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'The fearful khan and the delightful beauties': The construction of gender in secondary school textbooks in Kazakhstan

Naureen Durrani [*,1], Anna CohenMiller [2], Zumrad Kataeva [3], Zhazira Bekzhanova [4], Assem Seitkhadyrova [5], Aisulu Badanova [6]

Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University, 53 Kabanbay Batyr Avenue, Nur-Sultan City 010000, The Republic of Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how secondary school textbooks enact gender in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. As a 'gender paradox', with universal literacy and yet a higher representation of women at the tertiary level co-existing with multi-sectoral gaps at the expense of women, Kazakhstan offers an interesting context to empirically investigate the taken for granted relationship between education, gender equality and sustainable development. Post-structuralist discursive analysis is complemented with non-discursive methods to illuminate how textbooks entrench gender power relations, construct dominant masculinities and enact emphasised femininities, producing gender hierarchies and naturalising gendered national belonging. Possibilities for transforming gender relations in and through education are discussed.

1. Introduction

A consensus regarding the mutually beneficial relationship between education, gender equality, and sustainable development is apparent within international education and development policy (Biström and Lundström, 2021). Specifically, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda frames the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2016a), and SDG 5, which is concerned with achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, are pivotal to driving progress across all SDGs (United Nations, 2015). Reflecting the significance of multidimensional knowledge and skills to support the ambitious Sustainable Development Agenda applicable to all developed and developing countries, SDG 4.7 calls upon national governments to ensure learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including knowledge and skills for promoting gender equality (United Nations, 2015). Indicators for SDG 4.7 include the extent to which gender equality is mainstreamed in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment, and monitoring teacher and students gender related attitudes and interactions. Furthermore, UNESCO (2016a) calls for a more nuanced notion of gender equality that considers how ideas of masculinities and femininities impact institutional practices and norms. While the expanding notion of gender equality in international education policy and practice is positive, we argue the taken for granted assumptions between a positive relationship between education and gender equality needs to be investigated, particularly as a recent report monitoring global progress on gender equality in education found pervasive gender bias in textbooks and called for more gender sensitive teacher education (UNESCO, 2020). Through a contextualised study of textbook discourse and gender equality in Kazakhstan, this paper explores an important link between education, gender equality, and context to understand better how education might support gender equality in and through education. Specifically, our interest is how gender equality, as

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz (N. Durrani), anna.cohenmiller@nu.edu.kz (A. CohenMiller), zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz (Z. Kataeva), zhazira.bekzhanova@nu.edu.kz (Z. Bekzhanova), assem.seitkhadyrova@nu.edu.kz (A. Seitkhadyrova), aisulu.badanova@nu.edu.kz (A. Badanova).
[1] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2989-6851
[2] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6871-6898
[3] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1348-584X
[4] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6132-9764
[5] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7374-4447
[6] ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1147-0329

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part of SDG 4.7, is embedded in six selected secondary school textbooks used in the state-funded and managed schools. Three of the textbooks were taught in grade 7—English, Russian language and the history of Kazakhstan—while three were offered in grade 8—Kazakh language, algebra and the history of Kazakhstan.

Even before the SDG era, feminist concerns have long focused on ways the school curriculum is linked to gender by exploring the 'official curriculum'. School textbooks are, and will continue to be, an essential means through which the official curriculum is enacted, and in settings with limited instructional materials, 'textbooks play a powerful role in guiding classroom practice and often become the de facto curriculum' (Smart et al., 2020, p. 7). In the Central Asian context, the regional focus of this paper, 'textbooks are assigned across all public schools, without freedom to choose among many resources' (Palandjian et al. 2018, p. 172). Given their secure institutional location and students' compulsory exposure to textbook discourses, identity positions in textbooks can significantly shape students' understanding of gender equality. However, gender bias in textbooks is reported as an insurmountable barrier to achieving gender equality in education in a range of national contexts (UNESCO, 2016b, 2020).

While the literature on SDG 4.7 is emerging (e.g., Biström and Lundström, 2021; Jimenez et al., 2017), some countries and regions remain under-represented, including post-Soviet Central Asian countries (cf UNESCO MGIEP, 2017; Palandjian et al., 2018). Analysing the publications of three key international education journals across their history, Chankseliani (2017) notes that post-Soviet countries are under-represented in comparative education literature. Although she observes a growing focus on issues of identity and textbooks in publications on post-Soviet countries, not a single paper included in her review includes gender in its title. This paper, thus, fills a critical contextual gap in the literature by exploring the enactment of gender and gender equality in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. While Chankseliani (2017, p. 272) notes first authors of publications on post-Soviet countries are mainly (71%) linked to institutions located in 'high income countries outside the post-Soviet space', Waljee (2008, p. 98) laments that gender relations in Central Asia are predominantly studied by Western scholars, 'raising issues of voice and interpretation'. In contrast, all authors of the current paper are linked to a post-Soviet university, with early-career Central Asian researchers predominating the team of authors. Rather than claiming our interpretation as superior to those who are from or work in countries outside the post-Soviet space, we assert to have added an underrepresented voice in the asymmetrical configuration of knowledge production on Central Asia.

A methodological critique of measuring progress about SDG 4.7 highlights the exclusive use of quantitative methods to allow the ranking and comparison of countries (Crossouard and Dunne, 2021; Jimenez et al., 2017), but qualitative analysis is needed to understand how issues such as gender equality are incorporated and to what effect. Furthermore, the quantitative data needs to be critically interpreted to capture the specificities of the education system under review (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). This paper addresses the methodological critique by using discourse analysis, complemented by quantitative methods and drawing on existing ethnographic, sociological and historical literature to help historicise and contextualise the relationship between education and gender in Kazakhstan, a country that shares many similarities with other Central Asian countries. For example, a recent review of society and education in Central Asia reports access to schooling remains high in the region, except Tajikistan (Tabaeva et al., 2021), where both girls and boys drop out at the upper secondary level, but the transition rates for girls are poorer compared to boys (World Inequality Database on Education, 2021). Furthermore, all countries have undertaken large scale educational reforms, including textbook revisions, that simultaneously seek to delink Central Asian countries from their Soviet past and foster the development of new national imaginaries (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). Notably, nationbuilding discourses in Central Asia are intricately linked with gender (Gündüz, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2007; Palandjian et al., 2018; Tabaeva et al., 2021; Waljee, 2008), and curricular materials in the region pay scant attention to gender equality (Palandjian et al., 2018; UNESCO MGIEP, 2017)[1].

Kazakhstan offers an interesting case for charting progress on SDG 4.7—gender equality—for several reasons. As a Central Asian post-Soviet country, Kazakhstan has been a site of political, social, economic, and educational transformations. As a newer nation-state, coming into existence in 1991, nation-building became a fundamental task in post-independent Kazakhstan (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). Kazakhstan is a signatory to SDGs and several international conventions on protecting women's rights (Almukhambetova and Kuzhabekova, 2020). Kazakhstan has created the National Platform for Reporting (NPR) on SDGs, which falls under the purview of the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan submitted its Voluntary National Report to the UN on progress made on SDGs in 2019 (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019). While the report makes no reference to SDG 4.7 or integrating gender equality in curricular contents, it mentions various initiatives taken to enhance progress on SDG 5, including financial and technical assistance to female entrepreneurs, encouraging non-governmental women's organisations to protect women's rights and interests, reforming law enforcement system to protect women and children from violence and strengthening public monitoring of legislation. Nevertheless, the report acknowledged that while progress has been made, the low representation of women at all levels of decision-making remains a concern.

Kazakhstan is a 'gender paradox', with universal literacy and a higher proportion of women in higher education relative to men, alongside gaps at the expense of women in the economic, political, social and domestic arenas[2]. Despite high literacy levels, both men and women hold gendered norms (UNDP, 2020), and national and cultural discourses naturalise and legitimise gender hierarchies (Kudaibergenova, 2016, 2018). Kazakhstan's 'Concept on Family and Gender Policy for 2030', approved by Nazarbayev, The First President of Kazakhstan, in 2016, includes, among other issues, action plans to reduce stereotypes in education and employment and combat violence against women (The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016). It is, thus, significant to see how gender (in)equality is represented in school textbooks in this paradoxical context, particularly as the reduction of stereotypes in education is a national priority and knowledge on Kazakhstan's progress on SDG 4.7 is limited.

2. Kazakhstan: sociohistorical and educational context

As the most Russified of all Soviet republics, the 'project of building a new national identity' has been most intensive in post-independent Kazakstan (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017, p. 190). Like elsewhere, Kazakhstan's ruling elites turned to schooling for constructing new national imaginaries. The centrality of gender in discourses of national identity is evident across Central Asia (Kandiyoti, 2007), although the gendered dimensions of textbooks discourses in the region remain under-researched (cf. Palandjian et al., 2018). The ensuing discussion historicises the relationship between gender, education and state formation in Kazakhstan to help understand contemporary gender relations.

2.1. Gender and education before independence

Central Asian Muslims include both 'the sedentary populations of the great Islamic centres and urban settlements' who converted to Islam

[1] For a comparison of selected education and gender related indicators, see Tabaeva et al. (2021, p. 7).

[2] We are using the term 'gender paradox' in inspiration of the term 'Soviet paradox' used by Kandiyoti (2007).

much earlier and established formal religious institutions, and also nomadic populations of the steppes, areas constituting contemporary Kazakhstan, who embraced Islam relatively late and integrated Islamic practices with pre-existing religious beliefs (Kandiyoti, 2007). The colonisation of Central Asia occurred through Russian imperial expansion (Kandiyoti, 2007). The tsarist regime adopted 'the practice of modern European-style colonial empire building' to transform, uplift, and modernise Central Asia (Northrop, 2004, p. 7). Muslim Central Asia was thus the 'constitutive outsider' who helped establish the self-identity of Russians as civilised and modern. After the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917, Central Asian nations were 'subjected to new forms of control by a non-capitalist metropolis' (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 603). Although the 'backwardness' of Central Asian societies was attributed to Islam, Islamic practice was, and still is, diverse in the region (Akiner, 1996; Northrop, 2004).

Gender intersected with religion, i.e. Islam, in the Soviet modernity project (Northrop, 2004; Peshkova, 2014). The Soviet State framed Islam as 'lacking equality' (Peshkova, 2014, p. 127) and Muslim women as 'always veiled, secluded, and submissive' (Northrop, 2004, p. 25). Nevertheless, the universality of women's seclusion in Central Asia was a myth and veiling 'existed scarcely at all on the nomadic steppes' (Northrop, 2004, p. 43). Before colonisation, Kazakh women enjoyed 'reasonable equality' and equal gender division of labour and public presence, necessitated by the need to deal effectively with the challenges of their nomadic, mobile lives (Kudaibergenova, 2018). Nevertheless, the historian Kundakbayeva discusses in an interview with Sattarov (2021) that Kazakh norms established the superiority of men over women, and the status and power of women in society were linked to their age and their motherhood status. While young newly-married women had a limited say in the family, older women bearing a higher number of children, particularly sons, enjoyed a higher status in society. She further claims that women who could not reproduce or manage the household adequately were considered deviant (Sattarov, 2021).

The intersection of gender with state formation was also linked to the Soviet nationality policies that granted titular nationalities in the Union a distinct territory, carved out arbitrarily (Martin, 2001). Central Asian nationalities were deemed 'culturally backward' in developmental terms and seen in need of support to overcome their cultural and economic backwardness, even though their economies and natural resources differed. As part of creating new national identities, 'symbolic markers of national identity' such as folklore, dress code and cuisine were vigorously mobilised (Martin, 2001, p.13). However, the most significant aspects of national identities, such as 'religion, gender relations, social stratification, economic organization', were either to be discarded or homogenised (Martin, 2001, p. 183).

The Soviet Union's campaign against Islam had 'a strongly gendered sub-text' (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 609). The anti-religious policies created a 'Sovietized public sphere' and a 'traditional private sphere' (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 610), pushing Islam to the private domain and symbolising it as a marker of 'traditions' (Peshkova, 2014, p. 127). Soviet secularism and its approved discourse of 'tradition' normalised 'the association of domestic space with women and religion and of public space with men and a lack of religion' (Peshkova, 2014, p. 127).

The Soviet state used its policies in education and other domains to redefine 'womanhood' in the region, constructing the new socialist citizen to pursue its economic, political and cultural interests (DeYoung and Constantine 2009). Although ostensibly, education was used to 'modernise' the 'inferior other' (Waljee, 2008, p. 95), its ulterior motive was to undermine the communities' culture (Johnson, 2004). Imposed school attendance forced the nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz into a sedentary life (Johnson, 2004). In addition, the policy of *kolhoz,* or collectivization, and other governance decisions to control the population further resulted in the sedentarisation of the Kazakh people (Esenova, 1998). To support the 'indoctrination of scientific atheism', Quranic schools were shut down, disconnecting communities from their religious and literary heritage and closing their access to prevailing Muslim political thought (Johnson, 2004, p. 30).

The Soviet Union achieved its goal of universal literacy, and by the 1980s, Central Asian women constituted 54% of students in higher education (Gündüz, 2015). Nevertheless, 'high literacy and labour force participation rates' co-existed in the region with 'high fertility rates, large families and relatively untransformed domestic divisions of labour', which Kandiyoti (2007, p. 609) termed as 'the Soviet paradox'. She attributes this contradiction to a combination of social welfare policies and the vigorous promotion of 'motherhood as a social duty' in Central Asia. In contrast, men's public obligations were limited to engagement in wage labour and sociopolitical activism (Peshkova, 2014). By limiting men's family role to 'traditional' breadwinner who performed mainly in the public space, the secular discourse distanced them from childcare and sharing of household chores.

While the promotion of women's equality in education and the economy in Central Asia under the Soviet Union was revolutionary (Kataeva and DeYoung, 2017), women's participation in wage labour did not guarantee their empowerment, and men continued to be seen as leaders of their families. In Soviet Central Asia, the dominant discourses of gender established a direct link between wage labour and emancipation, politicised women's rights as a signifier of national identity, and essentialised men's and women's duties and rights vis-a-vis each other and the state (Peshkova, 2014). The Soviet legacies remain profound in post-independence Central Asia, as discussed below.

2.2. *Post-independence developments*

Kazakhstan's ethnic and religious landscape is diverse. According to the CIA (2021), in 2019, ethnic Kazakhs accounted for 68% and Russians 19.3% of the population, alongside smaller ethnic groups—Uzbeks (3.2%), Ukrainians (1.5%), Uighurs (1.5%), Tatars (1.1%), Germans (1%) and others (4.4%). These ethnic differences broadly map onto religious differences. The majority of Kazakhstani citizens (70.2%) identify themselves as Muslims, while 26.2% proclaim a Christian identity (CIA, 2021). The vast majority of the former are Sunni Muslims, while the latter are Russian Orthodox.

Post-socialist nation-building in Kazakhstan has 'been rooted in gendered nationalism, maintaining and producing traditional, social hierarchical or patriarchal order' (Palandjian et al. 2018, p. 169). The realm of culture and 'tradition' offered the key site for de-Sovietisation and reclaiming 'authenticity' and promoting national values (Kandiyoti, 2007). However, this cannot be simply attributed to the re-Islamisation of society (Kandiyoti, 2007). Kazakhstan is a vigorously secular state, and while a moderate religious revival has been observed post-independence, the society remains influenced by seven decades of atheism imposed by the Soviet Union (Thibault, 2019).

Across Central Asia, economic shifts seek to 'globalise' women by pushing them into the free market economy (Waljee, 2008), which has affected women the most, mainly due to the cuts to social welfare and protection. The neoliberal social and economic reforms and interventions, supported by international aid agencies, have 'disadvantaged women and worsened gender inequality' (Gündüz, 2015, p. 174). Almukhambetova and Kuzhabekova (2021, p. 572) argue that globalisation and the shift to free-market have also enabled the penetration of Western liberal views on women's position in society, which has simultaneously 'heightened women's expectations with respect to full-time employment, salaries, professional development, and equity in the workplace … [and] brought in sexism and devalued view of women via messages in popular culture and mass media'.

Kazakhstan was ranked 80th out of 156 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2021 (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2021), showing a substantial growth in gender inequality since 2006, when Kazakhstan was in 32nd place (Hausmann et al., 2006). In 2019, on average, women's salary was 67.7% of man's wage (Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Bureau of National Statistics, 2020). The same source reports that during the same year, the

number of women holding ministerial positions was 2 out of 16; the share of women in Parliament (Senate, Mazhilis) was less than 30%; only one woman held the position of *akim* [regional governor]; only 28 out of 116 university rectors [provost/ vice chancellor] were women. Moreover, one in three women experiences some form of abuse during her lifetime (MJRK, 2016). Both men (74%) and women (63.8%) agree that it is justifiable for a man to beat his partner (UNDP, 2020).

Kazakhstan has shown sustained support for gender equality policies and has made visible efforts to advance women's status (Almukhambetova and Kuzhabekova, 2020). Kazakhstan aims to enter the list of the 30 most developed countries in the world by 2050, drawing on the experiences of OECD countries and views gender equality as pivotal to the realisation of its modernisation and human capital development goals (MJRK, 2016). Although women's political and economic empowerment is a repeated theme in Kazakhstan's gender equality strategy and political statements, by linking women's role primarily to motherhood, family and demographic policies, policy narratives risk reinforcing gender stereotypes, counteracting policy intentions to promote gender equality (OECD, 2017).

Focusing on gender equality in education, Kazakhstan has achieved gender parity in schooling (UNESCO, 2020), with women being overrepresented (54.7%) in tertiary education (Turakhanova, 2019). Despite Kazakhstani girls outperforming boys in science and performing equally in mathematics, female tertiary graduates are underrepresented in specific science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields (UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, women continue to be overrepresented (over 70%) in teaching and health—feminised occupations with a high prevalence of low wages (OECD, 2017).

Nation-building through education has entailed large scale educational reforms, including curriculum reforms (Bridges, 2014) which aim to 'nationalise' the curriculum, delinking it from Russia, and 'internationalise' it to prepare globally competitive graduates (Bridges, 2014) but give scant attention to gender equality issues (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). Textbook development in Kazakhstan is standardised under the Ministry of Education and Science regulations on textbook development, assessment, approbation, monitoring, and publishing (The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2012) and in compliance with the State Curriculum Standard. Since 2005, Republican Agency 'Okulyk' (Textbook) has been accredited to assess and suggest textbooks for approval for use in all government-managed/funded schools. Local educational authorities then determine publishers and textbooks for purchase and supply to schools.

Some limited research on textbooks and identity construction in Kazakhstan exists. To transform 'the country from a Soviet satellite to a more Kazakh oriented state', the history curriculum and textbooks were completely overhauled (Kissane, 2005, p. 50), but the gendered implications of these revisions remain unexplored. Asanova (2007) analysed literature textbooks for 'Kazakh-medium' schools, and Mun (2014) studied early literacy textbooks. While both studies reported the increasing ethnicisation and Kazakhisation of textbooks, they did not explore the intersection of gender with Kazakh identity. By contrast, Palandjian et al.'s (2018, p.186) analysis explored the gender/nation couplet in early literacy textbooks and found that the dominant narratives in textbooks 'are based on the patriarchal imaginaries of the modern post-socialist nation-state'. UNESCO MGIEP's (2017, p. 51) analysis covered all aspects of SDG 4.7 across different Asian regions and countries and reported education policy documents and curriculum texts in Kazakhstan only make 'passing references' to gender equality. Given the expansive scale of UNESCO MGIEP's (2017) review, very little is illustrated about how texts construct gender.

Considering that Kazakhstan has a highly centralised and bureaucratic education system, schools or teachers have little or no power to decide which textbooks to use (Gimranova et al., 2021). In other words, textbook messages in this context carry immense legitimacy and potentially can act as a powerful discourse with profound implications for gender identity construction.

3. Theorising gender and textbook discourse

This paper draws on poststructural understandings of 'gender' and 'discourse'. In contrast to the modern binary of male and female, which conflates gender, sex and sexuality, Butler (2002) theorises gender as performative, arguing that the inherent stability of gender is a mere illusion. Gender as performative draws attention to the social constructedness of gender and sex. As such, gender is something we enact and do rather than something we are and own. The (re)production of gender identity is a continuous process in everyday life and institutional settings accomplished through actions and words. Gender is 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being' (Butler 2002, pp. 43-44). The reification of gender is an 'insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means' (Butler, 2002, p. 43). In other words, gender identity is not an essential and biologically determined identity, but gender performativity both reinforces and is produced by gender norms in society, creating the illusion of the gender binary.

Gender identity gets its presumed 'naturalness' through continued reaffirmation of gender enactments following cultural norms pertaining to definitions of masculinity—the idealised enactments of being manly, and conceptions of femininity—the idealised enactments of being womanly (Butler, 2002). For example, two widely used strategies textbooks use to essentialise and congeal gender are inclusion and exclusion. Inclusion tends to privilege certain signs by ascribing superior meaning to them. For example, the repetitive portrayal of men in combat and dominating roles can mark domination as masculine. On the other hand, the exclusion or the absence of some meanings results in unintelligibility. For example, the exclusion of men from caring and nurturing activities can mark caring and nurturing as incomprehensible if enacted by men.

Gender enactment is constrained and enabled by our multiple and intersecting locations in the social world, such as race, class, nationality, and religion. Discourses of nation, ethnicity, culture, religion and gender overlap and intersect, regulating our gender performances. As Section 2.1 illustrated, women have been identified as being particularly significant to imagining national identities and state formation (Yuval--Davis and Anthias, 1989; Mayer, 2000), particularly in post-colonial contexts where the maintenance of culture and traditions is left mainly to women since such work was relegated to the domestic sphere. Both the colonial and post-colonial states define difference by regulating women and inscribing power regimes on women's bodies (Dunne et al., 2020) through moralised judgements of women's conduct and scrutinising women's conformity to visible, embodied markers of appropriate modest conduct (Crossouard and Dunne, 2021). One example of the exercise of power on women bodies to distinguish 'our' women from the 'other' is the imposition of a particular dress code, for example, the unveiling campaign of women in Central Asia under the Soviet Union and the policing of boundaries by the independent Uzbek state, which differentiates between 'acceptable national dress—the colourful headscarf leaving the face bare' and veiling that is considered as Arab and therefore foreign (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 611). The implication for textbook analysis is to pay particular attention to who dominates the public and who occupies the domestic sphere and how is the nation inscribed on women's bodies in text and images.

Constituted by and dependent on a power hierarchy of masculinities and femininities, the gender order is context-specific and subject to change across time (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Particular forms of 'masculinity are not only constituted in their difference from other versions of masculinity but are also defined in relation to femininty' (Nixon, 1997, p. 298). Consideration of power relations is thus central in analysing how texts construct masculinities and femininities. It is through social practices that 'masculinities and femininities, as part of a vast network of gender meanings, come to organi[s]e social life' (Schippers, 2007, p. 92). These can be seen through embodied

interactions, raising and schooling children, sexual activity, producing and enacting textbooks, celebrating and commemorating national events, producing television programming, waging wars, and so on. Masculinities and femininities exercise hegemonic power as they offer a legitimating rationale for individual gender enactments and a normative framing for coordinating, evaluating, and regulating social practices. Thus deviance from hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity is swiftly and severely regulated and sanctioned by social institutions such as the family, the school and the workplace to preserve the gender order.

Drawing on poststructuralism, we understand discourses as '*broad constitutive systems of meaning*' (Sunderland, 2004, p. 6, original emphasis), including spoken and written language, images, symbols and social practices. Discourses enable the (re)production of identities since they denote 'practices that systematically form the object of which they seek' (Foucault, 2002, p. 54). Although intricately linked to 'power', discourses are not necessarily repressive but exercise productive power to induce pleasure and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Most discourses work by consensual regulation 'by offering 'obvious' or 'natural' ways of being' (Weedon, 1987, p. 100). In other words, power works not merely through imposition but also through the ways powerful discourses act on us to develop affective attachments to particular identity positions. Nevertheless, when consent fails, coercion is employed to maintain existing power relations.

Discourses, including gender discourses, are never ahistorical and always pre-exist individual speakers (Sunderland, 2004). Discourses differ in their social power, with more powerful discourses located in institutions, such as the school (Weedon, 1987). However, these institutions are sites of competing interests, and institutional practices and discourses are challenged, contested, and bound to change. Furthermore, textbook revision, like textbook production, involves the exercise of power and is often undertaken in a context of shifting political power and contestation (Durrani and Halai, 2020).

School discourses, including textbooks, offer students knowledge of 'approved ways to be' (Baxter, 2003, p. 26). Textual and visual representations in educational media are not gender-neutral, but instead, they 'either confirm or challenge the status quo through the ways they construct or fail to construct images of femininity and masculinity' (Weedon, 1987, p. 101). Dominant discursive practices, including those portrayed in school textbooks, seek to fix meanings of masculinity and femininity through inclusion and exclusion, alongside social regulation such as reward and punishment. Nevertheless, individuals are '*multiply* positioned in terms of their agency to adapt to, negotiate or resist dominant subject positions or take up identity positions within a resistance discourse' (Baxter, 2003, p. 31, original emphasis). The development and practice of new forms of gender discourse is neither the work of an autonomous, rational subject (Butler, 1990) nor merely a matter of choice but is rather agonistic and political (Crossouard et al., 2020).

Globally, numerous studies utilising different methodologies and perspectives have reported gender-normative representations in textbooks. Although more recent publications indicate a move towards greater gender-balanced depictions, such as in Europe (UNESCO, 2016a), Japan (Lee, 2018), Sweden (Alsarve, 2018), North America (Deckman et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2016a). Other studies mention the general invisibility of women in textbooks (Arnot, 2002; Islam and Asadullah, 2018; Skelton and Francis, 2009). While this is not an exhaustive list of the literature, the most recent 'Gender Report' undertaken by UNESCO (2020) for monitoring progress on SDG 4 reports that 'gender bias in textbooks is still rife' (p. 65).

Despite greater inclusion of women, when women *do* appear in textbooks, they are often portrayed in feminised professions and homogenised ways, associating them with the domestic sphere, and tasked with caring and nurturing, for example, in Greece (Kostas, 2021), depicted in the ethnic or national dress code in Afghanistan (Sarvarzade and Wotipka, 2017), and as the symbolic border guards of national and cultural identity and reproducers of national imaginary in four post-Soviet countries (Palandjian et al., 2018). Notably, women are absent from crucial spaces of national identity performance, i.e. the protection of the 'motherlands', which is mainly enacted by men, for example, in Pakistan (Durrani, 2008). Boys are often portrayed in a traditional discourse of masculinity, associating them with physical prowess, agency, and action, while given 'less space to incorporate traditionally feminine behaviors or activities, imparting the notion that masculinity may be compromised by such departures', for example in New Zealand (Jackson and Gee, 2005, p. 126). By contrast, the analysis of Norwegian social studies textbooks reported gender, sexuality and cultural norms were addressed 'in ways that *perform* gender equality and tolerance towards same-sex relationships as inherent traits in Norwegian culture but conflated 'Norwegian' with 'Western' sexual norms with a corresponding 'conflation between 'non-Western' and or 'Muslim' (Røthing and Svendsen, 2011). The authors asserted that such a portrayal served political interests and constructed 'ethnic' 'others' in Norwegian society. Thus, while attempting to dismantle gender stereotypes, textbooks built the stereotype of the 'other'.

Drawing on poststructuralist notions of gender and discourse, we argue that gender is performatively produced. The male/female gender binary relies on the continuous enactment of socially sanctioned behaviours of being an idealised woman and man in specific cultural and temporal contexts. We highlight the crucial role of textbooks as a legitimate and officially sanctioned discourse in shaping young people's gender enactments. A global review of papers utilising a range of methods and theoretical perspectives on the construction of gender in textbooks report that textbook messages are, more often than not, gendered. We now turn to the specific methods we used to analyse a sample of selected Kazakhstani textbooks.

4. Methodology

Our theoretical framing and previous evidence on gender analysis of textbooks have led us to explore the question, *How do textbooks construct gender in selected textbooks in Kazakhstan?* In addition, we are interested in understanding: i., how does the construction of gender differ across language and imagery? ii. and how does the construction of gender differ across the different textbooks selected for analysis?

4.1. Data sources

We analysed six secondary school textbooks for grades 7 and 8 in use in state-funded and managed schools called 'mainstream schools', constituting 95.5% of schools in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2015) (See Table 1 for a description and Appendix A for references). These grades were

Table 1
Description of textbooks analysed.

Grade	Subject	Year of publication	Publisher	Abbreviation used
7	English Language	2017	Express Publishing, Newbury*	Eng-7
7	Russian Language	2018	Mektep, Almaty	Rus-7
7	History of Kazakhstan (Kazakh Medium Schools)	2017	Atamura, Almaty	His-Kaz-7
8	History of Kazakhstan (Russian Medium Schools)	2019	Atamura, Almaty	His-Rus-8
8	Kazakh Language	2018	Atamura, Almaty	Kaz-8
8	Algebra	2018	Atamura, Almaty	Alg-8

Note: *International publisher; all remaining publishers are Kazakhstani.

selected as it is around this time students contemplate decisions regarding their subject speciality in grade 9, a selection that has a lasting impact on their education trajectories and future labour market outcomes. In grade 9, students are streamed into different specialities or educational pathways and assessed internally to complete basic education. Students are examined in four or five subjects, two or three of which are compulsory (mathematics and Russian/Kazakh) and two or three are electives. After finishing the 9th grade, students can either apply to a college to obtain vocational and technical qualifications or continue their schooling in the 10th and 11th grades. If they choose the latter, they are assessed by UNT (United National Test) at the end of grade 11. The UNT is a complex and crucial external exam and a 'determinant of which course, if any, they may enter at which higher education instituition' (Winter et al., 2014, p. 106).

The textbooks covered five curriculum subjects, including languages (Kazakh, Russian and English), algebra and history. All five subjects are compulsory in grades 7 and 8. While schools can choose the language of instruction, schools are expected to implement the trilingual policy that stipulates all schools teach three languages, Kazakh, Russian, and English (Bridges, 2014). History textbooks were included because they mainly select historical characters and episodes to create a unified national identity against the external 'other' in ways often explicitly gendered. To take account of differences in the language of instruction, two history textbooks were analysed, one taught in Kazakh medium schools (Grade 7) and another in Russian medium schools (Grade 8). Given the close association of mathematics with gender (Hottinger, 2016), our interest was to include mathematics, which is replaced by algebra in these grades. We assumed language and algebra textbooks might portray more contemporary social practices and situations, enabling analysis of gender enactments in the current context. All textbook publishers are located in Kazakhstan, except the English language textbook produced by a British publisher.

Previous research has indicated that analysing the gender of authors is useful (Kostas, 2021). We, therefore, investigated the gender of the first author and all authors for each textbook. Overall, a slightly greater proportion of textbook authors are women (Table 2). While collectively, the language textbooks have more female authors (N=6) than male writers (N=2), all three authors of the algebra textbook are men. However, since our sample of textbooks is small, we warn against any generalisability regarding a link between the gender of textbook authors and curriculum subjects.

4.2. Analytical methods and procedures

Quantitative content analysis was crucial in highlighting female characters' persistent invisibility and the naturalised portrayal of women and men, but its predominant use in textbook analysis has received criticism. Since it is easy to count characters, the findings of quantitative studies have led to tokenistic textbook revision, resulting in more or less equal representation of male and female characters but without challenging gender hierarchies and power in textbooks (Alsarve, 2018; Deckman et al., 2018). Furthermore, quantitative content analysis conceptualises gender as 'fixed' and immutable (Skelton and Francis, 2009). Therefore, a deeper analysis of gender within textbooks requires moving beyond content analysis to identifying how gender is naturalised through repeated enactments privileging particular understandings of what it means to be an 'ideal' woman and man while rendering other ways of being a woman and man as unintelligible.

To compare gender enactment in language and imagery within and across textbooks, quantitative content analysis complemented qualitative discourse analysis, supporting an in-depth understanding of gender enactment within and across textbooks. While the use of quantitative analysis in a study informed by poststructuralist insights could appear contradictory, following Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 4), we believe insights from 'discourse analytical perspectives' can be pragmatically combined with 'nondiscourse analytical perspectives' to address our study questions comprehensively.

The qualitative analyses focused on how everyday characters and national icons constructed gender by associating specific masculinities with the 'ideal' man and particular femininities with the 'ideal' woman and the power relations underpinning the ways textbooks accomplished gender. Quantitative analysis entailed counting characters along the binary of male (men and boys) or female (women and girls) within language and imagery. If the same character showed up multiple times, it was counted once. Given context-specific gender positions disparities discussed in Section 2.1, the distribution of males and females in leadership and STEM was also counted.

Each co-author analysed one textbook except Zhazira, who analysed two textbooks. The corresponding author synthesised all quantitative and qualitative analyses and worked individually with each author. Data analysis tools were aligned across team members. Analytical tools were trialed on the first chapter of each textbook, with the team reflecting together on issues and challenges encountered, leading to refinement of analytical tools. The quantitative tool was simplified in light of the trial analysis. Initially, the quantitive tool entailed the completion of four tables: i. counting characters along the gender binary; ii. counting the portrayal of leadership and STEM positions by gender; iii. counting the depiction of activities by gender, for example, leisure activity, applaudable activity and occupational activity; iv. counting the nature of interaction by gender, for example, affective, cooperative and violent. All four tables were completed for both text and images. Following the trial, the number of tables was reduced from four to two. The first two tables were completed for the entire textbook, and the last two tables were dropped as counting activities and interaction entailed substantial interpretation by each author, making it harder to maintain uniformity across all authors. By contrast, the qualitative tool worked well (See Appendix B). Nevertheless, given that any text is open to the reader's interpretation, no claim about the 'reliability' or 'standardisation' of the analysis is suggested. Indeed, we understand that subject positions in the analysed textbook were not lying passively to be objectively deconstructed by the analysts. Each author's multiple identities profoundly shaped their respective interpretation of text and images and posed specific challenges in writing this paper as a collaborative project.

Several steps were taken to mitigate these challenges. Each author first wrote a chapter by chapter summary of their analysis and answered a set of specific questions concerning the textbook they analysed (See Appendix B). Specifically, our analysis focused on the identity positions made available or excluded across the public and the domestic sphere and the power relations associated with such depictions across the textual and visual analysis. The textual analysis also explored how linguistic features were implicated in normalisation and marginalisation. Attention was given to the particularities of Kazakh and Russian languages in constructing gender power relations. These analytical texts were then shared, queried in face-to-face team discussions, and commented on by all authors, enabling nuanced analysis. These steps supported achieving rigour in our qualitative analyses.

Table 2
Frequency distribution of textbook authors by gender.

Textbook	First Author	Number of all authors		Total
		Female	Male	Number
Eng-7	Female	2	1	3
Rus-7	Female	1	1	2
His-Kaz-7	Female	2	0	2
His-Rus-8	Male	1	2	3
Kaz-8	Female	3	0	3
Alg-8	Male	0	3	3
Total	Female = 4Male = 2	9	7	16

5. Analysis

We draw on both discourse and quantitative analysis, presenting four emerging themes—gendered power relations, dominant masculinities, emphasised femininities and unsettling gender normative enactments.

5.1. Gendered power relations

The textbooks we analysed establish gendered power relations in different ways, including how frequently male and female characters appear in the textbooks, the relative importance given to male and female characters, gender bias in language, and the stereotypical representation of the gender binary.

5.1.1. Frequency distribution of male and female characters

The analysed textbooks create a gender asymmetry by underrepresenting women in both text (Fig. 1a) and images (Fig. 1b) relative to males, although this varies across the textbooks. Overall, the representation of females in text and images is only 13.4% and 32.5%, respectively. Although still unequal, the portrayal of females is more frequent in images compared to text. This relatively greater female representation in images might be because it is somewhat easier to identify the exclusion or inclusion of gender or other categories in pictures than in texts. The percentage of women in both text (34.7%) and images (45.8%) is highest in the English textbook, while the obliteration of women is profound in history (Grade 7) and algebra textbooks. Collectively, Fig. 1.a. and 1.b. demonstrate profound underrepresentation of females even when compared to countries in the Global South (see, e.g. Islam and Asadullah, 2018). The only country in Islam and Asadullah's (2018) study with worse inclusion of females in textbooks was Pakistan, a country ranked 153/156 on WEF's gender gap index (WEF, 2021). The near exclusion of women from textbooks both in historical narratives and contemporary Kazakhstan tend to normalise the subordinate position of women and may encourage students to view females as less significant than males in general.

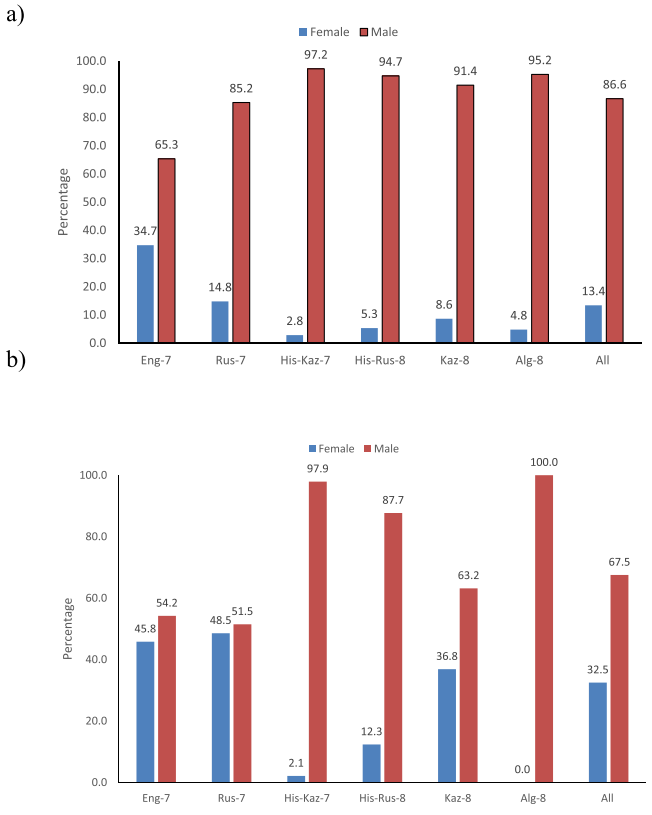


Fig. 1. a. Distribution of male and female characters in text. *Note*: No. of characters: Eng-7=196; Rus-7=549; His-Kaz-7=179; His-Rus-8=186; Alg-8=21; All=1376. **b.** Distribution of male and female characters in images. *Note:* No. of pictures: Eng-7=214; Rus-7=171; His-Kaz-7=143; His-Rus-8=73; Kaz-8=95; Alg-8=6; All=702.

5.1.2. The importance given to male and female characters

A strategy that signals the relative importance and status of characters is the order in which they appear in textbooks. Across the textbooks, we examined who were provided with names and whether it was a male or female character. Consistently, across all six textbooks, the first character with a name is male. This tends to reinforce men's privileged position in the gender hierarchy and bringing home to children the message of the inherent superiority of men (Table 3).

While most males cited in Table 3. are central characters, all women are mentioned in passing. Both history textbooks devote extended passages and, in most cases, several pages to delineate male national icons. By contrast, when a female icon is included in the rare instance, at the most, a couple of sentences are spared to admire their achievements. For example, the description of Shara Zhienkulova (1912-1991), a female pioneer in choreography and the winner of several awards, is limited only to three words, 'she earned fame' in the 1930s (His-Rus-8, p. 134). Likewise, the female singer K. Baiseitova (1912-1957), a holder of the 'People's Artist of the Kazakh SSR' award, only receives a single word of admiration, 'talented'.

Both history textbooks essentially erase women from the national narrative in textual (Fig. 1.a.) and visual depictions (Fig. 1.b.), but when women do appear alongside men, they are always listed after men, often using the connector 'тақЖе' (and also), implying women are only a supplement to men or rather a different group of humankind. This strategy is used several times in the history textbook (Grade 8) in portraying both heroes of the front (who took part in combat) and the rear (who provided food and fuel). All men are identified by their first and surnames, whereas the three women listed at the end are only recognised by their surname. In the extract below, names of only Kazakh males are in bold, implying the intersection of ethnicity with gender, with the Kazakh males being placed above non-Kazakh males:

> *Famous rice growers* ***Ibray Zhakayev****, Kim Man Sam, millet grower* ***Shyganak Bersiev****, and also, N.Satybaldina, A.Datskova, N.Alpysbayeva…* (His-Rus-8, p.157; original emphasis).

Similarly, when pictures of male and females icons appear in the history (Grade 8) textbook, men are listed before women with their names mentioned below the image. By contrast, the names of the female icons are not provided. Instead, students are asked to guess their names. Likewise, the only image of a woman in STEM in the Kazakh language is the last to appear in an activity asking students to use the pictures to make up a dialogue on the "World of space and spacemen (Ғарыш Және

Table 3
The first time a character is named in the textbooks by gender.

Textbook	Female		Male	
	Page No.	Name and Description	Page No.	Name and Description
Eng-7	12	Kelly, fictional character	6	Jack Stamford, central fictional character
Rus-7	57	Yefremova, author of a dictionary	5	V. Bianki, Russian poet
His-Kaz-7	48	Umai ana, a female deity	7	Bumyn, ruler of the Turkic Khanate
His-Rus-8	105	Nafiya Shormanova, wife of a Kazakh hero	6	Alikhan Bokeikhan, Kazakh national icon
Kaz-8	20	Aigul Amirbayeva, story writer	5	V. Thompson, Danish Scientist
Alg-8	62	Ainur, a fictional character	29	Michel Rolle, French mathematician

ғарышкерлер) (Kaz-8, p. 49) (Fig. 3). In Kazakh language, there is not a separate noun to indicate a female spacefarer. Both man and woman spacefarers are called 'ғарышкер'. In this example, we do not focus on the language of the task but rather on the order of images in it. Men appear first.

5.1.3. Biased language

An additional strategy to establish gendered power relations is the use of gendered language in textbooks, in particular, the use of generic 'he' or 'man' that establishes the masculine as the 'norm' and excludes women (Sunderland, 2000) and contributes to 'women's oppression, invisibility and subordination' (Lee and Collins, 2009, p. 335). Although different languages signal gender in different ways, androcentrism is a feature of most languages. While in recent years, the use of such language has declined in English language textbooks due to sustained academic criticism (Lee, 2018; Lee and Collins, 2009), our analysis indicates the use of such language prevalent in all textbooks except the English language: '*A citizen should devote his life to achieving his goals. […] He should pass on the generational moral experience and values inherited to his offspring*' (Kaz-8, p. 7). Similarly, the Russian language textbook used gendered language throughout chapter 9, titled '*If I ruled the world*'. The title itself is constructed in masculine terms in Russian, and all words describing rulers are male, for example, a wise man, a fair man (Rus-7, p. 264). Such examples also abound in the history textbooks.

We are not suggesting linguistic androcentrism is a characteristic of only Russian and Kazakh languages, as most languages use a variety of strategies to signal gender and the 'privileged position of men compared to women' (Formanowicz and Karolina Hansen, 2021, p. 2). Instead, we are highlighting the centrality of language in creating and sustaining gender hierarchies in subtle and almost invisible ways that contribute powerfully to naturalising the gender binary and gender inequality. Notably, linguistic androcentrism can be challenged, and gender neutral terms can be introduced, as in the case of English (Lee, 2018; Lee and Collins, 2009) and Spanish language (Acosta Matos, 2018). Tackling gender bias in a language requires making the subtle ways language constructs gender hierarchies visible, creating an awareness of the multiple negative consequences of biased language in sustaining gender inequality and de-gendering the language (Formanowicz and Hansen, 2021; Gabriel et al., 2018). Institutionalised guidance and intervention on gender neutral language are reported to positively impact the reduction of gender bias among students (Formanowicz and Hansen, 2021). Nevertheless, sustained and deliberate policy support is 'needed before gender-fair language can become habitual' (Gabriel et al., 2018, p. 854).

5.1.4. Normalisation of the gender binary

Finally, gendered power relations are established when textbooks construct gender stereotypically by portraying a rigid and unambiguous male/female binary using clothing and other gender-specific characteristics such as hair. For example, Fig. 2.a. and 2.b. stereotypically depict male and female characters (Kaz-8, p. 138), normalising the dichotomised gender system. These images are extracted from an activity that lists six pictures, showing males and females stereotypically in gendered occupations, attire and physical characteristics. For example, women are represented as teachers and nurses from highly feminised education and health sectors in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2017).

Likewise, textbooks support heteronormativity by representing families as always heterosexual. In other words, the 'normalcy' of the gender binary and heteronormativity is established by excluding non-binary identities and non-heterosexualities, similar to Deckman et al.'s (2018) analysis of health textbooks in the United States. However, it is crucial to understand what counts as a normative family in contemporary Kazakhstan. The institution of marriage and family remain strong in Kazakhstan, and even the younger generation predominantly envision their future as married with children (Dall'Agnola and Thibault, 2021).

Depiction of STEM positions

Source: Kaz-8, p. 49

Fig. 3. Depiction of STEM positions.
Source: Kaz-8, p. 49.

a. A female teacher and schoolgirls
Source: Kaz-8, p. 38

b. A female school nurse and a schoolboy
Source: Kaz-8, p. 38

Fig. 2. a. A female teacher and schoolgirls. **b.** A female school nurse and a schoolboy.
Source: Kaz-8, p. 38.

The Kazakhstani family law only recognises the union between a man and a woman, although Kazakhstan decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships in 1998 (Levitanus, 2020). The extended and nuclear families, as portrayed in textbooks, remain the norm. Nevertheless, the divorce rates are high, with around 40% of marriages ending in divorce (Smayyl, 2020, cited in Dall'Agnola and Thibault, 2021). Monoparental families are much common. Polygynous families are also not uncommon, although it is hard to estimate their proportion because polygynous marriages are not legal (Thibault, 2021. Polygynous families, although tolerated, are not openly recognised in society. Polygyny is not openly practised because it is not lawful in Kazakhstan. Thus, if polygynous Kazakh families or same-sex families were presented in textbooks, it would cause outrage.

In summary, the analysis presented in Section 5.1 makes it abundantly clear that textbooks create a gender order that establishes androcentrism and subordinates women. Men are more frequently portrayed in text and images, and they receive greater attention, particularly in the description of national icons. Male characters often appear before female characters. Gender bias in Russian and Kazakh language also maintain the privileged position of men. Gender hierarchies and power relations are reinforced additionally by enacting masculinities and femininities, which we analyse further in the paper.

5.2. Hegemonic or dominant masculinities

Gender hierarchies and power relations are further entrenched through stereotypical representations of masculinity/femininity that are sutured to ideals of the 'good' male/female. Both quantitative and discourse analysis indicate a range of subject positions are made available to boys to become an 'ideal' man. These valoursied masculinities are enacted in the public sphere and include the protector, leadership in various domains, excellence in STEM and being knowledgeable.

5.2.1. The protector

Textbooks identify dominant masculinity with the protector, a subject position that has received the maximum coverage, the most praise and is emotionally charged. The national icons portray strong men who are praised for defending their national territory and sacrificing their life for the 'motherland'. The two history textbooks stand out in particular since they recount the history of Kazakstan. Through the atrocities of the external 'other'—imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and the 'fascist' Germany—committed against the Kazakh nation, Kazakh men are framed invariably as courageous in their victimhood, steadfast in rebelling against the 'other', standing up for democracy and the rights of Kazakh people and protecting the nation even at the cost of their lives. For example, the multidimensional heroism of Alikhan Bukeikhan (1866–1937) is narrated across 4.5 pages (His-Rus-8, pp. 45-50). He is idealised as a political figure, researcher and writer, who was the '*soul of all the rallies and petitions, and counter-government agitations*' against tsarist Russia and who '*affected the birth of the Kazakh literary language*' and the Kazakh nation (His-Rus-8 p. 47 and 49 respectively).

The collective sufferings of the Kazakh nation, both under imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, focus on the victimhood of Kazakh men, for example, the Tsar's directive regarding the forced requisition of non-Russian men to rear work; delivery of food from Kazakh collective farms to Soviet authorities; the involvement of Kazakh men in the construction of Turkestan-Siberia railway (1927–1931); and the mass repression of Kazakh intelligentsia. The history textbook (Grade 8) vividly narrates the sacrifices of members and supporters of the Alash Party, including A. Bokeikhan (1866–1937), A. Baytursynuly (1873–1937) and S. Seifullin (1894–1938), who were arrested and repressed in the 1930s in pursuit of Stalin's policy of 'Sovietisation' of Kazakhstan. The textbook presents these men as heroes, praising their contributions, sketching their personalities, and their brutal punishment for standing up for the Kazakh nation (Hist-Rus-8, chapter 2).

Men's sacrifice and bravery are central in depicting the 'Great Patriotic War' (1941–1945) between Germany and the Soviet Union. The courage of Kazakh soldiers is recognised by quoting a military leader, '*In the Great battle near the Dnieper, the sons of the Kazakh people once again showed the enemy their ardent love for our motherland*' (His-Rus-8, pp. 144-145). Although the textbook also mentions '*in 1943, twenty-four Kazakh girls went to the front*', only the son's bravery receives extended emulation (His-Rus-8, p. 143). The nation itself is constructed as feminine, 'the motherland', whose vulnerability is protected by courageous and self-sacrificing 'sons'.

While men are portrayed at the forefront of the struggle for their nation's soul, engaged in a range of movements in the public sphere, women are conspicuously absent from the narrative of victimhood and repression. When women do appear occasionally and briefly, they are treated as a group and often discussed in relation to their husbands and male relatives. For example, women appeared in a discussion of the Akmola concentration camp established as a place of exile for women whose husbands fought for Kazakh interests, language, culture and land and were labelled as 'traitors of the motherland' by Stalin. These women are not named and referred to by the names of their male relatives as 'wives of S. Seifullin, T. Zhurgenov, S. Khodzhanov', and 'the wife and daughter of T. Ryskulov' (His-Rus-8, p. 105).

The protector masculinity is also constructed in fictional stories in other textbooks. For example, the English language textbook narrates a Kazakh epic, 'Maadai-kara'. The story's protagonist is Kögüdei Mergen, the son of King Maadai-kara who was left as a baby on the Black Mountain to protect him from his father's enemy, Kara-Kula. As soon as young Kögüdei Mergen was old enough, he:

> left the Black Mountain on his horse and rode across the land. He crossed a poisonous sea, made it through the moving mountains, and faced many monsters on his way until he reached the home of Kara-Kula and defeated him in battle. Kögüdei Mergen set all his people free from being slaves. (Eng-7, p. 58)

Men primarily enact citizenship protection and state duties in textbooks, reinforcing the protection of citizens as a masculine enactment. For example, the pictures of people engaged in citizenship responsibilities in the English language textbook are all men except the last one—police officer, firefighter, paramedic, traffic warden, and lollipop lady. The woman is listed last and has a socially lower position (Eng-7, p. 84).

5.2.2. The leader

Alongside the masculine protector, leadership in a range of domains is a powerful identity position linked to the masculine and to ideals of Kazakh manhood. Except for the algebra textbook, which does not portray characters in leadership activities, all textbooks overrepresent males in leadership activities related to the domains of politics, military, literature, fine and performing arts and government in both text (Fig. 4.a.) and images (Fig.4.b.). The gender imbalance in leadership positions is astounding across all books except English.

5.2.3. The STEM expert

The quantitative analysis indicated that STEM fields are also dominated by men both in text (Fig. 5.a.) and images (Fig. 5.b.), with marked ostracism of women from STEM domains. Across the textbooks, most scientists and mathematicians, whether national or international, are men. A Unit in the Kazakh language textbook illustrates different professions. The images depict more men than women, and only men are portrayed as engineers, IT technologists, nanotechnologists and oil and gas operators (Kaz-8, pp. 41-45). It is noteworthy to highlight that STEM icons receive an extended portrayal relative to other domains such as the fine or performing arts or literature. For example, while the grade 8 history textbook portrays the Kazakh geologist Kanysh Satpayev (1899-1964) across five pages (pp. 123-127), the biography of the male painter, Kasteev (1904-1973) takes up only a paragraph.

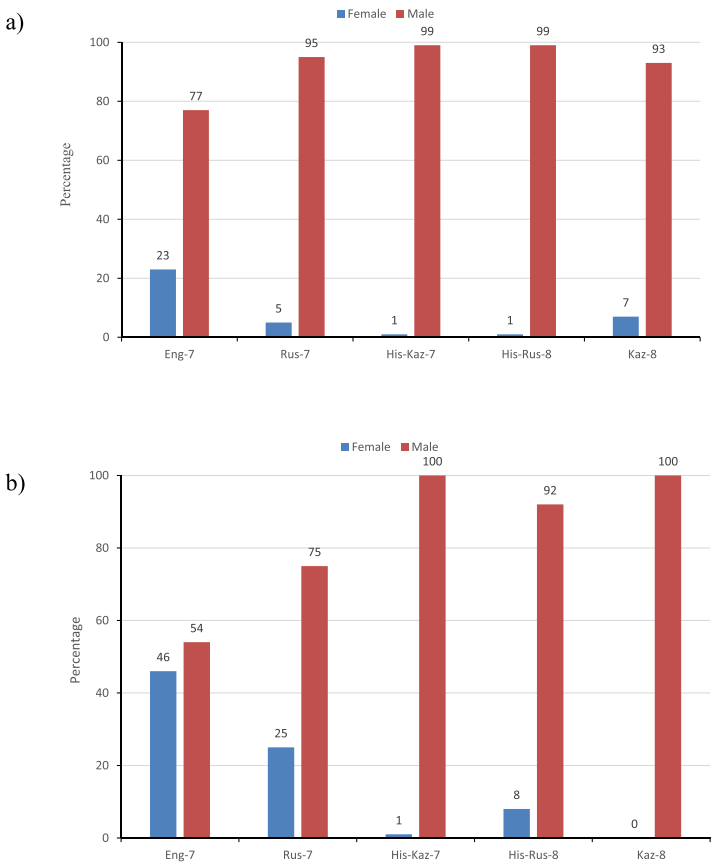


Fig. 4. **a.** Percentage distribution of leadership positions by gender in text. *Note: No. of leadership characters:* Eng-7=13; Rus-7=468; His-Kaz-7=166; His-Rus-8=284; Kaz-8=126; All=1057. **b.** Percentage distribution of leadership positions by gender in images. *Note:* No. of leadership images: Eng-7=13; Rus-7=65; His-Kaz-7=111; His-Rus-8=44; Kaz-8=5; All=238.

5.2.4. The knowledgable

The 'ideal' man is depicted as not only a leader within science and mathematics but in general as more knowledgeable. Unit 2 in the Kazakh language textbook includes and discusses only male philosophers' and authors' perspectives on moral values, entrenching the exercise of knowledge creation as an essentially masculine attribute. Likewise, the Russian language textbook narrates the story of a prince who went to seek knowledge from a 'wise man' (Rus-7, 272). Male power over females is thus established by depicting male characters as having greater knowledge than females.

Overall, the analysis indicates the dominant construction of masculinities as ingrained in texts and images, reinforcing men's privileged position in the gender hierarchy and men's domination of women. The ideal Kazakh man is the protector, strong, brave and self-sacrificing. He leads in politics, the fine arts and literature. He not only excels in STEM disciplines but is associated with knowledge in general. These masculinities are performed in the public sphere, and collectively, they construct the 'ideal' man as an embodiment of authority and awe, making him fearsome.

5.3. Emphasised femininities

Textbooks offer multiple femininities to girls. The emphasised femininities are associated with care and the domestic sphere, the reproduction of national identity and tradition, vulnerability and finally with beauty.

5.3.1. The mother and carer

Textbooks discursively construct the ideal womanhood with motherhood, care and the domestic sphere. These femininities are symbolised by the deity Umai ana (mother Umai), the only woman named and described across the entire history textbook (grade 7):

> *The Turkic peoples considered God and Umai ana as guardians of family and children (Hist-Kaz-7, p. 48).*

Two male deities Kok Tengri and Korkyt ata are mentioned in the same paragraph. The former is described as the God of Heaven, 'the creator of the world and lord of the world's destiny' and the latter as 'the one who cured people of disease and saved them from unhappiness' (His-Kaz-7, p. 48). Thus, women are stereotypically shown as caretakers and homemakers in the religious context and are listed after the masculine God. Nevertheless, textbooks elevate the status of motherhood by framing this identity position as worthy of love: '*If you love your mother, you will understand other people who love their parents* (Rus-7; p. 65).

The dominant association of the feminine with the private sphere notwithstanding, men also appear in the domestic sphere. However, they are not depicted in household chores such as cleaning or babysitting, which are enacted exclusively by female characters. Instead, male characters are portrayed in familial relationships such as grandfather and son. Even in the domestic sphere, the uncle, father, and son hold a higher social status over their counterparts.

When occasionally women are included in the national narrative, they are acknowledged mainly for their work in the rear, such as providing food, delivering clothes and other goods, reinforcing emphasised femininity with care and nurturance: '*The whole front, from sea to sea, you fed with your bread*' (Rus-7, p.253). Alternatively, they are involved in the emotional work of charging the patriotic and heroic spirit of the nation's sons (Fig. 6).

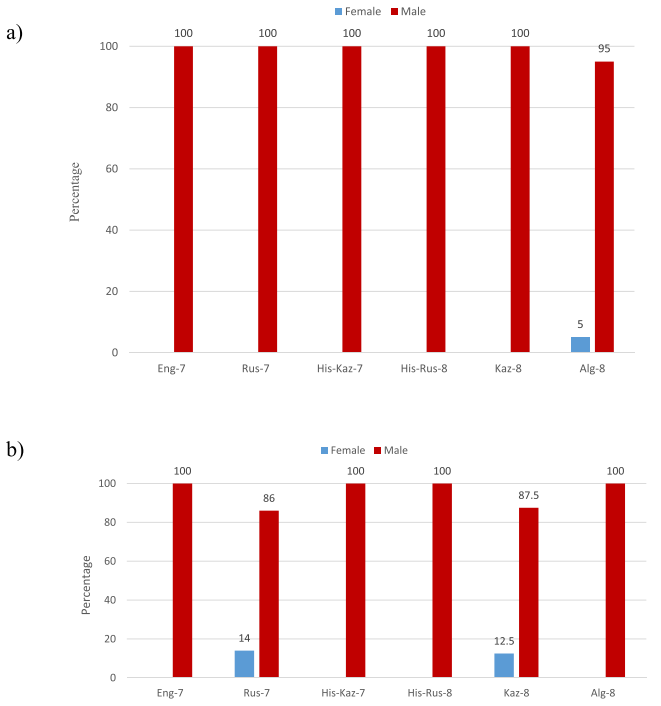


Fig. 5. **a.** Percentage distribution of STEM positions by gender in text. *Note:* No. of STEM chratcters: Eng-7=1; Rus-7=18; His-Kaz-8=13; His-Rus-8=21; Kaz-8=28; Alg-8=20; All=101. **b.** Percentage distribution of STEM positions by gender in images. *Note:* No. of STEM images: Eng-7=1; Rus-7=28; His-Kaz=6; His-Rus-8=5; Kaz-8=8; Alg-8=20; All=68.

Kazakh singer Roza Baglanova (1922-2011) performing for the military
Source: His-Rus-8, p. 162

Fig. 6. Kazakh singer Roza Baglanova (1922-2011) performing for the military. Source: His-Rus-8, p. 162.

5.3.2. *The reproducer of national identity and tradition*

Textbooks link the ideals of womanhood to the production of national identity. Women signify Kazakh culture and traditions. The female icons are described in the history textbook in a discussion of the cultural life of Kazakhstan during the 'Great Patriotic War'. Culture and arts are stereotypically framed as 'feminine' domains, with female singers and artists are depicted performing on the front to sustain and boost men's morale and fighting spirit (see Fig. 6).

Secondly, women contribute to the Kazakh national identity by symbolising and adorning Kazakh culture and traditions on their bodies. Across the Kazakh and Russian language textbooks, most females are illustrated as dancing and singing in national costumes. Fig. 7.a. presents traditional Nauryz celebration with females of different ages with food at the table. Fig. 7.b. depicts a veiled bride bowing to her mother-in-law. Fig. 7.c. portrays Kazakh hospitality representing a man sitting at the head of the table looked upon and listened to by women. Only the most respected person takes this place at the table in Kazakh culture. In the domestic sphere, the gender hierarchy is maintained through the reproduction of culture and tradition. In all three images, gender intersects with age, positioning the senior male at the top of the social hierarchy and younger females subordinated to senior male and female relatives.

> At betashar, a daughter-in-law's face was unveiled, and her new relatives were introduced to her. She was advised to be a respectful, polite, and good daughter-in-law (His-Kaz-7, p. 219).

It is essential to highlight that gender and age hierarchies portrayed in the textbooks are consistent with dominant Kazakh cultural practices. A man is always or often the guest of honour and females, and younger males sit along the table according to their social hierarchy. The bride is received the way it is presented. A crucial question is whether textbooks should reproduce culture or seek to transform it for social equality? Should textbooks portray reality or seek to represent a social world that is desirable to project (McKinney, 2005)? This is a debatable and political issue linked to purposes of education as seen by dominant elites.

5.3.3. *The delightful beauty*

We now turn to the idealised feminine position infused across the textbooks—beauty and fashion. In the Russian language textbook, a lesson recounts a Khan who disguised to see a dance performance by young people in Burabay, a wooded area in northern Kazakhstan. He was so enchanted by the beauty of the young girls that he could not withhold himself and came out of his disguise, went to the stage, and praised the girls. The girls recognised the Khan and felt so frightened by his presence that they turned into white birches (Rus-7, p. 40). This example reifies beauty as emphasised femininity and fosters fear and respect of the masculine and men more broadly.

The English textbook depicts women with a tiny waist and compact, elevated torso, reminiscent of classic Disney characters. Unit 1 in the English textbook includes two stories focused on boys, one on 'Paint Wars' and another on 'Super Gaming'. The accompanying photograph for the Paint Wars stands in contrast to the story, with a woman's close-up in a paintball mask (Fig. 8.a). Yet, in this small glimpse, the reader can identify a light-skinned woman with eye make-up and mascara, emphasising the importance of beauty for women even when engaged in extreme combat sports. Similarly, Fig. 8.b depicts a thin, fair-skinned woman in full-make-up and long hair, tied in a ponytail, playing archery in a listening and speaking activity focusing on hobbies. Thus, the enactment of non-normative femininities is neutralised by over-emphasis on beauty.

The association of beauty, looking perfect, and fashion is further established in an extended dialogue between characters Rita and Mary:

> Mary: You look great in that polo-neck Rita.
>
> […]
>
> Mary: Wow! They fit you perfectly. […]
>
> Rita: That's nice of you Mary. You look good, too. Your dress really suits you. (Eng-7, p. 108)

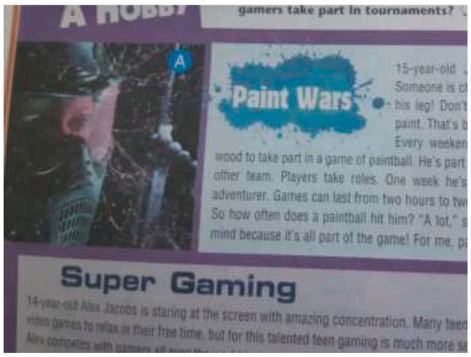
Even when women are depicted in non-hegemonic gender performances such as in combat with the enemy to protect the nation, their portrayal is softened through their visual depiction. The Russian language textbook depicts textually and visually two Kazakh women soldiers, Manshuk Mametova (1925-1944) and Aliya Moldagulova (1922-1943), who voluntarily joined the Army and sacrificed their lives during

a. A Nauryz feast
Source: Rus-7, p. 89

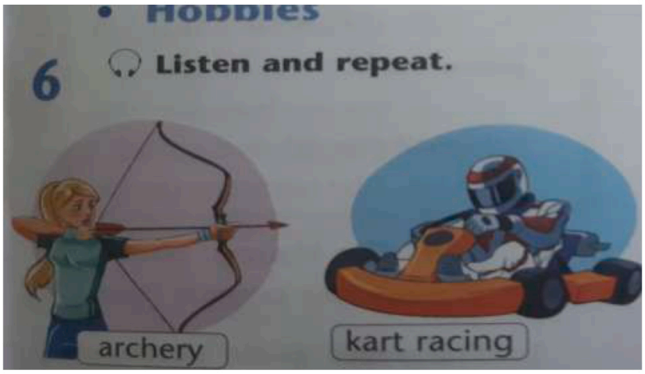
b.Young bride
Source: Rus-7, p. 75

c.Kazakh hospitality
Source: Rus-7, p. 77

Fig. 7. a. A Nauryz feast. b Young bride. c Kazakh hospitality.
a. Source: Rus-7, p. 89. b. Source: Rus-7, p. 75. c. Source: Rus-7, p. 77.



a Paint wars
Source: Eng-7, p. 6



b. Hobbies
Source: Eng-7, p.7

Fig. 8. **a** Paint wars. **b.** Hobbies.
a. Source: Eng-7, p. 6. b. Source: Eng-7, p.7.

World War II, decoupling the link between the protector and masculinity. However, even when occasionally women are depicted as heroic, their visual portrayal reinforces their femininity by showing them 'sexy' (Rus-7, p. 252). Depicting Moldagulova in a skirt and jacket is historically not inaccurate as the skirt was part of the female military uniform (Fig. 9). Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that the message portrayed by images of the two female Kazakh combatants is not that of heroism in action but rather draws attention to their body as sexy and their demeanour as playful.

The close link between beauty and fashion with feminine appearance signals to girls (and boys) that the social status and power of females are strongly linked to their appearance. The social depiction of beauty and attractiveness for girls can contribute to severe emotional, self-esteem, and eating problems among girls (Peled et al., 2019).

5.3.4. The vulnerable

The ideal female is positioned as vulnerable and in need of masculine protection. In other words, the enactment of the protector masculinity, discussed in Section 5.2.1, is enabled by the vulnerability of the female and the child:

> You have sweet children
>
> and a mother who took care of children
>
> please protect them both (Kaz-7, p. 18)

In a unit titled 'The Time Machine', the English textbook portrays a fictional character, Weena, who appears speechless because of fear. A male protagonist who is the narrator of the story '*decided to go underground and find about the [strange creatures]*' even when Weena begs him, '*Don't go down there! Please*!' (Eng-7, p. 56). Female vulnerability reciprocally constructs men as the protector.

Fig. 9. Statue of Aliya Moldagulova.
Source: Rus-7, p. 252.

The foregoing examples indicate emphasised femininities were shown as central within the textbooks and placed in a hierarchical position to hegemonic masculinities in ways to maintain women's subordination to men. As portrayed in the textbooks, the 'ideal' Kazakhstani woman is associated with motherhood, care, culture, tradition, and beauty. Her vulnerability enables the 'ideal' Kazakh man to protect her. These feminine virtues are oriented to compliance, nurturance, domesticity, and their positioning with respect to culture and tradition marks women as symbolic signifiers of the nation.

5.4. *Unsettling dominant gender enactments?*

The preceding sections focused on how textbooks produce gendered power relations and construct hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities. The analysis in this section moves to the rare moments where textbooks could potentially unsettle the gender order.

Textbooks offer very limited evidence that could be construed as an attempt to unsettle gender hierarchies and challenge dominant norms of masculinities and femininities. Fig. 10 depicts Mr. Smith, wearing an apron and cooking in the kitchen, while Mrs. Smith is sitting on a sofa reading a book. However, since this is a non-Kazakh family, students might not relate to this 'soft' masculinity. When gender relations as experienced in everyday life are questioned that transforming those relations become possible (Fig. 10)

The two Kazakh female soldiers, Manshuk Mametova and Aliya Moldagulova, mentioned in the Russian language text, as discussed in the preceding section, also appear in the history textbook (Grade 8). They are included as heroic, and therefore, we can consider it as a non-hegemonic gender enactment. However, their contribution is lightened by not naming them under their picture. By contrast, all male heroes in the same chapter have their names written under their image. Furthermore, the textual portrayal of the female soldiers is only a sentence long. Both women showed extraordinary heroism in the war. However, their

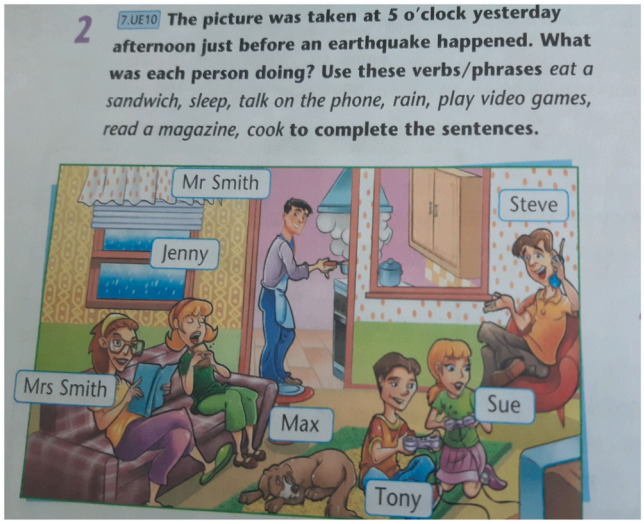


Fig. 10. A domestic scene in a verb activity.
Source: Eng-7, p. 78.

textual portrayal focuses on their death rather than their heroism on the battlefield.

> Among them [female Kazakh soldiers] is a machine gunner Manshuk Mametova, stuck down by a fascist bullet.
>
> Sniper Aliya Moldagulova died in one-to-one combat. (His-Rus-8, pp. 143-145).

Opportunities emerged in some chapters in the history textbook (Grade 7) to draw students' attention to acknowledge markers of social inequality. To its credit, the textbook highlighted inequality based on '*private ownership of livestock*' and lamented the denial of rights to slaves during the Turkic period. Additionally, it recognised social divisions between the rich and the poor in nomadic Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, gender inequality does not get any explicit mention in the same textbook. Ironically, the textbook mentions, in a neutral tone, several gendered traditions during the Kazakh Khanate but fail to highlight these have survived to date. These include the practice of *kalym*, bride payment made by the bridegroom to the bride's family, and expecting daughters-in-law to be obedient and dutiful. These traditions continue to make women vulnerable to domestic and structural violence (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, 2021), but the authors take no position on these issues, perhaps to avoid a backlash as these traditions are hotly debated in Kazakhstan.

Since this paper sought to understand the extent to which gender equality, as part of SDG 4.7, is explicitly integrated into the selected textbooks, we looked for instances when textbooks either mentioned gender equality or challenged gender inequality experienced in everyday life. Across the textbooks, we did not find any lesson that explicitly embeds gender equality or challenge gendered norms within Kazakhstani society, concurring with UNESCO MGIEP's (2017) review, which noted curriculum and policy documents in the country make only a casual reference to gender equality. While textbooks do show few examples of performing non-normative gender enactments, these instances are rare, and their potential to challenge gender inequality in society is not fully realised.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the extent to which ideals of SDG 4.7—knowledge and skills for promoting gender equality—are

embedded in school textbooks in Kazakstan, a country with a distinct gender imperial history and post-Socialist gender hierarchies. Discursive and non-discursive analysis of the construction of gender in six secondary school textbooks indicated textbooks marginalise females by under-representing them relative to males in both text and images, with this tendency being stronger in text than in pictures. The obliteration of females remains a concern regardless of whether a textbook has predominantly a male or female team of authors. While the English language textbook gives a relatively greater presence to females, the remaining five textbooks—Kazakh and Russian language, algebra and two history textbooks— are highly inequitable in the representation of females.

Textbooks associate hegemonic masculinity with the protector, leadership, excellence in STEM and being knowledgeable. These ideals of Kazakh manhood are enacted mainly in the public sphere and construct men as fearsome and authoritative. By contrast, emphasised femininities link women to the private sphere, requiring them to be mothers and nurturers, domesticated, compliant, vulnerable, and a symbolic marker of tradition and culture. The 'ideal' Kazakh woman personifies beauty. Thus, the social status and awe of the Kazakh man spring from his authority and the Kazakh woman from her appearance and looks. Textbooks entrench male power over females through normative masculinities and femininities, which also intersect with age and Kazakh ethnicity. While minimal evidence in unsettling gendered norms is apparent, such examples are inconsistent and contradictory. It is worthwhile to note these findings are not unique to Kazakhstan, as a recent global assessment of progress on SDG 4.7 notes that 'countries are still falling short in developing textbooks free of gender-based stereotypes' (UNESCO, 2020, p. 39).

The deployment of inclusion and exclusion in text and imagery in the selected textbooks tend to *normalise* the 'ideal' man and woman in Kazakhstan and could potentially give legitimacy to men's dominance over women and cast other ways of practicing masculinities femininities as deviant and subject to regulation. By and large, the consistency of gender messages makes it harder to read the textbooks otherwise. The portrayal of gender in textbooks maintains the existing gender order in Kazakhstani society and is counterproductive to the Kazakhstani government's objective of eliminating gender stereotypes in education.

Additionally, hierarchies based on ethnicity are also evident. The dominance of Kazakh icons and cultural practices in textbooks raises the question of the representation of ethnic minorities in Kazakhstani textbooks, as noted by Asanova (2007) and Mun (2014). Kazakhstan celebrates its multicultural diversity and takes great pride in calling itself a homeland of over a hundred ethnic groups, including Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Uighurs, Tatars, Germans, Koreans and numerous other ethnic groups (Daminov, 2020). The exclusion of ethnic minorities from textbooks could suggest that ethnic minorities are unimportant, not even relevant enough for the national curriculum to include them in textbooks. This, in turn, could alienate ethnic minorities from Kazakhstan's multicultural narrative.

Studies since the 1970s suggest that gendered textbook messages have a powerful influence on students' identity formation, discursive practices and emotional attachments (see Kostas, 2021; Lee and Collins, 2009), although gender discourses of social media, peer culture and family also shape gender identity construction significantly. The impact of textbook messages can be profound on learners for whom such gender enactments are 'normal' because of local gendered norms. Besides, as gendered beings, teachers might also fail to deconstruct the gendered textbook messages or as agents of the state lend support to official textbook discourses (Halai and Durrani, 2018). Notably, in Kazakhstan, teachers, family and peers significantly shape female students educational experiences and career choices (Almukhambetova and Kuzhabekova, 2020, 2021).

The promotion of gender equality in and through education requires students and teachers have access to non-sexist textbooks. Nevertheless, gendered textbook messages can be challenged. This would require teachers and school leaders to understand sexist textbook messages and offer alternative messages of gender equality through their talk and practice. Teachers' and students' access to resources that 'shows them how to go about providing a critique of existing material that has not yet been rewritten' would, therefore, be useful (Davies, 2004, p. 139).

The production of gender-sensitive textbooks also entails the capacity development of stakeholders and supporting collaboration across stakeholders (UNESCO, 2020, pp. 39-40). Nevertheless, textbook revision for gender equality is politically contested (Durrani and Halai, 2020). In Kazakhstan, demonstrations and organising political opposition are not interpreted as desirable forms of political activism (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017), and groups demanding gender equality often face state harassment and detention (International Federation for Human Rights, 2021). Therefore, incorporating an explicit gender equality agenda in education relies heavily on the commitment of state elites who have pursued traditionalised discourses as part of national ideology, de-Sovietisation and social and political control since independence (Kudaibergenova, 2018; Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, 2021).

Gender training for teachers and school leaders is often recommended to help them reflect on their gendered practices and understand the gendered power relations at the local level to promote gender equality among students (Kelly, 2019). Nevertheless, students' interpretation of the textbook is also shaped by the 'baggage of images and metaphors' they have acquired as a result of 'being positioned within the many and contradictory discursive practices that they have encountered' (Davies, 2004, p. 138). Teachers who seek to promote equitable gender relations would need to address the contestations emerging from the gender-equitable discourse that teachers and schools seek to promote and the many alternative discourses available to students outside schools (Durrani and Halai, 2018). Indeed, institutional level drive to strengthen gender equality through curricular means in a Kazakhstani higher education reported pushbacks from students, teachers and senior administrators (CohenMiller and Lewis, 2019).

In the end, *undoing* gender through educational inputs, while challenging, is possible, but *undoing* gender is a long-term process requiring critical reflection on one's lived experience of gender and gender assumptions and practices. It requires negotiated political action both inside and outside the school and negotiated presentation of the gendered self within the power relations at play between different social locations in which the subject (teacher or student) is located. The transformation of gender is 'filled with struggle, and these struggles make it hard to measure change in the fluid and messy world of gender' performativity (Kelly, 2019, p. 86). Such struggles and their achievement are unlikely to be reflected in the comparative global rankings, such as SDGs, which mostly rely on quantitative measures (Crossouard and Dunne, 2021). Liberal interventions for gender equality, such as SDGs, fail to recognise the symbolic significance of women to post-colonial countries that simultaneously seek to emulate Western 'modernity' whilst maintaining their cultural and national distinction through the feminine, marking gender equality discourses as foreign and Western (Crossouard and Dunne, 2021). Furthermore, liberal assumptions underpinning universalising gender equality norms inadvertently leave intact heteronormative hierarchies and binaries needing interruption in the pathway to gender equality (Dunne et al., 2020).

In concluding this paper, we suggest that explorations of teachers' enactment of textbooks and students' negotiation with gendered textbook messages are crucially significant for policy and practice and constitute productive areas for future research in Kazakhstan and beyond. These explorations will benefit from using gender theories that pay attention to how masculinities and femininities are produced within particular social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, in-depth qualitative methods are crucially important for illuminating the relations of power through which gender identities are constructed in education and beyond.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Naureen Durrani: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. **Anna CohenMiller**: Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing. **Zumrad Kataeva**: Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing. **Zhazira Bekzhanova**: Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing. **Assem Seitkhadyrova**: Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing. **Aisulu Badanova**: Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Visualization; Writing – review & editing.

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Appendix A. : Textbooks Included in the Analysis

Arinova, B., K. Moldasan, and A. Baishagyrova. 2018. *Қазақ тілі 8* [Kazakh Language Grade 8]. Almaty: Atamura.

Bakina, N.S. and N. T. Zhanakova. 2017. *Қазақстан тарихы 7* [History of Kazakhstan Grade 7]. Almaty: Atamura.

Evans, V., J. Dooley, and B. Obee. 2017. *Student's Book. Excel for Kazakhstan Grade 7*. Berkshire: Express Publishing.

Kabuldinov, Z.E., M. D. Shaimerdenova, and E.M. Kurkeev. 2019. *История Казахстана 8* [History of Kazakhstan Grade 8]. Almaty: Atamura.

Sabitova, Z., and K. Sklyarenko. 2018. *Русский язык 7* [Russian Language Grade 7]. Almaty: Mektep.

Shynybekov, A., D. Shynybekov, and R. Zhumabayev. 2018. *Алгебра 8* [Algebra Grade 8]. Almaty: Atamura.

Appendix B. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102508.

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