

HISTORY CURRICULA AND THE RECONCILIATION OF ETHNIC CONFLICT:
A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT
WITH BURMESE MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THAILAND

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I use ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and survey research to investigate the potential of history curricula both to foment inter-ethnic animosity and to further reconciliation in conflict-affected societies. I take Burma's sixty-year-long civil war and ethnic conflict as a case study, conducting research in collaboration with Burmese migrants and refugees in Thailand. I also address the dynamics of international aid to education and the ethics of conducting research in this setting. This dissertation includes four distinct articles, each concerning an aspect of these issues.

In the first article, I argue that Burmese history textbook discourse from the dynastic era to the present illustrates the "ethnification" of Burmese (*myanma*) identity and the classicization of Burman monarchies as a basis for nationalism.

In the second article, I conclude that a high school curriculum based on primary source documents juxtaposed to reveal multiple perspectives has the potential to delegitimize violence and promote critical thinking. I also find that history curriculum revision workshops are most likely to function as "intergroup encounters" promoting reconciliation among participants if a) individuals from outside the "party line" mainstream of all sides are included; b) there are structures in place to ensure the participation of people of lower status; c) participants analyze

the discourse of textbooks written by opposing sides in the conflict alongside primary source documents; d) participants conceptualize reconciliation and critical thinking as major purposes of teaching history; and e) parties outside the conflict fund and support, rather than directly control these efforts.

In the third article, I argue that the interventions of international actors in the education of Burmese migrants and refugees constitute a process of neo-colonial “missionization” in which ideas about schooling are negotiated and hybrid subjectivities particular to post-colonial, post-conflict settings emerge.

In the fourth article, I explain why the written consent process mandated for human subjects research by Institutional Review Boards was not well suited to the cross-cultural, collaborative, ethnographic education project that I conducted. I present an alternate model for ethical relations in research based on a Levinasian face-to-face consent process that cannot be preformulated or proceduralized.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born and raised in the US. I became interested in Burma while earning a BA in History at Reed College, and I wrote my undergraduate thesis on colonial, nationalist, and ethno-nationalist conceptions of Shan identity. I spent six months in Thailand in 2001 working with Burmese exiles at the Student and Youth Congress of Burma, and I have returned to the Thai-Burma border regularly over the past ten years to collaborate on educational projects with organizations such as Teacher Training for Burmese Teachers and The Curriculum Project. In 2003, while earning an MA in Education from Goddard College, I wrote a thesis about the history curricula used on the Thai-Burma border by ethnic and political opposition groups. I have also taught history in secondary schools in the US. I am now a high school social studies teacher based in Columbia, Missouri, but I am involved in ongoing projects on the border, including the development of a primary source-based curriculum that I conceived while writing this dissertation. This curriculum is scheduled to be published by The Curriculum Project in 2012. Please feel free to contact me at rose.metro@gmail.com with feedback or questions.

မြန်မာပြည်က ဆရာများသို့
dedicated to Burmese teachers

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Programme Party
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
GPC	<i>Glass Palace Chronicle</i>
GSUB	Government of the Socialist Union of Burma
IGE	Intergroup Encounter
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KCO	Karen Central Organization
KNU	Karen National Union
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
MCT	Migrant Curriculum Team
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ORIA	Office of Research Integrity and Assurance
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

Burma,¹ January 1947: the British colonial administration has called a meeting where leaders of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) and the Karen Central Organization (KCO) will explain their positions on Burmese independence. The situation is tense. The British have announced their intention to decolonize Burma within a year, but the AFPFL, a political party dominated by the Burman majority, has not secured the support of ethnic minority organizations such as the KCO, which are demanding independent states. The three delegations fan themselves in the heat as leaders make their opening statements. Then a woman from the KCO stands up and begins to speak:

We Karen people have always been close to the British, and not to the AFPFL, because we have had to endure genocide by Burman people. As a result, we have asked the British to give us our own government. We ask the British now to stop ignoring our request.²

Several of her KCO compatriots nod their heads in agreement. The AFPFL delegation is frowning, while the British shift uncomfortably in their seats.

I smiled and lowered the video camera. My Burmese co-facilitator and I exchanged elated glances. Our plan seemed to be working. For an hour, the teachers had set aside the identities they'd grown up with and taken on the roles of those on opposite sides of Burma's sixty-year-long civil war and ethnic conflict. Just as we'd hoped, this multi-ethnic group of Burmese teachers was able to *ko-hkyìn-sa*³—to put themselves in the place of others, a capacity I

¹ Burma is also known as Myanmar. A variety of political and semiotic considerations affect the choice between the two names, as I will explain in Chapter One. In general, I use “Burma” to refer to the country, “Burman” to refer to the majority ethnic group, and “Burmese” to refer to the language and to any of the ethnic groups with heritage in Burma.

² This and all other translations from Burmese are mine unless otherwise specified.

³ I italicize Burmese-language terms and use the conventional system for transcription recommended by John Okell (1971, pp. 66-67).

see as the first step toward grassroots reconciliation. The “Karen” woman who spoke was in fact Burman, and her delegation, like the British and AFPFL group, included Karens, Burmans, Arakanese, Shans, Mons, and people of mixed background.

These events took place in the hottest part of the hot season in May 2010, on the last day of a weeklong workshop for seventy social studies teachers from Burmese migrant communities who had gathered in the Thai border town of Mae Sot. For me, the workshop was the culmination not only of six months of fieldwork, but also of ten years of thinking, researching, and writing about Burmese history curricula. I had planned the workshop with the Migrant Curriculum Team (MCT), a group of Burmese educational stakeholders (teachers, administrators, community leaders) interested in re-thinking history curricula. The teachers had spent the previous days analyzing primary source documents written by the KCO, AFPFL, and British government, and I had designed the imaginary summit to test the hypothesis I had generated, with MCT’s help, during my fieldwork: that a primary source-based history curriculum could promote reconciliation of Burma’s conflict by helping Burmese people to become aware of and sympathize with the historical perspectives of those on the other side of ethnic divides. In this dissertation, I will present evidence confirming that hypothesis. I will also explore issues that surround the development and use of such a curriculum, including the evolution of a discourse of national identity in Burmese history textbooks; the relationships between Burmese stakeholders and the international NGOs that fund educational projects in Thailand; and the ethical dimension of conducting collaborative research.

When I look back at the video footage from that day, I still feel amazed by the teachers’ ability to take on the perspectives of others whom they may have been educated to ignore, resent, or fight against. While I cannot offer a description of the experiences that particular Burman

woman who spoke at the workshop brought to the table that day, I can make some generalizations about the participants' past experiences studying and teaching history based on my earlier research (Metro, 2006) and on insights gained during the fieldwork described in this dissertation. Most participants in the workshop would have grown up being instructed to memorize highly nationalistic textbooks geared toward securing their loyalty either to the Burmese military regime or toward an ethnic minority "nation," while constructing opposing groups or dissenters as enemies. Most teachers would have repeated these activities with their own students, even if they doubted the contents of those textbooks or worried that such instruction might perpetuate ethnic conflict, simply because they lacked alternative materials and methods to use.

With this background knowledge in mind, I watch the scene I videoed through the theoretical lenses that I brought to this project: the ideas that curricula have ideological consequences, that subjectivity emerges from discourse, and that reconciliation can come about through exposure to multiple perspectives on history. Not only do I view this footage, but I am also captured in it. My appreciative laughter, closer to the microphone and thus embarrassingly louder than any of the other voices, follows the speech I transcribed above. It reminds me to question (and to invite readers to question) my presence behind the camera, and my role in designing and documenting this educational intervention. The conclusions I will present in these pages were so deeply influenced by Burmese and international collaborators, scholars, friends, and mentors that it is difficult to claim them as "mine." However, almost all the words in this dissertation *are* mine, and I know that they will prompt reactions I can't anticipate. I encourage readers to contact me and share those reactions, whether they are critical, supportive, or just curious.

Justification

I believe that the scene I describe above has implications not just for the teachers involved or for the larger Burmese context, but also for people around the world who are struggling with questions of how to teach history in the wake of violent conflict. Broadly speaking, this dissertation concerns the question of how to revise history curricula in order to promote the reconciliation of inter-ethnic animosity in post-conflict⁴ or conflict-affected societies. It also addresses the question of how researchers should investigate this topic, considering their involvement in relationships among international and local stakeholders, and given the human subjects protocols stipulated by their universities.

These questions are important because in the aftermath of ethnic conflict, revising history curricula that fuel hatred and legitimize violence is a crucial step toward reconciliation and stability (World Bank, 2005). Yet conducting such revisions is extremely difficult and often only partially successful; due to disputes among stakeholders and controversies over historical truth, many projects fail to produce viable curricula that delegitimize conflict. Scholars studying contexts including Israel-Palestine (Brown, 2006; Naveh, 2006), Rwanda (Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy & Longman, 2008), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pingel, 2008) have described how history curriculum revision projects aimed at reconciliation have either been derailed or failed to fully achieve their aims because of logistical and ideological challenges.

Given the mixed outcomes of these and other post-conflict history curriculum revision endeavors, a clear understanding of best practices for such projects is urgently needed. As part of

⁴ I will elaborate on my use of the term “post-conflict” in Chapter Three. In general, I use it to refer to societies in which conflict has not ended, but has taken on new forms different from daily warfare (Gagnon & Senders, 2010).

this understanding, researchers require a theoretical framework to interpret the network of relationships encompassing international aid to education in post-conflict societies. In addition, they need tools to reconcile the human subjects protocols of their universities with local ethics so that their own presence as researchers does not alienate participants, thus upsetting the delicate process of developing reconciliatory curricula.

Burma makes a good case study to investigate these issues for several reasons. First, ethnic conflict there is not only long-lived but also “intractable” (Bar-Tal, 2003), in that civilians and soldiers have become embroiled in a cycle of violence perpetuated by their economic, political, and social survival strategies. Thus interventions that meet with success in the Burmese case cannot be dismissed as resolving only minor disputes. However, the situation in Thailand is relatively stable, and Burmese of different ethnicities have become accustomed to working together during years of exile (Metro, 2006). Thus the disruptions that occurred in other curriculum revision projects in conflict-affected societies—restrictive taboos around discussions of ethnicity (Freedman et al., 2008) and outbreaks of violence (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006)—were unlikely to occur. For me, another consideration in choosing this case study was that my proficiency in Burmese language and the network of connections I had built up in migrant and refugee communities over the past decade enabled me to work effectively in this setting.

Research Context

Before providing a summary of my methods, theoretical framework, and conclusions, I would like to offer some background information on the situation of Burmese migrants and refugees in Thailand in order to elaborate on the research setting. Burma is an ethnically diverse country of about 55 million people located in Southeast Asia. Ethnic separatists and opposition

groups have been engaged in civil war since Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, and since 1962 the country has been ruled by a succession of military dictatorships. The current State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)⁵ faces mounting accusations of human right abuses, especially against ethnic minorities and women (Amnesty International, 2009; Shan Women's Action Network & Shan Human Rights Foundation, 2002). These circumstances, along with the poverty they have produced, have led millions of Burmese to cross the border into Thailand to live as refugees, exiles, or migrant workers.⁶

Of the population of two to three million currently residing in Thailand, about 550,000 are school-age children (Lawi Weng,⁷ 2009). Most are undocumented/stateless, and as such they were not permitted to attend Thai government schools until 2005. Thus, a patchwork of Burmese-run, mostly internationally funded "migrant schools" sprung up to serve about 12,000 children along the border (Lawi Weng, 2009), while refugee camp schools serve 38,000 (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008).

These schools use a variety of history curricula that may foment inter-ethnic aggression. Many use textbooks written by the SPDC, which devalue ethnic minorities and valorize the domination of Burmans; however, other schools use curricula written by ethno-nationalist groups

⁵ In November 2010 the SPDC held multi-party elections widely condemned from outside Burma as flawed (UN News Service, 2010), which resulted in the SPDC-affiliated party winning a majority of seats in Parliament. As I concluded writing this dissertation in March 2011, the SPDC was in the process of transferring power to the civilian administration that was elected. As this process is as yet incomplete, I continue to use the terms "SPDC" and "military regime" in this dissertation.

⁶ As I clarify in Chapter Three, the boundaries among these groups are often blurred (Lang, 2002). In my research I worked with all three groups, but mostly those who identified as migrants.

⁷ Because most Burmese names consist of a series of syllables that form one coherent unit, rather than of first names and surnames, I refer to Burmese people by their full names in parenthetical citations and in the reference list. I do not use prefixes indicating status or gender (e.g., *U* or

that tend to demonize Burmans and rationalize violence against them (Thein Lwin, 2002). There are educators on all sides of the ethnic divide who acknowledge that extremist history curricula can worsen conflict and agree that reconciliatory approaches should be pursued, but inter-ethnic collaboration has not yet yielded materials appropriate for the ethnically mixed classrooms common in refugee and migrant schools (Metro, 2006).

This endeavor has taken on more urgency since the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) announced its intention to exert greater control over migrant schools. The MOE has partnered with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement a standardized curriculum as a way to address concerns that Burmese migrant children educated outside of Thai control represent a risk to national security (Office of the Education Council, 2008). One incentive for standardization, both in refugee and migrant schools, is that schools could be accredited. Accreditation would increase students' employability and afford them increased opportunities to pursue higher education. Yet the obstacle remains of finding a history curriculum that would be acceptable to all Burmese ethnic groups, to Thai authorities, and to the international NGOs that fund migrant and refugee education.

Given this situation, my research has the potential to benefit local stakeholders as well as providing knowledge to academic audiences. While studying the question of how to produce reconciliatory history curricula in post-conflict societies, I also worked with Burmese educational stakeholders to produce such a curriculum, which will be published by a local NGO, The Curriculum Project, and piloted in schools in 2012. I plan to return to Thailand in the coming years to train teachers to use this curriculum and to assess its reconciliatory potential in the classroom.

Daw) when referencing Burmese authors whose English-language work I cite, unless they

In the meantime, my insights into the process of developing this curriculum can benefit those in my research site. For example, my research illuminates the problems with existing textbooks as well as the social and logistical obstacles that have prevented their revision in the past. Moreover, as I argue in the body of the dissertation, the process of developing the curriculum was in itself reconciliatory: I document some improvement in relationships among the two hundred teachers for whom I facilitated workshops over the course of my fieldwork.

Collaborative research paradigm

I conducted my research within a collaborative paradigm (Lipka et al., 1998), working with the Burmese stakeholders I was “studying” to formulate questions, make decisions about the project, and draw conclusions (although I wrote up these conclusions on my own). I chose this paradigm because when I started the research I had already been working with Burmese educators on history curriculum issues for years, and I planned to continue doing so in the future. Therefore, positioning myself as a “neutral observer” would not have been feasible. There are certainly ethical, procedural, and representational difficulties involved in collaborative approaches (Lipka et al., 1998), in addition to the drawback that some scholars may question their validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Indeed, my collaborations with Burmese stakeholders were not seamless; they involved negotiation of goals and logistics (see my discussion in Chapter One, pp. 85-86).

However, this collaborative approach also offered many benefits. First, my close social and professional relationships with stakeholders allowed me to access data that a traditional researcher may not have been able to (such as frank assessments of interpersonal dynamics).

publish under names that include these prefixes.

Moreover, the give-and-take involved in collaboration led me toward ideas I never would have generated on my own, which reflected my colleagues' deep understanding of their own situations. Finally, I had the opportunity not just to describe conditions leading to reconciliation, but also to try to create them. In this respect I identify with other scholars who participate in projects they study as part of a commitment to social change (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Freedman et al., 2008). While some readers may suspect that my desire to foment reconciliation led me to see it where it did not exist, it is equally true that my accountability to my collaborators motivated me both to be transparent about the difficulties we encountered and to critically analyze our work in order to improve the process for the future.

Research methods

I wanted to capture the reconciliatory potential of curricula as well as the interpersonal dynamics surrounding its development. Therefore, I used a mixed methods approach with three elements: ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and survey research. Ethnography is the attempt to understand socio-cultural phenomena from an “insider perspective” through prolonged, naturalistic study (Emerson, 2001). Ethnography was useful in examining the relationships of educational stakeholders with each other, with me, and with other people in my fieldsite. My second method was critical discourse analysis, a way of determining the ideological content of texts by examining their structure, grammar, vocabulary, metaphors, and meta-narratives (Fairclough, 2003). I used this method to analyze Burmese history textbooks' potential to contribute to conflict or reconciliation. Finally, I relied on survey research, a way of describing a population by asking questions of certain sample of that population (Fowler, 2009).

I used this method to assess the level of reconciliation among teachers in one workshop that I conducted. I will describe my use of each of these methods in more detail below.

Ethnography

I conducted six months of fieldwork in the communities of Burmese migrants and refugees described above. I spent much of my time in the border town of Mae Sot and the larger city of Chiang Mai, locations I had visited regularly as a teacher and researcher over the past ten years. While in Thailand, I facilitated seven teacher trainings/curriculum development workshops ranging from one day to one week in length, with a total of about two hundred multi-ethnic, gender-balanced participants. I also discussed history curricula with local and international educational stakeholders⁸ and spent time with them in their homes, schools, offices, and various public spaces. My research design was similar to that of other anthropologists of education working collaboratively with communities on curriculum issues (Lipka, Mohatt, & Ciulistet Group, 1998) in that I moved between roles as a facilitator, observer, and researcher. This approach allowed me to build on my previous work in Burmese migrant and refugee communities, offering help with pedagogical issues of local relevance while connecting those concerns to an academic world beyond the Thai-Burma border.

During these activities, I positioned myself as an active participant in a process of social change rather than a neutral observer. I would call my research “openly ideological” (Lather, 2003) in the sense that I was not only trying to describe conditions leading toward reconciliation, but also trying to produce them, both during my fieldwork and by publishing insights that others

⁸ These stakeholders were mostly Burmese teachers, scholars, students, NGO workers, CBO (community-based organization) members, community leaders, and parents. They also included

could apply toward reconciliatory ends. Like most ethnographic researchers (Emerson, 2001), I assume that my own positionality (including my status as a white, female, 31-year-old US Ph.D. candidate) affected both the data I gathered and the way I interpreted it; other observers could have reached different but equally valid conclusions (see Chapter One, pp. 87-88). Reflexivity was central to my method in that I attempted to document, respond to, and problematize the way my presence impacted the situation I was researching. I follow Wanda Pillow (2003, p. 192) in defining reflexivity “not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions.” For instance, by drawing attention to my own role as videographer in the opening scene I described in this introduction, I disrupt the assumption that the scene is unfolding independent of my input and acknowledge that my representations of others are open to contestation. My motivation for inserting this type of disruption is not to create confusion, but to draw attention to the layers of complexity involved in interpreting and (re)presenting this research.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

While still in the US, I conducted CDA on lessons from a dozen current Burmese history textbooks produced both by the SPDC and by ethno-nationalist groups. I also examined textbooks from the colonial era to the present in order to understand how discourses about ethnicity had evolved. This preparation helped me understand the context for curriculum revision. I chose CDA as a method because Fairclough (2003) offers guidelines for systematic analysis of phenomena such as interdiscursivity (texts’ relation to each other) and logics of equivalence and difference, which are crucial for understanding the presentation of ethnic

employees and volunteers at local and international NGOs, most of whom were from Western

identity. I also adapted this process into a straightforward worksheet so that groups of teachers could conduct collaborative CDA on textbooks during curriculum revision workshops. As Fairclough (2003) points out, CDA is always selective, partial, and dependent on the priorities of the analyst; it is most useful when conducted in tandem with ethnographic research in order to understand the culture in which texts were produced. Therefore, my aim was not to produce a definitive analysis, but rather to use CDA to provoke reflection as part of a curriculum revision process.

Survey Research

In general, qualitative researchers form social theories based on the data they gather rather than setting out to test a particular theory as quantitative researchers do (Creswell, 1994). However, quantitative data can provide additional evidence for the conclusions drawn through participant observation (Atkinson, 1996). In one workshop, I used a survey with both closed- and open-ended portions (Fowler, 2009) to support my ethnographic observations about the level of reconciliation participants experienced. The surveys allowed respondents to give critical feedback that they might have been hesitant to share with me directly. I used ethnographic observations to design my survey (Axinn, Fricke, & Thornton, 1991) by writing the questions using the Burmese phrases I'd heard participants use over the course of my ethnographic work, and I analyzed responses according to the age, gender, and ethnicity of participants in order to assess the impact of these factors on reconciliation.

Validity

countries, and several Thai academics.

Triangulating these methods allowed me to reinforce both my insights about the texts and about reconciliation, thereby producing research with what I believe is robust validity. Using Patti Lather's (2003) criteria for validity in qualitative research, I seek to demonstrate not only triangulation, but also construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity.

Construct validity is the extent to which the foundational concepts of research (in my case, for instance, reconciliation) are operationalized and measured. One measure of construct validity is the extent to which data transforms one's original theories (Lather, 2003, p. 191.). Although my understanding of how history curricula promote ethnic conflict remained stable, my ideas about how to produce reconciliatory curricula changed. For instance, as I will explain further in the section "Evolution of the project over time" (p. 19), I revised my initial idea that stakeholders who conducted CDA on textbooks from opposing sides in the conflict could produce syncretic, reconciliatory texts incorporating multiple perspectives.

These shifts in my thinking resulted partly from my attempts throughout the project to assess the face validity of my conclusions, or the extent to which colleagues at my research site corroborated my tentative conclusions. Throughout the research and writing process, I conducted "member checks" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) by discussing my insights with people in my fieldsite. This practice helped me to refine my conclusions. For instance, I asked a variety of stakeholders represented in Chapter Three to read early versions of that text. Among the international NGO workers who read it, several not only felt it was true to their experience, but were also able to add to the typology of "Internationals" that I described. Their ability to build on the typology I had generated indicated to me that it was a helpful framework. One International who read it felt it was not an entirely fair depiction of that community, but did not offer specific refutation of the

points I had made. This feedback affirmed my conclusions while alerting me that they would be controversial.

Finally, the catalytic validity of the research, or its potential to produce desired social change, is not yet totally clear; it will be tested over the coming years as the curriculum I produced with the help of my Burmese colleagues is piloted in classrooms. However, if my conclusion that the workshops themselves produced some measure of reconciliation is correct, then catalytic validity has already been demonstrated to some extent.

Ethical Research

Throughout my project, I was concerned with the ethical implications of my actions as researcher, to the extent that I devote Chapter Four to this topic. Thus I will only briefly acknowledge here that I took various measures to ensure the wellbeing of the participants. For instance, in making decisions about the location, timing, duration, and content of workshops and trainings, I deferred to community leaders who understood the situations of participants better than I did. I found this practice essential in adapting to the quickly shifting landscape of social and political alliances and rivalries that characterized my fieldsite. While I was less “in control” of the process than some researchers might wish to be, I found this flexibility an appropriate way to respond to the tension between my ambition to collect data and my participants’ diverse, sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory goals.

Limitations

Despite my conviction that my methods were sound and my conclusions are valid, my data did have some limitations. My dissertation does not include conclusions about the

effectiveness of reconciliatory curricula with children. While I did pilot lessons in several schools, the majority of my work was with teachers and other adult educational stakeholders. I chose to work with them first because teachers' delivery of reconciliatory lessons has such a profound impact on their outcomes (Kitson, 2007), and so teachers' positive response to curricula is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their effectiveness with students. Furthermore, the results of my research were unlikely to gain much respect in the community without the understanding and approval of community leaders, so I wanted them to participate actively in the process. However, further study would be necessary to assess the impact of these curricula on the students who would be their ultimate audience.

Furthermore, while I acknowledge the importance of Thai stakeholders in shaping the educational context of Burmese migrants and refugees, I do not fully explore their perspectives in this dissertation. My lack of Thai language skills precluded serious ethnographic work in Thai-speaking contexts, and I felt I could not do justice to the diversity and complexity of Thai educators' and policymakers' perspectives on Burmese migrant and refugee curricula. However, given the ongoing tensions between Thai and Burmese nationalists about past wars between their respective kingdoms, there is much to be studied about the Thai MOE's interest in revising history curricula used in Burmese schools.

I also want to acknowledge that I did not conduct research in ethnic minority communities where neither Burmese nor English was spoken. Perspectives on history may differ in such communities, and research with them would surely have increased the depth of my understanding. Unfortunately, time constraints prevented me from exploring this possibility.

Finally, my data does not allow me to offer an explanation of how using a primary source-based curriculum affected the ways in which particular people—or groups as a whole—

subsequently taught history or interacted with people of other ethnic groups. My research led me toward the idea of a primary source-based curriculum and enabled me to test it in a pilot workshop at the tail end of my fieldwork, but I did not have a chance to track the effects of this intervention after the workshop had ended. The task of tracing the evolution of individuals' subjectivities before, during, and after exposure to primary source-based curricula and curriculum development process is one I hope to take up in future research, as I return to Thailand in years to come. This dissertation contains only a preliminary attempt at this effort.

Theoretical Framework

I used these research methods within the context of a theoretical framework that brings together scholarship from linguistics, cultural theory, historiography, curriculum studies, peace and conflict studies, and anthropology. In order to clarify the assumptions I made while conducting research, I would like to summarize the conceptualizations of subjectivity, discourse, ethnicity, history, education, conflict, reconciliation, structure, and agency that ground my project.

Subjectivity, Discourse, and Ethnicity

First, I prioritize post-structuralist concepts of intersubjectivity over a Cartesian view of sovereign selfhood (Butler, 2005). This means that I see identity not as fixed or given, but rather as a shifting range of possibilities for being that emerge through language (Silverman, 1983). This view is linked to the Bakhtinian idea that language is a medium by which meaning is

created dialogically in the context of ideological structures that interlocutors share (Voloshinov,⁹ 1929/1986). At the same time as language links us, it also creates the boundaries between us by drawing us into affective social structures that separate “I” and “we” from “you” and “they” (Ahmed, 2004). These “social effects of language” are called discourse (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). The sovereign self of the Cartesian paradigm is, in the post-structural framework, an effect of discourse brought about talking, reading, or interacting with other media (Silverman, 1983).

This understanding of subjectivity is consistent with an anthropological view that ethnicity is not an essential, inborn trait, but a designation for aspects of cultural practice that are seen as differentiating group identity (Barth, 1994). It also complements political scientists’ claim that national identity is created through the circulation of print media (Anderson, 1991). Yet arguing that ethnicity and nation are discursively constructed rather than genetically determined is not equivalent to claiming that they are merely imaginary; ideologies of difference have material consequences that reify these categories.

A return to the vignette that opens this introduction may make these ideas more concrete. In the speech I quoted, the Karen ethnic group is defined by its separation from Burmans, the perpetrators of genocide. Without discounting the very real patterns of violence that have occurred, it is possible to see how that violence is invested with meaning when it is plotted against unambiguous ethnic categories. Affect—the outrage and fear conjured by the word “genocide”—creates a discursive boundary between “We Karen people” and Burmans. Feeling membership in either of these groups has the potential to change listeners’ self-concept.

⁹ It is disputed whether Valentin Voloshinov or his close colleague Mikhail Bakhtin authored this

History Education and Ethnic Conflict

History textbooks are one medium¹⁰ in which conceptions of ethnicity and nation are conveyed, ideologies are reproduced, and subjectivities are generated. History is never value-free, and historians impose plots on masses of information that produce certain meta-narratives and silence others (Barthes, 1984/1986; Trouillot, 1995). Formal schooling often reproduces social hierarchies (Althusser, 1970/2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977; Foucault, 1975/1977), and curricula are inherently ideological (Apple, 1979). Therefore, history curricula usually offer a national narrative that legitimizes the contemporary power structure (Tosh, 1984), and they serve as an “identity resource” (Wertsch, 2000, p. 41) through which students construct ethnic self-understanding.

History curricula can also foment inter-ethnic animosity and legitimize violence in situations of ethnic conflict (Davies, 2004). Ethnic conflicts are those in which parties view ethnic difference as the primary causal factor, although it can stand in for or mask socioeconomic, linguistic, religious, or other distinctions (Ellis, 2006; McGlynn, Zembylas, Bekerman, & Gallagher, 2009). Ethnic categories are reproduced in history textbooks’ discourse, including the vocabulary, grammar, figures of speech, and meta-narrative they contain. For instance, the woman in the opening vignette expressed a narrative common in Karen history textbooks, in which Karen identity is built around common suffering of Burman oppression and British neglect. This narrative silences the religious, class, sub-ethnic, and linguistic differences

work. Either way, it is safe to classify the ideas therein as “Bakhtinian.”

¹⁰ Although I do not explore them in this dissertation, there are many other sources that contribute to historical understanding—Elizabeth Cole (2007) names “family, popular culture, the media, religion, political discourse” (p. 20). Therefore, I do not wish to overstate the case for the impact of history curricula.

that could threaten the cohesion of “Karenness,” thus preserving the power of Karen elites who wish to continue fighting the Burmese military regime (Gravers, 2007; South, 2007).

History, Conflict, and Reconciliation

This description of how history curricula foment inter-ethnic animosity accords with John Paul Lederach’s (1995) view that conflict is created through a culturally specific process of making meaning through language. This language of conflict has the power to essentialize the identities of parties to the conflict and place them into a meta-narrative of good vs. evil. As Lynn Davies (2004, p.15) puts it, “war stems from linearity, from simplistic purities, not from complexity.” For example, in the opening vignette, the speaker refers to “Karen” and “Burman” as if these groups are homogenous and morally transparent.

Yet if history textbooks can exacerbate ethnic conflict by suturing students to opposing subjectivities, revising curricula may ameliorate inter-ethnic animosity by complicating simple stories of “us” vs. “them.” The process of reconciliation that I envision does not require parties in conflict to come to a consensus about the past. On the contrary, I define reconciliation as a process of understanding and sympathizing with other groups while acknowledging their historical narratives as valid. As Andrew Schaap puts it, “a reconciliatory moment is not construed as a final shared understanding or convergence of world views, but as a disclosure of a world in common from diverse and possibly irreconcilable perspectives” (quoted in Cole, 2007, p. 5). This process could occur both in history classrooms and among educational stakeholders involved in curriculum revision. According to “contact theory” (Allport, 1954), which suggests that parties to conflict who spend time together may improve their relations under certain circumstances, both settings have the potential function as “intergroup encounters” (Bekerman,

2007; Schulz, 2008) leading toward reconciliation. For instance, the Burman woman in the opening vignette did not necessarily agree with the words she was saying, but her ability to say them to people who did identify as Karen was a powerful acknowledgment of their suffering and of the possibility of her own complicity in it. Students who do similar activities in classrooms might also become aware of and sympathize with the perspectives of other groups, potentially short-circuiting the essentialization of identity that perpetuates conflict.

Structure and Agency

This vision may seem utopian when compared to the description of education as the reproduction of social hierarchy that I described earlier. Certainly, structural factors cannot be ignored. I view Southeast Asia's monarchical and colonial past as having set the stage for the kind of education that is taking place on the Thai-Burma border today, in that a social and spiritual hierarchy rooted in tradition of Buddhist monarchy persists, colonial ideologies of race linger in textbooks, and schools evolved as a system through which authorities tried to produce more manageable subjects (Bhabha, 1994). This past informs present post-Cold War global capitalism, in which international funding to Burmese education can be seen as part of an effort by networks of governments, NGOs, militaries, and corporations in the Global North to promote their own security and financial interests in Southern societies (Duffield, 2001).

Moreover, Burmese elites on all sides of the ethnic divide, whose power and livelihoods are bound up in the continuation of the conflict, stand to lose if students begin to question the subjectivities that history textbooks offer them. Leaders of the SPDC and of ethno-nationalist armed struggle groups have built careers on the idea that inter-ethnic conflict is intractable, and have come to depend on the financial benefits garnered from resources located in the areas that

they control. If the younger generation begins to question the ideologies that fuel conflict and justify the current distribution of resources, these leaders may not be able to retain their power during the transition to a society that is not organized around ethnic and political divisions. Thus these powerful elites would not be expected to support a history curriculum that challenges the hierarchies and social organization on which their own power rests.

Despite these structural factors that tend to reproduce existing hierarchies, there is space in which new educational practices may materialize. I join anthropologists (Holland et al., 1998) and cultural theorists (Ahmed, 2004) in acknowledging both the ways in which social structures constrain discourse on one hand, and allow limited space for agency on the other. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, or the possibility for new subjectivities to emerge when oppositional positions come into contact, is helpful in reconciling the tension between structure and agency. For example, while the Burman woman in the opening vignette did not invent the Karen identity she role-plays, the fact that she as a Burman performs this identity changes its meaning and creates new possibilities for reconciliation with other teachers in the workshop.

To make this point clearer, we may think of this role-playing activity as a game of "musical chairs" in which people temporarily occupy the positions of others. My claim is not that sitting in someone else's chair for an hour enables one to have a final or complete understanding of that person's perspective, but rather that when one moves back to one's original chair, one finds its position has shifted slightly, and one's view of the world has been altered as well. In other words, the Burman woman does not become Karen, but through the effort to place herself in the Karen subjectivity, alters her own relation to her Burmaness, perhaps becoming less able to see Karens as a monolithic "they" and gaining an ability to acknowledge the ways in which the exclusivity of the Burman "we" has caused suffering. This possibility of a shift in

intersubjectivity through play in discourse accounts for why history education is capable not only of reproducing conflict, but also of transforming it. The hope enshrined in this project is not for the obliteration of ethnic identity, but rather for a changed relationship to ethnicity that offers a better chance for non-violent relations with those in other groups.

Evolution of the project over time

The theoretical framework I describe above remained stable throughout my project, and there were significant continuities in my research agenda over time. My focus remained on the process of producing reconciliatory history curricula, and my interest in discourse remained strong. My reflexivity about my own role, which had been a key element in my pre-fieldwork considerations, was also a constant.

However, there were some unexpected developments that influenced the logistics of my research and the format in which I presented my results. First, while I had initially planned to work with one or two groups of stakeholders on a long-term basis, this proved unfeasible due to participants' schedules. Therefore I facilitated shorter, more intensive workshops for eight (somewhat overlapping) groups. I worked on a long-term basis with one organization in particular, the Migrant Curriculum Team (MCT). This change in plan made it more difficult to track how participants' relationships evolved over time, but it increased the diversity and volume of my sample.

This larger sample size made survey research feasible. While I had not initially planned to collect any surveys, I did so in the last training I conducted, seeking both open-ended and closed responses from sixty-six participants about the level of reconciliation they experienced during the week-long meeting. While I had not had extensive training in survey design, I do

think I was able to use the data I gathered productively to support the conclusions I was reaching through participant observation.

Another factor I had not anticipated was the extent to which the activities I considered part of my dissertation research and those outside of it would converge. While conducting my research, I also planned to collect teacher feedback on and revise a Burmese history textbook I had written several years ago for a local NGO, The Curriculum Project. Although I initially saw this project as separate from my dissertation, some of the teachers I was collecting feedback from became active participants in my research, and the history textbook I had intended to revise alone became a collaborative project that will embody the conclusions of my dissertation. This development enables me to share the results of my research with the community in a more immediate and practical form.

The terms in which I discussed my project also changed as I became exposed to different literatures. For instance, while I had long been interested in reconciliatory processes, it was not until just before I began my fieldwork that I encountered the concept of “intergroup encounters” and Allport’s (1954) contact theory, which elaborated on the conditions under which parties to conflict who spend time together improve their relations. These new terms became part of the way I described my project.

Other shifts in my project were more foundational. I started out with three research questions. First, how does the discourse in Burmese history textbooks reproduce ideologies and patterns of identity formation that fuel conflict, and how can this discourse be expanded to promote reconciliation? Second, after multi-ethnic groups of Burmese educational stakeholders investigate the first question through collaborative discourse analysis, how do the revised textbooks they produce compare to originals in terms of their potential to promote

reconciliation? Finally, what are the obstacles to and possibilities for reconciliation that emerge among participants during this process? My hypothesis was that if multi-ethnic groups of Burmese educational stakeholders conducted collaborative analysis of the discourse of existing history textbooks written by opposing sides in the conflict, they would be able to understand the elements of those texts that fueled conflict. Then, they would be able to rewrite syncretic texts that avoided the discourses that were most problematic, producing curricula that could promote reconciliation. I also hypothesized that this process would enable participants from different ethnic backgrounds to experience reconciliation with each other.

Indeed, collaborative discourse analysis was a helpful first step toward reconciliatory curricula. I had worried before starting my research that I would not be able to transform CDA into a method useful to participants, yet the worksheets I developed to help them discover how texts fueled conflict worked quite well. However, it became clear that rewriting textbooks together was going to be prohibitively difficult and time-consuming. Moreover, this effort had the potential to exacerbate tensions among participants—even agreeing on a title for a hypothetical textbook proved impossible. With the help of one teacher from MCT, *Saya Aung Khine*, I came up with the idea of collecting primary source documents in place of a textbook. We hoped this format would avoid exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions because the documents did not contain truth claims made by historians from one group or another, but rather the (albeit biased or incorrect) ideas of specific historical individuals. Instead of asking students to accept one text as correct, a primary source-based curriculum would challenge them to analyze many texts to understand the perspectives of their authors and the context of their creation. Much of my remaining research endeavors were directed toward creating such materials and testing them with teachers.

This alteration in my hypothesis was a major shift for me, but allowed me to remain basically within the bounds of my three initial research questions. However, other experiences I had during research led me to write about different themes that emerged during fieldwork. I was open to these new possibilities because during my coursework, I had become interested in the idea of “the papers option,” or the prospect of writing several distinct articles for publication rather than a single unified dissertation. This idea appealed to me because my project was interdisciplinary, touching on curriculum studies, comparative and international education, anthropology of education, peace and conflict studies, research methodologies, cultural studies, and Southeast Asian studies/Burma studies. I reasoned that the papers option would allow me to present different aspects of my project to audiences in these disciplines. Therefore, I decided to write my dissertation in the form of four articles presented here as chapters.

I have already described the evolution of Chapter Two, which concerns the issues of history curriculum and reconciliation that I discussed above. During my research, I also became interested in the disjunction between local ethics and the human subjects protocols I had been asked to use by Cornell’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). I’d had some difficulty translating consent forms in a way I thought would be meaningful for participants. Indeed, once I arrived in my fieldsite I saw that these forms alienated participants. I decided to write about the difficulties I had using these forms as an anthropologist of education working collaboratively with educational stakeholders. The result is Chapter Four.

Another issue that captured my interest was the relationships among Burmese educators, the international NGOs who funded their activities, and the Thai authorities who monitored them. Indeed, it became impossible for me to ignore the tensions among these groups, so deeply did they affect my research. While I had initially thought of myself as collaborating solely with

Burmese educational stakeholders, I realized that these collaborations took place within a network of local-international relationships that re-played colonial dynamics by making Burmese the targets of conversion to foreign educational methods. I decided to write about these relationships, and the result is Chapter Three.

Finally, while I had done extensive analysis of Burmese history textbooks in preparation for my research, I did not anticipate that this work would become part of my dissertation. However, once I had decided to write my dissertation in the form of articles for publication, I saw that I could target the analysis of historiography and discourse that had grounded my project at an area studies audience. The result is Chapter One.

Chapter summaries

The chapters that make up this dissertation are intended to be able to stand alone; hence certain details are repeated and explanations may overlap. Because they are targeted at different audiences, I assume that readers have specific bodies of background knowledge related to each one, and I foreground issues of particular interest to likely readers while footnoting less salient matters. For instance, Chapter One, targeted at an area studies audience, assumes familiarity with Southeast Asian history and devotes considerable attention to Burmese-language terms, while other articles do not. I imagine that some readers of this dissertation will be interested in only one or two of these chapters, but they can also be read sequentially for an overview of my research.

Chapter One

Chapter One (“*Myanma* identity and the shifting value of the classical past: A case study

of King Kyansittha in Burmese history textbooks, 1829-2010”), which I plan to submit to an areas studies journal or edited volume, contains an account of how discourses of national and ethnic identity in history curricula have evolved since the colonial era. I start with the assumption that one of the primary purposes of any history curriculum is to offer a conception of national identity that bestows legitimacy on contemporary power structures (Tosh, 1984). I trace the process of “ethnification” (Gravers, 2007, p. 2) of Burmese or *myanma* identity over the past two centuries by examining the continuities and changes in the way schoolbooks portray one king, Kyansittha. Noting that classicization of certain aspects of history is a common basis for the construction of national identity (Chatterjee, 1994), I examine shifting interpretations of the classical past in authors’ portrayal of Kyansittha. By investigating Kyansittha’s appearances in dynastic, colonial, nationalist, and socialist era textbooks, I account for his transformation from a universal monarch in his own court inscriptions into a *myanma* king in current textbooks, in line with the military regime’s post-1988 project of “myanmafication” (Houtman, 1999) of Burmese identity.

As a theoretical framework to interpret these shifts, I use Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1995) idea that national narratives are built around silences that reveal the political priorities of their authors. I argue that the silences around which *myanma* identity is constructed are not cumulative but exponential, in that each element that is left out must be balanced by greater emphasis on other aspects. My analysis shows that those who seek to revise textbooks for political purposes are always beholden to existing narratives in ways they may not realize; they may both consciously manipulate the national narrative and unconsciously reproduce the assumptions or errors of previous writers whose conclusions they reject. While drawing inspiration from Trouillot, I take the perspective of an anthropologist of education, in the

tradition of scholars who analyze the discourse of curriculum in order to understand its ideological underpinnings (Apple, 1979; Clark, 2007; Skinner & Holland, 1996).

Chapter Two

Chapter Two (“Primary sources, multiple perspectives, and critical discourse analysis: Post-conflict history curriculum revision as an ‘intergroup encounter’ promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation among Burmese migrants in Thailand”), is written for scholars of comparative and international education or curriculum studies. It contains a description of a reconciliatory primary source-based curriculum, as well as a set of best practices for working with local stakeholders to produce this type of curriculum. I present this case study of Burmese migrants in Thailand in order to speak to debates about history education in conflict-affected settings including Rwanda (Freedman et al., 2008) and Israel/Palestine (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006). Given the potential of history curricula to exacerbate inter-ethnic animosity, and the difficulty of revising such curricula (Cole, 2007; Davies, 2004; Naveh, 2006), I identify the need to clarify best practices for history curriculum revision designed to promote reconciliation in the aftermath of ethnic conflict. I use Allport’s (1954) contact theory and recent work on “intergroup encounters” (Bekerman, 2007; Schulz, 2008) to suggest that both history classrooms and curriculum revision projects can function as spaces for reconciliation. To investigate these possibilities, I use methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003), participant observation (Emerson, 2001), and survey research (Fowler, 2009) in the context of curriculum development workshops with multi-ethnic groups of Burmese educational stakeholders.

I conclude that a high school curriculum based on primary source documents juxtaposed to reveal multiple perspectives has the potential to delegitimize violence and promote critical thinking. I also find that history curriculum revision workshops are most likely to function as

“intergroup encounters” promoting reconciliation among participants if a) individuals from outside the “party line” mainstream of all sides are included; b) there are structures in place to ensure the participation of people of lower status; c) participants analyze the discourse of textbooks written by opposing sides in the conflict alongside primary source documents; d) participants conceptualize reconciliation and critical thinking as main purposes of teaching history; and e) parties outside the conflict fund and support, rather than directly control these efforts.

Although I do not include it in this dissertation, I also describe these conclusions in another article targeted at a non-academic audience of Burmese educational stakeholders. I plan to submit this Burmese-language article, “Putting down our weapons when we talk about history: A curriculum for national reconciliation and critical thinking,” to *Maukkha*, an educational journal based on the Thai-Burma border. This article represents my commitment to share the results of my research with participants.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three (“Post-colonial subjectivities in the post-conflict aid triangle: The drama of educational missionization in the Thai-Burma borderlands”) is targeted at the emerging field of post-conflict studies. I create a theoretical framework to describe the interaction of local and international stakeholders in the education sector in post-conflict, post-colonial societies, and I offer practical suggestions to facilitate these interactions. I combine Homi Bhabha’s (1994) ideas about colonial subjectivity with Mark Duffield’s (2001) account of the merging of development and security to theorize a process of “educational missionization” in which “ideological entrepreneurs” (Gagnon & Senders, 2010, p. 2) from the Global North/West (to whom I refer as

“Internationals”) try to transform Burmese migrant and refugee education. I write the article in the form of a drama, conceptualizing the relationships among the “actors” (Burmese migrants and refugees, Internationals, and Thai authorities), as a “post-conflict aid triangle” in which Internationals’ desire for cultural others who are similar to but never quite equal to themselves conditions interactions among the three groups. I also describe these post-conflict borderlands as a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) in which the boundaries of these subjectivities are negotiated and hybridity emerges.

Thematizing my own role as a researcher enmeshed in these dynamics, I use my ethnographic observations to provide “scenes” that illustrate the workings of this third space. First, I observe that local employees of international NGOs occupy a hybrid position as the interpreters of International educational ideas in Burmese communities. Another subjectivity I describe is that of the “privileged informant,” upon whom Internationals rely for access to Burmese communities and for the legitimacy of their “participatory” programs. Both of these subsubjectivities reveal both power differentials between and the co-dependency of Internationals and Burmese. I also note the ways in which the phenomena I observe on the Thai-Burma border are similar to the dynamics of international aid that other scholars have observed in post-conflict settings (Carothers, 2003; Vavrus & Segher, 2010), especially in regards to education (Odora Hoppers, 2001; Samoff, 2004). Finally, I conclude with some practical suggestions for how Internationals can disrupt the discourses and practices that are a legacy of colonial inequalities.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four (“From the form to the face-to-face: IRBs, ethnographic researchers, and human subjects translate consent”) is written for an audience of anthropologists of education.

Based on my fieldwork with Burmese educational stakeholders in Thailand, I describe the drawbacks of using IRB-mandated written consent procedures in my cross-cultural collaborative ethnographic research on education. I situate these dilemmas in the literature on consent protocols' potential to alienate participants (Bradburd, 2006), exacerbate power differentials (Bryon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006), overlook cultural differences (Adams et al. 2006), and misrepresent researchers' intentions (Pritchard, 2002). Drawing on theories of intersubjectivity (Butler, 2005), ethics (Levinas, 1961/2000) and translation (Sakai, 1997), I describe a face-to-face consent process that offers alternate possibilities for ethical practice that contrast US IRBs' Cartesian paradigm for researcher-participant relationships. I argue that meaningful consent cannot be preformulated, proceduralized, or replicated, but that it takes place in unique face-to-face conversations situated in local practice, using local vocabularies. I present several scenes from my fieldwork to illustrate this face-to-face practice. Finally, I discuss the implications of my conclusions for IRB policies, noting that practical compromises between a Levinasian and Cartesian worldview are possible, but that forcing a confrontation among these competing ethical models may also be productive.

Connecting the chapters

While I did not shape these articles into a unified dissertation as is traditional in the social sciences, they do function as chapters, to a large extent. Chapter One provides background that introduces Burmese history textbooks as a literature under consideration, while illustrating my theoretical approach to historiography and history textbook discourse. Chapter Two summarizes my research on revising history curricula to promote reconciliation, Chapter Three illustrates the social context of this project, and Chapter Four describes the research methods I used.

Together, these chapters provide an account of my doctoral studies and research results. They also explain how I arrived behind a video camera in Mae Sot in 2010, filming a Burman woman pretending to be Karen and acting as if it was 1947. I hope these chapters also convey why, despite the layers of representation and play-acting involved, I believe that what she said both indicated and promoted reconciliation.

CHAPTER ONE

MYANMA IDENTITY AND THE SHIFTING VALUE OF THE CLASSICAL PAST: A CASE STUDY OF KING KYANSITTHA IN BURMESE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS, 1829-2010¹¹

Burmese history textbooks are getting shorter. Although acquiring a full curriculum from any era but the present is difficult, current history textbooks seem to be about half the length of those in use thirty years ago.¹² It may not be too surprising that the military dictatorship, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC),¹³ has instructed its Textbook Committee not to include much information about the past half-century, given ongoing ethnic insurgencies, pro-democracy demonstrations, condemnations from abroad, and categorization as one of the UN's "Least Developed Countries." It is more difficult to understand why the SPDC would reduce the space devoted to the pre-colonial dynastic era that it classicizes as the genesis of contemporary national identity, and from which it attempts to derive legitimacy (Schober, 2005). In the newly-built capital Naypyidaw ("seat of kings"), large golden statues of three kings (Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya), tower over the parade ground. In state-controlled media, these

¹¹ I would like to thank Tamara Loos, for whom I originally wrote the term paper on which this chapter is based; and Jacques Leider, who was kind enough to offer his comments on an early draft. I would also like to thank my Burmese teacher, *Sayamá* San San Hnin Tun, who helped me with many of the translations. Finally, I would like to thank Justin Smith, with whom I am collaborating on "A textbook case of nation-building: The discursive evolution of state and non-state history curricula under military rule in Myanmar," a forthcoming article on similar topics. Of course, any errors are my own.

¹² Comparison made based on a full set of current textbooks and a dozen used between 1975 and 1987.

¹³ In November 2010 the SPDC held multi-party elections widely condemned from outside Burma as flawed (UN News Service, 2010), which resulted in the SPDC-affiliated party winning a majority of seats in Parliament. As I concluded writing this dissertation in March 2011, the SPDC was in the process of transferring power to the civilian administration that was elected. As this process is as yet incomplete, I continue to use the terms "SPDC" and "military regime" in this dissertation.

kings are lauded as the founders of the “Three Myanmar Empires” who united the “national races,” laying the groundwork for the current Union of Myanmar (e.g., Tin Ka,¹⁴ 2006). If the dynastic era is so important to the country’s present, why has the coverage of it in state textbooks shrunk down from hundreds of pages in the 1950s to several dozen pages today? If, as the placement of these statues suggests, the SPDC is the inheritor of the kings’ glory, why is there relatively little to say about that glory?

In his discerning meditation on historiography, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995, p. xix) argues that studying history requires us to unearth the “roots” of power by examining the production of narratives and the silences around which they grow. Tracking how history textbooks have changed over time provides a fruitful opportunity for such an examination, but I would like to shift Trouillot’s metaphor from horticulture to arithmetic in order to suggest that the silences that structure Burma’s national narrative are not simply subtractions, progressing cumulatively toward a blank history textbook. I envision an equation of national identity in which chosen terms are “raised to a power” by the authorities who act as their “exponents.” But the information that textbook authors cross out in order to balance the equation does not disappear. As silences multiply, larger-than-life (although not necessarily longer) explanations must take their place.

¹⁴ Because most Burmese names consist of a series of syllables that form one coherent unit, rather than including first names and surnames, I refer to Burmese people by their full names in parenthetical citations and in the reference list. In parenthetical citations for Burmese-language works, I do not use the Burmese prefixes that indicate status and gender (in this case, *Tekkatho*; more commonly *Ū* or *Dàw*). When referencing Burmese authors whose Burmese-language work I cite, I include the appropriate prefix in the text at first usage only, yet I do not do so when referencing Burmese authors whose English-language work I cite. In the reference list, I include the prefix in parentheses following the name when citing Burmese-language texts or when Burmese authors publish in English under names that include these prefixes.

With this metaphor, I seek to emphasize that historians are always responding to previous claims in the same way mathematicians working collaboratively on a difficult problem over the course of many years check and re-check each other's work, challenging a theorem here or a calculation there. Historians who seek to revise textbooks are always beholden to existing narratives in ways they may not realize; they may both consciously manipulate the "correct" answers and unconsciously reproduce the assumptions or miscalculations of earlier writers whose conclusions they reject. Whether they negate, ignore, or appropriate what previous authors have written, they cannot help but assign it some *value*. In other words, they can attempt to overwrite or erase previous histories, but evidence of these alternate pasts remains beneath current versions like traces on a chalkboard over which a new equation has been inscribed.

With this metaphor in mind, my aim here is to examine the shifting importance, or "value," that history textbook authors assign to the classical past in narratives of Burmese nationhood. I also investigate how this value correlates with an understanding of ethnic and national identity, as expressed in the use of the Burmese terms *myanma*¹⁵ and *báma*, and the

¹⁵ The diglossia of literary and spoken versions of the Burmese language, as well as a variety of political, historical, and semiotic factors, complicate the use of the English terms "Burmese," "Burma," "Burman," and "Myanmar," and the Burmese terms *myanma* and *báma*. Their meanings are contested, and this paper will provide a partial genealogy of each. However, to summarize, I use "Burman" to refer to the majority ethnic group. I use "Burmese" to refer to the language and to the multi-ethnic national identity conceptualized in the colonial era but only partially realized in the present. I use "Burma" to refer to the territory annexed by the British in the 19th century and existing until today (since 1989, under the English name "The Union of Myanmar"). I use "Myanmar" to refer to the post-1988 nation-building project that the military regime has undertaken. I use *myanma* in three ways, which I will clarify in this paper: to refer to a.) the majority Burman ethnic group (the written equivalent of the spoken term *báma*); b.) a multi-ethnic national identity existing since the nineteenth century (called "Burmese" in English); and c.) the post-1988 multi-ethnic national identity that the military regime indicates by using the English term "Myanmar." See Houtman (1999, p. 45) for an extensive typology of these meanings. I italicize Burmese-language terms and use the conventional system for transcription recommended by John Okell (1971, pp. 66-67).

English terms “Burman,” “Myanmar,” “Burma,” and “Burmese.” Thant Myint-U (2001) and Michael Charney (2006) have described the formation of a *myanma* identity centered around Buddhism, Burmese language, and Burman ethnicity during the Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885). Furthermore, Mikael Gravers (2007, p. 2) points out that over the past century, identity in Burma has been “ethnified” as nationalists have adopted colonial racial paradigms that linked ethnicity to territory and national character, thereby replacing earlier, more flexible notions of identity (cf. Lieberman, 1978). Finally, Gustaaf Houtman (1999) and Mary Callahan (2004) theorize a process of “myanmafication” undertaken by the military regime since 1988 to transform earlier and more varied conceptions of *myanma* identity into a unitary culture. I search for evidence of these phenomena in textbooks, their source material, the circumstances of their creation, and their authors’ stated aims. In this manner, I analyze how ideologies related to ethnic and national identity have been reproduced and transformed in the context of political systems of monarchy, imperialism, nationalism, socialism, and military dictatorship.

I undertake this project through a “case study” of one figure who has appeared in textbooks over the past century in a variety of guises: King Kyansittha (1084-1112), a venerated leader from the Pagan Dynasty (1044-1287) who didn’t make the cut when the choice was made about whose statues would grace Naypyidaw’s parade ground. The legacy of Kyansittha, like those of other historical figures, has been reinterpreted over the centuries. I will consult inscriptions and dynastic chronicles that are the primary sources of information about Kyansittha; and a selection of textbooks by British historians from the colonial era, by Burmese nationalists before and after independence, by the socialist state following the 1962 coup, and by

post-1988 military dictatorships.¹⁶ I analyze how authors of these sources assign different meanings to the events in King Kyansittha's life. I hope to show that the ways in which historians leave out or "silence" certain interpretations while amplifying others indicate shifting conceptions of *myanma* identity and consequent re-valuations of the classical past.

I examine these sources not as a historian, but rather as an anthropologist of education, in the tradition of scholars who analyze the discourse of curriculum in order to understand its ideological consequences (Apple 1979; Clark 2007; Skinner & Holland, 1996). This means I assume that education is never politically neutral, and that formal schooling tends to reproduce the ideologies of whichever class or social group is dominant at the time (Althusser, 1970/2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977). History curricula in particular offer national narratives that bestow legitimacy on contemporary power structures (Tosh, 1984).¹⁷ In post-colonial contexts, this legitimacy is often connected to a "golden age" or classical past that serves to unite the nation on the basis of ethnic or cultural identity (Chatterjee, 1994). I also assume that curricula, like all texts, are discourses with both intended and unintended social effects that can be explored by examining their grammar, vocabulary, figures of speech, and meta-narratives (Fairclough, 2003). To make this assumption is not to claim that texts affect all readers similarly or mechanically; I embrace the Bakhtinian position that meaning is created dialogically between individual readers and writers within the context of ideological frameworks they share

¹⁶ It is difficult to find complete curricula from past eras, and I cannot claim to have read all textbooks that were used. The style and content of texts varies within the political cultures that I delineate, but based on my knowledge, the examples I provide can be taken as emblematic, if not representative of these periods.

¹⁷ I want to emphasize that the politicization of history education is not particular to Burma nor to military regimes, although this phenomenon is often easier to identify under authoritarian forms of government (e.g., Adam, 2005). History curricula also serve political purposes in my own country, the US (Loewen, 1995).

(Voloshinov,¹⁸ 1929/1986). Therefore, my readings, like all discourse analyses, are necessarily incomplete and limited by my own biases (Fairclough, 2003), as well as by the fact that I approach Burmese texts as a non-native speaker. This article represents my semiotic analysis of how textbook authors are in dialogue with each other, not an empirical investigation of how their intended audience interpreted them. However, I will conclude with a brief reflection on how my ethnographic fieldwork illuminates some Burmese readers' reactions to the texts I will discuss.

Kyansittha as a universal monarch in the Myakan inscription

The earliest surviving records about Kyansittha are inscriptions and court records created during his reign. All history textbooks about him are, directly or circuitously, based on these sources. The fact that they are in themselves already packaged for posterity highlights the elusiveness of a purely factual, value-free history. For instance, this section of the Myakan inscription, which is contemporaneous with the first surviving records in Burmese language, was carved in Mon script on a pillar in Pagan:

The king of the Law, who was foretold by the Lord Buddha, who is great in love (and) compassion towards ... all beings, —to the end that all beings may obtain happiness, bliss, (and) plenty, (and) be free from famine of tillage,— (in) every place that lacks water, lacks arable land, lacks strenuous cultivation, our lord the king of the Law dams the water, digs a tank, (and thus) creates arable land (and) strenuous cultivation (Duroiselle & Blagden, 1962, p. 142).

This inscription is no neutral chronicle of Kyansittha's deeds, but a narrative crafted to commemorate him as a *dammaraza*, or "King of the Law," who upholds Buddhist principles through his good works. This presentation of Kyansittha also calls to mind the ideal of the *sek-kya-mìn* (Houtman, 1999, p. 351), or universal monarch (Tambiah, 1976), in that he acts on

¹⁸ It is disputed whether Valentin Voloshinov or his close colleague Mikhail Bakhtin authored

behalf of “all beings” rather than a specific ethnic group within a clearly defined territory. In fact, it seems that the concept of *myanma* identity was not yet extant; an antecedent of the term was used for the first time in Kyansittha’s reign to describe the style in which his palace was built (Houtman, 1999, p. 53). During the Pagan Dynasty, Burmese, Mon, Pali, Pyu, and Sanskrit languages were all used, which indicates the coexistence of multiple ethno-linguistic groups and a hybrid culture rather than a homogenously Burman polity or one in which ethnicity was a salient division (Thant Myint-U 2001, p. 84). In keeping with this ecumenical spirit, the inscription describes Kyansittha as the ruler of an inclusive and undefined community in the tradition of universal monarchs whose pretense was authority extending in all directions.

Kyansittha as a *myanma* king in the Glass Palace Chronicle

Inscriptions like this were among the sources for later chronicles that presented the “sacred biographies” (Schober, 1997, p. 4) of kings by tracing their unbroken line of succession to the Buddha. Among the most influential has been *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* (GPC),¹⁹ commissioned by King Bagyidaw in 1829, just after the British won the First Anglo-Burmese War. The GPC may or may not have been used as a textbook in some monastery schools,²⁰ but Charney (2006) argues that it was directed at educating the British even more than Konbaung subjects; he asserts that the primary purpose of the “Buddhist literati” who wrote it was to defend the Konbaung monarchy’s territorial claims and to convince encroaching colonial powers of the state’s legitimacy.

this work. Either way, it is safe to classify the ideas therein as “Bakhtinian.”

¹⁹ I consult Pe Maung Tin and G.W. Luce’s 1923 translation, credited to the Burma Research Society, rather than the original Burmese version.

The GPC's portrayal of Kyansittha illustrates these goals and provides our first example of silence: the irrigation works mentioned in the Myakan inscription are not referenced in the twenty-plus pages devoted to Kyansittha. While it is difficult to know if the GPC's authors were aware of that particular inscription,²¹ they seem more intent on illustrating Kyansittha's spiritual pedigree than his agricultural works. The vast majority of the information about him consists of anecdotes from his life that evidence his good karma: the Mahagiri *nat* (spirit) and the god Sakra intervene on his behalf; an image of a wheel appears on his forehead; a sour lime tastes sweet to him; and he is able to vault over a high fence. The GPC's authors also establish an unbroken line of succession from the Buddha to the Konbaung monarchy by refuting previous chronicles' supposition that Kyansittha was the son of a *nagà* (mythical snake) and insisting he was a human sired by King Anawrahta.

This focus on spiritual lineage is accompanied by a concern with regional identity and territorial boundaries. For instance, the GPC's authors find an excuse to list the extent of Kyansittha's kingdom (which included some of what was, by 1829, part of the British empire) by explaining that his baby grandson wailed until this information was read out loud: "Eastward the Panthe Country, also called Satteitha; south-eastward the country of the Gywans, also called Ayoja; southward to Nagapat Island in mid-ocean; southwestward the Kala country, also known as Patteikara..." (Burma Research Society, 1923, p. 106). This description contrasts with the inscription quoted earlier in that it associates certain *lu-myò*, or "kinds of people" with specific

²⁰ It is not clear whether history was taught in monastery schools as part of religious instruction, and if it was, whether the GPC or other chronicles might have been used. (See Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 92, vs. Kyan, 2005, p. 3.)

²¹ The GPC refers to various inscriptions, but it is not clear if this particular one was consulted. G. W. Luce (1966) claims that inscriptions in Old Mon would have been incomprehensible to them; this view has been difficult for me to verify or disconfirm.

places.

The *lu-myò* around which the GPC is centered, and which is bounded by the peoples and places above, is called *myanma* (or *báma* in spoken Burmese). Thant Myint-U (2001, p. 88) argues that the concept of *myanma lu-myò* was consolidated around Burmese language, Buddhism, and the political and legal institutions based in the Konbaung dynasty court at Ava during the late eighteenth century. This identity was spread by itinerant monks in what was later described as a process of “Burmanization,” in which non-*myanma* people were given incentives or pressured to adopt *myanma* customs (Houtman, 1999, p. 137). Because *lu-myò* was more flexible than 20th century conceptions of ethnicity, people could “become” *myanma* by changing their political allegiance or behavior; the category *myanma* was capable of retaining its purity while incorporating other groups (Charney, 2006). However, Charney (2006) and Thant Myint-U (2001) agree that the history of *myanma* kings presented in the GPC reflects the reduced scope of the early nineteenth century kingdom at Ava rather than the long tradition of multi-ethnic empires indicated by sources like the Myakan inscription.

The still-fluid yet solidifying nature of *myanma* identity is apparent in one of the GPC’s anecdotes about Kyansittha. When deciding on a marriage partner for his daughter Shwe-einthe, Kyansittha chooses his handicapped nephew over a prince from Patteikara, after his advisors worry that Pagan might become “naught but a Kala country” (Burma Research Society, 1923, p. 105). The term *kulà* was used in the 19th century to refer to “an ‘overseas person,’ a person from south Asia, west Asia, or Europe, and probably insular south-east Asia as well” (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 89). The fact that *kulà lu-myò* could encompass such a variety of peoples illustrates how different the 19th concept of *lu-myò* was from a 20th century concept of ethnicity or race. *Kulà*

functions more as a catch-all term for otherness, defined in opposition to *myanma*, and its valence changes depending on the context. For instance, while Kyansittha rejects a *kulà* son-in-law, he brings *kulà* slaves to the capital after conquering some *kulà* territory.

In sum, the GPC presents Kyansittha and other *myanma* kings as main characters in history, while *kulà*, *talaing*²² (Mon), *tayok* (Han Chinese), *rakhaing* (Arakanese), and *gywan*²³ leaders took supporting roles. The GPC also evidences a new consciousness of competition among these *lu-myò* that emerged in the Konbaung era (Gravers, 2007, p. 12). While the Myakan inscription presented Kyansittha as a universal monarch, Konbaung Dynasty historians recalibrated this legacy in order to serve their own goals of shoring up the court's legitimacy as the inheritor of thousands of years of good karma accrued to *myanma* people. For these historians, the value of the classical past lay in its potential to glorify the Konbaung monarchy and thereby protect it from British designs. *Myanma* emerges from this discourse as a proto-national identity that classicizes a limited subset of regional history while silencing a past in which *lu-myò* was less politically salient.

Kyansittha as a Burman imperialist in colonial textbooks

The GPC and other chronicles provided source material for the Burmese history textbooks that British authors began writing for use in their new colony's schools in the 19th century. Yet as Jacques Leider (2009) has argued, the British were not equipped to understand the cosmology or royal idiom of Konbaung monarchs' self-representation. In particular, the

²² Many Mon people now consider "Talaing" a slur originating in Burman racism against them. I leave it unaltered in this and other texts to illustrate how terms of *myanma* origin came to dominate the discourse about ethnicity.

²³ Thant Myint-U (2001, p. 89) defines this category as including groups today known as Khmer, Shan, Kachin, and Thai—a category nearly as diverse as *kulà*.

omens and divine interventions designed to convey kings' karmic credentials struck the British as merely fanciful. One colonial official characterized the chronicles as "a mixture of fabulous tales, mythical imaginings, pedigrees, dry records of fightings [...]" (Scott, 1921, p. 429).

Therefore, they saw fit to remove the supernatural interventions and astrological details that figure so prominently in the GPC and other chronicles. In this way, the GPC's Kyansittha, whose birth is accompanied by auspicious omens, who is visited by Sakra and the Mahagiri *nat*, is transformed into an empire-builder with more worldly concerns.

While the British may not have absorbed all of the GPC's intended messages, they did unwittingly reproduce some of its silences. Thant Myint-U (2001) and Charney (2006) both argue that British historians, with less access to historical sources that revealed Burma's cosmopolitan past, accepted the GPC's positioning of *myanma* people as protagonists while neglecting the political legacies of other *lu-myò*. At the same time, the colonial passion for classification led them to conceptualize groups in Burma as discrete races, each of which was assumed to have a distinct language, culture, character, and territory (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p. 243). They translated *myanma lu-myò* as a race called "Burmans," while dividing other *lu-myò* such as *gywan* into Shan, Kachin, and a dizzying array of subgroups. This re-classification enabled British historians to read a new plot into the GPC's silence about non-*myanma* power structures: racially motivated warfare dominated but never decisively won by the Burmans. This observation confirms the insight that while colonial historians did not *invent* the concern about group identity in Burmese history, their fascination with it sometimes led them to spotlight it in misleading ways (Aung-Thwin, 1998, 2005; Lieberman, 1978, 2007).

Arthur Phayre's 1883 *History of Burma*, an archetypal work used as a school text (Bagshawe, 1976), provides an example of this phenomenon. Phayre portrays Burmese history as

a struggle for supremacy among bounded, coherent, and timeless groups called Burmans, Mons, Shans, Indians, and Arakanese. Phayre devotes only two pages to Kyansittha, excising ninety percent of the material available in the GPC and other chronicles and zeroing in on Kyansittha's hesitation to marry his daughter Shwe-einthe to the *kulà* prince. In Phayre's version of the story, unlike in the GPC, the prince commits suicide but nonetheless Shwe-einthe bears his child, Alaungsitthu, who succeeds Kyansittha on the throne. Phayre (1883, p. 38) translates *kulà* as Indian, titling the section on Kyansittha "An Indian Prince Comes to Pagan," thereby prioritizing a concern with racial purity in a way the GPC had not. Other section titles, such as "Shan kings in a divided Burma," reveal how Phayre (1883, p. 58) projects "Burma" as a unit of analysis hundreds of years into the past while defining it as an essentially Burman country in which non-Burman rule would have been an anomaly. This conceptualization of Burmese history both enabled and justified the British practice of ruling the supposedly Burman-dominated "Burma proper" separately from the "Frontier Areas," which were blocked out as the territories of Shan, Kachin, Chin, and other non-Burman races (Gravers, 2007, p. 13).

G.E. Harvey's (1926) textbook *Outline of Burmese History* retains this focus on race and dramatizes the competition it supposedly engenders. Harvey uses the GPC as a source, but what the Konbaung literati were trying to sell as a triumphant tale of a *myanma* monarchy glorious enough to control vast territory, he buys as a tragedy in which Burman kings act as romantic heroes doomed in their attempt to unify a country that is too large and ethnically divided (Phillips, 2005, p. 19). Harvey (1926) embellishes the GPC's tales of Kyansittha in order to craft a psycho-realist narrative of literary merit. He describes one military campaign this way:

The news that he [Kyansittha] was present in person spread dismay among the Talaings [Mons] marching eastward to bar his road—they remembered

his exploit against the Laos...[Kyansittha's] men burned to avenge [a previous battle] and free their homes... (p. 28)

Harvey not only echoes Phayre by referring to all people from Pegu as “Talaings,” while assuming those at Pagan to be Burman, but he also dramatizes their battles as an ongoing saga, stitching together a narrative of Burman aggression that drives the plot of his book. This move changes what the GPC presents as missions to expand territory, gather religious artifacts, or shore up dynastic power into a series of racial grudge matches.

In the process of heroizing Kyansittha, Harvey justifies British rule. Although this may initially seem paradoxical, Harvey (1926) characterizes Kyansittha's goal—establishing “undivided sway” (p. 32) over the diverse groups in Burma—in such a way that it anticipates the colonial project. Harvey's (1926) classicization of Burman dynasties is linked with his celebration of colonial renaissance:

The English conquest came not to destroy but to fulfill. Racial character cannot develop so long as the government is unstable. [...] [Burma's] was seldom a true unity, for whenever it was more than nominal it was maintained by means so terrible that they destroyed the end [...] The empire came to give her [Burma] that unity, and the reform scheme to give her power to make it a true unity welling up from within, not an artificial unity imposed from without (p. 185).

In other words, the British have done with law what the kings failed to do by force, and Burma's democratic future is the colonizers' gift. In this narrative, British presence is the only reason that internecine warfare has subsided. The GPC's idiosyncratic description of *myanma* identity, transformed by Phayre into a concern with Burman racial purity, becomes in Harvey's hands a vicious competition among the indigenous races of Burma from which the British emerge as heroes. For Harvey and other British historians, the value of Burma's classical past lay in its ability to justify their own intervention.

This attempt to narrate Burmese history in order to prop up British rule was not unique to Harvey, but was actually an educational policy. The 1916 *Report of the Committee to Ascertain and Advise How the Imperial Idea May be Inculcated and Fostered in Schools and Colleges in Burma*, released in the decade after the first Burmese nationalist organizations had formed, concludes that loyalty to the crown would best be promoted by co-opting Burman patriotism. Its slogan, “Burma for the Burmans within the Empire” (Taylor, 2009, p. 119), illustrates how the British attempt to keep Burmans subordinate marginalized non-Burman groups. While in the GPC, non-*myanma* groups’ presence in *myanma* empires proves the glory of *myanma* rulers like Kyansittha, in colonial textbooks non-Burman ethnic groups are cast as spoilers of Burma’s unity. In this way, colonial authors’ reinterpretation of the classical past fostered the growth of a national identity that excluded non-Burmans.

Kyansittha as a *myanma* unifier in nationalist²⁴ textbooks

Even while Phayre’s and Harvey’s books were still in use, Burmese authors were writing textbooks for use in the parallel National School system that the British were forced to allow after students’ protests of the colonial “slave education” system in the 1920s. Although they decried colonial pedagogy, the Burmese men²⁵ who wrote this new curriculum had been weaned on the British textbooks described above. Like the British authors who reinterpreted the GPC’s contents to suit their own political worldview, nationalists selectively absorbed British messages

²⁴ In this section I discuss materials created prior to independence for use in National Schools as well in the parliamentary era (1948-1962).

²⁵ Although I do not thematize gender in this article, it is significant that all the textbooks I discuss in this article were written by men or by committees dominated by men (a trend certainly not unique to Burma. An analysis of how gender influenced readings of the classical past is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the distinct roles for men and women in nationalist

even while vociferously rejecting imperialism. Harvey's comparison of the British Empire with Pagan was either too subtle or too offensive for them to reproduce, but they did accept Burman kings as unifying heroes whose accomplishments prefigured the modern nation-state. In other words, Harvey's Kyansittha may have been a Brit dressed up in Burmese clothing, but that did not necessarily stop the young men who read his textbook from imagining themselves in a similar role, without noticing the similarities among the "unifying" projects of monarchy, imperialism, and nationalism.

Although Burmese scholars followed the British in making the dialectic between racial unity and disunity their main theme, they introduced a new category of analysis that seems to have emerged in the early 20th century: a *myanma* people (*báma* in spoken Burmese; "Burmese" in English) who included not only Burmans but all *tàin-rìn-thà lu-myò*, or indigenous peoples of Burma (Houtman 1999, 49). However, *myanma* and *báma* continued to be used to refer to Burmans alone. To add to the confusion, even in its most inclusive sense, *myanma/báma* was often linked to Buddhism and the Burmese language shared by most Burmans. For instance, the 1930s nationalist Dobáma ("We-*báma*") organization took as its slogan a series of phrases that can be translated as "*Báma* country, our country; *báma* literature, our literature; *báma* language, our language...". (Khin Yi, 1988, p. 5) Although this "Burmanization," as it was called, was primarily an attempt to combat the dominance of "foreign" English and Hindi languages (Khin Yi, 1988, 6), it also served to exclude non-Burmese speaking ethnic groups from nationalists' conception of *báma/myanma*. Moreover, the nationalist movement was so deeply connected with Buddhism that one of its earliest incarnations, the Greater Council of Burmese [*myanma*]

movements (Ikeya 2011) may have been based partly on the glorification of a male-dominated dynastic era (see Zarni, 2009).

Associations (GCBA) was mistakenly referred to as “General Council of Buddhist Associations” by several of its founding members (Houtman, 1999, p. 49). Given that many non-Burmans were Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or animist, this association of *myanma* with Buddhism functionally excluded them from the category *myanma* even while it purported to include them. Despite the fact that non-Burmans did participate in the *Dobáma* organization, the name could be interpreted in more and less inclusive senses (Khin Yi, 1988, p. x).

Despite the ambiguity surrounding the term *myanma*, nationalist history textbooks used it to refer to an overarching national identity. Û Ba Than’s 1929 *Myanmar History Textbook* is one example. First, Ba Than reclaims as sources the chronicles that the British had maligned as unreliable, by exhaustively reproducing the details of kings’ lives presented in the GPC. However, he purges many references to the supernatural, perhaps out of deference to the British ideas he had absorbed in colonial schools. Although most of Ba Than’s text faithfully duplicates the GPC, he replaces the GPC’s veneration of Kyansittha’s spiritual pedigree with more worldly praise, describing Kyansittha as a hero “with outstanding courage who brought honor to all *myanma lu-myò*”²⁶ (Ba Than, 1929/1963, p. 69). Ba Than seems to use *myanma* here in the early 20th century nationalist sense described above to include all the *tain-rin-thà*, rather than in the more limited sense that the GPC apparently used it. However, he also includes *myanma* alongside Mons, Shans, etc. among the *lu-myò* indigenous to *myanma naing-ngan* (country) (Ba Than, 1929/1963, p. 21) This double meaning of *myanma* hints at the impending re-valuation of the classical past that nationalist historians would effect over the next few decades, while indicating the ambiguous nature of the national identity they would promote.

²⁶ This and all other translations of Burmese sources are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Although Ba Than's textbook was reprinted in the 1960s, and British texts were used well into the 1950s, a new type of schoolbook began to appear with independence. *Bo Ba Shin's* 1948 *Myanmar History* is one of the earliest textbooks that makes this trend toward nationalist classicization explicit by explaining that the birth of the Union was the fifth incarnation of a sovereign *myanma* nation following the four²⁷ dynastic empires. Prime Minister ù Nu, who signed the introduction, elaborates on this point, inviting students to realize "how down the country was when it was divided and how glorious were the periods of unity during the reigns of Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, Thanlwan Mintheya, and Alaungpaya," although he adds that "construction of the Union should rely on heart, and not on force like the empires of the kings"²⁸ (Ba Shin, 1948, p. 10). In other words, Nu agrees with Harvey that these kings' example should be emulated while their methods should be foresworn. However, Nu diverges from Harvey by blaming the British for dividing the *tain-rin-thà* rather than uniting them. This concern with ethnic division was timely; by 1948, some ethnic separatists had already rebelled. An army colonel who wrote a preface to *Myanmar History* acknowledged the need for a re-presentation of the classical era that was less *myanma*-centric, noting that accounts of *myanma* kings' military exploits in chronicles had caused other *tain-rin-thà lu-myò* to "naturally fear *myanma* people and not trust them" (Ba Shin, 1948, p. v). In these ways, Ba Shin's textbooks continued Ba Than's tradition of using *myanma lu-myò* to describe both Burmans and Burmese, while using the term *myanma naing-ngan* to project the contemporary Union of Burma hundreds of years into the past.

²⁷ Today, the SPDC recognizes only three Myanmar Empires, excluding the Restored Taungoo Dynasty led by Thanlwan Mintheya.

²⁸ This and other quotations from Ba Shin were translated by Justin Smith.

This new impetus to teach history in order to promote inter-ethnic unity is apparent in Ba Shin's (1948) sections on Kyansittha. First, he claims that Kyansittha composed inscriptions and records in Mon language instead of Burmese in order to promote Mon-*myanma* friendship and to please his Mon queen by following her customs. While debate continues until today about when the Burmese script was first used, the dominant theory in the colonial era was that it did not join Mon, Pali, Pyu, and Sanskrit among literary languages used in Pagan until the end of Kyansittha's reign (Lieberman, 2007, p. 379). Thus Ba Shin's reasoning about Kyansittha's linguistic choice is not entirely convincing, and it seems designed to build inter-ethnic unity in his contemporary setting rather than to reflect historians' understanding of the past.

Furthermore, Ba Shin includes a different version of the story told in the GPC and in Phayre's textbook about Kyansittha's decision concerning to whom he should marry his daughter Shwe-einthe. Ba Shin (1948) asserts that "for the cause of *myanma naing-ngan*'s unity, and to promote friendship with the Mon," Kyansittha married his daughter to a Mon prince (p. 70). Alaungsitthu, Kyansittha's successor and the result of this union, is described as satisfying all parties with his "mixed *myanma* and Mon blood" (Ba Shin, 1948, p. 71). There is no mention of the *kulà* prince, and Ba Shin apparently draws on other chronicles and court records to arrive at this account. The fact that he chooses this version of the story, and that he interprets it as signifying Kyansittha's desire to build up inter-ethnic unity in *myanma naing-ngan*, illustrates the new value that nationalists assign to the classical past as the genesis of the post-colonial Union.

In this manner, the tradition of heroizing Kyansittha continues, but on new terms. The Myakan inscription commemorated Kyansittha's benevolence to all people; the GPC recognized the karmic reserves that allowed him super-human strength; and colonial texts commended his

ability to unite different ethnic groups while labeling his tactics too harsh. Nationalists such as Ba Shin, however, praise Kyansittha as a diplomat who unifies ethnic groups in *myanma naing-ngan* through alliances. Sometimes these re-figurations are rationalized overtly, as in U Nu's preface to Ba Shin's textbook, but often authors do not acknowledge that they are making any change at all in the way Kyansittha had been represented in the past. Regardless of whether these changes are thematized by their authors, traces of earlier conceptions of ethnic identity remain. First, the GPC's prioritization of *myanma* people is preserved, although its more limited yet also more flexible conception of *lu-myo* is overwritten by a 20th century idea of races that are bounded and essentially competitive. Thus, even while explicitly rejecting the British meta-narrative of ongoing racial war in favor of one of unity, nationalists implicitly preserve the colonial understanding of ethnicity. This disjunction points to a key question that nationalists faced when trying to place a value on the classical past. Did history show that Burma had always been unified, except for the colonial interruption? Or did it show that Burma's challenge had always been, as it was in the 1940s and 50s, the threat of disintegration into its constituent ethnic parts? These two answers coexisted uneasily in nationalist textbooks.

Kyansittha as a *myanma* socialist in the BSPP curriculum

Kyansittha underwent another transformation after the 1962 coup, when the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) nationalized schools and the Committee on Curriculum Outlines and Books for School Use took over writing textbooks. This transition from textbooks written by private scholars to those written by a government-controlled committee marked a new era in which pedagogy was even more closely linked to political goals. As the military regime had promised shortly after the coup, they “resort[ed] to education, literature, fine arts, theatre and

cinema, etc., to bring into vogue the concept that to serve others' interests is to serve one's own" (RC, 1962, section 16). The conception of history also changed; according to the 1967 syllabi for primary and middle schools, it is "not the chronological accounts of rulers as has been accepted generation after generation. It is rather a study of the human or the events of the working people" (quoted in Zar Ni, 1998, p. 136). Inter-ethnic unity was still a political concern insofar as Shan leaders' proposal of federalism and the consequent threat of disintegration of the Union had been the justification for the coup. However, the rhetoric of inter-ethnic unity was somewhat overshadowed by the idealized unity of the workers and the peasants.

In this context, kings like Kyansittha were in an ambiguous category. On one hand, they provided examples of military prowess, which was aligned with the new leaders' ties to the army; Kyansittha was one of four "warrior heroes" whose name graced the teams into which all students were organized (Zar Ni, 1998, p. 139). However, the dynastic era was tainted by the inequalities of the "feudalist" system, and as noted above, the BSPP had announced it wanted to redefine history to include non-elite classes. As a result, the golden pagodas, jeweled palaces, and many slaves mentioned in earlier histories of Kyansittha are replaced by accounts of his work on behalf of the common people. For instance, the 1978 *5th Standard History* textbook explains that he "expanded the means of production including farmland, irrigation canals, wells, and reservoirs" (Government of the Socialist Union of Burma [GSUB], 1978, p. 57).

Kyansittha's agricultural works, memorialized in the Myakan inscription but left out of subsequent histories, finally re-enter the narrative as evidence of his socialist credentials. Yet unlike the Myakan inscription, the BSPP textbook asserts that the credit for Kyansittha's good deeds accrues not only to him and to the Buddha, but also to the common people. For instance, his military victories are partly ascribed to the "bravery and perseverance" of his soldiers, who

are acknowledged in textbooks for the first time (GSUB, 1979, p. 25).

In another nod to contemporary politics that fulfills the syllabus's goal to "drive home the importance of unity and mutual respect among Burma's indigenous national races" (quoted in Zar Ni, 1998, p. 136), Kyansittha reaches out to non-*myanma* people. In BSPP textbooks, the term *myanma lu-myò* remains both an ethnic group that strives for unity with other ethnic groups, and a national group that always-already includes them. For instance, while continuing to use *myanma lu-myò* to refer to Burmese people as a whole, the BSPP also describes them as distinct from other ethnic groups:

Valuing and respecting the Mons' strong traditions and culture, Kyansittha successfully built Mon-*myanma* unity. Kyansittha did not encourage the Mon to feel inferior to the *myanma*. He wanted the *myanma* and Mon to relate as equals. He wanted the Mon to get benefits (GSUB, 1978, p. 58).

The evidence for these claims is similar to that provided in Ba Shin's text—Kyansittha made inscriptions in Mon language and married a Mon princess. Yet this BSPP textbook goes even further in ascribing contemporary motives to Kyansittha by asserting that his actions sprung from his respect for Mon culture, not only from his desire to create an alliance with them, as Ba Shin had claimed.

In this way, both the valuation of the classical past as a time of inter-ethnic unity and the ambiguity about the double meaning of *myanma lu-myò* carries over from nationalist texts into the BSPP curriculum. Yet the BSPP assigns new meaning to the classical era as a time of the common people's economic and military triumphs. In the Myakan inscription, Kyansittha had acted on behalf of all beings and the Buddha; in the GPC he acted on behalf of *myanma lu-myò* and the Buddha; in nationalist textbooks he acted on behalf of *myanma naing-ngan*. In the BSPP curriculum, in contrast, Kyansittha acts on behalf of the people and with the people's aid.

Kyansittha as a Myanmar patriot in SPDC textbooks

After the 1988 coup ended both the socialist era and hopes of imminent democratization, the new military regime acted to resolve the ambiguity surrounding *myanma lu-myò* while revaluing the classical era in a subtle yet profound manner. Houtman (1999) describes this project as “myanmafication,” the creation of a unitary *myanma* identity, which parallels processes of Burmanization carried out in earlier eras. Callahan (2004) clarifies that myanmafication entails a simultaneous homogenization and differentiation of ethnic identity, in which minorities are “exoticized and infantilized” (p. 110) and difference is confined to superficial factors such as traditional costumes and dancing styles. Myanmafication is pursued by restricting the expression of minority languages and cultures (Callahan, 2004), a process that some ethnic minority activists connect to the military strategy of rape and forced marriage designed to genetically integrate the nation (Women’s League of Chinland, 2007).

The rhetorical aspect of myanmafication was heralded by the “Adaptation of Expressions” law of 1989, which altered the name of the country in non-Burmese languages from “Burma” to “Myanmar,” ostensibly in order to correct the misapprehension of colonists who had labeled the country by its spoken name rather than by the more formal term by which it had been known since the dynastic era—*myanma naing-ngan*. The law also claimed that *báma*—what the British had rendered as “Burma”—was not and had never been a nation, but was instead one of the ethnic groups that made up *myanma lu-myò* (previous usages of *myanma lu-myò* to describe the majority ethnic group went unexplained). These changes in terminology were explicitly linked in state media to a restoration of the glory of the dynastic era (Houtman, 1999, p. 48). This re-prioritization of the classical past involved renewed focus on unifying kings, and

on “submission to royalty and adherence to an unchanging tradition” (Douglas, 2005, p. 230) in public spectacles. At the same time, periods of “disunity” (read: absence of Burman dominance) were de-classicized.

In history textbooks, the result of this recalibration has been to focus on the three “Myanmar Empires” (*myanma naing-ngan-dàw-gyì*) led by Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya, who were most successful in expanding territory and tributary relations. A brief textbook is devoted to each of these empires in the 5th, 6th, and 7th Standards respectively. On the other hand, information about periods in which Shan, Mon, or Arakanese kingdoms were powerful has been reduced or eliminated (Metro and Smith, forthcoming). These changes have been facilitated by the fact that since 1988 the Department of Basic Education, which oversees the Textbook Committee, has been under the direct supervision of military leaders, who have frequently and without explanation removed lessons they no longer deem appropriate and ordered that existing lessons should not be taught (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2008). As Callahan (2004) notes, non-Burman ethnic groups have an increased presence in textbooks since 1988, but only in such a way that reinforces their subordination to Burmans. Although current textbooks describe the curricular mission as the promotion of values including “union spirit” and “patriotism” (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2008, forward), these values find expression in histories that reify the primacy of the people now called *báma lu-myò*. For instance, in the dynastic era, non-Burmans are portrayed as mostly passive. While Burmans annex their territory, build unity with them and occasionally raise them to high positions, non-Burmans themselves take little initiative (Metro, 2008).²⁹ Thus the warnings against over-glorification of Burman kings that prefaced Ba Than’s 1948 textbook go unheeded in current schoolbooks that replace

the GPC's abundant details with a simpler storyline of progressive Burman domination described as the unification of *myanma lu-myo*.

In this context, Kyansittha's role is both reduced and reified. There are brief passages about him in the 3rd and 5th standard textbooks, but they are largely redundant. The GPC's twenty pages, reduced to ten pages by Ba Shin in 1948, stands at two pages in current textbooks. Some of the information from the BSPP textbook is repeated, although instead of building up Mon-*myanma* unity, Kyansittha now strengthens Mon-*báma* unity, in accordance with the Adaptation of Expressions law. His actions are summed up this way:

Because he struggled to build up unity among the national races, promote agriculture, and propagate Buddhist teachings, Kyansittha continued the peace and development of the first Myanmar Empire that Anawrahta had built (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 33).

This trinity of activities—national unification, economic development, and religious patronage—is carried out by all kings who are heroized in current textbooks, especially the founders of the Three Myanmar Empires. These three missions also align with the political, economic, and social goals that the SPDC currently requires to be printed in all publications, including “national reconsolidation,” “development of agriculture as the base and all-round development,” and “uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation.” In any edition of the state newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar* (e.g., 1/27/2011), one can find the ruling generals carrying out exactly such activities: promoting “union spirit,” consulting about economic development projects, and making donations to Buddhist causes. The parallels between the kings and the SPDC is reinforced by the similar vocabulary and discursive patterns that are used to describe their activities (Metro and Smith, forthcoming). This alignment points toward a revaluation of the

²⁹ See Chapter Two, pp. 69-70, for more details on this discourse.

classical past as a proto-dictatorship in which the firm yet benevolent rule of kings like Kyansittha prevents disintegration of the unity of *myanma lu-myò*, which is both always-already accomplished and perpetually threatened.

The transformation of Kyansittha and *myanma* identity

Reviewing the coverage of Kyansittha from the Myakan inscription to SPDC textbooks, what I described earlier as “exponential silences” become apparent. The GPC’s innovation of a *myanma* country has been raised to a power so that it appears eternal. Colonists’ narrative of racial warfare has been canceled out by nationalists who inscribed inter-ethnic unity in its place, but both terms have a common denominator of essentialized ethnic identity. The current regime has crossed out nationalists’ and socialists’ use of *myanma* and replaced it with *báma*, while insisting that all the *tain-rìn-thà* add up to one *myanma lu-myò*. These processes of silencing and exponentialization are illustrated by Kyansittha’s sequential appearances as a universal monarch, a king, an imperialist, a unifier, a socialist, and a patriot, each of which could be qualified with a slightly different meaning of the term *myanma*. Kyansittha’s actions in each of these roles illustrate the changing value of the classical past, which offered the Konbaung monarchy legitimacy, enabled the British colonists to justify their rule, provided nationalists with a precursor for the Union, and signified to socialists a nascent people’s republic. The fact that the current regime both models the Union of Myanmar on the Three Myanmar Empires and casts ancient kings in their own image is just the latest revaluation of the classical era.

What is striking about all of these changes is that textbook authors don’t need to include outright lies in order to serve their political goals, they only need to carefully select and interpret the information they choose. In this way, Kyansittha’s shape-shifting appearances illustrate the

changing priorities of people with the power to write, distribute, and mandate schoolbooks. However, the unconscious continuities and accidental misunderstandings that persist in their accounts undermine any mechanistic alignment of political goals with ideological outcomes. Moreover, crossing out so much information requires the leftover points to bear exponentially more semiotic weight. While *myanma* kings loom ever larger in state discourse and in statuary, their significance has been boiled down to a trinity of factors that any child could memorize.³⁰ As history textbooks are shortened and more becomes unsayable, what is left behind must speak more clearly and forcefully.

Beyond *myanma* identity?: an ethnographic coda

The evidence I have presented shows that in re-valuing the classical past, the SPDC continues a tradition stretching back two centuries. It does so with renewed vigor and innovative tactics, but it seems no closer making the components of *myanma lu-myò* add up to an inclusive national identity. In 2008 I spoke to several of the men on Burma's Historical Commission who have contributed to writing textbooks in the past few decades. When I asked about ethnic diversity, one told me vehemently that "there is only one *myanma* culture" and that the differences among the *tain-rin-thà* were merely superficial (personal communication, 6/10/2008). In the official equation of national identity, "*myanma* = *báma* + non-*báma* *tain-rin-thà*." However, several times during our conversation this historian used *myanma lu-myò* to refer to the majority ethnic group rather than the *tain-rin-thà* as a whole; this kind of slip-up persists in textbooks as well (Metro and Smith, forthcoming). If *myanma* = *báma*, then substituting this

³⁰ Rote memorization of history textbooks is the main teaching method used in government schools. This imperative to memorize textbooks may be related to myanmafication, in that there

value back into the official equation yields *myanma* = *myanma* + non-*báma tain-rin-thà*, or *báma* = *báma* + non-*báma tain-rin-thà*. Either way, the equation can only be balanced if the “non-*báma tain-rin-thà*” has an exponent of zero that cancels their value entirely.

This specious nullification of non-Burman groups in the equation of national identity is a new formulation of a long-standing trend. It can be traced back to the Konbaung era, when the Buddhist literati who wrote the GPC were attempting to conceptualize the kind of country that the British would leave intact, and it is also visible in the anti-colonial nationalist movement’s conception of *Dobáma* (We-*báma*). As Thant Myint-U (2001) argues, “the strength and political dominance of a Burmese/Myanma identity based on older Ava-based memories has never allowed the development of a newer identity which would incorporate the divers peoples inhabiting the modern state” (p. 254). This observation raises the question of whether the pre-Konbaung conception of a universalist and ecumenical polity (as evidenced in the Myakan inscription) could be the basis for a contemporary national identity. If so, Kyansittha might be reconstituted as a hero yet again. Yet the re-valuation of the classical past as a time of ethnic fluidity and collaboration is elusive.

As evidence for the difficulties involved in such a re-valuation, I offer an experience from my ethnographic fieldwork on Burmese history curricula and ethnic conflict. In October of 2009, I met in a Thai border town with a multi-ethnic group of Burmese teachers including Burman, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Shan, and Arakanese participants to discuss the creation of a reconciliatory history textbook including perspectives of diverse groups within Burma. To start out, we examined not only the SPDC’s textbooks, but also those created by armed struggle groups such as the Karen National Union. It became clear that non-Burman participants assigned

are reports (Shan Herald Agency for News, 2002) that visiting state officials have required ethnic

a very different value to the classical past than the SPDC did. Shan, Mon, and Arakanese participants classicized empires built by their own ancestors, and the history books they trusted portrayed Burman kings as peripheral competitors rather than main heroes. Karen and Karenni participants associated the dynastic era with enslavement to more powerful groups, and the Karen Education Department's (2003) textbook portrays kings such as Kyansittha as brutal feudalists who oppressed the Karen people for centuries. The Christians and Muslims among the group tended to view the *dammaraza*'s pretensions of universal benevolence with skepticism, given the connection they perceived between Burmanization and Buddhist chauvinism. These counter-narratives certainly contain their own silences, but they introduce new challenges in balancing the equation of national identity. The contrast among these perspectives was so stark that participants could not even agree upon a name for this hypothetical inclusive textbook. Some non-Burmans rejected any title that included the words *myanma* or *báma*, while some Burmans challenged them to find another word that could be used to refer to an inclusive national identity.³¹

There is no simple solution to this dilemma. It seemed to me then that the debate could not move forward without an acknowledgment that the meanings of *myanma* and *báma* have shifted over time, and that even today they carry different associations for different people. I believe the material I have presented here illustrates this point, and I hope that my exploration of Kyansittha's appearances in textbooks helps to explaining why these multiple meanings persist. Although erasing inherited equations of national identity is impossible, unearthing the (mis)calculations of their architects may be productive.

minority students to recite controversial sections of history textbooks or face punishment.

³¹ We ultimately addressed these challenges by agreeing to move toward a primary source-based curriculum; I describe this idea in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO

PRIMARY SOURCES, MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES, AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: POST-CONFLICT HISTORY CURRICULUM REVISION AS AN “INTERGROUP ENCOUNTER” PROMOTING INTER-ETHNIC RECONCILIATION AMONG BURMESE MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THAILAND³²

It is widely recognized that extremist history curricula can fuel hatred and legitimize violence in situations of ethnic³³ conflict (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Bar-Tal, 2003; Davies, 2004). This recognition has nurtured the hope that post-conflict curriculum revision may support peace (Cole 2007; Johnson and Stewart, 2007; World Bank, 2005), alongside other measures (such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions) designed to help societies cope with past violence by establishing an accurate historical record. Yet such revisions may produce curricula that leave ethnocentric discourses intact (Naveh, 2006), and the revision process itself may exacerbate tensions among stakeholders (Pingel, 2008). As researchers in post-genocide Rwanda explain, “the development of a history curriculum in a post-conflict country reflects in microcosm the forces that drove the country’s conflict” (Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy & Longman, 2008, p. 684). As a result, their project, along with others (Brown, 2006; Pingel, 2008) have failed to produce widely-accepted reconciliatory curricula. Thus, policymakers face a catch-22: whether they continue to use existing curricula or attempt to develop new materials, they risk worsening

³² I would like to thank the Burmese educational stakeholders who participated in this research, and the organizations I collaborated with, including ZOA Refugee Care-Thailand, National Health and Education Committee of Burma, Migrant Curriculum Team, Karenni Education Department, Social Action for Women School, Curriculum Project, and Drum Publications.

³³ I understand ethnicity as a designation for select aspects of cultural practice that are seen as differentiating group identity (Barth, 1994). Ethnicity either can stand in for or mask socioeconomic, linguistic, religious, or other differences, and may vary in its salience from one historical period to the next. Ethnic conflicts are those in which (as in Burma) parties to conflict view ethnic difference as the primary cause, although in actuality other factors may contribute (Ellis, 2006; McGlynn, Zembylas, Bekerman & Gallagher, 2009).

relations among parties to conflict. This dilemma results from what Elizabeth Cole (2007, p. 18) calls a “chicken and egg” problem: which comes first, reconciliation or reconciliatory curricula?

I approach this predicament by applying Gordon Allport’s (1954) “contact theory,” which suggests that under certain conditions, parties to conflict may improve their relationships by spending time together. The literature on “intergroup encounters” (IGEs) (Bekerman, 2007; Schulz, 2008) has focused on delineating those conditions. I conceptualize both history classrooms and curriculum revision efforts as IGEs with the potential to foment reconciliation. This conceptualization allows me to widen the usual research focus on the new materials generated by revision to include the procedures by which they are developed, thereby clarifying the ways in which post-conflict history curriculum development might lead to reconciliation in process *and* product.

I investigated this issue in the context of Burma’s 60-year-long ethnic conflict and civil war, conducting research in Burmese³⁴ migrant communities in Thailand. I used participant observation, survey research, and critical discourse analysis to gather data during curriculum revision workshops with Burmese educational stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and community leaders) from diverse backgrounds. I found that a secondary-level curriculum constructed around primary source documents juxtaposed to illustrate multiple perspectives about the past has the potential to catalyze reconciliation in the classroom. I also found that history curriculum revision was most likely to lead to reconciliation among participants when a) individuals from outside the “party line” mainstream of all sides are included; b) there are structures in place to ensure the participation of people of lower status; c) participants analyze

³⁴ I use “Burmese” to describe people from all ethnic groups with origins in Burma, and I use “Burman” to refer to the majority ethnic group, as distinct from minorities such as Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Arakanese, Shan, Chin, and Mon. Burma is also called Myanmar.

the discourse of school textbooks written by opposing sides in the conflict alongside primary source documents; d) participants prioritize reconciliation and critical thinking as purposes of teaching history; and e) parties outside the conflict fund and support, rather than directly control these efforts.

I begin with an explanation of the theoretical framework I use to conceptualize history classrooms and curriculum revision as IGEs. A description of the educational context of Burmese migrants in Thailand follows. I describe my methodologies and design, then explain what occurred in the three phases of my research. Finally, I present my findings about primary source-based curricula and about the conditions for reconciliation during history curriculum revision.

History classrooms and curriculum revision as IGEs

In positing history classrooms and curriculum revision as IGEs, I employ an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together insights from curriculum studies, peace and conflict studies, social psychology, cultural theory, and linguistics. I start with the assumption that all curricula contain ideological messages that are lodged not only in overt content, but also in discourse, the non-explicit dimension of language (Apple, 1979). Like all texts, curricula “have social, political, cognitive, moral and material consequences” (Fairclough 2003, p. 14). In the case of history curricula, these consequences often include the formation of students’ identities (Wertsch, 2000). Especially in conflict-affected environments, students may learn to draw us/them boundaries (Seixas, 2000) and to dehumanize “enemies” (Bar-Tal, 2003). This is possible because our identities are not fixed or given, but are rather called into being through our interactions with various media (Silverman, 1983; Voloshinov, 1929/1986); texts

can shape readers' identities by offering them an emotional sense of belonging (Ahmed, 2004). History curricula can thus legitimize ethnic conflict by providing students with a narrative that correlates identity categories with moral worth.

This explanation of how history curricula foment inter-ethnic animosity aligns with a theory of conflict in which "war stems from linearity, from simplistic purities" (Davies 2004, p. 15). These insights suggest that complicating us/them categories and allowing multiple perspectives about history to coexist could disrupt the discourses that legitimize violence. The type of grass-roots reconciliation that could result from this process does not entail consensus about the past, but appears instead as an acknowledgment of others' suffering and validation of their histories, leading to what Andrew Schaap (in Cole 2007, p. 5) calls "a disclosure of a world in common from diverse and possibly irreconcilable perspectives." Grassroots reconciliation can run parallel to, prior to, or follow high-level treaties that officially end hostilities, but political peace is unlikely to last unless ordinary people de-essentialize identity and de-legitimize inter-group violence (Lederach, 2005).

This kind of reconciliation is similar to that which IGE specialists try to create, and their work provides insight into how to maximize the potential for reconciliation that exists when parties to conflict discuss history. IGE specialists find that long-term projects that involve parties to conflict in working together on equal footing to achieve social change with institutional support in a context where their identities are historicized rather than essentialized are most likely to catalyze reconciliation (Bekerman, 2007; Schulz, 2008). While IGEs may include discussions of history, I am not aware of any cases in which history classrooms or curriculum revision projects were conceptualized as IGEs. However, both could be designed to meet the conditions above. Precisely because history is so controversial, discussions about it offer fertile

ground for IGEs; as Michael Schulz (2008, p. 42) explains, “it is only by approaching and directly confronting... [contested histories] that a real chance of forming a more sustainable reconciliation emerges.” If parties to conflict engage with people from the “other side” whose stories disrupt their simplistic historical narratives, their own identities may become unsettled, their firm grip on moral certainty may be loosened, and coexistence may begin to seem more feasible.

Of course, this is a best-case scenario, and multiple factors conspire against it, including the entrenched hierarchies that fomented—and are perpetuated by—the conflict. There is also a tension between two desirable aims: accurately representing past violence, and avoiding overwhelming students with histories of violence to the extent that divisions are perpetuated. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework above has implications for post-conflict history curriculum revision. First, existing curricula cannot be taken at face value; their discursive, affective impact must be assessed. While the World Bank (2005, p. 35) recommends “purging” textbooks of offensive content immediately in post-conflict settings, such revisions are not a simple matter of deleting obvious inaccuracies and ethnic slurs. Altering the ideological valence of curricula requires a careful examination of language (Wenden, 2003). This type of examination, or “discourse analysis,” is often done by scholars to show how textbooks legitimize ethnocentrism (Clark, 2007; Dorschner & Sherlock, 2007), but it is *not* usually done by educational stakeholders revising curricula. Therefore, policymakers trying to expunge material that leads to inter-ethnic aggression may achieve only partial success (Davies, 2004; Naveh, 2006). Even when groups in conflict collaborate on educational materials, they may reproduce oppositional viewpoints that reinforce prejudices (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006). If stakeholders do not understand how the discourses of existing curricula perpetuate hatred, producing new

materials that catalyze reconciliation will be difficult. Thus, discourse analysis of curricula produced by parties to conflict is a starting point for revision.

The theoretical framework above also suggests that IGE best practices may address the concern that discussing history can re-ignite conflicts among stakeholders and derail projects (e.g, Freedman et al., 2008). There is evidence that reconciliation can result when educational stakeholders from different sides of a conflict revise history curricula together (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006), yet in order for such results to be more than a welcome side effect, conditions known to produce successful IGEs should be consciously created, and additional factors specific to history curriculum revision should be analyzed. In the next section I turn to the context in which I applied these ideas.

The education of Burmese migrants in Thailand: Whose history?

Burma is an ethnically diverse country of 55 million people located in Southeast Asia. Since British decolonization in 1948, a central government dominated by ethnic majority Burmans has been fighting minority groups seeking greater autonomy. The hostilities fit Bar-Tal's (2003) designation of an "intractable" conflict, in which civilians and soldiers are embroiled in a cycle of violence perpetuated by their economic, political, and social survival strategies. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC),³⁵ a military junta that continues the tradition of authoritarian rule in Burma since 1962, is charged with violating human rights, especially of ethnic minorities (Shan Human Rights Federation & Shan Women's Action

³⁵ In November 2010 the SPDC held multi-party elections widely condemned from outside Burma as flawed (UN News Service, 2010), which resulted in the SPDC-affiliated party winning a majority of seats in Parliament. As I concluded writing this dissertation in March 2011, the SPDC was in the process of transferring power to the civilian administration that was elected. As

Network, 2002; Amnesty International, 2009). Since the mid-1980s, these circumstances and the poverty they have produced have led millions of Burmese to cross the border into Thailand to live as migrant workers (on whom I focus here), refugees, or exiles.

The three million Burmese migrants estimated to be residing in Thailand include about 550,000 school-age children, the majority of whom are stateless (Lawi Weng, 2009). Although it became legal for stateless children to attend Thai state schools in 2005, in practice there are logistical, financial, and linguistic obstacles to their attendance (Thornton, 2006). Thus, a patchwork of non-accredited, Burmese-run, mostly internationally-funded “migrant schools” have sprung up to serve them. These extra-legal schools serve about 12,000 children of Burmese migrant workers in the border province of Tak; Thai authorities have vacillated between tacit acceptance and occasional crackdowns, and they now seek greater control over these schools (Lawi Weng, 2009). Until recently, school leaders have been free to select curriculum; most use textbooks produced by the SPDC or ethno-nationalist groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU). However, in the past few years the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) has partnered with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including World Education to develop a standardized curriculum as a way to address concerns that unregulated curricula may represent a risk to Thai national security (Office of the Education Council, 2008).

History curricula have been especially controversial.³⁶ Many ethnic minorities perceive the SPDC’s history textbooks as Burman-centric, while those produced by ethno-nationalist groups are accused of demonizing Burmans. While Burmese educators in Thailand acknowledge that extremist history curricula can worsen ethnic conflict and agree that reconciliatory

this process is as yet incomplete, I continue to use the terms “SPDC” and “military regime” in this dissertation.

³⁶ Information in these paragraphs from Metro (2006).

approaches should be pursued, inter-ethnic collaboration has not yet yielded materials appropriate for the ethnically mixed classrooms common in migrant schools. Some ethnic minority organizations that run schools aspire to teach children the history of their “own” ethnic group as opposed to the history of Burma as a whole, and they are keen to educate children about Burman oppression. In combination with direct or vicarious experiences of the SPDC army’s violence, this approach could result in children hating or fearing all Burmans. Burman-dominated schools, on the other hand, continue to use SPDC textbooks, perhaps with the most controversial bits excised, and some Burmans maintain that curricular reform must await political change in Burma. Thus, Burmese migrant children currently learn vastly divergent accounts of history. The disjunction between these curricula is magnified because history is usually taught through rote memorization, with little chance for students to compare different accounts. Thus a revision of methods as well as materials would be necessary to address inter-ethnic animosity.

For all of these reasons, Burmese stakeholders regard revising history curricula as a difficult task. Some believe it is better to avoid discussions of history curricula and stick with the status quo, but others feel that reforms are a key step in reconciliation. The challenge for those who seek reform is not only to produce reconciliatory curricula, but also to facilitate an inclusive process of revision in which disagreements about history do not erupt into rancor. In my research, I worked with several organizations that had taken on this challenge

Research methods

I chose Burmese migrants as a case study because although ethnic conflict in Burma is intractable, the situation in Thailand is relatively stable and Burmese of different ethnicities have

become accustomed to working together during years of exile (Metro, 2006). Thus I could avoid the disruptions that occurred in other curriculum revision projects—restrictive taboos around discussions of ethnicity (Freedman et al., 2008) and outbreaks of violence (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006). Another consideration in choosing this case study was that my proficiency in Burmese language and the network of connections I had built up in migrant communities over the past decade enabled me to work effectively in this setting.

I conducted my research within a collaborative paradigm (Lipka, Mohatt, & Ciulistet Group, 1998), working with the Burmese stakeholders I was “studying” to formulate questions, make decisions about the project, and draw conclusions (although not to write them up). I chose this paradigm because when I started the research I had already been working with Burmese educators on history curriculum issues for years, and I planned to continue doing so in the future. Therefore, positioning myself as a “neutral observer” would not have been feasible. There are certainly ethical, procedural, and representational difficulties involved in collaborative approaches (Lipka et al., 1998), in addition to the drawback that some scholars may question their validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Indeed, my collaborations with Burmese stakeholders were not seamless; they involved negotiation of goals and logistics (see my discussion on p. 86).

However, this collaborative approach also offered many benefits. First, my close social and professional relationships with stakeholders allowed me to access data that a traditional researcher may not have been able to (such as frank assessments of interpersonal dynamics). Moreover, the give-and-take involved in collaboration led me toward ideas I never would have generated on my own, which reflected my colleagues’ deep understanding of their own situations. Finally, I had the opportunity not just to describe conditions leading to reconciliation, but also to try to create them. In this respect I identify with other scholars who participate in

projects they study as part of a commitment to social change (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Freedman et al., 2008). While some readers may suspect that my desire to foment reconciliation led me to see it where it did not exist, it is equally true that my accountability to my collaborators motivated me both to be transparent about the difficulties we encountered and to critically analyze our work in order to improve the process for the future.

I used a mixed methods approach with three elements, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), participant observation, and survey research. CDA is a method for determining how texts reproduce social hierarchies and ideologies through their structure, grammar, vocabulary, metaphors, and meta-narratives (Fairclough, 2003). I chose this method because Fairclough (2003) offers guidelines for systematic analysis of phenomena such as interdiscursivity (texts' relation to each other) and logics of equivalence and difference, which are crucial for understanding the presentation of ethnic identity. I used CDA to understand how Burmese history textbooks fuel inter-ethnic animosity, and I adapted this process into a straightforward worksheet so that groups of teachers could conduct similar examinations. For instance, instead of defining interdiscursivity, I asked participants whose voices were included or excluded from texts. As Fairclough (2003, p. 14) points out, CDA is always selective, partial, and dependent on the priorities of the analyst. Therefore, my aim was not to produce a definitive analysis, but to use CDA to provoke reflection as part of a curriculum revision process.

I used ethnography (Emerson, 2001) to assess reconciliation among stakeholders, because reconciliation is a dynamic, long-term process that is difficult to capture quantitatively (Cole 2007, p. 10). My data included fieldnotes on interactions among educational stakeholders, as well as audio-recordings of curriculum revision workshops. I analyzed this data first by "open coding," writing memos about emerging themes, and then by "focused coding," pursuing key

themes in detail (Emerson, Shaw, & Fretz, 1995). In this way I assessed the conditions under which participants expressed understanding of and sympathy for the perspectives of other groups. I also used “member checks” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) to evaluate the face validity of my conclusions by discussing them with participants; for instance, based on participants’ feedback, I added the fifth factor leading toward reconciliatory curriculum revision processes (that outsiders should not directly control the revision process). Like most ethnographic researchers (Emerson, 2001), I assume that my own positionality (including my status as a white, female, 31-year-old US Ph.D. candidate) affected both the data I gathered and the way I interpreted it; other observers could have reached different but equally valid conclusions (see my discussion on p. 87).

In one workshop, I used a survey with both closed- and open-ended portions (Fowler, 2009) to support my ethnographic observations about the level of reconciliation participants experienced. I worked with Burmese colleagues to generate statements about reconciliation incorporating the Burmese phrases I’d heard participants use over the course of my ethnographic work. For the closed-ended portion, I used an agree-disagree format, which is most useful for assessing respondents’ reactions to complex statements (Fowler, 2009). I also sought open-ended responses to these statements so participants could express themselves in their own words. The surveys allowed respondents to give critical feedback that they might have been hesitant to share with me directly. I tabulated the responses to each statement (Figure 1), and I also analyzed probabilities of responses based on ethnicity, gender, and age categories.

Triangulating these methods allowed me to reinforce both my insights about the texts and about reconciliation. Fairclough (2003) notes that CDA is most useful when conducted in tandem with ethnographic research, in order to understand the culture in which texts are produced and

consumed. By using ethnographic observations to design my survey (Axinn, Fricke & Thornton, 1991), I improved its reliability, and the survey data provided additional evidence for the conclusions I drew through participant observation (Atkinson, 1996). Although quantitative measures such as surveys are better suited to testing social theories than forming them (Creswell, 1994), using them to support my qualitative data was helpful.

Research design

I modeled my tri-phasic design on similar history curriculum revision projects. Like Freedman et al. (2008), I had one phase for materials development and another for testing and evaluation. However, I added a prior phase in which I analyzed existing textbooks and adapted my method of analysis for use with Burmese stakeholders in order to avoid the difficulties Freedman et al. (2008) encountered dealing with unfamiliar historical discourses and translating their ideas for participants. Like Bar-On and Adwan (2006), I designed workshops where stakeholders created new texts. However, I adjusted these workshops mid-project to address a problem they also encountered—the fact that the new texts reproduced previous discourses.

In phase one, while still in the US, I conducted CDA on lessons from a dozen current Burmese history textbooks produced both by the SPDC and by ethno-nationalist groups. I also examined textbooks from the colonial era to the present in order to understand how discourses about ethnicity had evolved.³⁷ This preparation helped me understand the context for curriculum revision.

In phase two, I conducted five months of ethnographic fieldwork in Burmese communities in Thailand in 2009, during which I spent time informally with educational

³⁷ For details, see Chapter One.

stakeholders in their homes and workplaces as well as during workshops. I stayed mostly in Mae Sot, a border town of about 120,000 populated predominantly by Burmese. There, I partnered with local and international educational organizations (see first footnote) to offer six (one- to five-day) workshops for groups of twelve to thirty-five participants. As most workshops were toward the lower end of this size spectrum, I could build rapport with most participants and observe their interactions closely, which helped me gather ethnographic data. I had initially hoped to hold a longer workshop, as IGEs specialists (Bekerman, 2007) recommend. Although this proved unfeasible given participants' schedules, overlap among participants in different workshops, as well as the sustained contact I had with them over the course of my fieldwork, allowed me to observe their relationships over time.

The benefits of holding a series of workshops as opposed to working with one or two groups on a longterm basis included the larger sample size and the chance to experience the dynamics of groups with different demographics. In order to analyze the impact of ethnicity, age, and gender³⁸ on reconciliation, I sought out an ethnically diverse, gender-balanced, intergenerational group of participants. A total of 141 educational stakeholders participated in this first set of workshops. They were gender balanced, approximately one-third Burman, one-third Karen, and one-third from another group (including Karenni, Mon, Shan, Chin, Arakanese, and Muslim) or from a mixed ethnic background. About a quarter were between the ages of 18 and 29, a third were 30-39, a third were 40-49, and the remainder were over 50.³⁹

³⁸ Of the factors other IGE scholars (Bekerman, 2007; Schulz, 2008) analyze, these were the ones most salient in social hierarchies in my fieldsite. Others, such as sexual orientation and class, would have been interesting to analyze, but did not lend themselves to self-identification or observation. Political affiliation is also significant, but I do not analyze it due to its partial overlap with ethnicity.

³⁹ These figures are approximate, as I did not ask participants to report their ages in all workshops; in some cases, I estimated their ages.

Participants were recruited by the organizations with which I partnered. Participation was voluntary, yet some may have felt pressure to attend because community leaders had invited them. Thus, my sample contained both those who seemed genuinely interested in reconciliatory curricula, and those who expressed skepticism; this mixture meant that participants as a whole were neither overly predisposed toward reconciliation, nor closed off to the possibility. Thus the objection that participants were more likely to express reconciliation because they had self-selected for participation does not seem to invalidate findings.

However, in most workshops, participants were either previously acquainted or shared a common identity (e.g., schoolteachers). In some cases, they had been working closely already. The trust created by those commonalities may have facilitated reconciliation. Most workshops contained participants from a variety of ethnic groups, but two groups were purportedly mono-ethnic.⁴⁰ While these workshops could not technically be called IGEs, they did give me a chance to compare inter- and intra-ethnic dynamics. I found that the mono-ethnic groups were more forthcoming in discussing history, but that they were also more likely to unselfconsciously use terms such as “us” and “them” instead of exploring the experiences of other groups in ways that led toward reconciliation.

These workshops had two parts. First, I guided participants in collaborative CDA to examine several lessons on one topic from textbooks created by different sides in the conflict in order to help them discover the discursive patterns that led to inter-ethnic animosity. Then I asked them to try to create texts that combined the perspectives of those texts in order to promote reconciliation instead. During these workshops, I used ethnographic methods to observe the

⁴⁰ Although I do not elaborate on intra-ethnic divisions here, categories such as “Karen” and “Burman” are heterogeneous, containing sub-hierarchies and cross-cutting divisions (Gravers, 2007). See Chapter 1.

factors that led to reconciliation among participants, and outside the workshops, I discussed these factors with participants and community members. I had initially thought that these new texts could be used as sample lessons for a new curriculum. However, after realizing that CDA alone did not enable participants to produce reconciliatory texts, I had participants read primary source documents alongside existing lessons.

In phase three, I tested whether primary source-based lessons could lead to reconciliation. After spending several months in the US developing sample lessons, I returned to Mae Sot in 2009 to facilitate a weeklong pilot workshop in which seventy social studies teachers participated (see “Can a primary source-based curriculum promote reconciliation?” for demographics). During this workshop, I used ethnographic methods to observe reconciliation among participants, and at the end, I surveyed their attitudes toward the curriculum and toward others (see Figure 1).

Phase One: CDA of texts that fuel inter-ethnic animosity

I would like to present passages from two textbooks currently used in migrant schools that illustrate curricula’s potential to fuel inter-ethnic animosity. The first was written by members of the Karen National Union (KNU), an ethno-nationalist armed struggle group. This passage describes the life of Karen people in ancient times:

The Karen are simple and they are peaceful farmers. In living, working, sleeping and eating, they do things as one family and as real brothers and sisters. [...] They came to Burma before other nations did and lived simply in freedom for over 200 years. When the Mons and Burmans came in they oppressed and enslaved the Karens. The Karens had to become slaves and lived under the rule of others for about 2,000 years (Karen Education Department, 2003, 9-10⁴¹)

⁴¹ This text was translated from Karen by Thayu Htoo, while I translated all other texts and participants’ comments presented in this chapter from Burmese. Although I do not elaborate here

Here, as elsewhere in KNU textbooks, the adjectives “peaceful” and “simple” are “collocated” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 36-37) with Karen, while the verbs “oppress” and “enslave” are collocated with Burmans and Mons. In this way, the text establishes “logics of equivalence and difference” (Fairclough, p. 215) in which Burmans, Karens, and Mons are bounded, homogenous categories with clearly defined characteristics. This text offers Karen students an identity as innocent victims, which is used in later lessons to legitimize retaliation against Burmans. This text is clearly “addressed” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 54) to Karen students, but as many migrant classrooms are ethnically mixed, it also relegates Burman and Mon students to the category of aggressors.

The SPDC textbook is subtler in the way it correlates worth with ethnicity. In contrast to the KNU, the SPDC portrays ancient times as an era of inter-ethnic unity. This passage describes the actions of one Burman king, Bayinnaung:

After [the previous king] died, the empire broke into fragments and fell into anarchy. [...] Bayinnaung, in order to confront the bad situation, struggled to organize the empire. [...] Bayinnaung was able to successfully annex Inwa and all of Shan country. He was able to found a very extensive Second Burmese Empire because he was able to seize Chiang Mai, Linzin, Yodaya, and Manipur. Because Bayinnaung promoted Shan, Burman, and Mon people totally without ethnic discrimination to equal levels, all the citizens lovingly respected him (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 37).

This text “legitimizes” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 57) annexation by using the modal verb “was able to,” while de-legitimizing the independence of ethnic minorities from Burman rule by defining it as “a bad situation.” Regardless of whether they are annexed or promoted, non-Burmans are the passive object of verbs carried out by the Burman king; their only active role is to “lovingly

on the problems of translation, I acknowledge it is not a straightforward matter. For more details, see Chapter Four.

respect” him.⁴² Although ethnic minority students are offered an identity as part of the group “all the citizens,” that term includes them only as long as they accept a position in a Burman-dominated empire. While the text declares the absence of ethnic discrimination, the Burman-centric meta-narrative relegates ethnic minorities to a status as perpetual foreigners to be integrated into Burman empires.

While both texts propagate nationalist ideologies and legitimize inter-ethnic violence, the SPDC devalues other ethnic groups implicitly, while the KNU does so explicitly. Yet their similarities define them as part of the same genre (Fairclough, 2003, p. 220). For instance, the “modality” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 219) of both texts expresses a high degree of certainty, eschewing words such as “might” and “probably.” For instance, the KNU textbook alleges that “[the Karens] came to Burma before other nations did” without acknowledging the controversy surrounding this statement or the fact that many other ethnic groups also claim that they arrived first. Furthermore, both texts enforce strict logics of equivalence and difference by using terms such as “Burmans” to imply homogeneity of thought and action.

Phase two: collaborative CDA in curriculum revision workshops

Workshop participants reached many of the same conclusions I did about the ideological content of texts, although their greater grasp of context often led them to more sophisticated realizations. For instance, they noted that when a Burman king “respectfully invited” (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 31) his Mon counterpart to his capital, this verb had a double meaning that conveyed the Mon king’s passivity and subordination; moreover, several Mon

⁴² Although I focus here on the formation of ethnic boundaries, it is worth noting that this text also reproduces class and gender hierarchies in that ordinary Burmans are subordinated to kings

participants noted that in their histories, this “invitation” was described as a forcible removal. The fact that texts fueled inter-ethnic animosity was not surprising to participants, but insight into *how* they did so discursively was novel. After completing CDA, several participants expressed their renewed conviction that curricula should be changed. Furthermore, there was some evidence that this process had helped participants to understand and value the perspectives of other groups (see p. 84).

Yet while participants had no problem identifying the discursive elements that legitimized conflict, writing syncretic texts that avoided these elements proved extremely difficult. The new versions sounded much like either SPDC or ethno-nationalist accounts. For instance, one group repeated the SPDC’s claim that a Burman king had “built up inter-ethnic unity,” but left out details of the military conquests that the SPDC had used to support this claim. The resulting text retained the questionable accuracy of its predecessor, without offering an explanation of how inter-ethnic unity emerged. Another group, stymied by the task of recounting true events in a non-offensive manner, simply invented an alternate history in which ethnic groups had gotten along. Equivocal statements such as, “Some Mon people believe X, while many Karen people believe Y,” did not seem to fit into participants’ conception of history textbooks. Furthermore, although the information in the textbooks had been called into question, participants did not have other source material they could use to produce versions they felt were accurate.

Moreover, while the focused nature of CDA temporarily took the emphasis off participants’ emotional reactions to the texts, the attempt to rewrite them brought up ethnic tensions again. Disputes arose about which textbooks were more accurate. Several Karen

and women go unmentioned here as in most of the SPDC’s history curriculum, except insofar as

participants, while agreeing that the passage from the KNU textbook quoted above could promote inter-ethnic animosity, were deeply convinced that it was correct. The choice of each word became controversial. For instance, in one workshop, we spent over an hour discussing what a new textbook might be called; several Karen participants rejected the most obvious title, “History of Burma,” on the basis that including “Burma” or “Myanmar” in the title would alienate ethnic minorities who did not feel included in those terms, while several Burmans challenged them to come up with a more inclusive name. After a long discussion of titles including “History of the Place Some People Call Burma,” and simply “History,” I realized that if participants could not even agree on a title for a new textbook, the process of writing it would be prohibitively laborious.

After several similar experiences, I concluded that while conducting CDA on existing textbooks was a useful first step, on its own it did not enable stakeholders to produce reconciliatory curricula or to reconcile amongst themselves. These issues came to a head during a workshop with the Migrant Curriculum Team (MCT), a group of a dozen educational stakeholders based in Mae Sot. One MCT member, a history teacher named Aung Khine who had become one of my closest collaborators, approached me outside the workshop. He asked me to stop trying to rewrite textbooks with the group; he felt it was doing more harm than good for their relationships. He also observed that without data on which to base a comparison of texts, arguments about which were correct could be endless and bitter. After abandoning the idea of rewriting textbooks, Aung Khine and I came up with the idea of designing a curriculum based on primary source documents.⁴³

they are included in the category “all citizens.”

⁴³ I define primary source documents as those produced in the historical period under study instead of written by historians later. There is no strict separation between primary and

This idea was appealing for several reasons. First, it would avoid the monological voice of the textbook, which participants had such a difficult time letting go of when trying to rewrite a syncretic text. The genre of the textbook, with its modality of certainty and its univocal addressivity, hindered the inclusion of multiple perspectives. On the other hand, excerpts of primary source documents created by various groups, juxtaposed and skillfully framed, could convey the idea that there are always multiple perspectives on historical events rather than one indisputable truth. Furthermore, because these documents did not contain truth claims made by historians from one group or another, but rather the (albeit biased or incorrect) ideas of specific historical individuals, they might be less controversial. Instead of asking students and teachers to accept one text as correct, we would challenge them to analyze many texts to understand the perspectives of their authors and the context of their creation. This activity could improve students' critical thinking skills and help them to form independent opinions, whereas memorizing textbooks had rendered them passive and vulnerable to indoctrination with nationalist ideologies that legitimized violence.

However, this idea also presented obstacles. Primary source documents were difficult to find and would need to be translated into multiple languages; teachers would need training to use this new system; students used to traditional methods might find such an approach challenging; and leaders would need to be convinced of its value. Nonetheless, when Aung Khine and I presented our idea to the rest of MCT, they were willing to try it. We brainstormed topics students should learn about. I offered to gather documents on these topics and use them to create

secondary sources (a colonial historian's account of ancient Burma is a secondary source when studying ancient Burma, but a primary source when studying colonial historiography). Various scholars have suggested "dethroning the textbook" (Ken Osborne, quoted in Clarke, 2007, p. 112) and assembling a "montage" (Walt Werner, quoted in Clarke, 2007, p. 112) of primary and

sample lessons for high school, as well as primary and middle school lessons that scaffolded skills necessary for document analysis.⁴⁴ We planned that I would return in several months to facilitate a workshop for social studies teachers in which we piloted these lessons.

Phase three: testing a primary source-based curriculum

I conceived the workshop for social studies teachers as an investigation of the reconciliatory potential of the lessons, in which teachers stood in for students.⁴⁵ I also designed it to test conditions leading toward reconciliation during history curriculum revision, which I had developed in previous workshops (on which I will elaborate in the section, “A reconciliatory process”). The sample lessons I had designed were based on documents related to Karen, Burman, and British attitudes toward Burma’s independence in the late 1940s, which I chose (with input from MCT members) based on their ability to illustrate opposing perspectives.⁴⁶ We read the British government’s post-war plans to give Burman-dominated areas independence separately from ethnic minority territory; a majority-Burman political party’s announcement that it would seek a united, independent Burma immediately; and a memorandum a Karen group had

secondary sources. However, I have not heard of a history curriculum made up primarily of primary sources designed for use in post-conflict settings.

⁴⁴ Due to space constraints, I discuss only the secondary level in this article, but primary and middle level curricula would be essential to the success of the idea as a whole.

⁴⁵ Teachers and students cannot be assumed to react to curricula in the same way, but because teachers’ delivery of reconciliatory lessons has such a profound impact on their outcomes (Kitson, 2007), I believe that teachers’ positive response to curricula is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their effectiveness with students. While I did find that the primary source-based lessons I tested with students in three migrant schools in Mae Sot were successful in helping them to understand multiple perspectives, further research would be necessary to assess the impact of such a curriculum in the classroom.

⁴⁶ Some of these documents were originally in Burmese, and some originally in English. I had all documents translated into Burmese, in which most participants were fluent and all understood at least at an elementary level. It would have been helpful to have these translated into the first languages of all participants, but time and resource constraints prevented this.

sent to the British requesting a separate country under British protection, on the basis that ethnic minorities would be oppressed in a unified Burma. We also read a Burman politician's speech describing his vision for a country that united all ethnic groups, as well as secret telegrams in which British officials decided to let Burma incorporate ethnic minorities so their own government could make a quick exit.

After reading these documents, teachers answered comprehension questions to ensure understanding of various ways in which they could be interpreted, then moved on to critical thinking activities. For instance, we analyzed the bias of texts by comparing the terms that Karen and Burman organizations used to describe the British ("Guardian Angels" vs. "colonizers"); the British described themselves simply as "the government of Burma." Teachers saw that while each of these terms contained an element of truth, none was sufficient alone. This realization confirmed the importance of examining multiple perspectives. We also differentiated between historical facts (e.g., "The British colonized Burma and used its raw materials"), and value judgments about those facts (e.g., "The greedy British vampires sucked away Burma's resources"). Some exercises encouraged teachers to differentiate their own perspectives from those of the documents' authors. For example, after reading a Burman politician's 1947 speech about the role of ethnic minorities in national identity, we differentiated between the points that Karen and British officials would have agreed with at the time and those the teachers currently accepted.

These lessons culminated in a role-playing exercise in which we imagined that the British had called a meeting in 1947 to discuss Burma's future. The teachers were randomly assigned to be part of the Burman, Karen, or British delegation. Three teachers took on the roles of leading politicians from these groups. They made opening speeches expressing their positions, and then

the delegations asked and answered questions. Teachers did justice to the complex perspectives involved, and the act of representing a position different from their own was a concrete expression of reconciliation. A Burman teacher took on Karen leader's perspective, explaining why the Karens could not trust the Burmans enough to join the union because of the long history of oppression. A Karen teacher took on the British government's perspective, justifying the British decision to deny the Karen an independent country. Ethnic minority teachers including Shans, Arakanese, and Karennis made a convincing case on behalf of the Burman delegation that a unified Burma was the best option for everyone. Even teachers who ended up representing their "own" perspective had to see it in a different way in order to respond to questions from other groups.

Can a primary source-based curriculum promote reconciliation?

According to both survey data presented in Figure 1 and ethnographic observations, these activities did result in some degree of reconciliation. Participants commented in open-ended survey responses and in conversation that the opportunity to discuss history "openly" and "freely," to exchange "inner" feelings with people from other ethnic groups, enabled them to "put themselves in the place of others," and to "come to terms with" them. Some participants noted that this had been their first opportunity to gain insight into other groups' histories. A 30-year-old Burman woman wrote, "When I was in school, I only knew what was taught. Now, because of attending this workshop, I became more interested and I couldn't help wanting to discuss history more." The act of sharing diverse perspectives not only created interest, but also led participants to feel more optimistic about the potential for reconciliation. One 25-year-old

Burman woman wrote that she “couldn’t help being proud” to see people from many ethnic groups “sharing their feelings.”

While almost all participants agreed or strongly agreed with all the survey statements expressing reconciliatory attitudes, distinctions can be drawn among statements based on the percentage of respondents who merely agreed versus those who strongly agreed. Of all the statements, survey respondents were most likely to strongly agree that, “After this workshop, I believe more strongly that there are many perspectives about history and not only one.” 36% strongly agreed with this statement, while 33% strongly agreed they could sympathize more with those from other ethnic groups, 23% strongly agreed that they could get along better with others even if they didn’t agree about history, and only 18% strongly agreed that they could understand the perspectives of people from other groups or that they felt comfortable discussing history with them. The varying strength of agreement indicates a possible progression in attitude that might evolve over time with greater exposure to primary source-based curricula, with the first and most accessible step in reconciliation being the acceptance that multiple perspectives on history exist, and comfort discussing history with other groups only emerging after sympathy and tolerance of disagreement emerge.

Most respondents (53%) agreed or strongly agreed (24%) with the statement, “I think that using primary source documents to teach history is a good way to avoid problems between ethnic groups.” Some were quite optimistic; a 33-year-old Karen Muslim woman wrote in the open-ended response section, “Hatred among ethnic groups can disappear... We can solve the problems and come to an understanding.” Some noted that this method could reduce the “obsessive attachment” to one’s own perspective on history. However, 12% were “not sure,” and 2% disagreed that the method could achieve its aim. Several commented that the conflict was so

longstanding that there was no way it could be solved, and others noted that the effectiveness of the method depended on teachers' attitude toward reconciliation. Some felt that even the short excerpts of documents that we read would be too difficult for students to understand.⁴⁷ 9% of respondents did not respond to the statement. These non-responses may have provided a non-confrontational way of disagreeing, or they may have indicated that respondents simply ran out of time or energy—non-responses increased progressively for the last three questions on the survey.

I view the reconciliation and positivity about the primary source-based curriculum expressed in the survey data cautiously, since it is possible that some participants agreed with statements out of politeness or out of a feeling of obligation to me as the facilitator. They also may have been more likely to express socially desirable outcomes. Despite these concerns, the survey's indications that reconciliation occurred are supported by my ethnographic observations and in-depth conversations with participants and organizers. For instance, organizers noted that in similar weeklong workshops, attendance often dwindles progressively, and I had observed in previous workshops that if participants felt uncomfortable, they would simply "vote with their feet." We had consistent attendance (despite incredibly hot weather, which could have led to attrition), indicating interest, enthusiasm, and comfort conducive to reconciliation.

Despite these generally positive results, participants' comments on the open-ended portion of the survey also revealed obstacles to reconciliation that had occurred. One Arakanese teacher felt that the emphasis on the Karen-Burman conflict left out other groups' perspectives. A Karen teacher reiterated this point, asking for more information on Mon, Shan, and Kachin

⁴⁷ This concern is understandable, given that current history textbooks present one simple perspective and students are usually required to memorize rather than analyze it; further research

people's perspectives. Although I had anticipated that the emphasis on the Karen-Burman conflict might create this response, I had decided that given limited time, the value of exploring three perspectives in depth outweighed the imperative to diversify. This decision could be reconsidered in future workshops, not only by incorporating the perspective of more ethnic groups, but also by choosing documents that highlighted identity categories that cross-cut ethnicity, such as gender, age, and socio-economic status. In this way, ethnic divisions could be challenged instead of reified and people from different groups could see how they share common problems and goals.

Several participants also noted that a language barrier occurred for some ethnic minority people who could not speak Burmese well. This issue had also come up in other workshops I facilitated. When participants were asked if they needed a translator, they said no out of reluctance to impose on their hosts, and they might become embarrassed if a translator were used for their benefit. Yet if reconciliation is defined partly as understanding other groups' perspectives, then language barriers are clearly an obstacle to it. Although the simultaneous translation of multiple languages presents logistical difficulties, in the future this need should be fulfilled without stigmatizing those who require help.

Survey responses varied only slightly by gender, ethnicity, and age.⁴⁹ Because most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all statements on the survey, I was only able to arrive at statistically significant distinctions among respondents by grouping "not sure" and "disagree"

would be necessary to assess the importance of this concern. It is intuitive that students' difficulties would be minimized if critical thinking skills were scaffolded from early grades.

⁴⁹ Survey data was run on a multinomial logit generalized linear model with the three responses (strongly agree, agree, and disagree-not sure-no response), using the R program. Results reported are significant at a level of at least $\alpha = .05$. All probabilities are estimated. I am grateful to the Cornell Statistical Consulting Unit and especially to Cecilia Earls for assistance in arriving at these results.

responses together with non-responses (there were no “strongly disagree” responses). Grouping these three types of responses makes sense because refraining from answering a question or choosing “not sure” may have provided a culturally acceptable way to withhold agreement without openly disagreeing.

The first distinction can be made on the basis of ethnicity. People who identified as Burman (47% of respondents), Karen (21%), or of mixed ethnicity (10%) were about eight times more likely to strongly agree with the statements than those from other ethnic groups were (Arakanese, Karenni, and Muslim were represented) (see Figures 2 and 4).⁵⁰ These non-Karen, non-Burman, and non-mixed participants may have experienced less reconciliation because, as previously mentioned, the history of their own ethnic group was not mentioned in the lessons. These participants were 90% less likely to strongly agree that the primary source-based method of teaching history could help to avoid problems among ethnic groups. Likewise, they were 89% less likely to strongly agree that after the workshop they could sympathize more with people from other ethnic groups. They were also 89% less likely to give disagree, not sure, or unspecified responses to any statement. This figure indicates that their response to the workshop was in general more tepid than that of their peers. It seems that having the history of one’s own ethnic group included in the workshop provoked stronger positive *and* negative/non-committal feelings. However, this population represented only 6% of the total sample, so more data would be needed to confirm this phenomenon.

A second distinction can be made on the basis of age. People between the ages of 40 and 49 (17% of respondents) were 41% more likely than those of any other age group (18-30—38%; 30-39—18%; over 50—12%; no age reported—15%) to strongly agree with any of the

⁵⁰ 16% of respondents did not identify their ethnicity on the survey.

statements (See Figures 3 and 4). It is intuitive that those over 50, who have experienced a lifetime of ethnic conflict, would have more difficulty reconciling. I also noticed during the workshop that the higher levels of education that some elders had attained seemed to make them less open to considering perspectives they had never encountered in their schooling. However, the data does not support the assumption that the disposition toward reconciliation decreases with age, since those under 39 were less likely to strongly agree with the statements than their colleagues aged 40 to 49. This finding corroborates my observation that middle-aged people's life experience gave them the confidence to adjust their beliefs in response to new information, whereas young people tended to feel less secure when the history they had been taught was challenged. Supporting this observation, those aged 40 to 49 were 61% more likely to strongly agree that there were multiple perspectives on history and 68% more likely to strongly agree that they could more easily sympathize with people from other ethnic groups after the workshop.

Participants in the 40 to 49 age group also displayed a more polarized response to the question of whether a primary source-based curriculum could help to avoid problems among ethnic groups. They were 45% more likely to strongly agree *and* 45% times more likely to give a negative or non-committal response to this statement. This greater polarization of responses indicates that 40 to 49 year olds felt more confident in their ability to assess whether the curriculum would have its intended effect. It seems that life experience gave some 40 to 49 year olds an awareness of the obstacles to reconciliation that might arise, while convincing others that reconciliation could be fostered.

There were no statistically significant differences between men's and women's responses. According to my observations, men seemed to have more difficulty accepting perspectives different from their own. This may be because women have been socialized to

express less dissent, or because they found it easier to accept or tolerate countervailing perspectives. Because of the inequalities in participation between men and women that I will discuss in the next section, it is difficult to confirm these suspicions. Deeper investigations of the gendered nature of reconciliation are a topic for future research.

I present these statistics not to argue that there is a demographic “ideal type” of a teacher predisposed toward reconciliation, but as a preliminary exploration of how factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity impact group dynamics in IGEs. The information presented above provides some quantitative support for the ethnographic observations I made in order to arrive at the conditions for history curriculum revision IGEs that I outline below.

A reconciliatory process: Conditions for history curriculum revision IGEs

Both the initial series of curriculum revision workshops and the pilot workshop yielded insights into five conditions under which these IGEs lead toward reconciliation among participants.

The first condition is the participation of individuals from outside the “party line” mainstream of all sides. These “border-crossers” tend to be from mixed ethnic backgrounds and/or to have experience in several communities, and they often display a special ability to help others understand multiple perspectives. For instance, in one workshop, a Karenni teacher who had grown up inside Burma but then moved to a refugee camp as a teenager explained that as a child, he had been taught that the Karenni people who had rebelled against the government were bad. After fighting forced him to flee, he encountered a totally different education system in refugee camp schools run by an ethno-nationalist group. There, the military government was the enemy while the “rebels” were freedom fighters. Thus his idea of what it meant to be Karenni

was transformed. When he visited his village again years later, he was surprised to find that the people treated him with suspicion—he had become an “enemy” too. This kind of story complicated other participants’ idea that ethnicity was straightforward and absolute. The common perception that children should be taught the history of “their own” ethnic group was difficult to maintain when it became clear that people from one group could have vastly different experiences.

The second condition is to have structures in place to ensure the vocal participation of people of lower social status, who in Burmese society tend to be female, young, poor, ethnic or religious minorities, who might not speak Burmese as a first language and who often lack outward markers of status such as degrees or titles. Such structures are important because border-crossers tend to fall into this lower-status category, and without intervention the discussions were dominated by older Burman and Karen men. While it is not surprising that high-status persons dominate discussions (Kreuger & Casey, 2000), it was difficult to address this issue. I found that lower status people were hesitant to attend gatherings unless higher status people were present, apparently to avoid undermining their authority. Thus the groups could not feasibly be separated in order to access lower status people’s insights. Yet in mixed-status groups, any intervention that threatened the social hierarchy was risky (especially if it was perceived as coming from me as a foreigner); without the endorsement of high-status persons, no project would garner community respect. Furthermore, many lower-status people undervalued their own potential to contribute. I attempted to address this issue by bringing it up explicitly and explaining the rationale for seeking broader participation. Most high-status people were receptive to these efforts, but they were so used to dominating discussions that their behavior did not necessarily

change. These interventions produced more equitable participation than a laissez-faire attitude would have, but the challenge remained.

The third condition is to have stakeholders examine textbooks from multiple opposing sides in the conflict alongside primary source documents. I did see some evidence that CDA helped participants to become aware of and sympathize with other groups. Many had never had a chance to read each other's histories, due to linguistic or logistical barriers. For instance, one Burman headmaster was initially mystified by the KNU textbook's praise of British colonists, because the SPDC curriculum he had grown up with portrayed the British as oppressors whose divide and rule practices sowed dissension. One a Karen teacher—a border-crosser who had lived inside Burma, in Karen camps, and in Thailand—explained to him that many Karen people saw British colonists as protectors who developed health, education, and infrastructure. This was a revelation to the headmaster and to several other Burman participants, and this kind of breakthrough created a reconciliatory atmosphere. Reconciliatory attitudes also seemed to increase over time under these conditions. For instance, one Burman woman had in an early workshop expressed her conviction that there was only one correct version of history. Six months later, she explained to her colleagues in the MCT pilot workshop that after reading all these different histories and thinking things over, she had come to understand multiple perspectives and their value in the classroom.

However, while CDA of textbooks was useful in highlighting the tensions between different perspectives, comparing textbooks to primary sources helped to diffuse these tensions by providing a more neutral basis for comparison. It is crucial that all participants feel represented by the textbooks and documents used—overemphasizing Karen and Burman perspectives turned out to stifle reconciliation by making other groups feel overlooked.

The fourth factor is that participants conceptualize reconciliation and the development of critical thinking skills as main purposes of teaching history, as opposed to promoting nationalism and teaching one absolute truth about the past. While I took for granted that these four goals were irreconcilable, some stakeholders acknowledged the importance of the first two but were equally devoted to the second two. Others—mostly powerful community leaders—endorsed only the latter priorities. Some worried that if students thought critically, they would no longer respect authority. Others saw the value of critical thinking, but found it unfeasible without systemic change. Some objected to mixing education and politics by pursuing reconciliatory curricula; the idea that education was already politicized, and indeed could never be politically neutral, was not universally acknowledged. As in many intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2003), powerful people would stand to lose financially and politically if the conflict were officially resolved. Therefore, Burman and ethno-nationalist leaders might not support either high-level political reconciliation, or grassroots reconciliation projects in which students think critically about their identities. While MCT had initially conceived the pilot workshop as promoting national reconciliation⁵¹ and critical thinking, they eventually removed the first term from the title after pressure from some leaders (this is my interpretation—group members presented various rationales). I did discuss reconciliation in the workshop, but it was not part of the workshop’s official goals. Certainly, reconciliation can occur even if it is not named as such, but these political pressures—which are very difficult to alter—may work against it.

⁵¹ The Burmese word often translated as “reconciliation” is most often used in a compound term, “national reconciliation.” This term has been invested with various political and social meanings, and stakeholders did not necessarily associate it with the kind of reconciliation that I had in mind. It may be that using less loaded words—even if they were not as familiar—would have reduced controversy.

The fifth condition is that parties outside the conflict fund and support, rather than directly control history curriculum revision efforts. Both INGOs working in migrant education and the Thai Ministry of Education (MOE) have their own interests in curriculum revision; INGOs promote concepts such as “inclusive education” (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008), while the MOE is concerned that unregulated curricula might run counter to Thai national security interests (Office of the Education Council, 2008). In this context, the MOE has enlisted one INGO, World Education, to produce a standardized curriculum for migrant schools (World Education, 2007). Although this project has not yet yielded social studies curricula, many workshop participants expressed concern that the Thai or international stakeholders would impose history textbooks with which they were not entirely comfortable. While the financial support of World Education enabled MCT to stage the pilot workshop, and Thai authorities’ cooperation was necessary for the security of participants, MCT members and workshop participants strongly expressed that they wanted to be involved in curriculum decision-making on behalf of their communities. Given that IGE specialists have determined that reconciliation is most likely to occur when participants are involved in meaningful work with concrete outcomes (Schulz, 2008), curriculum revision workshops are less apt to function as IGEs if participants actually have little control over what kind of curriculum is used in the future.⁵²

This fifth condition brings up the question of my own participation. Burmese organizations were willing to collaborate with me partly because of my status as a Ph.D. candidate from the US. Besides a high respect for degrees in general, I observed a perception among some Burmese that Western foreigners are inherently qualified and/or less likely than Burmese to be biased toward one ethnic group. I see both perceptions as a legacy of British

⁵² For more details on the relationships among Burmese, Thai, and international stakeholders, see

colonization. Yet another legacy of colonization is a deep (and justified) mistrust of foreigners who want to control Burmese education. Thus, my participation had the potential to add to *or* decrease the legitimacy of curriculum revision projects, and neither taking charge nor stepping back would further the goals of my collaborating organizations. Furthermore, as a young woman, I did not have the qualities of natural leadership in Burmese communities that were so important to the legitimacy of the process. Local elites could easily dismiss foreigners like me as ill-informed, or reject my methods as culturally inappropriate, if my conclusions did not support their own beliefs (Sadan, 2007). Therefore, I took different roles depending on the setting. Sometimes I played the traditional facilitator, sometimes I shared this responsibility with Burmese colleagues, and sometimes I stayed quiet. I found that speaking English, even with a translator, magnified cultural disjunction, so I used Burmese despite my lack of total fluency; participation increased in volume and quality, supporting reconciliation.⁵³ In these ways, I tried to act as a guest rather than an “expert,” yet it is for Burmese stakeholders (and readers of this dissertation) to judge whether my presence was helpful in catalyzing reconciliation or not.

Futures

While the potential for primary source-based curricula revealed through this research are encouraging, obstacles to its implementation in migrant schools remain. First, it is not clear whether the political will exists to implement any new curriculum. Despite the positive outcome of the workshop, some leaders are still concerned that changing the history curriculum could cause conflict. Along with Burmese colleagues, I have produced a primary source-based

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⁵³ While Burmese is not a first language for all ethnic groups, it is usually more familiar than English.

curriculum that will be published by The Curriculum Project, a local NGO, in 2012. Migrant schools may choose to use it for the time being, but as they come under greater control of the Thai MOE and INGOs, curricular decisions may not be left to schools. Even if these entities approved this new curriculum, school and community leaders would have to buy into its purpose for it to be implemented effectively. Tensions could arise over the selection of documents or the role of various stakeholders in its development. This complex situation places those who want to move the project forward in a precarious position between local, national, and international interests. However, it does seem that this curriculum will be used by some teachers in the coming years.

Given the similarities I have observed between history curriculum revision projects in the Burmese migrant context, Rwanda (Freedman et al., 2008), Israel/Palestine (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Brown, 2006; Naveh, 2006), and other contexts (Pingel, 2008), the conclusions I have drawn here may be applicable to those or other conflict-affected settings. While some elements of reconciliation seem to be consistent across cultures, their expression is culturally specific (Lederach, 2005). I stake out a middle ground between the hope for generalizability and the insistence on localism. While each situation will necessitate unique responses, those of us pursuing reconciliatory history curriculum revision can learn from each other's successes and difficulties.

FIGURE 1: Survey responses from MCT pilot workshop for social studies teachers

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree*	Not specified
After this workshop, I feel more comfortable discussing history with people from other ethnic groups.	18%	80%	2%	0	0
After this workshop, I think I understand more about the perspectives of people from other ethnic groups.	18%	80%	2%	0	0
After this workshop, I can sympathize more with people from other ethnic groups who have suffered.	33%	65%	2%	0	0
After this workshop, I believe more strongly that there are many perspectives about history and not only one.	36%	61%	1.5%	0	1.5%
After this workshop, I feel I can get along better with people from other ethnic groups even if we don't always agree about history.	23%	71%	0	1.5%	4.5%
I think that using primary source documents to teach history is a good way to avoid problems between ethnic groups.	24%	53%	12%	2%	9%

*Strongly disagree was also an option, but it was not selected by any participants.

FIGURE 2: Probability of responses to statements on survey among people in the 40 to 49 age group

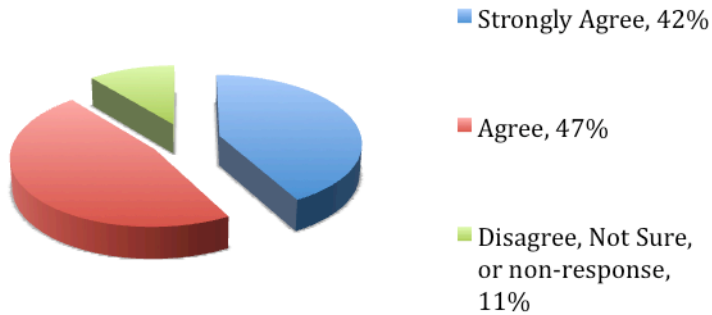


FIGURE 3: Probability of responses among non-Burman, non-Karen, non-mixed respondents (including Karenni, Arakanese, and Muslim)

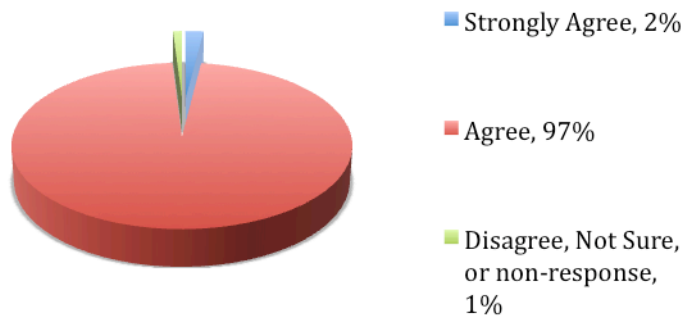
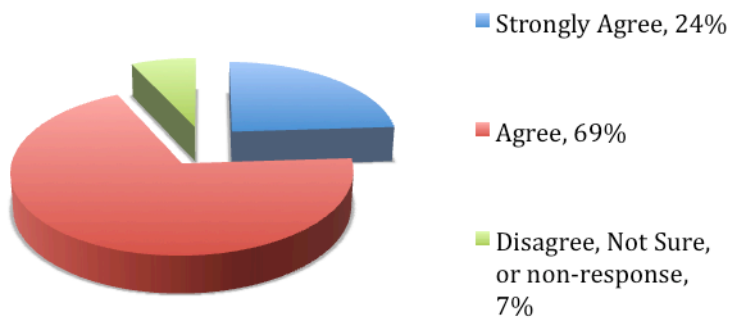


FIGURE 4: Probability of responses among all other respondents



*All probabilities are estimated. Probabilities in Figure 2 exclude population in Figure 3, and vice versa.

CHAPTER THREE

POST-COLONIAL SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE POST-CONFLICT AID TRIANGLE: THE DRAMA OF EDUCATIONAL MISSIONIZATION IN THE THAI-BURMA BORDERLANDS⁵⁴

Setting: post-conflict, post-colonial borderlands (Mae Sot, Thailand, dry season 2009—hot season 2010)

This research is located in the geographical, ideological, and political borderlands that connect Thailand and Burma,⁵⁵ where millions of people affected by Burma's sixty-year-long civil war and ethnic conflict dwell temporarily but often interminably. In 1984, the first camp for people displaced by political repression and fighting between the Burmese military and insurgent groups was established on Thai soil. In the ensuing decades, this refugee crisis has evolved into the paradoxical form of a chronic emergency (Lang, 2002). A range of state and non-state actors have become involved in this situation: the Burmese military regime (the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC),⁵⁶ the Royal Thai Government (RTG), the United Nations

⁵⁴ Thanks to Ashley South, Brooke Treadwell, Chika Watanabe, Dave Gilbert, Katie Julian, Kim Johnson, Marina Haikin, Mel Walker, Dr. Thein Lwin, and Maung Zarni for feedback on previous drafts of this chapter. I am also grateful to the participants in the 2010 conference on post-conflict missionization and memorialization sponsored by Cornell University's Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, where I presented an early version of this argument. In particular, I would like to thank Meg Gardinier for her response to that paper, and Stefan Senders and Chip Gagnon for introducing me to the concept of missionization. Of course, all errors are my own.

⁵⁵ Burma is also known as Myanmar. A variety of political and semiotic considerations affect the choice between the two names (see Chapter One). In general, I use "Burma" to refer to the country, "Burman" to refer to the majority ethnic group, and "Burmese" to refer to the language and to any of the ethnic groups with heritage in Burma.

⁵⁶ In November 2010 the SPDC held multi-party elections widely condemned as flawed (UN News Service, 2010), which resulted in the SPDC-affiliated party winning a majority of seats in Parliament. As I concluded writing this dissertation in March 2011, the SPDC was in the process of transferring power to the civilian administration that was elected. As this process is as yet incomplete, I continue to use the terms "SPDC" and "military regime" in this dissertation.

(UN), Burmese ethnic minority and pro-democracy armed struggle groups, International and Local⁵⁷ Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs, LNGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). None of these entities consistently provide Burmese border-dwellers with physical or economic security, yet all attempt some degree of control over their movement, their bodies, and even their innermost desires. One means of control is education, and it is on educational practices and discourses that I will focus in this chapter.

Before turning to education, I want to locate these borderlands within the emerging field of post-conflict studies. To be literal, the Thai side of the border could only be called post-conflict in a spatial rather than temporal sense, as fighting inside Burma continues. Even this limited “post-ness” is disturbed by violence that periodically bursts over the border. However, these borderlands *are* post-conflict in the sense that forms of government, regulation, social practice, and subjectivity have emerged that are distinct from those of daily warfare. One example of such a social practice is the provision of education directed at creating the kind of people who can resolve their differences peacefully (see Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004; McGlynn et al., 2009; World Bank, 2005). In fact, I would argue that reconciliatory education is one of the key indicators that a conflict can be designated as “post.”

The fact that education is emphasized in post-conflict settings also illustrates what Mark Duffield (2001) identifies as the post-Cold War “merging of development with security,” or the way that networks of governments, NGOs, militaries, and corporations based in the Global North are trying to act as agents of global governance to radically transform Southern societies in the

⁵⁷ Local NGOs may be run by Burmese people, Thais, or foreigners, while the CBOs I refer to are run by Burmese. I use “Local” as a generic opposite of “International,” and I capitalize both terms to remind readers that the Burmese (and the Thais) are an instantiation of a concept that exists in other post-conflict settings. In fact, as I hope to show, the boundary between Local and International is often blurred.

name of prosperity and stability that they claim are universally beneficial. Duffield (2001) describes how the hard power of military, state, and financial institutions is used to back up the soft power of a “new humanitarianism” that strives to promote “liberal peace,” a “system of carrots and sticks” that contrasts its imperial precedent in that “people in the South are no longer ordered what to do” but are “expected to do it *willingly* themselves” (p. 34). In this model, training replaces coercion. Social scientists are implicated in this new humanitarianism, as we constitute an industry of knowledge production that is called upon to conceptualize and evaluate development as security (Cooper & Packard, 1996).

In this theoretical framework, “post-conflict” settings can be re-theorized as the site of new wars in which these forces of global governance are enmeshed in relations of “antagonism and complicity” (Duffield, 2001, p. 252) with the state and non-state military powers and commercial interests that profit from and create the conflict and poverty that new humanitarians attempt to remediate. For instance, on the Thai-Burma border, US and EU governments fund the forces of “new humanitarianism” represented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and INGOs, which educate Burmese refugees and migrants toward liberal peace. Meanwhile, these same governments host and collect tax revenue from multi-national corporations that partner with the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and the SPDC to build infrastructure projects such as the Yadana gas pipeline, the construction of which involved human rights abuses (EarthRights International, 2010) that exacerbate conflict in Burma and increase flows of refugee and migrants. Far from indicating some kind of worldwide conspiracy, this example illustrates the ironies of the dissipation of power through global networks. While I will focus here on a small educational slice of this particular post-conflict setting, it is situated within the larger tableau that Duffield (2001) describes.

The educational practices I will describe here are complicated by the fact that the Thai-Burma borderlands are not only post-conflict, but also post-colonial. I argue that colonial domination of Southeast Asia set the stage for the kind of education that is occurring on the Thai-Burma border today. Specifically, I apply Homi Bhabha's (1994) account of colonial discourses on education to the current situation. I start with Bhabha's assumption that self and group identities are not fixed or essential. Instead, people are capable of inhabiting a shifting range of subjectivities⁵⁸ that are formed through interactions with others. Specifically, those interactions take place within discourse, a term used to refer to the social and ideological effects of language. In other words, "British" and "Burmese" are not timeless, essential categories, but malleable ways of being that are repeatedly redefined in opposition to each other by the way people talk and write about them.

Education is one of the primary means by which colonial authorities defined these categories in ways that reinforced the racial, cultural, and economic hierarchy on which their own power rested.

These ideas become more concrete as Bhabha (1994) describes how colonial officials saw education as a system through which they could produce more manageable subjects. These authorities wanted to educate colonized people to act British enough to make administering them easier, yet not so British that they would consider themselves equal to their rulers. This "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122, italics in original) led to the attempt to initiate new subjectivities. For example, colonial official Thomas Macauley hoped that schools could produce

⁵⁸ To avoid confusion, I use "subjectivity" in the sense described here, and "subject" only to refer to colonized people, although Bhabha blurs this distinction. I also use "identity" to refer to subjectivities insofar as they appear fixed and consistent—for instance, "Burmese identity."

“a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (quoted in Bhabha, 1994, pp.124-125) to act as cultural translators between the British and the natives they governed. Yet as Bhabha (1994) points out, these “mimic men” (p. 125) didn’t just imitate the British as they were intended to, but also resisted the roles that colonial education offered them and negotiated for power on their own behalf. This resistance was a threat to British dominance, and so the British came to feel ambivalent about these educated subjects.

Bhabha also describes how a “third space” emerged between the polarized positions of colonizer and colonized, in which the contact between British and indigenous ideas produced hybrid identities and practices. Drawing on Bhabha’s theories, I conceptualize the post-conflict borderlands as a “third space” where Burmese, Thai, and International ideas about education produce subjectivities and pedagogical practices that I will describe with a sense of *déjà-vu* from the colonial era.

By combining these theoretical frameworks of the post-conflict and the post-colonial, I arrive at a process I call “educational missionization.” Chip Gagon and Stefan Senders (2010) describe “missionization” as a form of “ideological entrepreneurship” in which concepts are transferred from the West/Global North into post-conflict societies (p. 2). I specify this term to describe the way that ideological entrepreneurs use education as a way to remake others in their own image, while equating this transformation with secular salvation from the oblivion of conflict and poverty that afflicts receiving societies. Educational missionization is a concept that can be viewed with equal clarity through the lens of Duffield’s (2001) analysis of the integration of development and security or Bhabha’s (1994) theory on the education of colonized subjects. I

see it through both lenses simultaneously in order to historicize it while locating it firmly in post-Cold War global capitalism.

The missionary metaphor bears some elaboration. Like religious missionaries, many of the ideological entrepreneurs involved in education today fervently believe that they are doing what is best for people in post-conflict settings by converting them to their chosen methods of schooling, which they see as universal best practices rather than culturally specific products. The missionary metaphor is especially appropriate for the Burmese context because evangelists converted many Burmese ethnic minority people to Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries, and like educational missionaries today, they brought financial support and political validation that created incentives for conversion. As with religious missionization, this educational “civilizing mission” can create in its targets both an internalized sense of inferiority and a resentment of missionaries’ hegemony. Finally, both types of missionization can be seen as having positive or negative effects depending on one’s ideological positioning.

Building on the physical and theoretical setting I have just laid out, I will write this essay in the form of a drama, describing the actors, presenting some exposition, and staging several scenes of educational missionization. I was inspired to use this form by Bhabha’s (1994) designation of the political as a performative realm in which colonialism “exercises its authority through the figures of farce” (p. 122). The dramatic mode of the farce, characterized by word play, mistaken identity, and physical comedy, showcases people’s desires for connection with others as well as the misapprehensions that thwart those connections. A farce is, however, distinct from a joke, and my aim is not to diminish the seriousness of the issues at hand. Nor do I write as a neutral observer of this drama, accusing my fellow Global Northerners of neo-

colonialism from a safe academic distance; as an ethnographer I am fully implicated in the scenes I will describe.

I risk writing in this non-traditional format because I want to emphasize the emotional dynamics—the melodrama and even slapstick humor— that can come into play in post-conflict situations alongside brutal physical and structural violence. This dramatic form helps me to bridge the gap between everyday interactions and the theories I use to interpret them, which I hope will make my work accessible to readers interested in either dimension. Finally, writing this chapter as a farce helps me to process the affective dimension of the situations I observed, and to account for the infectious laughter that people from all parties sometimes produced in situations that seemed utterly bleak.

Actors

The Burmese (The conflict-affected population)

While these people name themselves in varied ways, the labels that arguably impact their lives most are those the Thais and Internationals dispense: refugees, exiles, migrant workers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), insurgents, victims of human trafficking, illegal aliens, and most tellingly “persons with no person status” (Pitch Pongsawat,⁵⁹ 2007, p. 190)—categories which overlap and contradict each other, but which are defined in opposition to any notion of citizenship. These people move between Burma and Thailand, between refugee or IDP camps, factories, farms, and construction sites, often trying to avoid detection by Thais. They seek out or accept aid from Internationals, as well as forming their own CBOs, LNGOs, or other networks of support. They may identify as Burman, the majority ethnic group of Burma, or as part of a

minority group such as Karen, Karenni, or Shan (and thus might disavow the label “Burmese,” which I use here to reflect country of origin, not ethnicity). Some have loyalties to ethno-nationalist armed struggle groups or political organizations, while others may view regional or kinship networks as primary social ties.

The Internationals (The deliverers of aid)

This crowd of hundreds (thousands?) of NGO workers, volunteers, researchers, and philanthropists, mostly drawn from the wealthier classes of the global North but often representing themselves as the “international community,” have come to coordinate relief efforts, build capacity, gather data, and administer aid under the mandate of universal human rights or democracy promotion. To keep money flowing to their programs, they must propose their activities to funders using keywords linked to quickly-changing priorities formulated in Geneva and Washington D.C. (e.g., promoting psychosocial wellbeing, building civil society). Some establish permanent homes in Thailand and identify strongly as “helpers” of Burmese, while others focused more on building a career in international aid may fly in for a short-term project and never return. Most fall between these extremes, forming a transitory population with a lasting impact on the social landscape.

The Thais (The host country)

Although the relatively wealthier and more stable Thailand profits from trade with Burma’s military regime and the cheap labor of millions of Burmese migrants, most mainstream Thai media construct the Burmese as historical enemies and ethnic others to be excluded from

⁵⁹ I leave two-part Thai names whole in citations and references because conventions regarding

Thailand's health and education systems and to be blamed for crime, drugs, and disease (Pitch Pongsawat, 2007; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007). While these media often invoke ordinary Thais as a foil for the Burmese, those Thais most active in this drama are animated by state power: officials at the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Education (MOE), or the Immigration Office, as well as the army and police. The RTG's frequent policy shifts, as well as the lack of vertical and horizontal coherence in the state bureaucracy, produce considerable variation in the way Thai officials treat the Burmese. Although the RTG has historically been minimally involved in the provision of services to refugees (Lang, 2002), the perception of stateless populations in Thailand as a national security risk has recently motivated increasing involvement (Office of the Education Council, 2008). The Thais will remain mostly offstage in this drama, because as I lack Thai language skills, I have seen Thais mostly through the eyes of the Burmese and the Internationals. Therefore I focus on the Burmese-International relationship.

Narrator (The participant observer)

I am a white, female, US-based International who has spent time in these borderlands frequently over the past ten years, and I gathered data for this chapter while conducting fieldwork for a Ph.D. in Education. My research centers on the development of reconciliatory history curricula, but I was increasingly drawn into the vexed dynamic between the Burmese, the Thais, and the Internationals as it played out in the education sector. Over the course of six months, I collected ethnographic data on this topic by conversing with about forty people (half Burmese, half international). With some of these people, I had repeated in-depth conversations in Burmese and/or English, while I spoke with others more briefly. I also observed Internationals

first names and surnames differ from those in English.

and Burmese interacting socially and professionally. As this description suggests, I write as an anthropologist of education using lenses of cultural and political theory to examine daily interactions in which I am enmeshed, not as a neutral observer conducting a comprehensive empirical study.

Plot summary: The post-conflict aid triangle

I call the groups above “actors” not only because their actions shape this setting, but also because they play roles that are defined in opposition to each other. The descriptions above are reductive, obscuring significant internal divisions, because they reflect the way these three groups are discursively constructed in relation to each other.

I call this constellation of constituencies an “aid triangle” because it mimics a theatrical love triangle that forms the main plot of the drama: there is co-dependency, jealousy, manipulation, resentment, and above all desire—the desire to relate to others on the basis of a common humanity and/or on the assumption of irreducible cultural difference. The plot convention is familiar: the Conflict-Affected Population is flung into the arms of the Host Country, on the rebound from an abusive relationship with their Home Government (the Burmese military regime, which lurks just offstage). The Deliverers of Aid condemn the indifference of the Host Country and offer the Conflict-Affected Population a shoulder to cry on, but at the same time they worry that their generosity is being exploited. Even though the lovers may be bored with each other, even though they may feel alienated and misunderstood, they find it difficult to disentangle themselves or to sort out their loyalties.

Exposition: The post-conflict aid triangle in the education sector

The education sector illustrates this aid triangle well. There is both competition over who will determine the ideological content of the education provided to Burmese youth in the borderland, and reluctance to shoulder the costs associated with its provision. Until 2005 undocumented Burmese were not allowed to attend Thai state schools, and practical barriers to their access persist (Office of the Education Council, 2008; Thornton, 2006). Therefore most refugees attend schools run by committees composed of members of whichever ethno-nationalist armed struggle group dominates their camp, while the small percentage of migrant workers' children who access formal education usually attend a patchwork of Burmese-run, mostly International-funded "migrant schools" that have sprung up in border provinces.⁶⁰ These non-state schools are unaccredited and their graduates have few pathways to higher education. Until recently, they have used whatever curriculum their administrators selected—mostly textbooks created by the Burmese military regime or by ethno-nationalist armed struggle groups.

However, within the past several years both Internationals and Thais have become increasingly concerned about these unregulated educational environments. The Thai MOE seeks to prepare Burmese migrant students for the Thai labor market and to neutralize the national security threat that could arise if they develop loyalties to the Burmese state or ethno-nationalist groups (Office of the Education Council, 2008). Thus the MOE has announced a plan to incorporate younger students into the Thai system, while funneling those who remain into a few consolidated "migrant learning centers." The directors, teachers, and curricula of these centers would have to be approved by the MOE, yet they would continue to be funded by INGOs rather

⁶⁰ There are also non-state schools in IDP areas or cease-fire areas inside Burma, but I do not address these here because they are more affected by the Burmese military regime than by the RTG.

than by the RTG (Office of the Prime Minister, 2009). While overlooking Burmese-run educational LNGOs, the Thai MOE has partnered with World Education Thailand, a Boston-based INGO funded by USAID and UNICEF, to create a standardized curriculum—which, according to several school directors I spoke with, the centers are now mandated to use. World Education, in turn, sub-grants to several Burmese CBOs that help to implement their curriculum (World Education, 2007), even while other Burmese CBOs and LNGOs pursue overlapping or opposing educational initiatives outside the purview of World Education and the MOE.

Meanwhile, in the refugee camps, INGOs negotiate with Burmese groups about curricular content. While many camps are run by committees composed of members of the ethno-nationalist armed struggle group the Karen National Union (KNU), there are significant populations of Burmans, Muslims, and other ethnic groups. In these camps, textbooks are written in Karen language and espouse a rather extreme form of Christian-centric Karen nationalism (South, 2007), and yet they are published with support from ZOA Refugee Care Thailand, a Dutch, Christian INGO that has been funding education in the camps for the past twenty-five years.

Although ZOA has little control over what is actually taught, like several other INGOs involved in education, it has begun promoting UNESCO's concept of "inclusive education," based on the idea that students "have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on" (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008, p. 591). This mission is controversial: as a ZOA-affiliated research team puts it, "How far can the NGOs go in challenging the status quo without being accused of imposing their own cultural and political views on refugee education?" (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008, p. 615). This question has become more pressing since ZOA's mandate for the

provision of emergency services has finally expired and it is in the process of handing over its responsibilities to a reincarnation of the KNU's education department, which is intended to receive an influx of ZOA's former Local staff. In preparation for this transition, ZOA has paired each International employee with a local staff member, so that the former can "build the capacity" of the latter (fieldnotes 10/15/2009). The Thai army mediates the relationship between ZOA and the refugees because it is in charge of camp security and access, and the Thai MOE lingers in the background of debates about education as it ponders accrediting camp schools.

The situations described above are just two manifestations of the aid triangle; in fact, dozens of NGOs and CBOs are involved in the education sector. Yet the constellations described above provide a sketch of aid dynamics in refugee and migrant education. One interpretation of the plot is that Internationals expect to provide the brains and the money, Thais expect to provide the muscle, and Burmese are expected to provide a (semi-resistant) social body upon which the Thais and Internationals enact their plans for better education. Yet as I hope to show, educational initiatives are highly contested and their outcomes uncertain. The upheaval of conflict has created a space for social change, and the Thais, the Internationals, and the Burmese now compete to remake the youth in their own image: will the kids become obedient Thai workers, Burmese loyalists, ethno-nationalist patriots, citizens in a global democracy, or will they take on identities no one can yet imagine?

Scene one: The monologue of the educational missionary

All young people should be in school. But the kind of education they are getting in Burmese-run schools is low quality, because Burmese education is traditional, teacher-centered, and based on rote learning, whereas we Internationals offer modern, student-centered education

that promotes critical thinking and is scientifically proven more effective. Furthermore, Burmese-run schools lack inclusivity because Burmese societies have higher levels of ethnic, religious, and gender discrimination than our own societies do. Thus educational reforms are necessary, but they should not be carried out by Burmese people because they lack the expertise to create curriculum and manage education. Our advanced degrees and experience living in democratic societies qualify us to undertake these tasks. Moreover, Burmese people would have trouble carrying out such reforms because they tend to be disorganized and prone to conflict with each other, whereas we are more competent and work together more effectively. Although the Burmese community should participate in and take ownership of our educational reforms, it is difficult for them to do so because they are mostly passive and dependent and Burmese society is hierarchical and undemocratic.

This monologue is a distillation of both the subtext and the overt content of my conversations with some Internationals involved in education. To many of them, the ideas above are not offensive generalizations but regrettable truths. I should also point out that many Burmese people share these assumptions to some degree, and that some Internationals disavow this kind of thinking. I must also confess that as a teacher and researcher invested in ideas of critical thinking and reconciliatory history curricula, I cannot entirely escape the lure of the missionary mindset. Yet there is a spectrum of fundamentalism along which Internationals can be placed: one high-level INGO staff member told me he had never met a Burmese teacher who could think critically, while other Internationals were shocked by this presumption when I reported it to them.

This monologue rests on a delineation of Burmese and International subjectivities that emphasizes both the current gap between them and the potential for Burmese people to become

more like Internationals under the proper tutelage. Most Internationals are not so unsophisticated as to claim that Burmese people's "essence" holds them back; instead, a string of historical circumstances including colonization and dictatorship is at fault. However, the blamelessness of those not yet converted is the foundation of any missionary project: those who have not had the good fortune to hear the gospels of critical thinking, inclusive education, and standards-based assessment cannot be faulted for their ignorance. They can, however, be blamed for their lack of cooperation if they resist when presented with educational methods that are obviously superior to the ones they currently use.

While the missionary mindset insists on a firm boundary between the categories of Burmese and the International, it is inattentive to heterogeneity within them. Burmese educational traditions and innovations in critical thinking (Thein Lwin,⁶¹ 2010; Thein Naing, 2005) are overlooked, while International superiority is overstated (as a former public school teacher, I can attest that US education is also often teacher-centered and based on rote memorization). Moreover, the Internationals themselves are sometimes disorganized and have difficulty getting along with each other—it's just that their own societies aren't under a microscope. The medicalization is unidirectional, diagnosing the pathologies of the post-conflict society while ignoring the neo-colonial megalomania of some Internationals.

The distance between Burmese and International subjectivities is bridged through the concept of Burmese participation in International educational initiatives, the missionizing project's elusive final goal. This imperative seems to contradict the rest of the monologue, but it

⁶¹ Because most Burmese names consist of a series of syllables that form one coherent unit, rather than first names and surnames, I refer to Burmese people by their full names in parenthetical citations and in the reference list. I do not use prefixes indicating status or gender (e.g., *U* or *Daw*) when referencing Burmese authors whose English-language work I cite, unless they publish under names that include these prefixes.

is actually a key part of the missionary message. “Partnership” is the good news the Internationals are most eager to share, and that they must share if their own funders champion it (e.g., USAID, 2009). Yet for the categories of Burmese and International to remain stable, “participation” must not veer into fundamental criticism, and “ownership” must stay metaphorical rather than financial. Moreover, as far as I have seen, Burmese participation is welcomed only insofar as it supports International priorities. Thus, while participation is often planned and cited in brochures, I had trouble finding evidence of its frequency or results. The discourse of educational missionization takes on a euphemistic quality: in “partnerships” between the Internationals and the Burmese, it’s always clear who should be the senior partner; the greatest “capacity” that is built through “capacity building” seems to be the capacity to accept unlimited amounts of training.

Yet these educational gospels are not simply transmitted to a passive population; they are continually contested and redefined both by the Internationals who are supposed to preach them, and by the Burmese who are targeted for conversion. On the ground, International influence competes with Local power structures, yielding unexpected results. Below, I present a scene that reveals this dynamic.

Scene Two: The awkward grammar of the third space

I am facilitating a workshop on inclusive history curricula at an INGO office for a mixed group of Internationals and Burmese. Midway through the daylong workshop, I am feeling unsettled. The mostly Burmese participants are not saying much. The handful of Internationals present speak enthusiastically about the value of inclusive education, and I find myself agreeing. At one point, an International and a Burmese teacher-trainer who work at the same INGO

exchange a volley of comments that seems to build on previous discussions they've had about the merits of requiring children to attend school vs. the loss of non-formal learning opportunities.

"Sometimes," says the Burmese trainer with excitement in his voice, "while you are trying to include them, we exclude them!" (fieldnotes, 10/15/2009)

My first reading of this comment was "While you (the Internationals) are trying to include them (the Burmese refugees), you (the Internationals) exclude them (the Burmese refugees)." In other words, "inclusive education" can ironically be alienating when "inclusion" is coercive. This sentiment interested me because it expresses Burmese resistance to the educational mission. But when I re-read my fieldnotes later, I saw that an unexpected and (I believe) unintended "we" eclipses the second "you." In trying to account for this apparently subconscious slip, I re-interpreted the statement to mean, "While you (the Internationals) are trying to include them (the Burmese refugees), we (the Burmese employees of INGOs) exclude them (the Burmese refugees)."

While this slip of the tongue may seem trivial, it drew my attention to a phenomenon borne out by further research: the work of missionization is often done by Burmese rather than by Internationals. The impetus for "inclusion" may come from the Internationals, but this Burmese teacher-trainer and his co-workers must present this concept to their communities. The Local employees of INGOs involved in educational missionization are thus in a difficult position. They are paid several times teachers' salaries, which makes them the object of envy from below, yet they may resent the fact that Internationals are paid much more highly for similar work. Moreover, their jobs require them to bridge the gap between their employers and their communities. Not only must they literally translate terms like "inclusive education," which are difficult to express in Local languages (Haikin, 2009), but they must also smooth over

grievances that are expressed by one side but which the other side is unprepared to understand. Their social circles tend to be mixed; they may have to decide, on a given evening, whether to join their International coworkers for pizza, or to eat curry at a relative's house. They may be asked to carry out policies they do not support, or they may find themselves defending those policies in their communities, only to be accused of disloyalty.

In this sense, these Local employees can be compared to the cultural translators that British colonial education sought to create. Yet as Bhabha (1994) points out, cultural translation has unpredictable consequences, and the dialectic between the colonized and the colonizers yields previously unimaginable hybridity. The ideal of “inclusive education” that the Burmese trainer passes on to teachers may be quite different from whatever was conceived in an office in Europe or the US. For instance, while Burmese educational stakeholders recently surveyed unanimously agreed that inclusive education was important, they defined it variously as “cooperating with the [Karen Education Department],” encouraging children to be “polite in speaking,” and including children who are “naughty or disabled” (Haikin, 2009, p. 16). Across the distance between these definitions and the UN's, “we” (the Internationals) and “we” (the Burmese) are negotiated as categories, and the awkward grammar of a third space is enunciated.

This third space is not occupied only by Burmese. They share it, albeit not on equal footing, with Internationals who may not feel comfortable with the mission they have taken up. I spoke with many Internationals who believe educational reform can be beneficial, but who are disenchanted with what they see as the wasteful spending, skewed priorities, and coercive tactics of some INGOs. Some quit their jobs, while others stay to create change from inside INGOs. Some even cast themselves as gatekeepers who protect the Burmese from naïve or ill-intentioned

Internationals. In any case, they usually have more choice in their career path than their Burmese counterparts.

I also occupy this more privileged half of the third space. My research, which involves collaboration with Burmese educational stakeholders on the development of reconciliatory history curricula, involves both educational missionization and resistance to it. Thus I have also become enmeshed in the relationships of desire that characterize the aid triangle, and the resulting unsettlement of my own position as a researcher also made it difficult for me to use “we” unselfconsciously. In fact, there is another possible interpretation to the Burmese trainer’s comment, and it is that *I* accidentally wrote it down wrong, because I felt that “While you (Burmese employees of INGOs) are trying to include them (Burmese refugees), we (Internationals) exclude them (Burmese refugees).” In the next section, I will focus on the insights that came out of moving between Burmese and International contexts.

Scene Three: Privileged informants, ambivalence, and co-dependence

I arrive at [a Burmese teacher]’s house at dusk and the teachers are already there on the porch, eating mohinga and drinking whiskey. It has been a long day, but the mood is celebratory. There is laughter, teasing, and then tension as the conversation turns to a recent incident in which an International cut short a teacher training he was giving due a series of miscommunications. I explain that I don’t think he was trying to offend anyone, and he was in a difficult situation because he may have felt pressure to follow his organization’s guidelines. Some people nod in agreement, while others look unconvinced.

“I will ask foreigners for help,” says [a teacher], switching to English to make sure I understand exactly what he means. “But I will not beg them for help.” (fieldnotes, 5/5/2010)

* * * Meanwhile, across town... * * *

I go over to [an International working for an educational INGO]'s house after dinner and a couple of Internationals are sitting around drinking beer. One guy is telling a story about a Burmese school that was seeking funding, and I listen quietly although I am becoming more and more uncomfortable.

"...so they want money for their school. And the problem is, they feel like they deserve it!"

Finally I interrupt. "But there's a contradiction there, because there's this rhetoric of 'education for all' and 'education is a human right,' but you're saying that people who run a school don't deserve support for it."

He responds slowly and carefully. "...I just worry that we're creating relationships of dependence."

"Creating them? Those relationships are already there. How else are they supposed to get money?"

[...] "But you've got a lot of schools that people open just because they want to feel important, for their own egos."

I know what he means. I've heard the same complaint from Burmese teachers, murmurs of discontent about certain self-interested leaders. But it sounds different coming from an International. (fieldnotes, 10/21/2009)

These two scenes exemplify the ambivalence that many Burmese and Internationals involved in educational provision have toward each other. Bhabha (1994) describes ambivalence as arising from the colonizer's desire for a native subject who is a mirror image of himself, and his simultaneous reluctance to accept that subject's equality. This contradictory belief in

common humanity and irreducible cultural difference characterizes educational missionization as well. Internationals want to fund Burmese-run schools, but they may not trust Burmese people to make decisions about finances or curriculum. The Burmese have their own ambivalence, also based on the idea that they and Internationals have immutable differences. On the one hand, they recognize that it would be difficult to secure the resources they need to run schools without Internationals' help. At the same time, some feel uncomfortable with this relationship of dependence and the lack of dignity or agency it affords them. In informal, segregated contexts like the ones I described above, I often heard Burmese and Internationals express discomfort about the power differentials that characterized their relationships, and I often found myself taking up the voices of the absent other in those dialogues.

While this ambivalence seems to reinforce the boundaries between Burmese and Internationals, in addition to the local employees of INGOs, there is another type of cultural broker who inhabits a hybrid subjectivity. I use the term "privileged informants" to describe the high-status Burmese people on whom Internationals rely for access to Burmese communities. They speak English well and they are familiar with International customs and management styles, and these characteristics make them un-Burmese enough that Internationals trust them more fully. Their cultural capital allows them to deliver the kind of data the Internationals must provide to their own funders. Internationals may feel they have no choice but to rely on such people, but they may not realize how much choosing a privileged informant alters Local power structures. For instance, when an INGOs chooses to sub-grant to a CBO led by one of their privileged informants, they inevitably overlook others, creating or cementing rivalries. Because of patron-client ties in Burmese communities, these rivalries can affect large groups of ordinary teachers.

The choice of privileged informants both responds to and reifies Burmese social hierarchies. For instance, in accordance with Ashley South's (2007) description of power dynamics within Karen communities, I observed that Christian S'ghaw Karen with connections to KNU leadership tend to become privileged informants more often than animist or Buddhist Pwo Karen without political connections. Some Internationals are aware of this phenomenon: ZOA (2007) notes the tendency to rely on "the people we already know," (p. 11) and a ZOA-affiliated research team acknowledges that ZOA's reliance on Christian and S'ghaw Karen leaders entrenches social hierarchies (Oh & van der Stouwe, 2008, p. 600). These privileged informants gain even more power in their role as conduit for resources and information between Internationals and Burmese.

These privileged informants can be compared to the native elites that colonial administrators in Burma (and elsewhere) granted titles to, thereby institutionalizing their power and altering social structures (Thant Myint-U, 2001). Like the colonial administrators' reliance on native elites, Internationals dependence on privileged informants marks the limits of outsiders' power in the societies they attempt to control. Internationals sometimes expressed frustration at privileged informants' monopoly on power and consequent tendency toward corruption, yet they portrayed themselves as helpless to gain access to target communities any other way, because they were obliged to work within the very social hierarchies they were seeking to alter through "inclusive education." In this sense, Internationals may feel simultaneously uncomfortable with their own disproportionate power over the communities they are serving, and beholden to certain individuals or factions within those communities.

Thus, Burmese dependence on Internationals, identified by both groups in the scenes that open this section, becomes upon closer examination a kind of co-dependence that is only visible

when the categories of “Burmese” and “International” are broken down by analyses of class, ethnicity, and institutional power. This co-dependence challenges the binary oppositions of Burmese victim vs. International oppressor or International messiah vs. Burmese heathen. Yet both groups may hesitate to acknowledge this co-dependence insofar as it interferes with their ambivalent narratives about what it means to be Burmese or International.

Intermission: Meanwhile, in lands far away...

Researchers in other post-conflict settings have drawn conclusions similar to mine. My description of Internationals is similar to Catherine Odora Hoppers’s (2001) “‘knowers’ of Third World realities” (p. 22), and the people I designate as “privileged informants” can be placed in a framework in which international resources alter local power structures around the world (Rappleye & Paulson, 2007). Criticism of aid as social engineering and of its agents as sanctimonious imperialists is well-trodden ground: as Carothers (2003) says of US democracy promotion, “Missionary zeal pervades the field, bringing with it a disinclination for self-doubt and a reflexive belief in the value of the enterprise” (p. 8). In contexts as far-flung as Africa and the Balkans, authors have identified capacity building and partnership as repackaging for traditional donor-centered initiatives (Odora Hoppers, 2001; Samoff, 2004; Vavrus & Segher, 2010). These authors, who launch their critiques from a neo-Marxist, post-colonial, or critical theory perspective, highlight education as a sector in which neo-liberal capitalist ideologies are promoted (Odora Hoppers, 2001) and foreign policy goals are pursued (Samoff, 2004). While some scholars point toward the global convergence of educational practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2007), others show that even the most well-intentioned educational initiatives have unintended

consequences (Anderson-Levitt, 2003)—for instance, when the failure of donor-directed reforms delegitimizes recipient states’ educational systems (Kendall, 2007).

It is no coincidence that many of the contexts covered in this literature could be described as post-conflict; aid is directed at poverty and instability, which are increasingly seen as intertwined (Duffield, 2001). The primary irony of this flow of aid from the Internationals to the post-conflict Global South is that International intervention—in the form of colonization, covert funding to counterinsurgency or dictatorial governments, or outright regime change—often contributed to the conflict itself. For instance, the USAID logo appeared on both food aid to Guatemalan soldiers waging a scorched earth campaign against insurgents in the 1980s, as well as on shipments of peace education materials twenty years later (Oglesby, 2007).

Yet criticism of the hypocrisy of aid deliverers can be misconstrued as an unrealistic demand that Internationals should just “go away,” when there is no “away” to “go” to anymore, if there ever was. I hope that as the field of post-conflict studies develops, more scholars will complement their critical insights with concrete suggestions for how Internationals and Locals can work together in ways that are more satisfactory for both groups, without losing sight of the histories of violence that condition their relationships. I share Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan’s (2004) hope that despite the tendency for “participation” of aid-receivers to mask tyranny of aid-givers, there are ways to seek more genuine collaboration; it is toward such suggestions that I will turn next.

Continuing drama: Suggestions for practice

I’m venting to a Burmese friend: “The Burmese are like, ‘The foreigners are corrupt. They play favorites. There’s no transparency. They make promises they don’t keep.’ But the Internationals say exactly the same things about the Burmese!”

She laughs. “Yeah, yeah.”

I go on. “The Burmese say, ‘They don’t listen to us. They waste money on fancy air-conditioned trucks. They experiment on us like we are animals in a laboratory.’ Then the foreigners say, ‘They are conservative and stubborn. They can’t get along with each other. They don’t understand that we can’t just give them all the money they want.’”

“Ha!” she laughs. “They’re both right.”(fieldnotes, 10/23/2009)

Given the “both-rightness” to which my friend alludes, how could Burmese and Internationals avoid treating each other as the caricatures I ventriloquize above? Homi Bhabha (1994) gives us a way to conceptualize Burmese and International subjectivities, but can his work also be used to move toward less exploitative relations in contemporary practice? I believe it can.

The problem that Bhabha helped me to theorize, which the scenes from my fieldwork illustrate, is that Internationals and Burmese people imagine and speak about themselves and each other in ways that are grounded in histories of colonial domination predicated on racial, cultural, and economic hierarchies. These histories cannot be erased, but Bhabha points out that the hybridity of the third space has the subversive potential to undermine structures of domination and re-formulate the discourses on which they are based. One step toward such a reformulation that I have tried to take in this chapter is to direct attention toward polarized caricatures—scheming Internationals and virtuous Burmese on one hand, or selfless Internationals and greedy Burmese on the other—in order to see the hybrid subjectivities that emerge through the friction on the boundaries of such positions.

In my view, the next step is not a cynical acceptance of inequality, but an excavation of hybridity for the words and deeds that might transform it. This endeavor is predicated on the

assumption that discursive and material inequalities are interrelated, and that altering either offers the chance to transform the other. Therefore the re-imagination of subjectivities produced by educational missionization does not lead me toward an acceptance of the status quo, but toward a re-negotiation of what “better” education means. In this spirit, I would like to conclude with several suggestions that might be helpful both in the context of the Thai-Burma border, and more generally in post-conflict, post-colonial situations.

One of the polarizations that leads to inequality is that which casts Internationals as teachers and Burmese as learners. Therefore, while there are many programs in which Internationals build the capacity of Burmese, there are few programs designed to do the reverse. Mechanisms by which Burmese train Internationals working on the border—in culture, language, indigenous ways of knowing and making decisions—represent a chance to transform this binary opposition. Such programs could present indigenous educational traditions as a resource rather than as an obstacle to be overcome, while questioning the assumption that International education is better from the perspectives of all stakeholders.

The position of the “privileged informant” is one that seems to break down boundaries between Internationals and Burmese, but in fact increases stratification within Burmese communities. Internationals could rethink their reliance on privileged informants by designing structures of outreach to listen to voices from a broader spectrum of community members including the most marginalized. Internationals could cultivate their relationships with a variety of stakeholders rather than working through individuals who act as gatekeepers.

Finally, the subjectivities of Burmese and International educators are based on the assumption of economic inequality between them. The negative effects on morale for both groups could be mitigated by reducing the gaps between Internationals’ salaries, Local staff of

INGO's salaries, and ordinary teachers' salaries. This intervention would also help to restore the teachers to their traditional position of respect in Burmese society, which has been eroded over the past decades as teachers in Burma and on the border have been pressured toward corruption by their inability to survive on their salaries alone. The INGOs that fund Burmese teachers' salaries could commit to raising them to a level commensurate with those of teachers in Thai government schools—even if that meant cutting Internationals' positions or lowering their salaries.⁶² This would be an especially difficult step to take in times when INGOs' budgets are shrinking and funders would rather subsidize photo-ready projects such as building schools. However, INGOs could make an effort to educate their funders about the importance of a living wage for teachers in avoiding corruption, increasing educational quality, and improving working relationships among Internationals, Burmese, and Thais.

In making these three suggestions, I try to appeal to the desire that leads Internationals to undertake educational missionization in the first place. As I have tried to show, that “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122) often takes the form of two contradictory but intertwined positions: that Burmese have the same priorities, needs, and rights as Internationals do; but that Burmese are not fully capable of acting in their own best interests. While these positions may be a legacy of colonial ideology, I believe they also indicate an underlying desire to connect with others that is not entirely nefarious. The less damaging parts of this desire might be recuperated if Internationals acknowledged that insofar as they identify as “helpers,” their own subjectivities are contingent on casting Burmese people as “helped.” This

⁶² While there is no official minimum wage for migrant teachers, anecdotal evidence suggests that their base salary is equivalent to 70 USD/month, one third to one fourth of what local teachers in Thai government schools would make. Local employees of INGOs might make the equivalent of 400 USD/month, while International INGO employees could easily make ten times

reflection may lead Internationals like myself away from the certainty that our ways are best and toward a more humble and curious engagement with Burmese people and their educational practices. While the suggestions above do little to address the disturbing ironies of global governance and post-Cold War capitalism referenced at the start of this paper, I do hope this chapter exposes some of the motivations that prop up this system.

It is for the reader to judge whether the prescriptive conclusion to this article constitutes a re-colonization of Burmese education, and whether these normative claims reveal the neo-colonial soul beneath the ethnographic costume I wear. I don't mean to imply that the farce of educational missionization has a happy ending, but rather that all of us who participate in it may be able to disrupt the drama by taking the small but subversive step of pausing to laugh at the absurdity of the script history has written for us.

that amount. It is worth noting that increasing teachers' salaries would create a gap between them and other migrant workers; the suggestions I offer address the education sector alone.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM THE FORM TO THE FACE-TO-FACE: IRBS, ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCHERS, AND HUMAN SUBJECTS TRANSLATE CONSENT

It was almost my turn to speak, and I still hadn't decided whether or not to use the consent forms that sat nearby in a neatly photocopied pile. I felt lucky that a Burmese colleague had invited me to facilitate part of a workshop that his NGO had organized for refugee and migrant teachers in the Thai border town where I was doing fieldwork. Analyzing textbooks with this multi-ethnic group was a great opportunity in my research on the connection between history curricula and the Burma's decades-long ethnic conflict.⁶³ I had already introduced myself as a Ph.D. student and talked to many people in the room about my research. However, I knew that if I did not get the consent forms signed, my university's regulations would not permit me to use any data from the workshop in my dissertation. Still, as I looked around at the faces of the teachers, those I had known for years and those I had never met, I felt overwhelmed by embarrassment at the idea of imposing on them a form that I suspected would confuse, alienate, and alarm them without securing meaningful consent. There's a famously untranslatable Burmese word for this allergy to

⁶³ To summarize this conflict briefly: Burma, also known as Myanmar, is an ethnically diverse country of about 55 million people located in Southeast Asia. Since British decolonization in 1948, a central government dominated by ethnic majority Burmans has been fighting ethnic minority groups seeking greater autonomy and various groups seeking political change. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), a military junta that continues the tradition of authoritarian rule in Burma since 1962, has been documented as perpetrating human rights abuses including rape, forced labor, and torture, especially against ethnic and religious minorities and political dissidents. Since the mid-1980s, these circumstances and the poverty they have produced have led millions of Burmese to cross the border into Thailand to live as refugees, exiles, or migrant workers. These Burmese people are involved in a patchwork of non-state school systems that formed the setting for my research. Burma is also known as Myanmar; I use "Burmese" to refer to people of any ethnic group with origins within the country.

inconveniencing, perturbing, or disrespecting others: *à-na-de*.⁶⁴ Over ten years of working with Burmese people, I had learned when to feel *à-na-de*; knowing the word allowed me to discover a relation to others I could not name in English. As I waited for my colleague to introduce me, my heart pounded with *à-na-de*. When I stood up empty-handed, I felt a rush of relief and excitement. Reflecting on that moment now, I see my desire to be linked to the teachers by *à-na-de* rather than put the awkwardly translated words of the consent form between us.

That decision marked a turning point in my fieldwork. At that moment, I joined the ranks of what Jack Katz (2006) calls “IRB outlaws,” ethnographic researchers who violate or ignore the protocols of their universities’ Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in favor of ethical practices they feel are more appropriate to their methods and setting. That moment also heralded a transformation in the way I understand translation, consent, and the ethics of “human subjects” research. Most IRBs—including that of Cornell University—take a signed consent form as evidence that a human subject has made an informed and uncoerced decision to participate in research. For the IRB, the form (or the oral version of it) represents a legal and ethical procedure that can be translated into any language. However, I found that meaningful consent could not be preformulated, proceduralized, or replicated. Instead, it took place in unique face-to-face conversations situated in local practice, using local vocabularies.

In this chapter, I will present a theoretical framework for differentiating this face-to-face consent process from the one delineated by most IRBs. First, I will offer some background on the regulation of human subjects research and describe the consent process that Cornell’s IRB instructed me to undertake. Then I will explain why I found those procedures inappropriate for the kind of study I was conducting (cross-cultural, collaborative, ethnographic research on

⁶⁴ I italicize Burmese-language terms and use the conventional system for transcription

education), situating my concerns within the literature on why researchers in those categories have struggled with IRB regulations. I will move from this discussion of practical matters into underlying theoretical issues by contrasting the IRB's Cartesian paradigm for one-size-fits-all researcher-participant relationships with theories of intersubjectivity (Butler, 2005; Voloshinov, 1929/1986), ethics (Levinas, 1961/2000), and translation (Sakai, 1997) that lead toward a face-to-face consent process sensitive to cultural difference. Finally, I will present several scenes from my fieldwork that illustrate this practice. I will conclude by discussing the implications of my conclusions for IRB policies.

This endeavor is important because so many anthropologists (as well as scholars in other disciplines) grapple with the ethical dimension of consent and with the IRB regulations that surround it. These difficulties are apparent in casual conversations with other scholars as well as in the literature on IRBs—for instance, the special issue of *American Ethnologist* devoted to human subjects protocols (Lederman, 2006). Because debate on these issues is often heated, I want to state at the outset that I respect IRBs' mission to shield participants from harm and dissimulation, thereby “protecting the reputation of research” (Pritchard, 2002, p. 8). I also recognize that even in ethnographic research, real dangers can arise for participants (Plattner, 2006), as when ethnographer Napoleon Chagnon was implicated in various abuses of the Yanomami people whom he was studying in the Amazon (Skurski, 2011). Therefore I distance myself from calls for unfunded research to be deregulated altogether (e.g., Katz, 2006). The people who serve on IRBs are often overworked and pressured to balance their scholarly commitments with their responsibilities to their institution, to ethical principles, and to federal law (Center for Advanced Study, 2005), and I don't want to portray them as a monolithic

recommended by John Okell (1971, pp. 66-67).

adversary, but rather as a diverse group of people with good intentions and a range of skills and experiences. I also want to acknowledge that I provide no solution to what has become one of IRBs' main challenges—addressing the liability issues facing universities (Bradburd, 2006; Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). Without dismissing this challenge, I want to decouple it from overlapping but distinct ethical concerns in order to see the latter more clearly.

This re-imagining of the ethical is important in taking up Didier Fassin's (2006) challenge to anthropologists to invent their own principles and practices rather than simply complaining that the IRB's biomedical model doesn't fit their work. For while many researchers articulate the problems they face in obtaining consent according to human subjects protocols (Bradburd, 2006; Haggerty, 2004; van den Hoonaard, 2002), few detail alternative procedures—much less theories—by which they *do* obtain consent (for an exception, see Duneier, 2001). Therefore, I would like not only to explore why the IRB's "standard operating procedures" did not fit well with the kind of research I was doing, but also to theorize the practices I used in their stead. Without prescribing that other researchers should use the face-to-face process that I found helpful, I want to offer researchers and IRBs fodder for reflection on the paradigms that underlie consent procedures.

I also want to acknowledge at the outset that it is possible that if I had included in my initial IRB application the rationale I present here for why consent forms were not suitable for the kind of research I wanted to do, that I would have been exempted from using them, and thus would never have faced the decision of whether to become an "IRB outlaw." A combination of my inexperience as a researcher and my reluctance to seek advice from my committee, as well as mixed messages (as I interpreted them) from the IRB, led me to be less than forthcoming. I do hope that other researchers can learn from my experiences and make decisions that will be

beneficial for all. However, the fact that some projects may be declared exempt from IRB review does not address the underlying theoretical dissonance I will describe between the ethical paradigm expressed in IRB documents and the one I used in seeking face-to-face consent. I am not sure of the extent to which this dissonance can be harmonized, but I do think that “going public” with these issues yields a better chance that the review process can be shaped to accommodate researchers’ and IRBs’ needs as they work toward their common goal of fostering ethical research (even if their definitions of “ethical” never converge).

I was inspired to describe my experiences for an audience of educational anthropologists because IRB consent procedures raise special challenges for this discipline. Scholars who pursue collaborative or participatory research, as well as those who work outside the US or the English-speaking mainstream, may also face special hurdles. As Norma González’s (2010) recent Presidential Address to the Council on Anthropology and Education shows, many anthropologists of education fall into these latter categories as well. Yet there have not been many explorations of the impact of consent procedures on this type of research (for an exception, see Hemmings, 2006). I hope that my reflections will inspire others to share their thoughts on the ways that IRB regulations affect this scholarly community.

Standard operating procedure for obtaining consent in human subjects research

Before describing the consent procedures currently stipulated by Cornell’s IRB, I will offer some background information on the regulation of human subjects research in general. The post-World War II Nuremberg Trials classified Nazis’ experimentation on unwilling persons as a crime against humanity, and the resulting Nuremberg Code set forth ethical principles including the necessity of subjects’ voluntary consent. In the US, media attention to researchers’ ethical

obligations intensified in the 1970s. In particular, there was outrage over the U.S. Public Health Service's Tuskegee syphilis study, in which African-American sharecroppers in Louisiana were kept uninformed of their disease and denied treatment over the course of forty years.

In response to this and other situations in which researchers seemed to exploit vulnerable subjects unaware of the risks involved, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) issued the Belmont Report. The Report declared that researchers should act in accordance with principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons was defined to include treating all potential participants as "autonomous agents," or "individual[s] capable of deliberation about personal goals and of acting under the direction of such deliberation," while protecting those whose autonomy is diminished by age, "illness, mental disability, or other circumstance that severely restricts their liberty" (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979, pp. 2-3). The Report explained that respecting people's autonomy meant obtaining their "informed consent" by providing them with information on the risks and benefits involved, ensuring they comprehended this information, and allowing them to decide whether or not to participate (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979, p. 3). The Report's conclusions were broadly applied in 1991, when the "Common Rule" required all federally-funded institutions (including universities) to set up IRBs to ensure the fulfillment of these standards in any research involving "human subjects" ["living individual[s]" about whom researchers obtain "(1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual[s]," (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p. 2) or "Identifiable private information" (p.

4)]. By this means, many types of research came under systematic review, with biomedical investigations as the default model.⁶⁵

Not only do IRBs have to uphold the ethical principles in the Belmont Report in order to protect their institutions' federal funding, but they have also evolved into the role of shielding their institutions from liability for the effects of research on participants (Bradburd, 2006). Thus IRBs must balance the legal and ethical aspects of informed consent. Most institutions do so by requiring informed consent to be documented by a participant's signature on a form. Cornell's IRB notes that the consent form should be "legally effective," but also emphasizes that "informed consent is not a single event or form to be signed, but an educational and ongoing process that takes place between the Protocol Principal Investigator (Protocol PI) and the prospective participant" (Office of Research Integrity and Assurance [ORIA], 2010, p. 1). In other words, the signed form documents the subject's willingness to participate in the research, but it does not constitute consent in itself.

The IRB maintains this balance between legal and ethical priorities by mandating a systematic, replicable process of written consent for use in most types of research and settings (ORIA, 2010, p.1). Cornell defines "research" as "...a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" (ORIA 2007). The Common Rule stipulates that the requirement for written consent in human subjects research may be waived if "research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required

⁶⁵ Exemptions have been introduced for certain types of research, such as oral history, on the basis that its conclusions are not intended to be generalizable (see "Application of the Department of Health and Human Services Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects at 45 CFR Part 46, Subpart A to Oral History Interviewing" at http://web.archive.org/web/20080117043701/http://alpha.dickinson.edu/oha/org_irb.html).

outside of the research context” (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p. 8). While this exception could be taken to include most ethnographic research (Winslow, 2006), Cornell’s IRB seems to interpret this exception conservatively, noting that “while there are a few circumstances in which [it] may grant a waiver or provide for an alternative to the informed consent process,” written consent is “the standard” (ORIA, 2010, p. 1). Its sole example of research involving minimal risk is the observation of public behavior (ORIA, 2010, p. 7). Oral assent may be documented in lieu of written consent only if participants are blind, illiterate, unable to write their names, or speaking with researchers via telephone (ORIA, 2010, p. 13); even when oral assent is used, it must follow the format and include the same components as written consent.⁶⁶ The IRB may also excuse researchers from *documenting* the informed consent process that they have carried out when, for instance, the return of a survey may be interpreted as evidence that it has taken place.

When research takes place outside the English-speaking US mainstream, additional considerations apply. As the IRB explains, “The concept of ‘informed consent’ requires that it be obtained in a language that the participant understands” (ORIA 2010, p. 14). If participants do not speak English, translated consent forms must be prepared through a two-way process. The researcher creates an English consent form based on the template provided by the IRB. A native speaker of the target language translates it, then a different native speaker back-translates it into English so that the IRB can check the translation’s accuracy (ORIA, 2010). The researcher, a translator, and an independent witness work together to inform the participant and obtain

⁶⁶ This is the only mention of oral consent that I found in documents on the IRB’s website. Since completing my research, I have heard anecdotally that oral consent is also granted in situations where written consent might cause participants to feel uncomfortable (as it did in my project). The extent of and reasons for the disjunction between IRB policy and practice are beyond the scope of this chapter.

consent. The IRB also acknowledges that in other cultures, “showing respect for dignity and freedom may require different actions, protections, and attitudes,” such as consulting with local leaders (ORIA, 2009, p. 3). Researchers should fulfill these obligations in addition to the standard procedures for obtaining written consent, unless they have secured a waiver according to the provisions described above.

Despite these regulations, some researchers are not required to document informed consent at all because their projects are exempt from IRB review. For instance, under Section 46.101 b (1) of the Common Rule, “research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices” including “research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods” does not fall under the jurisdiction of IRBs (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p. 3). Such projects still are subject to various state and federal laws, as well as to the code of ethics articulated in the Belmont Report (ORIA, 2007).

In the absence of such an exemption, all researchers are expected to follow the steps outlined here. In cases of noncompliance, the IRB may suspend or terminate the research (ORIA, 2007). Publishers (or universities, in the case of theses and dissertations) may decide not to accept studies that have been conducted without IRB approval or in violation of IRB policies.

My attempt to follow standard operating procedure

Because I began my project under the IRB’s jurisdiction, I attempted to follow all of the steps described above. However, as I described in the opening scene, once I began my research I felt so uncomfortable with the consent form that I stopped using it consistently. Instead, I obtained consent through a face-to-face process I will describe later in this article. I did not

inform the IRB, as I was required to do whenever my research design changed. Nor did I tell my committee, for fear of implicating them in my decision. I was uncertain about how these actions would affect my ability to use the data I was gathering in my dissertation, but I felt so positive about the work I was doing with teachers that I continued it. One option would have been to explain the situation to the IRB and accept the consequences, whatever they were. However, like many other researchers (Katz, 2009), I avoided confrontation with the IRB for fear that my disclosure would result in the interruption or termination of my project, and I applied for a yearlong extension without disclosing the problems I'd had using the consent form.

I am not sure what the outcome of such a disclosure would have been, but it became a moot point when, in response to my application for an extension, the IRB informed me that my research was exempt under the provision for "normal educational practices" that I quoted previously. I had been unaware of this possibility for exemption when I initially submitted my application, and the IRB had approved my study without mentioning it. Either the IRB had changed its policy on how to apply the exemption, or simply had not noticed that it matched up with my project the first time around.

Either way, this development left me in a position I believe is somewhat unique: during the course of one project, I worked both within and outside of IRB guidelines. Although I was still obligated to follow the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons post-exemption, I had more freedom to interpret those concepts so that they would be meaningful in my research site. Although I had started using alternative consent processes before learning of my exemption, the change in the status of my project confirmed my decision to write about these experiences. One factor that made that decision easier is that I can explain the ways in which I violated IRB regulations with less concern about jeopardizing my ability to publish my findings.

I understand that some readers may find these violations troubling, but I hope to show that the alternative measures I took to gain consent were, in the context of my fieldsite, more thorough and more indicative of meaningful consent than the standard procedures recommended by the IRB. Moreover, I do not believe that anyone was harmed because of the ways in which I deviated from standard procedure.

While my position as an initially approved but eventually exempt researcher may be relatively uncommon, I am not alone in expressing concern about the ethical consequences of IRB regulations. There have been objections to the use of consent protocols from many quarters, especially from scholars like myself—ethnographers, collaborative researchers, educational researchers, and those working across cultures. Each of these four characteristics set my research apart from the kind of positivist biomedical study that is the default model for IRBs (Annas, 2006; van den Hoonaard, 2002). In the next section, I will describe why each of these four qualities made it difficult to use the informed consent procedures as I had been instructed.

Problems with the use of consent forms

Ethnography

Part of the reason that informed consent procedures didn't fit well with my project was that I was using ethnographic methods. Ethnographers have been among the most vocal critics of informed consent procedures, which they argue conflict with the inherent informality and unpredictability of ethnographic research (Annas, 2006; Bradburd, 2006; Katz, 2006; van den Hoonaard, 2002). In my case, these qualities did indeed make the consent form both challenging to create and damaging to my relationships with participants.

First, consent forms were designed for formal activities clearly separated from everyday

life, which are antithetical to ethnographic research (Lederman, 2006). While I planned to act as a participant observer in several workshops like the one I described in the opening vignette, I spent the majority of my time outside of such events, interacting with teachers and community members in their schools, homes, and other settings. To describe those casual pursuits in the “What I will ask you to do” section of the IRB’s template, I would have had to write something like: “If you agree to be in this study, you will spend time with me in informal settings over the next six months. During that time, we may discuss history curricula, inter-ethnic reconciliation, or unrelated topics.” It seemed odd to formally request consent to enter an informal relationship. Even if I had designed such a form, it would have been hard to determine who to ask to sign it. As other ethnographers have observed (van den Hoonaard, 2002), there was no clear separation between the people who were participating in research and those who weren’t. Yet my interactions with people went beyond the “observation of public behavior” for which informed consent could be waived.⁶⁷ Therefore, I wrote consent forms asking people to participate in curriculum development workshops, simply to have concrete activities to list.

The second problem I faced was that ethnography’s inherent unpredictability (Katz, 2006; Lederman, 2006) meant that my consent form quickly became outdated. When preparing my application, I had found it difficult to balance the IRB’s request for specific information about my plans with my desire to keep my project description general enough that I would not have to frequently alert the IRB to “any change in research design,” (ORIA, 2007). I had tentatively planned a sequence of workshops before arriving in Thailand, but I suspected that these plans would change. Just as I thought, once my fieldwork began, it involved all kinds of

⁶⁷ Again, anecdotal evidence suggests that Cornell’s IRB sometimes waives the requirement for informed consent requirement in other situations, yet I found no indication of these possibilities in IRB literature.

activities I had not had preapproved by the IRB. For instance, teachers asked me to deliver sample lessons at their schools. I did not seek IRB approval for this amendment to my study because it seemed to fall within “normal educational practices,” and because I was concerned that delaying this activity while I created consent forms for students’ parents and would have mystified and offended my hosts. Furthermore, my research interests were evolving. I had planned to write my dissertation on the connection of history curricula and ethnic conflict, but this investigation led me toward topics I had not anticipated, including the subject of this chapter.

Not only was it challenging to design a consent form, but using it also caused participants distress. As other ethnographers have observed, consent forms can make potential participants suspicious or uneasy precisely because the activities for which their consent is sought seem so benign (van den Hoonaard, 2002). Daniel Bradburd (2006) calls this the “chilling effect” (p. 243). I found that introducing a consent form at a workshop disrupted trust by contractualizing a relationship that I had tried to keep as informal as possible (while of course making it clear that I was doing research). Explaining to participants that my university wanted to make sure that no harm came to them only added to their confusion, also potentially bringing up their mistrust in large institutions. The activities we were engaging in entailed no obvious risks, so one conclusion participants could have drawn was that *I* was somehow dangerous or untrustworthy. As I shall explain in the section on cross-cultural research, participants’ discomfort occurred partly because the consent form didn’t translate well linguistically or culturally, but I attribute some of their unease simply to the disjunction between the informality of ethnographic research and the legalism of the consent form.

Collaborative research

Consent forms also presented problems because I was using participatory or collaborative methods. Setha Low and Sally Merry (2010, p. s211) define collaboration as part of engaged research, which may also include sharing and support, teaching and public education, social critique, advocacy, and activism. I was collaborating with groups of Burmese teachers to design history curricula intended to promote the reconciliation of ethnic conflict while studying this process from an academic standpoint. Thus my research also resembled Susan Brydon-Miller and Davydd Greenwood's (2006) delineation of participatory action research, a subset of engagement that is "built on voluntary partnership between a researcher and local stakeholders who form a collaborative team" (p. 120). Although researchers' negotiations with collaborators about "the underlying questions, rules for conduct, hoped-for outcomes of such work, and the respective rights and obligations when work is done" (Johnston, 2010, p. s236) often exceed the IRB's expectations for consent, I was aware that this type of study was sometimes difficult to get approved by IRBs that assume the neutrality of the researcher (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004). Therefore, when I initially applied for IRB approval I decided to "play it safe" (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006, p. 122) by presenting my study in a more traditional paradigm. Unbeknownst to me, a group of participatory action researchers at Cornell had already negotiated with the IRB for special provisions to accommodate their situation (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). In the absence of these accommodations, I joined other researchers using participatory methods (O'Brien, 2004) in finding consent forms inappropriate because they hierarchicalized my relationships with participants while creating the false assumption that the project was my intellectual property to use as I saw fit.

First, like other researchers using participatory methods (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006; O'Brien, 2004), I had pre-existing relationships with people in my fieldsite that stood to be

redefined by the consent form. The form placed us in a hierarchy with me as the “Protocol PI” and them as “human subjects” in the biomedical style. To be sure, there were already power differentials among us due to my status as a white US citizen with access to institutional resources. Even though Burmese colleagues had invited me to work with them, I was conscious of the colonial dimension of coming to advise them on educational issues; the history of white researchers’ exploitation of indigenous communities (Lipka, Mohatt, & Ciulistet Group, 1998; Smith, 2000) was inextricable from our interactions. Yet I found that the consent form exacerbated rather than promoted reflection on these power differentials. It placed me in a position to “investigate” them and denied their role as seekers of knowledge that would benefit their community. Moreover, the consent form assumed that I was in a position of power that would potentially allow me to exploit my colleagues, while ignoring the extent to which they might exercise authority over or derive benefit from me, as participants sometimes do (Wax, 1983).

A related problem, also noted by other scholars using participatory methods (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006; O’Brien, 2004) was that the consent form defined the project as mine when in fact it was the work of many within the community. In some cases, it was unclear whether they would have been holding similar workshops even if I weren’t present. It seemed odd to seek their consent for activities they might have been doing anyway, and it reinforced an inaccurate impression that what we were doing was my intellectual property, when I had actually developed the plans during years of working with some of the people whose consent I was now requesting. Brydon-Miller and Greenwood (2006) clarify that in participatory research, investigators should seek IRBs’ and participants’ permission to *document* projects rather than conduct them. As it was, the consent form negated participants’ role in shaping the research.

A final aspect of participatory research that complicated the use of consent forms was that, like similarly oriented scholars (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006; Johnston, 2010; O'Brien, 2004) I was not making decisions about the project alone. I had included details in the consent form that I suspected would change once I was in the field, not only because of the inherently unpredictable nature of ethnographic research, but also because I wanted to take Burmese collaborators' ideas into consideration. I did not want to pressure colleagues to follow the research design I'd had preapproved by the IRB at the expense of our relationships or against their better judgment. Thus, the details in the consent form became outdated soon after I arrived. I was hesitant to submit a revised consent form to the IRB because I suspected our plans would change frequently. Therefore standard procedures did not offer the flexibility I needed to make decisions in collaboration with my local colleagues.

Educational research

Another reason I found consent procedures challenging was that it can be difficult to reconcile educational research with IRB regulations (Hemmings, 2006; Pritchard, 2002). First, there is the question of whether the research falls under the aforementioned exemption for "normal educational practices," which, as my case shows, is not a straightforward determination. Besides this confusion, I faced problems promising confidentiality, delineating the benefits of research, and ensuring the voluntariness of participation according to the IRB's guidelines.

First, I faced a dilemma over how to interpret confidentiality in an educational context. As Annette Hemmings (2006) points out, it may be impossible and even undesirable for ethnographers to promise confidentiality in educational settings, which are seldom conducive to secrecy. I faced this problem when designing my consent form because although the workshops

were public events, discussions I had outside of the workshops were not. Furthermore, I wanted to credit collaborators and participants by name in my published work if they wished. When I consulted the IRB about how I should address this situation, the director suggested that I alter the template to indicate that while I could not promise confidentiality for comments made in the workshops, participants could choose to keep or waive their right to confidentiality for private discussions. However, in practice, the distinction between public and private spaces was blurry—a teacher who whispered an aside to me in the middle of a public meeting would not want to be identified by name, but a principal speaking on behalf of her community might expect me to credit her for her insights even if she had shared them in a private conversation. The explicit and tacit arrangements I made with various participants were too complex to typologize in a consent form. I would have had to design multiple versions for different participants, and amend them frequently during my fieldwork. Therefore, the medium of the consent form was useful neither in assuring participants that they could trust me nor in giving me clarity about how to treat data.

Describing the benefits of research on the IRB's consent template also presented problems. Ivor Pritchard (2002) points out that specifying the benefits of educational research may be difficult because there can be confusion over the distinction between individual benefit to participants and benefit to the community as a whole. Along those lines, I had developed a description of positive outcomes that included both learning about the experiences of people from other ethnic groups and helping the community by developing curricula that could aid in reconciliation. However, the IRB required that I remove this statement, because “benefits per se refer to health benefits only” (IRB Chairperson, personal communication, 3/26/2009). This definition of benefits reveals that the template had been designed for biomedical research and

could not accommodate research on education. Nonetheless, I had to change the form to read, “You will receive no benefit from participating in this study.” Not only was this statement inaccurate in my view, but it was also discouraging to participants. As one colleague who was helping to organize a workshop explained, “They [the teachers] will ask me, ‘So why am I participating?’” (fieldnotes 10/29/2009). The form created the impression that I was asking the teachers to become involved in an activity that was pointless for them and only benefitted me.

Finally, ensuring voluntariness was no straightforward task. As other educational researchers have pointed out, educational settings tend to be hierarchical, and it can be difficult to ensure that students are not subtly coerced by teachers, teachers by administrators, etcetera (Hemmings, 2006; Pritchard, 2002). Some teachers had been informed about the workshops by their headmasters or other people they respected. If I informed them personally, they might feel pressured to join either because of our pre-existing connection, or because of my status as a foreign teacher/researcher. The IRB’s protocols held up the ideal of an individual acting of his own free will, unconstrained by the web of relationships in which we all exist. This ideal seemed unrealistic, especially in an educational context. Of course, there is a spectrum of volition, and I wanted to assure participants that the workshops were not mandatory. Yet I questioned whether the best way to convey that was by asking them to sign a paper that said, “Taking part is voluntary.” The medium of the form created an impression of officialdom that belied this sentiment, creating the potential for them to feel *more* coerced. The form explained that participants could withdraw from the project at any time, but within a hierarchical system, it is understandable that people might feel that signing it amounted to a promise to participate.

Cross-cultural research

Finally, using consent forms was difficult for me because I was conducting research immersed in Burmese language and culture. Researchers working outside the US or the English-speaking mainstream have raised concerns about consent procedures on the grounds that they are meaningless or culturally inappropriate and thus damaging to participants' trust (O'Brien, 2004), even in the biomedical contexts for which they were designed (Adams et al., 2005; Dawson & Kass, 2005; McCabe et al., 2009). I faced problems with the translation of the consent form, with the meaning of its terms in local context, and with participants' negative associations with signing forms of any kind.

First, the consent form's terms were difficult to translate. As researchers working in various other non-English speaking contexts have observed, these difficulties are not merely technical, but indicate underlying disjunctions in worldview and epistemology (Adams et al., 2005; McCabe et al., 2009). For instance, phrases like "the right to confidentiality" are specific to a Western legal framework that assigns a positive value to individuality and privacy, whereas in Burmese culture these concepts can carry a negative connotation of underhandedness and dishonesty (O'Brien, 2004). Moreover, the Burmese word most akin to "right" (*ahkwín-ayei*) has implications closer to "permission" or "opportunity"—in other words, something that is granted, not innate. The closest approximation of "confidentiality" is *hlyó-hwek*, more like secretiveness. So "I waive my right to confidentiality" (meaning that their names could be used in my published work)⁶⁸ came out more like, "I give up my opportunity to be secretive." Whether a Burmese speaker would back-translate that phrase "correctly" would depend on their familiarity with US concepts of rights—the bare phrase had no clear meaning. Indeed, one Burmese

⁶⁸ Anonymity means that the researcher does not attach identifying information to data, while confidentiality means that the researcher does not include identifying information about participants in her published work.

colleague who scrutinized the consent form said that if I had to use it, I should apologize first and explain that “some words have no meaning” (fieldnotes 10/29/2009).

Furthermore, even if participants understood the consent form precisely, some terms had different meanings in the context of my fieldsite than they would have in the US. For instance, the IRB recommends that unless researchers identify specific harms that can come to participants, they should include the phrase “I do not anticipate any risks to you from participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.” For many of my participants, daily risks included chronic malnutrition, extortion by corrupt police, and deportation back to Burma. Participating in research did not increase those risks, and in fact, my presence as a foreigner may have made them marginally safer. Yet reminding them of these risks was certainly not an inviting way to propose research. This example shows that what is reassuring in one context may be disconcerting in another.

Finally, the consent form was problematic because, as in many cultures with a history of state oppression (Adams et al., 2006), participants had negative associations with signing pieces of paper. The Burmese military regime under which many participants grew up stands accused of forcing false confessions and using misleading contracts (Amnesty International, 2009). Furthermore, some participants had dubious legal status in Thailand and would have been unsafe if they returned to Burma, so any official-looking paperwork could bring up fears about security. My assurances that the signatures were for my university only did not seem to ease participants’ concerns. In one workshop, only one Burmese person agreed to sign the form (several foreigners from the US and Europe were happy to sign, highlighting the stark cultural differences in its reception). In another workshop, several participants took home the forms to scrutinize before hesitantly agreeing to sign them. The form, intended to assuage their fears and assure them of

their rights, instead seemed to cause anxiety and confusion.

For all of these reasons—related to cultural difference as well as to the nature of collaborative ethnographic research on education—I found that the forms I had designed based on the IRB’s template were not an effective way to gain meaningful consent. This realization led to my decision to stop using consent forms and become an “IRB outlaw” in the scene I described in the opening vignette. However, I did not stop seeking consent. Instead, I developed an alternative process I call the face-to-face approach. I saw the problems I encountered not simply as technical glitches requiring logistical responses, but as ontological issues inviting a re-theorization of the relationships involved in research. Therefore, in the next section, I will contrast the assumptions about intersubjectivity and translation embedded in the IRB policy with an ethical approach based on face-to-face encounters.

Applying theories of ethics, intersubjectivity, and translation to consent

IRB policies for obtaining informed consent, and the Belmont Report on which they are based, are grounded in a particular ethical paradigm. The Report’s concept of “respect for persons” is based on the idea that all individuals share a capacity for autonomous decision-making. In other words, we respect others because they have the same capacity to think that we do. The idea of cognitive sameness assumes a Cartesian model of subjectivity, best exemplified in the work of Jürgen Habermas (1992/1998, 2000), in which autonomous individuals make rational decisions about how to interact with each other based on universal principles such as freedom and democracy. This model of subjectivity creates the possibility of a contract between researcher and subject: the consent form. The Protocol PI designs the consent form for a human subject with whom she shares concepts of voluntariness, confidentiality, legality, risk, and

benefit, as well as practices of written and spoken communication. The US officials who conceived this process assume these terms and practices to be universal and thus translatable into any language. The consent form, based on this assumption of commensurability, puts the Protocol PI and the human subject into relationship with each other in advance of their meeting. The words of the consent form determine the parameters of this relationship, protecting the human subject from the Protocol PI and protecting the university from the human subject. This ethical paradigm rests on the standardization of the operating procedure and on the predictable, limited meaning of the terms involved.

The Cartesian model of understanding selfhood and human relations dominates institutional culture in the US (not to mention advanced Western capitalism in general). However, an alternate concept—intersubjectivity—emerges from semiotics. Intersubjectivity means that the self is not a pre-existing, clearly bounded consciousness, but instead a shifting range of possibilities for being that emerge through discursive engagement with others (Silverman 1983). Intersubjectivity is most easily understood in tandem with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept that language is a medium by which meaning is created through dialogue, rather than a way that individuals transmit meaning to each other. In other words, "meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker" but is instead "the effect of the interaction between speaker and listener" which is "like an electric spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together" (Voloshinov, 1929/1986, p. 102-103).⁶⁹ Language is not a transmission across empty space from an inner "I" to an inner "you," but what allows us to be in relation to each other. At the same time as it links us, language also creates the boundaries between us by drawing us into affective social structures that allow an "I" to feel part of a "we"

or to feel separate from a “they” (Ahmed, 2004). In other words, the illusions of sovereign selfhood and clearly defined group membership are created through the texts and forms of speech by which we address each other, and by which we are addressed.

One way to understand the contrast between the Cartesian and semiotic models of subjectivity is to compare English modes of address with those in languages that acknowledge intersubjectivity more thoroughly. English has only “I” and “you,” exemplifying a Cartesian paradigm in which individuals have one consistent subject position from which they address others as a homogenous group of “you”s. Burmese, on the other hand, has many words that stand in for those pronouns, depending on the age, gender, social status, occupation, spiritual qualities, and familiarity of the people talking. These pronouns both enable and constrain social relationships. I could call myself “daughter” when speaking to an older gentleman and “female disciple” when addressing a monk. A teacher in my fieldsite might call me “teacher” one day and “sister” the next, depending on subtle variations in the situation. This naming is necessarily provisional and contingent. There is no neutral word for an “I” standing outside of social relations; “I” only exists in relationship to specific “you”s in particular contexts. The rich vocabulary for conveying intersubjectivity that exists in Burmese and other languages helps to clarify the ways in which we are socially situated.

Intersubjectivity has ethical consequences. In a Cartesian model, the “you” is a known quantity, respected because of its commonalities with the “I.” In contrast, Emmanuel Levinas (1961/2000) posits that “I” am obligated to “you” precisely because I cannot assume our cognitive sameness. Whereas in the Cartesian model, an ethical relationship can be delineated in advance on paper, for Levinas, the ethical moment is always the face-to-face encounter, similar

⁶⁹ It is disputed whether Valentin Voloshinov or his close colleague Mikhail Bakhtin authored

to the “electric spark” of meaning that Bakhtin described as emerging only in dialogue. This moment cannot be preformulated or postponed; I cannot decide in advance who to be or what to say. In the moment of the face-to-face encounter, the other demands an ethical response, impinging on my freedom to do whatever I feel like. My desire to be connected to an other who exceeds my ideas about who they are places me in an impossible position, responsible for welcoming a presence I cannot anticipate. This subordination of one’s own freedom to the other’s unknowable priorities can seem abstract, yet again I find that Burmese words help me understand it better. In the opening vignette I described how feeling *à-na-de*, or hesitation to impose my plans on others, prevented me from using consent forms. Although this feeling is often associated with differences in social status, it also seems to me to approximate the Levinasian approach toward the other. It is possible that many languages have ways to express this attitude, but English does not seem to be one in which it can be succinctly invoked in one term, as it can be in Burmese.

This conception of ethics has wide-ranging implications for conducting research. Judith Butler (2005) shows how Levinasian ethics precludes claiming totalizing knowledge of the other, suggesting that “the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed” (p. 21). This idea contrasts with the Cartesian idea that the possibility of dialogue is predicated on common modes of thought, although it is also distinct from a possible caricature of Levinasian thought in which we are clueless about what others think or feel. Clearly, we are reacting to others’ linguistic and bodily cues all the time, not groping blindly with no structures to interpret them; however, as Butler argues, we cannot expect

this work. Either way, it is safe to classify the ideas therein as “Bakhtinian.”

others to “give an account” of themselves that will satisfy our desire to know them, and by knowing them, dominate them (p. 135). Peter Benson and Kevin O’Neill (2007) have similarly used Levinas’s ideas to theorize a kind of ethnography based on an “ethics of risk” that accepts the limits of knowledge one person can have of an other, and acknowledges the potential of their interaction to transform them both. The fact that the IRB would interpret an “ethics of risk” quite differently leads to my next point: the words involved in consent are far from straightforward.

Intersubjectivity also has implications for translation. The IRB assumes what Naoki Sakai (1997) calls “homolingual address”: all speakers of a language comprehend each other. For instance, in a homolingual address, I would assume that “benefit” means the same thing to you as it does to me because we both speak English. However, Sakai (1997) draws on Levinas to argue instead that all audiences are “heterolingual,” meaning that even when we address speakers of our own language, we are “always confronted with foreigners” (p. 9) whose comprehension we cannot predict, assume, or assess. This is because, as Bakhtin also observed, words have no fixed meanings, but are instead the vehicles of constant semiotic negotiation among us. Sakai (1997) argues that the illusion of homolinguality—the fiction that languages are bounded, uniform, and universally comprehensible by all speakers—was created by the idea of translation. For example, translating “benefit” into Burmese as “*akyō*” allows us to falsely believe that “benefit” means the same thing to all English speakers. However, in Sakai’s model, there can be no standard, correct translation of a term from one language to another, only competing translations offered by various interpreters. This model contrasts the IRB’s protocol for translation, in which one native speaker is considered equivalent to another and thus capable of back-translating the other’s translation into English. Without implying that all translations are equally valid, Sakai re-conceptualizes translation as a “practice of producing difference out of incommensurability

(rather than equivalence out of difference)” (Morris, 1997, p. viii). Thus the otherness of others is left intact, whether they speak the “same” language or not. Sakai (1997) explains that if we accept the reality of heterolingual address, we become members of a “nonaggregate community,” brought together “because we are *trying* to communicate, not because we are succeeding” (p. 7). Therefore communication is not impossible, but its accuracy can neither be taken for granted nor assessed.

Based on this alternate ethical paradigm, I developed an informed consent process that looked different from the IRB’s standard procedures. First, it occurred in a face-to-face conversation that could not be preformulated—although I considered my past experiences with Burmese people as well as relevant literature in preparation. That meant I could not have told the IRB in advance what I would say. Second, the meaning of the terms involved—research, benefit, risk, consent—are negotiated, not given. Finally, what makes my behavior ethical is not the extent to which I follow a predetermined code of action, but instead how I respond in the moment to the unpredictable words and actions of others I can never fully understand even if I gain insight into Burmese ethical conventions. While the IRB instructs me to inform participants of the risks and benefits involved in research, Levinas forces me to acknowledge that those risks include the harm I could cause participants by assuming that I know what will harm them, as well as the risk to my own sense of self, which will be transformed by my interactions with participants. However, this paradigm does not lead toward the cynicism of throwing up my hands and ruling all forms of consent equivalent, nor to declaring consent impossible. Instead, I take it as an invitation to be present in the moment of consent, to attend to the words I use to put myself in relation to others and to how those words cause me to feel connected to or separate from them.

In the next section I will offer three scenes from my fieldwork that illustrate a face-to-

face consent processes that transpired outside of the strictures of the standard operating procedure. The fact that these three scenes are quite different shows that this type of consent is context dependent and resistant to proceduralization, yet their commonalities are immediacy, openness to the presence of the other, and attention to relationship.

Three face-to-face consent processes

Collective consent

At the beginning of this article, I described my decision not to use consent forms in one particular workshop. Now, I would like to explain what I did instead. In fact, the process of consent began years before the workshop. My colleague's decision to contact me several weeks before the workshop that his NGO planned to hold was the outcome of a subtle vetting process during my time researching and teaching on the border. I went to his office and spent a couple of hours talking to him and his colleagues about their plans for the workshop, my research, and how they fit together. I offered to facilitate a session in which we analyzed the way existing textbooks exacerbated ethnic tensions, and tried to create new materials that promoted reconciliation. I explained that I hoped to learn from the way the teachers approached this task. I also said that my university wanted the teachers to sign consent forms. My colleague said this would be OK, but I sensed hesitation and discomfort.

Only on the day of the workshop, when I was face to face with the teachers, was I able to seek consent. I listened to my feeling of *à-na-de*, and I put the forms aside. Instead I told the group about my research and how it was connected to what we would do together that day. I acknowledged that talking about history and conflict could be uncomfortable, and invited their questions and comments on the "strengths and weaknesses" of my approach, using words I had

often heard people use to ask for feedback in Burmese. At the end of the workshop, I spoke with the colleague who had invited me. In my fieldnotes (10/16/2009), I wrote, “Later [my colleague] told me he talked to people and they said it’s OK to use the info for my research, they are interested. Consent doesn’t happen up front, it’s a private discussion. *I* don’t have to get consent—the group gives it to me.”

In this case, my willingness to give up control of the consent process was what allowed it to occur. This example questions the assumption that consent must always be individual, and that the researcher must direct the process. A group discussion for which I was not present may have allowed teachers to talk about my research without worrying that they would offend me. Moreover, hearing about my research from their colleague before the workshop gave them a chance to non-confrontationally opt out if they felt uncomfortable, rather than openly refusing to sign a form. This example may seem to contradict the face-to-face ethic because I did not have direct, individual encounters with each participant. I also acknowledge that within the teachers’ discussion, power relationships may have restricted some teachers from expressing reservations. However, I believe that my colleague’s explanation signified more meaningful consent than signed forms would have. Speaking with each teacher individually would have served my desire for the illusory security of “knowing” they consented, when in fact their willingness to show up that day and express interest in my research was evidence of a more substantive yet also more qualified consent contingent on my ongoing responses to their questions, invitations, and concerns.

Consent to document

I would like to share another story of consent, this one from a dialogue I had with a

woman who was not, strictly speaking, one of my research participants at all. Benson and O'Neill (2007) point out that Levinasian ethics challenge ethnographers' distinctions between "people who do or do not matter to a research project" (p. 47); the consent process occurs with whoever we encounter, not necessarily the people we seek out. After all, not only the people I was interested in, but all people in my fieldsite had to put up with my presence. This woman, who I will call *Naw Htoo*, was one such person. I saw her frequently and had casual conversations with her, and although I had been introduced to her as a Ph.D. student conducting research, she was not one of my "main informants." As I was not systematically gathering data during my conversations with her, she would not have qualified as a research subject at all according to the IRB. One evening I stopped by the place where *Naw Htoo* was living, and while eating dinner we had this conversation.

Naw Htoo [NH]: So I know you do research, but what does it mean?

Rose [R]: I spend a lot of time writing down what people say in conversations.

Because what I do, you know anthropology? Like, studying people?

Ethnography? (she nods vaguely) It's kind of like keeping a journal or a diary.

Because what I study is not only history textbooks but also people's relationships, so if the training does not work out, it is probably because of people's relationships, so I should study and understand why.

NH: Yes. (She nods, and pauses) So will you write down what *I* say?

R: Yes!

NH: No! (shocked, laughing) Really?

R: Yes, because you say interesting things. (We laugh). But in my paper, I won't use your name unless you want me to. [...]

(later, when I am leaving)

NH: (smiling) Now I make more work for you, you have to write it all down!

This is the first time I have talked to anyone about this aspect of what I am doing—the ethnographic part. I feel I have told her a secret in a way, that she will tell others and they will feel self-conscious or even mistrustful of me. But I should "give up my opportunity to be secretive"! (fieldnotes, 10/25/2009)

My feeling that I was giving up my own "right to confidentiality" (or the awkward Burmese translation of this phrase referenced in my fieldnotes) illustrates the mutuality of the consent process. I was not only seeking *Naw Htoo*'s consent, but she was also asking for something from

me: a face-to-face explanation of what I was doing and how it involved her. Her curiosity was a gift that caught me off guard and required my response. Although I suspect that her initial “No!” came from her shock that a researcher would find what she said interesting, it remained with me along with the consent she gave me when she joked that I had a long evening of typing up fieldnotes ahead of me. Just as *Naw Htoo’s* thoughts remain elusive to me, her consent hovers slightly out of my grasp. How could I claim to know what she thought or felt in those moments after I tried to explain my research methods? All I could do was continue to feel around for the edges of that consent, which I may not have been as inclined to do if I’d had her signature on a form.

Consent to name

To provide a contrast to the example above, I would like to illustrate the consent process between me and one of my closest collaborators. *Saya Aung Khine* and I worked together in various contexts and we remain in frequent contact. While I did initially introduce myself to him as a researcher, his influence on my project was so substantive that it would be more accurate to say that he explained my research to me than vice versa. During hours of conversation, we discussed many of the theoretical issues I address in this article: the difficulty of translation, the power differentials between Burmese people and foreigners, and the ethical dimension of relationships. We also discussed how I should represent him in my research. Although Aung Khine had signed a consent form giving up his right to confidentiality, he later told me that he was not sure if he was comfortable with me using his name or not. Although I wanted to give him credit for the profound insights that he shared with me, I was happy to accommodate his wishes. Shortly before I finished this dissertation, I sent him a copy so he could see how he

would be represented and decide if he wanted his name included. He agreed to have his name included, but he asked me to de-emphasize his role. I sensed that he added this caveat out of modesty, and it was out of respect for this modesty, as well as for whatever other unknown factors influenced his wish to remain in the background, that I did not include more of his story or comments in my dissertation. This example shows that face-to-face consent is an ongoing process that continues into the stage of representation and publication.

These three scenes that I have described don't represent any extraordinary innovation on my part. I am sure other researchers have sought out similar interactions, for similar reasons. Moreover, I don't want to suggest that I am an expert in face-to-face consent. I certainly bungled it on some occasions, mostly by trying to stick to my vision of what it should look like. However, the Levinasian model did help me to understand what transpired in those scenes, while offering inspiration for future enactments of consent.

Implications of face-to-face consent for IRB policy

The scenes I described above occurred during my life as an "IRB outlaw," but it is worth considering whether IRB regulations could accommodate such practices. Although the Cartesian paradigm in which the IRB operates may be incommensurable with Levinasian ethics, it is possible that practices acceptable under both worldviews could be found. There is already evidence of such practices at Cornell. For instance, some of the problems I encountered resulted from the inflexibility of the consent template, which has since been modified to fit social and behavioral research better. Other problems were related to written consent per se, yet this requirement could have been waived under a variety of provisions. If I had known to seek the educational exemption in the first place, I could have used face-to-face consent during my whole

project. Alternately, if the Common Rule's conception of "minimal harm" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p. 8) was consistently defined to include most ethnographic projects, as Deborah Winslow (2006) suggests, I could have argued for a waiver of written consent on these terms. I also could have lobbied for a waiver under the IRB's new policy on international research (ORIA, 2009), which takes local practices into consideration. All of these avenues would have been easier if IRB decisions were made public precedents in order to increase the predictability of the process and thus encourage researchers to be forthcoming (Katz, 2006).

While I support the IRB's recent amendments to standard operating procedure for international and social/behavioral research, the fact that policies were in flux during my studies meant that I received mixed messages from the various documents I encountered on the IRB website at different junctures. This confusion, combined with the fact that there was no public precedent for IRB decisions, meant that I had difficulty judging whether my petition for exemption or waiver would be successful, and for that reason I was hesitant to put it forward. I would have been more likely to do so if I had been aware that Cornell's IRB has already shown it is amenable to negotiation with scholarly interest groups (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). Indeed, the changes to IRB policy that I describe above came about because researchers took up the challenge (Fassin, 2006; Plattner, 2006) to become more involved in IRBs instead of merely criticizing, avoiding, or thwarting them. In other words, I could have been part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

It is less clear whether an explanation of the theories underlying my objections would have led to a productive conversation. I could have remained solidly within the Cartesian paradigm and used the IRB's own terms to argue that my research should be exempt from the requirement for written consent. On the other hand, I could have explained my broader concerns

about written consent using theories of intersubjectivity, ethics, and translation. There are arguments to be made both for practical compromises and for forcing a confrontation between competing epistemologies. Yet it is not likely or even necessarily desirable for IRBs to be converted to Levinasian ethics and dispense with written consent altogether. Indeed, consent forms may be appropriate for some types of research; I just don't think they were suitable for mine. Moreover, without the discomfort that the written procedures brought up, I would not have thought as deeply about alternatives. In this sense, I agree with Winslow (2006) the review process forces novice researchers like myself to think more subtly about ethical issues. That is why, although I would have been happy to avail myself of the exemptions described above, I believe they are a deferment rather than a resolution of the disjunction between a Cartesian and Levinasian paradigm. However, it may be that just as I could not expect unconditional consent from participants, I should not expect to come to a final understanding with the IRB. Perhaps the best I can hope for is a conversation that leaves theoretical differences intact while leading toward practices that are ethical from a wider variety of perspectives.

EPILOGUE

Scholarship is inevitably a product of the times in which it was produced, yet I often find that authors bracket out discussions of the current issues that influenced their choice of topic and shaped their arguments. This may be because academics feel that their ideas should be timeless (or at least enduring), or because they want their work to be judged on its logic and rigor rather than by its contemporary relevance. Or it may be because the trends and world events that affect academic choices seem so all-encompassing and obvious that they don't need to be mentioned.

However, I want to close this dissertation by making explicit how global, national, and local issues affected the way I wrote it. In particular, I want to mention the 2010 election in Burma, the widespread economic downturn beginning in 2008, and the 2010-2011 "Jasmine Revolution" in parts of the Middle East and Asia. Because one of my major procrastination techniques was reading the news and discussing it with friends, these events loomed large in my mind as I wrote, and I noticed the material and psychic ways in which they impacted my work. In particular, I want to bring out some of the tensions that I encountered between partisanship and honesty; between the worlds of theory and practice; and between the hope for positive social change that motivated me to undertake this project, and the realistic assessment of the many factors that conspire against such change. I hope that these meta-details help readers to contextualize my research.

The 2010 election in Burma

One event relevant to the subject of my dissertation was the November 2010 election in Burma, its first in twenty years. The SPDC claimed that the election heralded a transition away from military rule and toward an era of "discipline-flourishing democracy." Opposition parties

and voters faced the decision about whether to contest the election, thus legitimizing the SPDC's process even if they suspected it would be biased against them, or boycott it, effectively removing themselves from "the only game in town" (The Irrawaddy, 2010). This decision split the best-known opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Nobel Laureate *Dàw* Aung San Suu Kyi.

In the end, some opposition parties managed to get MPs elected, yet the party associated with the SPDC enjoyed significant advantages in campaigning and benefitted from election day irregularities (UN News Service, 2010), winning a majority of the seats. The new President is the former SPDC Prime Minister who traded in his uniform for civilian garb (Ba Kaung, 2010), and the meetings of Parliament that have been convened so far appear cursory (Wai Moe, 2011). The election's impact was immediately felt on the Thai-Burma border, as an armed struggle group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) took the opportunity to launch an attack on the SPDC that sent tens of thousands refugees fleeing over the border into Mae Sot, the town where I had conducted most of my research (Prachatai, 2010). Then, in the week after the election, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest, under which she had been held for fifteen of the past twenty-one years (BBC, 2010). I was riveted to these events, watching them on YouTube, debating them with friends on Facebook and email, and faithfully listening to the BBC Burmese radio broadcast.

More than the election itself, the discourse surrounding it affected my dissertation. While it is clear that the military remains in firm control of Burma, the influence that the changed form of government will have on people's lives (if any) is not yet apparent. Yet the bitter debates leading up to the election have reverberated through the communities of academics, journalists, activists, and diplomats who write about Burma. In the run-up to the election, some Burmese and

international observers hoped that even if the election results were a sham, incremental change might result, and that the increased space for civil society development was an opportunity in itself (Horsey, 2010; Lall, 2010). Some Burmese inside the country did decide to participate in the electoral process and in the civil society development projects surrounding it, and they received intellectual and financial support from groups in the US and EU (Beech, 2010); in addition, some ethnic minority leaders hoped that they might gain a greater voice in government (Ellgee, 2010). The exiled media condemned many of these Burmese as opportunists or as naïfs; their foreign backers were cast as “apologists” for the SPDC who were advancing their own economic and political interests (Aung Zaw, 2011; Wai Moe, 2010; Zarni, 2010).

Meanwhile, some foreign Burma scholars claimed that political change was being “held hostage to exile politics” (Lall, 2010). Such charges aroused fresh indignation among educated Burmese expatriates who have long criticized “Burma experts” who they deem uninformed or disingenuous, but whose pronouncements shape international discourse about Burma (Aung Zaw, 2011; The Irrawaddy, 2002; Zarni, 2010). Yet those launching these accusations, valid as they might be, also speak from a position of relative privilege removed from the daily life of ordinary Burmese people; some sources accuse the exiled opposition of being “out of touch” with current realities in the country they may have left decades ago (Fuller, 2010). In this context, the perspectives of “ordinary Burmese people” for whom many claim to speak are elusive.

In these ways, the election brought out underlying tensions in Burma studies, a field with roots in the colonial era, which scholars from the Global North/West continue to dominate. These power dynamics have prompted some Burmese scholars to question the nature of knowledge production about Burma. As Zarni (2011) puts it:

Burma Studies has by and large chosen to remain silent on the fundamentally criminal and colonial nature of Burma's "state-building" process, while in effect finding fault with the natives' languages, imaginations, social organisations and politics, without any empirical basis. [...] On their part, Burmese scholars and writers, both minority and majority, from the British colonial period onward, have constructed their own versions of neo-Orientalist historical discourses colored by different strains of patriotisms and ethno-nationalisms (p. 213).

On the contrary, some foreign Burma scholars lament the politicization of the field and defend the neutrality of their academic work. Robert Taylor (2009), whose controversial book *The State in Burma* polarized a generation of Burma observers by seeming to some to legitimize military rule, explains in the preface to the new edition:

The ability of the original book to generate antagonism apparently carries on, as I was abruptly reminded a few years ago. I sat at a cafeteria table during a break at an international meeting on Myanmar and introduced myself to a young postgraduate student who was also attending. When I told her who I was, she immediately announced that she hated me. Since we had never met, I was puzzled. How could reading my tedious prose evoke such strong emotions? She could not explain except to suggest incoherently that I was responsible for Myanmar not being the liberal, prosperous country she thought it should be. If only books and their authors had such powers! (pp. xv-xvi)

The gulf between Zarni's and Taylor's perspectives is emblematic of the tensions in Burma studies, which were apparent at the International Burma Studies Conference that I attended in Marseilles in 2010. Discussions about the elections were especially heated, but any topic could become a shibboleth for the political divisions and power differentials among Burmese participants, among foreign scholars, and between these two groups.

In this context, and producing scholarship about Burma as a foreign academic is fraught with pitfalls. Whether the topic is dynastic history or present-day tapestry-weaving, the temptation exists to size up its political valence based on a quick look at the acknowledgements and citations and on the choice of "Burma" vs. "Myanmar" vs. "Burma/Myanmar." Those who don't condemn the SPDC outright may be labeled as apologists for the regime, concerned only

about advancing their own careers (Kent, 2005). Those who do take a political position against the SPDC risk being dismissed as “activists-by-proxy” whose scholarly work is less than credible.⁷⁰ I suspect that most people who study Burma share my belief that while the SPDC is a collection of individuals with conflicting goals rather than the unified, monolithic force of evil that it is sometimes portrayed to be (e.g., by Rogers, 2004), it has not succeeded at carrying out the responsibilities of good governance. Yet many scholars avoid making even such a mild understatement in publications or in private conversations. This may be because they fear being blacklisted by the SPDC and thus cut off from their research site, because they want to protect their Burmese informants and acquaintances from harm, or simply because they do not find it appropriate to include any kind of political statement in their work.

I felt these tensions acutely while writing this dissertation. As will probably be clear by now to readers of any chapters of this dissertation, I believe that an exploration of one’s own biases and commitments is preferable to the elusive ideal of political neutrality in scholarship. Because I became interested in Burma through its democracy movement, and because my initial contacts were Burmese exiles on the Thai-Burma border, I have always been sympathetic to their perspectives even if I didn’t hold them above criticism. I am also aware of the tendency among Americans and Europeans like myself to romanticize the Burmese democracy movement and/or ethno-nationalist struggles, and to take on those causes as their own in ways that lead them to present one-sided versions of history (e.g., Mawdsley, 2001; Rogers, 2004). However, even my brief time inside Burma showed me that the situation there is much more complex than exiled democratic opposition movements sometimes portray it to be, and that no political party or interest group could purport to speak for “the Burmese people.”

⁷⁰ See, for example, David Scott Mathieson’s (2005) review of Monique Skidmore’s (2004)

Therefore my own loyalties are divided. I had friends and acquaintances on both sides the election debate, and I was disturbed by the virulence of the attacks lobbed back and forth on the comment pages of the articles I cited above. It is understandable that Burmese people have strong feelings on these issues—often, they have taken immeasurable risks and made incalculable sacrifices in order to do what they believe will help their country. I can also appreciate the concerns of foreign academics that their work will be judged not on its merits, but on the political message that readers (fairly or unfairly) read into it. Furthermore, I am sympathetic to Burmese people who are frustrated by the way that foreigners continue to dominate international discourse on Burma. I know that the fact that I am positioned to produce academic work about Burma while scores of brilliant, hard-working Burmese people are not has everything to do with the history of colonialism and current realities of global capitalism from which I disproportionately benefit.

For all of these reasons, I know that my work will be read by some through political lenses, despite the fact that I am not writing about contemporary politics per se. As Chapter One shows, even dry discussions of ancient history are affected by the current power dynamics in Burma. Therefore, I have taken care in this dissertation not to portray myself as a “Burma expert.” I circulated drafts of my chapters to both Burmese and international colleagues in order to gauge their reactions and adjust my tone. Perhaps most difficult in this regard was Chapter Three, in which I try to offer both Burmese and International perspectives in a way that both groups will be able to hear and appreciate. However, I am acutely aware that two of the moves I make in that chapter—the auto-ethnographic turn I take in writing about my own perspective, and my use of post-colonial theory that may seem like pretentious jargon to some readers—could

alienate some of my Burma studies audience (see Mathieson, 2005). In any academic work, it is inevitable some readers will disagree with the information presented or with the theories used to interpret it, but in Burma studies this effect is magnified. I am sure I made missteps that will not be clear to me for years to come, and that will only become evident to me when observers with insights outside my limited perspective share their thoughts. Therefore I ask for the feedback of my Burma studies audience, of whatever political persuasion—I am very interested in continuing the discussion.

The economic recession, 2008—present

The second event that influenced the writing of this dissertation was the economic crisis of 2008 and subsequent worldwide recession. This crisis, which cost 20 trillion USD and which many believe was brought about by the excesses of global financiers (Ferguson, 2010), had wide-ranging impacts relevant to my project, my career, and the way I position myself as an academic.

First, the higher education system in the US has faced massive budget shortfalls in the past three years. Cornell's Education Department, which had previously faced various struggles, was closed due to budget cuts as I was writing up this dissertation (Boor, 2010). The funding crisis also affected the state where I am currently living, Missouri, where public universities were targeted for cuts according to the logic of the market. State Senator Scott Rupp was quoted as saying that he supported academic research only based on its potential to promote local economic growth, explaining that "someone who is out studying the migration habits of the Hopi Indian tribes is not going to bring any jobs to Missouri" (Silvey, 2011). While research outside the "hard" sciences was devalued, and the academic job market for social scientists tanked,

unemployed anthropologists and sociologists were invited by private military contractors to become part of “Human Terrain Systems” designed to support the war effort in Afghanistan and Iraq (LeVine, 2011).

Meanwhile, the livelihoods of teachers at all levels became less secure. After Republican Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker announced that he intended to curb collective bargaining rights for teachers, professors, graduate teaching assistants, and all other public employees, tens of thousands of people rallied in Madison in what liberal media called an “people’s uprising” (Democracy Now, 2011) against cuts to public funding of health, education, and infrastructure. In response, conservative pundits warned public school teachers that their “generous union benefits” would end as the “educational gravy train” from which they had been profiting ground to a halt (O’Reilly, 2011).

While these developments called into question whether US teachers at any level would remain part of the middle class, the financial crisis had much more dire impacts on the educational stakeholders involved in my research, who were already subsisting on tiny salaries. INGOs on the border announced that decreased funding required them to cut the meager allowances on which refugees lived (Saw Yan Naing, 2011). Female migrant workers suffered disproportionately as their survival strategies were restricted in the wake of the financial crisis (Pollock & Soe Lin Aung, 2010). This trend was visible in the education sector as well; while many teachers faced wage reductions or cuts as funding to migrant schools foundered, women in particular tended to make less because they often occupied less prestigious positions in primary grades, for which salaries were lower to begin with. These hardships and inequalities seem likely to persist and even increase as the repercussions of the financial crisis spread.

As someone who hopes for a career bridging secondary and higher education, with continuing involvement in educational projects on the Thai-Burma border, the developments I described above prompted reflection on my goals. Because I am tied to the city where my husband has a job, and because I love working with teenagers in a high school setting, I had never planned on a traditional academic career. The recession also reduced the likelihood of a tenure-track education professorship becoming available nearby, and caused me to feel disillusioned about the future of the humanities and social sciences in US universities. Therefore, I was not writing this dissertation to maximize my marketability (a legitimate concern of anyone interested in making a living through scholarship), but rather for the sake of the project itself, which I believe was worth conducting and writing about. Since the primary audience for this dissertation was not potential employers, I wrote it for the people I hoped *would* be interested in reading it: scholars of education of various persuasions; anthropologists and other social scientists interested in post-conflict settings; people interested in Burma in particular; and the Burmese refugee and migrant communities who had participated in my research.

One way in which I tried to reach these distinct audiences was to write the dissertation in the form of articles for publication instead of as a coherent whole. Yet balancing the expectations of these readers was still difficult for me. In particular, I struggled with the tension between producing work that was on one hand theoretically rigorous and academically relevant; and on the other hand accessible to teachers, NGO workers, journalists, and other non-academics. Moreover, the deepening poverty and insecurity in which Burmese migrants and refugees lived motivated me to produce scholarship that made some gesture, however small, toward improving their material conditions—hence my suggestion in Chapter Three that International funders should subsidize increases in teachers’ salaries. While I did produce an account of my findings in

Burmese specifically targeted at migrant and refugee teachers, which will be published in an education journal based on the border, I still feel uncomfortable with the fact that the ways in which I wrote about those stakeholders in this dissertation would be opaque to most of them.

In other words, the tension between theory and practice, between ideas and their applications, runs across the pages of these chapters. I highly value theories that some people might find abstruse (Bhabha, 1994; Levinas, 1961/2001; Butler, 2005), and I have learned a great deal from scholars (Decha Tangseefa, 2007; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007) who describe the brutal realities of life on the Thai-Burma border in theoretical terms. Yet I also sympathize with practitioners who may be frustrated by the difficulty of applying such scholarship to the humanitarian, legal, and social work they do in these communities. In what sense are scholars who present themselves as writing against the physical and symbolic violence directed against marginalized people (Butler, 2005; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007) accountable to those very people? To me, it seems like a cop-out to say that my academic work need only be comprehensible to a tiny audience of specialists with whom I share specific vocabularies. I take inspiration from scholars such as James C. Scott (1990, 1998, 2009), who write about complex historical issues in ways are contemporarily relevant, politically charged, unburdened by mystification, and appealing across disciplines. Writing this dissertation has given me a new appreciation of how difficult it is to strike that balance, and I would welcome comments from readers who have insights that could help me do so in the future.

The Jasmine Revolution

Finally, as I wrote the last pages of this dissertation, a 26-year-old man named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a public square in a provincial town in Tunisia, igniting a series of

protests against dictatorial regimes across the Middle East and Asia that would become known as the Jasmine Revolution (Whitaker, 2010). These events were meaningful to me partly because they took place in a part of the world from which my grandparents migrated to the US, and the photos of unarmed young people facing down tanks reminded me what my life might be like if I had grown up without the privileges of US citizenship. The Jasmine Revolution also captivated me because it sparked debate about the conditions under which a similar uprising could succeed in Burma (Yeni, 2011). Indeed, as I listened to the bravery and desperation in the voices of protestors that came across the airwaves and through the internet (Kristoff, 2011), I thought of the uprisings in Burma in 1974, 1988, and 2007, during which so many people lost their lives.

Those uprisings, like the Jasmine Revolution, can prompt either hope or cynicism. While secular young people took the lead in organizing the protests in Egypt (Kirkpatrick & El-Naggar, 2011), there is concern that the power vacuum left behind might make way for Islamic fundamentalism (Tlili, 2011). As I write these words, Muammar Qaddafi's forces are in the process of re-taking much of the territory gained by Libyan protestors in the past few weeks (Shadid & Kirkpatrick, 2011). These mixed outcomes make it difficult to assess the extent to which these revolutions will benefit the people who started them.

The relevance of these events for my dissertation lies in the dialectic between hope for the amelioration of suffering for the world's poorest, most marginalized people, and the realistic assessment of the many structural factors that impede such change. I will be wrestling with that dialectic for a long time to come, and this dissertation offers no respite from it. Some readers may find my vision of reconciliation of ethnic conflict Pollyannaish, while others may think that I am too pessimistic about the endurance of hierarchies and inequalities. Yet if my belief in the possibility of reconciliation did not in some sense outweigh my faith in the power of violence, I

would not have spent years producing this dissertation. Conflict and reconciliation are simultaneous, and I believe that reconciliation's final advantage is its ability to reconcile itself even to the reality of ongoing conflict.

For that reason, there is no satisfying endpoint either to Jasmine Revolution or to the stories I have begun to tell in this dissertation. One thing I realized early on was that the longer I spent with my data, the more my ideas changed. If I had taken another year to write my dissertation, it would probably look very different; other events would have intervened that might have caused me to reconsider my conclusions. What has ended up in this dissertation—both stylistically and content-wise—was very much influenced by the circumstances I described above. The point at which I considered it “finished” enough to turn in is, in the end, arbitrary. The stories I am trying to tell are not over, and therefore I will need help from readers to understand their implications.

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⁷¹ Because most Burmese names consist of a series of syllables that form one coherent unit, rather than of first names and surnames, I refer to Burmese people by their full names in the reference list. I include prefixes referencing status and gender (e.g., *Ú* and *Dàw*) in parentheses following the name when citing Burmese-language texts or when Burmese authors publish in English under names that include these prefixes. I leave two-part Thai names whole because conventions regarding first names and surnames differ from those in English.

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