CHAPTER 3

'My Father Is Strong and Smart, My Mother Is Helpful and Kind'

'Gender Harmony' and 'Gender Equality' in Myanmar's Curriculum Revision Process

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During Myanmar's quasi-democratic phase from 2010 to 2021, the education system – long neglected under the military regime – became a reform priority both for the government and for international development[1] partners. In 2016, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (MOE) began working with organizations including the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to revise basic education curricula, given that one goal of the National Education Strategic Plan (Myanmar MOE 2016a: 27) was that 'all school children develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that are relevant to their lives and to the socio-economic development needs of 21st century Myanmar'. In this chapter, I will examine how the kindergarten to third-grade textbooks released starting in 2016 provided a space for the contestation of ideologies around gender. Whereas international development organizations prioritized globalized ideologies they called 'social inclusion' and 'gender equality', textbooks developed by Myanmar's military regimes before 2010 (and still used in some higher grades) presented local conceptions of what I will call 'gender harmony'.

Therefore, the international and local consultants who developed the new curriculum faced the difficult task of appropriating the ideology of 'gender

1 I use "development" and "international development" in this chapter as a shorthand for a non-homogenous field of actors based in various locations in the Global North/West. I'll cite Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2014) to explain the power dynamic between these actors and the Global South/East societies they "develop." Suffice to say, for now, that "development" is not an entity, but a relationship that tends to homogenize the actors at the "developing" and "developed" ends of the spectrum.

equality' promoted by international development organizations in a way that accorded with ideals of 'gender harmony' and satisfied Myanmar's MOE. What has emerged from these tenuous collaborations is a hybridized representation of women and girls – a collection of texts and images that mostly reinforce traditional images of 'gender harmony'; occasionally showcase 'gender equality'; and sometimes interpret this concept in ways particular to Myanmar. I leave both 'gender equality' and 'gender harmony' in quotations throughout this chapter, to indicate that they are ideas, not realities – I am not discussing actual gender equality (e.g., educational, economic, and health outcomes), or actual gender harmony (copacetic relations between men and women), but rather rhetoric and representation. It is also important to note that the ideological goals of textbook authors are not necessarily realized in the classroom; the relationships between texts and their readers are complex. Therefore, I do not make empirical claims about how texts affect students, but speculate, rather, about the intended and unintended messages that these texts send.

In order to do this, I use Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003) to compare the former and new textbooks' treatment of gender. To interpret this comparison, I use Gita Steiner-Khamsi's (2014) ideas about how local actors in the Global South/East receive, resist and translate educational policies and practices that derive from the Global North/West. I conclude that the hybridized representation of gender sends contradictory messages that ultimately reinforce sexist social structures of 'gender harmony' and gendered militarism. These textbooks show how gendered roles and norms were reproduced and changed during Myanmar's conflict-affected quasi-democratic phase. Given the military coup in 2021, these textbooks may become artifacts of a relatively brief period of cooperation between the Myanmar government and international development organizations. Or they may be superseded in a yet-to-be-imagined democratic school system. In either case, the textbooks have already made an impact, having been used by hundreds of thousands of children throughout the country.

Reception, Resistance and Translation of Development Ideology in Education

Myanmar's government curricula prior to 2010 have been the subject of several scholarly works, most of which examined their portrayal of history, ethnicity and national identity (Cheesman 2002; Metro 2019a; Salem-

Gervais and Metro 2012; Treadwell 2013; Zar Ni 1998).[2] These authors document how schooling in Myanmar has been used to promote the ideological goals of dominant social and political groups – specifically, those of Burman, Buddhist, male military leaders. These insights are situated in a wider field of curriculum studies, within which researchers have pointed out how education has been used as a political tool both in Asia (Cha, Ham and Lee 2018; Lall and Vickers 2009) and globally (Sleeter 2018; Ladson-Billings 2016). These studies grow out of theoretical work positing that schooling is never politically or socially neutral but is rather embedded in power structures that favour dominant groups (Apple 1979; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

While curriculum always contains ideology, the colonial encounter and the ongoing divide between the global North/West and the global South/East has shaped which ideologies are perpetuated in schools. During their colonial rule of Burma, the British used schools as an arm of the state in order to promote acceptance of their power, causing Burmese nationalists to refer to the British system as 'slave education' (Metro 2019a: 20). This colonial dynamic continues today, as international development agencies and intergovernmental organizations based in the global North/West *position themselves* as the bringers of 'modernity', 'critical thinking', 'human rights', and 'social inclusion' (including 'gender equality'). The implementation of each of these terms is debatable; just because the North/West lays claim to this intellectual territory does not mean that they enact these ideals in their own societies. Yet they package these concepts for export *as if* that were the case. In the context of Myanmar, I have referred to this process as 'educational missionization' because of the moral certainty and fervour characterizing the view of the 'missionaries' – that their brand of education is superior to anything anyone from Myanmar could produce (Metro 2014: 163).

Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2014), a scholar of international and comparative education, has developed a model for conceptualizing the neo-colonial dynamics at work in the international circulation of educational policies and practices. She describes how countries in the global North/West 'lend' educational policies and practices, while those in the global South/East are positioned as 'borrowing' them. She draws attention to the financial stakes

2 For an analysis of ethnicity and national identity in the new textbooks, please see Metro (2020).

involved in this transaction: 'As a requirement for receiving grants or loans at the programmatic level, policy borrowing in developing countries is coercive and unidirectional. Reforms are transferred from the global North/West to the global South/East.' (ibid. 2014: 156) In the case I describe here, as part of curriculum revision processes Myanmar 'borrows' ideologies such as 'social inclusion' and 'gender equality' from international actors based in the US, Japan and the EU. This is not to say that indigenous ideas of gender equality don't exist – I will argue that 'gender harmony' holds that place – just that, in transactions of educational policy and practice, Myanmar is positioned as a borrower rather than a lender.

However, this borrowing is not a straightforward, uncontested process. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) describes what makes educational practices attractive to borrowing countries like Myanmar as 'reception' (ibid. 2014); I find it useful to expand this term to include the ways in which borrowing countries adopt practices wholesale. Steiner-Khamsi (2014: 162) also notes that borrowing countries may actively or passively reject what is being offered, through 'resistance'; in these cases, there may be a 'reinforcement of existing structures'. Or borrowing countries may stake out a middle ground in which they 'translate' educational policies through indigenization of supposed international 'best practices'. These three strategies – reception, translation, and resistance – can be used to classify a spectrum of responses to intervention in education from the global North/West.

There are few analyses of Myanmar's post-2010 curriculum reform (Metro 2019b), and none that examine gender specifically. There are brief references to the portrayal of gender roles on pre-2010 citizenship textbooks in Brooke Treadwell's dissertation (2013: 157–158) and in Nick Cheesman's Master's thesis (2002), and articles on other topics point out that a limited conception of women's roles appears in textbooks (Faxon and Pyo Let Han 2018: para. 2). More recently, several edited volumes (Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019; Chambers, Galloway and Liljeblad 2020) have included theoretical material related to gender and curriculum, but as Shah and Lopes Cardozo note, 'the current curricula, teachers' guides and resource books have not been assessed in terms of […] gender sensitivities' (2019: 82). I fill this gap by using recent theoretical material on gender and curriculum as well as broader scholarly work on gender roles in Burma/Myanmar (Ikeya 2011; Tharaphi Than 2014), to add to a curriculum studies perspective on gender in Myanmar textbooks.

Analysing Curricula and Their Production

I conducted this investigation by performing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the kindergarten through third-grade textbooks and teachers' guides released since 2016, with comparisons to those produced earlier. CDA is a method that involves examining images and texts, including word choice, sentence structure, grammar and use of figurative language, in order to read between the lines for relationships of inclusion, exclusion, domination, and oppression (Fairclough 2003). CDA is not a search for objective truths; other analysts would likely arrive at different conclusions, depending on their prior knowledge and biases. In other words, positionality matters. I am a white woman from the US who has learned to read and write Burmese, but my first language is English, and my identity influences what I find. My conclusions are provisional – I invite readers to confirm, disagree with or elaborate on my interpretations of the texts.

In order to understand my conclusions, it is also important to consider the conditions under which these texts were produced. In 2012, the Comprehensive Education Sector Review process was launched by President Thein Sein in collaboration with the MOE. The MOE was supported by 'development partners' including the Asian Development Bank, Australian Aid, Denmark, the UK Department for International Development, the European Union, JICA, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (Comprehensive Education Sector Review 2018) – although, as Steiner-Khamsi's (2014) work reminds us, these 'partnerships' are far from equal. These agencies helped to carry out a Rapid Assessment and In-Depth Analysis, leading to a Five Year Plan – the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), released in 2016.

Tellingly, this plan does not include the word 'gender'. It references the need for greater equity, but this term seems to be used only in connection with 'ethnic languages and cultures' (Myanmar MOE 2016a: 34). The plan includes the goal that 'all children, boys and girls, access primary, middle, and high schools' (Myanmar MOE 2016a: 35), and it notes the need to 'redesign the curriculum' with a 'focus on 21st century skills,' (Myanmar MOE 2016a: 19); however, the latter concept is undefined. Thus, the NESP does not include a specific mandate for increasing 'gender equality' in the curriculum. The NESP thus falls in line with other government documents that either neglect to mention gender equality, or, whether explicitly or implicitly, negate it.[3]

3 See, for instance, Khin Khin Mra and Deborah Livingstone's (2020) explanation of how the 2008 Constitution enshrines male privilege.

Yet 'gender equality' has been at the forefront of the priorities of what is usually referred to as international development. The United Nations (UN Women n.d.: para. 2) defines 'gender equality' as 'the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.' One of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (UN n.d.). The World Bank launched an initiative for 'gender equality and development' in Myanmar (World Bank 2013). UNICEF (n.d.) noted that more than 60 per cent of underage child workers were girls, and that this labour might prevent them from accessing school. JICA (n.d.) also places gender issues at the centre of the development work it pursues in Myanmar, and notes that while there is not a large discrepancy in enrolment of males and females at the primary level, and women even outnumber men in tertiary education, those relatively high participation rates have not led to the expansion of employment opportunities for women (JICA 2013: ii). Moreover, the World Bank's $100-million-dollar Inclusive Access and Quality Education project, launched in 2014, listed 'gender and human development' as its primary theme (World Bank 2021). While international development organizations differ in their structures and approaches, the top-down nature of the funding process means that terms like 'gender equality' become ubiquitous, even as their meaning is negotiated on the ground. In this chapter, I use the shorthand 'the ideology of gender equality promoted by "international development"' to convey this ubiquity, even while recognizing that development is a heterogeneous category, and that the term carries multiple meanings.

Thus the process of developing new curricula reflects an ideological back-and-forth among local and international actors. While individuals within the MOE may have a range of views on 'gender equality', this priority was not an explicit part of the MOE's vision for revising the curriculum as part of the NESP. However, 'gender equality' entered into the equation; this may have been because the MOE delegated the duty of revising the curriculum to development partners UNICEF (kindergarten curriculum), JICA (primary curriculum), and ADB (secondary curriculum). These organizations then used their own personnel as well as the services of local and international consultants, who created the new textbooks by selecting some texts and images from pre-existing textbooks, generating new texts and images, and adapting pre-existing texts or imag-

es. The MOE then either approved the curriculum or requested changes. Finally, the development partners evaluated the new curriculum to see if it matched the goals and priorities they had brought to the process (including 'gender equality').

This is, at least, what I have been able to gather about the process, which is not fully transparent. I entered this process when I took on a consultancy with the World Bank in 2018, in which I evaluated the newly-created primary curriculum for its potential to promote 'social inclusion' (including 'gender equality'), 'human rights' and 'peace'.[4] However, it is important to clarify that this is not an ethnographic study of the experiences of development workers, MOE personnel or consultants, and that I have had limited and anecdotal access to their negotiations. Such a study would be fascinating, but difficult to conduct given the delicate relationships involved. Instead, my data is what emerges from the black box of intra-and inter-organizational discussions: the textbooks themselves.

'Gender Harmony' in Myanmar's pre-2010 Curriculum

Myanmar's textbooks were not a blank slate on which development partners could inscribe their ideology of 'gender equality'. Brooke Treadwell (2013: 157–158) has pointed out that military-era textbooks under-represent women and foment sexist stereotypes. I agree, but I would argue that they do so in a particular way. Pre-revision textbooks[5] contained an ideology I will call 'gender harmony', in which men and women play parallel yet unequal roles, working together to serve society's needs. The most iconic representation of this ideology is the map of Myanmar surrounded by smiling male–female couples dressed in the costumes associated with each of the 'national races'; this

4 I have written elsewhere (Metro 2019b) about the ethical imperative for scholars of education to be more transparent about taking on the double role of consultant and researcher, because I think we need to examine how our 'expertise' is part of the borrowing/lending relationships that Steiner-Khamsi (2014) describes. This transparency is important in understanding the financial structures of international development, as well as the unequal exchange of ideas that takes place. Therefore, I feel it is important to acknowledge that I initially examined gender in these textbooks as part of a consultancy, and that I did so because 'gender equality' was a priority for the World Bank.

5 I examine pre-revision textbooks produced from 2007 to 2016, although there were minor changes in content during this time. From some transplanted content, it seems that, in revising curricula, not only were the most recent version of textbooks used as raw material, but also earlier editions.

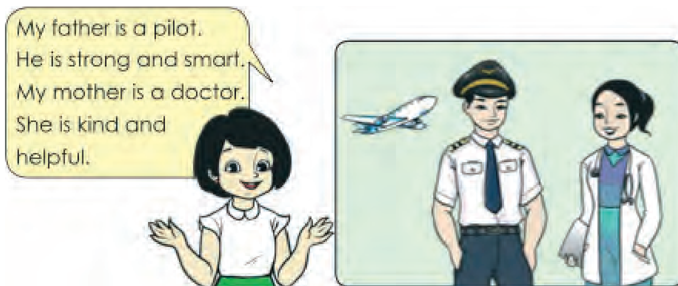

Figure 3.1. Third Grade English textbook (2019) showing male pilot and female doctor.

Figure 3.2. Kindergarten Myanmar Reader (2009) showing male soldier and female civilian carrying rocks.

Figure 3.3. First Grade Myanmar Reader (2017) showing male soldier and female civilian carrying vegetables.

Figure 3.4. Second Grade English textbook (2018) showing a girl's ambition to be a nurse.

Figure 3.5. First Grade Social Studies textbook (2017) showing King Bayinnaung.

Figure 3.6. Second Grade Social Studies textbook (2018) showing Queen Shinsawpu's rule.

Figure 3.7. Third Grade Social Studies textbook (2019) showing female banana business owner.

ထို့နောက် ခြစ်၍ရလာသော ငှက်ပျောသီးများကို အစိမ်းနှင့်အမှည့် သတ်သတ်စီခွဲပြီးကြော်ရသည်။ ကြော်သည့်အခါ စပါးခွံ၊ လွှစာမှုန့် တို့ကို လောင်စာအဖြစ်အသုံးပြုကြသည်။ ကြော်ပြီးသော ငှက်ပျောကြော်များကို ဇန်းများဖြင့် ထည့်၍ ဆီစစ်ထားရသည်။

ဆီစစ်ပြီးသော ငှက်ပျောကြော်များကို ထုပ်ပိုးမည့်သူများက ချိန်တွယ်ပြီး ဘူးများ၊ အိတ်များဖြင့် စားချင့်စဖွယ်ဖြစ်အောင် ထုပ်ပိုးကြသည်။ ထုပ်ပိုးပြီးသော ငှက်ပျောကြော်များကို ညောင်တုန်းမြို့အနီးတစ်ဝိုက်နှင့် ရန်ကုန်မြို့အပါအဝင် အခြားဒေသများသို့ တင်ပို့ဖြန့်ဖြူး ရောင်းချကြသည်။

Figure 3.8. Third Grade Social Studies textbook (2019) showing banana business workers.

Figure 3.9. Second Grade Myanmar Reader (2016) showing poem 'Our Mummy'.

Figure 3.10. Second Grade Myanmar Reader (2016) showing poem 'Our Daddy'.

Figure 3.11. Second Grade Life Skills textbook (2018) showing a girl objecting to unwanted touching.

ဆုံးမစာ

၁။ ထမင်းရည်အရက်၊
တစ်ချက်ကိုကင်း၊
ဘိန်းဘင်းကဆေး၊
လော်စာသောက်စား၊
ပြည်သူများ၊
စီးပွားဖျက်မည်သိ။

၂။ မလုပ်မကိုင်၊
မှိုင်တွေငေးကာ၊
နေရာကျောခင်း၊
ပျင်းရိဖင့်စား၊
ပြည်သူများ၊
စီးပွားဖျက်မည်သိ။

၃။ လူသွမ်းလူသောင်း၊
လူဘူးတောင်းဟု၊
မကောင်းမိတ်ဖက်၊
လူသူဖျက်နှင့်
ပေါင်းလျက်ယှဉ်သွား၊
ပြည်သူများ၊
စီးပွားဖျက်မည်သိ။

Figure 3.12. Third Grade Myanmar Reader (2016) showing male figure giving moral instruction to male and female children.

ဆရာရသေ့၏ တမာရွက်ဥပမာ

Figure 3.13. Third Grade Myanmar Reader (2016) showing girl bending her body to show respect for an older male teacher.

Figure 3.14. Second Grade Myanmar Reader (2007) showing poem 'Our responsibilities'.

occurs repeatedly in textbooks. This image is expanded upon in the third-grade geography and history textbook (Myanmar MOE 2007a: 4–11), where photographs of these couples appear on sequential pages alongside the characteristics of each group. In this sequence, 'gender harmony' and what could be called 'ethnic harmony' (in which ethnic groups also play parallel yet unequal roles, with Burmans leading and other ethnicities following) are fused to offer a vision of Myanmar society in which ethnic groups and genders peacefully coexist.

Another key representation of 'gender harmony' occurs in the pre-revision second-grade Myanmar Reader (Myanmar MOE 2007b: 50), which shows two columns of drawings alongside a poem called 'Our Responsibilities' (Figure 3.14). On the left, a male police officer apprehends a 'bad person'; on the right, a female officer directs traffic. On the left, a male doctor examines a patient; on the right, a female nurse takes a patient's temperature. In the bottom right, a female teacher and a male engineer provide role models for male and female students described in the poem.

Notably, this last image also conveys 'generational harmony' (in which younger and older people play parallel yet unequal roles), which is reinforced in other images. For instance, in the former third-grade Myanmar reader (Myanmar MOE 2016b: 11), a young girl bends her body to show respect to an older male teacher (Figure 3.13). We see how these 'harmonies' around age and gender reinforce each other, accumulating hegemonic power. In other images, a 'military–civilian harmony' is suggested alongside 'gender harmony.' Treadwell (2013: 158) draws attention to an illustration from the former civics textbook, of a male soldier lifting a basket of rocks and dirt

onto the head of a woman who will carry it away, apparently as part of an infrastructure project (Figure 3.2). Here, the relationship between military and civilian is also parallel but unequal, suggesting a mutuality that is, at the very least, debatable.

One final example of 'gender harmony' is the parallel poems 'Our Mummy' and 'Our Daddy' (Figures 3.9 and 3.10), which are in the second-grade Myanmar reader (Myanmar MOE 2016b: 4 and 6). The mother is shown caring for children and cooking, while the father is shown working in the rice fields and earning money. These representations of gender, along with the others discussed, convey the idea that women and men play distinct roles in society. In general, men are shown in higher-status jobs (doctors, engineers, soldiers). While women are occasionally portrayed as doctors (higher status), men are never shown as nurses (lower status). And although women are sometimes represented in male-dominated fields such as policing, they are not shown doing the more confrontational work of apprehending suspects, but rather the physically demanding yet ostensibly peaceful work of directing traffic. There is an illusion of parity – the suggestion that women aren't inferior to men, just different, and due respect in their own right – but this illusion is belied by the fact that women are almost always shown in lower-status positions.

The four dimensions of harmony that I have described, related to gender, ethnicity, age and civil-military relations, work together to create a vision of a well-ordered society in which each person 'knows their place'. In contrast, the ideology of 'gender equality' promoted by development shows, as we shall see, women taking on the same roles as men; taking on high-status roles including those outside of the 'caring professions'; and disrupting a 'harmony' that depends on them accepting lower status.

Analysing Gender in Myanmar's post-2016 Curriculum

Resistance

Adherence to the 'gender harmony' model – cases in which pre-revision representations of gender roles are reproduced in new textbooks – shows resistance to the ideology of 'gender equality' promoted by development. Resistance is the overwhelming pattern that I found in the new textbooks. Women and girls are under-represented overall, and, when they are shown, they are most often portrayed in caretaking roles, rather than in positions of

influence and power. For instance, when 19 occupations are described in the new third-grade English textbook, only three of the people shown (a nurse, a teacher and a policewoman) are female, whereas the farmers, doctors and members of other professions are all male (Myanmar MOE 2019a: Lesson 16). A poem in the second-grade Morality and Civics textbook describes a father working outside the home and a mother cooking (Myanmar MOE 2018c: 53). The women in the first-grade Social Studies textbook are mothers, teachers and nurses, whereas men are shown as doctors, engineers, soldiers, sailors and police officers (Myanmar MOE 2017b: 6–7; 14–15; 30). Likewise, the third-grade Social Studies textbook shows only male farmers (Myanmar MOE 2019c: 25–26), although in fact women are deeply engaged in agriculture (see Faxon's chapter in this book). Moreover, the cartoon teachers who appear on many pages of the textbooks are much more often female, especially in lower grades (which are considered less prestigious and yield lower salaries) (see Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019 and Lall 2020 for more on the gendered nature of the teaching profession).

Interestingly, the roles of men seem to have been slightly expanded from previous textbooks (they are portrayed as artists, dancers and hairdressers), yet women's roles remain relatively confined. For instance, the second-grade English textbook shows two cartoons in which a boy and girl discuss their occupations (Figure 3.4). The boy is linked with the occupations pilot, engineer and artist, while the girl expresses the desire to be a nurse in both cartoons (Myanmar MOE 2018a: 6). This lack of parity is echoed in the third-grade English (Myanmar MOE 2019a) textbook, which includes the sentence 'My father is a pilot. He is strong and smart. My mother is a doctor. She is helpful and kind.' (ibid.: 8; see Figure 3.1) I chose these words as the title of this chapter because reversing the statement ('My mother is a pilot. She is strong and smart. My father is a doctor. He is helpful and kind') would disrupt 'gender harmony' by revealing that the women are confined in a way that men are not – men *are* portrayed as helpful, kind doctors in other parts of the curriculum, but women are *never* portrayed as smart, strong pilots. Similarly, the second-grade Science (Myanmar MOE 2018d: 6) textbook uses the example 'A boy talks loudly. A girl talks quietly.'[6] in its discussion of sound waves. Quiet, timid boys do appear in other parts of the curriculum, but a girl talking loudly would be too disruptive to 'gender harmony'. Across the curriculum, boys and men are

6 All translations of Burmese-language portions of textbooks are my own. I ask forgiveness for any misinterpretations.

usually shown as powerful, strong and aggressive, while girls and women are *always* portrayed as gentle, kind and quiet.

Translation

There are some cases in which the ideology of 'gender equality' promoted by development seems to have been adapted to accord with local norms. Some nearly identical images have been transplanted from the former to the new textbooks with only slight changes. The image of the woman and soldier reappears in the first-grade Myanmar Reader (Myanmar MOE 2017a: 86) (Figure 3.3), although this time the woman's basket contains vegetables. This image could be read in two ways. The soldier could be helping the woman shoulder her burden. Alternatively, he could be burdening her with what he cannot accomplish by himself. The ideologies of 'gender harmony' and 'military–civilian harmony' would encourage the first interpretation. Indeed, the replacement of rocks with vegetables seems designed to pull the reader toward the more benign interpretation; the soldier is not overseeing forced labour, he's just helping a lady get to the market. Because many images were reproduced exactly, it seems that there was a concerted effort to adapt this particular image to the ideologies of development – not just the ideology of 'gender equality' but also that of 'peace'. Neither of these condone soldiers making women carry rocks on their heads. Ironically, in changing rocks into vegetables, the curriculum tones down one of the rare occasions where a woman's physical strength is showcased.

Another example of 'translation' is the addition of Queen Shinsawpu to the third-grade Social Studies textbook. In the former third-grade Geography and History textbook (Myanmar MOE 2016c), all of the seven historical figures described (including Kings Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, and Kyansittha) were male military leaders. By comparison, of the nine leaders described across the first-, second-, and third-grade Social Studies textbooks, only one, Queen Shinsawpu, is female. Although she is included, her portrayal sets her apart from the other leaders, who are praised for their bravery and military prowess – for instance, Figure 3.5 shows King Bayinnaung on a horse, carrying a sword and leading an army. In contrast, Queen Shinsawpu (Figure 3.6) is credited with making the kingdom of Hanthawadi 'peaceful and pleasant' under her rule (Myanmar MOE 2018e: 44).

The role of the 'powerful woman' is adapted in an interesting way for modern times. The third-grade Social Studies textbook introduces the female owner of a fried banana business (Myanmar MOE 2019c: 13). This portrayal is worth attention, since it shows the intersection of ideologies around gender and class. The owner is portrayed, in a cartoon drawing, as a wealthy woman, through the fact that she wears gold earrings, a necklace, and bracelets (in contrast to the unadorned teacher who introduces her statement) (see Figure 3.7). She explains that she pays her workers ten to twelve thousand kyat per day – more than twice the current minimum wage of 4800 kyat – so that they can have a good standard of living. While she is clearly an invented character (there is no photograph of her), her workers are real people who appear in photographs of what is apparently an actual fried banana operation. In Figure 3.8, we see a male worker doing the more strenuous physical labour of stirring the bananas in the pan full of hot oil, while the two female workers then sort and pack the fried bananas for sale. The fictional female owner of the fried banana business seems to be a concession to the idea, in the context of development, that women *should* own businesses.

The overall message about gender roles is that women can occupy positions of power if they have high class status; and if, in holding positions of power, they maintain their caring personae (seen here as paying a relatively high wage, out of concern for the lives of the workers). 'Class harmony' brings together gender, age and ethnic harmony in an ideology that binds people together and fixes their roles. As one dimension of harmony (gender) is challenged, the others are reinforced. For instance, we do not see here a young, poor, non-Burman woman exerting power over an old, rich, Burman man. Yet showing this mature, potentially Burman, wealthy woman exerting power over a young, potentially non-Burman, poor man is acceptable. This mixed portrayal of women's roles shows the 'translation' of ideologies of 'gender equality' by illustrating an additive approach; former roles have not been erased, but rather complicated by the addition of new material.

Reception

In some cases, the ideology of 'gender equality' promoted by development has been adopted wholesale into the curriculum. For instance, a lone female engineer appears in the third-grade English book (Myanmar MOE 2019a: 7). But it is the Life Skills textbooks, which have no antecedent in the previous

curriculum, that illustrate this dynamic most clearly, because there was no existing material on which to base the lessons.

The most obvious example of this new ideology in the Life Skills textbooks is the lessons on the prevention of sexual abuse. The second-grade Life Skills textbook instructs children to protest when they are the object of unwanted touching, no matter who has touched them (see Figure 3.11). A cartoon on this page shows a young girl saying 'Don't touch me, I don't like that!' to an older man who is patting her hips and behind (Myanmar MOE 2018b: 32–33). The lesson instructs children to tell a trusted adult if someone touches them in an inappropriate way. The topic of sexual abuse is taken up again in a third-grade Life Skills lesson called 'You Need to Object', which includes a news story about a case of child abuse (Myanmar MOE 2019b: 18).

These lessons are striking because they represent a departure from messages in previous textbooks, which emphasized the duty of young people to follow the guidance of elders, and which portrayed girls in subservient positions to male leaders (see Figure 3.12). Thus, the new lessons on the prevention of sexual abuse of young girls disrupt both 'gender harmony' and 'generational harmony'. In this case, the priority of preventing violence against girls and women, supported by development partners, has not only been incorporated into the curriculum but has increasingly become part of local discourses outside of school. Aye Thiri Kyaw's chapter in this volume explores, for example, the efforts made to pass a Prevention of Violence Against Women bill in the transitional era. Furthermore, in 2019, the highly publicized case of the rape of a three-year-old girl pseudonymously called 'Victoria' prompted widespread outrage (BBC News 2019). From 2017 to 2019, the number of rapes reported increased by 50 per cent, and, in nearly two thirds of the 2018 cases, the victim was a child (BBC News 2019: 15). This increase in reporting of sexual violence against women and children does not necessarily indicate that such attacks are increasing, but that the stigma around reporting them has been reduced. It is notable that the most significant example of 'gender equality' in textbooks coincides with – or may have even been preceded by – a wider shift in social attitudes. This suggests that the Myanmar Ministry of Education 'received' what the Myanmar public was, in fact, ready for, while rejecting or translating 'gender equality' in other cases.

Challenging, Reproducing, and Transforming Gender Roles: Possibilities for the Future

Overall, my examination of these new textbooks shows a slightly increased discourse of 'gender equality' alongside ongoing representations of 'gender harmony', which is in turn supported by other ideological 'harmonies' around age, class, ethnicity and military–civilian relations. Rare examples in textbooks show that women can break out of subservience or the domestic sphere, but these instances are contradicted by the much more frequent images of women shown in limited, caretaking roles, much as they were portrayed in the former textbooks. I would like to conclude by situating these findings within the literature on women in Myanmar/Burma, within scholarship on 'global development' practices, and within the current post-coup moment.

The way in which powerful women are portrayed in new textbooks accords with Tharaphi Than's (2014) challenge to the notion, popular both in Burma and internationally, that women in Burma enjoy relatively high status. She notes that 'very few powerful Burmese women exist' and that 'the few there are help to construct the notion of Burmese women's high status, thereby inevitably silencing the majority of "unequal" and disempowered women' (Tharaphi Than 2014: 1). Thus, the banana business owner in the third-grade Social Studies textbook is portrayed as having financial and social power, but her existence does not empower most women – any more than Queen Shinsawpu does (or for that matter, any more than does Aung San Suu Kyi – who does not appear in these textbooks). Moreover, the confinement of all of these women to the 'motherly' side of leadership roles places them solidly amongst most other women in the new textbooks, who are shown cooking, cleaning, caring for children, nursing or teaching.

To place these insights in the context of the '4 Rs' framework for sustainable peacebuilding in education used by Lopes Cardozo and Maber (2019: 22), the curriculum shows more recognition of women and gender issues, with limited improvements to representation, redistribution and reconciliation. Showing more women in textbooks is not necessarily a step toward gender equality if women are mostly shown in roles with limited power (e.g. as elementary school teachers) and if the few exceptions are tokens supposedly indicating parity where little exists.

This gendered division of labour cannot be understood without taking into account Myanmar's conflict-affected setting; it is enmeshed in this. Jenny Hedström (2020: 2) uses the term 'militarized social reproduction' to

describe 'the everyday emotional, material and symbolic labour undertaken by women within the household and the non-state or parastate armed group in communities embroiled in civil wars'. Not only does militarized social reproduction occur in households associated with non-state or parastate armed groups such as the Kachin Independence Army, Arakan Army and other groups currently engaged in civil war against the Tatmadaw; this kind of social reproduction also benefits the Tatmadaw itself. In other words, all the cooking, cleaning, childcare, teaching and nursing that women do enables the militarized state to function as it does, and textbooks reinforce this message about women's responsibilities. This 'military–civilian harmony' is hinted at in the image of a soldier helping a woman carry vegetables (Figure 3.3); however, for many readers of these textbooks the image of the soldier 'helping' the woman perform what could be called forced labour (Figure 3.2) is likely to accord with their life experience much more closely.

The way in which these textbooks reinforce 'gender harmony' makes the reception of content geared toward preventing the sexual abuse of girls even more striking. This chapter has demonstrated how 'gender harmony' intersects with other social structures such as class, age and ethnicity. Mostly, in these new textbooks, we see 'gender equality' hesitantly embraced only when other hierarchies are reinforced. Yet in the Life Skills textbook we see a young girl exerting authority over an older man, disrupting at least two 'harmonies' at once. Even while acknowledging the coercive power of Global North/West-based development, we can see changing attitudes toward sexual abuse as a truly local phenomenon. Chie Ikeya's (2011) book on gender in colonial Burma and the emergence of the 'modern' or *khit kala* woman points out that people in colonial Burma did not simply react to British ideas and practices; rather, they 'actively engaged with new and foreign identities, ideas, practices and institutions' (Ikeya 2011: 2). Likewise, MOE officials and local consultants did not randomly accept this representation of a young girl telling an older man to stop touching her. This example of *selective* reception of 'gender equality' suggests to me that this girl represents a *khit kala* woman for the 21st century – and that the students who read this textbook may take the example she provides even further, in ways that none of us can yet imagine. The different dimensions of social harmony are designed to reinforce each other, but when one is weakened, others may also lose their hegemonic power.[7]

7 I have devoted little attention in this chapter to ethnicity, which I examine in other analyses of the new curriculum (Metro 2019a). It would also be fascinating to

Even while acknowledging the agency of Myanmar people in prefiguring and responding to the priorities presented to them by international development, the question of whether development organizations should play such a large role in reshaping social structures in Myanmar is, for me, fraught with ambivalence. By using Steiner-Khamsi's (2014) ideas of borrowing and lending of educational policies and practices as a theoretical framework, I have tried to take a critical stance, questioning the idea that the ideologies of development are inherently superior to local ones. At the same time, as is probably clear from my analysis, I do wish to see an expanded role for girls and women in textbooks and in society as a whole (both in Myanmar and in my own country, the US, which has certainly not attained gender equality). As a consultant for the World Bank, I was part of the apparatus that delivered the ideologies of development, and I cannot separate myself from the structures I describe. I do want to be clear that it is not my intention to demonize development, just as it is not my intention to denigrate Myanmar's traditional ideal of 'gender harmony'. Instead, my aim has been to unpack the process of textbook creation during Myanmar's quasi-democratic phase, and to examine its ideologically complex products. I find that these textbooks illustrate what Marie Lall (2020) calls the 'policy practice gap', which she explains in this way:

> Caught between the policy texts written by the government and the priorities of development partners, it feels like ministry-based stakeholders as well as those further below do not own the change process; some claim they do not even understand it. (Lall 2020: 274)

These new textbooks, although stamped with the Ministry of Education's logo, actually reflect a complex interplay of ideologies coming from multiple actors, rather than a univocal endorsement either of 'gender harmony' or 'gender equality'.

Myanmar is not alone in its uneasy relationship with 'lenders' of educational policies and practices. In some cases, this subject position of being a 'borrowing country' has led to fascinating 'translations' of the terminology of development. For instance, Iveta Silova (2006) has shown how Latvian politicians

see how the treatment of gender in these textbooks compares to that in non-state curricula (e.g. those produced by the Karen National Union, the National Mon State Party and the Kachin Independence Organization). I lack the language skills to do this research, but I hope others will.

borrowed the Council of Europe ideologies of 'multiculturalism' and 'human rights' ,which they needed to reference in order to receive aid, to justify the continuation of Soviet-era ethnically-segregated schooling. The lesson, both there and in Myanmar, seems to be that development cannot treat 'borrowing' societies as blank slates. When new terms are introduced, pre-existing ideas do not disappear. Moreover, as terms circulate through these borrowing/lending relationships, we cannot assume that their meaning remains stable. 'Gender equality' might mean, to some, the inclusion of one female historical figure or high-status female business owner. For others, 'gender equality' would entail a radical transformation of all aspects of society. And some people might interpret 'gender equality' and 'gender harmony' as synonymous. Whichever definition one adopts, one would be able to find examples to appreciate and instances to decry in the new textbooks – which illustrates their polysemic nature, as products of Myanmar's quasi-democratic phase.

In this uncertain post-coup phase, the Civil Disobedience Movement has shaken up every supposed 'harmony'. Generation Z protesters have challenged gender roles and heteronormativity, Burman ethnocentrism, and hierarchies that kept them subordinated to their elders (The Guardian 2021). Education could become even more of a contested territory, as the opposition National Unity Government rejects what it calls the military's 'slave education' and plans a parallel school system (Myanmar Now 2021). It seems that all the ideological 'harmonies' that school textbooks have stubbornly presented in the face of increasing discord may finally give way to many new voices. I am sure that I am not alone in hoping that this may, indeed, come about.

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