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16. SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS, US AND THEM

A Conclusion

The books in this series have tried to surface “the hidden political, social, and economic curriculum of schools” in particular national contexts through the lens of school textbooks. The first volume looked at the portrayal of the nation, how textbooks appear to establish and maintain the legitimacy of the state, especially in periods of rapid change.

This second volume set out to examine textbooks from the perspective of portrayal of membership in the nation—who is “in,” a member, and who is “out.” How is membership defined, especially in multiethnic nation-states (which is almost all of them)? Of all the possible differences among people, which characteristics are socially selected as most salient for distinguishing insiders and outsiders? How overt are the definitions and distinctions made? How have they changed over time and under what sociopolitical conditions?

The chapters here examined “self” and “other,” mostly within national boundaries, but also in several cases where internal identity was defined in part in relation to external others, e.g., *Khan Banerjee and Stöber* in India and Pakistan, and *Spreen and Monaghan* in South Africa. In the Introduction, *Bokhorst-Heng* set the stage for a range of possible responses to diversity with a typology of national stances: destruction of the “other” through ethnocide or, more benignly, assimilation; separation of cultures through differentialist provision/segregation; and living—more or less closely—with the “other” in the pluralist approaches of conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and critical multiculturalism.

Though arguably natural human social phenomena, these stances are especially salient in the context of the identity of nations “imagined” as “communities” but lacking an organic foundation and composed of multiple identity groups. The state, its members connected primarily through “imagination,” has an inherent interest in maintaining a sense of “us,” distinguishing “us” from “them.” Not surprisingly, this often leads to “us” versus “other.” Not surprisingly, “us” versus “other” is particularly problematic when the “other” is internal to a state trying to imagine itself as one. In such constructions, the “fear of small numbers” is often realized (Appadurai, 2006), in more or less malign manifestations.

With history, territory, and language as the primary markers of the nation (Carretero, 2011)—as well as race, ethnicity, and culture—nation-building and nation-maintaining have almost always insisted on a singular, homogenous, and totalizing monoethnic identity related to a particular geography, with a justifying history. Ideally the identity and occupation of the land correspond. Primordial myths date the origins of such nations to ancient times. For some time, the nation-state has offered a more or less useful vehicle for economic and social development, for progress and the protection and advance of human dignity. Even in the supposedly postnational present, the aspirations of peoples without a country are often organized around the acquisition of one. To paraphrase Michael Walzer (2015), “Everybody needs a state.”

Like *Bokhorst-Heng, Engel* reminds us of the paradoxes facing the state as container for diverse populations, especially in an era of heightened globalization. Globalization with its movements of peoples and diffuse centers of power challenges the core existential conceit of the nation, that of essential commonality across large groups of people living within a certain territory under primary control of a national authority. Certainly immigration and increased movements of people challenge the territorial and ethnic integrity of the nation-state, as does technology, allowing individuals to activate membership in communities with shared interests rather than national boundaries and authority. In uncertain economic and social conditions, questions of identity, membership, belonging, and trust, us and them that might otherwise be tolerated, can become quite significant.

OBSERVED PATTERNS

And so, setting out to see how these school textbooks dealt with these issues, we found five general patterns.

First, while diversity in ethnicity, for example, is a fact in most countries, diversity did not always appear in the textbooks examined by authors in this volume. In the first place, membership among insiders or “us” is generally assumed, portrayed indirectly if at all. Definitions and selection criteria for who is “in,” though surely obvious to students and teachers, are not stated explicitly. Readers are likely to need a good bit of social context to “read” the textbooks correctly or at least to read them as insiders do. Textbooks rarely provide much instruction on “reading” the implicit tenets of the social context and contract. And so most students likely read texts with the perspectives and biases they bring to school. In such cases, it is not necessary to specify insiders and outsiders; most everyone likely knows. However, by leaving these delineations implicit and providing neither a counternarrative nor a critical way to read texts, textbooks are likely to confirm the perspectives, biases, and power structures of the larger society, regardless of content.

As a corollary, outsidership was also portrayed indirectly. Sometimes this was done by minimal portrayal—invisibility in some cases—as in *Schmidt’s* examination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) people in Canadian

and U.S. textbooks, or minimal and distorted portrayal as in *Brown's* analysis of Indians or *Howley, Eppley, and Dudek's* study of rural Americans. In other cases, outsidership was portrayed explicitly, and in contrast to "us" (see *Khan Banerjee and Stöber*, for example). Direct or not, the portrayals were sometimes quite negative. *Brown* characterized the portrayal of American Indians as foreign, enemy, inferior, dangerous. *Howley, Eppley, and Dudek's* rural people were "ingenious" then "ignorant," their lives "idyllic" then "backward," in line with shifts the authors identified in the national narrative of the nation. *Koh's* Malays were "lackadaisical," "slow," "unable to understand how to generate profit." In other cases, "others" were exoticized or trivialized (*Berkin*).

Some groups were portrayed in terms of what might be termed "associate membership," groups that obviously live in the nation's space but are not quite "us" or full members, groups whose children need to be educated into the character and characteristics of full membership, or who, by virtue of their membership in an outsider group, can only hope to be good associate members. These might also be termed internal outsiders. "Associate membership" was seen in the discussions of portrayals of indigenous peoples in *Berkin's* Mexico, *Brown's* America, as well as the children in *Koh's* colonial Malaya, *Butchart's* African American children during the U.S. Reconstruction Era, and even *Howley, Eppley, and Dudek's* rural Americans.

Thus, in terms of questions of membership, we found three groups: insiders, associate members or internal outsiders, and external outsiders.

It is interesting that while some portrayals changed over time and others did not, we saw no evidence of outsiders becoming true insiders. *Howley et al.* traced the shifting portrayal of rural populations in U.S. textbooks alongside the rise of globalization and an increasing penetration of capitalism into the American imagination. *Berkin's* review showed dramatic shifts in the type of Mexican citizen that textbooks worked to create, but relatively little change in the portrayal of indigenous peoples. *Brown* found very little real change in how American Indians were featured in the five eras of textbooks she examined. *Schmidt* found some change in the portrayal of LGBT citizens in that textbooks now actually make reference to LGBTQ people. Still, the portrayals have been anecdotal, thin, almost off-hand. *Messina, Sundaram, and Davies* worried that even the weak civic education they found in Spain and England was product of a rare period of relative openness, an opening on the verge of closing due to pressures from budgets and increased immigration. *Nesbitt and Rust* noted the persistence of historical notions of brotherhood within the context of French identity in spite of the drastic changes in French demography resulting from immigration. They suggested a recasting of French conceptions of brotherhood to include such diversity and a reappraisal of the relationship between whiteness and Frenchness.

In a third pattern, most textbooks seemed bent on shaping the civic character of their target students. Some textbooks specifically targeted internal outsiders with lessons on how to be (see for example *Butchart* and *Koh*), in a sense speaking to the

outsider. *Butchart* contrasted the textbooks written for freed Black slaves by other Blacks with textbooks written for freed Blacks by other groups. Other textbooks spoke to all children, indicating directly or indirectly a standard for what “we” are or should be like (see *Lo*, for example). Still others spoke to their audience about the “other,” as if those others might not be in the room reading the same books (see *Brown* for example or *Howley et al.* or *Schmidt*). Character shaping was portrayed in *Berkin’s* Mexico, *Butchart’s* post–Civil War South, *Koh’s* Malaya, *Lo’s* Hong Kong and Singapore, and *Nesbitt and Rust’s* France.

The corollary to shaping character in desirable ways is turning attention away from less desirable directions. *Messina, Sundaram, and Davies* found that textbooks from the UK and Spain “may reflect societies that neglect critical civic education, but perhaps that the societies themselves are active participants in such developments” (this volume). *Lo’s* comparative study of curriculum in Hong Kong and Singapore illustrated the careful delineation of traits of desirable citizenship (and by inference less desirable traits) in the two states, both civic but, in the end, quite different from each other and from a full range of possible civic values and skills.

Critical thinking is a common casualty, it seems. Foreclosing of more provocative options was most obvious in *Butchart’s* telling of the U.S. Reconstruction Era’s contrasting curricula for freed slaves. It was also quite clear in distinctions made in *Lo’s* reading of civics curricula in Hong Kong and Singapore, the encouragement of entrepreneurial thinking, for example, and of a citizen’s obligations to the state but the fencing off of critical thought about political matters. It is interesting, and not uncommon, that the units on China in the Hong Kong materials focused on ancient glories rather than contemporary issues.

Often the foreclosing of presumably more dangerous options was presented in a noncontroversial manner. For example, *Messina, Sundaram, and Davies* found:

What seems to be most apparent from our sample of textbooks is a commitment to what we have come to think of as a *common sense goodness* in which it is likely that only certain forms of contractual citizenships are deemed possible. Young people should know something about the world around them and be active in a responsible way to make their own lives and the lives of others better. It would be difficult to disagree with such a position. It is, however, necessary to consider what “common sense” means in the context of the demographic and other challenges faced by Spain and England and, specifically, what motivated the introduction of citizenship education in both countries. (italics added; this volume)

Among the cases examined, only South Africa (*Spreen and Monaghan*) and Canada (*Schmidt*) intentionally promoted a critical pedagogy. Even so, in South Africa, those efforts were undermined by the poverty and inequality that characterized the lives of students and the communities and schools where they lived as well as the presence of “outsiders,” who were seen as threats to the precarious hold students

had on access to national resources. This combination of a tightening economy and attempts to purify insider identity markers is frequently observed, in textbooks and in larger societies. In Canada, the textbooks did engage readers to think critically about the meaning of diversity and Canadian identity; even so, there was greater silence around LGBTQ diversity.

A fourth pattern was seen in more or less definitive and assertive descriptions of who “we” are, sometimes without a clearly articulated “other”—*McClure, Yazan and Selvi’s* Turkey; *Berkin’s* Mexico; *Lo’s* Singapore and Hong Kong; *Spreen and Monaghan’s* South Africa—and sometimes in direct contrast to the “other,” as in *Khan Banerjee and Stöber’s* Indian and Pakistani textbooks. China in *Lo’s* textbooks was portrayed in terms of the glorious past. It is interesting to note that in none of the cases presented was there mention of legitimate narratives other than the one adopted by the book. Similarly, there was not a sense that other groups, such as those being portrayed, might see things in different but equally valid ways than that portrayed by the book. Even when the official narrative did change, its legitimacy and the enduring nature of its current truth did not appear to be challenged in the texts. The idea of multiple narratives did not form part of any obvious pedagogy we saw discussed. Nor was there a sense of multiperspectivity or empathy for others.

Still, there was resistance by teachers, reported by *Barnes, Nyakudya, and Phiri* in their discussion of Zimbabwe, to the totalizing narratives of patriotic history the textbooks promoted, and in the development of emancipatory curricula in the post-Civil War U.S. South (*Butchart*). *McClure, Yazan, and Selvi* addressed the “possibility of teachers and students exercising their agency through the limited space afforded to knowledge construction in the new curricula in order to rewrite—and not simply reframe—the national narrative” (this volume). *Spreen and Monaghan* laid groundwork for resistance by proposing a bottom-up enactment of democratic ideals starting with the lived experience of teachers and students in poor communities, as necessary to implement the ideals of critical pedagogy in a context of inequality and poverty. *Howley, Eppley, and Dudek* (this volume) saw possibility in “backwardness”: “positioning rural people’s recalcitrance not as the sentimental attachment to an ‘imagined homeland’ (Bell, 2006, p. 154) but as a reasonable set of countermoves in the power relations of ‘a complex global economic and social network’ (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007, p. xi).”

SO WHAT TO DO?

Even as these cases illustrate patterns in what textbooks do, we ask: What can be done to promote curricula that are, vis-a-vis the identity groups we see in our nations and the world, inclusive, critical, and positively bonding?

In thinking about this, it may be helpful to reflect a bit on what we understand textbooks can do vis-a-vis relations among identity groups. We hold as axiomatic that multiple identity groups exist within most “nations.” Socially constructed, such identity groups exist in power relationship to each other. Official instruments

such as school textbooks tend to reflect the viewpoints of dominant groups, but also to hide their dominance, so as to maintain their position with minimal possible resistance. Dominance is manifested directly in control of the narrative, which can be assumed to be more or less consistent with the perspective of those in charge. The dominance of particular groups shows up in different ways, for example, by ignoring the existence of subdominant groups, minimizing their presence, distorting their role, framing or measuring the “other” using the metrics of the dominant group’s values and perspectives, painting portraits of “others” in assimilationist paint, and sticking to the facts while ignoring the underlying social relations. We would argue that such portrayals are normatively wrong and factually inaccurate and thus limit the potential for transformative, inclusive identities.

But to work most effectively, the dominance must remain hidden, even as social relations continue to feed into it. The social relations portrayed must appear natural, normal, and inevitable. This can be done by an ideological form of product placement, embodying an idea in the “furniture in the room”; presenting a potentially controversial idea as normal, and repeating it, desensitizing readers to its power; ignoring alternative ideas; denying or ignoring the *possibility* of alternatives; textual bullying; and so forth. If textbooks portray women in subservient and service roles in relation to men, and there are no challenges to this idea, ideas about women’s social roles are projected and any external prejudices reinforced, without any explicit text.

Pre-schooled in the informal education of family, peers, and community, children come to school with ideas about the social worlds in which they live. School helps them develop those ideas through explicit and implicit curricula, both intentional and unplanned. School can help children internalize, come to believe in the truth of, and elaborate the social hierarchies and relations of the larger communities; but it can also help them gain insight into those relations, the fact of their social construction, and the possibilities of changing them to accord better with higher values and the needs of those involved. Framed in this way, school can be seen as serving either a domesticating or a liberating function (Freire, 2000). This forces a choice, of course. Many schools would see their work as focusing on other things: the training of young minds in acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and skills; the socialization of young people; preparation for work; and so forth. All of these are noble goals and feature among the important aims of schooling. But attention to them alone leaves hidden power relationships untouched, unquestioned, thus aiding by default the normalization and reproduction of the current order. Given the role of schooling in development of national citizens, the national sponsorship and control of schooling, and the many important tasks assigned to schooling, it is not surprising that questions about the structuring and legitimacy of the social order and the role of the school are rare.

Here it may be helpful to return to Carretero’s notion of three types of history (2011, p. 3) introduced in Volume 1: “everyday history,” “academic history,” and “school history.” Carretero described everyday history (which we have termed “the

informal education of family, peers and community”) evocatively as “an element of collective memory that, in one way or another, is permanently inscribed—through experience and formation—in the minds and bodies of each society’s members, articulating shared narratives about identity, value systems and common beliefs” (Carretero, 2011, p. 3). Collective memory “elaborates and digests the conflicts lived in common, and also articulates a narrative about the human group we live in—internalized and shared by citizens as a whole—dealing with values that are deemed constructive for the present and future, and is doubtless one of the most solid foundations of social cohesion” (Carretero, 2011, p. xv).

Academic history is carried out by historians and social scientists, according to the discipline and logic of historiography, and aims at building disciplinary knowledge. We would agree with Carretero that by the time pupils encounter academic history in school, they will have learned the master narrative of their motherland and, at least in the case of students from dominant groups, “developed a strong and unique emotional bond to it” (2011, p. 5).

Berkin (this volume) captured the key dynamics of school history well in her opening:

The story of the Mexican nation, like many modern nations, involves the development of a national identity based on a manufactured ethnicity. A national community is produced when individuals project themselves onto, and recognize themselves in, a common national narrative that appears to be a legacy from time immemorial in spite of having been fabricated in the recent past. To be “national,” a population should make the tale of common ethnicity its own, representing itself as if it were a natural community with primordial origins, homogenous culture, and shared group needs. For the sake of inclusiveness and unity, Mexico presents itself as a community with common origins, culture, and interests that transcend individuals and social conditions. This imagined collective national identity is captured in the notion of *mexicanidad*, a concept that stems from 19th-century independence movements.

Mexicanidad is a deliberate attempt to produce a uniquely Mexican identity different from the Spanish identity associated with colonial power. It can be defined as the synthesis of indigenous and Spanish cultures, and it comprises symbols, designed to bolster Mexican nationalism, constructed during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Mexican government, especially the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, or SEP), has played a central role in unifying the nation around *mexicanidad*. It has done this by developing specific policies and creating associated symbols, particularly around notions of a common national language and the portrayal of a common race. These two methods function together to “naturalize” the nation’s origins.

Several points are worth highlighting. The goal of

what is taught at school under the name of “history” is ... to forge a stable collective identity, to create an established space for belonging where future citizens may feel embraced and comfortable. Consequently, it is a narcissistic narrative designed to arouse emotional adherence to what is *ours*. (italics in original; Carretero, 2011, p. viv)

Further, what is taught at school “is creating the first identity links between individuals and the ‘imagined community.’ It forms the first representation of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Carretero, 2011, p. 176). The emotional ties are strong. Even the most academic historians may find it difficult “to stop believing, deep in their hearts and despite so many mutations, that something ‘essential’ remains within their society” (Carretero, 2011, p. xv).

Everyday history is inevitable, and academic and school-taught histories *both* address essential social needs. Academic history helps meet the human need for an inquiry of the past that aims at fullest possible understanding. School history helps meet the human need for identification and affiliation with a greater purpose and a larger group, linked with the national necessity for citizens to identify and affiliate with the national project. This could be considered a core task of public schooling. But in normal times, identification and affiliation with an abstract entity such as the nation is difficult. Identity can be solidified in an out-group or “other,” but this often leads to essentialization of group characteristics, polarization, and potentially conflict. In diverse societies, an overarching national identity is likely to compete with other collective identities; school and everyday histories have to make sense of this, surely differently in different societies. An external threat, of course, can mobilize diverse people to put aside internal differences, but that requires the presence, or creation and maintenance, of an enemy. This is especially so when social groups feel a sense of collective insecurity.

Given its task in developing a positive identification with a larger national purpose and national identity, school history does not allow for easy acknowledgment of past mistakes or crimes. National history is generally linked to a collective memory of a noble people on a path of “progress, heroism, and liberty” (Carretero, 2011, p. xvi). Such narratives are difficult to reconcile with what current standards would see as historical crimes. How can a “good” people reconcile the occupation and acquisition by force of other peoples’ land? The task is easier when the others are “other.” And so there is a kind of internal contradiction within school history.

Indeed, to fulfill the social and national functions of historical certainty and moral satisfaction, school history cannot easily admit to lack of authoritativeness, the existence of multiple perspectives or ways of thinking, the social construction and interpretive nature of history, or alternative epistemologies. Yet these are precisely the tools of historiographers. Levstik and Barton (2015) noted four “stances” toward the past: an *identification* stance, a *moral response* stance, an *analytic* stance, and an *exhibition* stance. The identification stance corresponds closely to our description

of school history, that is, history aimed at promoting identification with one's people. The moral response stance can be seen in such aphorisms as "those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it," and "never again." An admirable impulse, the moral stance does not help students understand how "good people" such as ourselves can "do bad things." (see Daniel Friedrich in Volume 1 [Williams, 2014] for a discussion of these issues in the context of Argentina.) The analytic stance corresponds to academic history. A task for educators, attempts at analysis are always susceptible to cooptation. The exhibition stance relates to public displays of history and to assessment. It is less relevant to this discussion.

The transformation of school history into academic history does not accord well with human nature, which in addition to truth craves collective meaning and belonging. Jose Alvarez Junco, in his Foreword to Carretero's book, addressed attempts by Spain's Popular Party to popularize the idea of "constitutional patriotism," which

assumed that spiritual union or community of the citizens who make up our current polity should not be founded upon ethnic features or legendary myths, but rather upon a common institutional and legal framework that respects different cultures and individual rights ... But it did not succeed. Even though the discourse was politically correct, it was too cold. A vigorous patriot's favorite food is a good dose of nationalist emotion. People need to belong to something, to feel proud of that belonging, to eulogize themselves and—if possible—to despise others. (Carretero, 2011, p. xvi)

It seems theoretically possible that schools through textbooks and other means could take on the more challenging paths of building inclusive identities that promote collective meaning, belonging, and inquiry. But as *Spreen and Monaghan* illustrated in South Africa, such ideals are difficult to realize in the context of inequality, where many people lack the capabilities and thus freedom to meet their basic needs (Sen, 1999). Exhortations to welcome internal or external "others" are unlikely to gather much support when made to those who feel threatened by the "other," who lack the freedom and resources of the exhorters. An optimistic cosmopolitanism works well for those who can afford it.

Closely related are the role of learners and the nature of knowledge. Are children seen as passive recipients of truth external to them, or as co-constructors of history? Are children told or engaged? Do they memorize or practice? Can they see themselves as actors in history? Can more than one interpretation be right? When then is an interpretation wrong?

In the context of the everyday history curriculum of family and community and the powerful seductions of school history, what can textbooks (and schools) do to promote an inclusive, meaningful, critical history that helps us bond with each other and with our others? On the one hand, textbooks can reinforce or leave unquestioned the narratives outside school. On the other hand, textbooks can:

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- Provide accurate information that both challenges and accords with common national narratives.
- Provide counternarratives, as a matter of course and of pedagogy.
- Provide images of inclusive heroism.
- Identify virtue with admission of past national wrongs and the evolution of national ethics.
- Provide information about other groups.
- Give others voice.
- Allow national contradictions to appear. Contradictions challenge society, particularly the young, toward resolution, thus giving impetus to future generations to advance further toward national values.
- Teach multiperspectivity (Stradling, 2003).
- Help teach understanding and empathy of “others,” of those both outside and inside the shared national space.
- Create relationships and partnerships across “borders.”
- Help students learn to “read” the everyday history they bring to school and the social and political structures in which they live.
- Increasingly represent the voices and images of groups making up the nation and world.
- Help children learn to think critically and question received wisdom, even from us.
- Spark the imagination of young people toward the resolution of social issues.
- Encourage the agency of young people, on local and global issues.
- Focus on the processes and imagining of identity rather than the maintenance of fixed identities.
- Help young people become comfortable with the idea that there may be more than one right answer. Even so, not all answers are right.
- More fundamentally, “re-envision and reclaim” the “public space of schools ... for public deliberation and community engagement” (*Spreen and Monaghan*, this volume).

Despite it all, inclusive meaningful critical and bonding history is possible, currently practiced on a small scale, perhaps to grow larger. Even under challenging conditions, *Barnes et al.* reported that teachers and some textbook authors exhibited “a stubborn care” “for the critical quality of their work” (this volume). The challenge of inviting the “other” into the national house may require reconfiguration of that house, rather than showing them to an existing bedroom. *Nesbitt and Rust* (this volume) wrote of the introduction at one point of “multiperspectivity” into French textbooks:

To cultivate brotherhood in a period of significant transformation in both the nation’s demographics and its approach to history education, France would benefit from considering two questions that run counter to its historically universalistic orientation: that of group identifications/rights and that of race/

racism ... The traditionally French reflex in discussion of group identities is to warn of *communautarisme*, or the placing of group affiliations above national affiliations. Although ... ideologically justifiable, the uncritical reflex and the concept of *communautarisme* must be discussed and problematized for new brotherhoods to come about ... Discussions of race would benefit from moving beyond simply recognizing and denouncing acts of racism to exploring the construction of whiteness and the notion of white privilege, especially as they relate to “Frenchness” (Hughes, 2007). This would bring all students into the dialogue, allowing them to dissect and understand oppression and to eventually re-imagine brotherhood in a diversifying national context.

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