

Neo-Orientalist Representations of Muslims in the 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World Senior High School Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the discursive construction of Muslim and Moro identities in Senior High School literature textbooks in the Philippines, specifically the 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World series. Drawing on Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach and Behdad and Williams' theory of neo-Orientalism, the research interrogates how editorial framing and paratextual materials in the anthology-type pedagogic texts operate as sites of epistemic violence. A critical discourse analysis of six widely used textbooks reveals that while some Muslim-authored texts are framed with universality and neutrality, others are subject to reductive and essentialist framing strategies. The analysis identifies recurrent use of nomination, predication, intensification, mitigation, and perspectivisation, discursive tools that render Muslim identity as synonymous with violence, repression, or cultural backwardness. With Moro narratives consistently omitted, spatially isolated, or tokenised, what emerges from the analysis is the structural pattern of containment that mirrors global neo-Orientalist logics under the guise of multicultural and liberal education. Editorial choices such as guide questions, backgrounding, and visual cues frequently prime students to interpret Muslim identities through ideologically loaded lenses. The study concludes that these textbooks function as ideological apparatuses that reinforce dominant narratives, marginalise subaltern voices, and perpetuate colonial hierarchies in the unique context of the Muslim-majority region of Bangsamoro. It calls for urgent curricular reform and the inclusion of Muslim perspectives in content development to foster genuine epistemic justice in Philippine classrooms.

Keywords: Neo-Orientalism; Critical discourse analysis; Epistemic violence; Islamophobia; Textbook analysis

INTRODUCTION

The English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Philippines is deeply rooted in the legacy of American colonialism. Introduced during the American occupation (1898–1946), English was not merely a medium of instruction but a tool of epistemic subjugation, achieved through the introduction of power relations where the colonisers were the teachers and superiors to the colonised, who became perpetual pupils. This historical dynamic reflects the Philippines' ongoing struggle to define its national identity against the enduring influence of colonial powers, where the language is now widely used in governance, media, and educational documents and discourses (Coloma, 2004; Mulder, 2013; Tupas, 2021). The complexity of this struggle is further amplified when viewed through the lens of the Bangsamoro, the Muslim-majority region in the southern Philippines, which has historically resisted both Spanish and American dominations and was later illegitimately annexed in the formation of the Republic of the Philippines in 1946 (Agonoy & Teehankee, 2023). This annexation resulted in what would be Asia's longest sustained independence struggle that culminated with the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019 (Santos, 2020). This turning point is the latest attempt to quell the Indigenous rebellion for complete national integration (Hawkins, 2008; Jubair, 1999). Though BARMM may have resolved the direct violence caused by warfare, what remains

is the monumental task of addressing the epistemic violence embedded deeply in Philippine society against the Moros, the 13 Muslim Indigenous tribes of the Southern Philippine islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan (Mangurun, 2025).

Epistemic violence, as defined by Spivak (1988), refers to the systematic erasure or distortion of the knowledge systems of marginalised groups, or the subaltern, by dominant epistemologies. In the Philippine context, this violence has fragmented Filipino identity and alienated the Moros, who are often considered outsiders in their own land (Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies, 2006). This historical imposition reflects how dominant groups maintain control not just through coercion but by shaping cultural norms and institutions to naturalise their authority (Gramsci, 1971). Drawing on Wodak's (2001), this study situates language teaching and learning as active sites of political struggle, where power is negotiated, and marginalisation is perpetuated. The scholars, foundational to Critical Discourse Studies (CDA), argue that language education is not a neutral endeavour but a mechanism for maintaining Western hegemony and educational colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2008; Meyer, 2001; Mignolo, 2002; Phillipson, 2009). Freire (2005) further emphasises that education can serve as either a tool of oppression or liberation, a theme echoed in Said's (1978) critique of Orientalism and Grosfoguel's (2008) analysis of decolonial scholarship.

The study is motivated by the urgent need to dismantle these structures of injustice, beginning with the development of critical consciousness, or *conscientização* (Freire, 2005). It contributes to this liberatory praxis by examining how epistemic violence is sustained in English language classrooms, particularly through textbooks intended for Senior High School. These textbooks, as cultural artefacts, are not merely instructional tools but sites of ideological contestation where dominant narratives are reproduced and marginalised voices are silenced (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993; Riasati et al., 2012). Following Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony, these materials function as instruments of ideological control, subtly naturalising the dominance of certain worldviews while excluding or distorting subaltern perspectives. Among these, the *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* textbooks for Grade 11 and 12 Senior High School students stand out as a focal point for scrutiny. Ideally, these textbooks are intended to celebrate multiculturalism and justice and should therefore adequately represent the Moro subaltern.

The study employs Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) frameworks of Wodak (2001) as a methodological approach to examine the relationship between language, power, and institutions and reveal how discourses construct and maintain social inequalities. The analysis is simultaneously informed by neo-Orientalism (Behdad & Williams, 2007) in these materials' treatment of their Muslim subjects.

Despite recent political advancements such as BARMM, the Philippine education system continues to perpetuate colonial knowledge structures. One manifestation of this is the way Muslims, particularly Moros, are represented, or omitted, in learning materials. The *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* textbooks, used across Senior High Schools, reveal patterns of editorial framing that either marginalise, homogenise, or vilify Muslim identity. This reinforces the discursive othering that has long been central to Western Orientalist narratives (Göl, 2010; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978), which extends to the Moros, even in materials meant to promote inclusivity. It is in this context that this study interrogates the role of ELT textbooks in sustaining epistemic violence under the guise of multicultural education, in service of the dominant group's hegemony.

The study, within its aim to interrogate aspects of othering in the texts, proceeded with the following objectives:

- a) To critically analyse the editorial framing of Muslim representations in selected Senior High School literature textbooks through the lens of Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).
- b) To identify and categorise the discursive strategies that contribute to the construction and maintenance of neo-Orientalist representations.

This research provides a timely contribution to discussions on decolonial education and epistemic justice in the Philippines. By uncovering the mechanisms of discursive marginalisation in ELT textbooks, the study aims to support policy reforms, curriculum revision, and teacher training that are more reflective of the country's ethno-religious diversity. It also extends the theoretical application of Wodak's DHA and Behdad and William's neo-Orientalism to a localised Philippine context. Ultimately, this study serves as an advocatorial effort to dismantle deeply entrenched colonial residues in national education and advocate for inclusive, critically engaged learning environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TEXTBOOKS AS SITES OF HEGEMONY

Textbooks, as institutionalised tools of instruction, serve a dual function: they transmit curricular knowledge and simultaneously shape students' perceptions of national identity, morality, and cultural hierarchy. Scholars have long noted that educational content, particularly in postcolonial societies, is often saturated with ideological subtexts that serve dominant political and cultural narratives (Apple, 2004; Auerbach, 1995; Kesler, 2019; Pennycook, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). In the Philippine context, ELT materials often reproduce colonial hierarchies through subtle implantation of dominant epistemologies, usually in the form of discursive framing of race, religion, and gender (Gonzales, 2020; Tupas, 2021).

A growing body of literature has focused on the representation of marginalised identities within textbooks, particularly using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Curaming and Curaming (2020), for instance, conducted a CDA of English textbooks in the Philippines and found that despite superficial inclusion, representations of gender remain highly traditional. Their study revealed how power asymmetries continue to be discursively maintained even under the guise of progressive curricula. Similarly, in the Indonesian context, Khoirunisa et al. (2021) examined how tolerance values were represented in an EFL textbook. While the book contained overt messages of cultural respect, these were embedded within narratives that subtly reinforced dominant religious and national ideologies. This subtle act effectively minimises the voice and agency of minority communities. Orientalist practices, through postcolonial ambivalence, are demonstrated in the study of Khan and Rahaman (2019), which reveals that even in the conscious efforts to construct a 'glocal subjectivity', or a hybridised identity of local and global perspectives, in an ELT textbook authored by non-native Bangladeshi writers, vestiges of colonial representational patterns still persist. Their critical analysis shows that despite the exercise of critical agency, the intentional resistance to neo-imperial cultural imposition, the textbook exhibits a dual orientation: while striving to incorporate local cultural elements, it continues to depict the local context through Orientalist lenses, with local issues portrayed as problematic and global narratives idealised.

These findings align with Wodak's DHA to CDA, which emphasises how discourse enacts, sustains, and legitimises ideologies through institutions (Wodak, 2001). Additionally, this process cannot be fully understood without reference to Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, which frames ideology as a mode of domination secured not only through coercion but through consent. In educational systems, hegemony operates by embedding the worldview of dominant social groups into what is accepted as 'common sense'. Thus, textbooks function as tools of hegemonic reproduction, where selective knowledge and perspectives are legitimised while others are suppressed or rendered invisible.

21ST CENTURY NEO-ORIENTALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE WORLD

Neo-Orientalism builds on the foundational work of Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, which refers to the contemporary forms of cultural and epistemic domination that continue to marginalise Muslim communities globally. While other scholars, such as Shohat and Stam (1994), Sardar (1999) Mamdani (2005), Mahmood (2005), Göll (2010), Dabashi (2011), and Kundnani (2014) have critiqued the evolution of Orientalist narratives in modern contexts, Kumar (2012) is widely credited with being the first to explicitly use and define the term 'neo-Orientalism'. In her *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, she critiques how Orientalist narratives have been repurposed in the post-9/11 era to justify U.S. imperialism and the 'War on Terror'.

The persecution of Muslims can be traced to the legacy of colonialism, the rise of Islamophobia, and the geopolitical dynamics of the post-9/11 world. Colonial powers often portrayed Muslims as the 'Other', framing them as backwards, violent, and antithetical to modernity (Mamdani, 2005; Said, 1978;). Stereotypes that justify exclusion and violence were reproduced consistently through Orientalist narrative peddled in media, educational institutions, and policy-making bodies. Under the shadow of this era, the 'War on Terror' further exacerbated these tensions through the purposeful conflation of Islam with terrorism. Using securitisation as an excuse, state-sanctioned surveillance, militarisation, and discrimination against Muslim communities are made legitimate (Kumar, 2012; Kundnani, 2014). In the Philippines, this global narrative intersects with local histories of marginalisation, particularly in the BARMM, where the Moros have long been depicted as rebels, separatists or terrorists, effectively subverting their struggle for self-determination and cultural preservation into a natural inclination for violence (McKenna, 2017; Vitug & Gloria, 2000).

Although various works examine the political, historical, and economic dimensions of the Philippine/Moro dynamics, work investigating the epistemic dimension of the question is relatively scarce. One such is Valencia's (2022), which documents and examines media representation of Muslim Filipinos in the local media through Saidian Orientalism. Consistent with the broader patterns of Islamophobia, this study shows how Muslim Filipinos are often relegated to the periphery and are viewed as separate, with a propensity to violence and irrationality. Epistemic violence, or injustice, is also a topic in Mansueto (2022), where he explores Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice in the Philippine social realities, and briefly touches on the Bangsamoro under the section of othered and marginalised epistemologies. The analysis, however, is tinged with the Good Moro/Bad Moro binary that showcases the depth of penetration of this epistemic violence, even to spaces that claim criticality and objectivity.

METHODOLOGY

This is unobtrusive research that is analytic and hermeneutic in nature, with a focus on textual materials of pedagogic purpose as its subject of scrutiny. It adopted textual investigation to reveal the pre-existing epistemic violence in ELT through an abductive research design, which allows for iterative interplay between theory and empirical data. The methodological framework used is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with elements from the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of Wodak (2001). The findings from the strategies found in both the DHA are interpreted through the lens of neo-Orientalism by Behdad and Williams (2007), which repurposed the foundational theory in the post-9/11 realities (Kerboua, 2016) and are aligned with Gramsci's (1971) in the roles of material in maintaining hegemony in the concluding remarks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an integrated critical framework drawing from CDA using Wodak's DHA along with Behdad and William's concept of neo-Orientalism as an interpretative lens. These interrelated perspectives allow for a robust and interconnected critique of the discursive construction of Muslims, particularly the Moros, in the textbook analysis.

WODAK'S DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL APPROACH (DHA)

Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), developed by Wodak (2001), is used to analyse the discursive construction of Muslim and Moro identities in Philippine literature textbooks, which conceptualises discourse as a social practice embedded in historical and institutional power structures. This approach examines the phenomenon at various levels, including textual and intertextual (textbooks), along with the contextual (the Filipino/ Moro dynamics), in an attempt to uncover how othering is operationalised. Within this model, Wodak identifies key discursive strategies used to construct, legitimise, or marginalise social groups. These strategies function to naturalise inequalities, sustain stereotypes, and reproduce dominant ideologies. In the context of this study, they are defined and applied as follows:

1. *Nomination (Referential Strategy)*. Refers to how social actors or groups are named or referred to in the text. It includes the use of ethnonyms, labels, titles, and descriptions, metaphors/metonymies and pronominal designations that assign identity. Included here is the referential deletion, or the deliberate or unconscious omission of social groups, thereby rendering them invisible (Mansouri et al., 2017).
2. *Predication*. Involves the assignment of attributes, qualities, or actions to social actors. This strategy reveals underlying ideologies by attaching evaluative meaning to identities (Wodak, 2001).
3. *Perspectivisation*. Refers to how the text orients the reader toward a particular viewpoint. This may include editorial framing, guide questions, or suggested interpretations. In CDA, perspectivisation shapes how the audience processes meaning and forms opinions, often privileging dominant group ideologies (Mansouri et al., 2017).
4. *Intensification*. This involves the exaggeration of negative traits or behaviours associated with marginalised groups. It functions to amplify threat or deviance. In textbook discourse, intensification appears when texts overemphasise the brutality of groups (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

5. *Mitigation*. The opposite of intensification, mitigation downplays or softens the actions of dominant actors, especially when they are perpetrators of violence. This may involve the use of vague language, omission of agents, or euphemistic phrasing (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).
6. *Compartmentalisation*. Although not always isolated as a discrete strategy by Wodak (2001), in this research, it refers to the spatialization, where groups are geographically or textually segregated to imply marginality. This is closely linked to tokenism, but its emphasis is more on othering by superficial inclusion.

These strategies uncover how editorial framings reproduce dominant ideologies that sustain the marginalisation of Muslims in Philippine education.

BEHDAD AND WILLIAMS'S NEO-ORIENTALISM

Several works extend Said into the post-9/11 reality, when Islamophobia manages the public opinion by the so-called 'War on Terror', spearheaded by the Western world against multiple Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East (Poynting & Mason, 2007; Göl, 2010; Kaya, 2011). However, this study adopts Behdad and Williams' (2007) formulation of Neo-Orientalism as the central theoretical lens for understanding the representation of Muslims, particularly Moros. Their formulation exemplifies the narrative that now emerges to justify the violence committed across the Muslim world (Göl, 2010). Neo-Orientalism is not simply a continuation of Edward Said's (1978) classical Orientalism; rather, it marks a shift in how Orientalist discourse is packaged, circulated, and legitimised in the postcolonial, post-9/11 world, and intensified by the emergence of digital media (Kerboua, 2016; Abdul Wahid, 2023).

Whereas classical Orientalism relied on overt narratives of exoticism, backwardness, and civilisational inferiority, neo-Orientalism disguises its hegemonic logic beneath the rhetoric of liberalism, secularism, feminism, and humanitarianism (Wahid, 2023). As Behdad and Williams (2007) argue, neo-Orientalism rearticulates the East/West binary within frameworks that claim to promote multiculturalism, gender equity, and democratic values, thus making Orientalist discourse appear morally acceptable and politically neutral. This shift does not dismantle the colonial hierarchy; it reconstitutes it in a form more palatable to contemporary liberal societies. Additionally, the producers of the othering are not limited only to Westerners, through what Alahmed (2020) termed 'internalised orientalism', scholars among the othered communities took the frontline in perpetuating the neo-Orientalism, as in the case of Riaz in Martinez and Henson-Dado (2019) and Hosseini in Uychoco (2016).

In educational contexts, neo-Orientalism operates through subtle and systematic strategies, which are selective inclusion, perspectivisation, essentialisation, and strategic silence. Behdad and Williams (2007) highlight how the 'liberation' of the Muslim subject, especially the Muslim woman, is presented not as part of a shared struggle for justice, but as an encounter between the backwards Muslim Other and the enlightened secular-liberal subject. The key transformation is in the register of Orientalism, from the language of racial superiority to that of cultural concern and pedagogic inclusion.

This study utilises their framework to interpret how literature textbooks operationalise neo-Orientalist logics in both overt and covert ways. Through editorial framing, selection practices, and the structuring of reading activities (e.g., Orientation and Extension questions), textbooks mobilise liberal discourses that appear inclusive but reproduce foundational Orientalist assumptions. Textual and paratextual strategies exemplify how neo-Orientalism operates in

curricular knowledge production, especially in postcolonial settings like the Philippines, where Islam is simultaneously indigenous and othered. Textbook editors, as mediators of national pedagogy, participate in the re-inscription of colonial hierarchies under a veil of progress and pluralism. Through this framework, neo-Orientalism is not treated as a relic of past colonial projects but as a living discourse that actively shapes how students encounter, interpret, and internalise Muslim identities within the national imaginary.

THE DATA

The representative texts in this study are the six different textbooks for the *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* Senior High School English Communication Arts and Skills course. These textbooks were chosen for several critical reasons, including their function as a vehicle for social justice and an apparatus of cultural power (Apple, 2004; Freire, 2005; McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993). In classroom contexts, textbooks do not merely reflect knowledge but actively shape national identity, moral frameworks, and social hierarchies (Pingel, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Therefore, examining the ideological content of selections offers a powerful vantage point from which to understand how epistemic violence is embedded in the educational curriculum. This particular set is especially appropriate due to its anthology format, which allows for clearly distinguishable editorial framing that directly mediates student interpretation. Furthermore, since the course itself is titled *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the world*, it is designed to present a curated panorama of global and national voices, making any omissions, misrepresentations, or ideological slant all the more significant.

Structurally, these textbooks are anthology-type. Their compilers (here referred to as editors, despite being popularly identified as 'authors') curate the selections and guide interpretation through surrounding instructional texts. The anthology format divides each textbook into two primary sections: the World Literature section, which presents literary works from various global traditions, and the Philippine Literature section, which features regional selections meant to reflect the diversity of the archipelago (Department of Education, 2013).

The selection of specimen texts was based on availability and acquirability at the time of data gathering. The research was therefore limited to those retrievable textbooks which, through exhaustive online searches and bookstore reviews, were found to represent approximately 50% of the twelve identified titles.

One textbook was excluded from the analysis due to its non-anthological structure, deemed incompatible with the study's design, which required consistent editorial framing around complete literary texts. With the aforementioned context, the following are the specimen texts used:

- Frondoza et al. (2017). *21st Century Literature: The Philippines and the World*. Trinitas Publishing, Inc.
- Mata, E. L. et al. (2016). *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World for Senior High School*. Mutya Publishing House, Inc.
- Martinez and Henson-Dado (2019). *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the world*. Mindshapers Co., Inc.
- Palencia and Cruz (2019). *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World* (Third Edition). Azes Publication.

- Tayao, M. L. G., et al. (2017). *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the world*. C & E Publishing, Inc.
- Uychoco, M. T. (2016). *21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the world*. Rex Book Store.

Since the study focuses on Muslim representation, only those selections in the textbooks that were either authored by Muslims, featured Muslim protagonists, or significantly depicted Muslim cultural or religious contexts were included. The analysis thus zeroed in on the editorial framing of these texts, as a means to reveal how Islam, Muslims, and particularly the Moro identity, are constructed through language, placement, and interpretive scaffolding.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were extracted from the paratextual materials, which are operationally labelled as ‘editorial framing’. These pertain specifically to surrounding elements that orient, contextualise, evaluate, and extend the reader’s knowledge about the literary texts in the anthology-type textbooks. Editorial framings are especially significant because they reveal the ideological orientations of the textbooks. Their mediation directly influences how Muslim identities are constructed and received in Philippine classrooms.

FRAMING STRUCTURE

To organise the data, each editorial framing was analysed using a three-part structural coding framework:

1. *Backgrounding*. Includes contextual information such as the author’s biography, historical and socio-cultural background, and definitions of culturally specific terms.
2. *Orientation*. This is the most dominant framing element and typically appears in the form of guide questions. These questions are designed to direct the reader’s interpretive lens and often tap into shared social knowledge or presuppositions.
3. *Extension*. Post-reading activities or tasks that include reflection questions or take-home assignments that extend student engagement with specific cultural or thematic dimensions.

Once classified, the researcher examined each for linguistic and ideological markers.

IDENTIFYING OTHERING STRATEGIES

To investigate how Moro Muslims are discursively othered, this study employs the critical discourse framework of Wodak’s (2001) DHA. Her model is used to identify several discursive strategies present in the linguistic construction of the guide questions and other paratextual elements, the structural placement and labelling of sections dedicated to Muslims, the choice of the representative texts themselves, and their perspectivisation through backgrounding, orientation, and extension. The framework allows for a precise description of how Moros are systematically constructed as the cultural Other in Philippine textbooks.

COMPARATIVE AND INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGY

Recognising that each textbook frames literary texts uniquely, the analysis was organised first by textbook, then comparatively. This design allowed for both in-depth and cross-textual insights. The framing elements were examined in totality to assess not only overt biases but also the consistency of editorial perspectives—whether certain themes were persistently linked to Muslim identity regardless of author, genre, or context. This comparative method also uncovered intertextual patterns of epistemic violence, such as the recurring conflation of Islamic and national identities, or the selective visibility of Moro experiences. These patterns exhibit how editorial discourse functions as a curricular technology of othering, with implications that extend beyond individual texts.

INTERPRETING REPRESENTATIONS

After identifying the specific discursive strategies used to frame the Moro Other, the study interprets these findings within the broader ideological formation of neo-Orientalism, drawing specifically from the work of Behdad and Williams (2007), which describes a liberal-progressive ideological structure that recycles Orientalist logics under the guise of humanitarianism, gender advocacy, and multicultural tolerance. Behdad and Williams' framework allows the study to move from description to interpretation by locating the role of the textbooks in the larger ideological apparatus that legitimises marginalisation through liberal discourse.

To ensure the objectivity and reliability of the results and interpretations, the study underwent a rigorous validation process. Three panel members, each an expert in language and critical discourse analysis, meticulously reviewed the findings. These experts provided independent assessments and feedback, ensuring that the analysis was thorough, unbiased, and aligned with established theoretical frameworks. Their collective expertise contributed to refining the interpretations and enhancing the overall credibility of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

OTHERING STRATEGIES IN EDITORIAL FRAMING

The editorial content and framing structures of Senior High School literature textbooks in the Philippines reveal a consistent pattern of discursive strategies that reinforce neo-Orientalist representations. These strategies, as theorised by Wodak (2001), include nomination, predication, perspectivisation, intensification, mitigation, and structural exclusion (compartmentalisation).

SPATIAL OTHERING THROUGH NOMINATION AND COMPARTMENTALISATION

In CDA, nomination strategies refer to how individuals and groups are referred to or identified in discourse, encompassing the use of names, labels, titles, and descriptions that construct social identities (Wodak, 2001). These choices are not neutral; they signal whose voices are legitimised, backgrounded, or silenced. In the textbook edited by Palencia and Cruz (2019), the representation of Muslim authors, specifically in the inclusion of *Song* by Adonis and *Tonight* by Ladan Osman, demonstrates a subtle yet telling form of discursive marginalisation. These texts are presented

without Orientation or Extension tasks and are accompanied only by brief biographical notes. Such minimal editorial framing constitutes what is referred to here as referential undercontextualisation, where the lack of scaffolding reduces the interpretive depth afforded to these selections. Unlike the more robust treatment given to texts from other cultural groups, this sparse presentation renders Muslim authorship structurally peripheral. In effect, Muslim voices are nominally present but discursively silenced.

In a similar way, the textbook edited by Frondoza et al. (2017) spatially and thematically distinguishes Muslim-authored works by placing them in a separate section titled “Task 3: Enjoying Literary Works from the South”. This spatialisation strategy, which is termed here as compartmentalisation, marks Muslim narratives as regionally bounded and culturally distinct from the national literary mainstream. This inclusion is a textbook case of tokenism but is repurposed to create marginalisation despite the section's rationale being to invite the readers to “reassess and reevaluate notions that (one) may have about our Muslim brothers and sisters” (Frondoza et al., 2017, p. 260). This presupposes deficit thinking and casts these texts as pedagogical correctives rather than literary contributions in their own right. Compartmentalisation is also found in Martinez and Henson-Dado's (2019) edition. The inclusion of the epic *Bedasari* as the sole representation of Muslims in its Philippine section significantly lacks appropriate cultural identification, as it belongs to Malay Muslims in particular (Millie, 2004). The work is labelled “Mindanao Epic” in its subtitle, situated under the subheading “Epics”. This unqualified label essentialises a complex cultural artefact into a vague geographic category, considering that Mindanao is the geonym for a vast island populated by several cultural identities, where indigenous Muslims only comprise about 23.39% of the population (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). Other than these two inserts, there was no other framing element included. Wodak (2001) would identify this as a problematic instantiation of nomination, where referential categorisation flattens diversity. It also demonstrates perspectivisation by positioning the Moro identity as geographically distant rather than ethnically and historically central.

An extreme example, however, of exclusion is the textbook edited by Tayao et al. (2017) that omits representation of Muslim identities altogether. This deletion functions as a nomination strategy of exclusion, which is an invisibilisation of the Moros that normalises their exclusion in curricular materials.

ESSENTIALISATION THROUGH PREDICATION AND INTENSIFICATION

The editorial framing in Martinez and Henson-Dado's (2019) textbook exemplifies Wodak's (2001) strategy of predication, wherein social actors are attributed with particular characteristics, often negative or reductive. Guide questions in the extension such as “Why do Muslim women wear black veils?” (Martinez & Henson-Dado, 2019, p. 329) and “What are the restrictions imposed on Muslim women?” (p.329) assign Muslim identity a framework of constraint and repression, as if there is a uniform practice across the 1.5 billion adherents of Islam. This essentialist framing reduces complex, diverse lived experiences into monolithic representations. Further, questions like “Discuss the marriage system in a Muslim country,” (p.328) in the orientation are tied to verses referencing women's oppression, child marriage and polygamy, such as the following lines:

You must know them well, these maids
The hostage women of vanquished peoples,
Halal for a night, exile at dawn;
The slave girls who carried your blessed seed
And brought forth children of half status only, yet
Was it not honour enough for them?
The wives who wait their precious turns
To pay homage to the conjugal couch;
The hapless, cowering girl-child
Whose blood will stain your gray beard red

(Riaz as cited in Martinez & Henson-Dado, 2019, pp. 327-328)

This reinforces a schema in which Muslim societies are construed as inherently patriarchal and abusive to their women. The attribution of such practices as normative across ‘Muslim countries’ exemplifies intensification strategies—a discursive move that amplifies the perceived ubiquity and severity of a given social issue (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). These strategies work cumulatively to construct semantic macrostructures that conflate Islam with female subjugation, an association not found explicitly in the text, but the editorial framing has been perspectivized to create an explicit connection.

A similar pattern emerges in Uychoco’s (2016) editorial handling of an excerpt of Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Afghan-specific socio-cultural practices and realities are again discursively collapsed into a generalised ‘Muslim’ identity. This is the selection under the theme ‘Differences’, which presupposes the strangeness of Muslims against what is represented as mainstream identity. Through repeated use of nomination (‘Afghan’ and ‘Muslim’ used interchangeably) and predication (assigning traits such as backwardness or misogyny), the editorial apparatus flattens critical ethnoreligious distinctions. Orientation prompts such as “What stereotypes about Afghans and Muslims do we find in society?” (Uychoco, 2016, p. 136) and “What does the burqa reveals about Afghan and/or Muslim society?” (p.138) fail to deconstruct bias and instead prime students to read the narrative through an already ideologically loaded lens. This conflation is further exacerbated through visual semiotics, such as the depiction of a woman in a niqab as a paratextual illustration, standing in for the burqa, two garments with different cultural and regional significance. The editorial background even introduces 9/11 and Osama bin Laden, neither of which appears in the original text. This is a clear instance of semantic intensification. The editorial framing injects politically charged associations that cue stereotypical readings. These strategies do not simply frame the literary text; they actively shape how students are positioned to engage with Muslim identities through a lens of suspicion, pathology, and ideological fixity.

The textbook edited by Martinez and Henson-Dado (2019) contains the highest number of texts by or about Muslims across all six textbooks, with five selections in total, while Uychoco’s (2016) includes two. However, both textbooks largely frame these works without direct reference to Islam or Muslim identity. In both cases, nomination strategies function not to acknowledge Muslim subjectivity but to delimit or hide it. These acts of reference, when paired with selective predication and emotionally charged perspectivisation, enact what could be described as discursive exclusion through inclusion: Muslims are only named or acknowledged when their identities can be subsumed under narratives of difference, deficiency, or victimisation.

Moreover, in Frondoza et al. (2017), guide questions accompanying *Homecoming* by Elin Anisha Guro, such as “Does this story promote or criticise the culture that surrounds it?” (Frondoza et al., 2017, p. 260), encourage essentialist readings by prompting students to judge the text through

a reductive cultural lens. While the story itself resists religious or cultural stereotyping, the editorial framing imposes a narrow interpretive frame that risks reinforcing fixed ideas about Muslim identity, another case of predication.

UNEQUAL PRESENTATION THROUGH MITIGATION

Compared to Martinez and Henson-Dado's (2019) and Uychoco's (2016) essentialist framing, the Afghan context has not been conflated with Islam in the framing of *The Day My World Changed* (Yousafzai, excerpt from *I am Malala*) and *What I Will* (Hammad, a poem). These selections from Mata et al. (2016) both offer insights into Muslim-majority contexts. However, a different form of othering through intensification/mitigation emerges when the two are compared. The framing of *The Day My World Changed* is overt. It repeatedly references the Taliban and employs evaluative language that constructs them as irrational and anti-modern, as in the Orientation questions "What does 'a girl with a book' symbolise? What threat does it present to the terrorists like the Taliban?" (Mata et al., 2016, p.123). This use of intensification supports a polarised us-versus-them dichotomy. In contrast, *What I Will* by Suheir Hammad, a poem exposing Israeli violence against Palestinians, undergoes mitigation through structural passivisation. In Wodak's (2001) framework, mitigation includes obscuring of agency, as seen in the sentence "the mass murder going on in Palestine" (Mata et al., 2016, p.190) and "...the Palestinians refuse to participate in the Israelis' war" (p.190). The first omits the Israeli state as the agent of violence entirely, while the second presents the Israeli pogrom as a war that Palestinians can opt not to participate in (Moore, 2001). Using sentence structure, this strategic semantic operation mitigates the violence of Israelis, a glaring contrast to the intensification of the Taliban's culpability, despite the former having committed an incomparable amount of violence against the subjects of their persecution (Pappé, 1999). This is a glaring example of imbalanced treatment that is well-documented in the media (Shaheen, 2009). For this to find its space in educational materials illustrates the permeability of othering when left unchecked.

Across these textbooks, what emerges is a clear pattern of discursive moves that align with Wodak's (2001) DHA: nomination, predication, intensification, mitigation, and perspectivation. Within Behdad and Williams' (2007) framework, these editorial practices are not merely pedagogical oversights but ideological acts—recasting Orientalist binaries within a liberal framework of diversity, gender justice, and global awareness.

TABLE 1. Summary of the strategies used to otherise Moros in the textbooks

Textbook (Editor, Year)	Muslim/Moro Representation	Strategies	Framing Style
Palencia and Cruz (2019)	Song (Esber)	Nomination through spatial othering	No framing
	Tonight (Osman)	Nomination through spatial othering	No framing
Tayao et al. (2017)	Completely absent	Nomination through Omission	No Moro or Muslim text
Martinez and Henson-Dado (2019)	Bidasari	Nomination through Compartmentalisation	"Mindanao epic" removes cultural nuances
	Four Walls and a Black Veil (Riaz)	Nomination through conflation, Intensification, and Predication	Conflates Pakistani with Muslim
Mata et al. (2016)	What I Will	Mitigation through passivisation	Israeli violence is not named or mitigated
	I Am Malala	Intensification	While the Taliban's violence is intensified

Textbook (Editor, Year)	Muslim/Moro Representation	Strategies	Framing Style
Uychoco (2016)	A Thousand Splendid Suns	Nomination through Conflation and predication	Conflates the Afghan experience as Universal to all Muslims
Frondoza et al. (2017)	Homecoming	Predication	Segregate texts in a special section

Table 1 illustrates how selected literature textbooks employ discursive strategies that systematically otherise Muslim and Moro identities. In some cases, they are tokenistically included without context or completely omitted, as seen in Palencia and Cruz (2019) and Tayao et al. (2017). When violence is involved, however, Muslim representation is often intensified and conflated with Islam as a whole or the particular culture the work belongs to. This is evident in the editorial framing of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Four Walls and a Black Veil*, where Muslim identity becomes synonymous with oppression. Additionally, spatial othering, such as relegating Moro voices to separate sections, reinforces their marginality. Together, these strategies reflect a pattern of epistemic violence that privileges dominant narratives while silencing or distorting Muslim perspectives, reinforcing the urgent need for a decolonised, critically conscious literature curriculum.

NEO-ORIENTALISM IN TEXTBOOK EDITORIAL FRAMING

Behdad and Williams (2007) argue that neo-Orientalism represents a transformation, not in the essence, but in the rhetorical mode of Orientalist discourse. Where classic Orientalism openly exoticised and vilified the East, its contemporary variant embeds the same logics of cultural superiority within the progressive rhetoric of liberal secularism, feminism, human rights, and multiculturalism. This mutation allows Orientalist narratives to operate more subtly and powerfully within institutions presumed to uphold democratic values, such as schools and textbooks. It is within this framework that the representations of Muslims, particularly the Moros, in Philippine senior high school literature textbooks must be understood. Rather than employing overtly antagonistic representations, these materials deploy ostensibly humanitarian discourses to justify the marginalisation, pathologisation, and epistemic erasure of Muslim identities.

A primary strategy is omission or referential deletion, which is a form of epistemic violence disguised as neutrality. Textbooks such as Tayao et al. (2017) exclude any mention of Muslim identities in the Philippine literary section, while others like Palencia and Cruz (2019) include Muslim-authored texts without any interpretive scaffolding. This impacts the way the invisible curriculum is shaped, where policies of multiculturalism conceal deeply rooted ideological exclusions (Pingel, 2010). Bishop (2014) similarly critiques this as liberal erasure, in which silencing is justified by the pretence of objectivity or universalism, strategies deeply resonant with Behdad and Williams' critique of multiculturalism as a vehicle for Orientalist regulation.

Where Muslims do appear, they are often constructed through the strategy of nomination and predication, which homogenises diverse ethno-religious identities into a monolithic 'Muslim problem'. In Uychoco (2016), for example, Afghans are consistently conflated with Muslims, and Islam is framed as culturally deterministic, reinforcing neo-Orientalist flattening of difference in order to render Muslims intelligible only through Western epistemic categories. This echoes Shohat and Stam's (1994) claim that Muslim identities are rendered translatable across geopolitical spaces in Orientalist discourse, enabling Afghan, Palestinian, and Moro experiences to be read as symptoms of an undifferentiated cultural pathology. Kundnani (2014) further critiques this

racialised transnational logic in Western state discourses, especially post-9/11, where Muslims are no longer represented as national minorities but as global threats who require constant surveillance and pedagogic intervention.

Another critical neo-Orientalist tactic is predication, particularly in the framing of gender. In Martinez and Henson-Dado (2019), Riaz's *Four Walls and a Black Veil* is editorially framed to position the veil (and by extension, Islam) as inherently oppressive to women. The guide questions direct students toward an uncritical reading that equates Muslim culture with patriarchy, thus enacting what Behdad and Williams (2007) describe as liberal feminism utilised as civilizational critique. This logic mirrors the 'Muslim woman trope', extensively critiqued by Abu-Lughod (2013), who argues that such representations are less concerned with the agency of Muslim women than with affirming the superiority of secular liberal modernity. While appearing to advocate for gender justice, the textbook effectively reinforces a civilisational hierarchy in which the Muslim world is marked by stagnation and the West, or in this case, Christian Filipino society, by progress.

The discursive tools of intensification as opposed to mitigation also play a pivotal role in neo-Orientalist representation. Mata et al. (2016) intensify Taliban-linked violence in the framing of *I Am Malala*, while simultaneously minimising the structural violence of Israeli occupation in *What I Will* by Suheir Hammad. The result is a moral economy in which Muslim suffering caused by other Muslims is highlighted, while suffering inflicted by Western-aligned powers is suppressed. Poynting and Mason (2007) describe this as the racialisation of terrorism, where Islam is represented as a uniquely violent religion. van Dijk (2001) passivisation strategy further explains how agency is systematically removed from powerful actors (e.g., the Israeli state), concealing their complicity and allowing dominant ideologies to masquerade as balanced or objective. Behdad and Williams' framework illuminates how this strategic selectivity, framed through a humanitarian lens, continues to regulate which forms of Muslim suffering are legitimate and which are invisible.

Finally, spatial othering and compartmentalisation, as seen in Frondoza et al. (2017), are perhaps the clearest expression of neo-Orientalist containment. Muslim Mindanao texts are segregated into a section labelled "Task 3: Enjoying Reading Literary Works from the South," with prefaces that suggest students "reevaluate" their views of Muslims. While this may appear to promote empathy, the spatial isolation and presupposition of prejudice reinforce the logic of cultural separateness. As Wodak (2001) and Jahedi (2014) argue, such structural moves, though discursively soft, effectively reproduce cultural hierarchies under the guise of progressive pedagogy. Behdad and Williams would locate this within the liberal multicultural model that includes the Other only as an object of tolerance or pedagogic curiosity, not as an epistemic equal.

In comparison with similar analyses from other postcolonial contexts, these strategies confirm that the Philippine case is not anomalous. Studies by Khoirunisa et al. (2021) in Indonesia and Curaming & Curaming (2020) in the Philippines both reveal how even curricula professing inclusivity often retain conservative or hegemonic interpretive frames. Such findings bolster Wodak's (2001) DHA.

Taken together, these discursive strategies demonstrate how Philippine literature textbooks participate in a global neo-Orientalist order. Under Behdad and Williams' (2007) lens, these textbooks do not simply reflect ignorance or accidental bias; they function as ideological apparatuses that embed colonial logics within contemporary liberal education. By cloaking exclusion in the language of progress (feminism, diversity, and universal values), they perpetuate the same systems of epistemic violence that Orientalism has always served. The Filipino student is thus positioned not merely as a learner of literature, but as a subject interpellated into a hierarchical world-system where Muslims, particularly Moros, are always-already Other.

CONCLUSION

The overall textbook analysis reveals clear editorial attitudes toward Muslim subjects. The majority of these selections representing Muslims were framed without essentialisation, this is mainly because their subject matters are largely not Neo-orientalist. In contrast, four selections displayed thematic and discursive neo-Orientalist tendencies. Three of these were explicitly framed using strategies of nomination, predication, mitigation, and intensification, often conflating Muslim identity with region-specific issues. Guide questions reinforced generalisations, confusing "Muslim" with "Afghan" or "Pakistani" and presenting the black veil as universally oppressive. One text intensified Muslim-terrorism associations through unrelated backgrounding. Additionally, one textbook spatially isolates the Moro narrative. Even in a text initially framed as Afghan rather than Muslim, comparative treatment revealed implicit strategies of mitigation and intensification.

The role of English language education as a hegemonic tool for maintaining power and control in the context of colonialism is a well-documented case (Phillipson, 2009). It is also at the heart of English Language Teaching in the Philippines. Understanding this from the Subaltern perspective, this formation would remain in the forms and structures of education in a Postcolonial era through the imitation and extension of the newly formed government. It still exists today, as illustrated by the selected *21st-century literature from the Philippines and the World* textbooks. These apparatuses of learning are meant to be spaces of justice, but they are not. Instead, they sustain the muting down of the Moro subaltern voice. Furthermore, while they universalised the voices of the Muslims when they represent harmless themes, they easily referenced terrorism and conflated culture with religion and race for the entire religious group. They used linguistic and semiotic elements in blatant and nuanced ways to achieve this, but their effects are the same. In their participation in the ongoing epistemic violence, they have as much share in the blood of the Moros as the bullets that shattered Moro identities and communities.

These discursive patterns cannot be divorced from the broader structure of hegemonic discourse in the Philippine educational system. Education in the Philippines has long served as an instrument of nation-building through linguistic and cultural standardisation, a role inherited from its colonial past and extended by its postcolonial elites. English language education in particular, as a vestige of American colonisation, continues to function as a tool of symbolic power, one that disciplines minority identities through normative representations and enforces a homogenised vision of national identity.

From a subaltern perspective, this structure represents not merely a failure of inclusion but a deliberate epistemic formation that continues to erase, distort, and regulate Muslim identities. As the analysis of these textbooks shows, integration has been conceptualised as a one-way process, wherein Moros must accommodate the dominant Filipino identity without any reciprocal adjustment or recognition. This epistemic asymmetry perpetuates the very division it claims to resolve. The problem, therefore, is not the presence of Muslim difference, but the state's refusal to treat that difference as constitutive of Filipino nationhood.

This research contests not the Filipino identity itself, but the colonial residues that have shaped and narrowed its expression. As Mulder (2013) argues, the Philippine national consciousness has been deeply marked by colonial conceptions of race, religion, and modernity, which continue to animate its educational discourse. The textbooks' discursive strategies reproduce a logic of 'us' versus 'them' that positions the Moros as peripheral to the national self-image.

A genuine cultural transformation, then, must begin with a reimagining of the Filipino identity through the lens of its most enduring internal other: the Moro. This does not mean romanticising Moro culture or adopting it uncritically, but confronting the historical and epistemological violence that has excluded it from the national narrative. Only through this confrontation can the Philippine nation move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward a pluralist, dialogic understanding of itself. The subaltern voice, long silenced, must be heard—not as an object of tolerance, but as a co-author of the national story. In doing so, the Philippines may finally move from hegemonic containment to genuine integration, from epistemic violence to epistemic justice.

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