

Review, *Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan*

By David Waterman

Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan. M. Ayaz Naseem. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (Postcolonial Studies in Education), 2010. 171 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-230-61853-4.

While the foundational study for M. Ayaz Naseem's recent book is an overview of textbooks used in the Pakistani public schools and the marginalizing representations generally accorded to women, *Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan* goes well beyond the study itself in examining the context – social, economic, political and legal – which allows for the creation of gendered subjectivities. The introductory chapter, “Contextualizing Articulations of Women,” makes the provocative argument that, in its current form, Pakistan's educational apparatus actually disempowers women, thus going against the grain of development discourse which insists that education always represents progress (4). After a brief description of the methodology of the study, the author takes the time to situate himself in terms of subjectivity, being an upper-middle class male, urban and Muslim, educated in English, feminist ally and postcolonial citizen.

The following chapter outlines the poststructuralist approach to the research, especially as elucidated by Michel Foucault through the lens of genealogical method and the functioning of power. In the domain of education, according to Ayaz Naseem, poststructuralism is extremely useful for a critical understanding of the everyday and the ordinary: “how certain educational discourses [...] came about in the first place [...] focusing on what can be said, who can say what is said, which ‘truths’ are validated and legitimized, and what is excluded” (15). Educational textbooks play a key role in normalization and the creation of docile, properly formatted citizens, whether in Pakistan or elsewhere; the particularity, according to the author, is the paucity of critical research regarding educational discourse in Pakistan, including its “symbiotic fusion” with religious and political discourse as well (17; 19). Since curriculum design is largely controlled at the national level, a

chapter is consecrated to educational policy, beginning with a brief overview of the discouraging state of Pakistan's educational infrastructure and the unkept promises of successive governments to seriously address underfunding, illiteracy and other essential reforms. "Education policy discourse," Ayaz Naseem reminds us, "has been largely guided by the transposition of an educational vision that is grounded in the colonial and the Orientalist discourses of education on the one hand and by the global modernization and developmentalist discourses on the other," not to mention the active involvement of religious leaders (40).

The fourth chapter provides what the author calls a history of the present in terms of women and the State, beginning with statistics from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan regarding crimes against women, then continuing with a description of three axes along which the State has been conceptualized in Pakistan: historical-structuralist, Marxist and postfoundational (51; 53). Women have found themselves between two competing discourses, that of the State – itself a colonial legacy – and that of the religious ulema, and Naseem highlights the agency of women in spite of these difficulties, whether at the time of the nation's birth or in the present (61). One recalls the activities of the Women's Action Forum, and their sentiment of betrayal after having supported Benazir Bhutto's accession to power. The following chapter discusses in more general terms the constitution of subjectivity and positioning of the subject; here Naseem coins the term "religiopoly," defined as "a symbiotic merger of religious and militaro-nationalistic discourses where each discourse retains its originary criteria of formation but where these discourses together form the dominant discourse that constitutes subjects and subjectivities, positions subjects..." (66). The chapter continues with a section on legal discourse as it pertains to women in Pakistan; the author notes that prior to the Zia period, the legal system largely followed the British colonial model, but after the promulgation of the Hudood ordinances women were punished with far greater frequency than men (70). Representations of women in the media along a "good woman / bad woman binary" also help to reinforce what Naseem calls the "*hyperreality of the sermon*," privileging the message of conservative clerics (77; 78 original italics).

Textbooks from the Urdu and Social Studies curricula are reviewed in chapter six; among other problems of poor design and sloppy production, the author deplores the fact that "both the social studies and Urdu texts [...] are

heavily gendered with a pronounced androcentric bias.” He goes on to cite statistics showing 81% of characters are male, with males accorded more active roles – “freedom fighters, leaders, patriots, rebels” – as compared to the nurturing, mothering role of females (88-89). Throughout the textbooks, meaning is fixed along certain “nodes,” conflating “Muslim” with “citizen,” for example, or juxtaposing nationalism with religion, resulting, Naseem argues, “in a situation where everything that the text says has the authority and sanction of religion,” thus effectively separating Muslims from non-Muslims while clouding the immense diversity within the Muslim community itself (94-95). Such binary categorization is not limited to women, as we see in the following chapter, since this strategy of “Othering” also serves to effectively remove minorities from the national collectivity; Naseem points out that population statistics are never broken down into their nuanced elements – one seldom, if ever, finds Hindus or Bengalis mentioned, for example (104-105). Women, when they are mentioned, are most often connected to the Prophet’s family (Hazrat Khadija, Ayisha, Zainab) or to the nationalist cause (Fatima Jinnah; see 109). The section concludes with the various strategies and discourses of normalization, notably the normalization of militarism, authority, power / knowledge and gender relations / women. The final chapter of *Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan* recalls the dramatic walkout by members of the opposition parties in 2004, in response to the omission of Quranic verses from biology textbooks (119), then draws some conclusions of the study, warning that the quantitative increase in enrolment of girls and young women at all levels of education has not translated into empowerment, evidenced by the continuing relegation of women to second-class status, not to mention the prevalence of “honor” killings which often go unpunished (121). Overall, Naseem’s study concludes that educational texts in Pakistan “construct a metanarrative of religion and nationalism that includes only the masculine, militaristic, and nationalist narratives from past and present [...] excluded from the metanarrative are women, dissidents, and minorities” (127).

While patriarchal and conservative religious societies are often reproached for blatantly oppressing women, education is – at least ideally – supposed to represent progress, a way out of inequality and poverty. M. Ayaz Naseem’s study is sure to attract a good deal of attention precisely because it contests the accepted wisdom that education always equals progress and liberation. Pakistan’s governing elite have for years been insisting that

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genuine progress has been made, but Naseem's study suggests that the education system as it currently exists is part of the problem, part of the status quo which continues to create gendered citizens. Naseem is to be congratulated for exposing the nuts-and-bolts mechanics of how such representations are deployed, and to what ends; his study will be of interest to educators and sociologists, indeed anyone interested in the role of institutions in the formation of subjects. Those who administer Pakistan's educational system, on the other hand, may not be happy with what M. Ayaz Naseem has to say.