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Untying the Knot: Child Marriage in Situations of Armed Conflict

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**UNTYING THE KNOT:
Child Marriage in Situations of Armed Conflict**

Jolena Zabel
An Honors Thesis in Political Science
Professor Wendy Weber
April 20, 2016

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Abstract

Child marriage is one of the largest global human rights concerns today; one in three girls worldwide under age eighteen are married, negatively impacting their health, economic wellbeing, and education. While studies have been done on child marriage outside of conflict and, separately, on gender-based violence in armed conflict, little is known about what happens to child marriage *in* situations of armed conflict. This paper argues that child marriage in situations of armed conflict has both cultural and economic drivers, as is the case outside of conflict. Using the case of Syria, it shows that the effects of conflict, including host government policies and forced migration, can also act as a shock to an environment with preexisting drivers of child marriage to facilitate, further incentivize, and even demand the practice of child marriage. Aid organizations, governments, and communities must acknowledge child marriage as a long-term symptom of war that endures after peace is reached.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Child marriage is one of the world's most devastating and widespread human rights abuses. Defined as the marriage or informal union of a person under the age of eighteen, 15 million girls are married as children each year.¹ In the developing world, one in three girls is married before their eighteenth birthday and one in nine before they turn fifteen.² Child marriage has devastating implications for the girl, her family, communities, and the world. Child marriage is linked to reinforcing cycles of poverty, increased rates of maternal and infant mortality, gender inequality, and low education rates for girls.³ While researchers continue to better understand the causes and effects of child marriage, little is known about how situations of armed conflict can increase or change its causes and effects.

This paper explores the relationship between child marriage and situations of armed conflict. Despite a robust literature on gender-based violence (GBV) in armed conflict (Mertus 2000; True 2012; Thompson 2006; Enloe 1990) and, separately, on child marriage (Jamobo 2012; Lee-Rife et al 2012; Malhotra et al 2011; Mensch et al 2005) the relationship between the two is largely unstudied. No major scholarly efforts have taken place to explore the ways in which child marriage is affected by situations of armed conflict. In this paper, I seek to address this puzzling absence of knowledge on the relationship between child marriage and armed conflict with two interrelated research

¹ Raj, Anita, Ann Warner, and Allie McGonagle Glinski. "Understanding the Scale of Child Marriage." *Girls Not Brides*. 2014. Accessed December 5, 2015.

² "Child Marriage Facts and Figures." ICRW. Accessed September 27, 2015.

³ Raj, Anita, Ann Warner, and Allie McGonagle Glinski. "Understanding the Scale of Child Marriage." *Girls Not Brides*. 2014. Accessed December 5, 2015.

questions: (1) what is the nature of child marriage in armed conflict when compared to child marriage outside of conflict; and (2) how do humanitarian responses by governments and non-governmental organizations affect child marriage in situations of armed conflict?

To accomplish this, I will first begin in Chapter 2 by reviewing two bodies of literature: scholarship on child marriage and work on gender-based violence and armed conflict. In the first part, I will locate child marriage within international law and discuss the two main drivers of child marriage proposed in the literature: cultural and economic. I will then describe the numerous implications of child marriage and the ways in which the international community works to end the practice. In the second part of the literature review, I will discuss the literature on gender-based violence and armed conflict. This literature focuses primarily on sexual violence in armed conflict, examining the ways in which militarized masculinities and structural violence have gendered aspects that harm women and girls.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the case study of child marriage in the Syrian armed conflict. I first describe the benefits and limitations of a single case study, including why the Syrian conflict was chosen for this analysis. I then outline the framework for analysis used in the case study using *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women* by Jacqui True. True's framework has three components: (1) the relationship of gender with war, militarism, and globalized conflict, notably the affirmation of "masculine protector and feminine-protected identities associated with war

and militarism,"⁴ (2) the gendered division of labor in the household; and (3) the effects of the contemporary neoliberal globalization on women, especially the increase in violence against them.

Chapter 4 explores the case of child marriage in the ongoing Syrian conflict. I begin by providing an overview of the conflict and accompanying humanitarian crisis, followed by a description of the nature of child marriage in Syria before the crisis. Using True's feminist political economy framework for analysis, I then explore the ways in which armed conflict has affected the practice of child marriage in Syrian refugee communities. Based on this case study, I argue that the physical and economic instability created by the conflict acted as a shock upon the preexisting cultural and economic drivers of child marriage among Syrians. This resulted in a widespread increase of child marriage, as well as wider age differences between the girl and her husband and wealthier and better-educated families who had previously abandoned the practice choosing child marriage for their daughters. I also argue that conflict creates new drivers of child marriage linked to economic and cultural drivers, such as the insecurity caused by displacement and challenging host government laws or policies regarding refugees' ability to work, marry, and attend school. In the final section, I outline several policy recommendations to address child marriage in the Syrian refugee crisis based on my findings, including increased legal protection, prevention programming, and support for those already affected by child marriage.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the case study's findings. I also discuss the ways in which this case relates to existing debates in the literature on child marriage,

⁴ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 20.

especially the extent to which it is caused by cultural or economic factors. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for further study, such as the ways in which child marriage is occurring in other communities affected by the Syrian conflict. Given the lack of quantitative data and even qualitative data on certain issues, this study functions as a preliminary analysis of an important gap in the literature.

Chapter 2: Child Marriage as a Form of Gender-Based Violence

2.1 Causes of Child Marriage

The scope and scale of child marriage are tremendous; more than 720 million women alive today—just over ten percent of the world’s population—were married as children. This means one girl under the age of 18 is married off every two seconds.⁵ In Africa, which has the fastest growing child marriage rate, the number of child brides is expected to double by 2050, reaching 310 million.⁶ Early marriage results in numerous negative health, education, economic, and development consequences for the child bride, her family, and community. This includes higher rates of maternal and infant mortality, fewer girls completing secondary school and beyond, and increased poverty (Myers and Harvey 2011; Maswikwa et al 2015; Nasrullah et al 2014; Singh and Samara 1995; Svanemyr et al 2006; Ahmed et al 2007; Bajracharya and Amin 2012).

As with many human rights violations involving women and girls, activist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies have published a large portion of the literature on child marriage, including data, case studies, and articles (UNFPA, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Save the Children, and the International Red Cross).⁷ Due to the watchdog nature of these

⁵ "Why Does Child Marriage Happen? - Girls Not Brides." Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

⁶ "Child Brides in Africa Could More than Double to 310 Million by 2050 – UNICEF." UN News Center. November 26, 2015. Accessed December 22, 2015.

⁷ "Child Marriage." UNFPA. Accessed October 25, 2015.

"Child Marriage Facts and Figures." ICRW. Accessed September 27, 2015.

Why Does Child Marriage Happen? - Girls Not Brides." Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

NGOs, almost all of the work focuses on three main concerns: child marriage's causes, consequences, and ways to prevent the practice. Scholarly articles published in academic journals adhere generally to this pattern as well. Two main arguments arise within the literature on child marriage: that child marriage is driven by (1) cultural motivators, including traditional and religious practices, and (2) economic motivators such as poverty or lack of career opportunities. While most scholars and NGOs believe child marriage to be driven by a complex combination of these, many emphasize or study only one. Before discussing the two focuses within the literature on child marriage, however, it is important to first define child marriage and locate it within the context of international law.

Child Marriage in International Law

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989, entered into force in 1990, and currently has 196 state parties.⁸ In it, a child is defined as anyone under the age of eighteen.⁹ Articles 3, 6, and 12 in particular are relevant to child marriage, ensuring that children's opinions, rights, maturity, and wellbeing are considered in decisions about their lives.¹⁰ Article 3 states that in all actions in the public or private sphere (marriage straddles both), State Parties must consider the

"Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage among Syrian Girls in Jordan." Save the Children. 2014. Accessed November 14, 2015.

"Children in War." International Committee of the Red Cross. November 1, 2009. Accessed November 14, 2015.

⁸ The United States is the only UN country not a state party to the CRC, as it is only a signatory.

⁹ "Convention on the Rights of the Child." United Nations Human Rights. Accessed October 25, 2015.

¹⁰ Jamobo, Tamunoimama. "A Discourse on the Developmental Effects of Child Marriage." *African Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 135-36.

“best interests” of the child.¹¹ According to Article 6, State Parties must also ensure that the child’s survival and development are protected.¹² Article 12 states that children have the right, given a certain level of maturity, to state their own views and wishes and that these should be respected. This right related to one of the most complex aspects of the practice of child marriage, which will be discussed further in the coming sections. While child marriage opponents often use this right to demonstrate the violation of a child being forced into a marriage against their will, some children may find the prospect of marriage desirable in certain circumstances. In that case, some have argued that international law and that child’s rights conflict, and that some older children should be able to chose to marry if they so desire (Bentley 2005; Freeman 1998).

While marriage is not specifically mentioned in the CRC, in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Article 16 states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: (a) The same right to enter into marriage; (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.¹³

The inherent power differences between a child and her parents and older husband, it is impossible to establish a “basis of equality” for the marriage. It is true that in child

¹¹ In efforts to prevent child marriage, it is often extremely difficult to change practices in the private sphere where laws are less effective.

¹² "Convention on the Rights of the Child." United Nations Human Rights. Accessed October 25, 2015.

¹³ "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." United Nations Human Rights. Accessed October 25, 2015.

marriage, the question of what is in the child's "best interest" and what their true wishes are in respect to marriage can be unclear. However, because child brides are not eighteen and thus not of full, consenting age, child marriage is both a violation of children's and women's rights under international law.

Several regional bodies, such as the African Union, and many states have laws establishing a minimum age of marriage in alignment with international laws in order to prevent child marriage. For example, Maswikwa et al's study of minimum marriage age laws and prevalence of child marriage found that "consistent minimum marriage age laws protect against the exploitation of girls."¹⁴ Unfortunately, 93 countries still allow girls to be married under the age of 18 with parental permission, and 54 countries allow girls to be married one to three years younger than boys (Figure 1).¹⁵

Removed for copyright reasons.

Figure 1: Girls' legal protection from marriage compared to boys (Change Girls' Chances)

¹⁴ Maswikwa, Belinda, Linda Richter, Jay Kaufman, and Arijit Nandi. "Minimum Marriage Age Laws and the Prevalence of Child Marriage and Adolescent Birth: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Perspectives of Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41, no. 2 (2015): 58.

¹⁵ "What Do Laws around the World Say on Age of Marriage for Girls?" Girls Not Brides. October 10, 2013. Accessed November 14, 2015.

Even in many countries where there are laws against marriage below a certain age, such as Morocco, Zambia, and India, child marriage levels are still high.¹⁶ This is due in part to apathetic law enforcement and lack of reporting, and also in part to the strong social and economic drivers of the practice of child marriage, which will be outlined later in this chapter.

Child Marriage and the Cultural Relativist Critique

Before enumerating upon the complex drivers and implications of child marriage, it is important to first acknowledge the debate between the universal nature of human rights and its cultural relativist critique. Two prominent human rights scholars express this debate in connection to children's rights. In "Can There Be Any Universal Children's Rights?" Kristina Anne Bentley argues that many children's rights cannot be universal or non-derogable because they are separate from human rights, distinguishing between the rights one has as a child versus the rights one has as a human. These rights concern Bentley because they determine certain rights that can be violated or certain activities that are okay for adults, but not for children. Examples of this include marriage, labor, and soldiering. While it is not a violation of an adult's rights to be enlisted, work to support themselves, or marry, these activities would prevent a child from living healthfully and happily. Other rights in the CRC fall under the broader human rights banner, but are included again because children are more vulnerable to abuse. Thus, Bentley argues, the

¹⁶ "Why Does Child Marriage Happen?" Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

existence of the CRC and naming children's rights in general are more about the enforcement and increased protection of these rights rather than their enumeration.¹⁷

In fact, according to Bentley, children's rights are extremely difficult to classify as universal because there is no ubiquitous global understanding of childhood. Bentley cites scholar Vanessa Pupavac who argues that the "supposedly universal standards" outlined in the CRC are actually based in Western societal practices and beliefs surrounding childhood. This definition tends to focus on the protection of one's childhood, and is a unique privilege of the developing world. Worldwide, definitions, expectations, and realities of childhood vary widely. Imposing a Western conception of childhood on developing nations is, according to Bentley and Pupavac, setting them up to fail and be "noncompliant" to the standards outlined in the CRC. In regards to child marriage, 93 countries currently allow child marriage, including some Western states like the US. Though child marriage may be described as a religious freedom or other "right" in these states, this allowance does not preclude the fact that child marriage is a harmful practice and a violation of numerous children's' rights.

It is also important to acknowledge, argues Bentley, that "children do, as we know, have the capacity to act to varying degrees in the adult fashion...it is far from the case that that this is a universal experience for children."¹⁸ Given the varying degrees to which children are autonomous, combined with the inability to universally define childhood, it becomes very difficult to determine at what age people should be able to

¹⁷ Bentley, Kristina Anne. "Can There Be Any Universal Children's Rights?" *The International Journal of Human Rights* 9, no. 1 (2005): 110.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

marry or have their own children.¹⁹ A girl who marries at seventeen, for example, is not in the same position of vulnerability as a nine-year-old. The concept of child marriage, then, including its immorality and definition under international law like the CRC, becomes contestable under this critique.

Bentley's argument highlights many of child marriage's complexities, including the variety of its drivers globally and the possibility that some girls may desire marriage before the age of eighteen. While it is tempting under well-intentioned multicultural ideals to accept Bentley's argument, it fails in several key ways. Sonja Grover argues in "A Response to K.A. Bentley's 'Can There Be Any Universal Children's Rights?'" that to deny children's rights is "denying children's universal entitlement to security of the person."²⁰ While Bentley argues that the CRC and children's rights infantilize the rest of the world by imposing a Western conception of childhood, Grover argues that "there can be no more profound way" to infantilize the developing world than to argue that States are not obligated to protect children in extremely vulnerable situations. Child marriage, child labor, and child soldiering are all examples Grover cites of the type of violations that occur against children are left unprotected under Bentley's cultural relativist approach to children's rights.²¹

Moreover, Bentley argues that the rights outlined in the CRC are "derogable, culture-specific children's (or age-related) rights," which in turn makes them arbitrary as well as non-universal.²² Grover rightly points out that children's rights are not only non-

¹⁹ Ibid, 116.

²⁰ Grover, Sonja. "A Response to K.A. Bentley's 'Can There Be Any Universal Children's Rights?'" *The International Journal of Human Rights* 11, no. 4 (2007): 441.

²¹ Ibid, 441.

²² Ibid, 430.

derogable and inherent to all humans (as all humans have childhoods), they are also no less legitimate or non-derogable just because they cannot be realized in certain socio-political or cultural contexts worldwide.²³ The cultural relativity of childhood does not undermine the universality of human rights.²⁴ Children still have fundamental rights that must be protect, just as all humans do. Grover argues persuasively:

Childhood vulnerability as a function of age is a universal phenomenon and necessitates that children's human rights as stipulated in the CRC are stated such as to properly consider that vulnerability. In other words, children's protection rights are universal, though they may not be enforced universally. [...] Both Western and non-Western children are in dire need of those protections, and they have equal entitlement to the security of the person.²⁵

Thus, to claim that children's rights are derogable and not universal is to say that there are some children who are not entitled to the same protections as others.

One of these protections is the prohibition of child marriage. Bentley argues that the appropriate age of marriage depends on cultural context, thus making protection from child marriage a non-universal and derogable right. However, as Grover points out, children's rights are human rights, and child marriage entails a variety of human rights violations, including limiting education, personal development, and health. Grover argues "*child marriage infringes not only on the child's universal right to self-ownership, but also to reasonable health and security of the person protections.*"²⁶ To claim that protection from these violations is dependent on one's culture or age is demeaning to the thousands of child brides married every year.

²³ Ibid, 431.

²⁴ Ibid, 431.

²⁵ Ibid, 438.

²⁶ Ibid, 438.

Equally problematic is Bentley's attempt to distinguish between forced and arranged marriages. As Grover points out, "in the case of children who, as children, have no political or economic power, so-called 'arranged' marriages are in fact 'forced' in practice."²⁷ This is not to say that all arranged marriages are bad, but those that involve children cannot be consensual due to the very real power differences between children and adults. It can be argued that some children may want to be married under the age of 18, be it for personal, economic, or social reasons. But while children do have some degree of agency, as articulated in Article 12 of the CRC, the children's best interests must also be taken into consideration and in the case of early marriage, there are numerous negative impacts to a child's wellbeing.

In the argument of the 17-year-old versus the nine-year-old child brides, given the issues of autonomy, negative health implications, and inability to discern consent, there must be an age to provide protection. While the age of 18 compared to 17 is somewhat arbitrary and there is a real debate over what that age should be, it is undeniable that the older a child is, they are more physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared for every aspect of marriage, including being a parent.

This is true regardless of where the child was born. Grover argues that context—social, political, or cultural—does not affect children's rights' universality; all children everywhere deserve the same protection. The cultural relativist argument that considers protection from child marriage a non-universal, derogable right ignores the detriment to children's wellbeing and autonomy that takes place as a result of dangerous power inequalities, economic and educational losses, and negative health effects in child

²⁷ Ibid, 438.

marriages. It is true, however, that different violations of these rights arise in different places for many complex reasons. Child marriage is no exception, but while it is a global issue there are many places where it is more prevalent (as previously discussed) as a result of different drivers for the practice. The next two sections will discuss what these drivers are and how they influence the choices of families and communities to marry their daughters off at an early age.

Cultural Drivers of Child Marriages

Political scientists and promoters of human rights often argue that cultural forces drive the practice of child marriage. Culture, in this case, includes religious beliefs and traditional or ethnic practices (Raj, Gomez, and Silverman, 2014; Nasrullah et al 2015, Jamobo, 2012; Rodriguez, 2007). Many scholars use these factors almost interchangeably. In Ahmed's 1986 study of child marriage in Bangladesh, for example, he says child marriage is caused by "culture, like religion" and proceeds to examine a variety of socio-economic factors.²⁸ Despite this common usage in the literature, it is important to note that culture, religion, and ethnicity are certainly not synonymous.

Nevertheless, religion in particular is often identified as the root cause of child marriage, though no one religion is primarily responsible for encouraging or creating the practice. This is likely due to the fact that marriage is often considered a religious institution, located in the private sphere. In reality, marriage has large economic, political, and legal implications. Moreover, child marriage is and has been a practice found in almost every major world religion, including Christianity, Hinduism, and

²⁸ Ahmed, Ashraf Uddin. "Marriage and Its Transition in Bangladesh." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 16, No. 1 (Spring 1986): 50.

Islam.²⁹ The majority-Catholic Dominican Republic, Muslim Ethiopia, and Hindu Nepal, for example, all have child marriage rates of about forty-one percent.³⁰ This is in large part due to the ways in which communities, especially the religious leaders within them, interpret ancient holy texts and law. For example, in Raj, Gomez, and Silverman's 2014 study on Afghani perspectives on marriage, many people, especially religious leaders, agreed with interpretations of Islamic and Sharia laws stating that girls can and should be married as soon as puberty begins (often between ages 9 and 12).³¹ Similarly, the Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law, followed widely in Latin America, maintains that the acceptable age for marriage is 14 for girls and 16 for boys.³² Moreover, because it is often religious leaders who perform marriage ceremonies, their endorsement is essential to the practice and allows for its perpetuation in many communities worldwide.³³

Beyond religion, child marriage is also viewed as a cultural and traditional practice worldwide. Most NGO websites and fact sheets list tradition, religion, or cultural practices and beliefs as the primary cause of child marriage.³⁴ Girls Not Brides, the leading coalition for ending the practice of child marriage, states that "child marriage is a

²⁹ "Why Does Child Marriage Happen?" Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

³⁰ "Child Marriage Facts and Figures." ICRW. Accessed September 27, 2015.

³¹ Raj, Anita, Charlemagne S. Gomez, and Jay G. Silverman. "Multisectorial Afghan Perspectives on Girl Child Marriage." *Violence Against Women*, 2014, 14-94.

³² Walker, Robert. "Pope Francis Should Help to End Child Marriage." *The Huffington Post*. September 21, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

³³ Jamobo, Tamunoimama. "A Discourse on the Developmental Effects of Child Marriage." *African Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 135-44.

³⁴ "Why Does Child Marriage Happen?" Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.; "Child Marriage." UNICEF. Accessed May 4, 2015. "Marrying Too Young." *End Child Marriage-UNFPA*. Accessed May 4, 2015

traditional practice that in many places happens simply because it has happened for generations.”³⁵

Like many other traditional practices disproportionately harmful to women and girls, many scholars argue that a traditional devaluing of women lies at the root of the societies in which child marriages take place (Rodriguez 2007; Nasrullah et al 2014). This devaluation can manifest in gender roles, certain gendered ceremonies, and other cultural practices (it is also linked to an economic valuing, which I will discuss in the next section). Because women are viewed as the lesser sex, their contributions to their families and communities are often overlooked, making them appear less valuable or even burdensome as a result. It is not coincidental that high child marriage rates often correlate with the presence of female genital mutilation, sex-selective abortion, and inequitable enrollment rates in school between boys and girls.³⁶

For example, in Nasrullah et al.’s study of the perceptions of women who were married as children in Lahore Pakistan, many approved of their parents’ choice for their early marriage and planned to have their own daughters married before the age of eighteen as well. Women interviewed demonstrated how a “[s]trong influence of culture and community perceptions, varying interpretation of religion, and protecting family honor are some of the factors that may play role in the continuation of child marriage practice in Pakistan.”³⁷ The latter of these—protection of family honor, as well as the girls’ honor and virginity—is often a central motivator of parents to marry their daughters

³⁵ "Why Does Child Marriage Happen?" Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

³⁶ "Child Marriage." UNFPA. Accessed October 25, 2015.

³⁷ Nasrullah, Muazzam, Rubeena Zakar, Muhammad Zakria Zafar, Safdar Abbas, Rabia Safdar, Mahwish Shaukat, and Alexander Krämer. "Knowledge and Attitude Towards Child Marriage Among Women Married As Children-A Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan." *BMC Public Health* 14, no. 1148 (2014): 1-7.

off early (Jamobo 136; Lee-Rife et al 2012). Child marriage scholar Jamobo explains this complexity in the developing world context:

Early marriage in many tribes is looked at as a way of protecting the girl, thus the wife is ‘protected’, or placed firmly under male control; that she is submissive to her husband and works hard for her in-laws’ household; that the children she bears are thus legitimate; and that bonds of affection between couples do not undermine the family unit. Parents may genuinely feel that their daughter will be better off and safer with a regular male guardian.³⁸

Many of the aforementioned anxieties—that the daughter will become pregnant out of wedlock or that the family will be dishonored—are culturally or religiously motivated. However, Jamobo also notes that many families feel their daughters will not only be safer, but also “better off” when married, both socially and *economically*. Child marriage’s causal interaction between cultural impetus and perceived economic benefits make it an especially complex issue to understand and combat. In the next section, I will further discuss the economic motivators behind child marriage.

Economic and Political Drivers of Child Marriages

The causes of child marriage are more complicated than cultural drivers alone. Broader economic and political factors also contribute. Of these two, though neither is as well researched as the cultural drivers of child marriage, scholars best understand child marriage’s numerous economic motivations. In fact, many scholars argue that it is a practice driven primarily by poverty (Lee-Rife et al 2012; Bajaracharya and Amin 2012; Mensch, Singh, and Casterline 2005). Raj et al’s decade-long study of education in

³⁸ Jamobo, Tamunoimama. “A Discourse on the Developmental Effects of Child Marriage.” *African Journal of Social Sciences*. Volume 2 Number 3 (2012): 138.

Southeast Asia, for example, demonstrates that while cultural factors (notably region-specific religious interpretations) have some effect on child marriage rates, the level of poverty in a given area is the strongest correlating factor with high rates of child marriage.³⁹ It is important to note that his relationship is not causal, but rather cyclical. Girls from impoverished homes are left with marriage as one of their few options to try and escape poverty, but early marriage also leads to lower economic and educational opportunity, continuing the cycle of poverty.

Worldwide, child marriage is far more common in areas with low access to health care and high levels of poverty.⁴⁰ In places with widespread child marriage, girls on average have poor access to health care, education, and gainful employment. The top ten countries for number of girls married under the age of 18 are also some of the poorest: Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic, Bangladesh, Guinea, Mozambique, Mali, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, and Malawi.⁴¹

For women and girls, marriage is often seen in many parts of the world as a means to escape, prevent, or alleviate poverty. This is often because their communities see women as less capable of supporting themselves or as valuable assets to their family. For example, many scholars have linked women's access to workforce participation and income to the age at which they are married (Bajaracharya and Amin 2012; Singh and Samara 1996; Mensch 2005; Mensch, Singh, and Casterline 2005). In several studies, parents were incentivized to delay marriage for daughters whose economic value was

³⁹ Raj A, McDougal L, Silverman JG, Rusch “Cross-Sectional Time Series Analysis of Associations between Education and Girl Child Marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, 1991-2011.” *PLoS ONE* 9 no. 9 (2014): 2.

⁴⁰ “Child Marriage Facts and Figures.” ICRW. Accessed September 27, 2015.

⁴¹ Ibid.

perceived as contributing to the household income (Bajaracharya and Amin 2012; Jejeebhoy 1995; Singh and Samara 1996). Women who are able to support themselves outside the home are also less likely to marry prematurely (Chowdhury and Trovato 1994; Amin et al. 1998). Mensch, who writes extensively on this issue, argues that women should only marry after first attending school and then entering the workforce. In developing countries however, these priorities conflict and rarely occur in that desirable order (Mensch 2005; Singh and Samara 1996; Bajaracharya and Amin 2012).

Unlike the economic aspects of child marriage, political factors are studied less. As feminist international scholar Cynthia Enloe writes, “Marriage is political, marriage is international,” in discussion of the ways in which those in political power use marriage at all ages to control the population.⁴² While all marriages are political with gendered implications, child marriage in particular has long-term effects on women's political power, including their ability to organize, be leaders, and influence their communities. Marriage also makes child brides even more vulnerable to violence and exploitation at both the interpersonal and international levels. Child marriage also establishes harmful, unequal, power dynamics that affect and are affected by different political contexts, including armed conflict.

In this study, I address this complex relationship between conflict and child marriage. Limited scholarship exists on this relationship. Jayaraman, Gebreselassie, and Chandrasekhar’s 2008 study on the effect of the Rwandan Genocide on age of marriage suggests that women living in communities with larger death tolls were less likely to marry young, but that those in areas with higher infant mortality were likely to have

⁴² Enloe, Cynthia H. *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 10.

children at a much younger age.⁴³ This conflicting result—that conflict-related deaths appeared to cause both earlier and older ages of marriage, depending on who died—demonstrates the complexity of this relationship. There is much to be explored in respects to the ways in which conflict-related challenges can influence marriage decisions.

Gender Inequality: Social and Economic Drivers Combined

Child marriage targets girls at far higher rates than boys (UNICEF, UNFPA, Girls Not Brides). 720 million women alive today—about 10% of the world’s population—were married before the age of eighteen, compared to thirty-three million men.⁴⁴ The inequality between young girls and their older husbands lies at the intersection of the two drivers of child marriage research on its social and economic drivers. The gender inequality contributing to and perpetuated by child marriage is both social (including cultural, religious, and ethnic) and economic in nature.

For example, as discussed above, girls are far more likely to be married as children than boys, a decision motivated by a variety of factors ranging from poverty to cultural practice. However, these drivers share by necessity a social and economic devaluing of women and girls. Jamobo argues, “young girls are regarded as economic burdens” without real earning potential which makes families keen to have them married. This evaluation of the girls is both economic and social. While it is true that one less mouth to feed would be a tremendous financial break for an impoverished family, it is

⁴³ Jayaraman, Anuja, Tesfayi Gebreselassie, and S. Chandrasekhar. "Effect of Conflict on Age at Marriage and Age at First Birth in Rwanda." *Popul Res Policy Rev* 28 (2009): 551-67.

⁴⁴ Why Does Child Marriage Happen? - Girls Not Brides." Girls Not Brides. Accessed May 4, 2015.

also a result of a variety of social factors that the girls are less able to earn a living and seen as less valuable than their male peers (Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, UNICEF).

Thus, child marriage plays an integral part in perpetuating gender inequality worldwide. Only in addressing child marriage can gender equality along with many other development and human rights goals be reached, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goal number five on ending gender inequality. The next section explores the child marriage's implications, including consequences if it is not addressed and the benefits to the global community if it is ended.

2.2. Implications and Solutions

In recent years child marriage has been identified by human rights, development, and even humanitarian organizations alike as a tremendous barrier to achieving important—and often overlapping—goals in a variety of disciplines (Girls Not Brides, UNICEF, DFID, UN Women, USAID, CARE). This is largely due to the fact that child marriage is linked to numerous health, education, gender parity, and economic problems. It is helpful to characterize child marriage as the Greek mythological monster Hydra. To kill the Hydra, simply attacking a single head will not work, and a new head will regrow in its place. Similarly, child marriage is linked to maternal health concerns, low education rates, poverty, sexism, reproductive rights and more. Addressing only one or two of these issues—or attempting to address them without understanding their connectedness within the broader issue of child marriage—is bound to be frustrating and not achieve the desired results. For this reason, many of child marriage's negative effects, such as decreased education and health, are often targeted for improvement by aid and

development organizations as ways to combat the practice. Very few initiatives are holistic in their approach, targeting all of child marriage's causes and implications in their work, which lessens the overall effectiveness of anti-child marriage programs (Lee-Rife et al 2012; Svanemyr et al 2015). Lee Rife et al find in their analysis of child marriage prevention programs that almost all rigorous programs took one of several approaches, such as enhancing access to schooling or empowering girls with support networks. No program in their study addressed both cultural and economic drivers of child marriage.⁴⁵

Health

When young girls marry they are neither physically, emotionally, nor sexually ready for the assumed responsibilities of a wife. Many health consequences result from this immaturity. Child brides are far more likely to be young mothers and give birth at an unhealthy and unsafe developmental age for both themselves and the infant (Jamobo 2012, WHO 2011; Ahmed et al 2007). According to a 2007 study by Bates, Maselko, and Schuler child marriage is a key determinant of early childbirth.⁴⁶ Early childbirth comes with devastating implications for both the mothers and infants. Girls aged 10-14 at the time of childbirth are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women aged 20-24 due to higher risks of complications like obstetric fistula, Anemia, and Eclampsia.⁴⁷ According to Bajracharya and Amin, young mothers also have "poorer fertility

⁴⁵ Lee-Rife, Susan, Anju Malhotra, Ann Warner, and Allison McGonagle Glinski. "What Works to Prevent Child Marriage: A Review of the Evidence." *Studies in Family Planning* 43, no. 4 (2012): 292-3.

⁴⁶ Bates, Lisa M., Joanna Maselko, and Sidney Ruth Schuler. "Women's Education and the Timing of Marriage and Childbearing in the Next Generation: Evidence from Rural Bangladesh." *Studies in Family Planning* 38, no. 2 (2007): 101-12.

⁴⁷ Jamobo, Tamunoimama. "A Discourse on the Developmental Effects of Child Marriage." *African Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 140.

outcomes” including “inadequate birth spacing, lower contraceptive use, and a higher number of unintended pregnancies.”⁴⁸

Child brides are also vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDs. Due to the typical age disparity between child brides and their husbands, it is more likely that the girls’ older husbands have contracted a sexually transmitted disease before marriage (Jamobo 2012; Bajracharya and Amin 2012; Jones 2007). Lower rates of contraceptive use and higher levels of poverty correlated with early marriage also contribute to the greater risk of STIs for child brides, further exposing the power disparity between child brides and their older husbands (Bajracharya and Amin 2012; Nour 2006).

As child brides are some of the most vulnerable members in their communities, early marriage is strongly correlated with numerous health concerns including higher rates of malaria, domestic violence-related injuries, and cervical cancer (Nusrullah et al 2015; Nour, 2009). The psychological health effects of early marriage are also harmful. Child brides face high rates of both isolation and depression (Nour, 2009). They are often removed from their home, families and communities and must begin the roles of “wife, domestic worker, and eventually, mother.”⁴⁹ This loss of childhood and family home is incredibly challenging and stressful. Child brides are also more likely to miscarry or give birth to stillborn children, which adds yet another layer of emotional trauma to the experience of being a child bride (Nour, 2009; Nour, 2006).

⁴⁸ Bajracharya, Ashish, and Sajeda Amin. "Poverty, Marriage Timing, and Transitions to Adulthood in Nepal." *Studies in Family Planning* 43, no. 2 (2012): 81.

⁴⁹ Nour, Nawal M. "Child Marriage: A Silent Health and Human Rights Issue." *Reviews in Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 51-6.

Due to child marriage's considerable health implications, NGOs working to promote human rights and development aim to deter the practice of child marriage by informing parents and communities of the risks associated with it (Girls Not Brides, WHO, UNFPA). This is also reflected in academic discourse. Nasrullah et al, for example, recommend educating communities about the negative health effects of child marriage in order to incentivize delaying marriage until adulthood.⁵⁰ In fact, education—and not just health education—is closely linked to child marriage, as one of the main factors linked to child marriage's prevention. The next section will explore the detriments to education more broadly as a result of child marriage.

Education

Similar to the negative health implications of early marriage, child marriage is also correlated with many negative education outcomes. Education is understood both as something that is negatively impacted when child marriages take place and as a way to prevent early marriages from taking place. With the former, girls with little or no education are the most vulnerable to early marriage (Singh and Samara 1996; Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003). Jamobo writes, “attitudes towards the education of girls have begun to change even in traditional societies, many parents still believe... a girl's education is wasted when she is simply going to be married and work in a household.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Nasrullah et al "Knowledge and Attitude Towards Child Marriage Among Women Married As Children-A Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan." *BMC Public Health* 14, no. 1148 (2014): 6.

⁵¹ Jamobo, Tamunoimama. "A Discourse on the Developmental Effects of Child Marriage." *African Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2012): 142-143.

Often this results in girls' removal from school or never being enrolled in the first place.⁵² As Nour writes, "child marriage truncates girls' childhood [and] stops their education."⁵³

Education is also often cited as one of the better preventative measures of child marriage (Singh and Samara 1996; Mathur, Greene, and Malhotra 2003). Bajracharya and Amin state in their 2012 study of child marriage in Nepal "Increased educational attainment for girls is widely credited as being the single most important reason for delay in marriage in most of the developing world."⁵⁴ Many scholars agree, citing education and keeping girls in school as the most important deterrent of child marriage (Lee-Rife et al 2012; Nour 2006; Nour 2009, Svanemyr et al 2015). Nour writes, for example, that many of the most successful programs provide families with economic incentives to delay marriage and keep their daughters enrolled in school. This includes programs that feed children during the school day and others that provide employment for girls after their education to become financially independent from their parents.⁵⁵

These findings are supported by several studies (Malhotra 2011; Myers and Harvey 2011; WHO 2015, Raj, McDougal, and Rusch 2014; Jain 2007). Raj et al found in their 2014 cross-sectional times series analysis of child marriage in Southeast Asia, for

⁵² Ibid 143.

⁵³ Nour, Nawal M. "Child Marriage: A Silent Health and Human Rights Issue." *Reviews in Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 54.

⁵⁴ Bajracharya, Ashish, and Sajeda Amin. "Poverty, Marriage Timing, and Transitions to Adulthood in Nepal." *Studies in Family Planning* 43, no. 2 (2012): 79-92.

⁵⁵ Nour, Nawal M. "Health Consequences of Child Marriage in Africa." *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 12, no. 11 (2006): 1644-649.

example, that while keeping girls in primary school was unlikely to deter child marriage, maintain girls' enrollment in secondary school had some preventative effect.⁵⁶

Economic Wellbeing and Poverty

As discussed above, child marriage is thought by many scholars to be driven by economic need and poverty. Child marriage also helps to perpetuate poverty in several distinct ways. As Bajracharya and Amin write, "Among the poorest families, marriage decisions are likely made as economic survival strategy."⁵⁷ They find in their longitudinal study of child brides in Nepal that poverty was not only a cause of child marriage, but also an effect. As a result of the child bride's combined lack of education and isolation, she is "without skills, mobility, and connections, [and] her ability to overcome poverty for herself, her children, and her family is hindered."⁵⁸

In order to break this cycle, poverty-related programs, incentives, and advocacy are becoming increasingly part of human rights and development organizations' toolkit to prevent child marriages. Given the role economic need plays in incentivizing child marriages for many families, groups like the World Bank and International Center for Research on Women are testing programs that pay families to keep their daughters unmarried (WHO 2015 "Understanding the Economic Impact of Child Marriage"). Such

⁵⁶ Raj A, McDougal L, Silverman JG, Rusch "Cross-Sectional Time Series Analysis of Associations between Education and Girl Child Marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, 1991-2011." *PLoS ONE* 9 no. 9 (2014): 9.

⁵⁷ Bajracharya, Ashish, and Sajeda Amin. "Poverty, Marriage Timing, and Transitions to Adulthood in Nepal." *Studies in Family Planning* 43, no. 2 (2012): 79.

⁵⁸ Lee-Rife, Susan, Anju Malhotra, Ann Warner, and Allison McGonagle Glinski. "What Works to Prevent Child Marriage: A Review of the Evidence." *Studies in Family Planning* 43, no. 4 (2012): 288.

programs been very successful, even more so than other programs which promote education as a means to prevent child marriage.

For example, Lee-Rife et al's comprehensive study of twenty-three programs designed to prevent child marriage finds the greatest success with several widespread, incentive-based programs observed, compared to programs that targeted child marriage directly through girls' empowerment or legislative advocacy. The authors call incentive-based programs the "untapped approach to child marriage prevention," based on their success and infrequent use compared to other types of deterrent programs⁵⁹ These types of programs are expensive and untraditional, however, and it will likely take some time before they are normalized in development and human rights programming. The early successes of financial incentive-based programming raise interesting questions about the literature on child marriage's causes. If economic incentives work to delay marriage more than other cultural or educational interventions, there is a strong case to be made that economic necessity is the dominant or central driver of child marriage.

Gender Equality

As noted earlier, child marriage—including its indicators, drivers, and implications—is a complex and interrelated practice and problem. This is reflected in the ways in which gender inequality and discrimination affects the practice of child marriage both economically (girls are seen as being literally less valuable or as potential dowry-earners) and culturally (for example, many traditions and religions prefer sons over daughters). The continued practice of child marriage reinforces these beliefs, passing

⁵⁹ Ibid, 298.

them down from one generation to the next, the devastating implications of which have been discussed at length in this chapter already. As a result, gender inequality becomes a paramount concern as one of the main implications of child marriage practice worldwide.

Gender equality is also increasingly seen as a potential solution for child marriage. The premise is such that if girls are empowered and women become equal decision makers and breadwinners to men, especially their husbands, child marriage will greatly decrease. This is likely also a byproduct of other development and human rights conversations taking place, including the development of the Sustainable Development Goals in which to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” is the fifth goal out of seventeen. Additionally, the “holistic’ approach to the girl child has become a popular, and in the eyes of some, the only realistic way to address many of the world’s largest problems. This holistic approach includes working to end the practice of child marriage as well as education, employment, and anti-poverty and female genital mutilation initiatives as well.

Several studies of early empowerment development programs have shown initial success. These programs address both the main causes of child marriage, social/cultural and economic, as discussed earlier in this chapter. A recent case study by Girls Not Brides of a holistic program run by Institute Health Management Pachod (IHMP) in Maharashtra, India showed promising results, including a decrease in girls married before age eighteen from 80.7% to 61.8% after eighteen months of the program’s intervention.⁶⁰ This is part of Girls Not Brides’ Theory of Change on child marriage, which includes health, education, economic and legal support as well as placing an emphasis on ensuring

⁶⁰ "Integrated Project for Empowering Adolescent Girls." Girls Not Brides. *Theory of Change Case Studies: Empower Girls*, 2015.

that women are valued.⁶¹ Other groups, including the U.S. Government with their upcoming Adolescent Girl's Strategy (released in March 2016) include efforts to combat child marriage as part of a larger context of ending inequality and violence against women. The next section will address violence against women and, more broadly, gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict in order to better articulate the unique dimensions that shift and exacerbate these abuses.

2.3 Gender-based Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict

Child marriage, though accepted generally by the international community (including UN agencies like UNICEF and UNFPA, major aid-providing government agencies like USAID and DFID, and NGOs) as a form of violence against women and classified as gender-based violence (GBV), does not often fall into dominant conversation on these subjects. Most dialogues tend to center on grown women, with child marriage falling through the cracks between “women's” and “children's” issues. In the widely used UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), for example, child marriage is not reported as a form of violence or women's issue, but rather as part of child wellbeing.⁶² While a critical measure of child wellbeing, valuable attention and analysis is lost by not also considering child marriage as a form of GBV.

This near-exclusion of child marriage includes conversations and studies of GBV in situations of armed conflict. However, given that the scope of this project is to explore child marriage in conflict and better understand this relationship, it is important to

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys." UNICEF-MICS. Accessed December 4, 2015. <http://mics.unicef.org/>.

examine what literature exists of GBV and violence against women in conflict generally, especially sexual violence which will provide valuable frameworks for understanding child marriage in conflict. This section will define and explore the relationship between GBV and armed conflict in order to inform the rest of the study and establish a gap in the literature.⁶³

GBV in Armed Conflict

Gender-based violence occurs worldwide and across all socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, and racial lines in times of conflict and peace. Women in vulnerable situations, such as refugee camps, conflict, and poverty experience GBV more frequently and acutely than others (True 2012; Thompson 2006; Mayanja 2010). Moreover, GBV in situations of armed conflict occurs at extremely high rates, making it worthy of careful, gendered analysis.

In her landmark book, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe argues that perceptions of a violent and dangerous world—heightened during conflict—intensifies the “primacy” of men and

⁶³ It is important to first clarify several definitions. GBV, sexual violence, and violence against women (VAW) are often used interchangeably in much of the literature on this topic. These distinct definitions provide important nuance to this complicated conversation. GBV is a broad “umbrella term” that refers to any harmful act committed based on social constructs of gender, which most often privileges men.⁶³ VAW falls under the category of GBV, but is limited to those harmful acts perpetuated against women and girls. Sexual violence’s definition is limited specifically to harmful sexual acts, typically meaning rape or sexual assault, and can be used for a person of any gender. In the context of this paper, the phrase GBV will be used the most, as it is used predominately in the literature. VAW will be used occasionally due to the fact that women and girls represent an extreme majority of those affected by child marriage, especially in situations of armed conflict.

masculinity, thus subordinating women and femininity.⁶⁴ She notes that this preference for masculinity and the view of femininity as a weakness is embedded in both international and interpersonal politics globally. This has two main effects. First, it limits women to the position of near-objects requiring protection.⁶⁵ Second, in conflict or other military settings, it can result in militarized masculinities, which promote and even train extreme “enactments of manhood,” which target perceived weaknesses and femininity.⁶⁶ In armed conflicts, militarized masculinities can motivate systemic rape and other forms of GBV.

This book by Enloe was one of the first that looked at the relationships between gender and armed conflict. Since, there has been extensive feminist work that has built upon Enloe’s foundation. Cynthia Cockburn argues in her 1999 background paper “Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence” that studying “everyday” gender processes is essential for “understanding, preventing and ending” large-scale conflict and violence.⁶⁷ In this article, Cockburn evaluates situations of uneasy peace, war and political terror, peace processes, and post-conflict to better understand the ways in which gender plays a role in each part of the war to peace cycle. She concludes that in all times, “gender power relations should be made visible” in order to reshape militarized masculinities and other harmful or oppressive gender identities.

Another key early scholar of gender and conflict is Julie Mertus. In her book *War’s Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo and*

⁶⁴ Enloe, Cynthia H. *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 30.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 30-31.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 150-1.

⁶⁷ Cockburn, Cynthia. “Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political Violence” *The World Bank*, Washington, DC, June 10-11 1999.

Afghanistan, Mertus argues that humanitarian crises require gendered response in order to meet the needs of women.⁶⁸ She demonstrates that most current humanitarian practices and policies fail women in times of crisis, including the lack of training of aid workers and insensitive human rights laws that re-traumatize women. She concludes that women experience unique challenges during wartime and that these are often met with inadequacy from humanitarian organizations. She argues that new, more protective and empowering laws and policies should be enacted.

Fellow scholar Maria Thompson encapsulates the need for further study of GBV in conflict her article “Women, Gender, and Conflict: Making the Connections.” She argues that current literature on conflict focuses mainly on the roles and experiences of men in conflict. She cites the works of scholars Robert Kaplan, Samuel Huntington, Alex De Waal, Mark Duffield, and others, which, while providing complex analyses of conflict, rarely mention women. This perpetuates “the idea that war is largely fought by men...and that while violence against civilians is widespread, it is simply an unfortunate by-product of war.”⁶⁹ This erases the experiences of women, including the ways in which gender-based violence and violence against women—especially sexual violence—is used purposefully as a weapon in conflict. Child marriage in armed conflict, though often not conceived of as a weapon, is an overlooked example of this. Early marriages make girls even more vulnerable to violence in these contexts. The link between child marriage and sexual violence is especially salient; marriage is often used as a way to legitimize the

⁶⁸ Mertus, Julie. *War's Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*. Kumarian Press, 2000.

⁶⁹ Thompson, Maria. “Women, Gender, and Conflict: Making the Connections” *Development in Practice* 16, no. 3 (2006): 343.

rape or assault of underage girls. This connection will be discussed at length in Chapter 4's case study of child marriage in Syrian refugee communities.

In GBV literature, such as the studies of GBV and genocide discussed previously, sexual violence is at the forefront of study. Thompson notes that much of the literature on gendered violence in contemporary warfare focuses on rape or sexual violence as a “deliberate and necessary strategy of the conduct of contemporary wars.”⁷⁰ As scholar and UN journalist Rachel Mayanja put it, “The bodies of women and girls have become battlegrounds, not necessarily for bombs and shells, but for the hands and minds of armed militia and their associates.”⁷¹

Masculinity plays a key role in this violence, particularly the militarization of masculinity in conflicts (Thompson 2006, Enloe 2004; Alison 2007; True 2013). Scholar Miranda Alison argues, that conflict allows for the enhanced presence of hegemonic masculinity, which is almost always already present in social and cultural hierarchies.⁷² Whereas aggressiveness or any type of “masculinized” strength in women is suppressed in most societies, “connection between masculinity and being a warrior are very widely cross-cultural.”⁷³ In conflict, rape and other forms of sexual violence come to represent the pinnacle of heteromascularity, power, and warrior-hood. Moreover, as Thompson argued, women and femininity are also given roles in the gendered systems of war.

One specific example of sexual violence in armed conflict on which there has been extensive feminist work is the way rape is used as a weapon of war, such as in the

⁷⁰ Ibid,

⁷¹ Mayanja, Rachel “Armed Conflict and Women: 10 Years Since 1325,” *UN Chronicle* 1, (2010): 16.

⁷² Allison, Miranda. “Wartime Sexual Violence: Women’s Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity.” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 76.

⁷³ Ibid, 76.

ethnic cleansing and genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda in the early 1990s.⁷⁴ There is an extensive literature that examines the nature of these abuses; especially the relationship between rape and genocide (Jones 2002; Fein 1999; Jaleel 2013; Sharlach 2000) Fein argues in her study of the role of gender in genocide, which focuses primarily on rape, that “Rape is not only a ritual of degradation leading to genocide over generations but may be a means of inflicting death...as well as spoiling or undermining the reproduction of the victim group.”⁷⁵ Jaleel takes this argument further, proposing that the “ethnic enclave” conflicts dominating the post-Cold War period re-centered attention to rape as a key weapon of war.⁷⁶ This is indicated by the landmark shift to prosecute rape and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity at in ad hoc tribunals, such as the ITCY and ICTR.⁷⁷

These gender identities manifest in conflict through sexual violence in several ways. True's argues in her chapter on sexual violence in conflict that, in many instances, sexual violence begins in the home.⁷⁸ True cites two 2011 studies by Peterman et al and Gettleman that suggest that in situations of conflict, “twice as many women, or

⁷⁴ Ibid, 344.

⁷⁵ Fein, Helen. "Genocide and Gender: The Uses of Women and Group Destiny." *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 1 (1999): 58.

⁷⁶ Jaleel, Rana. “Weapons of Sex, Weapons of War.” *Cultural Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 119.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 118.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established in 1991 and 1994 respectively, were established by the United Nations Security Council to prosecute individuals charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes during the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan Genocide. Two decades later, both ad hoc tribunals are still in function. While many praise their landmark trials and prosecutions, the tribunals also have many critics.

⁷⁸ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 124.

approximately 22 percent, had been forced by their partners to have sex or perform sexual acts against their will.”⁷⁹ They go so far as to argue that future UN initiatives to end sexual violence in conflict—such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325—should address families and domestic violence in their initiatives. As conflicts continue, rape is widely used as a weapon of war—indeed, many scholars argue it is an ever-present and essential part of warfare (Thompson 2006, Alison, Ticktin 2011, Enloe 2004, True 2013). Gang rape in particular, argues Alison, represents a “bonding function” and is a highly prevalent form of wartime sexual violence.⁸⁰

The resulting scope and implications of this violence is tremendous. The number of women affected by sexual violence in a given conflict is almost always tremendous and likely underreported. In Rwanda, for example, though an exact count of rapes is unknown, approximately 5,000 “pregnancies of war”—children born out of rape—have been registered, indicating the staggering prevalence of sexual violence during that conflict.⁸¹ Studies also show a variety of social and health consequences for the individuals and communities affected (Mayanja 2010). Women who suffered sexual violence in conflict, for example, reported high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.⁸² Child brides are particularly vulnerable to experiencing emotional trauma as a result of their young age. Chapter 4's

⁷⁹ Ibid, 124.

⁸⁰ Allison, Miranda. “Wartime Sexual Violence: Women’s Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity.” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 77.

⁸¹ “Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence During the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath.” Human Rights Watch. September 1, 1996. Accessed October 26, 2015.

⁸² Tol, Wietse A., Vivi Stavrou, M Clarie Green, Christian Mergenthaler, Mark van Ommeren, Claudia Garcia Moreno “Sexual and gender-based violence in areas of armed conflict: a systematic review of mental health and psychosocial support interventions.” *Conflict and Health* 7 no. 16 (2013): 1.

upcoming case study on child marriage in the Syrian conflict discusses reports made by mothers of child brides whose daughters' mental health suffered after their marriages.

Despite the emphasis on sexual violence in the literature, women are not only “battlegrounds” and victims of sexual violence in conflict. They play complex roles as household leaders, activists for peace, and combatants. For this reason, Thompson argues that conflict analysts often make the mistake of lumping together women and children as one singular demographic of victims and then locate them within the conflict in roles defined by humanitarian relief, such as refugees or IDPs.⁸³ This one-dimensional classification, argues Thompson, ignores the many roles women play in conflict. She asks, “Would not analysis of women in conflict situations also be different if women were primarily located as actors in the political economy of war?”⁸⁴ She points out that especially in modern conflicts—including insurgencies and drawn-out conflicts—there are “gender policies decided by the controlling group to ensure women and men will be more effective in carrying out their roles in the war system.”⁸⁵ These policies have been well documented for men, most notably the process of militarization of masculinity in situations of conflict (Thompson 2006; Enloe 1990).

For women, however, this process is complex. Thompson cites a series of scholars and case studies showing how women participate in wars as “wives,” spies, sex and domestic workers, and even soldiers in war systems. In general, there are gaps in the literature when it comes to women and girls in armed conflict. Thompson writes that more gendered analysis of conflict must be done:

⁸³ Thompson, Maria. “Women, Gender, and Conflict: Making the Connections” *Development in Practice* 16, no. 3 (2006): 347.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 349.

...This includes texts dealing with the ways in which war effects women and girls differently from men and boys, the particular vulnerabilities that women develop in conflict, and the different ways in which relief and other forms of assistance and the cessation of hostilities can affect men and women.⁸⁶

While Thompson is correct that there is a need for scholarship on the ways in which war impacts women and girls, there are a limited number of studies available on that subject. For example, the scholarly works of Helen Fein, Cynthia Enloe, Jeane Bethke Elshtain, Jenny Mathews, and Elizabeth D. Heinemann each explore the unique challenges and circumstances women face in wartime. Nevertheless, beyond literature on sexual violence, too little focus is given to questions asking how other forms of gender-based violence occur in conflict, such as child marriage.

In addition to outlining the problematic gap in the literature on child marriage in situations of armed conflict, this chapter also described child marriage's economic and cultural drivers and its negative impact on health, education, poverty, and gender equality. A comprehensive background on child marriage's causes and implications is essential for the upcoming case study of the Syrian conflict, as both are implicated in situations of armed conflict in ways that reflect and complicate the research discussed in this chapter. To further prepare for the case study on Syria, the next chapter presents the methodology and feminist political economy framework used in the study.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 351.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As stated in the introduction, this paper seeks to address the puzzling absence of knowledge on the relationship between child marriage and armed conflict with two interrelated research questions: (1) what is the nature of child marriage in armed conflict when compared to child marriage outside of conflict; and (2) how do humanitarian responses by governments and non-governmental organizations affect child marriage in situations of armed conflict? This gap in the literature is likely a result of several factors. It is very difficult to collect information during armed conflict due to scarce resources, prioritization of triage services, and safety concerns. Data shortages are also likely a result of the fact that many of these marriages occur without official documentation, making it difficult to evaluate the scope and scale of the problem qualitatively. This chapter includes a discussion of this paper's model for analysis and single case study.

3.1 Single Case Study

In "Case Study Methods in International Political Economy," Odell defines a case as a "single instance of an event or phenomenon," which allow for theories to be developed and critiqued.⁸⁷ He offers several main advantages of the case study approach. First, when compared to large quantitative studies, he argues that qualitative studies allow for comprehensive and detailed analysis of theories and events.⁸⁸ Odell also describes the variety and reasoning behind of the many case study approaches used. Even the single case study approach can take several forms, which are "distinct but not mutually

⁸⁷ Odell, John S. "Case Study Methods in International Political Economy." *International Studies Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2001): 162.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 161.

inclusive."⁸⁹ The approach used in this project functions primarily as what Odell calls the "Disciplined Interpretive Case Study," which examines a recent or relevant event by applying an existing theory. It also acts as a "Hypothesis Generating Case Study," which any type of case study can become.⁹⁰ According to Odell, "One of the most valuable contributions of any method would be the generation of a new hypothesis that turned out to be valid or generated fresh lines of investigation."⁹¹

Though enlightening and useful, the case study method is imperfect. Odell describes several of its flaws, including its most obvious; even when comparative, case studies cannot demonstrate the representativeness of their findings.⁹² He argues, "A claim that the theory is valid in general cannot be considered established without having observed other cases."⁹³ Similarly, he argues that a qualitative approach alone cannot "test" a theory. Rather, Odell contends that qualitative and quantitative approaches are complementary, and should be applied to a hypothesis or theory in tandem.

Due to a significant lack of quantitative data on child marriage generally and especially child marriage in armed conflict, however, a qualitative case study approach is used in this project. This lack of data is unsurprising and explicable for three main reasons. First, there are very few organizations that collect data on women and girls, especially on child marriage. Second, many child marriages are unreported or unofficial, making it nearly impossible to gauge widespread practice. Finally, difficulties associated with operating in situations of armed conflict (including risk and limited resources)

⁸⁹ Ibid, 162.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 165.

⁹¹ Ibid, 165.

⁹² Ibid, 171.

⁹³ Ibid, 171.

prevent large-scale data collection. Future research should address this gap when data collection is possible.

In order to address the gap in the literature established in Chapter 2 on child marriage in situations of armed conflict, this paper adopts a single case study methodology. In this case study, the case examined is the Syrian conflict, including the rise of ISIL. The theory applied is the belief that child marriage is caused by a combination of economic and cultural factors (understood by some scholars as two competing theories), and the hypothesis being tested is that armed conflict has an effect on these drivers, causing the practice of child marriage to change. This case study will also use a framework for analysis taken from Jaqui True's *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women*, which will be outlined in the next section.

This case is useful and enlightening for several reasons. The Syrian conflict is a timely, on-going, and large-scale case, highly relevant to contemporary discourse in the international community. One risk Odell raises about the case study is the opportunity for "selective reconstruction," in which an event's presentation overplays certain factors that support the favored theory and underplay those that do not. In the Syrian conflict, the presence of multiple groups, varied cultural and religious contexts, and diverse economic backgrounds limits the extent to which blanket observations could be made. While limited to one geographic, temporal, and (to a certain extent) religious context, the Syria case provides a timely opportunity to apply the competing theories about the causes of child marriage and test the effect of conflict, on which no significant studies currently exist.

3.2 Framework for Analysis: A Feminist Political Economy Approach

In *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women*, True presents a helpful framework for studying instances of violence against women, including child marriage, which will be used in this project's case study. Based on the premise that violence against women is linked to women's level of poverty through increased vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, True argues:

A sustained feminist political economy approach needs to inform scholarly and NGO research and government and international policies and programs if we are to make any progress in addressing the root causes of violence against women and responding to its global scale and brutality rather than remaining content with saving one woman at a time.⁹⁴

This framework has three factors for analysis: (1) the relationship of gender with war, militarism, and globalized conflict, notably the affirmation of "masculine protector and feminine-protected identities associated with war and militarism,"⁹⁵ (2) the gendered division of labor in the household; and (3) the effects of the contemporary neoliberal globalization on women's labor in particular.

The framework's first factor emphasizes the relationship of gender with war, militarism, and conflict worldwide. True argues that the "gendered dimensions of war and peace" are intertwined with the global political economy and private patriarchal structures.⁹⁶ Violent conflict creates conditions for "extreme" violence against women by celebrating masculine aggression and viewing acts of violence against women as a predictable side effect of war. She rejects the notion that a line between war and peace can be drawn without acknowledging the ways in which women are affected long-term

⁹⁴ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 19.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 20.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 32.

from conflicts, arguing that "Insofar as women are unable to gain access to physical security, social services, justice, and economic opportunities due, in part, to the military buildup and privileging of militarized masculinities, their particular vulnerability continues in peace time."⁹⁷ This final element of True's feminist political economy method illuminates the nuanced effect of the Syrian conflict on girls, women, and families with child marriage.

The second of these factors, the gendered division of labor in the household, represents the "gendered public-private sphere" perpetuated by the belief that holds women responsible for the unpaid work in the home.⁹⁸ True argues:

...the strict division of roles in the domestic sphere constraints women's public participation and their access to education and economic opportunities in the market, in turn creating hierarchical structures that entrap many women into potentially violent environments at home and at work.⁹⁹

While this case study does not focus exclusively on the household economies and dynamics of those within the Syrian conflict, their connection to women's access to education and economic opportunity is central. The relationship between these realities and the possibility of violence both inside and outside the home is also important to the discussion of child marriage, especially given the presence of armed conflict.

The third and last factor in True's framework for a feminist political economy method is the modern existence of a "global, macroeconomic environment" that incentivizes cheap and unregulated labor with gendered effects. True argues that while this neoliberal environment has allowed women's employment to expand, it also increased their workload at home and work. Women are disproportionately affected by the

⁹⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 30.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 31.

poverty, marginalization, and lack of protection offered in this context. Moreover, True contends that the men disempowered by the same conditions can reassert their power over women with violence, including within the spaces religious fundamentalist and other non-state groups. Given the complex link between child marriage, economics, and a devaluing of women, this framework illuminates helpfully the ways in which girls are being impacted as a result of the conflict in Syria.

In the upcoming case study, all three of these elements are interrelated and overlap. The first and second elements, which describe the household and global political economies respectively, are often concurrent and will be discussed together as a result. The third element, which describes the gendered aspects of war, tends to prioritize discussions of physical security and violence over economic factors.

Chapter 4: Child Marriage in the Syrian Conflict

As described in Chapter 2, child marriage is a complex issue with both cultural and economic drivers. In times of conflict, livelihoods and worldviews change, prompting the question of how conflict affects to the practice of child marriage. The ongoing civil war in Syria provides an opportunity to observe the effect of conflict on child marriage firsthand. This chapter will examine the relationship between child marriage and conflict in Syrian refugee communities (little to no data is available about the current state of child marriage inside Syria) using the three components from True's feminist political economy framework. It will begin with an overview of the Syrian conflict and humanitarian crisis, followed by an evaluation of child marriage in Syria before the war. It will then describe the current state of child marriage in refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Western Europe.

4.1 Overview

The Conflict

In March 2011, pro-democracy protests against President Bashar al-Assad began in the Syrian city of Deraa. Security forces fired upon the demonstrators, killing several, inciting unrest nationwide. This fighting quickly became an intense, protracted, and sectarian conflict between President Assad's majority Alawite sect (allied with Iranian Shiite fighters and Hezbollah) against Sunni opposition forces, and, more recently, a proxy war between the United States-led "Coalition Countries" and a Russian-Iranian

alliance.¹⁰⁰ Since spring 2014, the rise of ISIL has further complicated and escalated the conflict.

In summer of 2014, over concerns of a rapidly expanding insurgency in Northeast Syria, a U.S.-led coalition of thirteen other countries began airstrikes to attempt to counter ISIL and other groups. Russian-backed airstrikes also began. This approach has been critiqued, especially after a Doctors Without Borders hospital was damaged in early December in an airstrike.¹⁰¹ On February 26, 2015, the United States and Russia set a deadline for a ceasefire in Syria, prompting some to question if the war could be nearing an end or entering a new stage.¹⁰² Despite the upcoming deadlines, insufficient progress has been made to indicate an agreement will be reached anytime soon.

The Humanitarian Crisis

Over four years (2011-2015), more than 250,000 people have been killed in the ongoing conflict.¹⁰³ 6.5 million more have been internally displaced and 4.1 million Syrians have fled the country, a number that has been steadily increasing since the conflict's beginning (see Figure 2).¹⁰⁴ A majority of refugees have sought refuge in Jordan and Lebanon, though two million refugees have entered Turkey or attempted to cross the Mediterranean to seek asylum in Europe. International efforts to abate the

¹⁰⁰ Gilsinan, Kathy. "The Confused Person's Guide to the Syrian Civil War: A Brief Primer." *The Atlantic*. November 15, 2015. Accessed January 25, 2016.

¹⁰¹ "Syria: Series of Deadly Bombings Partially Destroys MSF-Supported Hospital in Homs Region." MSF USA. December 01, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2016.

¹⁰² "Obama Says Latest Pact 'could End Syria's War'" Al Jazeera English. February 26, 2016. Accessed February 27, 2016.

¹⁰³ Rodgers, Lucy, David Gritten, James Offer, and Patrick Asare. "Syria: The Story of the Conflict." *BBC News*. October 9, 2015. Accessed January 25, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

humanitarian crisis have floundered. A combination of Western fatigue over conflict in the Middle East after Iraq and Afghanistan, other large geopolitical crises competing for attention, and a lack of cooperation from the Assad regime stifled any major, multilateral humanitarian intervention.¹⁰⁵ In 2012, the UN Security Council passed resolution 2177, demanding that the Assad regime cooperate with humanitarian aid organizations, but little change occurred thereafter.

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Figure 2¹⁰⁶

With no end to the conflict in sight, aid organizations and governments have grappled with how to assist the millions of Syrians seeking shelter, food, education, and asylum. Children are particularly vulnerable. Current estimates suggest that more than half of 4.4 million Syrian refugees are children, most under age 12.¹⁰⁷ In addition to child marriage, widespread malnutrition, lack of education, trauma, inadequate winter clothing,

¹⁰⁵ Hersman, Rebecca, and J. Stephen Morrison. "Syria's Humanitarian Crisis: What's to Be Done?" Center for Strategic and International Studies. December 21, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ "Syria's Civil War: A Brief History." *Vox*. October 02, 2015. Accessed January 25, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ "A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan." UNICEF. 2014.

child labor, and sexual violence are also growing challenges that affect children differently and often more intensely than adults (Save the Children 2014; UNICEF 2014). Inadequate funding for aid organizations has significantly affected support programs relating to child marriage in both urban areas and refugee camps. In 2015, only 32% of the UN's Syria Regional Refugee Response was funded, only allowing the most basic programs to continue.¹⁰⁸

The different challenges facing refugees in urban environments compared to those in refugee camps in particular have made coordinating an effective humanitarian response challenging. In Jordan, for example, 84% of Syrian refugees live in host communities rather than refugee camps.¹⁰⁹ This stress on cities and communities has impacted significantly the Jordanian job and housing markets, education system, and public support for refugee assistance.¹¹⁰ Moreover, unlike in camps, which are funded, controlled, and supported by international humanitarian organizations and governments, refugees in urban areas are more difficult to identify and serve (Francis 2015; Chatham House 2015). As funding from the international community wanes, these issues are expected to worsen.¹¹¹ Given the protracted nature of the crisis, concerns over Syrian refugees' inability to earn a living, access long-term housing, or receive an education are also increasing for refugees in and out of camps.

¹⁰⁸ Hersman, Rebecca, and J. Stephen Morrison. "Syria's Humanitarian Crisis: What's to Be Done?" Center for Strategic and International Studies. December 21, 2015. Accessed February 27, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Francis, Alexandra. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. September 21, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Difficult Truths." Chatham House. 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

4.2 Child Marriage in Syria before the Conflict¹¹²

Before the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, child marriage in Syria had both economic and cultural drivers, though the practice had declined over the last several decades. In 2009, official reports showed that 13% of Syrian women aged 20-24 had married before their 18th birthday, compared to twice that in 1990.¹¹³ A Population Reference Bureau report on child marriage in the Middle East and North Africa shows that the region's highest rates of child marriage are in the poorest and largest countries, such as Yemen and Egypt.¹¹⁴ This suggests that comparatively smaller and wealthier countries, like Syria, have fewer economic incentives for the practice. Moreover, almost all Syrian children (boys and girls) attended school before the war, compared to less than half as of 2014.¹¹⁵ As demonstrated in Chapter 2, educational opportunity is known to be central in delaying age of marriage and played a significant part in Syria's decreasing child marriage rate before the conflict.¹¹⁶

Child marriage still has many cultural drivers in Syria. Research has found that preserving family honor, including protecting virginity and preventing premarital pregnancy, is a powerful incentive for early marriage in Syrian families.¹¹⁷ Community and familial pressures can force families to marry daughters earlier than they may have

¹¹² Due to a lack of scholarly sources, this paper uses primarily news articles, NGO reports, and think tank pieces. This is likely for several reasons, including a general lack of attention to adolescent girls' issues as well as the fact that the conflict is still ongoing and difficult to assess on the ground.

¹¹³ "A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan." UNICEF. 2014

¹¹⁴ Roudi Fahimi, Farzaneh and Shaimaa Ibrahim "Ending Child Marriage in the Arab Region" *Population Reference Bureau*. 2013. 1.

¹¹⁵ "The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on Syria's future." Save the Children. 2015.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Roudi Fahimi, Farzaneh and Shaimaa Ibrahim "Ending Child Marriage in the Arab Region" *Population Reference Bureau*. 2013.

otherwise chosen. The importance of *sutra*, obtaining security and protection from hardship, is another example. It is rooted in Islam but has “wide cultural acceptance in the region.”¹¹⁸ In a UNICEF study of families in which early marriages had taken place, many participants cited providing *sutra* as one of the most compelling reasons to marry their child at a young age.¹¹⁹ Moreover, according to most sheikhs and regional interpretations of Islam, child marriage is acceptable and even desirable in some circumstances.¹²⁰ Given these factors, some Syrian communities perceive a girl’s early marriage as an honor.¹²¹

As is common worldwide, pre-conflict child marriages in Syria occurred primarily in poor, rural, and less-educated communities. In 2009, 26% of marriages involving a girl under 18 were in the poorest fifth of the population.¹²² Only 2% of women who had completed secondary school or more married before age 18.¹²³ Poverty in these areas leads families to marry daughters earlier in order to better provide for them.¹²⁴ In a 2013 UN Inter-Agency assessment of gender-based violence among Syrian refugees, which focused on child marriage, focus groups were used to discuss child marriage practices before the conflict. While many reported that their mothers had been married before the age of 18 as well, many women from Damascus and other urban

¹¹⁸ “A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan.” UNICEF. 2014.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Roudi Fahimi, Farzaneh and Shaimaa Ibrahim “Ending Child Marriage in the Arab Region” *Population Reference Bureau*. 2013.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

centers stressed that this was not the case for them, and that child marriage was a “rural tradition” that, at least before the conflict, did not apply to many Syrians.¹²⁵

Often, economic and cultural incentives for child marriage coalesce. Roudi-Fahimi and Ibrahim argue, “[p]oor and traditional families who value boys over girls have one less mouth to feed, and they often receive gifts and money from the groom and his family in exchange for the bride.”¹²⁶ Devaluing women has numerous effects related to child marriage: fathers decide their children’s marriages, women are often unable to support themselves financially or attend school at the same rates as men, and women are perceived as needing male protection.

4.3 Child Marriage in the Syrian Refugee Crisis

By 2013—two years into the conflict—25% of Syrian refugee marriages in Jordan involved someone between the age of 15 and 17 (up from just 0.5% in 2011).¹²⁷ UNICEF’s more recent survey shows that 32% of refugee marriages in Jordan involve a Syrian child bride, despite large numbers of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. Of those girls, 48% married men at least 10 years older.¹²⁸ This demonstrates that the rate of child marriage is not only increasing rapidly—a sharp change from what the decreasing rate pre-conflict—but that the marriages are occurring with increased desperation. The humanitarian organization CARE estimates that, in total, “the number of girls forced into

¹²⁵ Inter-Agency Assessment of Gender-based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, with a Focus on Early Marriage.” *UN Women*. (2013): 30.

¹²⁶ Roudi Fahimi, Farzaneh and Shaimaa Ibrahim “Ending Child Marriage in the Arab Region” *Population Reference Bureau*. 2013.

¹²⁷ “A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan.” UNICEF. 2014. 10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

marriage among Syrian refugees has tripled since the conflict began.”¹²⁹ The increase in child marriages has been a widespread consequence of the conflict’s humanitarian crisis. Cases of young girls marrying older men—sometimes much older—have been reported in every area in which Syrian refugees live: nearby refugee camps, Jordanian and Lebanese cities, and in Europe (Timms 2015; CARE 2015; Zeronian 2015; Al Arabiya News 2014; Rubin 2016).

Gender with War, Militarism, and Globalized Conflict

The first element of True’s framework for a feminist political economy analysis states that gender plays an intrinsic role in war, violence, and armed conflict. In the case of Syrian refugees, this analysis of the gendered affects of conflict is salient in the alarming rise of gender-based violence, especially violence against women and girls. As theorized by True, the violence sanctioned by Assad’s regime, rebel fighters, and later ISIL elevated “masculine aggression.”¹³⁰ The conflict also prevented women and families from accessing social and economic services necessary to preventing violence against women, including child marriages. In these contexts, True contends, gendered power struggles militarize masculinity, making women vulnerable to violence both in and

¹²⁹ Timms, Penny. “Child Brides: Number of Syrian refugee girls forced into marriage has tripled since conflict began.” *ABC News*. 14 October 2015. Accessed February 03, 2016.

Child, early, and forced marriage are often grouped together (CEFM). While similar in that each is a harmful rights violation, child marriage refers specifically to a marriage that includes someone under the age of 18. Early marriage is more ambiguous, but usually includes child marriages and a marriage that happened earlier than it otherwise might due to cultural, economic, or other undesirable circumstances. Forced marriage can happen to anyone at any age (though it is usually younger women or girls) and signifies that the marriage was nonconsensual.

¹³⁰ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 32.

outside the home. This was the case for the Syrian conflict, in which widespread violence against women—especially sexual violence—incentivized many families to seek safety. More than 30% of respondents in a UN Women survey reported leaving Syria and seeking refuge due to fears over sexual violence.¹³¹ Unfortunately, the threat of violence continued into the refugee context, both urban and in camps. Aggressive, militarized masculinities and communities and states' inability to protect women remained amplified outside of Syria, as the violence and trauma of the conflict remained close (both physically and emotionally).

When leaving Syria failed to provide adequate safety from these threats, Syrian families turned to different “coping mechanisms.”¹³² Early in the conflict, NGO reports and newspaper articles described child marriage as a response to sexual violence and exploitation. Reports of girls being kidnapped and raped made many women afraid to leave their tents or homes alone, even to use the bathroom (Rubin 2013; Mahmood 2014; Anderson 2013). One mother stated, “[m]y daughters were a huge burden to me... You can't imagine the fear of a mother when she looks at her daughter and thinks she might be raped at any moment.”¹³³ While protecting a girl's virginity had always been an argument for early marriage, it became a necessity with the heightened levels of rape, kidnapping and sexual violence. Rather than an honor and cause for celebration, a girl's early marriage became a question of immediate security.

¹³¹ Inter-Agency Assessment of Gender-based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, with a Focus on Early Marriage.” *UN Women*. (2013): 28.

¹³² True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 132.

¹³³ Mahmood, Mona. “Syrian Mother's Agony: why I made my teenage daughter a child bride.” *The Guardian*. July 17, 2014. Accessed February 03, 2016.

True argues that as long as women are blocked from security, support, and justice by the gendered aspects of conflict, they are vulnerable to violence.¹³⁴ As the violence shows no sign of abating in and around Syria, it is unlikely that the threats of gender-based violence will subside. As long as child marriage continues to be the best way to prevent this violence, despite being harmful in and of itself, Syrian refugee women and girls will continue to be forced by circumstance into marriages for which they are not ready or willing.

Household and Global Political Economies

True's second and third framework elements concern the effect of economies, both household and global, on instigating violence against women. These effects heighten in situations of armed conflict, in which violence is further motivated by the militarized masculinities described in her first framework and the previous section. In the case of Syrian refugees, the economic aspect of conflict has also created gendered challenges, incentivizing child marriage.

As the conflict and protracted refugee crisis worsens, economic insecurity continues to rise for Syrian refugees. In Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian refugees are unable to work legally. Some refugees, including children, find work illegally, but they are underpaid, vulnerable to abuse, and the consequences of being caught are severe, including deportation back to Syria.¹³⁵ The international community's financial support of Syrian refugees has also weakened. *The Guardian* reported in 2015 that inadequate

¹³⁴ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 32.

¹³⁵ "Access to Work for Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Discussion Paper on Labour and Refugee Laws and Policies." International Labor Organization, 2015.

funding of UNHCR programs aiding Syrian refugees would damage the population irreversibly.¹³⁶ Children are disproportionately affected, as they comprise a majority of Syrian refugees and are impacted more than adults by malnutrition and the lack of psychosocial support.¹³⁷ As the protracted crisis continues, Syrian refugees are faced with fewer options from host communities and the international community to support themselves.

At the household level, True describes the ways in which gendered division of labor holds women responsible for unpaid labor in the home and limits their ability to support themselves and their families outside of their home if needed.¹³⁸ Among Syrian refugees, many families are without male breadwinners, displaced from their homes, and struggling to find shelter and other basic necessities. Options for Syrian women and girls to earn money are limited, incentivizing early marriages to both lessen the number of dependent children on a family and receive an income from a bride price.

Moreover, refugee girls are also unable to attend school, removing both future livelihoods for girls and one of child marriage's key barriers. Almost all Syrian children attended school before the conflict, which was likely one of the main reasons for the previously reduced child marriage rates in the country.¹³⁹ This drastically changes the situation for many families who would not have considered marrying their daughters early in Syria, given their economic and educational background. According to True, the limiting of economic and educational opportunities creates patriarchal and hierarchical

¹³⁶ Grant, Harriet. "UN Agencies 'broke and Failing' in Face of Ever-growing Refugee Crisis." *The Guardian*. September 06, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹³⁹ Roudi Fahimi, Farzaneh and Shaimaa Ibrahim "Ending Child Marriage in the Arab Region" *Population Reference Bureau*. 2013.

structures that “entrap many women into potentially violent environments at work and home.”¹⁴⁰ While child marriage is viewed as one way to avoid this violence created in the absence of educational opportunity, it can also be a gateway to more harm.

True also argues that violence against women has roots in a neoliberal global economy. In her third framework element, she describes how poverty and marginalization disempower women in their economic decision and opportunities. Furthermore, True argues that neoliberal policies have created unregulated environments in which non-state groups have increased power and influence the economy, often at the expense of women and girls.¹⁴¹

This is observable in the Syrian refugee context, in which child marriage is rapidly becoming an organized, transnational trade, in which a value is assigned to a child bride and marriage brokers arrange unions for a price. These marriages can provide needed income for families, but are often against the girls’ wishes. According to one newspaper source, the “price” for a Syrian child bride in Lebanon is \$2,500 USD, which is the same as a refugee family’s yearly rent.¹⁴² One girl stated, “the man I’m marrying tells me, ‘I’m the one who protects you; I’m the one who feeds you. You have to do what I say, or I’ll throw you in the street’ ...I’m disgusted by him...but I’m doing this for my family, so we can live in security.”¹⁴³ She continued, “I’d rather be violated by one man

¹⁴⁰ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 31.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁴² Moss, Tara “Tara Moss Reports on the Rise of Child Brides in Syrian Refugee Camps.” *Marie Claire*. September 25, 2015. Accessed February 02, 2016.

¹⁴³ Anderson, Sulome. "Child Marriages Rise Among Syrian Refugee Girls." *The Atlantic*. May 28, 2013. Accessed February 02, 2016.

than every man in town.”¹⁴⁴ Another says, “ I wouldn’t have gotten married, it’s because of the situation.”¹⁴⁵

Reports from journalist and NGOs also show that marriage brokers and landlords profit significantly from facilitating these marriages. Predators looking to lure and exploit desperate Syrians linger in areas where humanitarian aid is given, offering free shelter or other aid.¹⁴⁶ After several Saudi clerics issued *fatwas* calling marriages to Syrian women acts of Islamic charity, demand for Syrian child brides increased.¹⁴⁷ As a result, while most of the earlier grooms were local or Syrian themselves, wealthy men from other Arab states are now also seeking marriages to Syrian girls.

As the conflict continues, however, suitable grooms are becoming hard to find for girls who are older or have already been married or raped. A Jordanian midwife who works in the Zaatari refugee camp (one of the largest) reported to the BBC that girls over 18 are now considered old and undesirable.¹⁴⁸ Several women in the same camp described how after four men kidnapped and assaulted one of their friends, her father was desperate to marry her off, “even to a beggar.”¹⁴⁹ The groom is likely to be a complete stranger to the family and far older than the girl’s father, increasing the risk of violence and economic insecurity for the girl.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Damon, Arwa. “Syrian Refugees marrying young teenagers.” *CNN*. June 25, 2013

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Rubin, Shira. "Poor and Vulnerable, Syrian Refugee Families Push Girls into Early Marriage." *The Christian Science Monitor*. December 6, 2013. Accessed February 03, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ “Syria’s Child Brides in Zaatari Refugee Camp Speak Up.” *Al Arabiya News*. August 21, 2014. Accessed February 02, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Anderson, Sulome. "Child Marriages Rise Among Syrian Refugee Girls." *The Atlantic*. May 28, 2013. Accessed February 02, 2016.

Impact

Given the increased physical and economic insecurity experienced by Syrian refugees, child marriage quickly became the “lesser of two evils.”¹⁵⁰ True argues that women’s “coping strategies” to address the increased violence caused by gendered affects of economies and wars make them even more vulnerable to further violence.¹⁵¹ Marriage, for example, can legitimize rape, limit women’s freedom of movement, and isolate her from her support networks. This is evident amongst Syrian refugees, for whom child marriage became a prominent strategy for providing physical and economic security with serious implications.

While the Syrian conflict did not spur the first child marriages to occur in Syria, based on NGO reports, early data, and individual stories, the conflict appears to be changing the circumstances and rate in which they occur. The economic discipline’s language of shocks and externalities is helpful to describe this phenomenon. Child marriage already had cultural and economic drivers in Syrian communities, including poverty, regional interpretations of Islam, and *sutra* (Roudini and Ibrahim 2013; UNICEF 2014; Save the Children 2015). Rates had been going down, but environments existed in which child marriage was accepted and even widespread. The Syrian Civil War and ensuing humanitarian crisis (particularly the protracted refugee situation), acted as a shock on these existing drivers. The conflict did not cause child marriages to happen out of nowhere, but it has created a context in which they happen at increased rates and involve younger brides from wealthier, better-educated families.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 32.

The conflict is also adding new drivers of child marriage, including the insecurity caused by displacement, problematic host government policies, and increased rates of violence against women, such as rape. The UNHCR reports that 10.8 million Syrians have been affected by the conflict, the majority of which is displaced from their homes.¹⁵² Given the literature's consensus that child marriage outside of conflict is driven largely by economic need and, especially in Syria with the role of *sutra*, the desire to provide a better life for their children, food and shelter shortages caused by refugees fleeing their homes create new economic insecurity-related incentives for child marriage. While these are related to preexisting economic drivers of child marriage, the conflict created insecurity that affected far more Syrians and worsened the situation for those already vulnerable to child marriage.

Refugees have also encountered legal and policy-related struggles as a result of their displacement. As discussed earlier in this chapter, refugees are often unable to work legally or register marriages and births in their host countries.¹⁵³ Many refugees also do not report their challenges to their host governments, either fearing deportation and other forms of retribution or believing that they will receive no help.¹⁵⁴ This impacts child marriage in two ways. First, refugees are unable to access work or sufficient support in order to prevent the economic need for child marriage as a result of host government policies. Second, because laws in host governments either do not prohibit child marriage

¹⁵² "Syrian Arab Republic." UNHCR News. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html>.

¹⁵³ "Access to Work for Syrian Refugees in Jordan: A Discussion Paper on Labour and Refugee Laws and Policies." International Labor Organization, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Francis, Alexandra. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. September 21, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

or obstruct marriage registrations, child marriages may take place without legal oversight. As a result, conflict creates new legal and policy-related conditions that both drive the practice of child marriage or make it easier for it to occur.

Additionally, the Syrian conflict has also caused the militarization of masculinity and related increase in sexual violence associated with the presence of conflict. The literature on GBV in armed conflict shows that women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence in armed conflict. *The Atlantic* reported in 2013 that Syria has a growing “massive rape crisis” affecting family stability, women’s ability to marry, and community health. Though sexual violence occurs during times of peace, it becomes weaponized during the conflict, which puts women and girls at heightened risk for assault (see figure 3). This increased level of sexual violence is tied directly to conflict, occurring in addition to child marriage’s preexisting drivers regarding girls’ protection and virginity in Syria. As a result, the conflict-induced increase in sexual violence further incentivizes early marriage.

WMC’s Women Under Siege
Reports of Sexualized Violence in Syria, March 2011-March 2013
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Figure 3¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Despite the immense pressures towards child marriage in these devastating circumstances, many parents feel regret afterwards. One mother said, “I swear I wasn’t able to sleep, I was afraid for the girls...I would not have let her get married this young if we were still in Syria.”¹⁵⁶ Many others report that their daughters became depressed after marriage. According to one mother, “[her] health was waning and her depression became obvious...I feel guilty whenever my eyes meet hers.”¹⁵⁷ Girls are forced to leave school and their family homes unprepared for the responsibilities of being a wife and mother. Moreover, most Syrian child marriages are nonconsensual and unregistered, which leads to increased rates of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and even abandonment.¹⁵⁸ These consequences put many girls in worse situations than before the marriage, the realization of which makes many Syrian refugee parents regret their decisions to marry off their underage girls.

Support from host governments, aid providers, and international organizations is critical to preventing child marriage in these communities, but weak policies and programs as a response to the humanitarian crisis have helped motivate the practice. Both the Jordanian and Lebanese governments do not let Syrian refugees work. This increases refugee families’ economic insecurity, which incentivizes child marriage. Weak laws on child marriage and even weaker enforcement also allow these marriages to take place. Public officials deny there is an issue; Ali al-Hojeiri, the mayor of Aarsal, Lebanon, told a

¹⁵⁶ Damon, Arwa. “Syrian Refugees marrying young teenagers.” *CNN*. June 25, 2013

¹⁵⁷ Mahmood, Mona. “Syrian Mother’s Agony: why I made my teenage daughter a child bride.” *The Guardian*. July 17, 2014. Accessed February 03, 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Rubin, Shira. “Poor and Vulnerable, Syrian Refugee Families Push Girls into Early Marriage.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. December 6, 2013. Accessed February 03, 2016.

reporter at *The Atlantic* that sexual exploitation against Syrian women does not exist, “Not a single Syrian woman has filed a complaint about this... We look after those girls as if they were our own daughters.”¹⁵⁹ Additionally, by making it almost impossible for Syrian refugees to register their marriages, host governments are making young girls’ entrances into marriage even more challenging.¹⁶⁰

Some international aid organizations are beginning to address the devastating consequences of child marriages among Syrian refugees, but limited resources and numerous other issues associated with the humanitarian crisis restrict progress. UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNHCR are leading this charge, though they require increased collaboration with local groups and governments if they are to have a significant impact in curbing the number of child marriages taking place. In Jordan, the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working group was created to coordinate responses to the rise of child marriages among Syrian refugees, but no results have been reported.

Many feel that these interventions are too little, too late. In an interview with *The Atlantic*, a Lebanese aid worker said, “We’ve been well aware that this has been a problem for some time. Responding is taking too long, when it should have been done immediately.”¹⁶¹ Rates of child marriage among Syrian refugees are still going up, and the physical and economic insecurity perpetuating it (not to mention the underlying cultural factors) are still insufficiently addressed. It is clear that child marriage will continue to be a significant problem among Syrian refugee communities for years to

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, Sulome. "Child Marriages Rise Among Syrian Refugee Girls." *The Atlantic*. May 28, 2013. Accessed February 02, 2016.

¹⁶⁰ “A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan.” UNICEF. 2014. 33-34.

¹⁶¹ Anderson, Sulome. "Child Marriages Rise Among Syrian Refugee Girls." *The Atlantic*. May 28, 2013. Accessed February 02, 2016.

come, even after the conflict has ended. True argues that until women are able to access justice, full economic and social opportunities, and their security, they are susceptible to violence regardless of whether or not the conflict has ended and there is “peace.”¹⁶² Such is the case of the girls affected by child and forced marriage, whose marriages and any harm done as a result of them will likely be unanswered for after the conflict ends.

The Crisis Moves to Europe

As the frontier of the Syrian refugee crisis moves to Europe, new challenges appear. A high-profile case in the Netherlands, in which a pregnant 14-year-old Syrian refugee girl named Fatema Alkasem disappeared from an asylum center with her 24-year-old husband, sparked debate across Europe about how these marriages should be treated and how to best protect the vulnerable girls in them. Many underage wives seek asylum in the Netherlands as a form of family unification.¹⁶³ Several have been granted permission, on the condition that their marriage has been legally registered, though this loophole has since been closed.¹⁶⁴ Other European countries with high numbers of asylum seekers, like Germany, refuse to recognize child marriages. It is unclear what will happen to Syrian child brides (and their children) in Europe or those hoping to gain entry, as most of their marriages are undocumented and all are illegal in European countries.

¹⁶² True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 32.

¹⁶³ Zeronian, Sarkis. "Syrian Child Brides Seeking Asylum Open New Front In European Migrant Crisis." *Breitbart News*. October 21, 2015. Accessed February 03, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Holligan, Anna. "Migrant Crisis Dutch alarm over child brides from Syria." *BBC News*. October 20, 2015. Accessed February 03, 2016.

4.4 Policy Recommendations

An effective humanitarian response by governments and aid organizations hinges on their ability to recognize child marriage as a humanitarian and security concern, not just a development project. After this shift, research-driven policy changes can and must be made to end child marriage among Syrian refugees and support those already affected. Save the Children's report "Too Young to Wed" presents five strategies for ending child marriage, drawn from studies on preventing child marriage outside of the conflict by the ICRW: (1) empower girls with information, skills, and support networks; (2) provide economic support and incentivizes to girls and families; (3) educate and unite parents and community members; (4) enhance girls' access to education; and (5) advocate for supportive laws and policies.¹⁶⁵ This section will expand upon these strategies, outlining ways in which they could be enacted in the Syrian context in three subsections: host government laws and policies, prevention, and supporting Syrian girls and families already affected by child marriage.

Host Government Laws and Policies

As discussed earlier in this chapter, host government laws and policies have a tremendous impact on Syrian refugees' use of child marriage as a coping mechanism to counteract their increased physical and economic insecurity. Changes to Jordanian and Lebanese laws and policies on both marriage and refugees could alleviate some of this pressure.

¹⁶⁵ "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage among Syrian Girls in Jordan." Save the Children. 2014. Accessed November 14, 2015.

Like Syria, child marriage had preexisting cultural and economic drivers in Lebanese and Jordanian communities. Both states' laws also permit child marriage. In Lebanon, there is no countrywide minimum age for marriage. Instead, regional religious communities create and enforce personal status laws that control legal procedures for marriage, divorce and inheritance.¹⁶⁶ In Jordan, while the legal age of marriage is 18, judges regularly grant waivers that permit younger girls to marry.¹⁶⁷ There are also considerable barriers to registering these marriages. To apply for a marriage certificate in Jordan, couples must present full identity and health paperwork, including a letter of permission from the Ministry of Labor in Amman. This process is expensive and a logistical nightmare for refugees, especially those who are unable to leave the camps. As a result, many marriages, both involving children and those between adults, are left unregistered. This makes it more challenging to prevent child marriages and support child brides, especially when they are abandoned or divorced.

For a short-term solution to this problem, the international community must pressure the Lebanese and Jordanian governments to ease marriage registration policies for Syrian refugees and establish programs to ensure all marriages are registered, both in and outside of camps. Humanitarian workers and organizations should work collaboratively with host governments, creating programs to inform refugees about marriage registration and facilitate the process. As part of a long-term solution, both governments should enact stronger laws against child marriage, train law enforcement, and educate communities.

¹⁶⁶ "Lebanon - Child Marriage Around The World." Girls Not Brides. Accessed April 25, 2016.

¹⁶⁷ "Jordan - Child Marriage Around The World." Girls Not Brides. Accessed April 25, 2016.

Host government laws and policies preventing adult refugees from working and refugee children from accessing education also drive the practice of child marriage. Because Syrian refugees are unable to work legally, they are entirely reliant on aid, generosity from hosts, or illegal work. All of these are undesirable and unreliable. In order to address the economic insecurity leading many families to choose child marriage, there must be other viable opportunities for families to support themselves. This means opening Lebanese and Jordanian labor markets to adult Syrian refugees. Additionally, more resources and focus should be spent on ensuring Syrian children are attending school, as educational opportunity acts as a strong deterrent of child marriage.

Prevention

Host governments and aid organizations must also work collaboratively to deter Syrian refugees from choosing child marriage. Including efforts to combat harmful laws and policies discussed in the previous section, successful prevention must address a child marriage's variety of drivers and incentives. A comprehensive prevention program should be implemented that is age-specific (acknowledging that elementary-aged girls' experiences are different from older girls) and addresses all parts of the community, including men, families, faith and community leaders, humanitarian workers, and the host community, in addition to girls vulnerable to the practice. Moreover, as described earlier in this chapter, refugees affected by child marriage and aid workers have testified that some child brides are essentially trafficked into marriages by predators offering food, shelter, and physical security. As a result, law enforcement and host government officials must also be trained and participating in the child marriage prevention strategy.

In addition to child marriage's drivers, a variety of actors and policies must be complicit in order for a child marriage to occur; successful prevention programs address all of these. This is already challenging to accomplish outside of armed conflict, which adds considerable stress to families and resources alike. However, the increased presence of aid workers, international organizations, and funding, as well as the contained environment of camps, provide an opportunity to educate and empower Syrian refugee communities to prevent child marriage within existing and extensive support mechanisms. In this environment, a comprehensive child marriage prevention strategy should renew focus on providing physical and economic insecurity, increase educational opportunities for girls, and provide community-driven programming that addresses the cultural drivers of child marriage. Such programming must be prioritized and integrated amidst existing humanitarian response plans.

Supporting Syrian Child Brides

The humanitarian response to child marriage in the Syrian refugee crisis must also support girls and their families already affected by child marriage. This must also be addressed by a variety of aid sectors, including health, education, advocacy, and economic empowerment. First and foremost, child brides must be provided with appropriate health care. This includes comprehensive sexual education, access to contraception, STI prevention methods, prenatal care when needed, and mental health support. Health professionals must be trained to anticipate, recognize, and treat health concerns associated with child marriage, such as the increased likelihood of child brides having complicated pregnancies, experiencing domestic violence, and contracting STIs.

This should also include educating and treating spouses of child brides, who may have contracted an STI or are unaware of the risks associated with early pregnancy. In order to lessen the numerous negative impacts of child marriage, health professionals and aid workers in the health sector must actively identify and treat those affected.

Aid organizations and governments must also improve legal support for child brides. As described earlier, this includes making marriage licenses more accessible in host communities. An effective support program must also include viable pathways to divorce and marriage annulment, however, as well as access to birth certificates for the children born to child brides. Additionally, if child brides or their families plan to seek asylum, child brides face unique challenges when attempting to enter European or North American host communities. Aid workers in particular must be trained and empowered to support child bride asylum-seekers and their families in this process.

In addition to providing health and legal support for child brides, the humanitarian response must also ensure child brides are not excluded from educational, economic, or psychosocial programming for children or women. Because child brides straddle the programming divide between women and children, they must have access to both support systems. Child brides should not only be able to attend school and be among people their own age, but also have access to communities of mothers and women. This includes access to financial empowerment programming and mother and women-specific psychosocial support. While it may seem undesirable to have girls entering into programs and spaces designed for adult women, the reality of their identities and responsibilities as wives and mothers in the eyes of their communities requires that the humanitarian support responds accordingly.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, I asked two key research questions: (1) what is the nature of child marriage in armed conflict when compared to child marriage outside of conflict; and (2) how do humanitarian responses by governments and non-governmental organizations affect child marriage in situations of armed conflict? The case of the Syrian armed conflict demonstrates that child marriage and armed conflict have a complex and understudied relationship, providing insights that address both questions.

For the first question, which seeks to determine the nature of child marriage in situations of armed conflict, Chapter 2 demonstrated that child marriage has two main drivers—cultural norms and poverty—both of which lead to the devaluation of women and girls. The study of Syria shows that while conflict does not cause child marriage to arise from nowhere, it increases economic and physical insecurities, which in turn amplify preexisting economic and cultural drivers of child marriage. As a result, child marriage rates are increasing and the practice has been reinvigorated. Refugees cite both physical and economic security concerns as motivations for early marriages. These causes are similar to those outside of armed conflict, but have been amplified as a result of violence and displacement. The economic language of a shock or externality is useful to describe this phenomenon.

Conflict also helps create new drivers, including displacement, host government laws and policies, and the threat of sexual violence. In the Syrian case, for example, refugees forced to enter Jordan and Lebanon are prohibited from working. Both displacement and harmful laws and policies increase their economic insecurity, further

incentivizing child marriage. Moreover, the increased sexual violence rates associated with the presence of armed conflict create greater fear for girls' physical security, motivating even more families to choose early marriage for their daughters.

The implications of the relationship between armed conflict and child marriage are severe. Not only will the effects of child marriage outside of armed conflict exist (as enumerated in Chapter 2), there is also evidence that suggests the harmful attributes of early marriage will be heightened. Due to the desperation caused by the increased violence and economic insecurity, families feel pressure to marry off their daughters earlier and are less particular when selecting a groom. Among Syrian refugees, girls are marrying at younger ages to older men who their families are less likely to know. Moreover, these marriages are unregistered and non-consensual, making girls even more vulnerable to abandonment, domestic violence, and other forms of abuse.

The second question in this thesis asks how responses to the armed conflict affect child marriage, including those by governments and NGOs. The case of the Syrian conflict, especially child marriage in Syrian refugee communities, shows that both NGOs and governments have not only failed to prevent or address child marriages, they have upon occasion been complicit in its growth as a means to counteract physical and economic insecurity caused by the conflict. The Jordanian and Lebanese governments, for example, have created policies that increase Syrian refugees' economic vulnerability by not allowing them to work. Moreover, by not allowing or making it very challenging for marriages to be registered, girls are even more vulnerable to entering into unwanted child marriages. While NGOs are slowly acknowledging the scope and scale of this problem, there has not yet been a coordinated response specific to addressing the rise in

child marriages. This is likely a result of the fact that child marriage prevention efforts usually fall under development work, not humanitarianism, calling into question the ability of humanitarian organizations to sufficiently address all aspects of the longer nature of modern conflicts. Humanitarian aid organizations and governments should approach child marriage in armed conflict as an urgent humanitarian issue, not just a development issue to be addressed when peace is reached.

There are still many unexplored aspects to the question of what happens to child marriage in situations of armed conflict. In conflict, for example, there is a breakdown of law and order. Thus, a barrier against child marriages (the law and law enforcement) is damaged if not entirely removed. The ways in which this collapse impacts child marriage should be explored. The link between child marriage and the way conflict limits educational opportunities was also briefly discussed in this project, but further studies could illuminate how providing education services could limit the use of child marriage as coping strategy for desperate families. The nature of child marriage in other contexts of the Syrian conflict should also be explored, including in areas controlled by ISIL and among internally displaced persons. Furthermore, when data is available, quantitative studies should be done to determine the extent to which this phenomenon occurs in other parts of the world during situations of armed conflict.

To conclude, the relationship of child marriage and armed conflict functions mainly as a set of preexisting conditions in which conflict actions a shock, reinvigorating the practice. Conflict also creates new drivers, placing girls at even higher risks of child marriage. In determining this phenomenon, this project not only addresses a gap in the literature, it also has practical applications. Governments and aid organizations should

recognize that child marriage is a humanitarian concern in addition to a development and human rights issue. They must also take steps to prevent the practice and help girls affected already. As the Syrian case study suggests, physical insecurity, laws and policies regarding refugee status, access to education, and the extent to which refugees' basic needs are met all drive families to choose child marriage for their daughters.

Governments and NGOs should collaborate to develop new prevention strategies and employ those currently used outside of conflict to ensure that conflict does not force girls into marriage. Child marriage is a serious, global issue that hurts the wellbeing of girls, families, and communities. This risk only increases during situations of armed conflict, making government and NGO action, as well as further studies like this one, essential to protecting girls in the future.

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