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Teaching terrorism, saving the state?

Education and geopolitical imaginations of terrorism in 12 violently challenged states

Abstract:

The role of education in political socialisation and the importance of terrorism discourses in promoting (or silencing) certain interests have long been acknowledged. This study combines both themes by asking: How do school textbooks, sanctioned by states that are violently challenged by internal opposition, discuss the issue of terrorism? I draw on, and contribute to, four distinct, yet related streams of research: critical geopolitics, critical terrorism studies, geographies of education, and young people's geographies. Simultaneously, while most work on the topic focuses on individual cases (typically of Western countries), I conduct the first comparative analysis of twelve countries from different world regions: China, Egypt, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Spain, Sri Lanka and Turkey. Contrary to recent claims, considerable heterogeneity persists regarding geopolitical imaginations of terrorism, while US-coined discourses are only infrequently adapted. However, there is still recognisable functionalist convergence as the states under analysis utilise their control of the education system in their internal struggles, mainly by portraying their opponents as evil, by ascribing a positive identity to themselves, and by calling for support by their citizens (including restrictions of human rights and democracy).

Keywords: civil war; education; everyday; geopolitics; political socialisation; securitisation; terrorism

1 Introduction

Education plays a key role in forming the geopolitical knowledge of young people. Consequentially, scholars of critical geopolitics and those in other fields have expressed concerns about state-directed education systems promoting stereotypes, militarism, support for authoritarianism, and hostility. Studies on India (Banerjee & Stöber, 2014) and Pakistan (Emerson, 2018), for example, show how school education in both countries normalises violence against the rival country as well as against various internal others. Rohde and Alayan (2012: 4) discuss how state elites in the Middle East and North Africa utilise education to disseminate “normative discourses of cultural authenticity, national identity and loyalty to the [authoritarian] state” (see also Ide et al., 2018). And German school

textbooks contain exaggerated depictions of environment-conflict links that create a sense of global threat, portray the global south as violent and incapable, and legitimise Western interventions (Ide, 2016).

In parallel to these debates, concerns have emerged about the term “terrorism” being instrumentalised for geopolitical interests, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 events. In the global north, the “war on terror” discourse continues to be used to justify increased surveillance, curtailment of civil rights, and military interventions such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq or drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen. Indirectly, such rhetoric of global, significant and unpredictable threats to national security is also used to justify cuts in social spending (Pain, 2014). Further, debates about terrorism frequently serve to fuel stereotypes about non-Western and especially “Arab”/”Islamic” places as backwards, dangerous and/or helpless (Amin-Khan, 2012), which have a long history in Western discourses (Said, 1997; Sidaway, 1994).

Such discourses are promoted or adapted by elites outside of the Western world as well, mostly for strategic purposes (Keen & Andersson, 2018). Although empirical research on debates in these countries is rare, research on states as diverse as China (Rodríguez-Merino, 2019), Morocco (Bartolucci, 2010) and Sri Lanka (Nissanka & Bentrovato, 2018) found that internal struggles are portrayed as part of the global “war on terror” in order to attract funding, military support and approval for political repression.

Yet, with very few exceptions (e.g., Nguyen, 2014), critical geopolitical research as well as terrorism studies have paid little attention to terrorism discourses as circulated by education systems and practices. I address this knowledge gap by analysing how state-sanctioned school textbooks discuss the issue of terrorism. The analysis focuses on school textbooks because “they reflect the knowledge and values defined by a given society, and particularly its political elites, as essential” (Lässig, 2009: 2), “remain the dominant media for knowledge conveyance” in schools (Fuchs, 2011: 22), and are hence important (although not deterministic) instruments of political socialisation.

Specifically, I study the period 2003-2014 and twelve states challenged by violent groups that threaten the state in terms of territorial integrity (separation) or regime/government survival (see Figure 1). This lens allows me to disentangle the geopolitical imaginations that state elites try to convey to young people in conflict contexts involving high political stakes, hence providing insights into the discursive dimensions of constitutive, antagonistic politics (Mouffe, 2005). In addition, I conducted the first comprehensive, comparative study of terrorism discourses in different world regions, thus going

beyond existing analyses of individual (often Western) cases. While the latter provide in-depth insights into particular country contexts, their comparability and generalisability are limited.

Figure 1 around here

Figure 1: Countries under study

In terms of theory, my analysis draws on, and contributes to, four distinct, yet complementary and mutually enriching streams of research: critical geopolitics (studying the interlinkages between language, power and politics), critical terrorism studies (interested in the social construction of terrorism and the political effects of these constructions), geographies of education (with a focus on how education intersects with inequality, marginalisation and conflict), and young people's geographies (analysing the agency of young people and its constraints). The subsequent section provides further details on the contributions of and to these four streams of research as well as their various interlinkages. This study also focuses on eleven non-Western countries so far hardly considered by critical geopolitics and terrorism studies, hence contributing to a diversification of knowledge and perspectives (Acharya & Buzan, 2009; Sharp, 2011b).

This article proceeds as follows: I discuss the theoretical background and context of the study in further depth, give information on the methods used and countries studied. Then, I present and discuss my results before drawing a brief conclusion. In essence, I find that all states except China and Nigeria include terrorism to a significant degree into their textbooks, but that considerable differences remain between the different states. This shows that despite strategic benefits, there is reluctance to adopt US-coined discourses. Yet, there still is some convergence in that states instrumentalise textbook content on terrorism to delegitimise their competitors, strengthen their own identity, and attempt to garner societal support, including for the restriction of human rights and democracy.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Critical geopolitics

Research into critical geopolitics is based on five interrelated assumptions (Dalby, 2010). 1) Every statement which is explicitly about or implicitly related to (international) politics contains a number of "geopolitical imaginations" (Müller, 2008: 323). 2) As the term already indicates, these are not objectively given, but are constructed by discourses. That is not to say that geopolitical imaginations are never in line with real-world developments or are even intentionally misleading. Rather, they

simplify a given topic or development (a necessary process in the face of limited human cognition) by highlighting certain topics, actors, characteristics, causes or dynamics, while ignoring others.

3) Geopolitical imaginations impact (foreign) policies by defining security issues, current political trends and threats, and (potential) partners, among other things. However, they have no deterministic impact, but rather shape which options become possible (or remain unimaginable) by influencing the worldviews of experts, policymakers and their constituencies (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). 4) As geopolitical imaginations highlight certain issues and privilege certain policies at the expense of others, they are inherently connected to power relations (that they sustain or challenge) and interests (that they serve or undermine) (Squire, 2015). Exposing the power relations sustained by geopolitical imaginations and the interests served by them is a crucial part of the critical research agenda. 5) While individuals and groups have a certain degree of influence on the geopolitical imaginations they (re-)produce or challenge, they are by no means autonomous and are always shaped by pre-existing discourses and cultural contexts (Müller, 2008).

The literature on critical geopolitics has identified security and fear as key concerns in geopolitical debates and policies (Pain, 2009). Military interventions in the global south, especially prior to 1989 and post-9/11, as well as tighter surveillance and border control measures are justified by geopolitical imaginations that highlight the inevitability of others having hostile intentions, the uncontrollable nature of certain spaces, and the increase in international migration (Campbell, 2005; Williams & McConnell, 2011). Consequently, terrorism has emerged as a key topic in critical geopolitics research (Ingram & Dodds, 2009).

My study contributes to existing research by linking critical geopolitics with critical terrorism studies (see section 2.2 and conclusion). In addition, critical geopolitics (especially when discussing terrorism) often focuses on discourses in the global north, while “there has been less consideration of the politics of representation from the margins” (Sharp, 2011b: 271). I engage with this issue by analysing terrorism discourses of 11 countries in the non-Western world. By doing so, this study also aligns with critical geopolitics’ concerns about the circulation of discourses because it analyses whether US-coined discourses are globalised (leading to a homogenisation of international terrorism discourses) or localised (indicated by a national re-framing of terrorism and the persistence of discursive heterogeneity) (Clausen, 2004).

2.2 Critical terrorism studies

Critical terrorism studies challenges conventional analyses of terrorism in two regards (Jarvis, 2009). On the one hand, it broadens the understanding of terrorism to include, among others, state violence and structural inequalities (e.g., Pain, 2014). On the other hand, an interpretative approach emerged that studies the social construction of terrorism. Research in this tradition analyses, for example, the stereotypes, interests, national identities and policy legitimations conveyed by different debates about terrorism (Jarvis & Legrand, 2016). In terms of epistemology, ontology and research interest, this interpretative strand of critical terrorism studies is hence closely aligned with critical geopolitics (Dodds, 2008).

An important debate in this context concerns the degree to which there has been a convergence of international discourses on terrorism after 9/11. Several studies conclude that although the term usually has a heavily negative connotation and refers to some kind of external enemy, strong differences remain between the discourses in different countries. These differences relate to questions of how important terrorism is as a problem, who is classed as a terrorist (can, for example, national liberation movements be terrorists, or states?), and what are the root causes of terrorism, among others (e.g., Ide, 2017; Jackson, 2007; Sahill, 2018; Sharp, 2011a).

Other authors, by contrast, argue that the “war on terror” discourse promoted by the USA has been globalised to a considerable degree and now constitutes the dominant international discourse. This discourse claims that terrorism is a significant problem affecting national and international security, is well-organised through global networks of non-state groups, is predominantly driven by Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology, and needs to be countered by improved surveillance and military confrontation (along with development aid) (Holland, 2013). Bhatia (2005: 13) argues that authoritarian governments facing strong internal opposition are especially likely to adapt the “war on terror” discourse “in the hope of US assistance or a *carte blanche* for repression”. This view has been supported by case studies on, for example, the Philippines (Santos Jr, 2010) and Sri Lanka (Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005).

So far, this controversy on the homogenisation of international terrorism discourses has been shaped by in-depth, yet hardly comparable studies on singular (and often Western) countries. I significantly advance the research by conducting the first comparative, cross-case study (spanning several world regions) on the topic. Specifically, I analyse the terrorism discourses in school textbooks of twelve states intensively (and violently) challenged by opposition groups. Such states are particularly likely to adapt the US-coined discourse and depict (violent) internal opposition as part of a severe, global and Islamist terrorist threat.

This paper is therefore able to connect research on critical geopolitics and (interpretative) critical terrorism studies to emerging geographical research on education. The field of critical terrorism studies especially has paid very little attention to the latter despite the insight that a terrorism discourse “circulates throughout the social body via educational system(s) and media” (Sahill, 2018: 324), and the considerable role schools are supposed to play in the “war on terror” (Nguyen, 2014; Quartermaine, 2016).

2.3 Geographies of education and educational media

Scholars working on the geographies of education from a critical perspective analyse how education intersects with and often reproduces inequalities along the lines of class, race and gender (Nguyen et al., 2017). Furthermore, and more relevant to this study, they have also focused on the geopolitical imaginations produced, challenged and contested by educational media, practices and institutions. Using the legitimization of and education for the “war on terror” in US schools as an example, Nguyen (2014: 111) shows that “[c]ritical geopolitics is well-positioned to disentangle and contest the constructed geographies that instigate feelings of fear and in/security around education practices and discourses.”

Benwell (2014) (studying textbooks of the Falkland Islands), Cairo (2006) (focusing on maps in Portugal) and Emerson (2018) (analysing school education in Pakistan) illustrate the importance of educational media for reproducing and reinforcing national identities. This is no surprise as school textbooks contain state-sanctioned discourses, that is, ministries of education and state education boards exert considerable control over textbook contents through direct production, licensing, setting up curricula and/or determining examination content (see Table 1 for an overview of how governments influence textbook content in the states under analysis). Therefore, I formulate the following expectation: States which are fundamentally (and violently) challenged promote terrorism discourses through their textbooks that reinforce national identity and set apart the “good” state from the “evil” opposition (i.e., “the terrorists”).

For around the last two decades, policy makers (especially in the USA and the UK) have been increasingly considering education as a key tool in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, and for preparing students for the “war on terror” (Nguyen, 2014; Quartermaine, 2016). Efforts to export such approaches to the education systems of other countries via development aid are well documented, and support studies claiming a global diffusion of the “war on terror” discourse (Novelli, 2010). This study enriches these debates with a specific focus on severely challenged states (largely

outside the Western world) and their debates about terrorism. In doing so, it resonates with Pini et al.'s (2017) call for further critical geographic analysis of anti-terrorism measures in education contexts.

2.4 Young people's geographies

Research has long shown the relevance of young people's experiences in shaping their political choices and worldviews as adults. Yet geographic research into children and young people, often conducted with close links to political geography, demonstrates that children also have considerable political agency (Skelton, 2013). Examples of this include youths participating in protests during the Arab Spring, against the war in Iraq, and more recently, for more ambitious climate change mitigation efforts (Hörschelmann, 2008; *The Guardian*, 2019; Woon, 2017). This research picks up calls from cultural and feminist geographers to devote more attention to everyday political processes. Such calls also resonate in security studies and terrorism research (Jarvis & Lister, 2016; Vaughan-Williams & Stevens, 2015).

However, as Benwell and Hopkins (2016: 11) point out, research has, to a large degree, "neglected the social and spatial contexts that often determine the extent to which children and young people can express agency." Several studies find, for example, that the worldviews and set of actions perceived to be available to young people are shaped by families, media, peers and teachers (Benwell, 2014; Nasie et al., 2016; Staeheli & Hammett, 2013). In other words, besides studying their experiences, agency and opinions, it is also important to analyse the factors shaping young people's worldviews.

Focussing on geopolitical imaginations promoted by state-sanctioned school textbooks thus provides a useful addition to wider research on the structural and discursive constraints of young people's agency, especially given school textbooks' privileged and near universal access to young people. This study hence contributes to young people's geographies by analysing a crucial medium of their political socialisation. As indicated by Table 1, an average of 77% of all young people are at least enrolled into secondary education and hence exposed to the materials under study (see section 3), with seven countries having enrolment rates above 80%. In addition, research on young people's geographies has so far largely focused on Western states (Holloway, 2014). Addressing this gap, my study provides comparative insights on several states in various world regions.

At the same time, young people's geographies' emphasis on agency help me to qualify and contextualise the findings on this study. Specifically, and in line with geographies of education research (see section 2.3), education does not exert a unidirectional or determinist influence on young people. Scholars have shown various times that textbooks can be re-interpreted and re-contextualised by

students (as well as by teachers) (Benwell, 2014; Mäkinen, 2014), with families, peer groups and lived experiences playing a more important role in political socialisation (Stacheli & Hammett, 2013).

3 Methods

This study conducts a comparative analysis of twelve countries (see Figure 1), all of which experienced (to different degrees) violent contestation of the state in the post-Cold War period, including actions widely considered as terrorism. Those challenging the state were motivated by a broad range of factors — including government change, separatism, and establishment of an alternative political system — and hence represent significant variation for cross-case comparisons (START, 2018; UCDP, 2018):

- China: In the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Uighur groups violently and non-violently resist their marginalisation by the Chinese state, demanding more autonomy or even separation.
- Egypt: *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* attempted to violently overthrow the Egyptian government during the mid-1990s in favour of a theocratic political system. The Egyptian military was able to defeat the group in 1998, but related (or successor) groups like *Tabwid wal Jihad* continued to carry out attacks, including suicide bombings.
- India: The Indian government is actively challenged by the Maoist Naxalite movement (resulting in several hundred battle-related deaths each year during the mid-2000s) and must deal with a number of separatist movements, including in Assam, Kashmir and Nagaland.
- Kenya: The country faced an insurgency by the *Sabaot Land Defence Force* (SLDF) between 2005 and 2009 as well as significant post-electoral violence in 2007 and 2008.
- Nigeria: During the 2000s, several groups started to violently push for the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Nigeria, such as *Ahlul Sunnah Jamaa and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (Boko Haram). Anti-government violence, for example by the *Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force*, also takes place in the Niger Delta.
- Papua New Guinea: The Papuan government and the *Bougainville Revolutionary Army* (BRA) fought a civil war over the independence of Bougainville during much of the 1990s. In the 2000s, the *Organization for a Free Papua* pushed for an independent West Papua, though violence was sparsely used.

- Peru: The *Marxist Revolutionary Movement Túpac Amaru* (MRTA) and the communist *Sendero Luminoso* challenged the Peruvian government until the mid-1990s in an intense civil war, and *Sendero Luminoso* continued to carry out attacks during the 2000s.
- Philippines: The Philippine government has been challenged by the revolutionary *Communist Party of the Philippines* (CPP) and the separatist *Moro National Liberation Front/Moro Islamic Liberation Front* (MNLF/MILF) during much of the 1990s and 2000s.
- Russia: Chechen groups have fought for independence of the region since 1989, with various cycles of armed clashes in Chechnia as well as bomb attacks and hostage-takings in Russian cities
- Spain: The *Euskadi ta Azkatasuna* (ETA) conducted a violent campaign for an independent Basque Country, with a high number of casualties during the 1990s and ongoing attacks during the 2000s. A ceasefire was declared in 2011.
- Sri Lanka: The *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (LTTE) fought for an independent Tamil state during the 1990s and again from 2006 until 2009 (when it was defeated by the government).
- Turkey: The *Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan* (PKK) fought the Turkish government for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state throughout the 1990s and 2000s. To a minor extent, the government has also been challenged by Marxist groups such as *Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*.

The analysis of school textbooks from these countries focuses on those secondary education textbooks published between 2003 and 2014 for civic education (or the respective national equivalent). Civic education is the subject most directly aimed at teaching students about current day political issues as well as trying to form a sense of national identity among them. In secondary education only as problems related to (international) peace and conflict are very infrequently addressed in primary education. Given that most of the debates about the convergence of international terrorism discourses and the globalisation of the “war on terror” focus on the post 9/11 period, the analysis only considers textbooks published in 2003 or later. Production cycles of school textbooks, and hence the incorporation of recent events into them, often extend to two years (with large variations among different countries and subjects) (Bläsi, 2018).

To create the final sample for the analysis, I collected all those textbooks held by the library of the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, Germany¹, that matched the criteria specified above. One

¹ See <http://bibliothek.gei.de/en.html> for further information.

should note that while the library contains the most comprehensive collection of school textbooks worldwide and aims to systematically update its stock every few years, some countries can be over- or underrepresented (for instance if the institute receives major funding for a country-specific project or if reliable book suppliers are lacking). I discussed this issue with staff members and, whenever possible, included additional textbooks that are freely available online into the sample to further reduce biases. Yet, one should be aware that India, Russia and Peru are slightly overrepresented, while relatively few books were available for China, Egypt, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. Also, I cannot rule out the possibility that especially in countries with federalised education systems and/or commercial textbook producers (see Table 1), certain forms of content are over- or underrepresented in the textbooks available.

In the next step, all textbook pages using the keywords “terror”, “terrorism” or “terrorist” were identified and where necessary translated into German or English.² The first screening of textbooks was always conducted by persons fluent in the respective language to read through the books and identify the pages mentioning the relevant keywords. These persons were later responsible for translating the respective pages to English (if necessary) as well. This ensured that my study focuses on how the terms terrorism and terrorist are discussed in the respective countries rather than employing a homogenous, externally derived definition to identify relevant text passages (although it risks that indirect references to terrorism not using the term are missed, while culturally deeply embedded meanings of terrorism cannot be extracted by a simple key word search either). Altogether, this study analysed 270 relevant pages contained in 209 textbooks (see Table 1 for further information). While the textbook sample for some countries seems rather small, one should keep in mind that especially in poorer countries with state-controlled textbook production, only one civic education textbook may exist for each grade, and this might be infrequently updated.

Table 1 around here

I employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches to reveal how the textbooks of violently contested states discuss terrorism. In a first step, I conducted a quantitative content analysis along the lines of Krippendorff (2004) using the textbook page as the unit of analysis. All pages were coded by

² For China, Egypt, Russia, Peru, Spain and Turkey, only textbooks in the main national language were found in the library. In India and Sri Lanka, textbooks are literally translated by the publishers into various national languages, and I drew on the English versions of them. Similarly, for Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, only textbooks written in English could be obtained. In all four countries, English is the official language and widely used in the education system.

two people, independently of each other, and any disagreements were subsequently resolved through debate (which included the project leader and the translator of the book, if necessary). The coding scheme was developed deductively from the relevant literature as well as inductively based on a first reading of the material. The main categories for the analysis were: perpetrators of terrorism, targets of terrorism, terrorist events mentioned, and reasons for/causes of terrorism.

In the second step, I analysed the material with a qualitative approach, inspired by the procedures of Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Specifically, I read through the relevant textbook pages, copied pertinent passages into a separate table, assigned a code (an abstract label summarising the passage from an analytical viewpoint) to them, and wrote a memo elaborating on the code as well as formulating thoughts for further consideration/analyses. Frequently used and/or particularly relevant codes were discussed with the coders of the quantitative content analysis, country experts and other colleagues working on the topic to reduce potential bias. One should note that contrary to Grounded Theory, I developed codes not only inductively from the material, but also deductively from the existing literature and the preceding quantitative analysis. Existing studies on terrorism discourses in the countries under analysis (if available) provided an important resource to contextualise the results of my analysis.

4 Findings

4.1 Prevalence and definitions of terrorism in the school textbooks

In all countries under study, I found references to terrorism in state-sanctioned school textbooks. 43% of all textbooks in the sample mention the term terrorism, with an average of three pages per book dedicated to the topic. Given that textbooks have to cover a broad range of topics, this is indicative of the prevalence (and political power) of the term in the twenty-first century (Bhatia, 2005). Drawing on the analysis of school textbooks, the Stanford Group claims that politically relevant concepts increasingly diffuse across the international realm, hence indicating the emergence of a world society (Buckner & Russell, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2009). In principal, my findings are in line with such claims. As Table 1 illustrates, however, the coverage of terrorism varies strongly within the sample. In some countries, a high number of textbooks discuss terrorism, with Russia (81%) and Peru (77%) being on top, while few textbooks from Kenya (13%) and Nigeria (9%) refer to terrorism. On average, Turkish (7.75) and Papua New Guinean (6.0) textbooks devote most pages to terrorism, while this number is only 1.0 (the lowest possible) in China, Kenya and Nigeria.

Two initial explanations for this pattern seem intuitive: First, one would expect terrorism to feature more prominently in the education systems of countries with higher levels of terrorism. Indeed, the correlations between terrorism deaths per one million inhabitants in the 2001-2012 period (START, 2018) and the percentage of textbooks (0.52, significant at the 10% level) as well as the number of pages per book featuring terrorism (0.60, significant at the 5% level) are positive. But given the small number of cases and the moderate strength and significance of the correlations, one should interpret these results with care.

Second, economically less developed countries might face a set of problems much graver than terrorism — such as poverty, hunger and disasters — and therefore discuss the issue less frequently in their textbooks. Confirming this assumption, the correlations between the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2017) and percentage of books (0.84) as well as the number of pages per book referring to terrorism (0.82) are positively and highly significant (both at the 1% level).

Yet, again the results are based on a very small N and other factors such as political discourses, national cultures and characteristics of the education systems (on which quantitative data is not readily available) are likely more important determinants of the prevalence of terrorism in educational media. In Nigeria, for example, discussions of terrorism “lay bare ethno-religious fault lines” between Christians and Muslims, and are therefore perhaps intentionally excluded from textbooks (Langer et al., 2017: 419). In the dominant Indian discourse, terrorism is closely linked with a negative othering of Pakistan, and hence important for the reproduction of a national identity, including in the education sector (Ide, 2017).

When approaching the material from a more qualitative perspective, the textbooks of all countries under analysis, with the exception of China and Nigeria, provide a (more or less) substantive discussion of terrorism. In China, one brief sentence appears identically in four different textbooks: “Our country opposes all forms of terrorism” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China 2010: 8). The lack of coverage might be due to a Chinese tendency to promote harmony in their education system rather than to discuss conflicts (Miletic & Bretherton, 2016). Furthermore, until very recently, the Chinese state had been cautious in using the term terrorism, partly because the (Western use of the) term is criticized in the global south (Du & Li, 2017).

In Nigeria, terrorism is only mentioned in one textbook: as a bullet point in a list of major crimes. This could be the case because terrorism is a controversial topic in Nigeria, because political conflicts generally play no role in the county’s textbooks, and because other (development-related) problems like poverty are considered more important.

Besides China and Nigeria, three further states provide no definition of terrorism in their textbooks (Kenya, Philippines, Sri Lanka). In the other seven countries, there seems to be basic agreement that terrorism (1) aims to create fear (2) by conducting acts of physical violence (3) in order to pursue political goals. In theory, this allows for the term to cover actions by the state as well, but almost all books focus on non-state groups only (see section 4.3).

There are important differences regarding the targets of terrorism mentioned in the definitions, however. Textbooks from Egypt, Peru and Turkey emphasise that terrorists use violence against (supposedly innocent) civil populations. India and Russian textbooks define terrorism as being directed against citizens as well the state, while in Papua New Guinea and Spain, no targets are mentioned in the definitions (see section 4.3 for a further discussion).

4.2 Adoption of US positions and the homogenisation of international terrorism discourses?

As discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3, there is considerable debate about the degree to which international terrorism discourses are homogenised within critical terrorism studies and (to a lesser degree) geographies of education. Diffusion of discourses via education-related development aid would be one mechanism behind this (Novelli, 2010). According to Bhatia (2005), governments would have also good reasons to draw on the US-coined “war on terror” discourse in order to delegitimise their opponents and gain external support. Various studies even conclude that geopolitical rivals of the USA like China (Rodríguez-Merino, 2019) and Russia (Russell, 2005) strategically adopt the “war on terror” discourse in order to increase the legitimacy of their (repressive) policies among an international audience.

However, my findings hardly support this convergence thesis. Certainly, there is some convergence of definitions of terrorism as violent, political and creating fear. Textbooks also frame terrorism in very negative terms, for instance as “disprising [sic] the value of human life” (Marcos 2012: 67) and “treating all human life with contempt” (Bogoljubova et al. 2011: 175), as having immense negative impacts extending to the “destruction of all forms of human morality” (Ciftci 2007: 59), and as being “directed against innocent people” (House Mohammed Sunna 2005: 80). One should recognise that terrorism is frequently used in opposition to the adjective “human”, hence implicitly framing terrorists as non- (or at least deficient) human beings.

Yet such negative framings of terrorism became common after World War II (Herschinger, 2013) and cannot therefore be interpreted as evidence for the recent homogenisation of terrorism discourses. Similarly, contentious issues such as whether states or national liberation movements can conduct acts

of terrorism are avoided in the textbook's definitions, hence indicating considerable potential for dissent.

Altogether, there is very limited adaptation of the US discourse in the textbooks under study. Al Qaeda, for instance, is only mentioned in the textbooks of five countries, and is only the most frequently considered single group in Papua New Guinean textbooks (mentioned on 17% of all pages referring to terrorism). Islamic groups in general are also only highlighted by textbooks from five countries, and only play a very limited role in India (12%) and Spain (6%). With the partial exception of the Philippines, no country's textbooks devote nearly as much attention to these groups as US educational media (Ide, 2017) or policy experts (Stampnitzky, 2013). Similarly, only textbooks in India, the Philippines and Spain discuss Islamism as a reason for terrorism, and even there, domestic and international motives are assigned a much more influential role (see Table 2).

These results are intuitive in the face of wider geopolitical contexts. Muslim-majority states like Egypt or Turkey are reluctant to highlight Islamist motivations for terrorism (Boyle & Mower, 2018), while religion plays hardly a role for insurgencies in Peru and Sri Lanka. In India and the Philippines, by contrast, Islam is an important part of the identity of the insurgent groups (see section 3). Russia is an outlier here as Chechen rebels have been increasingly linked with Islam since the late 1990s in the wider national discourse (Russell, 2005), yet the textbooks contain no such references.

Table 2 around here

The "war on terror" discourse promoted by the USA is also frequently challenged, both directly and indirectly. The most iconic incidence of the twenty first century in the US discourse, the attacks of 9/11, for example, is clearly the most frequently mentioned individual event (50 textbook pages in the sample mention it). But again, textbooks from China, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Turkey do not refer to it at all. The qualitative analysis reveals some direct criticism of the USA, mostly with regard to its foreign policy. A Spanish textbook claims that "the invasion of Afghanistan and more recently Iraq are clear examples of colonialism" (Xestoso 2003: 223), while a book from India (Uppal 2008: 35) comments on the same interventions by stating: "This is ridiculous! Does it mean that Sri Lanka can drop a missile on Paris if it suspects that some of the LTTE militants are hiding there?" Finally, the large differences between the 12 countries under study further undermine claims that there has been an international homogenization of terrorism discourses. As a complete examination of these

differences would extend beyond the scope of this article, I shall provide three examples to illustrate this claim.

First, and quite intuitively, there are considerable differences regarding the groups and targets discussed. ETA (Spain), Pakistani groups (India) and *Sendero Luminoso* (Peru) are frequently mentioned in the textbooks of those individual countries, but are not discussed by any textbooks of the other countries in the sample. Similarly, Egypt (67%), India (73%), Kenya (100%), Peru (81%), Russia (19%), Spain (33%) and Turkey (90%) most frequently refer to themselves as being a target of terrorist activities. By contrast, Papua New Guinea (33%) and the Philippines (33%) mention the USA most often (see Table 2).³ This is presumably because Papua New Guinea experienced very little attacks commonly associated with terrorism (START, 2018), while the Philippine state has a history of adopting US-coined terrorism discourses in exchange for financial and political support (Santos Jr, 2010).

Second, there are differences regarding the reference object at risk from terrorism, and consequentially also regarding the importance ascribed to the terrorist threat. Turkey (7.75) and India (4.21) are the two countries with the highest number of pages per book referring to terrorism, while in Russia, most textbooks (81%) discuss the topic. These countries also conceive terrorism as a clear threat to either national or international security. A Turkish textbook, for instance states: “Other states that work against our governments collaborate with terrorist groups [...] to destroy the social cohesion of our country” (Ciftci et al. 2007: 71). Similar content has been found for Russia: “International terrorism can be called the greatest challenge of the 21st century” (Kravčenko 2011: 168).

This resonates well with wider discursive contexts in the respective cases. The supposed terrorists – Chechens, Kurds and Pakistan-sponsored groups – have long been constructed as hostile and threatening other in all three countries (Kolås, 2010; Russell, 2005; Töngür & Kara, 2016). In China, by contrast, the term terrorism is generally not widely used, and Uighur groups provide relatively little challenge to the state (Du & Li, 2017). In line with longstanding concerns about security and tourism in the country (Fletcher & Morakabati, 2008), Kenyan textbooks are the only ones to portray terrorism as a problem for the tourism sector as it “has scared away many visitors” (Anyika et al. 2007: 135).

Third, the topics associated with terrorism and the lenses used to discuss it vary between countries. In Egypt, for example, the government has been challenged by radical Islamist groups (see section 3) and consequentially, the dangers of such radicalism play a prominent role in the broader Egyptian

³ Sri Lankan textbooks mention Europe under the Nazi regime (11%) and Sri Lanka (11%) equally often. China and Nigeria specify no target country.

discourse (Pinfari, 2016). In line with this, religion is an important topic in the country's textbooks, being highlighted on all pages discussing terrorism (Papua New Guinea following with 50% and India with 14%), and authors warn that “wrong and radical concepts of religion lead to radicalism and dogmatism” (House Mohammed Sunna 2005: 80).

Peruvian textbooks are most explicit in emphasising the negative human rights impacts of terrorism, which is reflective of the influence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on curricula development (Paulson, 2017). Papua New Guinea is the only country that refers to discrimination against Muslims as a major issue (33%). No surprising given the negative othering of Pakistan in the dominant discourse (Kolås, 2010), Indian textbooks are particularly concerned about state sponsorship, declaring “behind all this terrorism [targeting India], Pakistan is involved” (Kundra 2005: 191).

4.3 Terrorism discourses and the legitimacy of the state

Even though states that are violently challenged do not commit to US-coined discourses in order to gain (international) support, they still use the broad spread and privileged access, and hence the political and societal power, of their education systems in the struggle against their challengers. This confirms the expectations outlined in the section on critical geopolitics (2.1) and especially on geographies of education and educational media (2.3). Specifically, the school textbooks of those ten states under analysis that discuss terrorism substantively provide four geopolitical imaginations that support the contested state.

First, these challengers such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka, *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru, Kashmir separatists and Naxalite groups in India, and Islamist groups in Egypt are portrayed as terrorist groups or organisations. As already discussed in the previous two subsections, terrorism is portrayed as evil, a “disease” (Malik et al. 2006: 283), an instrument of inhumanity, and in especially in Egypt, Peru and Turkey as a threat to innocent people. Furthermore, with a few exceptions such as the *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación* in Spain or the Marcos regime in the Philippines (historical cases that have been viewed very critically in the period under study), textbooks do not discuss state terrorism.

Rather, terrorism is implicitly or explicitly conceived solely as anti-government actions by non-state groups. Textbooks from Peru, for example, mention the atrocities committed by both sides, but only refer to the MRTA and *Sendero Luminoso* as terrorists and devote significantly more space to their violent actions. The respective curriculum thus been much criticised for downplaying human rights violations by the government (Paulson, 2017). And a Sri Lankan textbook distinguishes between

various forms of conflict, one of which is “[w]ithin state against government by terrorists” (Educational Publications Department 2007: 86), hence closely linking anti-government activities with terrorism. By intertwining notions of evilness, inhumanity, and violence with non-state groups and anti-government activities (but not with the government), the geopolitical imaginations brought forward by the textbooks de-legitimise the government’s opponents (Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005 draw a similar conclusion for policy debates in Sri Lanka).

Second, a number of studies in international relations and political geography have shown how by delineating the self from a dangerous and external other, states are able to reproduce their own (positive) identity (Campbell, 2005; Telford, 2018). A similar geopolitical imagination is conveyed by the textbooks under study. The state is portrayed in a positive light as fighting the evil terrorists (who threaten international security, societal stability, the profitable tourism sector etc., depending on the country context), hence increasing state legitimacy and reinforcing a positive identity. In India, for example, textbooks portray the state and its leaders as cooperative and seeking peace, but threatened by a foreign and hostile other:

“While India attaches the greatest importance to maintain friendly relations with all its neighbours, Pakistan’s continued support to terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of India is a very big hindrance in keeping good relations” (Kher and Sharma 2004: 211).

Similarly, the following quote from a Peruvian textbook illustrates how the state of Peru is portrayed in a positive light by highlighting how it successfully addresses a very serious threat to its people. One should also note that by emphasising the alliance between the Peruvian state and its citizens, the textbook (in line with broader efforts by conservative groups, see Paulson, 2017) remains silent about state-directed violence against civilians, while broad support for the state is emphasised:

“The terrorist violence caused a deep crisis that seriously affected the unity of the Peruvian state and society. Fortunately, the counter actions of state and its citizens brought about the end of this baleful period” (Proyecto Todos Juntos 2014: 28).

Third, the positive image and identity of the state is further consolidated by highlighting its active, important and positive role in international struggles against terrorist threats, for instance in the Philippines:

“The Philippines [...] supports major decisions of the UN on issues concerning world peace and order. An example of this was the Philippines’ stand on the act of terrorism against the United States on September 11, 2001” (Ong et al. 2009: 147).

With the highest number of references to 9/11 (33%) and a tradition of domesticating international terrorism discourses (Santos Jr, 2010), the Philippines is certainly a most likely case for the occurrence such depictions. But they can be found in the textbooks of countries like China, Egypt, India, Russia or Spain as well. Implicitly, discussions of successful international cooperation also construct the state as a member of a larger front of states (perhaps representing humanity) fighting against the inhuman terrorists.

Finally, as the state is a positive entity fighting against an evil (and external) other, the support of citizens is recommended, if not demanded. In the Philippines, a page on crime (explicitly including terrorism) claims that “[i]t is the duty of the Filipinos to participate in various government programs in order to curb criminal activities” (Ong et al. 2009: 196).

Such statements might well pave the way for restrictions on human rights and democracy (Ingram & Dodds, 2009; Jarvis & Legrand, 2016). In the sample studied, such claims are absent in consolidated democracies like India or Spain, but could be found in states with an autocratic tradition such as Russia: “The moral conceptions of our society are protected by restricting citizens’ rights and freedoms” (Bogolyubova et al. 2011: 226). Also consider the following quote from a Turkish textbook, especially in the context of the mass suspensions and imprisonments of journalists and state officials after the failed coup d’état of 2016:

“News which portrays the government in a negative light can make a positive contribution to terrorism [...] Some media even have direct links to terrorist groups [...] Terrorists can also work at states institutions in their target country to achieve their goals” (Yigit 2007: 101, 115).

5 Conclusion

This analysis has attempted to disentangle the geopolitical imaginations regarding terrorism that states aim to convey to the next generation of citizens by including them in their school textbooks. Specifically, I have focused on the post-9/11 period (2003-2014) and on twelve states violently challenged by domestic opposition to study situations involving high political stakes. These situations are crucial in reproducing, modifying or challenging deeply rooted, constitutive geopolitical imaginations (Mavelli, 2013). While most other studies on the topic in critical geopolitics and critical terrorism studies conduct in-depth analysis of individual countries, usually in the Western world, I contribute a comparative and decentred perspective. This is done by conducting the first

comprehensive, cross-case study on terrorism discourses and by including eleven countries from non-Western regions.

Based on a quantitative and qualitative examination of the material, I have drawn three main conclusions. First, terrorism is discussed to a significant degree in the textbooks of ten of the twelve states under study (with variations that can be attributed to the amount of terrorist violence, the level of economic development and the broader national context). Definitions converge towards three characteristics: Terrorism involves violence, creates fear, and has political purposes. Overall, this indicates the continuing relevance of terrorism as a concept in the world society of the twenty-first century.

Second, significant heterogeneity persists among the countries under study in terms of the geopolitical imaginations of terrorism. Contrary to claims by several researchers, especially in critical terrorism studies (e.g., Bhatia, 2005; Holland, 2013), a domestication of terrorism discourses prevails (at least in school textbooks). Despite strategic incentives, the adaptation of the US-coined discourse remains limited in the aftermath of 9/11, and at times, the US position is even actively criticised. This supports previous findings by Sahill (2018) and Sharp (2011a), among others.

Third, in line with insights from geographies of education and educational media (Emerson, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017), contested states use their education systems to discuss terrorism in a way that supports them in their struggles. Although significant variation remains, school textbooks portray the states' opponents as evil and inhuman, affirm the positive identity of the state (*vis-à-vis* a threatening other), and encourage young people to support and obey the state. This (limited) convergence of international terrorism discourses is less driven by an adaptation of US positions but rather by functionalist incentives to capitalise on (1) state power about the education system and (2) the widely shared negative connotations of the term terrorism.

While not the main goal of my study, this article also opens avenues for dialogue with postcolonial approaches in political geography and international relations. It decentres the study of terrorism discourses by analysing several countries outside the West that have, to date, been largely (though not completely) neglected in academic analyses (while not dealing with “over-studied” cases like the USA and the UK) (Nayak & Selbin, 2010). This study hereby draws attention to a range of alternative geopolitical imaginations of terrorism, for instance as a criminal activity less relevant in the broader development context (Nigeria), as a problem for tourism (Kenya), or as one strategy in a larger international conflict (India). Further in-depth research about such alternative discourses and how

they challenge, but also interact with understandings of terrorism dominant in Western countries provide a fruitful avenue for further research (Acharya & Buzan, 2009; Sharp, 2011a).

Implicitly, this article also touches upon connections between the different theoretical approaches outlined in section 2. Both critical geopolitics and critical terrorism studies have recognised the importance of educational contexts for a while (Benwell & Hopkins, 2016; Quartermaine, 2016). Critical terrorism studies has been at the forefront of addressing important questions about the possible homogenisation of international terrorism discourses and its political consequences (Bhatia, 2005; Jackson, 2007). Critical geopolitics can contribute to this endeavour. It is based on similar epistemological and ontological positions, yet brings to the table an advanced understanding of how discourses “travel” between different spaces and (formal, practical and popular) domains (Dittmer & Gray, 2010; Ide, 2016), and consequentially, how and why heterogeneity prevails (at least in the case of this study).

At the same time, critical geopolitics and critical terrorism studies, when joining forces with geographies of education, can disentangle the geopolitical imaginations that shape young peoples’ worldviews and agency. Conversely, young peoples’ geographies highlight that children and youths not only have political agency, but also the capacity to reflect upon, criticise and shape geopolitical imaginations.

This points towards an important blind spot of my study. Based on the material gathered, little can be said about how textbook content is used by teachers and received by students. In generally, research agrees that textbooks are the most widely used media in schools (Fuchs, 2011) and that they can have an important impact of students’ opinions and worldviews (Ide et al., 2017; Voigtländer & Voth, 2016). But it is far from uncommon for teachers to replace or recontextualise textbooks in case of (political) disagreement (Emerson, 2018; vom Hau, 2009), and studies have shown that other media, peers and family members are more important for political socialisation than schools (Fukuoka, 2011; Staeheli & Hammett, 2013).

Extricating the usage, reception and contextualisation of textbook knowledge on terrorism thus remains an important task at the intersection of critical geopolitics (especially with the recent turn towards audiences), terrorism studies (which have started to focus on everyday understandings of terrorism), geographies of education (which only start to grasp the reception of school textbooks) and young people’s geographies (in particular due to its emphasis on young people’s agency). One should be aware, however, that in many countries, it is hard (and in autocracies often impossible) to obtain

official permissions for ethnographic, interview or questionnaire research in schools, particularly for foreign citizens.

While much remains to be done, cooperation between these lines of research (as well as other fields such as critical security studies) could enable scholars to provide advice for education policy makers, curriculum designers, textbook authors and teachers. Such advice would be based on genuinely critical and transformative research, yet also be practical and problem-solving.

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