WHOSE EDUCATION? WHOSE NATION?
Exploring the Role of Government Primary School Textbooks of Bangladesh
in Colonialist Forms of Marginalization and Exclusion
of Poor and Ethnic Minority Children

By

Silmi Abdullah

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Through an analysis of Social Studies textbooks of the government primary school curriculum of Bangladesh, this thesis highlights the role of the education system in pushing poor and ethnic minority children out of school. The texts and graphics are analyzed in order to examine the ways in which they oppress and exclude these children by perpetuating dominant ideologies of nationhood, constructing a notion of the “ideal citizen,” and criminalizing those who do not fit this category. Using an anti-colonial and post-colonial theoretical framework, the study situates the education system of Bangladesh within its histories of colonial domination and argues that the discourses present in these textbooks reflect colonial forms of racism and oppression, and reproduce class and ethnic hierarchies characteristic of the larger Bangladeshi society. Most importantly, this study advocates the need for a just and equitable education system that respects all children of Bangladesh as citizens of the country.
Acknowledgments

I would like to emphasize that this project is not simply a product of my own efforts, but a culmination of the important contributions of many wonderful individuals. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sheryl Nestel, whose kindness and constant support have been indispensable for my sustenance throughout this journey. A huge thanks to my former professor and mentor, Dr. Amar Wahab, whose vision, insight and immense faith in me led me to the doors of OISE and gave me the strength to pursue this passionate project. Thanks to Kristine Pearson, Margaret Brennan, and Dr. George Dei, who with their wise advice on administrative, academic and financial matters helped me navigate through this program with ease. I would also like to thank Professor Sherene Razack and Professor Diane Farmer for making their classes so enjoyable and allowing me to share parts of my thesis with them. My friends and family have been the greatest source of strength during this venture. Special thanks to my beautiful friend, Julita. The deep visions of life and the support we shared have not only made my transition from undergrad to graduate school smooth, but have also strengthened my belief in myself and my work. Thanks to my friend, Adeel for always reminding me the importance of spirituality in one’s life and work, and indeed, that has made this journey much more beautiful. Thanks to my grandmother for taking the trouble of gathering my research data for me, and to my uncle Ahmed Fazlullah and Aunt Dilshad Ara who have always encouraged me to follow my heart. I am eternally grateful to my loving parents, who have provided the most nurturing, caring and comfortable environment for the completion of this project. And last but not least, thank you God, for making this dream come true.
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Dedicated to the Children of Bangladesh
List of Acronyms:

BBS = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics  
BRAC = Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee  
BNP = Bangladesh National Party  
CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis  
CHT = Chittagong Hill Tracts  
CIA = Central Intelligence Agency  
CIDA = Canadian International Development Agency  
CPE = Compulsory primary Education  
DPE = Directorate of Primary Education  
EEC = European Economic Community  
GDP = Gross Domestic Product  
IDA = International Development Association  
ILO = International Labour Organization  
IRIN = Integrated Regional Information Networks  
NCTB = National Curriculum and Textbook Board  
NCLS = National Child Labour Survey  
NGO = Non-Governmental Organization  
NPA = National Plan of Action  
ODA = Overseas Development Administration  
OISE/UT = Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto  
OPEC = Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries  
PEDP = Primary Education Development Program  
SIDA = Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency  
UAE = United Arab Emirates  
UNDP = United Nations Development Program  
UNICEF = United Nations Children’s Fund
1. Introduction:

Imprints on a child's mind:

I have little recollection of the exact year in which the event that I am about to describe occurred. Yet the event itself is so vividly painted on the canvas of my memory that it often leaves me, to this day, with mixed feelings of immense joy and deep sorrow. It happened during one of our annual winter holidays, when my family and I travelled from Saudi Arabia to my birthplace, Bangladesh to spend time with my grandparents. I recall being a primary school student at the time and still clearly remember the day my grandfather took me on an excursion to Sonargaon, one of the most historic cities of Bangladesh.

As he took me around, I was spellbound by the majestic white palace of the medieval rulers partly overshadowed by the cool winter mist that hovered above, and I marvelled at the pleasing greenery, the gardens, the ponds and the fountains around it which completed this dreamy scenery. But being a child, I soon began to seek company of my own age and wished that I had a friend to play with once we were finished with touring the site. My wish was fulfilled soon enough. As my grandfather and I sat on the grass to have lunch, I saw a little girl roaming around the area. Her friendly demeanour and twinkling smile instantly appealed to me, and we immediately became friends. It is strange that I remember her name so clearly, perhaps due to its pleasant sound and beautiful meaning. Josthna (Star-lit night) was her name. We ran through the fields, laughing and chasing one another until we reached her home by the periphery of the site, and in an instant, the world of
picturesque gardens and palaces crashed before me.

Josthna lived in a tiny slum house with her mother and siblings, a space enclosed with four straw walls and a fragile straw roof for protection, her abode where she so cheerfully welcomed me. Suddenly her bare chest and ragged shorts became much more pronounced. Moreover, my sadness intensified and engulfed me as Josthna momentarily forgot my company for a few pennies that a gentleman promised her if she cleaned up all the litter that the tourists had caused on the grounds nearby. This was the very first moment in my life where I came to know my country as a land of simultaneously existing contrasts, of mansions and slum houses, of the rich and the poor, of glory and of tragedy. I cannot to this day, forget the beautiful face of Josthna, her graceful and friendly smile, and her starry eyes that reflected her name so perfectly. I cannot erase from my mind how desperately, yet happily she agreed to clean up the garbage of the tourists for the mere few pennies. I have met many other Josthnas along the journey of my life so far: the little girls and boys that worked at various urban households to save their dying siblings or parents, or children selling flowers amidst traffic jams in hope of the same few pennies, receiving only abuse in return.

It is extremely important to point out that by remembering and thinking of these children, I do not in any way invoke a sense of condescending pity where I pretend that my privilege pays no part in their condition and that their poverty is some entity irrespective of structures of oppression in which people with monetary and cultural privileges (albeit unconsciously) take part. Rather, by bringing these children into focus, I intend to bring to the forefront the role of my country's
government. I bring into focus its structural elements which create ways to perpetuate inequality by keeping the very victims of oppression away from opportunities that would help them to release themselves from oppression and inequality. Thus, I bring the readers’ attention to the specific purpose of my study, which examines the role that the government education system (specifically primary education) in Bangladesh plays in keeping millions of children like Josthna away from the privilege of education, making them desperate for a few pennies and most importantly, having them believe and accept that social hierarchies are “timeless” and “natural” phenomena.

**Aims of the Study:**

The system of education in Bangladesh is complex as it consists of different types of school systems, including government-funded schools, religious schools, and non-formal, NGO – run schools. However, the focus of this study will be government-funded schools, as these schools represent the majority (60%) of all primary school children in the country (Tsui et al., 2007). and are the sites of government policy implementations.

Formerly a part of the Bengal province of the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh gained liberation from British colonial domination in 1947, at which point it became known as East Pakistan. It gained its final independence as a state from the West Pakistani government in 1971. Since liberation, the country has gone through numerous efforts to educate its population, with limited success of some of the policies due to political instability as the aftermath of recent liberation. However, after 37 years of independence, Bangladesh still seems to be far from
achieving “a universal primary education,” a goal that has been set by the government since the 1980s (Khatun, 1992, p. 126).

Despite numerous policies of making primary schooling accessible to the masses, such as the successive five-year plans, the compulsory education act of 1992, the Primary Education development programs (I and II), the National Plan of Action, and several curriculum revisions, “primary education has never been equally accessible for all groups” (Kabeer, Nambissan and Subrahmanian, 2003, p. 28). “Access to education is an issue particularly for children living in remote areas, from extremely poor households or ethnic minority groups, and those with special needs” (BRAC website, 2008). Moreover, despite periods of increased enrolment, drop out rates increased dramatically during the period of “PEDP-II” (Primary Education Development Program II, which was a massive project supposedly aimed towards inclusive education running from 2003-2009) (IRIN, 2008). Given the seriousness of the issue of disengagement and drop-out amongst particular groups of children, it is both necessary and appropriate to investigate primary education in contemporary Bangladesh.

As a major research objective, this thesis will re-orient the existing discussions on high levels of dis-engagement and drop-outs among poor and ethnic minority children of Bangladesh by shifting the focus from commonly attributed causes of educational “failure”. The common reasons suggested as contributors to low school enrolment and increased involvement in labour have been the pressure of both school and work (Ahmad, 1991), the level of parents’ education, and poverty (Kabeer, Nambissan and Subrahmanian, 2003). As George Dei (2000) argues,
“attributing increasing levels of drop-outs to family and socioeconomic conditions serves to blame the victims of systemic oppression by pathologizing the trinity of student-parent-community” (p. 17). The intention of this study is not to deny the role of poverty or other factors in children’s disengagement in school, but rather, to bring the flaws within the education system into focus with the hope of addressing the issue in holistic, rather than pathologizing terms.

Concentrating specifically on the curriculum of the primary school system, I will be using textbooks as a site of analysis in order to fulfill the primary learning objective, which is to understand how these texts construct ideologies of nationhood, citizenship and belonging and what role they play in the marginalization, otherization and oppression of children from lower socio-economic status and ethnic minority groups. By theorizing that colonialist practices of oppression based on ethnicity and class are a reality in both the macro socio-economic structures and in everyday interactions, I intend to locate their specific manifestations within the seemingly neutral education system, specifically the textbooks and to investigate the extent to which they challenge and demystify the notion of Bangladesh as a culturally homogenous nation and that of “universal primary education” built upon an “inclusive” philosophy.

In short, this thesis will explore the role of textbooks in pushing the rural and urban poor, and ethnic minority children out of the school system, thereby sustaining and reproducing ethnic and class hierarchy characteristic of Bangladeshi society. More importantly, through an analysis of the textbooks content and exploring its links with the multiple colonial histories of Bangladesh, I theorize that
ethnic and class oppression both in the schools and in the larger society is nothing short of a British colonial form of racism. I explore the ways in which racist categorizations and stereotypes characteristic of British imperialism still perpetuate themselves in the so-called independent nation of Bangladesh through the policies and practices of the social and political elites, thereby giving rise to an internal colonial project. I argue that the practices of exclusion and inferiorization used within and reproduced via these textbooks are so strikingly similar to colonial methods, that ethnic minority groups and the poor working class can be seen as racialized populations or “races” that are constructed to be inferior and evicted from citizenship. The study is significant due to the lack of critical enquiry in this area in the context of Bangladesh. Most importantly, as a decolonizing project, the study hopes to fulfill its ultimate objective by asserting a need for a transformed education system, where minoritized children can claim their voices as citizens of Bangladesh. It is important to point out that by a transformed education system, I refer to a holistic system of knowledge which will contribute to greater economic opportunities for disadvantaged students, but will certainly not be limited to serving that function. Through this study, I envision a curriculum that will welcome each and every child of my country through fundamental principles of equity, diversity and love for one another, so that all students achieve the integrity, character and self-confidence required to move a nation forward.

**Personal Location:**

As part of the ethnic majority group of Bengalis and belonging to a middle-class family, I am able to locate myself within multiple sites of privilege. Yet, I have
simultaneously been marginalized in contexts that were separate, but in ways that have urged me to stand in solidarity with the oppressed children of my country. I spent my primary school years in Saudi Arabia in a small town where Arabic was the only medium of instruction at schools. Having no way of communicating or relating to the school system, I had no option but to receive my education at home. The textbooks I used were brought from Bangladesh during my yearly visits. Although eventually I moved to a city where I attended a school that followed the Education Board curriculum of Bangladesh, the Saudi Arabian policy of restricting “foreign” students from attending local universities compelled my family to leave the country and settle in Canada. During my twelve years in a country which I considered my second home, I was constantly made to feel that I did not belong, and that I was an outsider that was prohibited from the privileges of primary and post-secondary education. As I came to Canada and developed a critical consciousness, I began to forge the links between my status as an outsider in Saudi Arabia, and those millions of children of Bangladesh who are considered foreign and unworthy in their own country. I started to notice the relationship between the Bangladeshi school textbooks I studied (but did not question) as a child, and the struggles of children like Josthna. Almost two decades later, as I opened the primary school textbooks and noticed through a critical observation of the content that there has been very little progress in the ways in which they are written, my deep concern led me towards the mission of standing with the marginalized peoples of my country for the cause of this project.
**Theoretical framework:**

In my study, I aim to use a combination of theoretical frameworks, namely an anti-colonial discursive framework and post-colonial theory. Not only is each framework useful in its own right in addressing my research problem, the two complement one another, giving rise to a more dialogical and interdisciplinary tool in understanding oppression in the context of the primary school curriculum. More importantly, these frameworks help to contextualize the historical roots of colonial forms of oppression in the case of Bangladesh, a country that has faced numerous periods of colonial domination.

**Anti-colonial discursive framework:**

The anti-colonial discursive framework is essential for this study, as it is an appropriate guide for understanding colonial relations of power. As Dei and Azgharzadeh (2001) state, “The anti-colonial discursive framework acknowledges the role of societal, institutional structures in producing and reproducing social inequalities” (p. 301). Moreover, it is important to note that “colonial in this sense is not conceptualized simply as foreign or alien, but rather as imposed or dominating” (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). This becomes important in recognizing a practice of dominant knowledge production within schools through textbooks as a colonial act of imposing on particular groups of students by erasing, skewing, or marginalizing their epistemologies. It also helps to identify and challenge the power and role of the government/state in reproducing ethnic divisions, class hierarchies, poverty, etc by excluding specific groups of the population from the education system.
What is most significant about the anti-colonial discursive framework is that it is articulated as “an epistemology of the colonized,” and it sees “marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories” (Memmi 1969, Fanon, 1963 and Foucault 1980, as cited in Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). As such, it gives voice and power to marginalized groups to resist and subvert colonial systems of power through establishing their own lived experiences and ways of knowing. Moreover, the anti-colonial framework provides a common ground for resistance, by realizing the interlocking nature of various systems of oppression which disallows the privileging of any one site of difference over another (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). While ethnicity and class are the two sites which I examine in my project, the anti-colonial framework helps me to simultaneously understand that intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, ability etc create multiple and often overlapping layers of oppression. This allows for the coming together of different groups and resistance against all forms of colonial domination. In other words, through an analysis of ethnic and class discrimination within the education system, this study makes use of an anti-colonial lens in order to make a point to resist and challenge oppression in its entirety.

**Post-colonial theory:**

Drawing on the works of Homi Bhabha, David Goldberg, Kay Anderson and Paulo Freire, this study makes use of post-colonial theory as a complement to the anti-colonial framework in my utilization of theoretical frameworks. As Freire formulated a revolutionary educational philosophy as a way of decolonization by empowering the underclasses / the marginalized, his work becomes instrumental in
both understanding the power dynamics between the educational system and marginalized children in Bangladesh and thinking of possible ways to challenge and subvert the dominant powers in education.

According to Freire (1971), an oppressive educational system establishes “knowledge as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 58). This concept known as “Banking education” is indispensable in understanding and exposing a curriculum that not only assumes that students enter the school system as “empty vessels,” but also establishes itself as the all knowing authority that can “educate” children through a skewed perception of the children’s worlds and by erasing any knowledge they might bring into the classroom. Thus, Freire’s work becomes crucial in the interpretation of textbooks and investigating the ways in which these texts are written over an erased psyche of students. Freire further asks, “If the implementation of liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed” (p. 39)? This is paramount in understanding his approach to solutions, namely the absolute necessity of the oppressed themselves to be involved the development of a pedagogy with the aim of subverting or rupturing hegemonic systems of education. This will be extremely important in my research and analysis of textbook language, as my work being an entirely decolonizing project, it will allow me to avoid any re-enforcement of dominant ideologies which promote top-down solutions and impose them upon the oppressed.
Edward Said is another post-colonial thinker, whose works including *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) serve as a useful guide with regards to bringing Freire’s work on oppression in education to the specific realm of text and language. Alireza Asgharzadeh (2005), who uses Said’s work as a framework in his own PhD research states, “Said’s work helps us to understand how colonial powers colonize human imagination and understanding through the misrepresentation of the other through literature, media, press and various discursive methods” (p. 75). He further mentions, “For Said, all texts are produced within a web of interconnected social, political and humane relations, which do not allow them to be studied, interpreted and analyzed independently of and in isolation from such relations” (p. 76). This helps me to bring primary school textbooks out of the confines of the classroom and situate them within the larger social and political context. More importantly, it aids me in legitimizing my analysis which takes into account not only the ways in which larger socio-political forces shape textbook content, but also the ways in which textbooks serve to reproduce those forces.

The works of Homi Bhabha (1994), David Goldberg (1993) and Kay Anderson (2007) are indispensable as they help to link the present situation of knowledge production in primary schools in Bangladesh to the colonial histories of the country and more importantly, to demystify the notion of cultural and racial homogeneity by pointing out both obvious and disguised practices of racism both in the larger society and in the text produced for children. Homi Bhaba’s book, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and David Goldberg’s (1993) theory on Race and Racism provide a novel method of understanding ethnicity and class in Bangladesh, as they
help to illustrate that ethnic and class discrimination both through discourse and material forces in the country contains striking parallels with the form of racism seen in the British colonial administration.

**Methodology:**

**Data:**

The data used in this study are primary school textbooks for grades 3 to 5 which came into use in the year 2008. The books selected are of a specific subject area, namely Social Studies. They have been collected from a public bookstore where school textbooks are sold.

**Social Studies Textbooks:**

The Social Studies Textbook that is used at the primary level is entitled, “Poribesh Porichiti - Shomaj” or “Introduction to Society.” These textbooks (of grades 3 to 5) have been particularly chosen due to the relevance of their content in terms of presenting information regarding the people, culture and history of Bangladesh. Moreover, it is in these books and specifically in these three grades that the ideas of nation, nationality and citizenship manifest themselves to a significant degree.

**Critical Discourse Analysis:**

The reason that Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is so appropriate and significant in the analysis of textbooks is that it “it studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and
talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2001, pg. 352). In other words, this analytical method is specifically devoted to uncovering the power relations and the structural systems of power and domination that manifest themselves in text, which is precisely the aim of my study. Its emphasis on language and its underlying power relations bears great resemblance to the post-structuralist notion of discourse. As Paetcher (2000) states, a Foucauldian, post-structuralist notion perceives discourse as “a way of speaking, thinking or writing that presents particular relationships as self-evidently true” (p. 41) or as “socially organized frameworks of meaning that define categories of what can be said and done” (Burman, 1994, p. 2, as cited in Paetcher, 2000, p. 42). It further mentions “that discourses are intimately involved with power relations” (p. 42). In other words, speech, thought and texts are regulated and produced based on who has power and what kind of knowledge is allowed to be produced. While Dutch theorist, Teun A. Van Dijk (2001) in his method of Critical Discourse Analysis treats discourse in a similar manner, he diverges from post-structuralism in his notion of “power."

Foucault describes power as the following: “Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allowed to slip away; power is exercised from innumerate points” (Foucault, 1978, p. 94, as cited in Paetcher, 2000, p.43). According to this definition of power, it is “not held by any one institution or group. It is everywhere” (Paetcher, 2000, p. 43).

Van Dijk’s focus lies on understanding who has access to the production of discourse, and how and why it is produced, and the implications it has on reproducing domination and inequality. As such, it is important for him to
understand discourse as interlinked with “the social power of groups and institutions.” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 354) Therefore, utilizing a Foucauldian notion of power as circulating and operating everywhere in a “net-work like fashion” (Paetcher, 2001) does not suffice in my work, as it undermines (though does not exclude) the power held by institutions like the school and the government and the groups they legitimize as ideal by reproducing a particular discourse on nationhood and belonging.

Based on one of the central tenets (of CDA outlined by Fairclough and Wodak) that “discourse constitutes society and culture” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353), the fundamental premise of my study is that primary school textbooks of Bangladesh are anything but neutral and rather than being produced in a vacuum, are in a constant engagement with the larger society. CDA thus, provides me with the tools necessary to uncover the hierarchical power relations embedded within the text of children’s books between different socio-economic classes, between the Bengali speaking majority and non-Bengali speaking ethnic minorities, between the urban middle class and the migrant, rural labourers, and so forth. More importantly, it allows me to investigate and illustrate the ways in which these textual relations of power reflect and reproduce group relations and institutional power structures of the larger society. Furthermore, the commitment of critical scholarship in CDA towards giving importance to the experiences and opinions of members of oppressed groups and supporting their struggles against oppression and inequality (Van Dijk, 2001) is an appropriate fit with the aims of the anti-colonial discursive framework and post-colonial theory.
It must be stressed however, that my analysis of oppression towards ethnic minorities and the working class separately does not contain the implication that these two groups always face oppression separately and exclusively by virtue of either poverty or ethnic background (as such an approach would be a direct contradiction to the anti-colonial discursive framework). I attempt to perform my analysis keeping in mind that there are numerous, interlocking levels of oppression and based on overlapping characteristics, ethnic minority and poor children may be placed simultaneously on various places on the social hierarchy and face various levels of alienation.

I specifically use Van Dijk’s (2001) multidisciplinary approach to CDA through his analytical framework of the “discourse-cognition-society triangle” (p. 97). He emphasizes the need for CDA to be diverse and multidisciplinary not only through an integration of the works of scholars from various cultures, disciplines and directions of research, but also through an account of the complex and integral relationships between discourse structures and the larger social structures. More importantly, he asserts that understanding the complexities of these relationships entails recognizing the role of “cognitive” properties in shaping discourse. In other words, beliefs and goals of the speaker or writer become crucial not only because they formulate a certain discourse, but also because through that discourse, they reflect and reproduce social or group ideologies, and the structural aspects of society, such as group relations within institutions, organizations, political systems, etc. “Cognition” then becomes an essential component, the necessary bridge between discourse and society.
This “sociocognitive” interface between text and society stressed in Van Dijk’s framework can reflect personal opinions and perceptions of an author regarding the event or issue described in his or produced text, or “socially shared norms, values, interests, or goals of groups” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 98). This is very appropriate in the analysis of textbooks, as the subject location of the author in terms of social class, ethnic background, gender and ability is very telling both in terms of the discourse produced and the socio-political structures of which the citizens are a part. As Neeladri Bhattacharya argues, “Writing textbooks, as we all know, is an exercise in a particular form of pedagogy. How the argument is to presented to the child becomes important. It reflects not only our conception of history, but also how we visualize the function of the text, that is, what we intend the text to do” (Bhattachariya, 2009, p.107). In the case of the Social Studies textbooks used in this study, it is very difficult to verify the individual personal beliefs and the specific intentions of the authors. While the books contain a list of authors on the first page, they do not specify the author in terms of each of the article. Therefore, my work relies on finding patterns within the socio-economic and/or ethnic background of the authors and their reflection in the common beliefs and ideologies found throughout the text. In any case, the “discourse-cognition-society” model is the most appropriate framework, as it allows me to interpret children’s textbooks by asking the following questions:

- Who is producing the textbooks?
- What are the socio-economic, political and ethnic backgrounds of the authors whose works are compiled in the language and history textbooks?
- What kinds of belief systems or ideologies of the authors are reflected through the text?
- What is their relevance to and role in the perpetuation of racist and oppressive relations between groups in power and disadvantaged groups both inside and outside educational institutions?

The methodological details of how the text itself will be analyzed in order to answer these questions are discussed below.

**The discourse structure analyzed:**

Based on the framework of Van Dijk, this study analyzes text at the structural level and uncovers its underlying meaning. “Discourse structure are often informally divided into surface structure and deep or underlying structures” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 103). The surface structures, which he associates with “forms of language use one can see or hear, such as sounds, intonations, gestures, letters, graphic displays, words and the order of words in a sentence” (pg. 103), express and “code” the underlying meanings which say much about ideologies, prejudices, biases, stereotypes etc. Word order, use of active and passive voice, etc fall into the category of syntactic structures. However, the main structural element of discourse that my analysis relies on is content, “such as choice of topics, propositions, lexical terms” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 99), and images. As Van Dijk argues, “In the lexical description of the properties and actions of majority versus minority groups, we
find the major surface manifestations of underlying mental models of ethnic events, and hence of ethnic prejudices” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 106). In other words, how the author’s/authors’ cognitive properties have perceived, formulated and presented a particular event or idea can be found through surface structural elements, such as lexicon. This is extremely relevant in my particular study, as it helps to identify the racist attitudes towards both ethnic minorities and the exclusion of poor populations through the words and images used to describe them. These structural aspects of discourse have been used to reveal the underlying meanings in terms of what the perspectives of the authors are, what is being implied, what is being assumed or presupposed and what is being argued overall at a more global level, i.e. in a large, coherent body of text. Prior to the analysis, topics of the texts were identified through chapter titles and those that were relevant to the discussion of nationalism, citizenship, people, culture and history were particularly selected for analysis. Words, phrases and images that have both direct and implicit meaning have been located for the purpose of an analysis of local meanings. At the same time, larger bodies of text such as paragraphs have been analyzed to analyze the global argument. Moreover, how frequently similar ideologies appear in a textbook, or in the other words, the number of pieces reflecting similar ideologies provides an idea as to whether the compilers of textbook information want to maintain coherence in delivering a specific (dominant) form of knowledge to the recipients, namely the students.

Since at the heart of CDA research is the linking of language and social relations of power (as mentioned earlier), the analysis of these representations
require both a local and global contextualisation of the text, which calls for a return to the discussion on "cognition." While a local contextualization entails taking into account the subject location of the authors and their "cognition," i.e. their beliefs and goals which may reflect a dominant perception of social relations, a more global contextualization of the text takes into account the ways in which such perceptions and ideologies reflect and reproduce material socio-political relations. In other words, the final step in the "discourse-cognition-society" triangle is the placement of the discourse in question within the institutional practices and forces in society. Texts are related to social structures in order to explore how personal beliefs, ideologies and knowledge presented in discourse materialize into the real world to reproduce systems of unequal power. Through a global contextualization of texts within the societal groups, organizations and institutions which they address or refer to, or in other words, by locating the structural entities in which these ideologies operate, the text's role in sustaining dominance and oppression within these larger structural systems are understood. As Van Dijk (2001) argues,

CDA is mainly interested in the role of discourse in the instantiation and reproduction of power and power abuse (dominance), and hence, particularly interested in the detailed study of the interface between the local and the global, between structures of discourse and the structures of society. We have seen that such links are not direct, but need a cognitive and an interactional interface: social representations, including attitudes and ideologies are often mediated by mental models in order to show up in discourse, and such discourse has social effects and functions only when it contributes to the formation or confirmation of social attitudes and ideologies (p. 117).

Therefore, after the location of dominant narratives, my ultimate goal in the analysis of the text is to understand how the ideologies used by dominant, privileged groups (e.g. Bengali speakers and those belonging to higher socio-
economic classes) to control discourse and to produce a dominant and biased knowledge about disadvantaged groups (such as ethnic minorities and urban slum and rural families) serve to marginalize and erase the voices of students belonging to those groups by affecting their cognition. The ways in which the “ideal” student and citizen, the “true” heritage, history, culture and social life of Bangladesh are constructed have been understood as a manifestation of the historically perpetuated power relations between governmental powers, culturally and socio-economically privileged groups and their less privileged counterparts within institutions of social interaction. Most importantly, the linking of discourse structure with larger societal structures characteristic of CDA research helps me to explore whether and how the alienation and exclusion of ethnic, slum and rural children through textbook knowledge translates into their interaction and relationship with their teachers, children from privileged groups and the education system as a whole.
References


2. Bangladesh: A Brief Background

**Geography and climate:**

Bangladesh is a relatively small South Asian country with India located on its east, west and north and Myanmar (Burma) located on its east. The Bay of Bengal lies to the south of the country. The floodplains of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna, the delta formed by these three major rivers, two areas of uplands in between the rivers and the hills and valleys in the country’s eastern part make up the main surface features of Bangladesh (Rashid, in Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004). “The Ganges unites with the Jamuna (main channel of the Brahmaputra) and later joins the Meghna to eventually empty into the Bay of Bengal” (CIA world factbook, 2009). Bangladesh is almost entirely flat apart from the small area in the extreme Southeast, known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts which contains the highest point (Bigelow, 1995). Administratively, the country is divided into six divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Barishal, Rajshahi, Khulna. These are divided into 64 Zilas or districts. The districts are divided into 507 thanas or subdistricts, which in turn are divided into 4600 Unions, or groups of villages (Haiplik, 2004). There are approximately 86,000 villages that make up the map of this nation, and which contain the majority of the Bangladeshi population.

Bangladesh consists of a tropical climate, with mild winters from October to March, hot and humid summers from March to June, and humid, warm rainy monsoon from June to October (CIA world factbook, 2009). The Himalayas to the north of the country shelters the country from the cold, dry winds of the central
Asian countries of Tibet and Mongolia, resulting in the mild winters. The moist winds known as the Monsoon winds blow from the Indian Ocean and are blocked by the Himalayas, giving rise to significant rainfall (Rashid, in Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004). Bangladesh has six seasons, namely “Grishma (the hot months of April and May), Borsha (monsoon months of June and July), Sharat (the humid months of August and September), Hemanto (October and November when the hot weather breaks), Shitth (the delightful, cool winter months of December and January) and Boshonto (February and March when the violent storms relieve the mounting heat)” (Bigelow, 1995, p. 10).

**The people:**

Contrary to popular belief that Bangladesh is a culturally and ethnically homogenous country and the frequent, automatic association of Bangladesh with Bengalis, the country in reality is composed of rich cultural and ethnic diversity amongst its population of approximately 136 million. The Majority of the people in Bangladesh are Bengalis, who migrated in 50 BCE (Sarkar and Davey, 2009, p 3). Besides the Bengalis, there are more than forty-five ethnic minority groups (Haiplik, 2004) who “are referred to as Adibashi, a general Bangladeshi term for indigenous people” (Sarkar and Davey, 2009, p. 3). “There are also about 200,000 immigrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Gujrat” (Er-Rashid, 1997, p. 191).

The ethnic minority groups include the Santal, Khasi, Garo, Hajong, Kachari, Bara, Tipra, Riang, Chakma, Taungjainya or Tanchangas, Mogh, Mru, Kuki, Lushai, Kuli, Halam (a tribe of the Lushais), Bom, Pankho, Khumi, Khyen, Manipuri, Mikir, Oraon, Gurkha, Rajbangshi, Patro, Kharia, Munda, Malo, Mahali, Bedia, Bhumji, Kole,
Bhil, Karmakar, Mahato, Muriyar, Muhosor, Pahan, Paharia, Rai, Sing, Asam, Barman, Dalu, Hodi, and Banai (World Bank, 2008). The Santals and Khasis have been migrating from the Chhota Nagpur Plateau since the 1870s, eventually coming to Goalpara (Assam) by the 1920s. The Khasis, who are concentrated in the Sylhet District are mostly tea-garden labourers (Er-Rashid, 1977, p. 187). The Garo, Hajong, Kachari, Tipra, and Koch belong to a large group named Bodo or Bara (p. 187). The Chakma, Taungjainya, Mogh, Baruas or Rajbangshis (Bengali speaking Buddhist group), Tipra, Mru, Kuki and Lushais make up the main groups of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a region saturated with political history. The following table illustrates the regional distributions of the Adibashi (or Adivasi) communities:

Table 1: Ethnic groups of Bangladesh and their corresponding regions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Ethnic groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Sylhet (Sumangonj, Mouvlibazar, Sylhet, Hobigonj district)</td>
<td>Monipuri, Khasia, Garo, Hajong, Patro, Kharia, Santal, Oraon etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Mymensingh (Mymensingh, Tangail Netrokona, Jamalpur, Sherpur district)</td>
<td>Garo, Hajong, Koch, Barman, Dalu, Hodi, Bana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazipur</td>
<td>Barman, Garo, Koch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Area (Patuakhali, Barguna and Coxsbazar district)</td>
<td>Rakhain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-West (Jessore, Satkhira, Khulna district etc.)</td>
<td>Bagdi (Buno), Rajbangshi, Santal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitagong Hill Tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari district)</td>
<td>Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Bawm, Pangkhu, Lusai, Tanchangya, Khiang, Mru, Asam, Gurkha, Chak, Khumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-Bengal (Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Noagaon, Bagura, Sirajgonj, Chapainawabgonj, Natore district etc.)</td>
<td>Santal, Oraon, Munda, Malo, Mahali, Khondo, Bedia, Bhumij, Kole, Bhil, Karmakar, Mahato, Muriyar, Musohor, Pahan, Paharia, Rai, Sing, Turi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religion and Culture:

Due to the diversity of the country's population, the cultural and religious composition of the people of Bangladesh is equally versatile. “87% of the population is Muslim, 11% is Hindu, 0.6% is Buddhist, and 0.3% is Christian. There is also a mix of various tribal religions observed by the Adivasi communities” (Ahmed, 2001, p. 8, as cited in Haiplik, 2004, p. 86). While the state language is Bengali, there are 38 other languages and dialects spoken by Bangladeshis. These include Arakenese, Assamese, Bishnupriya, Burmese, Chak, Chakma, Chin-Asho, Chin-Bawm, Chin-Falam, Chin-Haka, Chin-Khumi, Chittagonian, Darlong, Garo, Hajong, Ho, Khasi, Koch, Kok Borok, Kurux, Megam, Meitei, Mizo, Mru, Mundari, Pankhu, Pnar, Rajbanshi, Riang, Sadri-Oraon, Santali, Shendu, Sylheti, Tanchangiya, Tippera, Usi and War (Lewis, 2009).

Economy:

The economy of Bangladesh is primarily agricultural. “Although more than half of the GDP is generated through the service sector, nearly two-thirds of Bangladeshis are employed in the agricultural sector” (CIA World Fact book, 2009). 11% of the labour force is employed in industry. Agricultural products include rice, jute, tea, wheat, sugarcane, potatoes, tobacco, pulses, oilseeds, spices, fruit; beef, milk, poultry, while industries include cotton textiles, jute, garments, tea processing, paper newsprint, cement, chemical fertilizer, light engineering, sugar (CIA world factbook, 2009).
Labour, which also brings remittances, is extensively exported to Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Kuwait and Malaysia. Children constitute yet another enormous source of labour in Bangladesh. “Children are found working in the following activities, sometimes under hazardous conditions: auto repair; battery recharging and recycling; road transport, such as rickshaw-pulling and fare-collecting; sawmilling; welding; metalworking; carpentry; fish drying; fish farming; leather tanning; construction; and garment manufacturing...According to a survey by the ILO, there are over 421,000 children, mostly girls, working as domestic servants in private households, some in exploitive conditions” (United States Department of Labour, 2008). In 2002/03, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted the second National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) and found that the “The total number of working children aged 5-17 years in rural areas is estimated at 6.4 million as against 1.5 million in urban areas, and as many as 93.3 per cent of all working children in the age group of 5-17 years operate in the informal sector. Agriculture engages 4.5 million (56.4 per cent children), while the services sector engages 2 million (25.9 per cent), and industry, 1.4 million (17.7 per cent)” (ILO, 2005).

Foreign aid has brought more than $US 1.5 billion per annum over the past decade (Plunkett et al, 2000, p. 29, as cited in Haiplik, 2004, p. 93).

“Although Bangladesh has made some progress in reducing poverty, it still faces the reality that, “about 41% of the population lives in poverty” (Rahman, 2009, p. 1). Landlessness and unemployment have also led to a rapid growth of the urban population due to migration of the rural population in search of work. The chronic poverty of the population has been attributed to causes such as “lack of access to
productive assets, a saturated labour market, unemployment, and illiteracy, lack of better-paying job opportunities, early marriage, social injustice and poor government” (Rahman, 2009, p. 2).

**Political History:**

Any understanding of the complex present socio-political scenario of Bangladesh requires its contextualization within its equally intricate political history which is tied to the histories of India and Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, the region known as Bangladesh today was formerly a part of the Bengal province of the Indian subcontinent. During the partition of India and Pakistan at the end of the British colonial administration, present Bangladesh became known as East Pakistan, while West Bengal remained with India. In 1971 after the liberation war with West Pakistan, the former East Pakistan came to be known as the country, Bangladesh.

Prior to British rule, Muslims ruled Bengal for five and a half centuries (1200 AD to the year 1757). Muslims from Delhi conquered Bengal in the 13th century, and Bengal was brought into the Moghul Empire in 1576 (Bigelow, 1995). “The British East India Company took control of Bengal in 1757” (p. 23). Due to the boundless wealth of the province, the trade of Bengal became more and more profitable to the East India Company from the early eighteenth century onwards, accounting for 75% of the company's procurement of Indian goods by 1750. Profits were extended by abusing free trade rights and illegal participation in internal trade, which was hindered in 1756 due to Nawab Siraj-ud-daula’s action taken against the extension of fortifications in Calcutta by the British to deter attack from the French. However, not only were trading privileges restored, but the province came under the
company’s control as the British took revenge by overthrowing Nawab Siraj and replacing him with their puppet, General Mir Jafar in the famous battle of Plassy in 1757 (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2003). The company governed British India from 1757 to 1857. The company was dissolved in 1858 after the Great Mutiny of 1857, at which point the British Crown seized the responsibility for South Asia (Bigelow, 1995). The mutiny, which is often described as the first war of independence against the British, was a “response to multiple grievances. Among these were British cultural policies, the severity of revenue assessments, and the degradation of landed and princely elites” (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2003, p. 99).

Under British rule, “economic transportation and communication systems were transformed and by 1870, interior markets were opened to external trade through the rail system” (Bigelow, 1995, p. 23). Economic exploitation continued as “Indian wealth was being leeched for Britain’s benefit” (p. 23), resulting in growing nationalistic feelings amongst Indians. However, in order to avoid agitation, the British began to strengthen communal feelings between Muslims and Hindus. In 1905, Bengal was partitioned along the lines of Hindu and Muslim majority, Bihar and Orissa to the west being the Hindu majority and Bengal and Assam to the East being the Muslim majority. In 1906, the Muslim League was formed in East Bengal out of the needs to serve the interests of the Muslim community (Bigelow, 1995, p. 24). Although Bengal was re-united in 1911 due to the grievances of the Bengali Hindus, the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 marking its final independence from British colonial rule once again, divided Bengal, resulting in the formation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) under the rule of West Pakistan.
“Pakistan was founded to provide a Muslim nation on the sub-continent” (Bigelow, 1995, p. 25). However, the exploitation of Bangladesh in political, economic and cultural/linguistic terms continued during the Pakistani regime. Nationalistic feelings strengthened among the Bengalis when Urdu was declared the state language of Pakistan. February 21, 1951 marks one of the most important days for Bengalis and the beginning of the freedom movement of Bangladesh, as on this day, students were killed and hundreds were injured by police-fire as Bengalis demanded their language (Sobhan, 1993). Nationalism intensified as Bengalis felt that politics remained in the hands of the Punjabi elite. On the 26th of March, 1971, after a complete non-cooperation movement with the military government of Pakistan, Bangladesh declared independence. After nine months of a bloody civil war, the Pakistani Army surrendered and the independent country of Bangladesh came into existence (Bigelow, 1995).

The Bangladeshi independence was followed by great political unrest, as “leadership went to inexperienced hands” (p. 28). The leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, became the first prime Minister of Bangladesh. However, Rahman and his most of his family members were assassinated on August 15, 1975, after which numerous coups and counter coups succeeded each other and Martial Law was proclaimed in 1976 (Sobhan, 1993). General Ziaur Rahman was the Chief Martial Law administrator “until he formed the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and was elected President” (Rosser, 2003). After Rahman’s assassination in 1981, Lieutenant General H.M. Ershad (leader of the Jatiya party) took over in 1982 and was elected president in 1986. Under his leadership, “Bangladesh was
constitutionally defined as a socialist democracy” (Bigelow, 1995, p. 29). Ershad was forced to step down in 1991, at which point BNP came into power, this time led by Ziaur Rahman’s widow, Begum Khaleda Zia. In 1996, Zia’s term ended and Sheikh Mujib’s daughter, Sheikh Hasina came into power as leader of the Awami League (Rosser, 2003. p. 142). The BNP returned to power in 2001 in coalition with the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party, and from the period of 2006-2008, Bangladesh was ruled by a caretaker government as the scheduled election of 2006 did not take place. Currently, Bangladesh remains a parliamentary democracy with the Awami League being the party in power, and opposition parties being the BNP, the Jatiyo Party, the Jamaat E-Islami Party and other smaller parties (Bigelow, 1995).

**Education:**

The stages of government education in Bangladesh can be divided as follows: Primary education (grades 1-5), secondary and higher secondary education (grades 6-12) and University education. Grade 10 is followed by the board matriculation examinations, after which students continue onto grades 11 and 12 (known as college). (“Grade” is termed as “Class” in the Bengali medium schools). Grade (or class) 12 is followed by the board intermediate examinations after which students choose their field of study at the University level in preparation for a Bachelors or professional degree. Higher education includes Masters and Doctoral degrees.

Sixty-five percent of the formal primary schools in Bangladesh are under direct management of the government, and rest are registered non-governmental community-initiated schools which receive government support and assistance and
follow the government curriculum (IRIN report, 2007). While the medium of instruction in government schools is Bangla (or Bengali), private English medium schools also exist alongside government schools (both at the primary and secondary level) which can be afforded by the urban elite and where “the students are subject to British-determined curriculum and assessment” (Imam, 2005, p. 1). Other non-state providers of education include NGO-run schools, one of the largest ones being BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) which runs more than 40,000 non-formal primary schools geared towards poor children who are neglected by the government school system (Chowdhury and Asadullah, 2008). Religious education is provided by “Madrassahs for Muslims, Sanskrit Tols for Hindus, Pali Tols for Buddhists and English Seminary for Christians.” (Haiplik, 2004, p. 106) “Most Madrassa high schools in Bangladesh are financed by the state and include a modern curriculum alongside traditional religious subjects” (Chowdhury and Asadullah, 2008, p. 1).

The quality of education presents a multi-faceted problem in Bangladesh, especially in the schools run and supported by the government. Teachers are inadequately qualified and poorly trained and paid. According to Mohammad Badal Miah, an Assistant Professor in Dhaka, the poor infrastructure of the school, including “lack of libraries, gyms and playgrounds, lack of educational resources, sub-standard pedagogical methods and curriculum are some of the many factors that negatively affect student learning” (IRIN report, 2007) and contribute to increasing drop-out rates. According to a UNICEF report (2009), teacher-centered classrooms and rote learning are characteristic of the education system, with
textbooks being the only reliable source for teachers to deliver the education (Khondokar, 2009). “According to a study conducted by 10 NGOs, with the Commonwealth Education Fund, the dropout rate has increased from 33 percent in 2002 to 47 percent in 2006” (IRIN report, 2007) for both boys and girls.

**Evolution of primary education in Bangladesh:**

As the focus of this thesis is on primary education, the following discussion of the history of education in Bangladesh primarily involves that of the primary education system of Bangladesh along with a general context of education during the colonial period. More specifically, the section highlights important developments in government primary education, as the study deals with formal government primary school system, which reflects “The Bangladeshi government’s largest effort to achieve universal primary education” (Mian, 1999, p. 104).

**Colonial Bengal:**

Krishna Kumar (1988) argues that the roots of the heavy dependence on textbooks in schools at present, which he calls the “textbook culture” is related to the “early 19th century when the East India Company took certain definite steps for establishing an education system” (p. 453). Even though practices of memorization were already in place in India, he argues that colonial educational policies intensified the practice of textbook-centered learning.

“It was in Bengal that the British laid the foundation of their subsequent colonial expansion in India” (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004, p. 254), and therefore, Bengal was one of the first regions to come into contact with colonial systems of
education. Prior to the British administration, education was not administered by the state, but left in the hands of private individuals. Each religious community had its own system of education which was patronized by the wealthy, but drew students from the poorer classes (p. 267). However, intentions of the British to facilitate colonial expansion through educating the Indians had begun to take shape as early as the eighteenth century, which were rooted in orientalist justifications that Indians were “morally degraded.” This is seen in East India Company official, Charles Grant’s treatise of 1792 which emphasized the need to educate Indians based on this logic. Although the suggestion was not accepted initially by the Company or the parliament, the Charter Act of 1814 officially recognized the educational responsibility of the East India Company’s government towards its Indian subjects (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004). Efforts of missionaries to Christianize the population (with limited success) by forming a dialogue with students through teaching in vernacular subjects, and the eventual establishment of colleges that introduced Western systems of science and medicine all constituted the involvement of the colonial government in education of the Indian subjects (p. 272). Most importantly, the education system adopted a specific format in 1854 from Sir Charles Wood’s dispatch (Kumar, 1988, p.453), which completely altered the pre-colonial education system, the patterns of which can be seen in Bangladesh to this day.
The following are some of the major decisions that entailed the new system:

“i) The new system would be governed by a bureaucracy at every stage from primary schooling onward and in all aspects, including the structure of syllabi, the content of textbooks, and teachers’ training.

ii) The new system would aim at acculturating Indian children and youths in European attitudes and perceptions and imparting to them the skills required for working in colonial administration, particularly in middle and lower rungs.

iii) The teaching of English and its use as a medium of instruction would be a means of this acculturation and training.

iv) Indigenous schools would have to conform to the syllabus and textbooks prescribed by the colonial government if they wanted to seek the government’s aid.

v) Impersonal, centralized examinations would have to be used to assess students’ eligibility for promotion and to select candidates for the award of scholarships.” (Kumar, 1988, p. 454)

Despite numerous changes in primary education policies in “post-colonial” India and Pakistan, and subsequently in post-independence Bangladesh, the foundation put in place by colonialism of complete bureaucratic control of education entailing the regulation of teachers and curriculum still remains.

**Primary education during the Pakistan period (1947-1971):**

Efforts to make primary education compulsory and free had already begun by Indian political leaders such as G.K. Gokhale in response to mass illiteracy in Bengal prior to partition (Khatun, 1992). Moreover, Indian nationalist and political leader, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was highly dissatisfied with the education
system put in place by the British government. In a conference in 1937, resolutions were made based on Gandhi's basic principles of primary education by the Government of Bengal: "compulsory free education, education through craft, education through mother tongue, self-reliance, education connected with the life of the educand, and finally inculcation of the ideals of democratic citizenship" (Sharma and Sharma, 1996, p. 157).

Following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, primary education in East Bengal followed the pattern of education introduced in 1937. The All Pakistan Educational conference held in 1947, along with proposing five years of free and compulsory primary education, made Urdu and Islamic religious instruction compulsory, which became part of national policy of education. However, the East Bengal Educational system reconstruction committee in 1949 (with Moulana Md. Akram Khan as president) aimed to advise the government in reconstructing an education system that was a remnant of a foreign government (Khatun, 1992). With the aims of the full "development of a child's intellectual, moral and aesthetic potentialities" (p.60), implantation of reading and writing the mother tongue, arithmetic, social studies, science, arts and crafts, physical training, games and music, and optional religious instruction was proposed. Moreover, in order to improve the quality of textbooks, the East-Bengal school textbook act of 1954 gave the government the power to establish the "East Bengal textbook board" which would be comprised of "men of high status and knowledge and experience" (p. 51) to prepare, publish, select, approve and distribute textbooks. Despite the aforementioned and subsequent official aims of aiding a child's moral and
intellectual development, Sharifa Khatun (1992) argues that primary education “remained bookish, classroom oriented and theoretical” (p. 76).

The Commission on National Education formed by Ayub Khan in 1958 was established with the purpose of setting up a uniform education system in Pakistan, and a new objective was inserted into the implementation of primary education, namely: the awakening of a “sense of citizenship, civic responsibility and patriotism” (Khatun, 1992, p. 64). Nationalistic feelings of Pakistani solidarity along with Islamic ideologies guided the framing of the curriculum and for primary schools in Pakistan in subsequent years (Khatun, 1992). These feelings however, were being shaken by the rising nationalism of the people of East Bengal due to their political, economic and linguistic oppression.

**Bangladesh: (1971-present):**

The Universalization of primary education, which entails “that all primary age group children are in school, there is no drop-out at all and every child who enrols in class 1 passes through all classes and completes V” (p. 126), was a theme that emerged prior to the independence of Bangladesh. (As mentioned previously, “Class” in this context is equivalent to “grade” or year of study) However, despite numerous aforementioned policy developments in Pakistan, primary education remained a matter of neglect as the colonial foundation of educating Indians to act as middlemen between the ruler and ruled led to expansions of higher educational institutions (Khatun, 1992).

“In 1971, when Bangladesh was created, there was no compulsory primary education... The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh established the responsibility of
the state to provide education to all its citizens” (Unterhalter et al., 2003, p. 87). The educational measures taken by the state after independence were guided by its aim of national reconstruction and redesigning of ideologies imposed by the Pakistani government. The National Curriculum and Syllabus committee was adopted by the Government in 1975 in order to formulate the new curriculum. Several Five-year plans were developed (from 1973-1978, 1980-1985, and 1985-1990), all of which targeted increased primary school enrolment along with other aims including improvement of the quality of instruction and curriculum, strengthening administration and supervision and improving facilities (Khatun, 1992). However, the objectives could not be met initially due to political unrest of the newly liberated country and later, due to low government expenditure (Khatun, 1992). Moreover, rote memorization rather than critical thinking in schools were emphasized within the plans of this committee (Mian, 1999). The curricular framework put into effect by this committee continued onto the 1990s (Khatun, 1992).

Primary education remained one of the top priorities of the government during the third five year plan, during which the Bangladesh National Education Commission was constituted to “meet the socio-economic and political need and aspirations of the country” (p. 71). Besides the aims of the commission to establish primary education as a means to develop the child’s physical and mental capabilities and ethical and moral qualities, other objectives included: a) the development of “brotherhood, international understanding and to attain ethical and spiritual values based on the basis of the faith that all men are created by Allah and Allah is the source of all thoughts and actions b) “To create awareness about one’s own country,
patriotism and national solidarity” (p. 72). In 1981, during the government of General Ershad, A directorate of primary education (DPE) was established (Unterhalter et al., 2003, p. 90) under the control of the Ministry of Education.

Programs to expand primary education began to be influenced by foreign organization in the 1980s. The mid 1980’s also saw the rise of NGO initiatives in providing non-formal primary education for children in rural areas (p. 90). Moreover, “Between 1990 and 1995, 58% of government funds allocated to primary education came from donors” including “the IDA of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, SIDA, the British ODA, CIDA, UNICEF, UNDP, the EEC, OPEC and the governments of Japan, Germany and Saudi Arabia which came with policy initiatives to improve access and revise the curriculum (p. 91). “General Ershad’s Government also promulgated the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act of 1990” (p.91) entailing the constitutional provision for free, universal and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 to 10. By 1993, all urban and rural thanas (sub-districts) were brought under the act, but enforcement of it was extremely difficult due to the number of students compared to the inadequate number of schools (Haiplik, 2004).

More recent and large-scale initiatives regarding primary education in Bangladesh include The National Education Policy 2000, PEDP (primary education development project), PEDP II (running from 2003-2009) and the National Plan of Action (NPA) on education for all. The National Education Policy places a high emphasis on nation and national identity building, the PEDP prioritizes educational quality improvement and enrolment increase as its aims, and the NPA bases its
preparatory work on the implementation of the National Education policy using research generated through PEDP projects (p. 93). “The PEDP II is a “US$7 billion project funded by the government (63.9 percent) and development agencies (36.1 percent)” (IRIN report, 2007).

Currently, the production, development and distribution of government school textbooks in Bangladesh are under the authority of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB, an organization under the Ministry of Education) which was established in 1983 by merging the East Pakistan School Textbook Board and the National Curriculum Development Centre (established in 1981) (Ministry of Education, 2006).
References


3. Literature Review

The uncovering of unequal power relations through an analysis of children’s text is not a new approach in anti-oppression research. Drawing on Fanon, Laryck, Shwarz, Sterling, etc, Doyle-Wood (2003) states that all these authors share the belief that “racist texts for children form one of the most insidious tools of oppression within the arsenal of white hegemonic systems of power” (p. 4). While Doyle-Wood’s work does not specifically deal with textbooks and covers children’s literature in general, I find the work of Andrea R. Prewitt (2008) useful in my study as it specifically recognizes the significance of textbooks in perpetuating oppression. Prewitt’s thesis on representations of African American students in history textbooks of Georgia states explicitly that “textbooks are political tools aimed at transmitting particular ways of looking at the world” (Williams, 2005, as cited in Prewitt, 2008, p. 22). The study further emphasizes that “facts and figures, ideas, and cultural values, which are transmitted through words and pictures, impact child development in such a way that it is carried into adult life” (The Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1980, as cited in Prewitt, 2008, p. 23).

Although my work may not be directly related to texts produced within a system of white supremacy (as the textbooks are produced by Bangladeshis themselves), the aforementioned works were fundamental during my research on literature as they re-affirmed my belief that the primary school textbooks produced in Bangladesh are anything but neutral. More importantly, they helped me to link
the current process of text production with the colonial past of Bangladesh, which was pervaded by white hegemony. With the use of such background research, I have therefore, been able to illustrate the ways in which the system of knowledge production via textbooks in Bangladesh mirrors the racist project of writing children’s text within a white hegemonic system. Since issues of race and racism seem to be virtually absent in the existing literature on education and curriculum within the context of Bangladesh, my study is unique and diverges from any previous on work on children’s text and also any work on education in Bangladesh.

In George Dei’s book, *Removing the Margins: The Challenges and Possibilities of Inclusive Schooling*, he explicitly states that the book transcends a mere articulation of issues of racism and oppression in the education system (Dei, 2000) and discusses the ways in which dominant knowledge can be subverted in order to remove the boundaries that divide students along racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, class, linguistic, and religious lines. Moreover, inclusive schooling is discussed within the Context of North America. On these grounds, the book seems to be related to my project in a limited way, as my study primarily engages in locating, articulating and understanding the effects of oppressive education on marginalized students in a Bangladeshi context. Nonetheless, the book has been extremely important as it has allowed me to form the basis of my study through presenting and emphasizing the need to investigate structural forms of oppression within educational institutions. It has re-affirmed my belief arising from my own schooling experiences that educational failures have an integral relationship with schooling experiences, and that “structural processes of schooling foster unequal
opportunities and create differential outcomes, particularly for racially minoritized students and those from low socio-economic family backgrounds” (Dei, 2000, p. 16).

Bringing structural processes of schooling into focus allows one to locate the relationship between centre and margin, which Dei argues is a power relation (p. 16). As long as any knowledge is selectively placed at the centre, others will be marginalized. Hence, Dei’s argument that inclusion in the process of learning entails centering all learners and that “the experiences, histories, cultures and identities of all learners are considered as central to all levels of educational practices (e.g. teaching, instruction, curriculum and textual production)” is key in my study. It helps to not only situate textbooks as a structural and systemic site of oppression, but allows for the exploration of the power relation between margin and centre and investigate ways in which such marginalization can be subverted.

Another of Dei’s books, entitled Reconstructing Drop-out: A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students’ Disengagement from School (1997) is instrumental not only in understanding the curriculum as a tool in oppression and marginalization of students, but also in recognizing it as a direct factor in the disengagement of students and the discontinuation of their education. Although discussed within the Canadian educational context and the disengagement of Black students in particular, the work is highly significant due to its acknowledgment of curriculum content as a significant factor in pushing students out of school. The chapter entitled, “Curriculum Content and Connection” highlights the role of a “middle-class, mono-cultural nature of school culture and values” (p. 140) in alienating students who do not belong to the dominant class and culture and
therefore causing them to discontinue school. Through the narratives of numerous students and teachers, Dei illustrates how lack of representation of Black students’ histories and worldviews prevents students from being able to identify with the schooling experience. He states, “The exclusion of Black History then, was regarded by these students as a clear deterrent to gaining a meaningful experience from their education...Virtually all drop-outs felt the curriculum had not included anything relevant to their experiences, whether in the form of Black History or in the form of an understanding of Black experiences in general. There was a pervasive feeling of being systematically excluded” (p. 138). This middle-class, mono-cultural environment is also strongly manifested in the primary schools of Bangladesh, as will be seen in this thesis. Dei’s argument that “issues of identity are strongly tied to the process of disengagement” is one of the central premises of my project, and it is based on this premise that I analyze the textbooks to explore precisely how Bangladeshi primary school textbooks influence the process of identity formation amongst children from disadvantaged groups.

Another crucial point at which Dei’s work converges with mine is the linking of school with the larger society in the pursuit of the critical exploration of the school system. The contention that the school is not an apolitical or neutral site, a site which is linked to the “inequalities and inequities of the larger society” (p. 220) is one of the main guiding frameworks in my study. From theory to analysis, my study re-enforces the indispensability of bridging connections between the school curriculum and the larger socio-political and historical context (of Bangladesh) within which these books are being produced and circulated.
Michael H. Romanowsky’s article, *Problems of Bias in History Textbooks* (1996) provides a sound criticism of history textbooks in America. Through the specific context of America, the author contends that textbooks, especially history textbooks must not be seen as neutral or impartial educational tools and that “they incorporate attitudes and ways of looking at the world” (p. 170). Moreover, he shares the belief with authors such as George Dei (2003) and Andrea Prewitt (2008) that “textbooks are influenced by the political, ideological or moral beliefs of the authors,” which “usually support the status quo” (p. 170). His work is also important as one of his main objectives lie in exploring the representations of minorities and their historical situation in textbooks.

Other monumental pieces of work that emphasize the need to understand education and curriculum as integrally linked to political projects, and more importantly, historically linked to the project of colonialism include John Willinsky’s *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End* (1998) and J.A. Mangan’s book, *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience* (1993). While Willinsky explains that “civilizing” education was provided by the colonizer to the colonized in exchange for “their lands and selves” (p. 91), Mangan illustrates how this was achieved by producing textbooks both in the British metropole and colonies through the use of racial stereotypes and negative representations of the colonized in textbooks. Although general in theory, and different in context in temporal terms, these works provide the groundwork for my study as they lead to the realization that curriculum and textbook knowledge production in previously colonized countries must not only be linked with its recent
(post-independence) politics, but it is indispensable to contextualize it within their colonial histories. In fact, it allows one to challenge the temporal distinction that is made between the colonial period and post-independence period through the exploration of patterns and parallels in education and politics that transcend such temporal boundaries.

The dissertation of Yvette Claire Rosser, *Curriculum as Destiny: Forging national identity in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (2003) is one of the few pieces of literature in the Bangladeshi context that discusses the importance of curriculum, especially Social Science/History textbooks and historiography “in the creation and transmission of national ideologies” (p. vii). It is informative as it traces the detailed history of textbook writing in Bangladesh (although in the secondary curriculum) and notes the various transformations that have taken place in the textbook content with the transforming political scenario. The linkage of the nuances and biases in historiography with the larger political contestations between opposing parties demonstrates the importance of political and institutional forces in knowledge production. However, the study is pre-occupied with tracing the ways in which political battles have shaped the writing and recording of mainstream political and historical events. For example, it illustrates that who received credit (Sheikh Mujib or General Zia) for independence in the books was dependant on the political party that was in power. In so doing, the study ignores the implications that political events have for minority or underprivileged populations. While the complex transformations of the political context are important, a pre-occupation with how the interplay of these battles have shaped the writing of dominant political events
ends up undermining the history of the masses, especially those that have been oppressed by political organizations. While the study acknowledges that “there are plenty of colonial paradigms lingering in textbooks of Bangladesh” (p. 254), and that the “masses of Bangladeshi students are indoctrinated with outdated, destructive and racist theories” (p. 256), it does not explain how political agendas have manifested themselves in textbooks so as to exclude students along the lines of ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, ability, etc. It does not explore how the histories of minority groups have been documented and hence, the study becomes an analysis of dominant knowledge itself and does not encompass the relations between dominant and marginalized populations. My study, while acknowledging the complexities of political developments in Bangladesh, puts more focus on the overarching project of national identity formation and its common thread that runs through the political differences of various times and its specific implications on the identity formation and oppression of minoritized groups.

Hossain and Tollefson’s (2006) article, *Language Policy in Education in Bangladesh* has been relevant, as it brings the state’s project of nation building directly into the context of education and alludes to its role in exclusion of ethnic minorities in schools in Bangladesh. Albeit briefly, it discusses the privileging of Bengali language and the absence of minority languages as a factor leading to lower academic achievements among ethnic minority children. However, it does not include any discussion on whether the textual and pictorial content of textbooks exacerbates the problem by constructing images of Bengali nationality and ideologies of citizenship and belonging.
A 2009 article, *Exclusion of Indigenous Children from Primary Education in the Rajshahi Division of North-western Bangladesh* discusses in particular, the exclusion of indigenous children from primary education. Focusing on the indigenous groups of North-western Bangladesh, the study reveals that twenty-two percent of children completed a year of primary education in 2004 and eighteen percent had attended but dropped out, inferring that “the majority of indigenous children are excluded from the primary education system, and probably never experience or complete their primary education” (Davey and Sarkar, 2009, pg. 7). The causes are attributed to poverty, child labour, landlessness, ignorance towards education, parents’ seasonal migration and cultural alienation. However, this study also returns to the cliché’d method of limiting the focus to poverty, labour, migration etc which takes away attention from structural systems within education that may be contributing to drop outs and the vicious cycle of poverty. Although social, political and economic exclusion of the indigenous groups is mentioned as a factor of low attendance and it is added that exclusion extends into the classroom through lack of educational resources and a classroom that is not welcome or inclusive, it is touched upon briefly and is thrust into the category of “other reasons.” In other words, the study alludes to the absence of research regarding the lack of inclusion in the education system, but it does not take this up as one area that needs crucial attention.

In suggesting solutions, the article calls for government efforts in ensuring “good quality education for all children,” yet providing quality education for indigenous children seems to encompass only monetary measures, which would include reducing or eliminating costs associated with education or providing
financial incentives or increasing the number of schools (pg. 10). There is no mention of the need to scrutinize the curriculum itself. However, a point of convergence of this study with that of mine is its suggestion of involving indigenous people both in the classroom and management level in order to understand the needs of these children and solve their problems. The difference lies in the fact that this study treats language barriers and cultural alienation and disintegration as “other” problems implying the secondary nature of these issues, while my study brings discrimination and cultural alienation of these people within the education system to the centre (in terms of importance) along with poverty and the other issues. As such, it brings pedagogical methods, with a specific focus on the delivery of knowledge via textbook as a major site of enquiry and investigation regarding the issue of underprivileged children dropping out from school.

Muna Hussain’s dissertation, entitled *Primary School Management and Gender Development in Bangladesh: Linkages between Intervention and Impact* (2006) explores the relationship between school management and unsatisfactory learning outcome of females within primary government schools in Bangladesh compared to NGO run schools, such as BRAC. While it does not touch particularly upon the learning outcomes of children from ethnic minority groups and/or lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the study is significant in that it is one of the few pieces of literature that highlights the importance of the system itself in affecting the academic achievement of students. More importantly, it identifies curriculum design and modes of delivery of lessons as one of the key variables that affect learning outcomes. In addition to presenting facts such as lack of timely availability of
textbooks for government primary school students and a pedagogical method applied by teachers that does not encourage critical thinking, she emphasizes the fact that “textbooks are not based on actual situations of the target audiences and their concerns” (Hussain, 2006, p. 56). Through a couple of examples, the author makes the point that the content of textbooks including illustrations does not reflect the lived realities of the student audience and are not necessarily interesting (p. 72). However, the study does not go into any detail with regards to analyzing the content and how it perpetuates discrimination and alienation. Neither is there any reference to the larger socio-political scenario within which these texts are being produced.

Mohammad Saiful Islam’s dissertation, Factors Responsible for Primary School Drop-outs in Rural Bangladesh: a Delphi Study (2000) is a useful study as it identifies and concludes (using a panel of knowledgeable experts including parents of both in-school and drop-out children, teachers and NGO field workers) that an “improper” curriculum is one of the factors for primary school drop outs. However, this being the conclusion of the study arrived at through mostly statistical measures, it does not describe or investigate the characteristics of the so-called improper curriculum or the ways in which it leads to students dropping out. My study, therefore, picks up from where this study concludes. Taking as a fact that a faulty curriculum of primary schools affects student performance in Bangladesh, my study explores the common aspect of the curriculum in both rural and urban government schools, namely the textbooks and explores precisely how it alienates and negatively affects students by stereotypes and racist and offensive representations.
A useful piece of literature that directly makes use of textbook analysis in order to show how dominant groups in Bangladesh influence the production of a particular kind of knowledge is the dissertation of Shayela Ahmed Mian (1999). A section in her thesis contains a lengthy content analysis of language textbooks of the primary curriculum and she does a commendable job in pointing out the biased representations of Bangladeshi national identity, its cultural and national symbols, and its citizens (both urban and rural). However, her study contains serious limitations as she makes a flawed assumption that Bangladesh is a racially, linguistically and religiously homogenous country. As a result, she understands the promotion of Bengali-ness as a marker of national identity in textbooks to be a political motive of the government to assert its difference from Pakistan and India. What is completely absent is the recognition of such a selection of content being a racist project to marginalize the many ethnic minority groups within Bangladesh, or in other words, being an internal colonial political project. Furthermore, her discussion of textbook content as reproducing class stratification does not take into account how this stratification becomes complicated when interlocked with ethnicity, religion, etc.

Sohana Khonodokar, in her paper, *An Analysis of Gender and Ethnic minority Representation in Social Studies Textbooks of Bangladesh* (2000) does a commendable job in analyzing grade 3 and 4 primary school textbooks of social studies in order to argue that what is included in or excluded from the content of the texts reflect conscious decisions of those in power and that in this way, textbooks reproduce dominant social values and social inequality. Although part of her
analysis looks at gender representations in textbooks, something that is not part of my study, her analysis of ethnic minority representation in textbooks is something that is useful and along with the purpose of her work, serves as a point of convergence with my work. Albeit briefly, Khondokar points out some examples of how ethnic minorities are marginalized in the textbooks through undermining their religions in comparison with the dominant religions of Bangladesh and the tendency to isolate the ethnic minority citizens and their cultures. The point at which I diverge from her work is my focus on the relationship between the text and the larger society. While Khondokar does acknowledge the role of textbooks in reproducing social inequality, her work does not include a detailed account of how these textbooks are also influenced by larger societal forces, norms and values and more importantly, does not look at the historical origins of such values or does not provide details regarding the theoretical framework within which she is working. (This is most likely due to this report being a work in progress and in a raw version)

As such, my methodology also differs from Khondokar as using critical discourse analysis, my central focus lies on connecting the textual to the material. More importantly, my analysis relies heavily on race, tracing the present to colonial and neo-colonial relationships of power relevant to the history and politics of Bangladesh, which is something that is not taken up in Khondokar’s study.

The aforementioned collection of texts that have been reviewed for the purpose of the project has been significant and useful in some form or another. Beginning from a general review of literature that deals with the broad themes of racism and oppression through children’s texts, the focus was narrowed as pieces of
literature were reviewed in order to explore the research performed in the specific context of education in Bangladesh. While each of the works has had something to offer in terms of theory or background information, the fact remains that there has been no study done which has critically analyzed the primary school textbooks in Bangladesh, especially within the framework of race and colonialism and with a specific goal of understanding its effects on ethnic minority and poor students’ experience in schools. As a result, there remains a large gap in studies of the experiences of underprivileged primary school students and the systemic oppression that they face. It is this very gap that this project attempts to at least begin to fill.
References


4. Ethnicity and Class as Race: Race and Racism in Bangladeshi Nation Building

In order to bring into focus the role of the education system, especially textbooks in marginalizing poor and ethnic minority students, this section of the thesis seeks to theorize social stratification in Bangladesh (a country that has faced numerous periods of colonial domination) as mirroring colonial systems of racial categorization. Drawing on David Goldberg’s concept of “ethnorace,” and “cultural race,” the paper challenges the popular notion of Bangladesh as a culturally and racially homogenous nation, and argues that the project of nation building in the country has always been contingent upon the construction of a ‘colour line,’ creating multiple divisions between groups, such as that between the Bengali speaking majority and ethnic minorities, and between the urban middle class and the poor. As a foundation for understanding and interpreting the discursive constructions of poor and ethnic minority groups within textbooks, this paper investigates relations between groups in the larger society to theorize that both socioeconomic class and ethnic background (marked by a different and “inferior” culture) become synonymous with race, and argues that marginalization based on class and ethnicity in the context of Bangladesh is essentially racist and colonial in nature.

“Post-colonial” Bangladesh, or Homi Bhabha’s colonial mimic?

A logical starting point and perhaps the most useful work in post-colonial
studies that helps to reveal colonialist practices of domination in Bangladesh is Homi Bhabha’s work on colonialism and mimicry. It is crucial in contextualising “post-colonial” Bangladesh within its history of colonialism and understanding present socio-political dynamics as not occurring within a spatial and temporal vacuum, but integrally linked to colonial and neo-colonial forms of power. In *Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha “defines mimicry as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Godiwala, 2007, pg 59).

“Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite...It is the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha, 1998, p. 86). In other words, it is a strategy which justifies colonial power and domination by “civilizing”/“modernizing” the colonized through the “superior” values of the coloniser, and simultaneously keeping the colonized different enough to maintain the boundary between the “innately inferior” other and the “superior” colonizer. In *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006), Daniel Coleman also discusses the strategy of colonial domination:

European colonial expansion, as Stuart Hall explains in the ‘West and the Rest’ was premised on an isochronous idea of progress. He observes that colonial-era Europeans tended to believe that ‘there was one path to civilization and social development, and that all societies could be ranked or placed early or late, lower or higher, on the same scale...This idea of social evolution, however, introduced colonialism’s troubling ambivalence, for while it confirmed the civility and modernity of White Europeans by contrast with the stages of primitiveness it posited among Europe’s others, it also suggested these others could be civilized...The signs of European civility would be best demonstrated when those who were well advanced on the scale of modernity helped those who were less advanced to ascend the evolutionary ladder (p. 12).
This ambivalence that Coleman speaks about is also what Bhabha articulates in his work on mimicry. The injection of the values of the colonizer into the colonized with the aim of “modernizing” ironically accompanies rigid racial categorizations that must always work to keep the other out of the boundaries of civility. Furthermore, Bhabha argues that the copying of “attitudes, behaviour, manners, and values of the colonizing culture” contains both a threat to the colonial structure and a mockery and menace in the resemblance between the colonizer and the colonized (Godiwala, 2007).

It is based on this argument that I theorize Bangladesh as a colonial mimic, which through its partial adoption of colonial values may have threatened colonial domination during independence as a form of resistance. However, I argue that it is this very partial resemblance that allows for the continual re-inscription of Bangladesh as the “unfortunate,” “pre-modern” “third-world within the context of global relations of power and simultaneously, allows for colonial systems of power and domination to exist within "post-colonial" Bangladesh where nation building by the local political elites is based on the same premise of progress and civility.

**Race and Racist Discourse:**

While literature on the concept of race abounds in critical scholarship, this paper relies primarily on race as articulated by David Goldberg. Challenging the notion of racial and cultural homogeneity as constituted in the national narrative of Bangladesh and identifying racial divisions within the country becomes possible
through understanding race as “a fluid, transforming, and historically specific concept parasitic on theoretic and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at any historical moment” (Goldberg, 1997). Goldberg argues that “race” as a self-ascribed or imposed category transcends far beyond the idea of containing pigmentation or skin colour as its only criterion, and racial constructs must be understood within the context of specific histories and the meanings they hold within that context. Race is a “constitutive feature of modernity, ordering conceptions of self and other, of socio-political membership and exclusion. It has identified exploitable individuals and populations for subjugation, and it has been used to rationalize and legitimate domination, subjugation, even extermination” (p. 149). What holds significance in this process of othering is the set of criteria used to categorize a group as the Other, which, Goldberg emphasizes are embedded in historically and socially specific contexts. Therefore, historicizing the social hierarchies and power relations within Bangladeshi society reveals the ways in which groups, such as the ethnic minorities and the working class populations have been racialized throughout history, even though such constructions are rarely explicitly articulated as containing any racial basis.

The following sections illustrate how colonial discourses of the Other in various ways have shaped and continue to shape material power relations among various groups in Bangladesh. Understanding these material relations as a product of discourse becomes integral to investigating how these relations in turn, shape children’s textbook discourse and thereby, reproduce and perpetuate relations of inequality and racism in society. As discussed earlier, in my utilization of the
concept of “discourse,” I draw on Teun A. Van Dijk’s theorization of the term, which he articulates as a communicative event through the use of spoken, written or printed language (Jorgensen, 2002). As previously mentioned in the introduction chapter, his emphasis on the link between discourse and society is essential in my study in particular, as my theorization of racial constructions and racism in Bangladesh is heavily dependant upon locating macro processes of power that have shaped certain discourses and thereby have shaped material power relations, and understanding how these relations further perpetuate themselves as those in power reproduce these discourses in micro sites, such as children’s textbooks. While discourses from the colonial period help me to theorize material acts of racism, investigating material power relations becomes integral in identifying the power structures responsible for reproducing racism through textbooks. Using Van Dijk’s model, which relates discourse, cognition of the producer of discourse, and society, and which emphasizes the power of institutions and dominant groups, I am able to illustrate the ongoing dynamics between discourse and materiality.

**Constructing the “inferior” non-Bengali: from savagery to tribalism:**

In order to investigate the relationship between the Bengali-speaking majority and the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, it is important to trace these relationships back to the colonial period and attempt to understand the ways in which colonial discourse has shaped the construction and maintenance of a ‘colour line,’ a process which Anthony Farley (1997) defines as the “division of the worthy from the unworthy on the basis of race” (Farley, 1997, pg. 466). More importantly,
my contention that the historical eviction of groups such as the Chakmas, Garos and Santals from full citizenship and national belonging is essentially racist, calls for a re-articulation of the term “ethnicity” and a need to challenge it as a category separate from race in this context.

Returning to Goldberg’s argument of race as a fluid concept allows for the possibility of racial difference to be articulated as a difference in culture, resulting in a term which he articulates as “cultural race.” Culture would include “language group, religion, group habits, norms, or customs; a typical style of behaviour, dress, cuisine, music, literature and art. Primarily at issue in such cultural differentiations are values and perceived behaviour circumscribed by claimed group membership” (Goldberg, 1997). His example of racial groupings by the European linguists in the nineteenth century based on linguistic differentiations is significant in understanding the ways in which any of these categories that mark a culture can be the basis for a group to be constructed as a “race” and excluded based on that construction. While Goldberg is right in arguing that such racial categorizations need not rely on an argument claiming biological difference and notions of superiority and inferiority, I show that the cultural difference based on which, ethnic groups such as the inhabitants of the CHT have been treated as second class citizens is also heavily interlinked with biological claims of superiority and inferiority. I argue that the various methods through which they have been oppressed have been underpinned by the idea of difference as “innate”, articulated by Kay Anderson as “biological essentialism” or “innatism” (Anderson, 2007).

Goldberg also draws on the idea of cultural difference is his discussion of
ethnicity as race. Through the term “ethnorace,” he argues that ethnic group formation through boundary construction between self and other along moral, ethnic, kinship, linguistic, and territorial divides can also be used to create racial difference. In other words, the criteria used to define ethnicity can also be used to create racial divide. This, Goldberg argues, can happen either through consent and choice of the ethnic group itself, or by domination by others (through forced classification). I draw on this concept to argue that ethnic groups of Bangladesh have been constructed largely by domination starting from the colonial period which was not just based on cultural difference, but also on cultural, moral, and intellectual inferiority. Any self-identification of the many diverse ethnic groups as races (whether prior to colonialism and as resistance to colonialism) becomes overshadowed by imposed construction of the groups as one ethnorace, which dissolves their diversities into a single ethnicity, or a single race that is non-Bengali and more importantly, less desirable than the Bengali speaking majority. I also argue that such a racial construct need not be based on the presence of a common attribute, but also by the commonality created by the absence of an attribute that the dominant group possesses. As such, ethnic minorities come to be seen as a race through the fact that they do not speak Bengali, and that they lack intellect and modernity.

Under the British colonial regime, the CHT was regulated by the colonizers by “trampling down the political consciousness of the people” (Majumder, 2003) and preventing democracy. A Deputy Commissioner was appointed to take charge of the CHT and worked with the “tribal” chiefs for the benefit of colonial rule (Majumder,
Descriptions of the CHT inhabitants by British colonists demonstrate how they were categorized and inferiorized based on their cultural practices as well as their phenotypic characteristics, both assumed to be biologically heritable. The following paragraph by R.H. Hutchinson is sufficient to illustrate the discursive constructions of ethnic minorities as the “inferior other:” “The tribes that inhabit the Hill Tracts may be divided into those of undoubted Arakanese origin as the Chakmas and Mughs, and those of mixed origin, the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. They speak numerous and diversified dialects and more or less savages...The inhabitants of the CHT are, as a rule, short and thick set build, with distinct Mongolian features” (Majumder, 2003).

Here the notion of the savage is seen to emerge. Although the CHT inhabitants seem to be separated in this particular statement according to descent relations, it is overpowered by the homogenizing category of the “savage” into which once they are thrust, the differences disappear. Similarly, the physical characteristics (given that they are stereotypical in themselves and established through the colonial gaze) may differentiate the CHT inhabitants from another group, such as the Garos. However, colonial reports that describe the Garos as the “simple tribals” lacking sophistication and education in comparison to the “cleverer” Bengalis (Bal, 2003) thrusts the Garos and the CHT inhabitants into the same realm of primitivism. In discussing enlightenment ideas of the savage, Kay Anderson states that the “savages” were either virtuous “children to nature,” or “bestial subhumans” (Anderson, 13). Furthermore, Goldberg asserts that in nineteenth century anthropology, the “primitive assumed synonymy with the racial other” (Goldberg,
marked by cultural criteria including communality, ritualism, commitment to private property, etc. (p. 156) Hence, the self-ascribed or stereotypically imposed cultural differences of the Bangladeshi ethnic minorities do not matter, as ultimately, they are all the same insofar as they are culturally “inferior” and “uncivilized” compared to the Bengalis.

While the notion of the savage may or may not have been explicitly used in subsequent periods in the history of Bangladesh, I argue that such categorizations gave rise to a demarcation between the Bengalis and non-Bengalis based on notions of superiority and paved the way for the persistence of the idea of a monolithic, close-to-nature, tribal culture marked by pre-modernity. It gave rise to a construction through which “Bengaliness” achieved meaning and the “Bengali” became installed as the “ideal” national subject. It is here that the shaping of Bangladesh as a colonial mimic becomes apparent, as ideas of modernity and pre-modernity began to shift from their exclusive association with the European/non-European binary and extend into the relations amongst groups within Bangladesh.

At the end of colonialism, when the Indian sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan, the CHT was included as a part of the Muslim-majority Pakistan (which included East Bengal) despite their aspiration of being part of India. Moreover, their land was encroached upon as the Pakistani government allowed for the settlement of alarming numbers of Muslim families in the area (Majumder, 2003, p. 38). Illegal settlements of Bengali Muslims also occurred in the territory of the Mymensingh Garos (Bal, 2003). Interestingly, B.P. Barua (2001) calls this process “internal colonization.” I argue that had not the constructions of the “superior
Bengali” and “less intelligent, simple tribals” been already in place, it would not have
been so facile for the Pakistani government to allow for mass settlement of families
in these regions against official policy. Such colonization had to be underpinned by
assumptions of the minorities as “unimportant” and their land being available for
exploitation.

While these are examples of colonial processes of oppression, what is
remarkably interesting and perhaps leads to the most relevant contextualization of
representation of ethnic minorities in children’s textbooks is the way in which
colonial constructs of the “tribals” were utilized to formulate ideologies around
national identity and belonging in “post-colonial,” independent Bangladesh. As seen
both in the case of Garos and the CHT inhabitants, political leaders after the
independence of Bangladesh constructed the idea of a nation based on “Bengali
identity,” a consciousness that emerged prior to liberation and formed a major
factor in liberation from the imposition of the Urdu language by the west Pakistani
government. In 1972, the constitution of Bangladesh defined nationalism in a way
that had serious negative implications for non-Bengali ethnic minorities:

The unity and solidarity of the Bengali nation, which, deriving its identity from
its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh
through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be
the basis of Bengali nationalism (Article 9, CPRB, 1972: 5) (Pfeffer, Ratha and

Furthermore, through the declaration of the parliament in 1974 that Bangladesh is a
“uni-cultural and uni-linguistic nation state” (Bal, 2003) and through the Prime
Minister’s statement that ethnic minorities would be “promoted” to the status of
Bengali, the colonial legacy of racism becomes apparent. Although the post-1975
government (following the assassination of Sheikh Mujib) replaced “Bengali Nationalism” with “Bangladeshi Nationalism” as state policy as an attempt to take into account the ethnic diversity of the country, the effect remained the same as before, as secularism was replaced with Islamisation. In 1988, Islam was declared as the state religion of Bangladesh which turned ethnic minorities into a “religious minority.” In any case, the marginalized situation of the ethnic groups remained unaltered despite the change in semantics (Pfeffer, Ratha and Behera, 2008, p. 151). The abolition of any special status for the minorities in an attempt to homogenize the culture and national identity of Bangladesh may have led to the production of a counter narrative (as Ellen Bal argues), as it led to a strong sense of self amongst these groups and shaped their self-ethnogenesis or racial identification. However, the basis on which nation building proceeded imposed and maintained a particular construction of racial identity, and it was the dominant discourse that overpowered any genuine, self-ascribed identities of ethnic minorities. If the prime minister had the intention of “promoting” minority groups to Bengali status, he had to assume an inferior status of these groups which needed modification and elevation to a more legitimate status. If, during a visit to the area of Rangamati in 1973, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib asked the “tribals” to be “good Bengalis” and to join the national mainstream (Barua, 2001, p. 104) there had to be an assertion in place about their “improper” behaviour” which criminalized them for denying an identity which was not theirs to begin with. Thus, through a brief historicization, it becomes apparent that the boundary formation between the ethnic minorities and the Bengalis is a deeply racialized project, where race is inscribed onto them through domination,
and through dissolving their diversities into one “inferior race with inferior cultures.”

**Poverty as “culture:” the working class and racism:**

The following section will argue and illustrate that although the poor (mainly the members of the working class) have not been explicitly racialized in ways that the ethnic minorities have through labels of “savage,” “primitive,” “simple,” and “anti-intellectual” introduced by the colonial discourse, the rise of the middle class of Bengal through contact with colonial authority paved the way for a prominent and permanent boundary formation between the privileged classes and the poor.

My utilization of the concept of “class” draws from Pierre Bourdieu’s theorization of class “that fuses the Marxian insistence on economic determination with the Weberian recognition of the distinctiveness of the cultural order and the Durkheimian concern for classification” (Wacquant, 1998, p. 223). For Bourdieu, the definition of class transcends the limits of socio-economic boundaries characterized by access to means of production, and is very much tied into the lifestyles and dispositions that are available for adoption to those who possess economic privileges. Bourdieu argues, for instance, “To appreciate a painting, a poem, or a symphony presupposes mastery of the specialized symbolic code of which it is a materialization, which in turn requires possession of the proper kind of cultural capital” (p. 223). Therefore, socio-economic class becomes synonymous with a particular “culture” with particular “values,” and Bourdieu’s emphasis lies in the ways in which these values become naturalized as inherent markers of a group in order to justify the unequal distribution of resources. The epitomization of the
lifestyle of the privileged class not only constructs such values and dispositions as constituting a culture that members of that group acquire through innate capacities, but also serves to impose a particular way of life as superior while inferiorizing that of others. As Wacquaint explains while speaking of Bourdieu, “To impose one's art of living is to impose at the same time principles of visions of the world that legitimize inequality by making the divisions of social space appear rooted in the inclination of individuals rather than the underlying division of capital” (Wacquaint, 1998, p. 225).

Although Bourdieu’s theory relied on the French context, I find it useful to employ it in the case of Bangladesh as the construction of a “middle class culture” and a “culture of poverty” helps to theorize racism in yet another arena where race is popularly seen to be absent.

“For British India, it can be argued that the emergence of the new social classes was the outcome of British policies towards land” (Alam, 1995, p. 14). The colonial administration distorted pre-capitalistic modes of production in Bengal through destroying rural self-sufficiency and increasing peasant impoverishment by dispossessing them from their lands and heightening competition amongst them for lands (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004). A large rural proletariat was formed and the rural dominant classes became allies of the metropolitan Bourgeoisie who facilitated extraction of surplus from the peasants and ensured outward extraction to the metropole. Thus economic hierarchies were sharpened from the colonial period (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2004). The project of the British to create an educated middle class known as the “bhadrolok” or “gentlemen” was embraced by the Hindus, but not by the Muslims initially. However, social and economic
pressures eventually caused Muslims to perceive western education as “a gateway to jobs and a “better” way of life” (Osmany, 1992). What bears significance here is that the economic privileges created by colonial conditions allowed the wealthy rural groups “the leisure of culture and politics” (Osmany, 1992, p. 89). It was their privilege that allowed their children to acquire social mobility and merge with the urban middle class as professionals, educators and government officials, thereby becoming “encultured” with “rational,” “enlightened” ways of thinking and living through a “modern” education. It is here that Bourdieu’s notion of class gains the most relevance as it reveals the processes of domination and resulting structural inequalities that become concealed under and are justified by the continuing distinction between the middle class and the poor as possessing “innately” different cultural values.

While a detailed discussion of the specific processes by which class was shaped throughout the colonial period in Bengal and the subsequent period of the Pakistani colonial regime is beyond the scope of this paper, what is noteworthy and holds the most significance is that the middle class, through its economic privileges was able to gain an education that shaped certain dispositions, and also gave rise to a political and nationalistic consciousness, something that the impoverished populations did not have access to. As Shireen Osmany argues, “the history of Bangladeshi nationalism is in a way the history of the Bengali Muslim Middle class...Exposure to Western thoughts and learning by means of British sponsored University and college education helped the growth of secular concepts like language-centered national identity, aspirations for political emancipation and
demands for a legitimate share in the control of power institutions in the socio-political matrix of British India, later Pakistan and finally Bangladesh” (Osmany, 1992, p. 77). Indeed, the masses were mobilized in the fight for freedom both during the creation of Pakistan based on religion-centered national identity and later during the separation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) from West Pakistan in 1971 based on language-centered national identity. While this provides an impression of national solidarity that transcends socio-economic boundaries, I argue that the prominent demarcation between the middle class and the working class has always operated based on a “cultural” difference that continues to manifest itself in post-independent Bangladesh through government policies and the national discourse. I argue that members of the middle class and the ruling elite are continuously legitimated as the ideal, modern, national subjects with values that the poor simply do not or cannot acquire. Most importantly, I assert that such a process is not devoid of any racial basis or racialized discourse.

It only takes an exploration of the ways in which the slum population has been treated in Bangladesh to realize the intensity of the colour line between the “modern, middle-class citizen” and the “pre-modern, destitute, sub-citizen.” One of the devastating effects of class polarization throughout the history of Bangladesh has been the rapid expansion of urban slums. “Bastee (slum) settlements were initially formed because of the transfer of capital out of East Bengal in the early-18th century and later during the period of colonisation. The rate of bastee formation accelerated with the independence of 1971” (Rahman, 2001, p. 51) due to landlessness and unemployment created and aggravated by the periods of colonial
domination, and later through the oppression of the new socio-political elite. Slums were established through urban migration of rural populations in search of employment and protection from natural calamities. The fact that the shacks of the slums are not recognized as dwelling units and not covered in the national census (Rahman, 2001) and that in numerous cases “the bastee shacks have been demolished in the process of evicting the basteebashees (slum-dwellers) in the urban areas of Bangladesh” (p. 51) illustrates the inferiorized status of the urban poor. The demolition of slums by the Pakistani Army in 1971, by Bangladeshi police and paramilitary forces in 1975, and the erection of metal sheets along the road leading to the president’s house to hide the slums from foreign dignitaries (Rahman, 2001) are all events that exemplify the process of institutionalized violence and extermination of poor populations. This, I argue cannot exist without a discursive construction of the poor as disposable, and unworthy of national protection. The continuous reproduction of the middle class member as the deserving citizen not only requires the establishment of the poor as inferior, but also the ascription of the inferior values and lifestyles to an “innate” biological deficit. Moreover, that this kind of a boundary construction is racialized becomes more apparent in a study done on slums in the book, Social Structure and Cultural Practice in Slums (2000).

The book illustrates how the author, who is privileged enough to have studied at a prestigious university in Bangladesh and clearly belongs to a privileged socio-economic class portrays life in the slums of Dhaka city as a “culture” and forms the basis of his study on the binary of modernity and tradition. Statements such as the following: “Slum culture is different from mainstream urban culture as the
former is tradition bound whereas the latter is the product of modern industrial society” (Das, 2000, p. 7) make apparent the division of the “modern” from the “pre-modern” and “traditional”. In line with mid-twentieth century Western culturalist explanations of the lower class as consisting of “patterns of behaviour and values characteristically different from those of the dominant society and culture, and transmitted intergenerationally through socialization” (Waxman, 1977, pg 7), the author’s portrayal inscribes a sense of stagnation and permanence to the slum dwellers as being “bound” by tradition. It simultaneously assumes that tradition is absent from the middle class and that modernity and tradition are mutually exclusive. Moreover, assertions that they are “superstitious,” and “fatalistic,” that “they are unfamiliar with modern and secular ways of life” as they bring their “values and norms” from their places of origin (i.e. the rural areas) homogenize and skew the lived realities of these populations and naturalize these dangerous stereotypes as irrespective of histories of oppression and inequality. Quite clearly, this re-inscribes and reflects colonial methods of categorizing, where once more, Goldberg’s concept of “cultural race” proves handy. As a marker of a different “culture,” I argue that the poor, the working class becomes a racialized group that is inferior to the better-knowing race, the middle class. It is the middle class that embodies the “taste” and “dispositions,” as Bourdieu puts it, which the lower classes do not possess. Through a pathologization of these populations which separates “middle class values” and “lower class values”, the ‘colour line’ re-emerges, dividing the nation between the ideal citizens and those that need to be “fixed,” and inculcated with values of modernity and progress.
The idea that such a process essentially underpins racist thought obtains more weight by contextualizing the idea of “modernity” within the development discourse.Neo-colonial relations between the Global North and South particularly help to theorize the racial construction of poor populations as they inject a particular definition of “modernity” into the project of nation building. If the rural dominant classes became allies of the metropolitan Bourgeoisie during the colonial period, the middle class in independent Bangladesh becomes the ideological, if not the physical ally of foreign development workers and aid providers through the sharing of western values of progress, civilization and modernity. Projects of poverty reduction (often largely funded by foreign donors) become cloaked with the mission of emancipation from a “stagnant and “backward culture” with the western culture of fast food, shopping malls and technology established as the epitome of culture. Therefore, not only is the “third world” racialized as a world of tradition, irrationality, overpopulation, disorder and chaos (Goldberg, 1993, p. 164) by the West, countries in the “the third world” become internally fragmented along the lines of the working class being in the realm of irrationality, chaos and underdevelopment and the middle class as the race that has progressed into “modernity” and which denies any identification with the “culture” of the poor. This is not to discredit or deny the presence of any genuine efforts of poverty reduction free of culturalist judgments, nor is the intention to suggest that the entire middle class as a homogenous group shares the same values and is accountable for racist exclusions of the poor. In fact, such an assertion would fall into the very practice of stereotyping that the paper tries to rupture. Rather, the argument here is that
western notions of modernity and progress were and continue to be so pervasive in society through development activities, media, and architecture that they serve to construct the ideology of a modern, middle class culture which is idolized, strived for and adopted by many who have the economic privilege and which is set in opposition to that of the lower socio-economic class.

**Conclusion:**

The discussion of the oppression of ethnic minorities and working class populations in Bangladesh is indeed brief, simplified and not devoid of limitations. Nonetheless, highlighting some of the important events in the history of Bangladesh and its making as a nation is sufficient for the purpose of exposing the presence of state-induced oppression and for theorizing such violence as underpinned by racial constructions. It serves the purpose of bringing race (largely absent from studies on Bangladesh) into the forefront by identifying the role of colonialism in not only subjugating Bangladesh as a whole, but shaping the region as a colonial mimic where internal powers use identical systems of violence to fragment the nation between the “modern citizen” and the “pre-modern others.” It must be stressed however, that the discussion of racism towards ethnic minorities and poor people separately does not imply an oversimplified method of exclusion where these two groups always face exclusions and discrimination separately by virtue of either poverty or ethnic background. If Goldberg’s definition of race as fluid helps to theorize ethnic minorities and the poor as races, the same fluidity also helps to understand that overlapping characteristics may position these groups in different scales on the racial hierarchy at various times. For instance, a middle-class ethnic
minority, a working-class Bengali speaking individual, or a working class ethnic minority will slip into multiple racial categories simultaneously and will face various levels of oppression. Keeping this complexity in mind, this chapter has attempted to illustrate how boundary formations between groups through constant dynamics of discursivity and materiality rupture the national myth of racial homogeneity in Bangladesh. Thus, the chapter has been formulated as logical foundation for and precursor to understanding the pervasiveness of such violence in seemingly neutral spaces, such as schools.

The Implication of the History and Politics of racism in Education: Textbooks as Discourse:

Through the historicization (albeit brief) and theorization of racialized violence in Bangladeshi society, it becomes easy to locate manifestations of such oppression within the textbooks used in government primary schools and understand their role in the larger project of nation building. An analysis of the content of the Social Studies textbooks (known as “Introduction to Society: Social Studies” or “Poribesh Porichiti” in Bengali) illustrates the role of discourse within education in marginalizing children of working class and ethnic minority backgrounds by perpetuating the notion of the ideal and desirable national subject.
**References**


5. Social Studies Textbooks: a CDA Analysis

If colonial mimicry is observed in the material forces of oppression that have been historically exercised by political elites of Bangladesh towards its underprivileged citizens, it is safe to contend that the manifestation of such mimicry within the education system is inevitable (education being one of the most significant vehicles for the imperialist cause). J.A. Mangan (1993) in his book, The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience summarizes the role of the British Imperial Curriculum:

A major purpose of this education was to inculcate in the children of the British Empire appropriate attitudes of dominance and deference. There was an education in imperial schools to shape the ruled into patterns of proper subservience and “legitimate” inferiority, and one in turn to develop in the rulers convictions about the certain benevolence and “legitimate” superiority of their rule. Imperial education was very much about establishing the presence and absence of confidence in those controlling and those controlled. Once colonial territories were established this process began in classrooms...The European forced his way into the worlds of other peoples with epistemological models, representative symbols, alien forms of knowledge and patterns of action which he defined. In turn, these peoples had to reconstruct their worlds to embrace the fact of white domination and their own powerlessness...A large part of imperial image construction was concerned with the creation of positive and negative stereotypes. These stereotypes existed to manipulate reality so as to reflected imperial values, ambitions and priorities and to promote them as proper, necessary and constructive: imperialism required a carefully crafted image of the colonizer and colonized (p. 6).

As mentioned in the background chapter, the complete bureaucratic control of education in British India led to such positive and negative image constructions in textbooks for Indian pupils. Not only was India represented as a degenerate and backward culture (Kumar, 1998, p. 459), history textbooks of Britain were saturated
with stereotypical and derogatory images of India as a “strange and disorderly state, clearly inferior to the progressive, Anglo-Saxon community of the reader,” and its people as worshippers of “the cow, the monkey, or anything unusual, such as a peculiar shaped stone or tree” (Mangan, 1993, p. 27). Clearly, the project entailed instilling notions of superiority of Britain and the biological and cultural inferiority of the Indian people, thereby justifying imperial rule and facilitating Britain’s task of nation building. The following analysis of the curriculum of contemporary Bangladeshi primary schools illustrates the striking parallels it contains with the British imperialist project.
The table below contains the list of chapters in the Social Studies Textbooks of each of the three grades studied:

Table 2: List of chapters in Social Studies Textbooks (grades 3-5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Environment</td>
<td>Our duties for family and at school</td>
<td>Development activities of an area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are All Humans</td>
<td>We are all humans</td>
<td>Social and National resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Responsibilities for family and school</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Social skills and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and Discipline in family and school</td>
<td>Our Basic Rights</td>
<td>Dignity of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Country</td>
<td>The Geography of Bangladesh</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Geography of Bangladesh</td>
<td>Environmental pollution in Bangladesh</td>
<td>Compass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Resources</td>
<td>The effect of population increase in Bangladesh</td>
<td>Rights and duties of citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our rights and duties</td>
<td>Our history and heritage</td>
<td>The Geography of Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dignity of Labour</td>
<td>Our liberation war</td>
<td>Protecting the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Thought</td>
<td>The path-makers of the independence of Bangladesh</td>
<td>The population of Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Cultures</td>
<td>Lifestyle of the “Tribes”</td>
<td>Historical site and monuments of Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problems of population increase in Bangladesh</td>
<td>Dignity of labour</td>
<td>Our history and heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity of labour</td>
<td>The rights and duties of citizens</td>
<td>British Rule in Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic thought</td>
<td>Notable personalities in Social Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our social and political life</td>
<td>Our liberation war</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different cultures of Asia</td>
<td>Different ethnicities of the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal brotherhood</td>
<td>The cultures of Europe and Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Peace and the UN</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Eviction of the ethnic minorities from national identity:**

While any discussion of the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh is absent in the grade 3 textbook, the grade 4 books designates a single chapter to them entitled, “The lifestyle of the Tribes” (see list) and the grade 5 book contains as a subsection entitled “Lifestyle of the tribes of Bangladesh” in the chapter “Different ethnicities of the world.” The descriptions of the various ethnic minority groups in the grade 5 and grade 4 textbooks are remarkable in that they are saturated with meaning that reflect colonial racist ideologies. Within a total of 17 chapters in the grade 5 social studies textbook, the sixteenth and single chapter on ethnic minorities contains a detailed description of only three groups, namely, the Garos, Monipuris, and Khashiyas. Not only is the topic itself thus, marginalized, the descriptions both reflect racist categorizations and isolation through exotic difference.

The following sentences illustrate this:

“‘The garos have fair complexion. They have flat noses, light eyes and big ears. Their height is medium. They are very strong.’” (Sultana et al., 2008, p.140)

“‘The Khashiyas are also fair-skinned, flat-nosed and are small eyed. They have thick heels and have medium height.’” (Sultana et al., 2008, p. 142)

“‘The Monipuris are fair-skinned, small-eyed, slightly flat nosed and are medium in height.’” (Sultana et al., 2008, p. 143)

If analyzed at the level of lexicon, use of words such as “flat nose,” “big ears,” “thick heels,” demonstrate a striking resemblance with colonial methods of caricaturing, stereotyping and cataloguing in the construction of the savage. An imposition of fixity, which Homi Bhabha argues is a necessary characteristic of stereotyping (Bhabha, 1994, p. 75), is observed in the physical descriptions of the
Garos, Khashiyas and Monipuris, implying that they are invariably “flat-nosed,” “big-eared,” or “small-eyed.” Moreover, the parallels with the colonial method of characterization and cataloguing through the colonial gaze, which seals, generalizes, exaggerates and thereby demonizes the physical characteristics, demonstrate the absence of agency of minority groups to represent themselves. That there is a need to describe the physical characteristics of minority groups to begin with, whereas any sort of physical description of Bengalis is completely absent from the textbooks reveals the underlying presupposition of Bengalis being the unmarked yet standard category based on which the heel thickness and eye and ear sizes can be measured. Yet in reality, it is through the demonization of these groups that Bengaliness is established, standardized and legitimized. As Sara Ahmed (2002) argues:

> It is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the subject. The very act through which the subject differentiates between others is the moment that the subject comes to inhabit or dwell in the world. The subject is not, then, simply differentiated from the (its) other, but comes into being by learning how to differentiate between others...As a mode of subject constitution, recognition involves differentiating between others on the basis of how they “appear” (p. 24).

The unmarked, undescribed Bengali identity is normalized both through differentiating the “strange” minority groups as “tribes” or “subcultures” amidst a dominant (in this case, Bengali) culture and through cataloguing the differences in appearances of these groups, as seen in the descriptions above.

While there is a call for “love towards all human beings” (p. 140) near the beginning of the chapter, the descriptions of the ethnic minority groups illustrate the way in which they are locked into a realm of savagery and tribalism, a notion
that has its roots in enlightenment thought and is re-enforced through the images that accompany the text.

In her discussion of the savage, Kay Anderson states, “Savagery has been constructed in western myth and commentary running many centuries as a mode of life that exists ‘closer to nature’” (Anderson, 2007, p.13). She further sheds light on the enlightenment/colonial ideas of the savage, which set the binary between savagery and civilization and established “savages” as either virtuous “children of nature,” or “bestial subhumans” (p. 13). In the case of the descriptions of the Garos, Khashiyas and Monipuris, a bit of both is observed. The acknowledgement that “we are all human” and “that we should love all humans” loses meaning when anthropological descriptions of ethnic minority citizens of Bangladesh are underpinned by implications of monstrosity, bestiality and sub-humanity through their “big ears,” and “thick heels.” In addition, the simultaneous ideological constructions of them as ‘virtuous children of nature’ become especially apparent through the images placed next to the text. The images are entitled, ‘A Garo woman’ (Sultana et al., 2008, p.40) and ‘A Khashiya Man and Woman’ (p. 143).

As the titles suggest, the first image illustrates a woman from the Garo ethnic group, and the second contains an illustration of a man and a woman from the Khashiya group. Moreover, in each of the two images, the individuals are placed in a background of a natural landscape containing hills, plants and grass. The stereotypical adhesion of these bodies to a natural landscape, and more importantly through only two images not only tokenizes the populations, but erases the complexities of the everyday lives of Garos and Khashiyas. Implied to be stuck in the
stagnant wilderness, a “primitive” geographical space, a clear line is drawn that separates ethnic minorities from the “mainstream” Bangladeshi society, from the urban metropolises, from realms of education, employment and other activities of “civility.” In the grade 4 textbook, the images, entitled ‘Santal women dancing’ (Modina et al., 2008, p. 91) and ‘Marma Men and Women Performing “Jhum” Cultivation’ (p. 88) are slightly more animated as a Santal dance, and cultivation activities known as “Jhum” cultivation of the Marmas are observed respectively. Nonetheless, the individuals never seem to leave the hilly areas and there is no representation of interaction with other groups of Bangladesh in any of the images. Constructed much like a travel brochure, the subtopics in grade 4 textbooks describing the lifestyles of these groups include the following: “community characteristics,” “home,” “food habits,” “clothing style,” “occupation,” “social and religious festivals,” and “rituals.” While topics are not clearly outlined as such in the grade 5 textbooks, the descriptions include information that would fall under these very topic headings. While the intention here is not to undermine the significance of such characteristics in understanding the lifestyle of ethnic minorities, the absence of such categorizations in the case of Bengalis and the isolating tendency underpinning each of the images and the textual descriptions, which permanently and stereotypically associate these groups as a far away population re-inscribes the colonial ideologies of savagery and pre-modernity and constructs them as separate from the “ideal, mainstream” citizens of Bangladesh.

Interestingly, the only instance where ethnic minorities are shown to have any interaction with Bengalis in these texts and where their association with nature
and “primitive ritualism” is momentarily ruptured is through a complete displacement from their culture and geography and an implication of their “progression” into “modernity.” If analyzed at a more global level of discourse structure, looking at the macroproposition or overall argument presented through a sequence of sentences, the re-enforcement of the modern-pre-modern binary becomes apparent.

The second last paragraph of the ethnic minority chapter in the grade 5 textbook is as follows:

All the ethnic minorities including the Garos, Khashiyas, Monipuris, and Murongs have recently been influenced by modern education and culture. As a result, their lifestyles are changing. Many are leaving their own traditions and becoming used to the modern way of life (Sultana et al., 2008, p. 146).

Near the end of the chapter in the grade 4 textbook, the Santals are described as follows:

Recently, the Santal society is being influenced by modern society. Many of them are becoming used to the modern way of life through education. As a result, their behaviour is changing (Sultana et al., 2008, p. 91).

The arguments in both of these paragraphs from both textbooks are identical. In both cases, it is proposed that the lifestyles and behaviour of ethnic minorities are changing and they are becoming used to “modern” life, because of their increased “influence” by “modern education and culture.” The assumptions here are two-fold: ethnic minorities are “pre-modern,” and the only way of shedding their primitiveness and tribalism is by gradually shifting towards “modernity,” which is of course marked by the education and culture of the majority. Tradition and modernity therefore, are constructed as mutually exclusive. The lexical choice
apparent through the use of the word “behaviour” implies a natural primitiveness that is now being overcome by the blessings of “modernity” and “civilization.” Thus, a strict geographical and cultural boundary accompanied by characteristics of inferiority and premodernity is first drawn in these texts, followed by a dilution of the boundary only through assimilation with the dominant group. The devotion of one chapter out of seventeen to ethnic minorities, the infiltration of that chapter through stereotypical and exotic representations of various groups, and the virtual absence of any representation of them (and by them) as active participants in positive social change and historical achievements and simultaneously as proud adherents of their cultures demonstrate how ethnic minorities are evicted from the national imaginary into an isolated geography and simultaneously to a temporal realm of primitivism. That there is a complete omission or absence of a discussion on minority cultures, languages and religions in the chapters entitled “Our history and heritage” in grades 4 and 5 further reifies the separation and exclusion of these groups from the national heritage of Bangladesh. It is the Bengali majority that therefore, comes to constitute the pronouns “we” or “our.” They are not only established as the ideal citizens through their “normal” physical appearance that needs no description, but also through their “noble” work of bringing the “other” into modernity. Such isolation, categorization, “grotesque caricaturing” (Doylewood, 1999) and missionary act of civilizing is no different than a colonial form of racism.
The poor as the undeserving citizens:

An analysis of grade 3, 4 and 5 social studies textbooks also reveals unequal power relations between the economically privileged (typically the urban middle class) and the poor, working class populations. At a very superficial level of discourse, something as simple as the use of pronouns in a sentence or a series of sentences is very telling in that it indicates the intended audience for the text. Analyzing where the pronouns “we, “us,” “they” and them” appear within text reveals the process of separation of the privileged class from individuals belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds which also makes very clear who is considered the “ideal national subject.” In the two chapters of the grade 3 textbook, entitled “Our responsibilities at school and at home,” “Rules and regulations of school and home,” a common set of rules are repeated as a lesson for students to follow. However, a careful look at the use of pronouns and the images associated with the text demonstrate the exclusion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds from the entire topic.

Our responsibilities at school and at home:

We can do some work at home. We can keep our study desk, books and bags tidy. We can organize the clothes, toys and other belongings of our younger siblings. We can keep the dining table clean (Modina et al., 2008, pg. 18).
Rules and regulations of school and home:

What we must do after school: After returning from school, we will change our clothes and keep them in their designated place. We will organize our bag and books. We will take a shower or wash up. We will eat. Then we will rest. Then we will play, learn music, draw pictures or read story books (p. 22).

What we must do in the evening: “In the evening, we will wash up and have something to eat. Then we will study. After studying, we will sit with our family members and have supper. Then we will brush our teeth and chat with everyone for a while. Then we will go to bed on time (p. 24).

A visual illustration accompanies the second and third excerpt above. An image, entitled ‘Drawing during leisure time’ (Modina et al., 2008, p. 23) corresponds to the excerpt under the heading, “What we must do after school.” Similarly, another image with the title, ‘Eating supper together’ (p. 23) accompanies the paragraph under the title “What we must do in the evening.” The first of these images contains an illustration of a boy and a girl drawing pictures in a room that contains a bed and a study desk with numerous books on its surface. The children are also well dressed. The second image illustrates a tokenized middle class nuclear family with two children having supper at a large dining table with a wide array of dishes on its surface.

Upon careful examination of the written excerpts, it becomes apparent that the pronoun “we” is used to imply membership to a group who share the privilege and ability to participate in activities such as “changing clothes,” “learning music,” “painting and reading story books,” “eating at a dining table,” “tidying a study desk,” etc. Through the description of a very privileged lifestyle (and its reiteration through the visual representations), the assumptions of the presence of dining
tables, multiple clothes to wear, and the luxury of learning music being applicable to everyone in reality draws a strict boundary between the urban middle classes or the economically privileged rural populations and the economically disadvantaged. The images of a furnished home with cement walls and the erasure of any representation of the daily life of students from working class backgrounds automatically excludes them from the group of “disciplined” students whose ability to follow the rules outlined above are naturalized. As such, it is only the privileged students that are installed as the “good student,” and the “good citizen.” Poor children on the other hand, who may not be privileged enough to reside in any place but the slums, are pathologized and criminalized for causing “harm” to the nation, which are themes that exist in all three books.

In the chapter, “We are all humans” in the grade 4 textbook under the sub-heading, “Attitude towards different children and people,” the following excerpt encodes multiple underlying meanings both through lexicon and the overall proposition:

> There are many orphaned and destitute children among us. We will share our food and give them our clothes. We will always try to explain to them that we are all humans. We are always by their side. Those children are children just like us. We will never hurt their feelings. We will never let them feel that they are helpless. If they are any kind of trouble, we will help them so that they feel that they are healthy and normal like us (Modina et al., 2008, pg. 9).

Here, the use of the pronoun “them” shows the separation of poor children from “us,” once again the intended audience being the economically privileged child. While the lesson of helping is not negative on its own, the separation of groups using “we” and “them” at a site where children from various backgrounds are recipients of
the knowledge automatically renders the poor student as a passive participant, or not a participant at all. Furthermore, the establishment of charity as the only basis of relationship between the economically privileged and the underprivileged child does not play a positive role in making all children feel welcome at the site of learning. In fact, the suggestion of helping children so that they feel one of “us,” or “healthy” or “normal” like “us” illustrates the implied association of poverty with “deviance” and “abnormality.” Most importantly, histories of class oppression are completely erased through this process of naturalizing and pathologizing poverty.

The most conspicuous manifestation of such pathologization is observed in the chapter dealing with overpopulation in Bangladesh common to the textbooks of all three grades. The same topic is discussed under a slightly different title in each grade. The titles are as follows for grade 3, 4 and 5 respectively: “The problem of population increase in Bangladesh,” “The effects of population increase in Bangladesh,” and “The population of Bangladesh” (See list). A lexical analysis of the three titles is telling in that the discussion of overpopulation over the span of the three academic years begins with its establishment as a “problem.” While negative representations of overpopulation can be argued as factual and therefore can be seen as warranting awareness from a young age, beginning its discussion as a “problem” is highly problematic when the accusation is exclusively applied to poor families, which is precisely what is seen in these textbooks. In particular, a pair of images in the grade 3 textbook entitled ‘Number of family members’ (Modina et al., 2008, p. 75) and the associated body of text require careful attention. The two images are placed side by side in the textbook, with the image on the left illustrating
a four member, middle-class family against the backdrop of a cement wall with curtains and a wooden door. All the members have smiling faces drawn onto them. They are well clothed and the parents are dressed in professional attire. The image that is placed on the right hand side consists of a nine member family standing together with the parents and some of the children in ragged clothes, some half clothed and one new born child who is not clothed at all. The background contains the front of a slum house made of straw. The facial expressions of the members in this family emanate sadness and despair.

The following is the text that accompanies these images in the book:

What do we see in the pictures? On the left, we see a family of four with two children. On the right, the family has nine members. Therefore, let us figure out ourselves which of these families is small and which one is large.

Usually families with a small number of children are called small families. Families with a large number of children are known as large families. In our country, a family with two children is considered small.

We have learned the criteria of small and large families. Let us count the members in our own families and write them in our notebooks. Let us also write down the number of members in a few families that we know. Now let us compare which family is the smallest and which is the largest. This is how we will be able to easily identify small and large families (Modina et al., 2008, p. 76).

If the overall proposition of the text above is analyzed, it is evident that it seeks to differentiate between large and small families and to teach students the ways in which they can point out the differences. The juxtaposition of the two images with the text reveals the implication that a large family is characteristic of the poor. The first of the images described above, which illustrates a middle class family (as
evident through their clothing) shows the ideal family consisting of the standard, appropriate number of children (two). The cement wall with curtains and a wooden door indicates a typical middle class home. A large family with nine children shown in the image beside contains the obvious representation of a poor family. Juxtaposing two extreme scenarios by establishing a binary between two classes (a two children family versus a nine children family) accompanied by an exercise of differentiating large and small families with an emphasis on the “cons” of a large family does very little to instil a nuanced awareness of overpopulation and simply serves to reify social (in this case, class) difference. Highlighting “lack of nutrition,” “disease,” “need for extra housing,” “environmental pollution,” “overload of passengers in vehicles” (p. 76-78), as the disadvantages of large families (implied to be exclusively poor families) simply pathologizes these families through naturalizing their tendency to give rise to overpopulation.

Thus, after establishing the “problems” of overpopulation through the identification and isolation of people causing these problems in grade 3, the issue is taken up in more detail in grades 4 and 5. The chapter entitled “the effects of population increase in Bangladesh” does not specify or contain implications regarding the subjects held responsible for the increase. However, by this time, the students’ cognizance has processed (through the grade 3 text) who these subjects are. Effects such as “dirty streets,” “garbage,” “slums,” “unplanned housing,” “traffic jams,” “crimes” (p. 42-43) are discussed in grade 4. The reasons for overpopulation are discussed for the first time in the grade 5 book, which include child marriage, lack of women’s education, high child mortality rates and male child expectations
etc (Modina et al, 2008, p. 79). However, there is no government accountability in such issues and the role of the state or government in influencing low quality of education and poor healthcare is erased out of the discourse. In fact, it is emphasized that over-population is causing “problems” for the government as “the necessities cannot be fulfilled due to limited resources” (Modina et al., 2008, p. 76).

The exclusive and both overt and concealed inferiorization of poor populations remerges in grade 5 and is indicated by the image entitled ‘A densely populated slum’ (p. 76) which illustrates the filth created in the urban landscape by these slum dwellers. The following excerpt further demonstrates how populations are blamed for destroying the landscape and creating a nuisance in the country:

> Cultivable land is diminishing due to the creation of homes for extra people. This is leading to deforestation and the social and natural environment are deteriorating. The number of vehicles is increasing and the extra vehicles are creating tremendous traffic jams leading to air pollution (p. 78).

By using words such as “extra people,” and attributing slum creation and deterioration of the country’s natural beauty and environment to over-population by the poor, illiterate populations, they are symbolically evicted both from the national geography and citizenship. The history of the advent of slums as a result of unemployment and landlessness through colonial processes of oppression are completely erased, and so is the responsibility of the government in making education and healthcare less accessible to the economically disadvantaged. Thus, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of ability of family planning, cleanliness and organization are all naturalized as dispositions that inherently belong to the working classes.

Most importantly, the very inclusion of the topic of overpopulation at the
primary level bears little logic as sex education is not taught at this level. In such a situation, discussing overpopulation contains no meaning as there is no nuanced discussion on the complexities of overpopulation in Bangladesh. Without an understanding of family planning and the very process of population growth, the concept of contraceptives, etc (the use and availability of which is tied at least partly into access to education, which ultimately depends on systemic barriers and opportunities), the children only selectively learn that overpopulation is causing a nuisance in the country. Through the images of big versus small family and exercises of pointing out and recognizing the big and small families amongst their classmates, they learn to do just that, to point out the differences between the “better knowing”, “more educated” “good” small family and the unintelligent, problem-causing large families.

While there is an emphasis on keeping families small, the children have no idea how exactly that is possible. The only thing that they do learn (reinforced by the stereotypical images) is that it is the poor children’s parents that are somehow responsible for this problem, and therefore, do not belong to the group of the good, middle class students, neither are they a part of the larger body of the “good” citizens, namely the middle class families. As Sara Ahmed (2002) in her discussion of the imagined neighbourhood states, “The model of the neighbourhood as an organic community – where a sense of community arises from the simple fact of shared residence – defines social health in terms of the production of purified spaces and the expulsion of difference through ways of living together” (p. 25). Thus, through the recognition and establishment of the impurities of the strangers
in the neighbourhood, namely the slum dwellers and the rural poor, the goodness and intelligence of the middle class is secured in place, and the space that they occupy comes to embody the “organic and purified neighbourhood” and represents the legitimate landscape in the national imaginary. Furthermore, through Bourdieu’s definition of class as coming to embody a “culture,” and Goldberg’s argument of race as “culture”, these strange bodies that share the landscape and neighbourhood with the responsible citizens are cast out of the national identity that belongs not only to the middle class, but the middle class Bengali. Although most of them may be Bengali, their “culture” of poverty deems them inadequate for their passing as citizens. “Wiping furniture,” “learning music after school,” “having supper at the dinner table” as described in the textbooks all become constructed and legitimized as inherent markers of the economically privileged class and “race”, which marginalizes the poor student reading these textbooks as unworthy and filthy. Although a common theme of respecting the working classes exists in all three grades under the headings “The dignity of labour,” “the dignity of labour,” and “the value of labour” respectively, the following statements (from the grade 3, 4 and 5 books respectively) reveal that they are simply seen as groups that the country requires for its economic and social wellbeing:

We value all labourers and professionals in our society. We depend on them for various reasons. We will respect all labourers and professionals. We will respect all kinds of jobs (Modina et al., 2008, p. 62).

We all depend on labourers of our society for our everyday necessities. All labourers have the same respect. They are of immense value to our society. We must be respectful towards their labour (Modina et al., 2008, p. 98).
We all receive the service of labourers. We are dependant on them. That is why we must never look down upon them. We will not look down upon their work. We must love them. We will co-operate with them during times of need and help them during times of distress. We will respect their work and respect them (Sultana et al., 2008, p. 28).

The consistent theme in these three texts, whether directly mentioned or implied, is “value.” The proposition seems to be the need to respect these working classes as they are of “value” to the society. If considered on their own, these texts seem to provide a positive message, especially because there is a call for respect towards both professionals and labourers in the grade 3 book. Yet, if juxtaposed with the rest of the analyzed text which reveals the brutal pathologization and criminalization of these same working classes, it becomes apparent that the proposed “love” and “respect” comes with arrogance and selfishness. The difference between professionals and working classes is observed in the representations of every day lives of people as discussed before, in the images and texts that epitomize the legitimacy of the middle class lifestyle. The working classes, therefore, deserve respect in so far as they bring benefit to the country, as at all other times they are simply causing nuisance by multiplying and polluting the national landscape. They are to be “respected” not as citizens of the country and agents of their own lives and experiences, but as the vehicles of societal and economic progress and well being.

**From Text to Context, From Textbook to Nation:**

While the aim of this analysis was to understand the ways in which textbooks exercise symbolic violence as they marginalize students from ethnic minority and lower socio-economic backgrounds, an integral part of critical discourse analysis as mentioned earlier, is to move beyond the text and investigate how these textual
power relations translate onto the larger society. If the analyzed material found in the textbooks is placed against the historical and socio-political scenario of Bangladesh, it becomes apparent that racist and oppressive language used in these books is neither an accident, nor an innocent error. A critical discourse analysis of the material remains incomplete and meaningless unless it is placed within the cyclical, continuous relationship of discursive and material forces of oppression, and particularly within both the discursive and material project of the construction of the nation, which Sara Ahmed (2002) eloquently takes up in Strange Encounters.

She argues that “the boundaries of nations are not simply geographical or geopolitical (though they take both these forms) but also discursive...Nations are produced and constructed as places and communities in which a “people” might belong” (p. 98). Being both real and imaginary (p.98), the nation then becomes a bounded geopolitical space that legitimizes and allows certain people to be entitled to that space. In other words, it is the constant dynamic between governmental and political rules, activities and forces and the discourses around nationality and nationhood that determine what a particular nation comes to embody. Crucial in this process (both discursive and material) of constructing nationhood, Ahmed argues, is the production of strangers. The imagination and creation of national solidarity based on a concept of “we” requires the production of “they,” the populations that do not belong: a central concept of “Said’s classical theory of orientalism,” where “the Occident comes into being as a material place though the creation of an ontological distinction between it and the orient” (p. 99).

In the context of Bangladesh therefore, the imagined nation of Bangladesh as
belonging to privileged Bengalis is constructed both through the discourses and socio-political forces that pathologize, criminalize, exoticize and oppress the economically destitute and culturally distinct. The construction of the nation as monocultural has required the proximity of strangers (who do not fit that culture) in order to establish that proximity as threatening. Simultaneously, it is this very imagination that shows (and has historically shown) its material affects in the form of governmentality, by deciding who receives power and privilege and therefore, is included as a citizen. (As discussed previously, the material, political relations between the Bengali speaking majority and the ethnic minorities, and the middle and upper class and working classes of Bangladesh shaped by colonial discourses have historically been one of oppression, marginalization and eviction from national belonging) In turn, it is those in power that propagate the production of discourses (as seen in textbooks) that reiterate colonial methods of discrimination and racism. If political processes and government forces have always disadvantaged poor and ethnic minority children, it is the same processes and forces that allow for such text to be published and circulated, and the oppression is continued as children not only feel excluded and unworthy at school, but internalize their worthlessness as natural. While the intentionality of the authors is difficult to verify, their privileged status as Bengalis and as writers of textbooks indicates a particular set of beliefs and ideologies shared by dominant groups which are sanctioned by the government institutions such as the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) under the Ministry of Education, and undoubtedly reflect the historical and contemporary group relations that permeate the society. These institutions have been under the
control of the same political powers who despite their differences and change of
terms have historically installed the Bengali Middle class citizens as ideal. This
geographical entity then, which itself was once a colony becomes fragmented into
the orient and the occident. These texts become a medium through which the orient
exists in the psyche not only as the material spaces of those “strange” lands of hills,
primitive savages and superstitions, and the “dirty” slums and villages, but comes to
embody anything or anyone (people, cultures, worldviews, ways of life) that is
“foreign,” that does not fit the notion of what it means to be a Bangladeshi.
References


6. A Step Towards Transformation:

While the bulk of this study has attempted to identify oppressive practices perpetuated through children’s textbooks using an integration of a post-colonial and anti-colonial framework from theory to analysis, a decolonizing project that simply stops at an analysis of a problem without hope or suggestion of some sort of transformation bears little meaning. At the same time, it is the very anti-colonial framework that reminds one that a decolonizing study cannot under any circumstance reify the colonial order by simply laying out or imposing a solution from one’s privileged position as an academic. Dei and Azgharzadeh (2001) summarize the central principles to be followed within the anti-colonial discursive framework:

The anti-colonial discursive framework allows for the effective theorizing of issues emerging from colonial and colonized relations by way of using indigenous knowledge as an important standpoint...The anti-colonial discursive framework is an epistemology of the colonized, anchored in the indigenous sense of collective and common colonial consciousness. Colonial in this sense is conceptualized not simply as foreign and alien, but rather an imposed and dominating...The anti-colonial discursive approach sees marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories. Its goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations (p. 300).

The importance of indigenous knowledge and the marginalized being the agents of their own experiences and histories in this framework reminds me that while I stand in solidarity with the oppressed as being part of the shared colonial history of the country, my privileged position as a Bengali-Canadian, middle class
academic in a North American institution also sets me apart from specific histories and experiences of people who have faced and continue to face multiple levels of (neo) colonial oppression based on ethnic background and/or socio-economic class. As such, my critique of colonial forms of racism and discrimination in the primary school textbooks loses meaning if I dictate what should be included in these books. Rather, I make a suggestion to transform the current system by using a Freirian education model that also emphasizes the crucial need of the participation of the marginalized groups in transformation. In its pursuit of challenging institutional systems of power and privilege, the anti-colonial framework does not imply that power lies or can lie exclusively within such institutional structures. Its belief that the colonized and the marginalized have the power and agency to question, challenge and transform the current order. It is this belief in the power of the oppressed that provides the hope that Paulo Freire's education model (often accused of being idealistic) can be very applicable in the current pursuit of transforming the current primary education system.

While Freire’s banking concept of education specifically deals with the oppressive relationship between the teacher and student, where the teacher monopolizes the authority in knowledge and assumes the student to be an empty receptacle of that knowledge, I argue that in a highly textbook-centric education system such as the one in Bangladesh, it is the textbooks that become the teachers that dehumanize the students. In pointing out the oppressive character of the human instructors, one cannot ignore the authorities and institutional powers that are responsible for materializing the project of knowledge transmission through
textual production and circulation, a project in which teachers can be active participants, or merely a medium. Therefore, I argue that challenging the banking system of education not only entails questioning and restructuring the pedagogical methods imposed upon or adopted by teachers, but also challenging the text and subverting the structures that provide power to certain groups to produce knowledge for and about others. It is through this perception of banking education that Freire’s discussion on liberation becomes applicable to the context of primary education in Bangladesh.

In emphasizing the agency of the oppressed, he states the following:

“Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation” (Freire, 1971, p. 45)? Therefore, the pursuit of a transformed education system must begin with resistance from the masses. As Freire further argues, the solution is to transform the structure so that the marginalized peoples become “beings for themselves” (p. 74). Not only must there be a diverse representation of people (in terms of both ethnic and socioeconomic class background) responsible for writing textbooks, they must be in dialogue with the masses so that it is the colonized, the marginalized and the oppressed who, as subjects of their own histories, cultures, lives and experiences decide what should or should not be included in the books and how they should be represented. According to Freire, a truly liberating education system cannot entail the interests of the oppressor, and hence, the process of revolution which is based on dialogue must be accompanied by humility and hope and faith in humankind (p.
“Dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish that naming” (p. 88). Therefore, any struggle for transformation through dialogue must first ensure the elimination of arrogance of those who claim to “know better.”

While one might question the practicality of such dialogue in a country that has both been a victim of more than one colonial power and exercised decades of colonial processes of oppression towards its own people, it is my contention that optimism is fundamental for any process of transformation to begin, and that such a process has to begin from the grassroots level. Although the interconnectedness between discourse and society may seem to imply that a liberating education system first requires the transformation of the socio-political structure, I propose that it is the subversion of an oppressive education system that is the first step in transforming a society and its political structures. By this, I do not imply an oversimplified, linear and causal relationship where a transformed education leads to a transformed society and not vice-versa. Rather, I suggest that it is the resistance of the marginalized people that can open the door towards a dialogical relationship between educational policy makers and the masses, leading to a better body of knowledge taught to children. Through respect and love for the diverse population of Bangladesh, not only is there a better possibility of more children (from minoritized groups) continuing their education, but there is hope of the fostering of that love and respect translating outside of the classroom, in everyday public life and eventually in governmental and institutional structures. Once again, it is by no means a magic formula implying an absolute causal link, but a step towards positive
change, triggering one factor out of many that are responsible (in the network of relationships between education, politics and everyday life) for the oppression of ethnic minority and poor students.
References


Conclusion and Future Directions

This thesis has attempted to adopt a new direction in educational research in Bangladesh. Through my critical focus on textbooks, I have tried to show that within the myriad factors held responsible for primary school drop-outs, a crucial variable, namely the role of textbooks remains largely ignored. Contrary to previous works (in the Bangladeshi context) which have merely touched upon or identified curriculum as a secondary factor, I have probed into the content of these texts in order to illustrate the ways in which these play a major role in alienating and pushing underprivileged children out of school through constructions of national identity and the “good” citizen. In doing so however, I have not implied a deterministic cause and effect relationship between textbook discourse and children’s disengagement, but rather, understood it as one of the many threads in the network of equally significant variables that influence a child’s continuation or discontinuation of education.

By bringing attention to the education system itself, I have attempted to undermine the practice of victim blaming and emphasize the role of systemic structures in the oppression of students from disadvantaged groups. Most importantly, through the shared objectives of the anti-colonial and post-colonial theoretical framework and Critical Discourse Analysis, this thesis has linked textbooks discourse with the larger socio-political context and the colonial history of Bangladesh, thereby establishing its central argument that the Social Studies Textbooks of primary schools oppress students in a way that is no different than
colonial forms of racism and inferiorization. Finally, I have advocated a transformed education system which can be worked towards through the resistance and solidarity of marginalized groups and (non-arrogant and unbiased) debate and dialogue between policy makers and the masses.

While this thesis has chosen two (overlapping) sites of oppression, namely socio-economic class and ethnicity for the purpose of analysis, it by no means undermines the importance of other avenues such as gender and ability. As it is the goal of anti-colonial thought to challenge oppression in its entirety, this thesis acknowledges the importance of all sites of oppression and their interlocking nature, and anticipates a larger future study that will take gender and ability into account. Another interesting study would be to make a comparison between the social studies and language textbooks, or conducting an analysis of language textbooks themselves, as these books are also saturated with messages of nationalism and national identity conveyed through poetry and short stories. Through a CDA analysis that would take into account the individual authors of these pieces and their background (which is more accessible and transparent compared to the background of the authors of the Social Studies textbooks), a more thorough and holistic understanding of the education system and its effects on children’s experiences and performance can be achieved.