Appendix A

Blog 4 Assignment: Child Brides

Watch the three videos on child brides and read the supplementary article Child Marriage: Case Studies and Analysis.

A thoughtful response should reflect awareness of the moral and practical complexities of the practice. Where applicable, you should apply the material/concepts from Chapters 12 and 13.

Grading Rubric for Blog 4 Assignment: Child Brides

1. Communication/Clarity
   You must use proper grammar and spelling. Do not respond impulsively, organize your thoughts and provide an argument for your point of view.

2. Critical Thinking
   Keep your “gut” feeling response to a bare minimum. Your assessment and normative claims must be well-reasoned and supported with adequate evidence (economic, cultural, religious, and other factors).

3. Content Application
   Employ the essential concepts and theories in identifying and assessing the moral dimensions of the issue. Do not retell or summarize the story.

4. Reflection/Perspective
   Examine the issue from a pluralistic perspective (the point of view, circumstances, or moral systems of all parties involved). Do not review the “right” or “wrong” aspects of the practice from just your own moral system.

Description of Global Learning Goals

1. Awareness of problems and issues in other countries and societies
2. Different systems of morality
3. Recognition of factors that affect choices and actions in different societies
4. Importance of sources; recognition of both negative and positive bias
5. Development of perspective/self-reflection

Assessment Results for the specific global learning outcome:

Make choices and decisions informed by multiple frames of reference, including international and contexts.
The initial response of most students to the forced marriages of young girls in non-western societies was shock at the existence and numbers of child brides. This was followed by a “gut” level condemnation of the practice. Not surprisingly, many students simultaneously blamed or associated the practice with extremist Taliban-Muslim “countries” and other culturally backward societies.

After watching all of the videos (documentary clips) posted for the blog discussion, the majority of the students adjusted their perspective. Although no one approved of the practice, nearly all students

Blog 4 Topic: Child Brides Student Work

“A” Level Responses

(1) The practice of marrying girls off at a pubescent or prepubescent age is common among generally poor people in developing countries. It is prevalent in countries in the poorest regions of Africa, Asia, and Central Asia due to various reasons; some, but not all, of the reasons are economic conditions, religious practices, cultural traditions, the stress of war, and the lack of autonomy for the female sex.

As the video interviews showed, many of the girls who are sold or traded into marriages with older men are neither emotionally nor physically ready to become a wife, sexual partner and mother. Given this fact, there is clear indication that the perception of female adulthood is culturally relativistic and very much dependent on other circumstances. The videos and articles show that the marrying of young girls in many cases is a direct effect of poverty or economic determinism. The mothers in Afghanistan and India who could not feed all of their children knew that the female child would be fed by a husband. It’s hard to say if this is a violation of “human rights” or an attempt to do what is best for their daughters in cultures where early marriage is traditional. Biological determinism also plays a role. Since the mothers themselves have little control over their reproductive functions, many have many more children than the fathers can support. At the same time, the prospective husbands want females who are “virgins” with no other man’s progeny.

A major contributing factor to “child brides” is a lack of education and gender equity. Females in these societies are not provided an education. According to a PBS news report, before the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, education proved vital to breaking the cycle of poverty, sexual discrimination, and oppression. The young females who speak out on the Facebook sites “Girls not Brides” and “Half the Sky” want their own families and societies to understand that an educated girl has a better chance of feeding herself and helping her family. Their fate should not be biologically and culturally determined. These ideas have a broader significance because girls in developing countries are not the only ones affected by poverty and early pregnancies.

There is a sense in the US that we are better than Afghanistan and Kenya because we don’t sell our children or deny females equal rights. Often times we have difficulty looking at similar problems right here from a global perspective. Chapter 11 showed that we have the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in the developed world, but we don’t look at this as a form of child abuse. An unwed fourteen-year-old-mother in the
US is in many ways not much different from a married one in Afghanistan, India, or Kenya. If she comes from a poor family, she probably won’t finish her education or escape from poverty. Many unwed teenage mothers here may be free in the sense that they have not been sold into marriage, but they are not free to be “girls” with bright futures. Instead of seriously looking at the social, educational and healthcare policies that do nothing to reduce teenage pregnancies, Americans look at the abuse of children, and in particular the violation of female children’s rights, as something immoral that only happens in other countries.

(2) Female children being “sold” as brides to other families is an issue present in many undeveloped countries. Most people who approach this practice from a Western viewpoint think of it as pure “evil” and a gross violation of human rights. I know that I did. My first reaction to the stories in the videos was that no mother or father who loves their child would do such a thing. No matter how bad our financial situation, my parents would not have sold my young sister into a marriage with a “child molester.” I like to think that in an ideal world almost no family in the world would be willing to “sell” their immature daughter into marriage. The world, however, is made of different cultures and different environments. People who live in countries like India, Niger, and Afghanistan live in environments so harsh that surviving from day to day is all they can do. The economic conditions in some of these countries are so bad that a family cannot hope to feed and care for all of the children. The women in these poor regions have no access to healthcare or birth control, if anything they are expected to bear children for their husbands. I can see where a mother in Niger who knows that her female children will be the first to go hungry, would be willing to send a child away into a marriage. Maybe her daughter will have more food than if she stayed at home. Possibly she even believes that the daughter will go to a good man.

According to some of the material, the arrangement of child bride marriages has a strong cultural foundation in non-Western societies, but I don't think that cultural pressure alone explains it. I agree with the view that extreme poverty and lack of birth control make child brides a necessity. This view reflects the metaethical position of economic determinism. It holds that actions or choices can be limited or forced by the economic situation around you. If there are limited options to starvation, then the action of selling a child could be a matter of survival rather than morality. If a woman also has no way to control the number of children she has due to biological determinism, then she has no choice or “freedom” to care for all of the children born into extreme poverty.

We think that all families have choices, that there are better options to selling children into marriage, forced labor or prostitution. The reality is different. People in underdeveloped countries are experiencing high population growth rates while the amount of farmable land is actually diminishing. This is true in Afghanistan where decades of occupation and war have destroyed traditional farming and made economic development impossible. I personally want to help women in Afghanistan escape from the religious oppression of the Taliban, but without fixing economic and environmental issues that perpetuate child brides, women will still be trapped. For me, the problem of child brides appears to be strongly linked to the global problem of economic justice.

Unacceptable Responses
(1) When looking at the situation of child brides two things come up as primary ethical issues. One is economic determinism. In the Indian and Afghanistan culture many of these young girls are given up to marriage before they have the choice based off their parents feeling it is the best situation for them financially. They see their girl building a family with a more well off individual as them building a better life together. This is a result of poverty due to overpopulation, diminishing farmland, etc. There also the presence of sexual morality, and whether it is right to put preteen girls in positions where their role is to "serve their men sexually", as well as human rights and whether is right to thrust someone in that position. These young girls are discriminated against due to their ways of their religion, relative to our culture where this type of situation would be looked down upon as far as the sexual roles are concerned here in America. However, the female gender is discriminated against here in our country as well, and that points to a global societal issue. One cannot determine whether it is unethical because as cultural ethical relativism explains, this all depends on the culture, and different ethics are based from different cultural views. Getting married young would be ethical if a girl wasn’t forced into it. Religions that force females to marry don’t recognize the human rights of the female so even if there is no poverty, there could still be child brides. From my personal morality, I think that all women have a right to decide on marriage for themselves. Men too. If I was starving and had a daughter I would want her to eat, so maybe I would try to marry her off. But I wouldn’t force her to marry an older guy.

(2) Children in Afghanistan and Africa are accepted into marriage before they can even dress themselves and have any idea of what is going on in their surrounding world. The children have no choice on who and when then they marry. They are far too young to make that decision, and the parents base their decision of the dowry of the men, which is how much they are willing to pay their bride for marriage. Every day and night after these girls are married they wash clothes, they clean the house, they cook dinner at all times. The girls marry their husband at a real young age, then they wait to be with their husband after they hit the stage of puberty. In Niger, these women who are too young to get married, they are still married and they are also forced to give birth to their husbands baby. A young woman in Niger was 12 when she was forced to give birth to a baby. She was incapable of having the baby and the baby died before it was time to give birth. The young woman who was 12 years old, had a ruptured bladder, and a bad nervous system after the pregnancy. These children almost have no human rights in these times of their lives. Their human rights are gone due to how their society and religion work out within their families. The children are so busy and tied up to their new families that they don’t even have time to go to school and that is a violation of freedom. Every kid deserves the choice of being able to learn and go to school. The girls who are too young to make their decisions on their own future are easily being discriminated against because of their gender. These young woman are at a loss for human right, they are discriminated against because of their age and gender in their religion, and they also have no freedom in their young lifestyle. The girl in Afghanistan also shows the oppression that comes with extreme religious views in some Muslim countries. There are some religious groups in America who would like to force marriage on young girls, but we have laws that prevent this from happening. Also, it is illegal to prevent girls from going to school in the US, which is just the opposite in some of these countries. It was interesting that many of the girls wanted an education for the same reason we do. It shows that education is regarded as a human right that helps all women to make a better life for themselves.