During the final year of my PhD candidature, I was very fortunate in receiving a one month fellowship at the GEI to complement my research. This was an invaluable experience that enhanced the comparative component of my research and enriched me personally.

I use a mixed methods approach to research the nature of multiculturalism by investigating the representation of ethnic, religious and gender-based identities and the discourse surrounding issues of social justice and civic values. Civics education was introduced during the civil war by the Government of Sri Lanka as part of the education reform process which was targeted at increasing social cohesion. Prior research on post-independence textbooks in Sri Lanka indicated that stereotyping and bias towards Tamils (portraying the Tamil population as invaders), might have contributed to discrimination (Nissen and Stirrat 1991; Davies 2004).

Multicultural societies within liberal democracies struggle to maintain a balance between contributing to nation building (by adopting a unified national identity), while challenging the inequalities and identity-based discrimination that minorities often face. The narrative power of textbooks is often used to define the boundaries of citizenship as well as the rights of citizens. Civics education is used as a platform to promote standardised national values for social cohesion and nation-building (Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic 2000).

Therefore, the representation of multiculturalism in civics textbooks may reflect the dominant (context-specific) understanding of diversity, which in turn has implications for policy and practice in reality.

My theoretical framework dissects the representation of identity into three main categories:
1. The liberal approach (acknowledges differences and variations in identities).
2. The plural approach (highlights cultural similarities by focussing on how different cultures worked together to achieve common goals).
3. The critical approach (explicitly focuses on historical and current social injustices).

The framework also categorises the portrayal of social justice issues (such as the representation of war, human rights and social inequalities) as conservative or critical, while the discourse surrounding civic values is categorised as collectivist, individualist, normative and patriotic.

The aggregate findings of this research indicate that the civics textbooks of Sri Lanka promote national patriotism and a collective national identity (inclusive of minority identities). The discourse promotes collective civic values, stresses civic duties over civic rights and has a conservative approach to social justice, by failing to mention the historic and current social inequalities within Sri Lanka. The findings are complimentary to similar textbook research conducted in Asia, where civics education is used as a tool that promotes collectivist national cultural values such as obedience and respect for authority (Chan 2006; Cho and...
Park 2014), which in turn promotes a collective, unified national identity which is conducive towards nation-building (Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic 2000). However, post-colonial, warring and post-conflict nations pose particular challenges to forming a unified national identity, especially due to historic grievances as well as examples of current inequalities and discrimination against minorities. The results can be interpreted as paradoxical to the normative aims of multicultural education and the representation of minority rights in the humanities textbooks from poly-ethnic Western liberal democracies such as the UK, USA and Australia.

The extensive textbook collection at the GEI library enabled me to gather examples from civics, geography, social science and history textbooks of India, USA, Korea, Ireland, England, Hong Kong and Malaysia. I mainly gathered examples that illustrated the various approaches to representing identity, social justice issues and civic values. Internationally, I found several examples illustrating the critical approach to multiculturalism (which was largely absent in the Sri Lankan textbooks). The comparative component of my thesis will compare and contrast the findings of the Sri Lankan textbooks with context-specific international examples. The library also contained a large methodological collection, which I found extremely useful for improving my conceptual and analytical framework, as well as substantiating the theoretical component of my thesis.

I wish to thank the staff at the GEI (current and retired) who generously offered me their time and provided me with the most constructive feedback for my research. I also want to thank the library staff that went out of their way to help me.

REFERENCES