Introduction

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

Muhammad Ayaz Naseem and Georg Stöber

The concept of identity has evolved from an essentialist notion of a dominant group (which largely disregards the existence of plural identities or “patchwork identities”¹ and their contextuality)² into a notion that recognizes the discursive and fluid constitution of identities that are “constantly in the process of change and transformation.”³ Beyond academic debate about definitions, identity remains a relevant category in politics and society. Identity politics mobilize followers and supporters and may foster nation building. They are seldom unchallenged, for different discourses of identity often struggle for supremacy.

Identity politics as understood here generally entail an effort to construct a group consciousness among a set of people on the basis of multiple identity markers. Consequently, they foster group cohesion in opposition to others and mobilize members in favor of corporate activity. Identity politics thus reinforce selective inclusion, a heightened sense of belonging to a “we” group and a sense of unity among individual members, while also excluding nonmembers via a process of “othering”, which effectively defines the boundaries of the “they” group.⁴

Identity politics are employed as “means” by marginalized groups in the context of social movements.⁵ At the same time, they are employed by “dominant” groups on national, transnational, and supranational levels.⁶ While one side calls for (national) “unity” and integration, other groups demand a right to diversity. Likewise, the “dominant culture” tries to codify its own cultural, political, and ideological values in terms that are generally binding for minorities.⁷ Techniques of exclusion, inclusion, homogenization, hierarchization, and differentiation are used simultaneously, while the focus might shift from contesting external enemies to fighting internal sectarians.⁸

In the South Asian context, identity politics and the contestation of dominant values arise, for example, in the Dalit movement and among social or regional movements whose members feel dominated and marginalized by the politics of “the center”.⁹ However, not all of these movements¹⁰ were initiated by “subalterns”. Some movements were initiated by dominant groups, partly to counteract subaltern movements and to

maintain and perpetuate their hegemonic status. For example, organizations in India such as Sangh Parivar (Family of Organizations, [of the Hindu-nationalist movement]), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ([RSS] National Volunteer Organization), pursue their own identity politics and initiate campaigns or “movements”. However, these organizations and their identity politics are not always regarded as movements in themselves.¹¹

On an institutional level, political parties, which are sometimes the descendants of or related to social or political movements, pursue their own identity politics.¹² Here, mobilization, especially in the context of election campaigns, can even result in “riot politics”.¹³ The parties focus on specific (such as religious) divides, while minimizing the importance of other divides, such as caste or language, in order to broaden their potential electorate.¹⁴ Identity politics provide the ideological foundation of these divisions in society and in political praxis, and provide arguments with which members justify heinous acts such as arson and killings in the context of “riot politics”, “jihad”, and comparable outbreaks of violence.¹⁵

On the national and state levels, the dominant, official state discourses reflect the interests of parties that control the state apparatus (which might change frequently). Moreover, they reflect the persistent constitutional basis of the state, as well as central or regional perspectives, which require negotiation on levels beyond mere party lines. Therefore, they may deviate from a party’s political identity discourses.¹⁶

In the broader context of citizenship, state discourses not only include or exclude people. They also lend society a structure that underlies the struggle of the “dominated”. Thus, British colonial administration defined languages and included categories of religion, caste, and tribe or race into their census according to the colonial or orientalist understanding of Indian society.¹⁷ This practice of colonial or orientalist census taking added social, political, and legal values and meaning to these categories, while also enforcing their assignment, solidifying fluid structures, and framing partition, which, after independence, provided the foundation for eruptions of violence. In some cases, as in India, this categorization also determines how resources are redistributed in favor of the underprivileged.

In South Asia, as in many parts of the world, governments have the means to pursue identity politics by disseminating values via curricula, syllabi, and school textbooks.¹⁸ Those not in power do not have access to these means to contest the identity politics of the dominant group. However, identity politics and contestation in and via education and educational discourses is a complex phenomenon. Dominant groups with governmental power are not in a position to exclude all contestation by other interest groups.

The educationalist Thomas Höhne has identified multiple filters, influences, interferences, and controls (applied by politicians, academ-

ics, educators, media representatives, parents, and others) to which the knowledge that appears in textbooks is subjected. He argues that these filters produce a specific form of knowledge that is “socially accepted and dominant” and represents societal “common sense”, a “consensual, representative and hegemonic discursive knowledge.”¹⁹ This knowledge forms part of the cultural memory of a society. In practice, the application of textbook knowledge in schools has a normalizing effect. Content is objectified, differences are naturalized, and ordering principles are legitimized.²⁰ At the same time, this process also results in textbook representations being contested when groups try to control discourse and to affirm the hegemonic status of their interpretations.²¹ The textbook controversy that took place in India in the early 2000s, followed by other controversies, are outstanding examples of this process.²² In Pakistan, the textbook controversy and ensuing violence in Gilgit-Baltistan in the early 2000s is a prime example of hegemonic and counterhegemonic contestations over meaning making.²³

Since schooling is generally a national enterprise, and since various groups of actors tell different “stories” and use textbooks in schools in different ways, practices in schools testify to a large variety of ways in which theoretical models are implemented in reality.²⁴ Following Höhne’s arguments, one should avoid a generalized view of textbooks as instruments of intentional indoctrination by those in power, as “weapons of mass instruction,” in the words of Charles Ingrao.²⁵ Nevertheless, the extent of state control varies from place to place, while there are many examples of direct obligations to pursue specific, officially defined identity politics.²⁶ In the context of South Asia, the case of Pakistan demonstrates how political demand to promote the “ideology of Pakistan” has often been described and criticized.²⁷

In addition to the fact that identity politics are contested and produce conflicts, they also give special meanings to conflicts between states and within societies. Thus, textbooks can become a source of controversy, and they discuss, highlight (or avoid), and interpret conflicts in the light of the policies they pursue. They draw the boundaries between “us” and “them”, support (territorial) claims, and attempt to naturalize specific national worldviews. They also explain historical conflicts and present political constellations—and often interpret history in light of virulent conflicts. Textbooks relay and pass on particular interpretations of past conflicts to the next generation, including narratives of perceived injustice inflicted by an adversary, and may exacerbate specific conflict constellations. But textbooks also offer strategies for resolving conflicts or discussing them in a way that enables pupils to understand and thereby take into account the perception of the other side(s).²⁸

This special issue of *The Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* focuses on conflicts and identity politics in school textbooks in the re-

gional context of South Asia. Moving beyond international relations and interstate conflicts, it focuses on internal conflicts. However, it should be kept in mind that, following the colonial past and the different interpretations of partition, internal conflict can and often does affect the relations between neighboring countries in South Asia. For example, Indian Tamils support the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils; Bangladesh and Indian West Bengal are linked by a common language, but also by a long common history, not least in the context of the formation of independent Bangladesh. Similarly, Pakistani support for the Kashmiris in India has also been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The central questions may be formulated as follows. How do textbooks reflect specific identity politics when constructing the national “we”? How are societal lines of conflict reflected in these textbook discourses? Do the books exacerbate conflicts and, if so, which specific conflicts? Or do they, with sensitivity and reflexivity, try to reduce the importance of lines of conflict, by relativizing and questioning official identity politics? These are the questions that the articles in this volume try to answer.

Muhammad Ayaz Naseem examines ways in which Pakistan’s educational discourse in general, and curricula and textbooks in particular, exacerbate and/or mitigate conflict on the intrasocietal and interstate levels. This article examines the textual constitution of militarism and militaristic subjects in and by Pakistan’s educational discourse. His poststructuralist approach focuses on two subjects, namely social studies and Urdu, which are taught in the public school system of Pakistan, in order to critically examine the constitution of militaristic subjectivities in Pakistan that may or do lead to societal conflict. He also traces the nascent (but vibrant) counterdiscourses that have successfully rid the educational discourses of content and values that tend to foster conflict.

Aspects of identity formation via textbooks in Bangladesh after 1971 are presented by *Shreya Ghosh*. She examines the representations of four important events in Bangladesh’s pre-independence history during the periods of British rule and when its territory was the eastern part of Pakistan. Being Muslim and Bengali are the key concepts used by the textbooks to refer to national identity formation. These components vary in degree and importance over time, following changes from military rule and elected governments with different outlooks.

Focusing on India, *Basabi Khan Banerjee* and *Georg Stöber* analyze the presentation of internal lines of conflict in textbooks produced by the NCERT and by the state boards of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The various ways of treating “communalism”, “untouchability”, and language-based “regionalism” are linked to distinct identity discourses. These discourses are not only marked by differences between secular and Hindu-national positions, for region-specific identity discourses can also be detected. The books differ in terms of their interpretations and in their

different ways of handling conflicting issues, ranging from avoiding, addressing, and reflecting on them. They also differ by adopting different approaches to teaching.

Anne Gaul analyses identity formation in Sri Lankan textbooks. Textbooks and education in general are officially regarded as a means to foster social cohesion on the basis of multiculturalism in this conflict-ridden country. The author examines the definition of the national “we” and the representation of minorities. Despite the integrative policy, the national “we” is highly Sinhalese (and Buddhist) centered, where minorities are generally unrecognized or negatively connoted. Tamils are portrayed as foreigners. Therefore, the author concludes, the textbooks fail to foster social cohesion and to overcome the societal divides following the violent conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil citizens.

The studies in this special issue illustrate a number of links between identity discourses in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, which draw on discourses rooted in the colonial past. However, although Pakistani textbooks meet with criticism inside Pakistan on account of mistakes and their gendered and militarized perspectives, the dominant discourse is not matched by a strong counterdiscourse. Nonetheless, a minor but emphatic and realistic counterdiscourse has emerged among historians and in civil society. Efforts made by these groups have started to show in the latest curricular revisions, which make amends to the previously militaristic discourses in the education realm. In spite of this, the “ideology of Pakistan”, framed in religious overtones, appears to be the guiding principle. In India and Bangladesh, by contrast, counterdiscourses are more prevalent. In India, the composite-secular discourse is countered by a Hindu-communalist discourse, and in Bangladesh the Muslim-nationalist discourse meets a Bengali-nationalist discourse, which affect both internal and external relations.

As Sri Lanka did not belong to the partitioned subcontinent (colonial India), the discourses described above do not affect Sri Lankan textbooks. However, the Sri Lankan conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil is linked to India, especially Tamil Nadu, whose regional parties regard themselves as advocates of the rights of the Tamils. After the military end of the civil war, the textbooks avoided societal conflicts. Their concept of Sri Lankan nationalism focuses on the Buddhist, Sinhala-speaking majority, marginalizing Tamils and other minorities.

Most of the articles in this special issue emerged from panel presentations that took place during the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Annual Conference in 2010 in Chicago. The panel entitled “Exacerbating Conflicts, Promoting Peace? The Role of Social Science Textbooks in South Asia” served as an initial platform for exchanging results of research activities on the same issue, involving cooperation between the education departments of Concordia University (Ayaz Naseem)

and McGill University (Ratna Gosh) in Montreal and the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig (Georg Stöber). Supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and matching funds from individual grants given by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada) to Dr. Naseem and Dr. Ghosh, the participants explored the potential of education, especially as expressed in textbooks in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, to exacerbate or mitigate conflict on intra- and inter-state levels. Part of the outcome of this research has found its way into this issue. It is important to note that the contributors to this special issue analyze their topics while referring to a variety of theories and methodologies, and therefore reflect different ways in which research into the dynamics of conflict exacerbation and mitigation may be undertaken. It is to this end that we would like to acknowledge our sponsors for their financial support and the editors of *The Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* for having accepted the contributions for publication. We are also particularly indebted to the managing editor for accommodating the articles included in this issue.

Notes

1. Heiner Keupp, Thomas Ahbe, Wolfgang Gmür, et al., *Identitätskonstruktionen: Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999).
2. Oommen, "Introduction," in *Social Movements I: Issues of Identity*, ed. T. K. Oommen (New Delhi: OUP, 2010), 40.
3. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identities?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1–17, 4.
4. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identities?" 4–5.
5. Identity politics can be broadly defined as "a mode of political activism—typically though not exclusively initiated by groups excluded from traditional main-stream politics. Such marginalized groups generate a self-designated identity (group consciousness) that is instantiated by the individual identities of its constituents. Identity politics differs from many social movements, such as left-wing or fundamentalist Christian activism, in that the constituents of the former—such as women, Afro-Americans, gays—are politically marked as individuals. Politics and personal being are virtually inseparable. This inseparability owes largely to the natural production of the political categories" (Kenneth Gregen, "Social Construction and Transformation of Identity Politics," in *End of Knowing: A New Developmental Way of Learning*, ed. Fred Newman and Lois Holzman (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–16, 1). English-language literature emanating from feminist, postcolonial, and subaltern studies often focuses on this aspect, sometimes reserving the term for this specific level.
6. See Wolfgang Kaschuba, "Geschichtspolitik und Identitätspolitik: Nationale und ethnische Diskurse im Kulturvergleich," in *Inszenierung des Nationalen: Geschichte, Kultur und die Politik der Identitäten am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Beate Binder, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Peter Niedermüller (Cologne: Böhlau,

- 2001), 19–42; Birgit Rommelspacher, “Identitätspolitik in Deutschland zwischen Islamisierung und (Re)Christianisierung,” in *Islam und Diaspora*, ed. Rauf Ceylan (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012); André Zimmermann, “Die Identitätspolitik der Europäischen Union,” 2010, accessed 16 April 2014, http://www.gsi.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/forsch_zentr/voegelin/publikationen/studierendensymposium/zimmermann_identit_ts politik.pdf.
7. See Birgit Rommelspacher, *Dominanzkultur*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1998).
 8. For the interrelationships between movements and institutionalized politics, see Jack Goldstone, “Introduction: Bridging Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized Politics,” in *State, Parties, and Social Movements*, ed. Jack Goldstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 9. See Martin Fuchs, *Kampf um Differenz: Repräsentation, Subjektivität und soziale Bewegungen. Das Beispiel Indien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999); Martin Fuchs, “Erkenntnispraxis und die Repräsentation von Differenz,” in *Identitäten: Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität 3*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Frieze (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 105–137; T. K. Oommen, ed., *Social Movements I: Issues of Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010); T. K. Oommen, ed., *Social Movements II: Concerns of Equity and Security* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
 10. Some authors, like Oommen, distinguish between movements focusing on identity related issues and on those with “concerns of equity and security” (“Introduction,” *Social Movements I*, 34–42, and *II*, 34–40). To attract supporters, however, these movements also need to distinguish between “us” and “them”, that is, to define identities.
 11. Thus, the Sangh Parivar is understood as the umbrella organization of the Hindu nationalist movement.
 12. In political praxis, movements and parties interact. The transfer of the demands of movements into practical politics results, however, in their transformation. For an example, see Louise Tillin, “Questioning Borders: Social Movements, Political Parties and the Creation of New States in India,” *Pacific Affairs* 84, no. 1 (2011): 67–87. For a diachronic perspective, see Manali Desai, “From Movement to Party to Government: Why Social Policies in Kerala and West Bengal Are So Different,” in Goldstone, *State, Parties, and Social Movements*, 170–196.
 13. Ward Berenschot, *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the Indian State* (London: Hurst, 2011); Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003); Christophe Jaffrelot, *Communal Riots in Gujarat*, Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, Working Paper No. 17 (Heidelberg: South Asia Institute, 2003); Steven Wilkinson, “Communal and Caste Politics in India,” in *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 262–273. This instrumental aspect should not be regarded as a sufficient explanation for the outburst of violence. Additionally, as Jaffrelot (*Communal Riots in Gujarat*, 8–9) points out, excessive violence might become counterproductive, for party supporters also suffer from anarchy and curfew. Responsibilities for law and order and coalition requirements may disqualify riot strategies.

14. This strategy is also used to spread (Hindu-national) RSS ideology among the *adivasi* ("tribals"). See Peggy Froerer, *Religious Division and Social Conflict: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Rural India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010).
15. They also (re)produce the stereotypical and phantasmagoric conception of "the other" (based on different concepts of purity), which, together with a lack of self-esteem, Hansen regards as the psychological background of individual rioting behavior. Additionally, they include the memory of previous riots, which seem to confirm the conceptions of individuals involved in riots and thus reinforce communal antagonisms. Reactions and counterreactions cause this perception of the other as an enemy to be reproduced in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), reprinted in omnibus *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 200–217.
16. For a discussion of Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan politics with respect to national integration, see Swarna Rajagopalan, *State and Nation in South Asia* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2006).
17. Ram Bhagat, "Census and Caste Enumeration: British Legacy and Contemporary Practice in India," *GENUS* 62, no. 2 (2006): 119–134.
18. Where nongovernmental schools are allowed to exist, other organizations might pursue their own identity politics also via schooling. See Nandini Sundar, "Teaching to Hate: RSS' Pedagogical Programme," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, no. 16, 17 April 2004, 1605–1612; Bonita Aleaz, "Madrasa Education, State and Community Consciousness: Muslims in West Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40, no. 6, 5 February 2005, 555–564.
19. Thomas Höhne, *Schulbuchwissen: Umrisse einer Wissens- und Medientheorie des Schulbuches* (Frankfurt am Main: Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 2003), 78–79 (translation by the authors).
20. Höhne, *Schulbuchwissen*, 168–169. Also see, Muhammad Ayaz Naseem, *Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2010).
21. For political influence in European cases see Arie H. Wilschut, "History at the Mercy of Politicians and Ideologies: Germany, England, and the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 42, no. 5 (2010): 693–723.
22. See the relevant notes in the contribution by Khan Banerjee and Stöber in this issue.
23. See Georg Stöber, "Religious Identities Provoked: The Gilgit 'Textbook Controversy' and Its Conflictual Context," *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 29 (2007): 389–411.
24. See Stuart Foster and Keith Crawford, eds., *What Shall We Tell the Children? International Perspectives on School History Textbooks* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2006); Jason Nicholls, ed., *School History Textbooks across Cultures* (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2006).
25. See Charles Ingrao, "Weapons of Mass Instruction: Schoolbooks and Democratization in Multiethnic Central Europe," *JEMMS* 1, no. 1 (2009): 180–189.

26. See Peter Carrier, "Introduction," in *School & Nation: Identity Politics and Educational Media in an Age of Diversity*, ed. Peter Carrier (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 7–12.
27. See Jon Dorschner and Thomas Sherlock, "The Role of History Textbooks in Shaping Collective Identities in India and Pakistan," in *Teaching the Violent Past*, ed. Elizabeth Cole (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 275–315; Elisa Giunchi, "Rewriting the Past: Political Imperatives and Curricular Reform in Pakistan," *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 29, no. 4 (2007): 375–388; A. H. Nayyar and Ahmad Salim, eds., *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2003); M. Ayaz Naseem, *Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); M. Ayaz Naseem, "Allah, America and the Army: Impact of the US Involvement in South Asia on Pakistan's Educational Policy," in *By the Dawn's Early Light: American Post-conflict Educational Reconstruction from the Spanish-American War to Iraq*, ed. N. Sobe (New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2009), 207–228; M. Ayaz Naseem, "The Soldier and the Seductress: A Post-structuralist Analysis of Gendered Citizenship through Inclusion in and Exclusion from Language and Social Studies Textbooks in Pakistan," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10, no. 4–5 (2006): 449–468; Yvette Claire Rosser, *Islamisation of Pakistani Social Studies Textbooks* (New Delhi: Rupa & Observer Research Foundation, 2003); Yvette Claire Rosser, "The Islamization of Pakistani Social Studies Textbooks," in Foster and Crawford, *What Shall We Tell*, 179–194; Rubina Saigol, "Enemies Within and Enemies Without: The Besieged Self in Pakistani Textbooks," *Futures: The Journal of Forecasting and Planning* 37 (2005): 1005–1035; Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, "Polarisation of Social Studies Textbooks in Pakistan," *The Curriculum Journal* 22, no. 1 (2011): 43–59. See also the contribution of M. Ayaz Naseem in this volume.
28. For example, Sri Lankan textbooks for civics offer materials with which to teach conflict resolution among individuals. One such textbook is *Life Competencies and Citizenship Education: Part I, Grade 8* (2008; repr. n.p.: Education Publications Department, 2011), which contains a unit entitled "Let Us Minimize Conflicts." Other books in this series include comparable units. One Indian textbook series published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) addresses conflicts that take into account different perspectives. See the contribution by Khan Banerjee and Stöber in this issue.