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## Section 3

# **Political Projects and Movement Building**



## 'Too young to wed'

### *Envisioning a 'generous encounter' between feminism and the politics of childhood*

Virginia Caputo

#### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Children, as Sharon Stephens noted in her groundbreaking work *Children and the Politics of Culture* (1995), live their lives at the intersection of local and global processes. These processes intensify interactions and movements of people, ideas, images and things. Stephens's insightful analysis focused specifically on considering children's lives in view of global neo-liberalism by troubling the notion of culture as part of this context for understanding childhood. In arguing that children's lives are entwined with, and affected by, global forces, Stephens pointed to the circulation of Eurocentric ideas of childhood within the realm of internationally circulating signs, goods, labour and capital. Childhood becomes a symbol of nature and an object of protection through this circulation, an ideal held up against the realities of children's lives in changing conditions and in diverse world regions and social contexts. One of Stephens's concerns was that through this circulation, the category 'child' – like the category 'woman' – risks becoming essentialised and homogenised, thereby obscuring the diversity that constitutes it in local contexts.<sup>2</sup>

Stephens's work to link globalisation and childhood was timely and significant. Her expansive thinking brought together insights from anthropology, feminism and childhood studies to explore global political, cultural and social transformations and how they articulate with substantive changes in children's lives. Importantly, her view of 'culture' as a

theoretically and politically contested term was set alongside a dynamic concept of childhood in a time of far-reaching local and global change and uncertainty.<sup>3</sup>

Following Stephens, childhood scholars have continued to expand their analyses of children's lives in global political-economic contexts. Anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent (1999), for instance, suggest that children are both affected by global political-economic conditions and, in turn, affect everyday practices embedded in local-level interactions. Their work considers a cultural politics of childhood and its articulation with local instances of violence. Implicit in the arguments put forward by all three of these scholars are several shared concerns of feminist and childhood studies:<sup>4</sup> to view power through a matrix of gender and other social lines of difference; to understand the intersection of global political-economic systems with systematic disadvantage and oppression in actual people's lives; to account for the social and cultural characteristics of inequalities that give rise to gendered harmful practices, including discrimination and violence, that affect both women and children; and to acknowledge that through globalising forces, once-localised representations of the 'child', like that of 'woman', circulate on a global landscape where they are made meaningful and deployed in diverse contexts.

In this chapter, I use a feminist childhood studies lens through which to view the issue of the early and forced marriage of girls.<sup>5</sup> Over the past decade, this issue has emerged as one of concern and urgency on the global stage.<sup>6</sup> I take up this inquiry with a particular interest in the representation and rhetoric that accompanies circulating images of children and childhood from the global South. For this analysis, the photo exhibit *Too Young to Wed* serves as a focal point. The exhibit debuted at the first United Nations International Day of the Girl in New York in 2012. It was sponsored by the United Nations Population Fund<sup>7</sup> as part of a globally launched initiative to end the early and forced marriage of girls worldwide.<sup>8,9</sup> Audiences in places around the world, as well as virtually, have viewed the images.<sup>10</sup> By using a feminist childhood studies lens, I explore the contours of the politics of visibility and invisibility arising from this circulation and the implications this has for social change.

Specifically, I advance three arguments. First, that forced marriage, situated at the nexus of feminism and childhood studies, is an embodied practice that, as Lila Abu-Lughod notes,<sup>11</sup> encodes local social and cultural dynamics in broader contexts of politics, poverty, patriarchy and culture. Regardless of their age, women and children are positioned through forced marriage as victims, as property or commodities in a

system that devalues and dehumanises children and infantilises women. This treatment marks the conceptual connection between children and women in forced marriage as less than fully human. Images of the forced marriage of girls in the Too Young to Wed photo exhibit extend this connection through representations that guarantee children's dependency, passivity and silence, and secure their victimhood through a paternalistic rhetoric that focuses primarily on rescue and protection.

The rhetoric of rescue and protection is key to the second argument advanced in this chapter. Too Young to Wed circulates images of girls of the global South to receptive audiences in the industrialised North in a play of distant viewers and visual objects. The rhetoric that accompanies the exhibit frames the relationship between viewers and subjects in the images; namely, girls in a forced marriage are to be pitied and protected from cultural contexts that are viewed as backward, ignorant and 'barbaric'. This framing all but negates the agency of those images to powerfully engage viewers in questioning what is being expressed and makes inaudible the voices and lived experiences of the girls themselves. It is a situation reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak's question: 'Can the subaltern speak?'<sup>12</sup> Spivak points to the power-laden process of *giving* silenced 'others' a voice with which to express their own lives and experiences. She argues that global power relations erase the lived experiences of those living in the global South by replacing them with knowledge about the global South. This knowledge is generated and rearranged so that it is made palpable and intelligible. In effect, this process makes it impossible for the 'subaltern' to speak. Moreover, it unproductively detaches knowledge from its context and produces it without accounting for the experiences of people themselves. Knowledge that emerges in this way, Spivak argues, merely reproduces narratives that reinforce Western dominance and authority.<sup>13</sup> This process of 'speaking for' those in positions of powerlessness occurs in the Too Young to Wed exhibit where images and rhetoric further reinforce the cultural divide between viewers and the exhibit's visual objects. The division between girls of the industrialised North and girls living in the global South is clear. What emerges in this paternalistic process is an 'Us/Them' binary that assigns benevolent agency to the dominant 'Us' of the West, and victimisation and passivity to the subordinate 'Them' of the global South, who are imagined as oppressed and in need of rescue and protection.<sup>14</sup>

In writing on the politics of visibility and interpreting images in the 1970s, Susan Sontag points to a similar situation in the images of victims of war. She questions whether or how photographs connect to truth or reality, arguing that 'photographs of the victims of war are themselves species of

rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus.<sup>15</sup> Sontag's insightful comments regarding images as rhetoric that flatten complexity bring me to the third argument that I advance in this chapter. I query whether *Too Young to Wed* fulfills its goal to galvanise political action to end early and forced marriage or whether the images fuel the rhetoric of rescue and protection and obscure truths about people's lives only to reveal 'partial truths'. What are the consequences of circulating these images? Do the images foster understanding and solidarity with those experiencing early and forced marriage or do they serve to bolster imperialist rhetoric that may exacerbate rather than alleviate problems of forced marriage, moving no closer to ending the practice?

In examining these arguments, I echo Sara Ahmed's call for a 'generous encounter',<sup>16</sup> one that unravels and complicates the mutual interests, conceptual dependencies and theoretical conflicts and tensions between women and children. Considering a 'generous encounter' between feminism and the politics of childhood for exploring early and forced marriage is not, as Ahmed argues, a plea for commonalities and equivalencies. Rather, as she acknowledges, while there is incommensurability at some level, it does not necessarily mean that they cannot co-exist in relation to each other.<sup>17</sup> Further, Ahmed notes that the effort is not to move beyond oppositions that totalise and refuse the 'other';<sup>18</sup> rather it is to argue for 'an economy' which includes conflicting and competing co-existence. This seems to be a particularly appropriate strategy for exploring forced marriage given that feminist interest in children and childhood in the past has often positioned children as adversaries rather than women's contemporaries, with more differences than commonalities.<sup>19</sup> Forced marriage provides an opportunity to highlight these commonalities and explore tensions and mutual interests that arise. Thus, I invoke Ahmed's notion of a 'generous encounter' to contemplate the resemblances between the lives of children and women without hierarchy. In doing so, forced marriage becomes a context within which childhood and womanhood emerge as categories of experience. This formulation is far from the one that might be proposed by Firestone, who might call for the obliteration of childhood altogether (see Zehavi, this volume). Rather, for feminism and the politics of childhood, envisioning this 'generous encounter' appears to offer a productive approach that enriches understanding of lived experiences, interrupts adult-centricity, and reflects the challenges of theorising and practice in contemporary dynamic contexts. It seems to me that an invigorated position emerges from which to conceptually move across, through and around, rather than beyond, the barriers of binaries including child/adult and girl/woman. At a broader level

still, forced marriage may offer the possibility to produce what Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty argue, is a shared sense of 'engagement based on empathy and on a vision of justice for everyone'.<sup>20</sup>

When I first encountered the practice of the early and forced marriage of girls, I felt frustrated by the tendency to treat it as a problem of vulnerable, helpless and silent girls. It reminded me of portrayals of women similarly imaged as passive and victimised.<sup>21</sup> My concern was heightened by an opportunity to work closely with the *Too Young to Wed* exhibit in 2013.<sup>22</sup> I began to more fully understand and question the scope of the exhibit's reach to both live and virtual audiences around the world.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on feminist and post-colonial critiques, I queried the relations of 'knowing' offered by the set of circulating images of children and childhoods and questioned how political action can be constituted through visibility. Of particular concern was the repeated deployment of the notion of 'barbarity', which was linked to particular societies by those hoping to raise awareness of the scope and consequences of the practice. The phrase was used, for example, at the UN General Assembly in 2013 during the introduction of the first ever stand-alone resolution condemning early and forced child marriage: proponents called for an end to the 'barbaric' practice.<sup>24</sup>

The child protection, legal and non-governmental communities rose to the challenge to find ways to end the practice. They explored legislative, activist and protectionist avenues alongside political attempts.<sup>25</sup> Notably, what marks many of the efforts directed at ending early and forced marriage is a focus on saving and protecting girls that, when cast within a global neoliberal framing (as Stephens suggests), relies on individual rather than communal and structural solutions to ending such a practice. These solutions sometimes neglect to consider the contexts in which girls live amid adults. They also fail to attend to the cultural politics of childhood and how ideologies of girlhood, childhood and womanhood intersect in locales that naturalise what it means to be a girl or a child. This occurs in part because of the tenacity of dominant Eurocentric notions of childhood and girlhood that rest firmly on vulnerability, innocence and a lack of agency. By emptying out the significance of the contexts of early and forced marriage, and obscuring what gives rise to the inequalities that fuel this practice, such efforts render girls as failing: failing to be resilient, or to stay in school, or to manage their own reproductive health. This casting back to individuals works hand in hand with a rhetoric that positions those in the industrialised North as authority figures who are able to guide those located in the global South in overcoming their problems and to help them to 'acquire the characteristics of civilized peoples, and take their place alongside them in the world'.<sup>26</sup>



## Early and forced child marriage at the nexus of feminism and a politics of childhood<sup>27</sup>

Scholarly research reveals that some of the challenges of early and forced marriage are due, in part, to complex definitional issues. Forced marriage, for example, becomes early marriage when we pay attention to cultural understandings of age and capacity. Concepts of consent and coercion come to the foreground as well, marking the definition of early and forced marriage as complicated terrain.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to definitional challenges, early and forced marriage has garnered attention from legal and human rights scholars. In analyzing the practice they appeal to human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. A 2006 UN study on all forms of violence against women highlights in its definition of forced marriage a lack of meaningful consent. Further, the Convention Against Slavery considers forced marriage a 'slavery-like' practice<sup>29</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, applying to all people under the age of 18 years, states that this practice is a violation of children's rights.

### Scope and context of early and forced marriage

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, over 700 million women today were married before they reached the age of 18.<sup>30</sup> Ideology, power, legal responses and language are some of the factors that fuel the practice of forced marriage, coupled with contexts characterised by oppressive patriarchal social structures, gender discrimination, poverty and inequality. When enmeshed with cultural attitudes and religious practices, these factors help to sustain the practice in diverse local contexts. In contexts affected by war and conflict, the conditions for early and forced marriage are further exacerbated.

To consider these factors in turn, let us look first at how ideological aspects drive and sustain the practice of the forced marriage of girls. Feminist and childhood scholars argue that one of the conditions that makes girls and women vulnerable and susceptible to forced marriage is a process of devaluation that rests on the notion of girls and women as less than fully human. That is, not only are girls viewed as 'on their way to becoming' fully human, their full humanity remains precarious even when they reach adulthood. The slippage between childhood, girlhood and womanhood locates girls on unstable conceptual

terrain. Moreover, dehumanisation as a process acts to guarantee their dependency by enforcing passivity and restricting agency.<sup>31</sup> Situated in positions of relative powerlessness and ensconced in families that are in turn embedded in communities, for girls in these contexts, control is at the heart of the practice of forced and early marriage. The practice is linked too with sexuality and gender relations, as well as culturally situated ideas about girlhood, womanhood, family obligations and honour.

Within these local contexts, legal responses to early and forced marriage are complicated as well. For example, while the practice may be prohibited in civil or common law, customary laws and practices may condone it. This means that decisions regarding early and forced marriage may be made in terms of securing a daughter's future by 'marrying' her with an older male, while other decisions are concerned with the larger family unit by using 'marriage' as an opportunity to connect families and create alliances through reciprocity systems, or to enable access to resources such as land. These decisions may have tremendous personal consequences for individual girls' physical and emotional health: the well-being of the family or community is effectively allowed to supersede that of the girl.<sup>32</sup> As Carolyn Archambault notes with regard to early and forced marriage in the life of a Maasai girl named Esther,<sup>33</sup>

In light of the circumstances in which Esther's father's decision was made and his intentions, he shifts from a symbol of patriarchal oppression to a persona of a concerned father. No longer simply a violator of his daughter's rights to an education, he can be understood as a victim himself of economic, ecological, and political forces beyond his control that render the path that would attain security for Esther (and other young women like her) more uncertain.

### 'Barbarism' and rescuing and protecting girls

The connection between barbarism and early and forced marriage plays a powerful role in sustaining the practice. The term 'barbaric' captures a constellation of meanings from notions of cruelty and brutality to backwardness and uncivilised ignorance.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, labelling a practice such as early and forced marriage as 'barbaric' has strategic and powerful consequences. It encodes a paternalistic stance and reinforces geographic and cultural distances that set up a dichotomy of locales where the practice does or supposedly does not occur.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, deploying the term 'barbaric' firmly attaches the practice to persons living in particular localities; in turn, this

aids in justifying interventions in their lives. As Dana Cloud argues with regard to circulating images of Afghan women, they serve to 'establish the barbarity of a society in which women are profoundly oppressed'.<sup>36</sup> Cloud analyses the ways images of Afghan women circulate alongside a 'clash of civilizations' rhetoric that reproduces the narrative of a 'white man's burden'.<sup>37</sup> Stabile and Kumar go a step further to argue that the visibility of Afghan women in the post-9/11 context was used to sell the war to the US public by constructing the West as 'a beacon of civilization with an obligation to tame the Islamic world and liberate its women'.<sup>38</sup> In the example of *Too Young to Wed*, the discourse of barbarism legitimises calls for an end to the practice in the lives of those living in the global South.

## Too Young to Wed as political photography

*Too Young to Wed* circulates images to audiences in the industrialised North in both live and virtual spaces. Some viewers will see in the images an unmediated and authentic replica of reality, while others will recognise the photographer's influence in constructing these images for particular effect. Lutz and Collins describe the politics of what viewers 'see' as 'political photography',<sup>39</sup> where images are used to educate and motivate viewers who wish to see social change. They argue that rhetorical strategies combined with images expose audiences to human suffering and 'often operate by encouraging an empathic involvement with the photographed subject – a desire to intervene directly with the frame of the photograph in order to ease the depicted pain or comfort a hungry child'.<sup>40</sup> Lutz and Collins posit that by portraying people living in the global South as exotic, idealised and natural, viewers in the industrialised North are situated both in opposition and authoritatively.<sup>41</sup>

It is hardly a coincidence that the *Too Young to Wed* photo exhibit distances early and forced marriage from any association with those living in industrialised Northern countries; none of the girls in the images are located in a North American or European context. This omission is significant for it accomplishes a number of things: first, it displaces the practice of early and forced marriage elsewhere, creating an insularity and providing the comfort of distance to the viewers of the images. Second, by framing the practice as an issue for girls located in the global South, this focus diverts attention away from equally oppressive and patriarchal practices that affect the lives of girls in the industrialised North.<sup>42</sup> Further, framing this practice through a discourse situated firmly within Eurocentric ideas of childhood and girlhood makes the problem appear as though located in places

both geographically and culturally distant from the industrialised North. The rhetoric obscures many reasons for this practice: the poverty experienced by families who cannot afford to provide for their daughters; security for girls and their well-being as future adult women; devaluation of daughters in comparison with sons; debts and/or conflicts that can be settled through early and forced marriage in order to address threats to family relationships. In this culturally and politically charged landscape, girls are portrayed as a problem to be remedied.<sup>43</sup> In the Too Young to Wed example, governments appear to deliver solutions that may or may not have any resonance in the contexts and circumstances in which girls live: that is, by keeping girls in school, assisting them in choosing to delay marriage, offering information about reproductive health and training in life skills to make them better wives and mothers at a later time in their lives. These 'solutions' may or may not bring early and forced marriage to an end.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, paternalism emerges when the issue of early and forced marriage is displaced to people living in the global South. What remain hidden are the social and political-economic dimensions of this global issue. Attention is diverted away from government policies, international trade agreements and other political arrangements that tie the very governments that are championing the campaign to end early and forced marriage to the local contexts in which the practice continues to flourish.

The photo exhibit appears to mimic this strategy of deflection and individualisation through the very composition of the images. For instance, in many of the exhibit's images, girls are depicted alone, pictured outside of familiar contexts of family and community, placed against gloomy backdrops or in open and vast unpopulated landscapes. If not alone they are with a child or husband, further reinforcing their roles as wives and mothers. The imaging engenders a sense of isolation, quiet desperation and powerlessness and, by extension, reinforces the practice as if it takes place in isolation from other relationships, which is hardly the case. The solution to the problem of early and forced marriage appears in equally simplistic terms: to halt the practice.

This strategy of individualisation and decontextualisation is a powerful one, yet it is hardly surprising that it occurs in a neoliberal globalised era. As Xiaobei Chen has argued, the twenty-first century has produced the birth of 'the new child-victim citizen'.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, at a broader political level, it also reflects, among other things, a shift to a renewed political interest in children, and in this example, girls. The increased attention to girls as a concern for foreign policy is remarkable given the lack of political will that has been a much more common occurrence in relation to girls.<sup>46</sup>

## An economy of visibility and invisibility

Too Young to Wed is both compelling and contradictory. On one hand, the photographs are aesthetically beautiful; on the other, the images offer viewers meanings that may be understood in unintended ways. The power of the photographs compels viewers to consider the multiple meanings of girls and girlhood, including girls as children who experience a loss of childhood, girls as 'becoming women', girls as brides, girls as victims of violence and girls as mothers. The process of determining which meanings become 'real' to viewers and which ones remain invisible is part of the sense-making that viewers undertake, selecting some elements and leaving others aside. Feminist communications scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser calls this process 'an economy of visibility'<sup>47</sup> to describe the relationship between viewers and those who are imaged. This economy consists of an interplay between visibility and invisibility whereby something appears, circulates and becomes exchanged. In Too Young to Wed, the girls and their suffering are circulated, exchanged and become 'real'. Banet-Weiser explores this process for the possibilities it holds in transforming oneself into a commodity in social media as a space of visibility for girls. If Banet-Weiser's argument is extended to the Too Young to Wed images, given the viewership of this exhibit worldwide and the many different audiences it has reached, we must consider the implications of turning girls into commodities or what Claudia Aradau argues are 'spectral presences on the scene of politics'<sup>48</sup>.

Related questions emerge. Who assesses the value of what is circulated in such an exchange, for whom and with what consequences? Too Young to Wed offers viewers an instance to suppress and replace details of girls' lives and experiences with meanings that are consistent with dominant Eurocentric notions of girlhood and ideal childhood. In its quest to raise awareness and end early and forced marriage, does Too Young to Wed clear a space of visibility for *actual* girls so that the practice might end, as the UNFPA initiative suggests? Or does the exhibit merely provide another space of *invisibility* for girls' lives, wherein securing their human rights remains outside of their grasp? As the photo exhibit circulates, it engages viewers with girls' suffering framed within an ethos of compassion. Compassion enables viewers to 'suffer' with the girls, yet at a distance. Viewers of the images become 'witnesses' to the suffering of girls. Following Hannah Arendt,<sup>49</sup> if compassion is actualised in situations in which those who do not suffer meet and come face to face with those who do, distance becomes a political dimension that has the effect of unifying across spatial and temporal locations. This interaction

comprises what has been called a 'politics of pity',<sup>50</sup> one that does not attach itself in a localised way yet cannot completely free itself from the local and particular either.

In *Too Young to Wed*, we see this dimension unfold when audiences view the images of girls through a lens of compassion. Compassion grounds these elements that create both an intimacy with viewers as well as a comfortable distance from the subjects of the images. By masking the diversity of those experiencing early and forced marriage, the images appear to exacerbate this distance. Devoid of contextual details, they homogenise girls' lives into a unified representation of girlhood so that early and forced marriage appears as a singular, integrated issue. Postcolonial childhood and feminist scholars including Sarada Balagopalan,<sup>51</sup> Olga Nieuwenhuys,<sup>52</sup> and Erica Burman<sup>53</sup> have argued that this compression and glossing-over of the intricacies of how local and global forces intertwine is partly an effect of the circulation of liberal categories like freedom, rights and equality. They argue that their repetition in postcolonial contexts produces children's lives in limited ways, against a Eurocentric, bourgeois notion of childhood as a global ideal.<sup>54</sup>

The politics of pity is not only apparent in the photo exhibit: it is used too in interventions orchestrated in international politics. As we see in high-level political gatherings at the UN, discussions of early and forced child marriage are framed by unifying notions of 'poor victims' and 'barbaric' practices. These discussions feature tokenistic participation by articulate young women on high-level panels who are asked to speak on behalf of all girls who have experienced early and forced marriage. These appeals to emotion in turn create superficial solidarities that employ a politics of pity combined with a rhetoric of rescue and protection. Activism through these solidarities manifests as a real possibility linking pity with praxis. Claudia Aradau has written extensively about the way this works in the lives of trafficked women. She argues that 'a politics of pity tackles the "disordered situation" ... These emotions drive political interventions and strategies of governance.'<sup>55</sup> As Aradau notes, 'from the war on terror to interventions in crisis situations (e.g., famine and natural catastrophes), political actions depend on and are limited by emotions'.<sup>56</sup> For girls who are, as Aradau says, placed among categories of individuals who are 'non-dangerous', this is a particularly salient point. Indeed, like the figure of the 'child', the figure of the 'girl' enables a 'safe' intervention for those who engage with it because girls are situated in relative positions of powerlessness vis-à-vis adults. Aradau argues that for trafficked women, 'if human rights have become the rights of those who are too weak or

too oppressed to actualize and enact them, they are not “their” rights. They are deprived of political agency; the only rights are our rights to practice pity and humanitarian interventions. Victims are therefore divorced from the very possibility of political agency...’.<sup>57</sup> Consider how for girls imaged in the Too Young to Wed photo exhibit, it appears the exclusion of their political agency is guaranteed.

It behooves us, therefore, to carefully contemplate whose interests are served by silent, decontextualised images of girls in the global South, circulated to audiences in the industrialised North. It befits questioning interventions to end the practice of early and forced marriage framed by rights discourses and governmental efforts to attend to, and uphold, girls’ rights. While these efforts no doubt bring attention to the matter as well as positioning girls on political agendas from which they, like women, might otherwise continue to be excluded, I would argue that they also extend and ignite foreign policy relations in problematic ways. To be clear, the problem is not that governments have a stake in reducing violence in girls’ and women’s lives, whether because it has implications on the stability of their own countries, for health costs or other reasons. Instead, and what may be less apparent, the issue is the connection between eliminating girls’ suffering – in this case by ending the practice of early and forced marriage – and the *kind* of political attention it garners, for whom and for which purposes. Again, Aradau makes a similar point in the case of trafficked women, arguing that ‘the elimination or alleviation of suffering is part of a process of governing, of social re-ordering, in which the causes of suffering are eradicated, dealt with or transformed. In governmental terms such an intervention has not only to represent and constitute a particular situation, but also to confer particular identities upon subjects.’<sup>58</sup>

Too Young to Wed confers identities to girls that are both complex and political. As it circulates specific sets of meanings and discourses regarding their lives, framed by compassion and pity as well as rescue and protection, Too Young to Wed has the potential to exacerbate the challenges for actual girls rather than improve them. By visually encoding ideas about girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, culture, consent and coercion, it helps to shape connections, conceptually and substantively, in an economy of visibility that both facilitates and impedes the goal of ending early and forced marriage. It impedes by engaging audiences in a politics that *may not* translate into an active force within the political arena and that may oppose some children against others by deeming some lives (i.e. those of children living in the industrialised North) more valuable than others. It is political in that it captures viewers’ emotional

responses but keeps the girls in a state of what scholar Luc Boltanski has called 'distant suffering',<sup>59</sup> a divide that may ultimately work against active engagement and social change for the *actual* empowerment of girls as called for by the international community.

## To conclude

I opened this chapter recalling Sharon Stephens' words on the importance of highlighting the politics of childhood, and of troubling the notion of culture in contexts framed by global neoliberalism and marked by poverty and rising inequality. Women's and children's lives and interests emerge as intertwined and demonstrates how they can be productively considered in dynamic socio-political and globalised contexts. Stephens compels us to pay attention to children in relational ways with adults and to account for the conditions of their lives within a broader global political-economic and sociocultural framing. She views children not only as 'on their way to becoming' full members of society but as fully present among adults and important to what matters politically, economically, socially and culturally in the world. Her words remind us to understand children's experiences, like those of women, in their locally unique and relational situations, combined with the external forces that drive and affect their lives and, in turn, affect and intertwine with the lives of women. I would argue that this conceptual and political intertwining emerges through a generous encounter between feminism and a politics of childhood. Using the example of *Too Young to Wed*, I have pointed out what an increased visibility has to do with conceptualising the figure of the child as a powerful symbol of the future, as well as a locus for the present interplay of local and global forces that challenges childhood, girlhood and womanhood in contemporary contexts. Thus the contribution of this chapter has been to theorise childhood in a way that reimagines the mutual interests, conceptual dependencies and tensions between women and children through the example of forced marriage. Forced marriage provides an opportunity to contemplate the resemblances and tensions between the lives of children and women without hierarchy when envisaged as a context within which both childhood and womanhood are constituted and emerge as viable categories of experience.



## NOTES

- 1 I wish to thank the editors and reviewers for their insightful comments on an earlier draft: these greatly assisted in the writing of this chapter. I am also grateful to Taylor and Francis for permission to revise and reprint a portion of the article 'Children's Participation and Protection in a Globalized World: Reimagining "Too Young to Wed" Through a Cultural Politics of Childhood', which appears in the *International Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 1 (2017): 76–88.
- 2 Representations of Afghan women and girls have been deployed and have circulated in similar ways, including, for instance, the image 'Afghan Girl' on *National Geographic's* June 1985 cover. For more on the ways images of Afghan women circulate, see Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre, 'Portraying the Political: National Geographic's 1985 Afghan Girl and a US Alibi for Aid,' *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 4 (2010): 336–56; Vera Mackie, 'The "Afghan Girls": Media Representations and Frames of War,' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26 (2012): 115–31.
- 3 Sharon Stephens, *Children and the Politics of Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.
- 4 For more on diverse traditions of 'childhood studies' in the United States, Britain and Scandinavia, see entries for 'anthropology of childhood' and 'sociology of childhood' in Oxford Bibliographies, available at <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>.
- 5 I use the term 'early and forced marriage of girls' in this chapter to mean a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18. This phrase is sometimes used interchangeably in the literature as 'forced, early marriage' and 'child marriage'. The term 'early marriage' is also used in the literature to refer to an individual's level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development, in addition to age, which could complicate their ability to consent to marriage. The term 'forced marriage' can refer to women at any age and connotes any marriage without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties involved, or when one or both parties is prevented from ending or leaving the marriage. For more, see Office of the High Commission, 'Preventing and Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage,' Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. April 2014. A/HRC/26/22, <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/new-ohchr-report-child-early-forced-marriage/>; and UNICEF, 'Child Marriage,' [https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58008.html](https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html).
- 6 For examples of early and forced child marriage initiatives, see the United Nations Population Fund website at <http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>.
- 7 UNFPA is a UN agency dedicated to addressing issues such as sexual and reproductive health, matters concerning young people including child marriage, human rights and gender equality, and population matters. For more, see their website at <http://www.unfpa.org>.
- 8 The initiative was championed by ministers of foreign affairs from Canada, Ghana and the Netherlands.
- 9 Too Young to Wed is the name of an initiative organised through a partnership between the United Nations Population Fund and US-based VII Photo Agency to raise awareness and end early and forced child marriage. The exhibit features the documentary photography work of VII's photographer Stephanie Sinclair and videos by cinematographer Jessica Dimmock.
- 10 Too Young to Wed's images are of girls who have been forced into early marriage living in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India, Nepal and Yemen. After the photo exhibit's debut in New York, where it was also featured on billboards in Times Square, it arrived in Ottawa, Canada in the spring of 2013 as a first stop on a tour that over the rest of the year took in Washington, Montreal, Copenhagen, Morocco and The Hague. In early 2014, the photo exhibit appeared in Tangiers, Oslo and in March at the UN's Palais des Nations in Geneva. Later in the year it was displayed in Stockholm, Helsinki, Lisbon, Madrid, Vienna, the UK, Beirut, Amman and Argentina. The exhibit returned to New York at the end of 2014 and in early 2015 was seen in Khartoum, Sudan; Bihar and Mumbai, India; Dhaka, Bangladesh and Ankara, Turkey.
- 11 Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,' *American Anthropologist* 3, no. 104 (2002): 783–90.
- 12 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.
- 13 Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

- 14 Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'
- 15 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1973), 6.
- 16 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000); Sara Ahmed, 'Identifications, Gender and Racial Difference: Moving Beyond a Psychoanalytical Account of Subjectivity,' in *Representations of Gender, Democracy and Identity Politics in Relation*, ed. Kumar Renuka (New Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996), 288–302.
- 17 Ahmed, 'Identifications, Gender and Racial Difference,' 288–9.
- 18 Ahmed, 'Identifications, Gender and Racial Difference,' 288–9.
- 19 Erica Burman, 'Beyond "Women Vs. Children" or "Womenandchildren": Engendering Childhood and Reformulating Motherhood,' *International Journal of Children's Rights* 16, no. 2 (2008): 177–94.
- 20 M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (xiii) (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 21 Rae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre, "Portraying the Political: National Geographic's 1985 Afghan Girl and a US Alibi for Aid." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 4 (2010): 336–56.
- 22 Too Young to Wed was installed at the Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa, Canada in May and June 2013. My involvement came at the invitation of my university to co-organise a speakers' panel for the exhibit.
- 23 According to a 6 January 2014 post by Stephanie Sinclair on the Too Young to Wed blog, the photo exhibit has had a vigorous online presence as well: 'Since we started, images from the campaign flooded the mainstream media, appearing in more than 100 online and print media outlets including CNN, The New York Times and National Geographic... Too Young to Wed raised awareness about child marriage around the world... Thanks to you, our voice through social media was powerful and we had an amazing Instagram campaign that brought 500,000+ likes to our images and stories of children who bravely refused their marriages in India.' Some of the images in the Too Young to Wed photo exhibit are available at <http://tooyoungtowed.org/#/video>.
- 24 For the full text of John Baird's speech to the UN General Assembly see *Huffpost Politics* (blog), 'John Baird's Speech To The United Nations: Full Text Of Speech Delivered At The UN October 1st, 2012,' *Huffington Post*, 1 October 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/10/01/john-bairds-speech-united-nations-text\\_n\\_1928907.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/10/01/john-bairds-speech-united-nations-text_n_1928907.html).
- 25 Cécile Aptel, 'Child Slaves and Child Brides,' *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14 (2016): 305–25; Alexia Sabbe, Marleen Temmerman, Eva Brems and Els Leye, 'Forced Marriage: An Analysis of Legislation and Political Measures in Europe,' *Crime, Law and Social Change* 62 (2014): 171–89; Girls Not Brides; Alphaxard Chabari and Eva Palmqvist, 'Violence against Children in Southern Sudan: A Participatory Study on PHP, Sexual Abuse and Early and Forced Marriage,' *Save the Children Sweden*, 1997. <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/1403.pdf>; Neha Jain, 'Forced Marriage as a Crime against Humanity,' *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 6 (2008): 1013–32; Joar Svanemyr, Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli, Charlotte Sigurdson Christiansen and Michael Mbizvo. 'Preventing Child Marriages: First International Day of the Girl Child, 'My Life, My Right, End Child Marriage,' *Reproductive Health* 9 (2012): 31. Published online. Doi 10.1186/1742-4755-9-31.
- 26 Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 164.
- 27 'Girls Not Brides' is a global partnership directed at ending early and forced marriage. It includes 400 civil society organisations from over 60 countries. For more information see <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>.
- 28 See Women Living Under Muslim Laws, *Child, Early and Forced Marriage: A Multi-Country Study. A Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OCHCR)*. December 2013, <http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/UN%20report%20final.pdf>
- 29 Forced marriage is not commonly defined as slavery despite increasing attention to this argument. See the UN General Assembly, 'Resolution 66/140, Calls for an End to Forced Marriage as a "Harmful Traditional Practice",' 2006. [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/140](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/140). See also United Nations General Assembly, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including its Causes and Consequences, Gulnara Shahinian: Thematic Report on Servile Marriage,' 10 July 2012, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-41\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-41_en.pdf).

- 30 See UNICEF, 'Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects' (Geneva: UNICEF, 2014), [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child\\_Marriage\\_Report\\_7\\_17\\_LR..pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf). See also UNICEF, 'Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed, Progress Report' (Geneva: UNICEF, 2012), [http://www.unicef.org/lac/Committing\\_to\\_Child\\_Survival\\_APR\\_9\\_Sept\\_2013.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/lac/Committing_to_Child_Survival_APR_9_Sept_2013.pdf); UNFPA, 'Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy' (Geneva: UNFPA, 2013), <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP2013-final.pdf>
- 31 See Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (this volume) for a discussion of how Sahrawi refugee women and girls are marginalised on the basis of gender and generation.
- 32 See Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Preventing and Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage,' Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, April 2014, A/HRC/26/22 (Geneva: United Nations, 2014), on the wide-ranging impact of child forced marriage on girls who face physical, psychological, economic and other violences resulting from the practice.
- 33 Carolyn Archambault, 'Ethnographic Empathy and the Social Context of Rights. Rescuing Maasai Girls from Early Marriage,' *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 4 (2011): 638.
- 34 Merryl Wynn Davies, Ashis Nandy and Ziauddin Sardar. *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism* (London: Pluto Press, 1993).
- 35 For more, see Julia Alanen, 'Crafting a Competent Framework to Combat Forced Marriage,' *American Journal of Family Law* 30, no. 2 (2016): 1–14; Julia Alanen, 'Shattering the Silence Surrounding Forced and Early Marriage in the United States,' *Children's Legal Rights Journal* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 1–37, both on the situation in the United States.
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- 40 Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 271.
- 41 Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, 271.
- 42 Thanks to Ohad Zehavi for pointing out this dialectical omission.
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- 44 To read more on the links between early and forced marriage and education, see the Girls Not Brides website at <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/education/>
- 45 Xiaobei Chen argues that for children who had historically remained non-citizens, a reconfiguration of citizenship has occurred vis-à-vis the child and childhood, and that this emerges in discourse in cultural, legal and political settings. Chen describes this figure as the 'new child-victim citizen'. Xiaobei Chen, 'The Birth of the Child-victim Citizen,' in *Reinventing Canada: Politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Janine Brodie and Linda Trimble (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 2003): 162–87.
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- 58 Aradau, 'Perverse Politics,' 259.
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