

Anatomy of a Riot: Enquiring into the Civil Unrests in our Past A Seminar by Educators and Students

*Presented by Singapore Heritage Society & Singapore Association for Social Studies Education
Saturday, 13 September 2014, 9 am-2.30 pm,
Venue: Seminar Room, Level 2, National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road, S(178897)*

Every year, 21 July has been commemorated as Racial Harmony Day in Singapore. However, how many of us know that it memorializes the 1964 riots, which claimed over 400 casualties? This year marks its 50th anniversary. It is popularly known as “the *race* riots” and epitomised as the state of race relations in Singapore. 50 years is a timely juncture to reexamine what we know about the event, as well as other episodes of civil unrest that make of up our collective history.

A collective enquiry into the episodes of civil unrest in Singapore history will help citizens construct a renewed understanding of their significance in providing shared experiences and developing a national identity. This seminar will also highlight the different perspectives and opinions educators and students have of Singapore history.

The seminar is free but registration is required due to limited seating:

<http://anatomy-of-a-riot.eventbrite.sg>

Conveners

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Programme

0900 – 0930	REGISTRATION	
0930 – 1000	Dr Chua Ai Lin President, Singapore Heritage Society Asst/Prof Ho Li-Ching President, Singapore Association for Social Studies Education Assistant Professor Laavanya Kathiravelu Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University	Welcome Keynote Address

1000 – 1030	Panel 1: Symptoms <i>What are the different perspectives of a riot?</i> Chair: TBC	
1000 – 1030	Actors Drama Box	Senang – Reading of & discussion on monologues from the play about the 1963 riots on Pulau Senang
1030 – 1135	Panel 2: Pathology <i>How are riots explored in literary works?</i> Chair: TBC	
1030 – 1045	Megan Tham, Rachel Lee, Nicole Chan, Yan Rong and Joelle Chiang Yee Hui Raffles Girls' School (Secondary)	The Making of Riots in Post-War Singapore (1)
1045 – 1100	Pat Wong National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University	The Spectre of "Race Riots"
1100 – 1115	Mohamed Latiff Mohamed and Hoirull Amri Bin Tahiran ASAS 50	Retak Mencari Belah (<i>Cracks Looking to Cleave</i>)
1115 – 1135	QUESTION & ANSWER	
1135 – 1205	SUSTENANCE	
1205 – 1310	Panel 3: Prognosis and Diagnosis <i>What are the causes and consequences of a riot?</i> Chair: TBC	
1205 – 1220	Muhammad Nur Hakim National University of Singapore	The Driving Factors Behind a Riot and Lessons to be Learnt
1220 – 1235	Teo Chee Yan, Christie Soo, Koe Chua Jia Ying and Simone Ku Raffles Girls' School (Secondary)	The Making of Riots in Post-War Singapore (2)
1235 – 1250	Faustina Joyce Fernando, Jiang Zhifeng and Shawn Ho Cheng Ying Temasek Junior College	What's in a Riot? An Analysis of Two Incidents in Singapore's History
1250 – 1310	QUESTION & ANSWER	
1310 – 1400	Panel 4: Treatment <i>How are riots studied in school?</i> Chair: TBC	
1310 – 1325	Chan Joo Seng Ping Yi Secondary	Strategies for the Teaching and Learning of Civil Unrest/Riots
1325 – 1340	Carey Lai Zheng Hui and Justin Yip Jia En Victoria School	Where are our Communal Heritage Markers?
1340 – 1400	QUESTION & ANSWER	
1400 – 1430	DISCHARGE	

Abstracts

Panel 1: Symptoms – What are the different perspectives of a riot?

Actors, “Pulau Senang (Interactive Theatre)”

Drama Box

Pulau Senang was a prison settlement from 1960 to 1963. It housed an experiment to reform prisoners through hard labour. However a riot broke out in July 1963 resulting in the death of 4 prison officers, including the Superintendent in charge of the settlement Daniel Dutton.

This Theatre-in-Education project will explore the some of the possible cause for the riot through the voices of the detainees. The characters are created based on research as well as trial documentations, and through dramatic conventions, lead participants to imagine why an experiment that was well-meaning turned into a violent outcome.

Panel 2: Pathology – How are riots explored in literary works?

Megan Tham, Rachel Lee, Nicole Chan, Yan Rong and Joelle Chiang Yee Hui, “The Making of Riots in Post-War Singapore (1)”

Raffles’ Girls School (Secondary)

Megan Tham, Rachel Lee, Nicole Chan, Yan Rong and Joelle Chiang Yee Hui are Secondary 1 students at Raffles Girls’ School (Secondary).

Using *The Singapore Story* and history textbooks as a case study, these students will study how accounts of post-war riots have been constructed and presented to Singaporean students.

Pat Wong, “The Spectre of ‘Race Riots’”

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Dr Pat Wong teaches literature, creative writing and multicultural studies at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. She has authored a collection of short stories, *Going Home*.

Using Yen Chung’s novel *Clarence Plays The Numbers* and Rex Shelley’s novel *The Shrimp People* as take-off points, this presentation asks if civil unrest in the 1950s has lodged itself too implacably in our collective psyche as “race riots”. Could writers have merely used the riots as verisimilitude in recapturing a past? More significantly, could the spectre of “race riots” that continues to guard our “racial harmony” not be the cause of our current anxiety but instead the inheritance of the divisiveness of a society manifest through race, ethnicity, class and religion in the last years of our colonial past?

Mohamed Latiff Mohamed and Hoirull Amri Bin Tahiran, “Retak Mencari Belah” (*Cracks Looking to Cleave*)

ASAS 50

Mohamed Latiff Mohamed has served in the education service from 1968 to 2000. He is a prolific writer in the Malay language literary scene in the Nusantara. His national and regional accolades include S.E.A. Write Award (Thailand, 2002) and the Cultural Medallion (Singapore, 2013). Hoirull Amri Tahiran is a graduate of University Malaya and an acclaimed writer who has won many literary awards, the most recent of which is an Honourable Mention in the 2013 Golden Point Awards. Both men are stalwart members of ASAS 50 which is a literary association of Malay language writers founded in 1950 and still going strong today.

This session will discuss on issues mentioned in Latiff’s latest novel “Confrontation” (2013), a tale of pre-independence Singapore. It revolves around the simple lives of *kampung* (village) residents, with looming issues such as political upheaval, race riots, gang wards and the *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia. As a child during that era, Latiff will also share his insight on the 1964 and 1969 riots.

Panel 3: Prognosis and Diagnosis – What are the causes and consequences of a riot?

Muhammad Nur Hakim, “The Driving Factors Behind a Riot and Lessons to be Learnt”

National University of Singapore

Muhammad Nur Hakim is a Year 4 undergraduate at the National University of Singapore.

The main point which Muhammad Nur Hakim would like to present would be the root causes of a riot. Questions he will explore include: Is there a driving force behind every riot? Since riot is a form of civil disorder against authority mainly in large groups, could the main reason behind each riots be due prolonged suffering of an individual or group which have been kept silent all these while which resulted in the eruption of such riots.

We tend to generalize these individuals who orchestrate or groups involved in such riots as irrational, hooligans, rowdy and others but there has been evidence whereby it may not be the case.

In a span of a few years, we have seen several uprising/riots which have been occurring throughout middle east and some parts of the world. Moreover, with the rise of social media, there has been direct impact and correlation between the rises of such phenomenon. Based on all these information, how can Singapore learn and move forward to prepare ourselves to prevent such cases from happening again.

Singapore has been relatively free of riots ever since the 1960s but recently the Little India riots sparked off another debate about whether our country is well prepared to handle another form of riot as the consequences are quite severe. Moreover with the rise in globalisation and the influx of foreigners, Singapore is literally filled with people of different types of race and culture.

How can Singapore learn from its past events as well as happenings around the world and better prepare to prevent such events from happening again?

Teo Chee Yan, Christie Soo, Koe Chua Jia Ying and Simone Ku, “The Making of Riots in Post-War Singapore (2)”

Raffles Girls’ School (Secondary)

Teo Chee Yan, Christie Soo, Koe Chua Jia Ying and Simone Ku are Secondary 1 students at Raffles Girls’ School (Secondary).

Given that systems have elements that interact with each other to perform a function, these students will examine if this assumption applies to the causal factors of two case studies of dissimilar riots – the Maria Hertogh Riots and the Hock Lee Bus Riots. They will examine how and to what extent causal factors interacted in a similar manner to cause the outbreak of a riot.

Faustina Joyce Fernando, Jiang Zhifeng and Shawn Ho Cheng Ying, “What’s in a Riot? An Analysis of Two Incidents in Singapore’s History”

Temasek Junior College

Faustina Joyce Fernando, Jiang Zhifeng and Shawn Ho Cheng Ying are JC1 students from the Temasek Academy Unbound (TAU) Humanities Programme.

Introduction

We often accept that certain events in our past and present can be defined as riots. But what makes a riot? In their investigation of the various elements that make a riot, this group decided to look at two different events that have been termed as riots: the Hock Lee Bus Riots of 1955 and the Little India Riot of 2013. Through a temporally-sensitive approach (looking at what occurred before, during and after the event), they wish to assess if these incidents can be labelled as riots.

Basis of Comparison and Definition

In their initial investigation to find a definition for the term, the students came across French philosopher Alain Badiou’s work on riots. Badiou classifies various events as “immediate”, “latent” or “historical” riots, varying in terms of how the event started, the impact the event has, and how the event is framed by those with power to influence the perception of the event.

Firstly, a struggle for equality is in some sense the first significant determinant of a riot. When a group of people feel disempowered, helpless or neglected, seeds of resentment are sown, which may result in outbursts of emotion, and even violence. Through looking at the Hock Lee Bus Riots and the Little India Riots, they will question if there are elements of ideological intent underlying the actions of the rioters, or if the riots can be solely explained as spontaneous outbreaks of chaos.

The extent of the impact of the event is also critical in our understanding of the riot. In his classification of a riot, Badiou suggests that “historical riots” have a *long-lasting* impact on the *social fabric* as such riots significantly change the status quo that existed before the riots. Their primary observation of the events that unfolded after the Hock Lee Bus Riots and the Little India Riot suggests that little radical change occurred. However, they wish to go beyond Badiou’s definition to look at the extent of damages and disruption to the daily lives of people *during (and shortly following)* the event. In this way, they compare the immediate effects on the general population when both events were triggered and make a judgement if they both are indeed riots.

Finally, a significant determinant of what a riot is can be seen by the framing of an event as a riot after its occurrence by those in positions of power. Government and media, having broad and powerful influence over the general populace, can shape the perception of the event as a riot. They

question whether this picture was painted by these two bodies to shape the wider public's perceptions. Furthermore, they also recognise that not all in the wider population may consider these events to be riots and such differences in assessment will be considered in our final analysis.

Method of Investigation

Their method of investigation involves looking at scholarly articles, government reports and newspaper reports on the two riots to gather information on the source, impact and stakeholders involved in a riot.

Panel 4: Treatment – How are riots studied in school?

Melvin Chan Joo Seng and Samuel Wee, “Strategies for the Teaching and Learning of Civil Unrest/Riots”

Teachers
Ping Yi Secondary

Melvin and Samuel are teachers at Ping Yi Secondary School who oversee the History, Social Studies and National Education subjects and programmes.

As educators, Melvin and Samuel sincerely hope that their students will be able to dive into the complexity and comprehensiveness in the study of civil unrest and/or riots. In order to achieve this objective, it certainly boils down to the need for effective planning. Practitioners need to design lessons that match the intellectual, moral and emotional levels of the students and simultaneously ensure that the students are able to grasp hold onto the centrality of the event.

However, beyond the intense and thorough preparation by the educators, Ping Yi Secondary School--being the Centre of Excellence for Design Education-- believes that in order to achieve the most optimal level of understanding, the spirit of co-construction of knowledge [educators and students] needs to be presented.

Armed with this common understanding, in this seminar, participants can look forward to gaining insights into the methodology and implementation of the co-construction of knowledge in the teaching and learning of civil unrest/riots in classroom context through the sharing by the educators and the students. This ranges from the alignment of the teaching through using the 3Cs 'educational' framework to that of facilitating, acknowledging and empowering students' voices and ideas in displaying their own individualized form of understanding of civil unrest/riot.

Carey Lai Zheng Hui and Justin Yip Jia En, “Where are our Communal Heritage Markers?”

Victoria School

Carey Lai Zheng Hui and Justin Yip Jia En are Year 4 Victoria Cedar Alliance Integrated Programme students in Victoria School.

Most students in secondary would have studied about the 1964 Race Riots and the 1955 Maria Hertogh Riots. Having taken lower secondary History, most students will also be familiar with the 1954 Hock Lee Bus Riots. These are social and communal upheavals well-known to most students in learning about the need to preserve social cohesion and build community bonding. However how many of us know where these riots occurred? How can we present these historically significant

events in our nation building story from becoming a footnote of the political message they are used to impart? What will Singaporeans young and old remember of those days of rage?

It is timely on this 50th year of the 1964 Race Riots to revisit the exact locations of these riots and to refresh our collective memory of what it might have been like then and the place as it is now. They will start with an academic research of primary accounts to pinpoint the exact location where of these significant riots occurred. Next they will survey members of public and our friends to find out how many people actually know where these riots occurred. They will then visit places in Singapore which are marked by heritage plaques to sample public knowledge of these important events. They hope to find people more knowledgeable and aware of our tumultuous road to building a cohesive nation. In summary, their search for these riot locations is to propose that the NHB erect heritage plaques at these locations to convey the significance of social cohesion by place-marking the sites of these events.
