politics, requiring critique and analysis, is unable to cultivate patriotism, in any case, it will more likely erode it (Yuen & Byram, 2007). Walters (1994) however argues for a radical rethinking of what it means to be a good thinker: a good thinker could well be analytical yet creative, rigorous yet flexible, critical yet committed. A good thinker could well be a patriot.

Types of “critical” thinking

Typically, citizenship educators use the word “critical” in two contexts: critical thinking and critical pedagogies (Johnson & Morris, 2010). While the two terms have areas of intersection as both involve skills of reasoning and dialogue and discovery of new knowledge, they are different as critical thinking is focused on the abstract and individual and is context-neutral (“objective”); whereas critical pedagogy is focused on the concrete and collective and is context-driven (“subjective”). The “critical” that is being used in this article is more aligned with the “critical” in “critical pedagogy” and is more often associated with social advocacy and justice than an application of logical steps to attain an objective answer. From this view, the reason why some scholars reject the possibility of “critical patriotism” could stem from them using “critical” in the sense of “critical thinking” of an individual. The type of thinking required in democratic citizenship education is more often subjective, with many individuals contributing their “complex set of presuppositions and commitments” to the discussion (Walters, 1994, p. 14). In this case, subjectivity is inevitable, enriches thinking, and is reflective of what actually happens in society.

Besides the two types of “critical thinking” mentioned, critical thinking can also be a resistance to state hegemony. In his study on critical patriotism, Fairbrother (2003b) described critical thinking as a form of resistance at the individual level, in the minds, thoughts, attitudes, and dispositions of some Hong Kong and Chinese university students against the indoctrinating character of political education.

Key features of critical patriotism

We have earlier established that patriotism is an “action oriented” concept, and it entails active participation in the political life of one’s country. We also clarified the epistemological roots of “critical” in “critical patriotism”. We proceed to describe critical patriotism.

Salient in critical patriotism is the notion of social justice and the idea of critique of and dissent against policies that are deemed unhelpful to the nation. Notably, critical patriotism involves a commitment to the nation’s ultimate welfare and to universal ideals rather than to national policy or course of action taken by the government (Staub, 2003). This means the critical patriot is willing to go against prevailing norms and stand up to authorities, should such counter-actions mean a greater benefit to his country and countrymen. This feature of critical patriotism is compatible with democratic citizenship education, emphasizing the values of social justice that democracy entails, such as fairness, equity, freedom, and justice (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). This involves the willingness and capacity to deviate from the group’s position and oppose governmental policies and actions that undermine the democratic ideals that guard the welfare of the nation. In other words, it emphasizes social criticism, and calls for citizens to

engage in thoughtful and critical analysis of their beliefs, and recognize the complexity of public issues and opinions (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). It also involves understanding that the state represented by policies, practices, and institutions are imperfect and have to change with the times and the “willingness by citizens to engage in corrective actions is essential” (Staub, 2003, p. 498).

The willingness to critique and dissent against policies is incomplete without the intellectual capacity to do so. The second feature of critical patriotism, the use of critical thinking in decision-making, also aligns with democratic citizenship education, which develops in students “intellectual prowess and self-discipline” to make decisions on controversial issues (Ochoa-Becker, 2007, p. 124). In democratic citizenship education, students appraise the validity of truth claims made by politicians, journalists, and other citizens, and make intelligent and defensible decisions related to public policy and action. Similarly, critical patriotism requires citizens to be informed individuals who have gone through the necessary deliberation process before they take corrective actions (Staub, 2003). Being informed means that students have access to varied sources and counterclaims. The more knowledge they have on an issue, the more likely they are to identify thoughtful and well-grounded alternatives. Next, they should be able to analyse the credibility of sources and critically appraise evidence, only concluding after a period of intellectual wrestling and suspension of judgement (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). This capacity requires having “at least minimal information about the true nature of events” and “knowledge of how information tends to be biased in one’s group or influenced by its culture and political process” (Staub, 2003, pp. 505–506).

The context of Singapore

Singapore is a small island-nation in Southeast Asia with a diverse population consisting of Chinese, Malays, Indians, and other racial groups. As with many newly independent countries in Africa and Asia, a single political party, the Peoples’ Action Party (PAP) has been dominating the political scene in Singapore since the nation’s independence in 1965. The centralist government maintains a high level of political legitimacy and ideological consensus among the citizenry, owing to the impressive economic growth of the nation over the past five decades (Chua, 1995). The rapid development of the nation came with trade-offs, such as periodic suspension of democratic norms and processes. Hence, democracy in Singapore has been described as “non-liberal communitarian democracy” (Chua, 1995, pp. 184–202).

In addition, the PAP subscribes to an elitist ideology (K. L. Ho, 2003), in which “government is the business of governors” and the task of governing is left in the hands of a small group of representatives who make difficult decisions on behalf of the masses; the role of the masses is to “express an overall judgment on this performance when the politicians episodically present themselves for election” (Heater, 1990, p. 215). Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described the elite in society as “the core group of people who occupy key positions of power and influence, and set the direction for the society and country” (H. L. Lee, 2005). Underlying an elitist ideology is the assumption that the general public lacks the political skills – experience, resources, and information – to enable meaningful participation in decision-making (K. L. Ho, 2003). These conditions and assumptions suppressed political participation in Singapore for many years.

This has, however, been changing since the turn of the century, as Singapore undergoes profound economic and socio-political changes, resulting in a different political landscape, known as the “new normal” (Low & Vadaketh, 2014, p. 1). These changes were facilitated by transitions in leadership, with the new political leadership “more inclined to foster consensus building than quick-fix authoritarian procedures” (Chua, 1992, p. 93). The clearest incident that demonstrates this “new normal” in politics was the 2011 General Election (GE 2011) whereby the PAP only managed to win 60.1% of the popular vote, down by 15% compared to 10 years before. This reflected a new generation of voters who were no longer satisfied with high standards of living, but also wanted more political involvement. The younger generation of electorate is now more politically informed, discerning, and increasingly active (Ong, 2011). This changing social and political context opened more spaces for critical patriotism in Singapore.

Social Studies in Singapore

Against this backdrop of a changing political culture, Social Studies was introduced in 2001, as a vehicle for National Education, the form that citizenship education takes in Singapore (Sim & Print, 2005). Social Studies aims at developing well-informed and responsible citizens with a sense of national identity and a global perspective (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board [SEAB], 2013). The major themes in the syllabus include good governance, sustaining economic development, and nation bonding. Social Studies is a required course occupying one-and-a-half to two hours per week of class time for students of ages 15–17 years old at the upper secondary level and is examinable at the national examinations – the GCE “O” and “N” Levels.

In Singapore, Social Studies is a differentiated citizenship curriculum to develop participation in the national project. L.-C. Ho (2012) found that the Social Studies curriculum formally allocates students into three distinct citizenship roles: (1) elite leaders: consisting of the students from the Integrated Programme (IP); (2) mid-level executives: consisting of students from the Express (E) and Normal Academic (NA) streams and (3) local “heartlander” followers: consisting of students from the Normal Technical (NT) stream. As of 2014, 18 out of 161 secondary schools offer the IP, an integrated secondary and junior college programme for high ability students. These schools will be called “elite schools” in this article, while the other schools offering the E, NA, and NT programmes, and attended by most of the population, will be called “mainstream schools”. In general, L.-C. Ho (2012) found that the Social Studies curriculum for each track was designed to achieve different educational goals. The elite school curriculum develops values like advocacy as well as political and civic consciousness, and aims at developing future leaders who can critically analyse and interpret social issues. In contrast, the mainstream curriculum emphasizes values like responsibility and integrity, and aims to build a core group of workers who might be aware of social and political issues, but not inclined to inquire about them.

Methodology

We use the qualitative instrumental case study to study critical patriotism in teachers. An interpretive case study involves intensive, long-term participation in the field, careful recording of field notes, and analytic reflection using direct quotes from interviews, detailed description, and narrative vignettes (Erickson, 1986). Such fieldwork research on teaching makes the “familiar” strange and interesting and problematizes what is often taken for granted (Erickson, 1986).

We purposefully chose Kopsia Girls’ School as the research site to observe critical patriotism. Kopsia offers the IP, a six-year programme, allowing students to bypass the “O” Level examinations to proceed directly to the “A” Levels. Hence, curriculum time for examination preparation is used for broader and deeper learning experiences, such as providing more opportunities for students to discuss controversial issues and to develop the Singaporean identity and commitment to their fellow citizens (Shanmugaratnam, 2002). The student profile of Kopsia is unique, consisting of high ability learners who attained above average scores in languages, mathematics, and sciences at the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). Indeed, as described by L.-C. Ho (2012), the Social Studies curriculum in Kopsia resembles a university level social sciences course whereby concepts like common space and social contract are examined and there is little requirement to adhere to the prescribed national curriculum.

Subsequently, we decided to focus on two Social Studies teachers who had more than 10 years of teaching experience because they showed exceptional abilities to engage their students critically and agreed to participate in this study. In their lessons, they encouraged critical thinking through innovative pedagogies like projects and debates, in contrast to the teachers who relied on traditional approaches, such as drill-and-practice and model answers. The scope of this article prevents the elaboration of the traditional methods of teaching, but one could refer to the work of Baildon and Sim (2009) to better understand the constraints typically faced by Social Studies teachers in Singapore. Hence, Kopsia Girls’ School and the two participants were purposefully selected to yield “information-rich cases” on critical patriotism (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

The research was conducted over a year. In 2013, we obtained three sources of information from each teacher: two hour-long semi-structured interviews, six hour-long lesson observations, and informal interviews before and after each lesson. In line with the case study approach, we first described each teacher as a unique entity, and then compared the patterns that emerged across the two cases. Analysis was data-driven and inductive, using the constant comparative method. The raw data, including field notes and interview transcripts, were coded with the use of NVIVO 10. The codes were then refined and grouped into categories. Descriptions were then written based on these codes and categories. Methodological triangulation of the data from multiple sources, together with checking back with the participants, maintained the credibility of the findings (Stake, 1995).

Findings

In this section, we present Farah's case first, followed by Victor's. Note that the teaching vignettes present only a snapshot of the Social Studies programme in Kopsia. They reveal more about the teachers' style and personality, than the total experience of the students. Kopsia's Social Studies programme also encompasses assessment, cohort-wide forum discussions, and community engagement projects.

Case study of Farah

Farah's profile

Farah is in her early-40s and of Malay-Muslim descent. Her experience as an educator spanned 19 years, having taught 11 years in mainstream schools, served three years as a curriculum planner at the Ministry of Education and is currently in her fifth year at Kopsia. She majored in History and Geography at the university. She has a deep interest in political studies and reads widely. At the time of the interview, she was reading "Nation States and Nationalisms" by Siniša Malešević and "Singapore in the Malay World" by Lily Zubaidah. She shared that her switch from the mainstream schools to Kopsia was a significant turning point for her as a Social Studies educator, as it was in Kopsia that she learnt to be more critical and questioning. It was as if she experienced a conversion experience, from one who used to be a "mouthpiece" of the government, to one who is now a "watchdog" of the government.

Farah's understanding of patriotism

Farah understands patriotism to encompass both the loyal and the critical citizen. She defines a patriot as a "responsive" and "responsible" citizen, who has a "sense of obligation" and "sense of belonging" but is also "critically aware of the environment" and contributes actively to its "construction". The patriot should take an active role as a "social advocate" and a "catalyst for change" to confront inequitable and undemocratic social structures. She also prioritizes the principle of "noblesse oblige" which is the "responsibility" and "obligation" of those who "are at the top" to "give back" to community. She often reminds her students that they are "not in any ordinary school" but in the "top girls school" and they should not "serve their own interests" but to "serve everybody else, especially the lesser fortunate ones". In her opinion, education for patriotism in Singapore has been too "top directed" and students have been told too much what and how to think; lacking are bottom up opportunities or platforms for students to think on their own and be "critical of the policies and the laws" that they live with. However, Farah concedes that this liberty to critique has its limits and "at the end of the day" she wants her students to internalize the national values and to be "better Singaporeans".

Farah's enactment of critical patriotism in Social Studies

In line with Farah's perceptions of a lack of platforms for students to participate in the political process, she compensates by emphasizing critique of government principles and policies, through debates and group discussions. Her instruction usually involves helping students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequalities.

Farah addresses issues of social justice and equity by playing the devil's advocate and asking thought-provoking questions. During one of her lessons, she problematized the principle of meritocracy, pointing out the difference between equality and equity. Meritocracy or the provision of equal opportunity to citizens according to effort and ability, regardless of race, language or religion, is an important national principle. Farah guides students to question how it has been implemented in Singapore. In one lesson, she illustrated to her students that while all 12-year-old Singaporean children have equal opportunities to sit for the PSLE, the children from higher socio-economic status families who come better prepared, being "endowed" financially, have a higher chance of excelling than children from lower socio-economic status families. She asked her class, many of whom were from privileged backgrounds, "How many of you here had piano lesson when you were young? Violin lessons? ... Okay, see these hands that are coming up. I cannot ask that same question in a mainstream school. I've tried that and the response was almost negligible. We are talking here about a thing called cultural capital." The class was generally passive, quiet and slow to answer Farah's questions. Sensing this, Farah then asked the students to break into groups to discuss national policies or principles that are in need of revision. She gave them instructions to consider the aims and objectives of a policy, their stakeholders and competing interests, the strengths of the policy, and their gaps and flaws. Through this task, Farah challenged her students to consider the consequences of policy for different subgroups in society. By assigning students the task of revising policies, she helps them understand that policies require change as socio-political conditions changes (Staub, 2003).

In another lesson, Farah problematizes a government policy – The Parenthood Priority Scheme, a scheme which gives married couples priority to public housing. The government has instituted many similar policies geared towards reversing Singapore's declining total fertility rate. The need for couples to first be engaged before having access to subsidized housing has become common and accepted knowledge that few question it. A joke even exists among Singaporeans that a man proposes by buying a flat. Farah challenged this "very Singaporean mentality" which links public housing to procreation and familyhood. She asked her students, "Do you think this concept needs to be challenged? While it may have been valid in the 1970s and 1980s where people were more traditional in their views about family life, now it's a new millennium and Singaporeans are more progressive in their thinking. We are talking about the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBTs) community today. Do you think that the notion of public housing tied to procreation is still valid? Will many people fall through the cracks?" She asked her students to consider which people groups are disadvantaged by this policy and then asks them to, in groups, write a letter to the press or relevant authority as a form of social action, to address an issue of their choice. Farah's students chose to critique policies such as the ban of chewing gum in Singapore and the government's decision to demolish the Bukit Brown cemetery with heritage value in Singapore to build an expressway. At times, however, Farah stops short of fully empowering her students when she reminds them that "governance is never the easiest thing in the world" and that the Singapore government is not populist, but "is known to make very pragmatic decisions".

Farah's lessons were usually teacher-dominated. She confessed that having taught for many years in an education system in which the teacher is the epistemic authority, at times she felt uneasy and had to consciously "hold back" to allow students room for discussion. To prevent dominating classroom discussions, she usually divides her class into discussion groups of four or five, and visits each one to give feedback.

Case Study of Victor

Victor's profile

Victor is in his mid-40s and of Chinese descent. He has been an educator for the past 15 years, spending 10 years in mainstream schools before coming to Kopsia where he has since taught for five years. Victor's undergraduate degree was in Sociology and Political Science. Before teaching, Victor worked in the private and government sectors, and pursued a Masters in Southeast Asian Studies. Victor has a high interest in current affairs and frequently began his lessons discussing the latest news such as

Boston marathon bomb attacks in April 2013 and the Malaysian Election in May 2013 with students. His personal philosophy as a teacher was to welcome students to disagree with him as he believes in humility and accepting the ideas of others. Unlike Farah, Victor shared that he taught in a similar manner in mainstream schools, except in a more “toned-down” manner according to the students’ intellectual and emotional capacities.

Victor’s understanding of patriotism

Like Farah, Victor’s understanding of patriotism encompasses the patriot and the critic. He understands patriotism as “a role and a privilege”. His word choice reveals both a “functional” and an affective component to his understanding. A role implied responsibilities toward the nation; while a privilege implied a sense of pride of being a citizen. He said a patriot should not be “subservient” but needs to be a “participant”. Victor values the ability to think and question and the disposition “to see a bigger picture and to understand why certain things are done in certain ways”. To develop empathy for others from less privileged backgrounds, he uses a lot of “social narratives” or the “telling of stories” to bring students “into a world which they might not be cognisant of”. Like Farah, he regularly reminds his students that they are “primed for great things... because of their ability to see things and do things” and hence they must be ready to help others who cannot help themselves. Victor also thinks that citizenship education in Singapore has been too top-directed and that “we are force feeding a little bit too much”. He argued that patriotism has to “strike the heart” and cannot be nurtured by “pushing it down” people.

Victor’s enactment of critical patriotism in Social Studies

In line with the importance Victor places on engaging not only the minds, but also the hearts of his students, he frequently uses multimedia on current issues to help students more easily identify with issues and engage their emotions. He builds up his lessons upon students’ questions and answers, while encouraging those with differing views to speak up.

Victor developed a socio-political or critical consciousness in his students by toggling between the different perspectives, helping students to understand the incongruities between political messages from the government and alternative messages from other groups in society. To illustrate, in one of his lessons, Victor projected the website of an alternative news site reporting an event held at the Speaker’s Corner at Hong Lim Park, the only place in Singapore where citizens are allowed to hold public protests. In this particular protest, Singaporeans had gathered concerning the then newly released Population White Paper which projected a 6.9 million population, of which half are foreigners, by 2030 (National Population and Talent Division, 2013). The White Paper triggered an uproar among citizens who were against bringing in more foreigners to counteract the ageing population in Singapore. Victor pointed to photographs of protestors holding posters on the website. One of the posters showed: “Singapore need public transport not world class ‘transport’”, revealing this protestor’s unhappiness over the influx of foreigners in the country. Another poster displayed: “It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong”, revealing this protestor’s distrust of the government. The last poster showed: “What do you call natives of this wealthy island? *Singapooreans*”, revealing another protestor’s concern over the widening income gap. Thus, Victor exposed his students to the issues the common Singaporeans are typically dissatisfied about. Thereafter, he “balances” it out by asking his students to deal with these complaints maturely and rationally, reminding them not to “believe everything they say” but to ask “why are they saying things like that”. More tellingly, sensing that he had offered too many dissenting views, he qualified,

...I’m lucky to be a Singaporean... The government really has our interest at heart. A lot of policies that come across as being harsh turn out to be good for the people. I accepted this doctrine as I was growing up and I still believe it. The best compliment I receive when somebody from another country finds out that I am from Singapore is, ‘the government works’.

Victor’s balanced approach to dealing with issues was also seen in how he handled the topic on taxation. By means of a concept map, a technique Victor uses in almost every lesson to help students see relationships between concepts, he explored the viewpoints of the government, the rich, and the

poor. He began by sharing the government's rationale for instituting the Government Service Tax (GST) which is a consumption tax, rather than relying more on the personal income tax, in order to reduce taxation on the rich and encourage them to make more investments to spur economic growth and hence benefit all in the society, including the poor. Next, he shared from the poor's perspective that their income has not been increasing as much and they "do not get life's goodies. In fact, they get very frustrated when they see others driving Ferraris down the street and they are the ones sweeping the floor". He then elaborated on "redistribution economics" and how "money taken from the rich is given back to the poor" through both indirect means such as the maintenance of public infrastructure and direct means such as conservancy rebates and GST credits. He reminded his students to be discerning in analysing the government's policies, rather than uncritically accepting or rejecting them, "You have 5 million people depending on you. What are you going to have to do? You have to say, 'Fine, 60% is better than the 40% that is going to suffer. So let's do the 60%." Victor's conservatism is seen in what he did not say. For example, he missed opportunities to critique this common refrain by the Singapore government that "the best way to help the poor is help the rich" but simply explained the government's rationale to his students (Low, 2014, p. 21).

In contrast to Farah, Victor engaged his students' opinions more at the class level than at the group level. On many occasions, students did have a point of view which they wanted to share. Victor facilitated these discussions like a skilled music conductor, at times he asked certain students to wait when their views raised at a later stage would flow better, and then encouraged other students to speak up when it helped moved the discussion forward.

Discussion

The two teachers believed that the patriot should play an active and political role in society (Primoratz, 2002). Their love for the nation, rather than impeding them from critiquing it, as put forth by Hand (2011), drove them all the more to critique it. Their love for the nation was not abstract but a concrete concern for the welfare of specific citizens in the nation (Staub, 2003, p. 507). Naturally, this understanding of patriotism led them to discuss topics on social justice and inequality to help students empathize with disadvantaged groups in society and to consider how policies can be revised for their benefit.

Generally, Farah and Victor enacted their lessons in line with the key features of critical patriotism (Staub, 2003), and in a manner compatible with democratic citizenship education (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Adopting elements of critical pedagogies, both teachers unearthed weaknesses in the current political system and opened students' eyes to social divisions such as income inequality and other forms of disparities and polarizations in the society (Johnson & Morris, 2010). They urged students to consider the consequences of policies and practices on minority groups (Staub, 2003). Besides allowing students to deviate from the government's stand on issues and encouraging social criticism, the teachers also focused on students' intellectual development. They avoided indoctrinating students with shaky truths or painting over problems that plague society but helped them to make intelligent political judgements related to controversial issues in the society (Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p. 5). They did so through questioning official knowledge and creating a classroom environment where ambiguity was embraced. Thus, students were given opportunities to grapple with contrasting viewpoints and achieve the best answer, as opposed to the right answer. A comparison with literature on this topic suggests that this critical approach practised by the two teachers is common in elite schools, but rare in mainstream schools (L.-C. Ho, Alviar-Martin, & Leviste, 2014).

However, the teachers differed in their teaching methods and emphases. Farah mainly engaged her students on an intellectual level through strength of argument and logic, akin to what Walters (1994) described as traditional "good thinking"; whereas Victor engaged his students also on an emotional level, described as an inclusive form of critical thinking (p. 1). Though their methods differed, both integrated elements of critical pedagogies into their lessons (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Victor was, however, clearly more conservative than Farah. He consistently balanced out critical perspectives with emotional ones. A possible reason for this could be that Victor, being a member of the Chinese majority, may be more

complacent about addressing social inequalities; whereas Farah, who is a member of the minority group could be more aware of her rights. A study by Pang and Gibson (2001) suggested that teachers from underrepresented groups are better positioned to address the gap between the ideal of justice and the reality of injustice, because of their emotional and experiential proximity to the issues addressed. This finding that the teachers have found ways to discuss controversies and question the status quo is significant. Given that these teachers have been socialized like most other teachers in Singapore, their ability to challenge is not something to be taken lightly (Baillon & Sim, 2009).

Elite school teachers do not have the same constraints as mainstream school teachers. There is no pressure to prepare students for the "O" Level examinations, nor are there limits to the topics they can cover (Baillon & Sim, 2009). However, both teachers were as professional as teachers of national schools, acting as civil servants who are expected to follow national guidelines and serve the nation's needs (Baillon & Sim, 2009). This is seen in the tension observed when these teachers enacted critical patriotism. For example, while the teachers discussed different perspectives, they avoided suggesting that the government could have taken wrong steps. Instead, they explained the government's point of view as if students should also accept the "logic" of the government's decisions. Similar to L.-C. Ho's (2012) finding that communitarian values are integral in the elite schools' Social Studies curriculum, similar to mainstream schools, the two teachers taught by these values. They sought to bring students to a consensus through a "willingness to compromise" (Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Arts [MICA], 1990, p. 120). Yet, the responsibility of educating the brightest minds in Singapore led them to at times breach these values. Evident in the interviews, the teachers were aware that they were raising the next generation of possible "elite leaders" of the country (L.-C. Ho, 2012) who should not be blind to gaps in policies and laws but be empowered to change them (p. 410). As Victor said, "In the interest of our nation, we prepare our students to be more discerning, as opposed to more obedient."

Following this, teachers also nurtured compassion in their critical students, similar to the concept of care put forth by Staub (2003). For example, Farah and Victor addressed the elite students' reputation of being arrogant and reminded them to be humble and to put the interests of others above their own. While the teachers did not use the term "social justice", their teaching approaches, and rationale for them, reflected an inclination towards it (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). The teachers often stressed that a patriot should care for other citizens, especially the weaker ones. Farah often preaches the idea of "noblesse oblige", reminding her students to use their future positions of authority to serve those of lower ranks. Ironically, while the teachers were trying to mitigate the consequences of an elite education system, such as apathy to the disadvantaged in society, by reinforcing that students in Kopsia were special and different, they were unwittingly perpetuating social inequality in society. However, one should not belittle the teachers' efforts instilling a critical mind in their students, for it is often the upper- and middle-class citizens who challenge the PAP's stories and ideologies (Low & Vadaketh, 2014, p. 5). And these students may very well grow up to do so.

Critical patriotism, derived from liberal political tradition in Western political philosophy, hints of anti-authoritarian (Westheimer, 2009). For societies like Singapore whose citizens are willing to suspend some of their individual rights for the common good (Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Arts [MICA], 1990), critical patriotism may be expressed in a different way. Indeed, Farah had shared during an interview that she often reminds her students to be respectful of authority even if they are angry with certain policies. Some scholars have described the relationship between the state and individual in different political systems to be different (Chua, 1992; W. O. Lee, 2004). In Western liberalism, the restricted role of the state and the enlarged role of the individual assumes a relationship of contestation (Chua, 1992). In Singapore, where the reverse is true and the state's role is considerably larger than the individual's, there is a relationship of consensus (Chua, 1992). Unlike Western critical patriotism, where the role of the individual is to guard and exert their rights and wrest power from the state, Singaporean critical patriotism involves the individual giving up certain rights and to entrust the government to make certain decisions in favour of the common good. Our findings suggest that in a society like Singapore, critical patriotism may not pan out in the same confrontational manner as in Western liberal societies, where intelligent individuals defy authority to bring about emancipation

to the oppressed. Conversely, critical patriotism is expressed through individuals who negotiate with authority to bring about changes in society. Indeed, in Singapore, leaders are often seen as honourable individuals who in exchange for the trust and respect of the population, make the right decisions for them (The White Paper, 1991). The teachers did not challenge the existing political process or powers with the intention of overthrowing it, but instead challenge by working within the system to change it. Sensitive to the socio-political context in Singapore, the teachers taught students how to meaningfully yet realistically change the existing structures and processes. In other words, they wisely “picked their battles”, instead of taking an approach that was too radical. They knew that change proceeded more gradually in Singapore than in other more liberal contexts.

A difference between critical patriotism and its variant constructive patriotism that is not immediately obvious is that critical patriotism emphasizes the need for the oppressed groups or people aligned to the oppressed groups to stand up to authority; whereas constructive patriotism emphasizes the need for the bystander group (or people who are not immediately the victims of policy) to respect the rights and welfare of all people, including the oppressed group and to speak up for them (Staub, 2003). This difference in emphasis was observed in our teachers. The teachers, quite unlike the special group of students in Fairbrother’s (2003a) study, did not perceive a state hegemony that needed to be resisted. Instead, they saw their role as people of conscience who kept the government in check and prevented the abuse of authority. Indeed constructive patriotism involves commitment to one’s group and social responsibility (Staub, 2003, p. 509), what critics argue are absent in liberal society (Chua, 1992). What has been observed in our teachers was more akin to constructive patriotism than critical patriotism. Farah and Victor were nurturing patriots with a conscience for fairness and justice.

Conclusion

In Singapore, the newly forged ideological consensus, that of a communitarian ideology, privileges collective welfare over individual rights. Singaporeans in general hold on to values such as placing the interest of the society ahead of individual interests and striving for consensus on a course of action, instead of confrontation. These values guide teachers to adopt what appears to be more like constructive patriotism, rather than critical patriotism. Critical patriotism is a popular concept to study patriotism in the classroom. However, this study has shown that for contexts like Singapore and possibly other non-Western nations, critical patriotism may not be the best yardstick to measure teachers’ understandings and behaviours, as teachers, owing to the type of society they belong to, may rightly not fit the mould. In Singapore, critical patriotism is enacted with a different spirit: one favouring consensus as opposed to confrontation, one favouring gradual change over radical change.

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