

Was May 13 naturally orchestrated?
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Perhaps it was. That would be the answer to the event that has become embalmed as a semiotic of racial conflict. Perhaps it wasn't planned. We need more interpretations of this event. If we ban more books on this, we are afraid of holding a mirror to our history and ourselves.

If we encourage our youth to explore the roots of the bloody conflict, we will have a better generation of thinkers. No more "Ketuanan Melayu, China, India," or whatsoever notions of self-aggrandisement. Just the simple act of opening the dialogues of peace.

But was May 13 planned? I have some thoughts.

It has to happen when and because the lid of authoritarianism was lifted. It was the British lid that brought some kind of stability to the lowest of the lower class of Chinese, Indians and Malays.

Root of the conflict

May 13 was naturally orchestrated as a rude conclusion to the violence brought about by the system of capitalist exploitation; a system that operated successfully at various levels. At the top of the pyramid is the British ruling class, next came the Malay aristocrats and feudal lords or the sultans who collaborated unwillingly with the British robber-barons, The Sultans played the role of obedient tax collectors and managers of the industrial age capitalist system of production, run on the ideology of Oriental Despotism. At the lowest rung, true to the feudal production system, are the indentured serfs and the local padi cultivators.

The traditional/hereditary rulers were successful in making sure the rakyat in each state produces cheaply and sell their labour at dirt-cheap price in order for the feudal production system to continue to survive - so that the system could continue to fill the coffers of the British Empire and at the same time help enrich the local chieftains.

May 13 was a symbolic breakdown of this system of oppression – a radical protest against a feudalist-turned-aristocrat-prime minister who served the British well, after being educated in the ways and mannerism of the colonialists. British ideology of imperialism and race superiority/white supremacy couched in "scientific language of Oxford and Cambridge and royal academies this and that" were taught to the natives who would be rulers, so that the panopticon-synopticon matrix of colonialism may prevail.

May 13 was not merely a natural occurrence in the matrix of international capitalist production but a phenomena that occurred in many a society that undergo the stages of economic growth on the one hand and the stages of political conflict on the other. Combining these two, the race riots is a semiotic – political economic phenomena of deconstruction of socio-economic illusioned-stability – a contradiction in the capitalist mode of production. It was a coup d'etat of society against its own internal notion of progress.

It has a similar fundamental character of the pre-Roosevelt Socialist revolt of the 1930s, Paris Uprising of the 1960s, Iranian Bloodless Revolt and Revolution of the late 1970s, the Los

Angeles Riots of the 1990s, the Jakarta burn-down of 1998, and the Paris Riots of 2005. In all these, the roots lie in the growth of the underclass and the problem of economic injustices and criminalisation brought about by neo-colonialist strategies of the ruling elite. Dehumanization is a fertile ground for inner repression.

May 13 may have the manifestation of a race conflict, but essentially it is one whose underlying force of mass anger lies in the clash of suppressed classes of varied ethnic origin.

Interpretation of the incident has merely been few. Tunku Abdul Rahman wrote about it to explain why it occurred and how he was part of the problem and solution in one. That was an official historical narrative – a government's view of what transpired. Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Malay Dilemma offered another interpretation from his point of view, explaining why it happened and what transpired between the Tunku and him. That was another official explanation.

But again, I reiterate, the more interpretations of the incident the better – so that we may have many explanations and find patterns in the meaning of these explanations. One must however be equipped in the understanding of the complex interplay between technologies of control, the economics of oppression, the sociology of mass anger, and cybernetics of conflicts, the archaeology of mass cultural repression, the genealogy of the feudal-oppressive-matrix, and the ideology and power/knowledge dimension of communicative and propagandistic systems – all these – in order to understand the "Butterfly Effect" of May 13 1969.

May 13, 2009?

Maybe it is too early to predict or too dangerous to be Nostradamus-ising or soothsaying or be playing the numerology game of anticipatory politics. Or maybe there will not be a race riots as we are now glued to our television sets and sucked into the abyss and black hole of the Internet, unable to plan for a revolution nor be ready for any natural occurrence ala May 13, 1969.

Maybe our brain cells have died a natural death out of decades of being fed with the "feel-good" ideology broadcast through radio and television. Or maybe we have been systematically programmed to amuse ourselves to death through a system of mass consciousness and euphoria that has been telling us to be happy with what we have, while the super rich and powerful amongst us continue to rob the nation in broad daylight through a conspiracy with outside forces in the form of investment arms and tentacles.

I still think that the bloody riots of May 13 was an orchestrated natural disaster – something our forefathers of Merdeka/Independence crafted as part of the cultural logic of late capitalism.

We can only know the answers through books we do not ban. Let us stop this pathetic policy of book banning.

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