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Abstracts

Special issue: **Textbooks, Identity Politics and Lines of Conflict in South Asia**

Introduction. Textbooks, Identity Politics and Lines of Conflict in South Asia

Muhammad Ayaz Naseem and Georg Stöber

Deconstructing Militarism in Pakistani Textbooks

Muhammad Ayaz Naseem

This article examines the textual constitution of militarism and militaristic subjects in and by educational discourse in Pakistan. The article focuses on two subjects, namely social studies and Urdu, which are taught in the public school system of Pakistan. In order to examine the constitution of militaristic subjectivities, the author draws upon concepts of poststructuralist theory and critical discourse analysis. The author's main argument is that it is vital to first deconstruct the constructs of war from the minds of people in order for the constructs of peace to be instilled. There are many sites where such deconstruction needs to begin. One of the likely places for such an exercise is in textbooks, for these are sites in which war and violence are or can be constructed and instilled into the minds of future citizens. These are also natural sites for the construction of defenses of peace, for these spaces harbour agency to resist war and violence. This article examines textual and discursive data from Pakistan's educational discourse (mainly curricula and textbooks) to illustrate how war and militarism are constructed by these discourses via curricula and textbooks.

Identity, Politics, and Nation-building in History Textbooks in Bangladesh

Shreya Ghosh

If nations are 'imagined communities', as many theorists like to define them, then they need an ideology to create a cohesive imagination. In modern times, the project of writing 'history' has been an important instrument in the service of this ideological purpose of justifying and reproducing the modern nation-state as the predestined and legitimate container of collective consciousness. School textbooks, at least in South Asia, have long been among the most exploited media for the presentation of the history of the national collective. This essay is a study of school textbooks in Bangladesh. It looks at narrative representations of selected episodes from the past, both pre- and postindependence, in order to reflect on how they construct 'history'. The article relates textual images to issues of community relations and identity by identifying and sharing the ways in which the audience for nationalist discourse is created, nurtured, and secured via symbolic means.

Living in Harmony? ‘Casteism’, Communalism, and Regionalism in Indian Social Science Textbooks

Basabi Khan Banerjee and Georg Stöber

Three societal lines of conflict, ‘casteism’, communalism, and regionalism, are regarded as severe challenges in present-day India. This article discusses and compares differences between presentations of these lines of conflict in six textbook series for social sciences prepared by the Indian states of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, and by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New Delhi. The variations in perspective, scope, and approach are related to changing educational approaches and to specific discourses of identity politics, which may be explained in terms of the impact of different positions adopted by states and the union towards the issues, and in terms of the discursive dominance of specific sociopolitical viewpoints.

Where Are the Minorities? The Elusiveness of Multiculturalism and Positive Recognition in Sri Lankan History Textbooks

Anne Gaul

This article analyses the representation of Sri Lanka’s communities in history textbooks which are currently in use. Even before the end of the war in 2009, the education system was recognised as an instrument with which the country’s divided society could be rebuilt. The issues addressed in this article concern a period in which ambitious educational reforms are being implemented that envision textbooks as a tool for the creation of a new generation of citizens in a postwar society. It reveals that the general lack of recognition of minority communities, and the negative representations of the Tamil community in particular, which appear in these textbooks are not compatible with the proclaimed vision of a multicultural yet integrated society. Instead of fostering social cohesion, these textbooks may deepen ethnic divides and stereotypes, and therefore thwart reconciliation and long-term peace.