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**Silenced Subjectivities & Missed
Representations: Unpacking The Gaps Of
The International Child Marriage Discourse**

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List of Acronyms

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DFID	UK's Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Modification
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GNB	Girls Not Brides
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
POPIN	United Nations Population Information Network
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

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Abstract

At a time when “the girl child” is the new favourite investment, beneficiary and symbol of hope for the development machine, child marriage has become one of the central issues in the girl agenda. However, the much-celebrated global campaign against child marriage has come in the form of a monolithic representation of what this practice constitutes, underpinned by contested notions of gender, race and age, and colonial notions about girls’ agency, sexuality and vulnerability. Such understandings in turn condition how child marriage is framed as a site for development intervention, while obfuscating alternative realities of this practice that do not fit the dominant discourse. Nonetheless, it is time to question what is the problem represented to be with child marriage that has permeated all levels of development policy, scholarship and practice.

In this research, I thus aim to explore how dominant representations of child marriage structure how the international development community understands, problematizes and tries to address this practice. I will do so, through an exploration of discourse using techniques in critical discourse analysis, namely Carol Bacchi’s WPR approach to policy analysis, contextualized within the Girls Not Brides Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. In particular, I draw from secondary data and empirical research that speaks to the nuances of child marriage to construct my argument. This research is informed by the works of post-colonial feminist writers and scholars from the new sociology of childhood, as well as post-development theory. I hope that unpacking the limits to the dominant child marriage discourse invites development practitioners and academics to engage more wholly with the contextual specificity of this practice, and generates greater awareness about the material consequences of dominant representations.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to development studies that focus on Children and Youth, and Women and Gender. More specifically, it adds to the limited critical literature on the study of child marriage and the role of discursive representations in structuring development interventions on the subject.

Keywords

Child marriage, Girls Not Brides, Discourse, Girl Power, Representations

Chapter 1

Introduction

Nature of the problem

In 1997, Wolfgang Sachs warned us about how development language and the terms we use to explain related issues play a fundamental role in structuring the way we understand and ultimately discursively construct them as problems to be addressed. He argued that development discourses extinguish the diversity of experiences, histories and representations, and consequently produce single ways of practicing and conceptualizing this field (Sachs 1997:xvi). As a result, complex colonial histories overlap with notions of culture, religion, ethnicity, modernization, class, globalization and development, imposing 'neutral' categories in contexts with messy histories and social realities (Bunting, 2005:22; citing Bunting and Engle Merry, 2004). Fast-forward 19 years from the time Sachs and likeminded scholars first criticized this tendency in development discourse, and I am sitting at my first 'expert meeting' on child marriage in the Netherlands, called "Lifting the Veil". As the day progressed my initial anticipation about a full day of meetings, panels, and networking slowly turned into disappointment, as I realized how relevant Sachs' warning continues to be to development practice today. But how could this be? Where was all the uneasiness I was feeling at the conference coming from? Maybe it was the uncomfortable looking, token child bride dressed in her 'traditional' gown being interviewed at the podium. Maybe it was the speeches by members of the Royal family, reminiscing their 'normal' child-marriage-free childhoods. Maybe it was the videos, or the title of the event, or the tone of conversations ... or maybe it was just all of the above. But among all the unease, the message that day echoed by the international community was loud and clear: we have to end child marriage.

Despite being an old practice that has concerned academics and development practitioners since colonial times, child marriage only recently became a main area of focus for international agencies working on children and women related issues. This shift has come at a time when "the girl child" has become the new favourite investment, subject and symbol of hope for the development machine. By this term, I refer to the web of power holders and knowledge brokers on development issues consisting of international organizations, academics, development practitioners and policy makers who define the top development concerns the world should be addressing and thus guide the flow of aid and development funds. In this sense, the machine is powered not only by knowledge and technical expertise, but also by the availability of resources and the idea of investing in development. The new preoccupation with girls is not only apparent in the thousands of girl-focused campaigns spearheaded by development organizations worldwide, but also in the vast amount of resources poured into the cause. The 'girl agenda' has become so widespread and dominant –trendy even – that today it defines what girlhood is, who is included in these campaigns, and the sort of interventions worthy of funding. For example, the World Bank recently announced they would be investing \$2.5 billion in projects directed specifically towards girls' education and empowerment

(World Bank 2016). Some of the ideas pushed by the girl agenda are also reflected in the ‘dominant child marriage discourse’, or the mainstream terms through which child marriage is understood.

Most of such literature generally explains child marriage as a standardized bundle of universally applicable causes and consequences that revolve around the ‘othering’ of cultural functionings believed to disadvantage girls and countries from the Global South. In turn, these narratives guide why and how the international community addresses this practice. However, empirical studies show there is more to this child marriage story than what the dominant discourse claims, but these are silenced by a seemingly all-encompassing representations of the issue. Therefore, I am conducting this research to expose the way child marriage is represented through assumptions about girlhood and the developing world, and critically question the effects of a troubling, yet much-celebrated discourse. Posing these questions is particularly important today, because as Sachs warned us these understandings continue to structure the flow of resources and the relationship between the Global North and South. At a time when child marriage is considered one of the biggest and most damaging development problems threatening girls today (Girls Not Brides 2014a), it is extremely important to be critical of how this problem is represented and talked about. Only then we will understand what exactly is problematized about child marriage, what are the assumptions guiding the dominant representation of the problem and what are the consequences of such a portrayal of the problem.

Problem statement

In international development practice and academia child marriage is defined as “a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18” (UNICEF 2014b). It severely concerns the development machine because it is believed to be associated with the end of girls’ education, physical, psychological and sexual violence, early motherhood and limited economic opportunities (Girls Not Brides 2014a). These set of ‘problematic practices’ undermine girls’ wellbeing and entail a violation of their human rights. Therefore, based on these prevailing representations, child marriage has been created as a social problem from the developing world that needs the intervention of the development machine, influencing international policy and action. Despite the popularity of the dominant child marriage discourse, I digress from this representation and instead sustain child marriage as it is generally understood misses the problem. Instead, I see child marriage as the consequence of greater social injustices, like poverty and gender inequality, which simply stopping young people from marrying before they turn 18 will not adequately address. On the contrary, the dominant concern for child marriage only serves to perpetuated a series of problematic, Western assumptions about gender, race and the North/South divide, age and childhood, sexuality, vulnerability and agency, which come together and materialize into interventions that reproduce unequal power relations between the developing and the developed world. As a result, child marriage becomes a monolithic representation that obfuscates other realities and expressions of this practice and reproduces latent colonial and modernist agendas that deserve to be named.

Based on this statement of the problem, my research will aim to unpack what is the problem represented to be for the international commu-

nity, what are the various assumptions about gender, race, age, sexuality, agency and vulnerability which come together to structure the discourse and the effects these representations generate. I will also explore what is left unproblematicized to ultimately expose the gaps of the 'global' discourse of child marriage, through the help of empirical research on the subject from various contexts and takes on the practice. Because the fight against child marriage is spearheaded by Girls Not Brides (hereafter GNB), the global partnership of civil society and international organizations that aims to end child marriage, the network will thus be the focus on this research. Working in over 80 countries, GNB plays a fundamental role in creating, utilizing, and perpetuating the dominant child marriage discourse I aim to analyse. Therefore, I find it a useful and representative example of how 'truths' – or meanings – about social problems are constructed and disseminated, and eventually influence the way the international community addresses them. What also makes this partnership an interesting case to study is the surprisingly rapid rate at which its outreach continues to grow, most recently creating a Dutch national chapter in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Girls Not Brides 2016a).

It must be understood that the purpose of my research is not to pass a value judgement on the practices associated with child marriage, to defend them or to make recommendations about how to better address it. In this paper I also do not intend to carry out a program evaluation of initiatives that attempt to tackle child marriage. To be critical of how this problem is understood and intervened does not mean to suggest that the practices associated with child marriage do not have any negative implications on young people in some contexts or that it does not deserve our attention. Rather, my critique is of the ways in which child marriage is problematized and addressed in international discourses, which to some extent misses the problem at hand. In sum, this critique does not aim to problematize or evaluate the integrity of campaigns like that of GNB, but rather how child marriage has come to be understood and created as a source of intervention by the development community at large.

In turn, my research paper will aim to answer the question: *In what ways do dominant representations of child marriage structure how the international development community understands, problematizes and tries to address this practice?* In order to unpack the gaps in the dominant child marriage discourse of the Girls Not Brides partnership, I have developed the following secondary questions to guide my research:

1. What claims of truth does the Girls Not Brides global partnership generate about child marriage?
2. What assumptions related to gender, race, sexuality, age, vulnerability and agency underpin the dominant child marriage discourse?
3. What are the material or discursive consequences generated by this representation of the problem?

Organization of this paper

This research paper is organized as follows: In chapter 2 I situate child marriage in the global agenda and explain what the dominant child marriage dis-

course contends about this practice. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the theoretical approaches that structure the direction of this paper and key concepts relevant to its content. In chapter 4 I explain the methodological approach used to answer my research questions, as well as the limitations to this investigation. In chapter 5 I analyse what the problem with child marriage is represented to be by GNB, and I unpack the assumptions and effects of this discourse. Lastly, in chapter 6 I present the concluding remarks of this research and proposals for further investigation.

Chapter 2

Situating Child Marriage in the International Development Agenda

In this section I explain how as part of the ‘girl power’ movement child became an integral part of today’s development agenda. I also explain the dominant child marriage discourse and how this framework defines the practice. I conclude the chapter with a summary of critical approaches to child marriage.

The ‘Girl Power’ movement

Before I explore the limits to the dominant child marriage discourse, it is important to first explain what this discourse consists of, and how it got to be centre stage in international development debates. While efforts to legislate and curb child marriage started in India with the Sarda Act of 1929 under the British colonial empire (Mukherjee 2006), the issue of child marriage slowly started to gain importance in development discussions appearing in numerous international agreements to protect girls’ rights within the international legal framework. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1964), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989). Years later, a surge in attention to the issue came with the ‘gendering’ of development, started by feminist activist and academics to increase international concern for women’s rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the 1980’s and 90’s. As a result, the importance of focusing development efforts and practice on Third World girls was first addressed at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, where the programme of action called for the “elimination of all child marriages and other unions” (POPIN 1994). A year later girls were also discussed by the international community at the UN 4th World Conference on Women in 1995. In Beijing, the concerns of the girl child were given their own platform for action, where the international community pledged commitment to ending all forms of discrimination against girls, including child marriage (UN Women, The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women).

However, despite this initial attention to the issue, girls and particularly child marriage, did not become a fundamental part of the international development agenda until the mid-2000, when the adolescent girl and the issues that concern her wellbeing became the object of investments of the development machine. This discourse is known as the ‘girl power’ movement, and it started when Nike Foundation released its corporate campaign known as the Girl Effect. This campaign aimed to direct investments towards adolescent girls to promote their economic empowerment through the promotion of education as global imperative to development (Switzer 2013:350), and to mobilize the notion of girls as ‘agents’. Some academics identify the non-innocence of this shift in investments as an increase in the neoliberalization of development studies, and the incorporation of neoliberal ideas, such as individuality, agency,

independence and consumer empowerment into development strategies and programmes (Koffman and Gill 2014). Under this campaign, the adolescent girl was thus constructed as the most profitable source of investment for the development machine, since promoters of the ‘girl agenda’ argue that healthy and educated girls would marry later, have fewer children and have better economic prospects. In turn, this would end the intergenerational cycle of poverty and boost the economies of developing countries (Koffman and Gill 2013). It was under such terms how the ‘girl child’ became known as the solution to the development problems of the Third World among international development circles. Since it launched, the Girl Effect marked a before and after in the ‘girl-powering of development’, reimagining the distribution of development funds, and making the girl child the most popular and funded subject in the development agenda. For example, since 2009 girls have been the subject of plenary sessions at the World Economic Forum and UN bodies, they have their own fund at the World Bank, they count with their own UN Interagency Task Force at the WHO, have their own International Day on October 11, and have turned into the development objective of countless organizations, donors and governmental bodies around the world (Koffman and Gill 2013).

The role of Girls Not Brides

Eventually, and given the availability of funding, the development machine was able to diversify their efforts and address multiple issues hindering girls’ wellbeing. International attention to the issue of child marriage is a direct response to this specialization of development thought and practice. In particular, child marriage gained an international name when The Elders created the first global network to end child marriage in 2010, to bring together those organizations and institutions working on the issue. This group of independent global actors and leaders created by Nelson Mandela aims to promote peace and address issues of human suffering (The Elders n.d.a), and thus decided to take up child marriage as they “sought to address gender inequality and tackle the effect of religion and tradition in justifying gender discrimination”(Hodgkinson 2016:8). This network is known as Girls Not Brides, and it is increasingly being recognized as a knowledge hub and a main advocate against child marriage (The Elders n.d.b). Since then, they played a fundamental role in establishing GNB among the international development community.

Today, GNB includes 631 members working in over 86 countries to end child marriage. Some of these members are national and international NGOs, youth led or grassroots organizations and members of civil society. Their affiliates include some of the largest and most active institutions working on child marriage or children and women related issues, such as International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), Plan International and Save the Children. All members of the partnership are working on issues related to education, poverty, girls’ safety, health and human rights and justice (Girls Not Brides n.d.a). The incoming resources of the partnership are also growing at a rapid pace, much like their members, reinforcing their growth in legitimacy and influence in organizing international action against child marriage. For example, while in 2013 the organizations incoming resources amounted to 339,183 British pounds, half of which came from transfers from The Elders; in 2014 their annual incoming resources had quadrupled to 1,485,146 British pounds consisting solely of donations and grants (Girls Not Brides 2015a:26).

Their impact also cuts across hierarchical structures, as they work with a vast number of organizations at the grassroots, national and international levels, working directly with communities or at the highest levels of international policy making. Such connectivity makes GNB particularly successful at spreading their message and achieving their objective to end child marriage. For example, besides informing the strategy, activities and messaging for all members of the global partnership, in 2013 the network managed to pass the first ever Human Rights Council resolution aimed at “strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage” (UNHRC 2013). Since then, the UN General Assembly in 2014 and the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 have passed two respective resolutions recognizing child marriage as a human rights violation and an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Girls Not Brides 2015b). A big part of the recognition and influence of GNB in the subject of child marriage comes from the knowledge they produce on the subject, through a combination of reports, articles, videos, and various platforms for knowledge sharing between development practitioners, such as conferences and events. Through active campaigns, conferences, a respected international image and a constant presence in policy-making, GNB has successfully established itself as an expert in fighting child marriage, influencing not only how the international community understands child marriage, but also organizing how and why it gets addressed by the development machine.

A closer look into the ‘dominant child marriage discourse’

In international development circles, the main concern with child marriage is that in developing countries girls marry under the legal age of majority, before they are physically and emotionally ready for the adult-commitment of marriage, thus prematurely ending their childhood (Warner 2004; UNFPA 2012). In light of these age-based, legal interpretations of ‘child’ the dominant discourse claims “child marriage is a human rights abuse” (UNFPA 2012:4) that is forced on girls (Levine et al. 2008:49), as it has been established in numerous international conventions like the CRC. Based on this understanding researchers quantitatively define the magnitude of the problem through statistics that illustrate the seriousness they see in this trend. Such that according to UNICEF (2014) over 700 million women were married before the age of 18. This means that at current rates, 14 million girls a year, or 39,000 girls a day, will marry before they turn 18, and almost half of these girls before the age of 15 (UNFPA 2012). Even though the data suggests child marriage rates are slowly declining, statistical analysis predicts that at current rates “the total number of women married in childhood will grow [...] to approximately 950 million by 2030, and nearly 1.2 billion by 2050” (UNICEF 2014: 6).

Such numbers also vary tremendously per region of the world, pointing at *where* the international community finds child marriage is a problem. According to the statistics, the prevalence is highest among rural and poor communities in developing countries. Above all, South Asia and West and Central Africa have the highest indices of child marriage, with 56 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, and thus are the regions where most scholarship on child marriage comes from (UNICEF 2014). The dominant discourse also finds child marriage prevails in Eastern and Southern Africa (38 per cent), the Middle East

and North Africa (24 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (30 per cent), East Asia and the Pacific (21 per cent) (UNICEF 2014). However, despite being generally acknowledged in some literature, very little is said or researched about indices of child marriage in Western contexts (Lemmon and ElHarake 2014; Warner 2004). Together, these gross numbers effectively present child marriage as a big development concern affecting very specific regions of the world.

Dominant understandings on the cause of child marriage

Since the ‘girling’ of development, academics and practitioners in this field have extensively theorized and researched the causes and consequences of child marriage. The majority of this extensive body of literature points at the “interplay of social norms, economics, structures and familial motivations” as the leading causes to this practice (Hodgkinson 2016:18). For the most part, the literature suggests gender inequality and girls’ lower social hierarchy are one of the main reasons for child marriage. These systems in turn perpetuate patriarchal structures where men hold most of the decision-making power while women are passive and docile. They also lower the social value of investing in girls and their education, which in turn perpetuate perceptions of girls as economic burdens for their families (Hodgkinson 2016). This perception is exacerbated when gender norms strongly define femininity in terms of women’s reproductive role and care giving duties. Consequently, younger brides are preferred as they can contribute to their husband’s household for a longer time (Vogelstein 2013). Additionally, in contexts where religious norms place family honour in girls’ bodies and shame pre-marital relationships and intercourse, it is said child marriage is promoted as a way to protect girls’ “dangerous sexuality” (Gaffney-Rhys 2011).

Other texts attribute child marriage to poverty and the added financial burdens children incur on families of low socioeconomic status (Levine et al 2008:47; Vogelstein 2013). As a result, families may view child marriage as a strategy for economic survival, by relocating that cost to girls’ husbands (Gaffney-Rhys 2011:360). In other circumstances, the literature also explains child marriage is a “bartered transaction” (Warner 2004:239) in the form of a negotiation of a bride price from the spouses’ family to the girl’s family, or a dowry from the girl’s family to that of her future husband’s. The price is usually correlated to age, where the younger the girl the higher the bride price or the lower the dowry (Jensen and Thornton 2003:18). Consequently, the monetary exchange and the costs incurred in this transaction become a strong economic incentive that perpetuates child marriage, particularly in situations of economic vulnerability. More recently, the literature is starting to explore the links between child marriage and humanitarian crises. A report by World Vision (2013:7) found that vulnerability to child marriage is exacerbated when girls are under the care of extended family due to situations like orphanhood, or when there are other shocks to the household including environmental disasters, migration and conflict. In these contexts, “existing social networks and protection mechanisms are disrupted”, which leaves girls more vulnerable to being married off early. Above all, the literature echoes how these concerns for safety, poverty and gender inequality come together to create social environments that offer limited opportunities for girls, particularly in terms of education and workforce participation (Hodgkinson 2016). It is interesting to note, however,

how throughout most of the literature, the family is seen as the focal site where many of these factors come together and perpetuate child marriage, rather than problematizing other institutions like the market or the state.

Another factor found to contribute to the prevalence of child marriage relates to poor law enforcement and legal systems, lack of information and limited legal services that undermine girls' protection and make the practice go unpunished (Gaffney-Rhys 2011; Jensen and Thornton 2003:10). For example, while the international community has fought long and hard to make the minimum age for consent to marriage 18 in 88 per cent of countries around the world – as illustrated in Figure 1 below – (WORLD Policy Analysis Center 2015:1), most countries still count with a number of legal loopholes, like making exceptions when there is parental consent or under customary laws, that continue to allow early marriages in numerous circumstances (Vogelstein 2013). The maps underneath illustrate such discrepancies, between countries' minimum legal age of marriage and the provisions that make exceptions to this rule possible (WORLD Policy Analysis Center n.d.).

Figure 1 - Map of Minimum Legal Age of Marriage

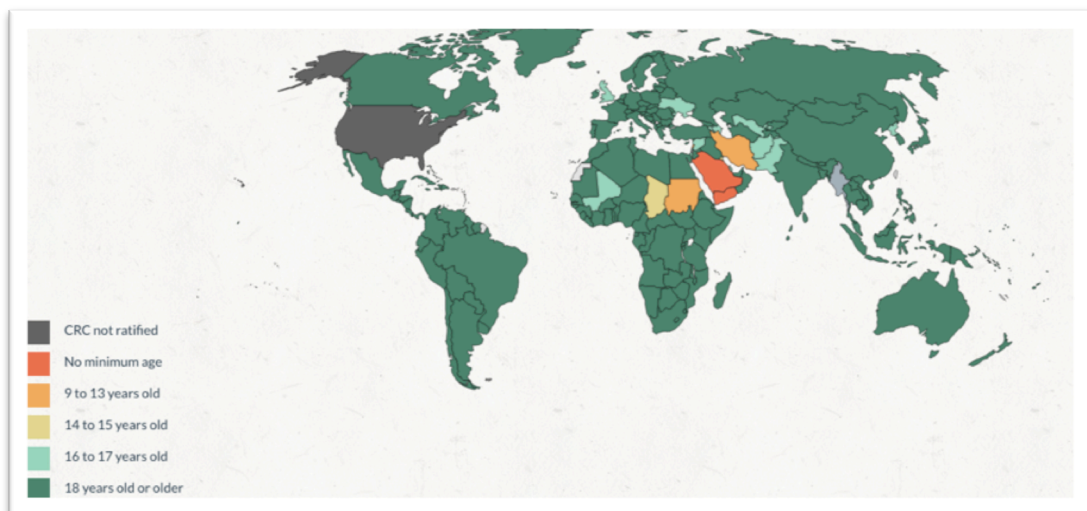
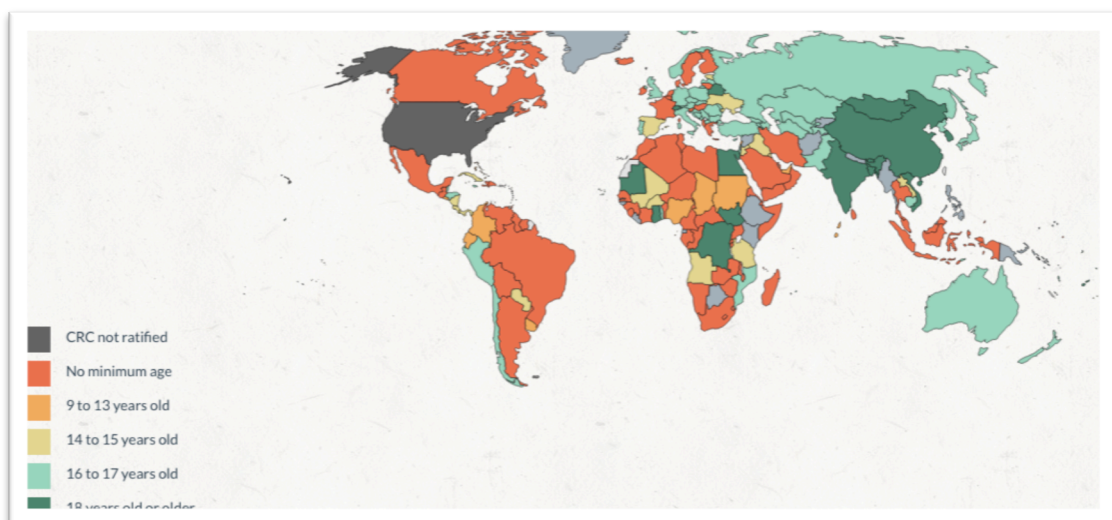


Figure 2 - Map of Minimum Legal Age of Marriage When All Exceptions Are Considered



Dominant understandings on the consequences of child marriage

Regarding the consequences of child marriage, girls' poor educational attainments are among the ones that mostly concern the international community. According to Jensen and Thornton (2003:11), child marriage leads to high rates of school dropout because girls need "to devote their time to the care of their new home or to childbearing". Consequently, this increases girls' indices of illiteracy and stops them from learning skills that could lead to income-generating activities, which in turn has economic repercussions in the long run (Svanemyr et al. 2012). For example, UNFPA (2012) suggests poor educational attainments perpetuate girls and women's low participation in the paid economy, while reinforcing gender stereotypes and increasing girls' financial dependency on their husbands. The literature also claims that interrupting girl's education has consequences that extend far beyond the individual, including curtailing girls' potential for upward mobility, as well as their chances to overcome poverty for themselves and their children (Lee-Ride et al. 2012; Gaffney-Rhys 2011). Ultimately, this is said to slow down countries' economic growth and challenge global development objectives (Giving What We Can 2014).

The literature also highlights physical, sexual and psychological violence as among the direst consequences of this practice. In particular, Lee-Rife et al. echo grave concern for how child marriage leads to the sudden end of childhood, as girls "take on adult roles and responsibilities before they are developmentally ready" (2012:228), which stunts their psychological development. Additionally, girls are perceived to be at more risk of violence and exploitation because of their dependence on their husbands and the power imbalances this creates within marriage (UNFPA 2012; Vogelstein 2013). Moreover, it is believed that usual age differences between spouses difficulties girls' ability to assert themselves in the household, and gives them "less power, status, agency and autonomy" (Jensen and Thornton 2003:10) to make decisions and state their opinions. Separation from their families and communities is also a commonly cited consequence, particularly where it is customary for brides to move into their spouses' families, for weakening girls' social circles and increasing their vulnerability (Svanemyr et al. 2012).

Lastly, the effects of child marriage on girls' health outcomes are another reason why the international community sees this practice as a serious development problem. These concerns are always related to motherhood and childbearing. Of particular concern is girls' early sexual activity and pregnancy that are linked to maternal mortality and infant mortality, and the likelihood of experiencing complications during labour (Mikhail 2002). According to a report by UNFPA (2012:4) childbirth is the leading cause for deaths of girls age 15-19 in developing countries. Early sexual intercourse is also said to increase girls' risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), given the literature claims that while most girls marrying early are virgins this is often not the case for their older husbands (Gaffney-Rhys 2011). Overall, the various consequences child marriage leads to both at the individual and the national level are used as compelling arguments to justify the need to end this practice.

Critical perspectives on child marriage

While the majority of child marriage literature echoes many of the points highlighted in the previous section, a few range of studies take a more critical perspective on what the problems and challenges with child marriage really are. Of these, Bunting's (2005:17) work has been particularly influential in inspiring the perspective I take in this paper. In her article, she challenges the utility of a human rights framework to both define and address child marriage in an effective manner, arguing "a uniform marriageable age and a narrow rights-based analysis misses the complexity of both marriage *and* age". Instead, she stresses on the need to pay more attention to the socio-economic contexts of where child marriage takes place, and thus to develop international strategies that are culturally relevant. In her work, she also explores the cultural constructions of age and the particularity of place in conditioning how and why child marriage is practiced. Similarly, Archambault (2011:632) questions the rescue fantasy of the international community towards child brides among the Massai in Kenya. Through an ethnographic study, she contests common binaries between "tradition" and "modernity" or "victims" and "perpetrators" and how these dichotomies "obscure important structural factors that give rise to early marriage", resulting in ineffective policies and initiatives. In her study, she also redefines child marriage to mean a coping mechanism for pastoralist communities at a time of population growth, climate change and land reforms. Together, these studies triggered my curiosity to further explore the limits of how dominant representations of child marriage inform this problem. Even though not explicitly related to child marriage, other feminist academics, as well as scholars from the new sociology of childhood have taken similar approaches as Bunting and Archambault in relation to a vast diversity of topics, including Female Genital Modification (FGM) and youth agency and vulnerability, which I have also drawn from to build my critique of GNB's discourse. These alternative understandings are explored further in the following section as part as my theoretical framework.

Not criticizing child marriage as such, but questioning the girl power movement that has strongly influenced international concerns for child marriage, Koffman and Gill (2014; 2013) and Switzer's work (2013) have also been extremely influential. Their studies specifically focus on how the Girl Effect has targeted investment on girls in the global south as the key to promote economic development. In particular, the authors explore the way in which the Girl Effect discourse articulates gender, age, empowerment and development imaginaries in a manner that perpetuates relations of power between the Global South and North, and help promote neoliberal capitalist agendas. Despite being limited in quantity and not always speaking directly to child marriage, such critical literature has encouraged me to similarly question representations, problematizations and agendas currently being pushed by GNB in the global fight against child marriage. More importantly and in light of the claims of the dominant discourse, such alternative approaches make me question, is child marriage *really* the problem, or is it just a symptom to bigger social justice concerns? Guided by their approaches, I intent to explore the gaps of a prominent – yet absolutist-sounding discourse – that has absorbed much of development aid and resources. In light of such limited critical literature on child marriage, my research aims to contribute to such body of work, turning attention to the

importance of representations and their role in portraying practices from the Global South as sites for development intervention.

Chapter 3

Child Marriage through a Feminist, Post-Colonial and Post- Structuralist Lens

To deconstruct the embedded meanings of child marriage in the GNB global partnership, and more broadly in development today, I use a Feminist, Post-structuralist and Post-colonial lens. In this chapter, I thus draw from theories of on post-development, post-colonial feminism and the new sociology of childhood to conceptualize alternative notions of age, gender, sexuality, race, agency and vulnerability relevant to this research. These notions will be explored further in my analysis vis-à-vis GNB's discourse.

Post-Development theory

To begin with, when studying understandings of child marriage we “cannot afford to neglect attention to how the identities and the social practices that we explore are coloured by long-established ways of conceiving of them” (Lewis 2011:205). Therefore, because this research is partly concerned with how child marriage is constructed as a problem to address according to Western benchmarks, I draw from post-development thinking. This theory helps me unpack how development issues are ‘problematized’ and thus created as phenomena to be corrected by technical expertise; or as McKinnon (2011:3) puts it, how they become the “geopolitical agenda of the day” in mainstream development practice. According to Escobar (1995), patriarchy and ethnocentrism play an influential role in structuring said problematizations, by silencing the voices of actors in the developing world in defining their own reality. As a result, the West becomes the benchmark for which to measure the ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ of the Third World. In other words, Escobar argues that the ways we have come to think and understand the developing world are the result of a the “colonization of reality”, whereby “certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon” (1995:5). In turn, this colonization reduces subjectivity through the imposition of modern categories imposed by dominant frameworks, through a series of monocultural assumptions that are not relevant to many contexts (de Sousa Santos 2014). He thus invites development practitioners to decolonize our assumptions about the developing world and question the productive capacity of development discourse.

When it comes to child marriage, a similar pattern of representation can be observed in policy and in the literature. A clear example is how child marriage is discursively framed as part of Third World ‘tradition’, and thus remote to Western contexts despite it being practice in countries such as the US and the UK (Warner 2004; Gangoli and McCarry 2009). More interestingly, child marriage is not problematized equally in all regions of the Global South. Development attention is heavily concentrated in ‘hot spot’ regions, where most of the literature and research about child marriage comes from and there is the heaviest amount of development intervention (UNICEF 2014). Conversely, child marriage in Latin America has only recently begun to be re-

searched and problematized in relation to the issue of early motherhood, despite counting with some of highest rates of child marriage in gross numbers in the world (Taylor et al. 2015). Despite the clear imbalance, it is such geographically concentrated research that continues to inform agencies and countries about the ‘global problem’ [read: only in developing countries] of child marriage. This avid contrast speak to post-development’s criticisms about how dominant ways of thinking are institutionalized, and create singular ways of thinking that erase diversities like the contexts where child marriage is deemed a problem by the international community.

Post-Colonial Feminism

Understandings of child marriage as a Third-World-only problem are also closely associated with how women and girls in developing countries are discursively constructed as monolithic subjects in scholarship, policy and development practice. Historically, it is true that simplifying ‘gender’ and ‘women’ has helped forward these issues in the development agenda and draw international attention to the matter. However, these discourses rely on the homogenization of the ‘Other’ – like ‘child brides’ – to achieve their goal. This is where a post-colonial feminist lens helps me unpack dominant representations of child marriage, since this theory is generally concerned with how western discourse represents the experiences of Third World women and girls in these contexts through the appropriation of “knowledge” (Mohanty 1988). As a result, categories such as ‘girl child’ are constructed as coherent groups with common interests and a shared oppression, which is apolitical, ahistorical and decontextualized in a way that dismisses the power structures behind such categorization. In turn, this leads to the invisibility of other aspects and realities about child marriage, such as representations of men and boys as also victims, causes or solutions to this practice. In a recent paper, Greene et al (2015:2) address the nominal attention boys receive in child marriage discussions, showing the numerous ways boys “face decreased livelihood opportunities” because of this practice, and addressing how notions of masculinity often contribute to this practice by socializing men as dominant, rational and assertive decision makers. Nonetheless, important gaps still persist particularly about the husbands in child marriage.

One of the fundamental international concerns with child marriage is closely linked to sexuality, or rather with emphasis on the violation of childhood innocence. This concern is related to prevalent associations between child marriage and early motherhood, sexual violence and exploitation, which consequently erase girls’ sexual subjectivity. In turn, such representations are perpetuated and normalized through the hegemony of discourse, images and symbols (Foucault 1990), and become fundamental to construct child marriage as a site for development intervention. Rubin’s (1984) “sexual hierarchy” helps illustrate how and why the international community sees child marriage as unlawful. Her sex hierarchy refers to the spectrum of sexual behaviours and practices, which range from “normal” and “acceptable” – including Western concepts like reproductive sex, heteronormativity and marital sexual relationships – versus “evil” and “unnatural” sexual practices, like marriage before the age of 18. In other words, child marriage deviates and is pitted against Western understandings of what a “normal” and “good” sexuality entails that has to be

corrected through development interventions. Drawing from post-colonial thinking, Lewis illustrates how Western understandings of a natural sexuality have been used as a benchmark to sensationalize African – and other non-Western – sexualities and women’s bodies since colonial times, overemphasizing women’s “high-risk behaviour and sexual aggression”. Based on these forms of understandings about practices, sexualities and bodies from the Global South, the international community justifies the policing and intervention regarding girls’ sexuality. For example, in child marriage literature and practice there is a tendency to describe girls’ sexuality as “exploited”, “violated” and “dangerous”, overemphasizing the negative consequences it may bring. While it is undeniable that child marriage can be exploitative and violent in numerous ways, Murphy-Graham and Leal engage with the idea that child marriage can also allow girls to explore their sexual subjectivity, even if that means “swimming in the river and wearing short skirts”, in a social context where children’s sexual rights are severely regulated (Murphy-Graham and Leal 2015:26).

The New Sociology of Childhood Studies

Moreover, sexuality is particularly contested and problematized when it comes to children and young people, since dominant notions of childhood see sexuality as “polluting innocence”, and therefore as an “accomplishments of maturity and the preserve of the adult world” (Bhana 2008:77). Through this rhetoric that perpetually defines children as non-sexual, vulnerable and without competence to deal with sexual matters (Waites 2005:19), child marriage is understood as a bodily deviant practice with the need for interventions that help protect girls’ sexual integrity. Even in more contemporary approaches to development, such as in the recent shift towards a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) that promote principles of child participation, agency and empowerment, children continue to be represented as passive, desexualized and vulnerable beings (Bhana 2008:77). Matthew Waites extensively explores this contradiction in *The Age of Consent* (2005), where he highlights how despite there being a vast appreciation for promoting children’s participation in policy literature, children are still viewed as lacking the moral agency to make any major decision about their lives. This tension is exacerbated when it comes to children making decisions to engage in sexual matters. However, more contextual studies, such as Faiz Rashid’s (2008) research about married adolescent women in urban Bangladesh, show how girls navigate their sexual agency, through a web of gender norms, class expectations, cultural understandings about sexuality and age, and other structural factors outside their control. Rashid’s findings demonstrate how, in a context where women gain status through marriage and motherhood, married girls redefined their sexual rights and agency to mean “something to forfeit in exchange for tenuous rights to security; they mean a short-lived power - mediated by men - over other equally poor but older women” (2008:158). In the face of this contradiction between mainstream ideas of youth sexuality and the contextual working of girls’ identities, Waites rightfully asks the question “what, then, are the conditions in which children should be entitled to participate in decision-making, and give their ‘consent’ in activities affecting them?” (2005:19). A quick look into the dominant child marriage discourse makes it clear that while most international

development organizations acknowledge children have the capacity to participate and make decisions about certain things like their educational experience, they continue to refute the idea that youth possess the sexual agency and maturity to consent to marriage and thus justify the need to control girls' sexual bodies through interventions to end child marriage.

Furthermore, scholarship and policy about child marriage not only adopt problematic conceptualizations of race, gender, sexuality and agency across cultures, time and space, but also "obfuscates the diversity of childhoods" and "miss[es] the complexity of both marriage and age", by assuming a universal category of the child (Bunting 2005:18). However, scholars coming from the new sociology of childhood have extensively criticized "age-based definitions of life stages" that differentiate childhood and adolescence from adulthood for imposing an imagined "global model of childhood and youth" (Ansell 2005:79;23). This imaginary originated in the West, and was then exported to Africa, Latin America, Asia and the rest of the developing world through colonialism, migration and through the development interventions of NGOs and other international organizations. With them, they brought in views of children as vulnerable, in need of care and the protection of the modern West that reinforce the role of Western countries as defenders of children's rights in the developing world (Bunting 2005:21). In turn, these ideas influenced theoretical models about childhood that begin "outside of or uninformed by the social context within which the child resides" (Ansell 2005:13, citing James et al. 1998:10). This notion sees childhood as universal, natural stage, marked by children's innocence, lack of agency, vulnerability and need from protection (Ansell 2005:13).

Nonetheless, once again a monocultural framework fails to describe the experiences of many children and youth around the world. Ansell explains how "while Western culture views children as individuals, moving towards autonomy, many cultures construct children as fundamentally part of a family, lineage or clan" (2005:65). While in Western contexts, transitions to adulthood are seen as a linear process through which people enter the workforce, leave their parents' home and form a new family; around the world youth transitions happen in a multiplicity of way that cannot be captured by such monolithic representations. Ansell gives the example of how in many instances marriage is seen as the milestone that symbolizes adulthood; while in other contexts this milestone could be sexual maturity such as among the Hausa from northern Nigeria, or even motherhood and childbearing (Ansell 2005:80). However, despite the plurality of meanings and ways to define childhood, in development circles the tendency to measure children's wellbeing and their experiences against an imagined "normal childhood" of Western origins still persists. This tendency is, then projected onto policies, practices and campaigns like GNB, that problematize and try to address practices from the Global South such as child marriage.

In sum, post-development thinking, post-colonial feminism and the new sociology of childhood share the dismissal of normative categories and monolithic representations, which seem to be pervasive throughout many debates in development thought and practice, including child marriage literature. The way these theories explore concepts and issues related to child marriage, such as youth sexuality and the definition of childhood, allow me to question many of taken-for-granted truths in child marriage discourse. I will take their theoretical insights further into my analysis of GNB's discourse, and ultimately unpack the

gaps between what about child marriage is problematized, what assumptions condition this representations and the effects this generates in development thought and practice.

Chapter 4

“What Is The Problem Represented To Be?”

Having addressed the research problem and theoretical approaches that inform this paper, I will now present how I aim to answer the questions posed in this research and explore the representation of the problem of child marriage, the assumptions behind it and its effects.

Texts, secondary data and sample selection

In order to unpack the GNB discourse, I draw from a diversity of secondary data published by GNB on their website. For this study, I selected seven texts to carry out an in-depth discursive analysis, out of 27 documents published by GNB since 2013. These are, GNB Theory of Change (2014a), GNBs 2014 Annual Report (2015a), #MyLifeAt15 Campaign Engagement Toolkit (2015c), a policy paper titled “Ending child marriage by 2030” (2016) and three infographics: “Child marriage: a global problem too long ignored” (2013), “Child marriage, a violation of human rights (2014) and “Child marriage in humanitarian crises” (2016)¹. All of the documents in this study are published by GNB as the author, with the exception of the policy paper that is published by Girls Not Brides UK, the national chapter of the network. In this case, the author of this text is separately identified as Robert Henderson, an advocacy officer at World Vision UK, with whom GNB co-published this paper. Being aware of the authors of these texts is important to know whom these documents speak for, on whose behalf, and therefore what conclusions can be drawn about the postures of the organizations that produce them (Lakoff 2001). In this case, it is possible to say the findings in this research speak directly to the postures and beliefs of GNB as an organization in all the texts in this study. The fact one of the documents was published in partnership with other organizations is also telling, as it suggests there is a certain amount of agreement in the portrayal of the issue between these institutions.

Out of all the texts, 5 are reports and publications, including articles, reports, policy brief and factsheets that address both the scope of the problem, its causes and consequences, as well as progress achieved in ending child marriage and interventions to address it. From the remaining, #MyLifeAt15 is a campaign document from a social media inspired global initiative to involve policy makers and the general public; while the Annual Report is the first ever published review of the networks’ achievements and work in 2014. The oldest text included in this study was published in 2013 because GNB has no prior publications from this date. When selecting the texts, I decided to include a diversity of documents, to map out the discourse across different platforms for knowledge making and knowledge sharing used by the network. This also allows me to check for consistency in use of the discourse throughout the different texts. Moreover, the range of documents analysed in my research speak to

¹ An overview of the texts follows later in this section

different audiences of the development machine within the network's reaches, ranging from policy makers to civil society organizations and the general public. The texts in this research also vary in length and theme, some addressing particular aspects on child marriage, like human rights law or child marriage in situations of conflict and humanitarian intervention, to more technical aspects such as the organizations theory of change or annual report.

Critical discourse analysis and the WPR approach

When knowledge about development problems like child marriage is produced, this knowledge is not neutral or created in a vacuum. Rather, knowledge is situated (Haraway 1988) as it comes from a particular place in time and space, and thus reflects specific interest and ways of conceiving the world. The knowledge I am creating in this paper comes from the perspective of a young Masters' student, originally from the Global South, studying issues of gender and youth from a critical perspective in the West. My perspective is also informed by past work experience on child marriage, from personal encounters with young people that married before they turned 18 and from participation in various conferences and events around the topic. This is also the case with GNB, as their own position and views come from specific places that condition the knowledge they create about child marriage. This research aims to unpack this knowledge and explore the productive capacity of GNB's discourse. This is because discursive practices have profound effects in helping produce and reproduce relations of power through the ways they represent and position people (Wodak and Meyer 2009:6, citing Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:258). Therefore, it sounds suitable to use discourse analysis as the methodological approach to carry out this research. More specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is particularly useful to unpack the nuances about what is said about child marriage in development practice and how that is framed. CDA is defined by Wodak and Meyer as being "fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (2009:10). Consequently, this method can help me expose the social relations of power implicit within the discourse and its social effect in shaping how we understand child marriage.

In particular, motivated by Bacchi's concern for the "non-innocence of how 'problems' get framed within policy proposals, how the frames will affect what can be thought about and how this affects possibilities for action" (2010:50), I will use the "What is the problem represented to be" (hereafter WPR) approach to carry out this analysis. The method was developed by Bacchi (2009), adapted by Goodwin (2013), and consists of six questions to "probe the conceptual underpinnings of problem representations" (Goodwin 2013:171) by uncovering normative frameworks and assumptions behind conceptualizations of "truths". In other words, WPR allows me to tease out how child marriage is created as a problem of intervention for development practitioners, what subjects and objects are produced from this representation of the problem, where are the silences in the discourse and ultimately what are the effects of such representations. Because the focus of WPR is not "problems" per se, but rather problematizations (Goodwin 2013:170), I therefore find it an adequate tool to unpack the questions posed in my investigation, concerned

with how child marriage is problematized, understood and addressed by the international development community. A summary of the WPR approach can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1 - Overview of the WPR method for analysis

Question	Goal	Strategies
1. What's the problem represented to be?	To identify the implied problem representation.	Identification of the problem as it is expressed in the policy.
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underline this representation of the problem?	To ascertain the conceptual premises or logics that underpin specific problem representations.	Foucauldian archaeology involving discourse analysis techniques, such as identifying binaries, key concepts and key categories.
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem, representation to take shape and assume dominance.	Foucauldian genealogical analysis involving tracing the 'history' of a current problem representation to identify the power relations involved in the prevailing problem representations.
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	To raise for reflection and consideration issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations.	Genealogical analysis, and cross-cultural, historical and cross-national comparisons in order to provide examples of alternative representations.
5. What effects are conducted by this representation of the problem?	To ascertain discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects.	Discourse analysis techniques including identification of subject position, dividing practices where subjects are produced in opposition to one another and the production of subjects regarded as 'responsible' for problems. Impact analysis: consideration of the material impact of problem representations on people's lives.
6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defend-	To pay attention to both the means through which some problem representations become	Identification of institutions, individuals and agencies involved in sustaining the problem rep-

ed? How could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?	dominant, and to the possibility of challenging problem representations that are judged to be harmful.	resentation. Mobilizing competing discourses or reframing the ‘problem’.
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Source: Goodwin (2013:173), citing Bacchi (2009)

From Bacchi’s approach, I only take questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 to inform my answers and analysis, based on the research focus and scope of this investigation. To answer Bacchi’s first question about what is the problem represented to be – and also to begin to understand some of the assumptions guiding this representation – I deconstructed the selected texts, paying particular attention to language, specifically the qualifiers and adjectives used to describe child marriage (Yanow 1999). I also focused on their connotation, frequency of use and ultimately the tone they created around the topic. For example, I noted whether the diction that explained child marriage was mostly positive or negative, and thus whether child marriage was casted in positive or negative light. I also noted what the most pressing aspects around this topic were framed to be, as well as those practices associated with child marriage that systematically re-occurred throughout the texts analysed (Gasper 2004). These techniques helped me answer the first sub-question of my investigation, concerning the claims of truth the GNB discourse makes about child marriage. Bacchi’s second question, about the presumptions that underlie the representation of the problem, spoke to the second guiding question of my research about the assumptions underpinning how child marriage is constructed as a problem of intervention. Besides looking at the stated language and its effect, I also looked at the indirect and unstated connotation of the terms used, and in turn how these were used to construct the subject of child marriage and the actors within it. Moreover, I noted what larger frames were mobilized, such as human rights, and tried to unpack the meanings of using such frameworks in seemingly neutral ways (Gasper 2004). To answer this question, I focused on the audience of certain texts or initiatives as well, namely the #MyLifeAt15 campaign. Moreover, I paid attention to how notions of gender, race or the global North/South divide, age, sexuality, vulnerability and agency overlapped in the child marriage discourse and structured the patterns of assumptions that underpinned it.

In relation to the third question of this investigation, concerning the consequences generated by this representation, the fifth question posed by Bacchi allows me to unpack these effects. To do so, I looked at the “development language” terms and broader frameworks used in the texts, such as ‘human rights’ or ‘change’, and how these notions were used to explain or construct child marriage as an intervention project for the development machine (Stillar 1998). Particularly, as I conducted my research I paid attention to the implicit agendas pushed this discourse, such as the agenda of modernity, and other effects of this representation. In turn, this informed how the discourse related child marriage with broader development objectives and the kinds of material effects this generated to address it. I also tried to identify how the main actors in the child marriage discourse were created in the problematization of practice, to deepen my deconstruction. Moreover, looking at what was invisibilized in the representation shed light on the gaps in the discourse and the consequences such silences generated (Gasper 2004). That which was left unproblematized was also part of my critique of how the dominant child mar-

riage discourse often misses the problem. Once I conducted the analysis of each text², I then moved to identifying overarching overlaps and contradictions, and observing the most recurring patterns of representation. In sum, drawing from part of Bacchi's framework of analysis, allows me to explore the questions I pose in this research and critically unpack not only what are the assumptions that underpin the discourse of child marriage, but the knowledge created about this practice and its effects.

Overview of texts analysed

A Theory Of Change On Child Marriage –2014

This text is the backbone to network's mission, and aims to consolidate the efforts, interventions and activities of all members of the GNB partnership, governments and policy makers under an overarching approach to end child marriage. This is why this document was included in my analysis. In 11 pages, GNB's theory of change outlines the problem GNB identified with child marriage, namely how it "denies girls their rights, choice and participation and undermines development priorities, hindering progress towards a more equal, healthy and prosperous world" (Girls Not Brides 2014:1). From this problem, they then develop four main strategies to catalyse change at the community, national, international level through collective work and the availability of resources. Their strategies include empowering girls, mobilizing change in attitudes at the family and community level, providing services like education, health and economic opportunities for girls, and strengthening laws and policies that prohibit child marriage. Ultimately, they believe these strategies will allow girls to choose whom and when to marry, and lead healthy, fulfilling lives in the pursuit of their dreams. According to GNB this is the theory of change that can create a world free of child marriage where girls and boys have equal social status and can achieve their full potential. In other words this document "articulates what an effective response to child marriage entails" (Girls Not Brides 2014:4), and thus stands at the core of the network's work defining the objective of all 600-plus members of GNB. Therefore, it has a high impact for action, as it strongly dictates how and why child marriage is constructed as a problem worthy of international intervention.

#MyLifeAt15: #EndChildMarriage Campaign Engagement Toolkit –2015

This document summarizes the only social-media inspired campaign launched by GNB. It aims to encourage governments and policy makers to make child marriage an explicit issue on the post-2015 agenda, and thus consolidate efforts to end child marriage by 2030. This campaign is a good example of how the principles of the dominant child marriage discourse are adapted into global campaigns, which aim to create a personal emotional connection between those working to end child marriage and the victims of this practice. Because it engages the general public through accessible platforms like Facebook and Twitter, this 16 page long text is influential to assess how the campaign may

² See Annex I for the full Analysis table

influence public opinion on the issue through its representation, which is why I included it as a relevant text for my investigation.

Ending Child Marriage by 2030, Tracking Progress and Identifying Gaps - 2016

This document aims to trace the progress made so far by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to end child marriage since the Girl Summit in 2014. In 12 pages, it summarizes why child marriage is a concern for Western countries like the UK, and names the steps needed to scale up efforts against this practice. It is important to analyse this paper to understand how the discourse of child marriage and its main arguments are translated into policy recommendations to guide action and direct the flow of international resources, which is why it is part of my analysis. The policy paper was written by Robert Henderon from World Vision UK, and was published by this organization with GNB UK, Plan UK and the Royal Commonwealth Society.

Annual Report 2014 –2015

This document is the first annual report from the organization detailing some of their main achievements since GNB was created in 2011. The document summarizes the network's collaboration with other international stakeholders, their mission, the objectives GNB has been working towards and some successful interventions to end child marriage. To some extent, this text justifies the existence of GNB and why they think child marriage is a development problem that needs to be combated in a collaborative manner at the international level. Therefore, it helps reinforce GNB place as the leader of the fight against child marriage and their role as knowledge brokers on the issue. Besides, it was included in this study because it is the only glimpse into the past work of the organization before 2013. The document is 30 pages long.

Infographic: Child Marriage, A Global Problem Too Long Ignored –2013

This infographic reviews the main problem with child marriage and what this practice means for girls in developing countries according to GNB. In other words, this document is a clear illustration of why GNB sees child marriage as a problem worth addressing, particularly in relation to poverty, education, inequality, health, HIV/AIDS and violence, and what are the consequences typically associated with it. Like the rest of the infographics (see below), these documents are only one page long in factsheet format, and it was included because it summarizes a particular aspect of child marriage intended for the general public, yet with a low level of impact for influencing policy or interventions.

Infographic: Child Marriage, a Violation of Human Rights – 2014

This document summarizes the reasons why child marriage constitutes a violation of girls' right to health, decision-making, a life free of violence and education. The text also lists the main international treaties and conventions the practice contravenes, and illustrates the role of various actors in ending child marriage. This document is a good representation of what GNB prioritizes in a

HRBA when discussing child marriage, which is why it was included as part of my analysis.

Infographic: Child Marriage In Humanitarian Crises – 2016

The infographic illustrates the connection between child marriage and conflict, displacement and natural disasters, what causes may spur this link and how decisions taken by families in fragile situations may perpetuate the prevalence of this practice. The document briefly lists some of the main measures to ensure girls' protection during these contexts and prevent child marriage. Because it is a topic that does not come up in any other documents in this study, I included this document to verify if in this case the discourse was still consistent with the other texts.

Limitations of my study

Because the latest publication from GNB is from 2013, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about how the discourse has changed since the organization was created in 2011. This constrain thus limits the depth and amount of comparisons that can be made. In years to come, it would be interesting to add to this study with more available material to gain further insights on how GNB adapts their discourse through time. Another limitation of my study is my focus on girls. I do so because of the length constraints of this paper, as well as because most of the GNB discourse explicitly focuses on girls. However, I make this choice aware not only that boys can also be affected by and vulnerable to child marriage (Parsons et al. 2015:12, UNICEF 2014b), but also that in the GNB discourse there is an implicit, unstated representation of men and boys. This silenced representation is also very particular, where husbands are often casted as the perpetrators of violence towards girls. This invisibility confines to the institution of marriage and thus neglects how girls can experience physical and sexual violence within the family or in schools. This representation should be included in further research on the subject. Moreover, many of the documents analysed in this study include graphics and pictures of girls from around the world. I am aware how these images are also part of the representation of this practice, however due to my methodological approach and the constraints of this paper I chose not to include these in my analysis. It is also important to note that GNB also uses an extensive amount of videos to create knowledge about child marriage. Unfortunately, for the same reasons as with pictures I chose to focus on texts. In future investigations, videos should be considered to carry out a deeper and more representative study of the discourse.

Chapter 5

The Problem With Child Marriage Is Neither *Child* Nor *Marriage*

In this chapter, I will try to answer my research question *in what ways do dominant representations of child marriage structure how the international community understands, problematizes and addresses this practice?* In the first subsection, I present a systematic overview of what the problem with child marriage is represented to be in GNB's discourse. In the rest of the sections I unpack the assumptions that underpin representations of child marriage and its effects, in relation to three of the main trends found in the discourse.

Girls Not Brides' representation of the problem

One of the recurring patterns of representation in the texts analysed in this study is the use of a Human Rights framework to define and condemn child marriage. Drawing from this framework, one of GNB's main problems with the practice voiced 25 times across the texts, is that girls "under the age of 18" are being married, violating human rights standards. Child marriage thus entails a "brutal curtailment" of girls' childhood (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:4) "hindering their [...] preparation for adulthood" (Girls Not Brides 2013). Through these representations GNB mourns the loss of girls' innocence, which is a concept inherent to Western notions of childhood, and effectively problematizes the *child* in child marriage. Moreover, 6 of the 7 documents in this study make 57 explicit references to "rights" or "human rights". Most references are in relation to how child marriage "infringes" or "violates" human rights to education, health, decision-making and a life free of poverty and violence. According to GNB (2014b), these violations are self-perpetuating and interrelated, such that child brides are more likely to be pressured into early motherhood, "face high risks of death or injury" and increase their risk to maternal mortality and STIs. As a result, girls are more likely to "drop out of school" and miss out on gaining skills to become economically active. Together, these factors not only perpetuate the cycle of poverty, but also make girls more dependent on their husbands, putting them at a higher risk of physical, sexual and psychological violence. Ultimately, these violations are said to trigger the surrender of girls' dreams and "rob girls of every opportunity to thrive" (Girls Not Brides 2014a; 2013). In this sense GNB also problematizes *marriage*, as the institution within which these human rights violations take place and are maintained. This problematization is further emphasized though 57 negative qualifiers, such as, "denies", "hinders", "deprives" and "stunting", that highlight the "devastating consequences" of early marriage (Girls Not Brides 2015a:1).

Additionally, while five of the texts analysed engage 15 times with the idea of "choice", this is never in reference to girls' agency, but rather to highlight the lack of decision-making and the absence of choice. By definition, GBN represents all child marriages as inherently non-consensual and forced upon girls. This representation of the problem in turn constructs girls as pas-

sive victims, reinforcing their vulnerability and erasing their sexual agency. In particular, in 6 of the texts GNB shows concern 14 times for how non-consensual marriages undermine the sexual rights of girls and perpetuate sexual violence. Though not explicitly mentions, the texts always imply this violence comes from their husbands. The widespread use of a HRBA to condone child marriage may seem unsurprising – obvious even – considering most development organizations working in children-related topics embrace the CRC as the backbone to their work. However, when these representations are put together, it is extremely clear GNB does not only use this framework because it relevant to development studies today, but to convey child marriage is an destructive practice that needs the intervention of the international community to address it.

Furthermore, one of the most compelling arguments of GNB (2014a:1) repeated throughout their discourse is the necessity to “end” child marriage, as an “integral part in achieving development goals around the world”. GNB reiterated the importance to “tackle” or “address” child marriage throughout all texts a total of 163 times. To do so, GNB claims there are “key areas of change needed in the communities and behaviours of families” (Girls Not Brides 2014a:9) to “change established attitudes” (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:6), in addition to “legal reform, changes in cultural norms at the community level, and measures to strengthen girls’ education and improve opportunities for young women” (Girls Not Brides 2015c:7). The need to generate a particular kind of change is also made explicit in all the texts analysed, excluding the three infographics, a total of 117 times. GNB’s concern for transformation is further emphasized in the existence of their ‘Theory of Change’, to organize an effective response against child marriage. According to the network, the way to end child marriage is through collective work, which is extensively reinforced in the discourse 240 times through the use of “we” and “our” language in five of the texts. For the most part, “we” language aims to encourage collective action against child marriage among the development machine – “We must move from commitments to action” (Girls Not Brides 2015c:3) –, justify the need for a global partnership and emphasize teamwork - “together we can end child marriage” (Girls Not Brides 2013) – or to reiterate GNB’s objectives (2014a:9) - “our ultimate objective is not only to prevent children from marrying before the age of 18 but also to ensure that they [...] have the opportunity and freedom to thrive”. However, it is important to note that in “we” GNB only includes the international development community, policy makers and other civil society organizations, as having an active role in this fight against child marriage. Meanwhile girls, their communities and the rest of the developing world are excluded from this representation and instead given passive roles as the recipients of such changes, brought to them by GNB and its members. In sum, it is clear that GNB’s discourse is consistent not only throughout its sources of knowledge, but also with the dominant child marriage discourse described in chapter 2. Moreover, through this discourse GNB successfully manages to systematically construct child marriage as a global problem for development intervention by problematizing *child*, *marriage* and the series of practices it is associated with on the basis of a human rights framework. In that process, it not only directs action for how to address child marriage, but also defines the roles of the international community, girls, their communities and GNB in that fight.

‘Cherry picking’ a Human Rights Based Approach

While the ideologies about children, gender and marriage that structure the GNB campaign to end child marriage are portrayed as natural and normative in their discourse, these ideas draw from popular yet contesting ways of thinking that pervade throughout much development through and practice today. Their consistent use of a HRBA to development is a good example of this trend in their discourse. From the practical side, it is hard to undermine the strategic importance of utilizing such a framework to discuss development problems. On the one hand, using human rights discourse helps explain child marriage in a language that is widely used in development today, making the issue relevant to the development agenda. On the other hand, mobilizing such a framework helps define child marriage as a “grave violation” of girls’ human rights, which “infringes” on their right to education, health, empowerment and more (Girls Not Brides 2014b). In itself, this is a strong and efficient statement to make to mobilize resources and ensure the commitment of governments and policy actors against the practice. Therefore, GNB (2015a:1) repeatedly references human rights to problematize child marriage, in order to bring international attention to what was previously known as a “taboo topic” while justifying the network’s leading role in the fight to end child marriage.

At the same time, a human rights framework comes with its own baggage of implicit assumptions and implications that deserve to be explored further. To begin with, using a human rights framework means defining childhood in legal terms, where “in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 18 should be minimum age of marriage for boys and girls” (Girls Not Brides 2015a:1). Moreover, this framework assumes childhood is not only defined by age but is a universally shared phase in all countries in the world. This presumption is best exemplified in GNB’s #MyLifeAt15 social-media-inspired campaign. The main objective behind this campaign is to raise awareness about the issue of child marriage, by encouraging Western activists and girls, development practitioners, and the general public to share personal stories, photos and memories about their dreams when they were 15. Inherent to this campaign is the belief in a timeless, common ‘girlhood’ or ‘childhood’, reflected in “this glimpse of individuals’ lives from around the world, a look back at their hopes as teenagers and their aspirations of young people today” all share common dreams (Girls Not Brides 2015c:4). As a result, it sets a standard for what a ‘normal childhood’ looks like –reflected in the participants who did not marry under 18 – pit against any other expression of this time phase that in turn is seen as abnormal – like the ‘othered’ child bride. This dichotomy in turn perpetuates a rescue mentality in the name of all girls who marry before turning 18.

However, the campaign disregards how their imaginary of what being a ‘normal 15 year old’ is, is not a realistic expectation or representation of this period of life in many contexts outside the West. As argued by scholars from the new sociology of childhood studies, using a ‘straight -18’ (Ansell 2005) rule imposes a western understanding of childhood, which often times does not speak to specific cultural definitions of this period in contexts where child marriage is practiced. For example, in some contexts biological changes in youths’ bodies, such as when girls get their first period, mark the transition into adulthood instead of age. In these cases, girls are more likely to be married “shortly

after achieving social maturity, and consolidate their adult status when they become mothers” (de Waal 2002:14). Such is the case of the Hausa of northern Nigeria, a region of the country where according to GNB (n.d c) 76 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18. This is because Hausa girls “ideally marry as soon as they are sexually mature, [because] at this stage a young woman enters purdah and loses the freedom she had as a child” (Ansell 2005:80). Similar universalizing understandings about age and childhood also apply to how marriage is conceptualized within the discourse as an “abrupt end to [girls’] childhood” (Girls Not Brides 2014b), disregarding how in certain cases marriage is also seen as girls’ natural initiation into adulthood. Boyden et al. research in Ethiopia (2012:520) shows how practices like child marriage have “traditionally ensured girls’ moral and social integration, and thereby their effective transition to adulthood”. In this sense, marriage is not something to be mourned but rather celebrated, as the values attached to these practices are protective of girls and supportive of their wellbeing.

More importantly, implicit monocultural assumptions of age, childhood and marriage contradict GNB’s attempt to accommodate for cultural diversities. For example, in four out of the seven texts analysed in this study, GNB (2014a:5) shows explicit awareness about how “child marriage patterns will differ across cultural settings” and therefore how “action plans [must be] tailored to specific contexts for tackling child marriage” (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:10). However, while appreciation for diversity is seen as the “strength” of the network and can mean an attempt to adapt to contextual specificities, such flexibility is rarely reflected in how GNB frames and problematize child marriage (Girls Not Brides 2015a:17). Instead, these are left as empty statements behind which lies one type of imagined child bride, where the only “tailoring” necessary is the degree to which individual girls need more education, or information of their sexual rights, or laws to protect her. Therefore, while they claim to take diversity seriously, GNB still falls short of reflecting that awareness in their interventions and representation of the problem.

Furthermore, the fact that child marriage may actually be valued in certain contexts is still a reality widely ignored by the international development community, mostly because of the large influence human rights have in framing child marriage as nothing more than “a grave violation of children’s rights” (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:4). A similar assumption is also very prevalent in discussions about FGM (Boyden et al. 2012), which tend to overemphasize the multiple opportunities practices as such take away from girls, but hardly ever considers what girls have to gain from them. More importantly, it renders it unthinkable that girls may actually value early marriage (Koffman and Gill 2013), and as a consequence renders this possibility as discursively and materially irrelevant. In a study about FGM in Muslim Africa, Engle (1991: 1525) explains that the impossibility for human rights activists, particularly Western feminists, to associate practices like FGM and child marriage with any kind of human or social value stems from maternalistic tendencies that dismiss girls’ desires “by attributing to [their] false consciousness”. The human rights violation cycle triggered by child marriage in the GNB discourse creates a similar trend as that described by Engle; and therefore beyond failing to engage in a debate about what girls can gain from child marriage, the discourse consciously and perpetually constructs this practice as one that simply and inherently *cannot* bring an element of opportunity into girls’ lives.

Nevertheless, empirical research from various contexts where child marriage occurs shows how reality is much more nuanced than what GNB claims. For example, Boyden et al. (2012:520) research found that since girls are integrated into society through marriage, in this context the practice of child marriage represents a type of protective measure to buffer girls, their households and their wider community from a series of social and physical risks, such as violence, social stigma and exclusion from their peers. Therefore, considerations for marriage go beyond girls themselves and are entrenched in broader social relations between families and communities. In this sense, their findings bring into question child protection and the importance of considering the wider social values attributed to these practices, which often time are obfuscated by HBRA's concern with individual rights (Boyden et al. 2012:521). After all children are also "belongings" (Esser et al. 2016), meaning they are embedded within broader social networks and systems of care, which are as equally interested in their protection and wellbeing as the international community. Additional research shows early marriage can also mean a way for young people to validate their social status in a context where womanhood is defined by marital status and motherhood like in urban Bangladesh, while also protecting girls from social instability and violence (Faiz Rashid 2008). As Lewis suggests, for many girls the value of marrying early "revolves around dignity and pride, a sense that seems to defy the negativity associated with subordination on the basis of gender, class, race and youth" (2011:213), which is a reality in certain contexts that has yet to be acknowledged by the international community.

Another important assumption of this discourse related to a human rights framework is that young people under the age of 18 cannot consent to marriage or make decisions about their own sexuality. Therefore, according to Girls Not Brides, and as echoed by a vast amount of literature on the subject, "marriage should only take place with the free and full consent of both parties; this is rarely the case where one of the spouses is under the age of 18" (Girls Not Brides 2014a:5). This is because children are not perceived to have the psychological, emotional or physical development to consciously and responsibly make these sorts of decisions and give full consent to marriage (Girls Not Brides 2015a). However, more and more studies continue to challenge this preconception, the latest one being a study conducted by Promundo – a member of GNB – in Brazil. Their research found that "child marriages in Central and Latin America are mostly informal and consensual with varying levels of agency on the part of girls" (Taylor et al. 2015:17). In some cases, girls identified attempts to control their sexuality and restricted social mobility as a key factor in their decision to marry early or enter into an informal union. In other cases, the research found that problems at home such as domestic abuse, high indices of urban violence and other urban insecurities heavily influence their decision to marry as a form of protection. While it is important to understand this 'constrained' agency in terms of limited opportunities for girls, it still represents a careful negotiation between girls' options and their sexual agency. In turn, Taylor et al. shed light on how "this type of agency – arguably, in the context of limited opportunities – stands in sharp contrast to stereotypical images of child marriage. It opens up the possibility that girls are not necessarily passive victims in child marriage" (2015:64).

More interestingly, the fact that the international community still refuses to see children as agents with capacity to give consent, even when faced with

empirical research, suggests not all elements of this human rights framework are equally mobilized within the discourse. In fact, the strategy of use of a HRBA can be best described as ‘cherry picking’, or the selective implementation human rights instruments. For example, as I have previously argued one of the main assumptions of GNB’s discourse is that child marriage inherently violates girls’ rights. However, while GNB is quick to condone how child marriage impacts girls’ educational attainments, simultaneously it grossly overlooks those rights from the CRC, such as Article 12, which acknowledge children’s participation and recognize their right to make decisions about their life— including when girls consent to marriage, choose to marry early or become sexually active at a young age. This obvious – yet seemingly unacknowledged – tension, in turn generates thorny claims such as “every girl has the right to lead the life that she chooses and that, by ending child marriage, we can achieve a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for all” (Girls Not Brides 2015a:4). Statements as such are problematic because while they imply that girls have the ability to decide how to live their lives, their ability to make decisions *cannot* and *should not* include marriage before the age of 18. This shows the extent to which the international community imposes their own ideas and expectations of what it means to be, think and act like a child. These expectations come from ideals of freedom and choice that we assume ‘others’ in the Global South cannot possess, based on how those regions and its practices has been discursively constructed and represented as colonial projects. This raises the questions: is ending child marriage a realistic or even desired expectation for all girls in the developing world? Could it be that some girls want different things than what networks like GNB envisions for them? (Abu-Lughod, 2002). More importantly, this contradiction raises the question – as posed by Waites (2005) – to what extent is the international community ready to give young people the right to make final decisions about their lives? While it is clear youth participation and decision-making are echoed throughout a wide range of policy literature on the matter (Waites 2005:22; citing Schofield and Thoburn, 1996), these rights become more challenging in relation to sexuality due to a continued refusal in the literature to acknowledge how often times youth explore their sexuality at different and earlier times than what is imposed by Western human rights standards (Taylor et al. 2015: 51). In turn, these assumptions perpetuates the idea that young girls have a fragile and dangerous sexuality that needs to be protected through foreign intervention, in order to preserve their innocence and bodily integrity.

All together, these representations and assumptions convey the idea that child marriage is a monolithic practice that is problematized and treated equally around the world. While such conceptualization of child marriage does not always address the empirical reality of many girls and contexts where child marriage is practiced, it nonetheless serves the strategic purpose of justifying the need for Western intervention to fix the problem of child marriage. Above all, the assumptions that underpin understandings of child marriage not only invisibilize other realities and expressions of this practice that do not fit into the dominant representation of the problem, but also continue to reproduce unequal power relations between the developed and the developing world. In particular, GNB’s uncritical use of a HRBA overlooks how historical processes, “inequalities, uneven power relations and structural features of neo-liberal capitalism that produce the very global injustices” (Koffman and Gill 2013:86) the network is trying to correct.

The double discourse about girls

Another important characteristic found about how GNB represents child marriage, is the extensive use of a double discourse about the situation and potential of girls in developing countries threatened by the practice of child marriage. The double discourse about girls was first noted by Koffman and Gill (2013; 2014) in their research about girl power and biopolitics in the Girl Effect campaign, where they criticize the dichotomy created between girls in the West as “can do girls” and their disempowered counterpart, or “girls at risk”, from the global south. Their critique of the non-innocence of this binary can be extended to the how child marriage is represented in GNB’s discourse. On the one hand, in #MyLifeAt15 GNB (2015c:5,2) claims “girls’ dreams are cut short because of child marriage”, and thus encourages the international community to act in the name of “every girl, everywhere, having the opportunity to achieve hers [dreams], without child marriage holding her back”. This entails a deeper sense of loss than the opportunity to not get an education that alludes to the surrender of girls’ sense of self, their aspirations and their resilience to continue to fulfil their potential despite marrying early. These representations normalize understandings of girls from the Global South as “disempowered”, “dependent” and “deprived” (Girls Not Brides 2015:a), defined by their “essentially truncated life” (Mohanty 1988:65) instead of their ability live in the pursuit of their dreams even within constraining circumstances. However, not only does empirical research show girls are not *always* and *only* victimized by child marriage, but ultimately colonizes girls’ daily existence through a universal representation of their disempowerment that assumes all girls are oppressed in equal terms and by similar structures, irrespective of place, class, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality (Mohanty 1988:72).

Parallel to this representation, runs an equally problematic discursive construction that presents girls as counting inexhaustible potential to curb development problems and bring forwards entire nations. GNB (2013) argues that when girls are not married early and their human capital is cultivated, they can “help lift them[selves] and their family out of poverty” and break the inter-generational cycle of poverty (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:4). Otherwise, promoting “system that undervalues the contribution of young women limits its own possibilities” (Girls Not Brides 2015a:6). In this way, GNB turns girls into the symbol of hope of global development objectives, capable of transforming their own realities as well as that of their countries. This representation is very consistent with the “girl power” movement’s push for girls’ empowerment, based on the idea that when girls benefit the whole of society does too (UNFPA 2012). On the one hand, it is hard to overlook how such a representation creates a similar double discourse as that noted by Koffman and Gill (2013) that pulls on assumptions about “girls at risk” and “can do girls”. #MyLifeAt15 is a good illustration of this dichotomy between the “empowered”, educated and healthy non-child-brides that share memories and aspirations from their youth, to emancipate the uneducated, oppressed victims from the Global South who “cannot live [their] adolescence in the purpose and pursuit of achieving [their] dreams” because of child marriage (Girls Not Brides 2015c:5). Cornwall et al. (2007:4) are critical of the non-innocence of these representations for how they translate into development “slogans, fables and myths”, where women and girls appear “both as abject victims, the passive subjects of development’s rescue, and as splendid heroines, whose unsung vir-

tues and whose contributions to development need to be heeded.” Likewise, perpetuating this narrative may be a strategic move by GNB to showcase girls as a worthy investment and object of their intervention.

Moreover, this double discourse and its implicit representation of child brides affect how the development machine operationalizes their interventions to address child marriage. For example, according to GNB (2014a:1) to address child marriage the international community needs to increase girls’ access to services like education, “as alternatives to child marriage.” The development machine has massively picked up these recommendations. Recent research on child marriage interventions in the developing world found that the majority of interventions analysed in their study (total of 63) focus solely on education and in reducing the costs associated with sending girls to school (Kalamar et al, 2016:S20). While this approach may be beneficial in contexts where child marriage does terminate girls’ schooling, Hutchinson and McNall (1994) challenge this deterministic model in a study about Hmong high school students. They found that such an approach may in fact not be an appropriate strategy among communities where “early marriage and high fertility still are viewed as an effective economic strategy that increases the chances that one or more children will be successful in the world of education and work” (Hutchinson and McNall, 1994:588). Therefore, there is a need to reconsider how the discourse represents child marriage as a problem that can be technocratically solved through the delivery of equal services irrespective of structural inequalities and diversity. More importantly, it is tantamount to carry out more research that explores the relationship between child marriage and education in a diversity of contexts, given it is “not evident whether educating girls directly lessens the likelihood of them marrying young, or whether independent variables cause this relationship” (Hodgkinson 2016:36). In turn, this will prevent reductionist narratives that translate into misguided interventions.

Besides perpetuating this problematic dichotomy, above all the double discourse obscures “discussions of differences, power, history or social transformation” (Koffman and Gill, 2013:92) behind bland talk about girl-to-girl solidarity. Particularly, it invisibilizes many of the problems experienced in Western countries, such as the issues of reproductive health and sexual violence among adolescents in Europe, which is one of the main concerns the international community manifests about the practice of child marriage (see the beginning of this chapter). For example, GNB (2015a:6) condemns how girls who marry before 18 are more likely to “suffer physical, sexual and psychological violence” throughout their life, or to be pressured into early sexual relationships and early motherhood, putting them at risk of death or injury during childbirth (Girls Not Brides 2014b). Reports on adolescent sexual and reproductive health in developing countries reinforce this outcry, through statistics that indicate “33% of females aged 13–24 in Swaziland experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. This prevalence falls within the reported range for other Sub-Saharan African countries” (Hindin and Fatusi 2009: 58). While it may be easy to point at these gross numbers make claims about the Global South that justify the intervention of the development machine, these statistics are extremely similar to rates found in Europe. For example, a European Union (EU)-wide survey conducted by FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – on violence against women, found one in three women in the EU, or 33 per cent, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since

the age of 18 (2014:21). Out of this number, 21 million women experience the same type of violence before the age of 15. What is particularly interesting to note in this study is how 15 is defined as the age of majority instead of 18, based on definitions used by the World Health Organization (WHO) in their studies on violence (FRA, 2014:121), and therefore how differently sexuality and sexual violence are problematized in these contexts vis-a-vis child marriage in the Global South. Similar arguments can be made about the age at which young people become sexually active, where Avery and Lazdane (2008:61) found that in 13 out of 31 countries studied in Europe more than 30 per cent of adolescents become sexually active by the age of 15. Similarly, while the average age of first sexual activity in Sud-Saharan Africa is 18.5 years, the “median age at first sex among 20–24-year-old women ranges from a low of 16 years or younger in Chad, Mali and Mozambique to a high of 19.6 in Senegal”(Hindin and Fatusi 2009: 59). Surprisingly, the policy recommendations that come out of very similar prevalence rates are strikingly different for Europe, where the “ability to create a supportive SRH environment that meets the needs of youth” (Avery and Lazdane 2008:68) is seen as an important priority, and the Global South where ending child marriage is seen as a fundamental precondition to end sexual violence against girls.

To connect these arguments with what the problem is represented to be by GNB, it is clear the issue is neither with “child”, since this contested category not only misrepresents life transitions but also reduces youth’s agency; or with “marriage”, because the absence of early marriage does not mean girls will not experience sexual violence or complete their education. In other words, GNB monolithic representation of child marriage misses the diversity of expressions and values of this practice in many contexts. More importantly, despite sounding naïve, representations of child marriage reinforce relations of power between the Global South and North based on allegations and assumptions about what child marriage entails that problematize practices in developing countries as sites for intervention of foreign development expertise.

Child marriage or modernity in the agenda?

One of the main methods GNB uses to place child marriage at the heart of the development agenda is through explicit links between child marriage and the achievement of global development objectives. To accentuate how child marriage is a global threat to development, GNB reinforces how far reaching the “devastating consequences for girls, their families and their countries” can be, and thus how the “alarming tide” of child marriage needs to be urgently addressed by the development community (Girls Not Brides 2015a:1). The argument that child marriage and development are mutually exclusive also makes GNB and their main objective extremely relevant, given child marriage “undermines numerous development priorities, hindering progress towards a more equal, healthy and prosperous world” (Girls Not Brides 2014a:1). Moreover, connecting how “child marriage directly hinders progress in 6 of the 8 Millennium Development Goals”, to how “unless the international community tackles child marriage, it will not fulfil its commitments to reduce global poverty” (Girls Not Brides 2013), is an effective way to draw policy attention to the issue and generate a sense of seriousness about the problem. At the same time,

linking the prevalence of child marriage to underdevelopment helps reinstate GNB's role as 'experts' in ending child marriage.

Nevertheless, behind the importance for global development goals runs an implicit agenda about modernity that further perpetuates relations of power between the Global North and South. Firstly, GNB (UK 2016:4; 2015a:6) frames the consequences of child marriage as extending beyond girls and their bodies into entire nations, claiming because of early marriage "girls face barriers to reaching their potential, draining communities and nations of innovation and prosperity". Through economic language, like "innovation" and "potential" to "thrive" GNB reinforces how child marriage opposes economic growth and the idea of modernity, where the discourse implies all countries want to be at. More importantly, such references suggest the hidden agenda is not only pushing for an ideal of modernity, but also for neoliberal and capitalist interests. This narrative is also very consistent with Girl Effect, which perpetuates representations of a "girl who has been 'reached' and 'helped' before 'the ticking clock' has seen her married and pregnant, and thus can go on to transform her life chances and those of her community and nation" through integration into the market economy (Koffman and Gill, 2014:246). However, those narratives simultaneously lead to a "colonization of reality" (Escobar,1995:5) where the unequal power dynamics and the operational features of neoliberal capitalism responsible for conditioning many of the global injustices that movements like GNB and the Girl Effect try to correct are invisibilized, and instead portrayed as native to developing countries (Koffman and Gill, 2014:244).

GNB attempt to impose an agenda of modernity is also reflected in how the initiative to end child marriage comes from the West, and therefore from outside many of the contexts where child marriage is articulated as a problem to address. Such "managerability" of development has been extensively criticized by post-development academics, condemning the "remarkable continuity of optimism about the possibility of transforming society through organised interventions" (Giri and Van Ufford, 2003:8), and top-down impositions that colonize practices, knowledge and values in the developing world, treating them as issues to "correct" mirroring the West (Escobar 1995). Consequently, one of the material consequences of this way of thinking is that girls' at risk or affected by child marriage and their bodies are seen as human capital investments and the focus economic, social and political development interventions that must be regulated, measured and managed by institutions like Girls Not Brides and its members (Switzer, 2013: 349). These forms of intervention range from girls' empowerment programmes, Child Protection Clubs and Football clubs to prevent child marriage (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:6), to "mainstreaming child marriage prevention" into programmes that deal with education, health and violence against women (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:10). Numerous feminists however, have criticized mainstreaming for how the concept of gender – and feminist agendas – have been stripped from its political meanings and incorporated into development policy (Cornwall 1997; Smyth 2007). This has lead even more reductionist representations, such as narratives that cast women as the "victims" and men as the "problem" of gender inequality, that overemphasize certain aspects of the discourse while invisibilizing others, as it happens with child marriage.

Furthermore, child marriage discourse, and hence the agendas implicit in these representations are rooted in deeply colonial understandings that con-

tinue portray child marriage as a project for foreign intervention. This is primarily done through the problematization of “traditional roles” (Girls Not Brides 2014a:5) envisaged for girls in places where child marriage is prevalent. This representation thus dismisses cultural and social norms for being backwards, inhibiting the fulfilment of girl’s potential by not providing “realistic alternatives”, and thus ultimately hindering development (Girls Not Brides 2014a:5). Moreover, value judgements about how communities’ have a “misplaced perception of providing protection for girls” (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:4) assume GNB and the international community know better about child protection and youth’s wellbeing than their girls’ families or communities. Many practices and realities from the Global South have been casted in a similar light by development practitioners for many years, condemning cultural beliefs or social and religious practices, “reflected in the ‘public appropriation of societal transformation in the name of development’, seemingly overdetermining social narratives about present and future lives” (Morarji 2014:185, citing Sivaramakrishnan and Agarwal, 2003).

These ways of thinking in turn explain why GNB’s (2014a:9) approaches to end child marriage rely on modifying practices, beliefs and traditions through their strategic activities. Even though they believe this change must occur locally, it nonetheless has to be “catalysed by national, regional and global action” (Girls Not Brides 2014a:5). Establishing the direction of change also helps set a standard of acceptable “positive” norms, as opposed to the “negative social norms” that underpin the prevalence of child marriage (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:6). In this case, contrasts like negative vs. positive further discredit the practices from the Global South as wrong and undesirable while reinstating the superiority of Western morals and practices. Comparisons between customary and national – meaning statutory – law further reinforce this contrast, where “recognising customary laws and practice over and above the national law, communities may establish or reinforce existing behavioural or gender norms which may not be conducive to child protection” (Girls Not Brides UK 2016:9). Once again, these claims reinstate the moral superiority of formal laws – that often follow international legislation – above customary or traditional ways of thinking and acting. More importantly, it is clear that while GNB portrays this change as neutral, concerned with girls’ wellbeing and the “transformation of communities and nations” (Girls Not Brides 2014a:9), its seeming innocence obscures the underlying colonial and modernist agendas that underpin it. As a result, by stating what and who has to change about child marriage and steering the direction of that transformation, GNB institutionalizes the typical colonial dichotomy between the ‘problem’ – in this case child marriage– and the ‘solution’ in Western intervention, in dominant representations of child marriage.

Overall, it is clear that because of the legitimacy and recognition as a knowledge hub among the international community working on child marriage, GNB has a lot of responsibility and influence on how they decide to represent this practice to the international community. At a time when the development agenda is extremely concerned with child marriage, it is crucial to be aware of the layered meanings of what the problem with child marriage is represented to be and the impact these representations have, as more and more resources, policies and intervention continue to be developed in order to address this problem. More importantly so, because these representations help perpetuate

relations of power and structure the relationship between the Global North and South in the international development field.

Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of my research I raised the concern that the dominant child marriage discourse misses the complexity of this practice through the imposition of a monocultural representation of the problem. In turn, this representation influences how child marriage is understood, problematized and addressed by the development machine. Though a discursive analysis of the Girls Not Brides partnership to end child marriage, I unpacked the various aspects of this practice the network deems problematic. This representation is characterized by numerous colonial and ethnocentric assumptions, underpinned by intersecting notions of gender, age, race, sexuality, agency and vulnerability that altogether construct child marriage as a site for development intervention. These presumptions also create a monolithic story of child marriage that overemphasizes girls' suffering and oppression.

The vast majority of child marriage literature closely echoes many of the concerns raised by GNB in their representation of the issue, namely fear for human rights violations, the role of 'tradition' in perpetuating this practice, and the positioning of this practice as inherent to the Global South. As a result, alternative realities about how child marriage is perceived and expressed in numerous contexts, such as ones that attribute value to early marriage, are deemed unthinkable and silenced by the dominant framework. However, critical perspectives on child marriage and empirical research allowed me to challenge these totalizing representations and expose the contradictions and the silenced subjectivities about why and how child marriage is practiced. In other words, while the dominant discourse is not irrelevant, my research found this framework is largely incomplete in the truths it perpetuates. In turn, analyses about child marriage are based on universalistic, ahistorical categories that only help justify the need for international development intervention to address it (Mohanty 1988). More importantly, far from being neutral, such categories perpetuate relations of power and structure the flow of resources between the Global North and South. In turn, child marriage interventions are not only inappropriate at times or promote dubious agendas, but also miss what is problematic about child marriage. Namely, how "early marriage is a symptom not a cause of the socio-economic troubles facing many adolescents in developing countries" (Bunting 2005:34). Therefore, delaying youth's age of marriage will not necessarily address many of the social problems that give rise to this practice.

By exploring these questions, my research contributes to the limited critical body of literature that studies this practice and its discourse from outside the dominant framework. I have also shed light on the importance of representations and the productive capacity of discourse in structuring how the international development community understands and conceives problems in the international development agenda (Escobar 2007). Moving forwards, further research has to be carried out accommodating for contextualized expressions of this practice. Moreover, fluid and representative systems of understanding and knowledge making need to be developed around this practice, so as to make room for diversity and accommodate more reflexivity on the im-

pacts of our situated knowledge. When it comes to representations, big gaps about silent representations of men and boys, and how they affect and are affected by this practice need to be taken up by academics. Only then we will gain a more comprehensive understanding on the workings of this practice. Above all, there is an urgent need in development thought and practice to face our own biases, and create space for diversity of knowledge and pluralities about the bodies, places and practices we wish to investigate. At a time that child marriage is already at the heart of the development agenda, we can move beyond monolithic representations and start redefining how we understand child marriage on the basis of girls' resilience, rather than their suffering. Or on the basis of what this practice might provide and its value, rather than only on its oppression and what it takes away. Maybe even, on how the problem may be with the international development community and not, for once, with the Global South.

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Annex I – Analysis Table Using WPR

Question	Document 1- Girls not Brides Theory of Change	Document 2 – #MyLifeAt15 Campaign Engagement Toolkit	Document 3 – Policy Paper: Ending Child Marriage by 2030
1. What's the problem represented to be?	<p>-Child marriage is a pervasive practice in the developing world – which “infringes their rights and is a major setback to development” p.4</p> <p>-Unless we end child marriage, women and girls will not attain the same social status as boys and men and attain their full potential</p>	<p>-“1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married as children” p.3, which means an end to girls education, a number of health complications and economic dependence → undesirable and dangerous</p>	<p>- Child marriage undermines the development objectives abroad of the UK, and therefore efforts must be scaled up in order to end this practice by 2030. To do so, the international community needs to “mainstreaming child marriage” p.3 and invest in programs that aim to end GVB, girls empowerment and gender inequality.</p>
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?	<p>-The vulnerability and low status of girls in developing countries, as a result of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Girls experience gender and sexual inequality ⇒ Traditional roles hold girls back and leaves them without alternative opportunities to early marriage ⇒ Children should not marry when under the age of 18 <p>-In addition, a number of structural and societal drivers help perpetuate this practice, such as poverty, age inequality, conflict and insecurity</p> <p>-Contextual specificities about child marriage exist, which by definition makes interventions vary, but overall there seems to be a similar imagined child bride to which this theory of change applies.</p>	<p>- Understanding child marriage as a “human rights violation”</p> <p>-AND as “holding back” the development of girls’ entire communities and nations → the consequences are then taken beyond the girl herself into entire countries – reinforced new obsession with the girls child as the worthwhile investment of the development machine and as the hope for development</p> <p>⇒ In this regard child marriage is regarded as an END for girls always. In other words, girls cannot gain anything from child marriage, only lose, either</p>	<p>- Everyone should be concerned and working towards ending child marriage at the legislative and governmental level, especially now that it has been recognized as one of the targets in the SDGs.</p> <p>- Child marriage is a “grave violation of children’s rights” and a “brutal curtailment of childhood” p.4 → also uses a human rights framework to condemn this practice and again suggests how child marriage is the “End” to girls’ lives. Very bleak picture is constantly painted which is something perpetuated over and over in their discourse throughout → “girls face barriers to reaching their potential, draining communities and nations of inno-</p>

	<p>-Despite it being debated, girls do not have the capacity to give full consent or “choose” to marry – structures, which would allow this to happen do not exist. “Marriage should only take place with the free and full consent of both parties; this is rarely the case where one of the spouses is under the age of 18” p.5</p> <p>-This problem fits “within a broader framework of development and human rights” p.7</p> <p>-Therefore, to end child marriage one must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Empower girls, through training, skills and information + support networks ⇒ We need to involve families and communities – because there is not enough awareness about the harms of CM, and thus is entails a change in attitudes and perceptions towards this issue ⇒ Provisions of services to married girls and those “at risk” of child marriage – including education, adolescent friendly health services and economic opportunities ⇒ An “enabling legal and policy framework” p.7 that ensures the effective implementation of human rights frameworks 	<p>rights, freedom, opportunities, dreams or even their lives.</p> <p>⇒ Being married as a child implies living a life without purpose and the surrender of our dreams – “every girl should be able to live her adolescence in the purpose and pursuit of achieving her dreams” p.5</p> <p>OR “to ensure that no girls’ dreams are cut short by early marriage” p.5</p> <p>- child marriage is a “harsh reality” for far too many girls, which must end. Otherwise, and according to statistics 1.2 billion girls will be married as children by 2050. P.3</p> <p>-Child marriage is a multi-phased problem, which therefore needs investment and commitments, such as “cross-sectoral policies programs and plans to end child marriage that engage all ministries and stakeholders, including civil society, children and youth” p.3</p> <p>-More political commitment and action at the national level is needed in order to effectively end child marriage → there’s strong</p>	<p>vation and prosperity” p.4 // “child marriage hold back millions f girls globally from reaching their full potential” p.5 = the ONLY way forward for entire countries, and girls themselves, is to end child marriage. This is effective to gather national support behind the practice, but at the same time it places responsibility on girls to achieve countries development goals.... But it is regardless an overreach</p> <p>-Children would and should never choose to marry early – assumes that when children marry early they are forced to take on responsibilities not suited for them → patronizing approach towards children that does not see them and policy actors and agents</p> <p>- Assumes that actions to end this practice and the answer to the end of child marriage comes from outside, from international development aid and expertise, and therefore never from within → colonialist undertone = “the development sector and wider international community have made significant progress in tackling child marriage” p.4</p> <p>-Establishes hierarchy from West in understandings about how to protect children that are patronizing and assumes people in developing countries or situations of</p>
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	<p>-Child marriage directly hinders development outcomes of countries and holds entire nations back – integral to gender inequality</p>	<p>and important governmental component to this practice p.7</p> <p>-The use of “we” language and use of language such as “common goal” objective, helps personalize the campaign. Moreover, by asking people to submit their own photos and sharing their own stories or TBTs → puts a face to the struggle and sends the message of we-are-all-in-this-together and shared solidarity.</p>	<p>conflict do not know what is best for them or their children → “mis-placed perceptions of providing protection for girls during time of increased instability” p.4</p> <p>- Solution also over an over seen as “empowerment”, “education” “life skills” “awareness about their rights” “comprehensive sexual education” and “girls’ empowerment” p.6</p>
<p>3. How has this representation of the problem come about?</p>	<p>To create their theory of change, Girls not Brides consulted with 150 individuals and member organizations, as well as “other child marriage experts”, involved in advocacy, research and programs, UN agencies, donors and government representatives p.10 → already establishes itself as an expert in this matter</p>	<p>International Day of the Girl Child, first ever was 2011, were international attention was turned to promoting the rights and wellbeing of girls, because they were viewed as the future of development and nations → importance of investing on girls, they empowerment and the promotion of their rights was emphasized.</p>	<p>-DFID as funder and member of the Girls not Brides UK alliance coordinated with UNICEF ‘the Girl Summit in July 2014 to “mobilize domestic and international efforts to end FGM and CEFM”p.3. This policy paper was then written to evaluate the efforts and progress made in the last 2 years since the summit and identify further areas of work.</p>
<p>4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?</p>	<p>-Even though they justify the focus on girls on the matter instead of children “seemed to diminish the importance of gender inequality in shaping patterns of child marriage” p.5 – they are in fact reinforcing the understanding that child marriage is only an issue for girls and therefore that interventions and investment should focus on them as a target group → further contributes to making child marriage a “girls-issue ghetto”</p>	<p>- Idea of a common and shared “girlhood” or “childhood”, which everyone is entitled to and which everyone has to enjoy. The problem is that representation is imagined and underpinned by particular notions of what being a “normal 15 year old” is, which may not apply or be realistic expectations in many contexts outside the West. It is founded on the idea that “individuals’</p>	<p>- A lot of emphasis is placed on “change” → such as “change established attitudes” p.6 among girls, communities and entire countries. A change in perceptions, understandings, activities, ways of thinking. However this always implies that change does not need to happen internally in how the international community sees this problem, but rather in how the “others” or those who practice child</p>

	<p>-Overall the discussion seems very diluted → for example, it assumes child brides are always victims that they cannot choose to marry early in an informed and consensual manner, because young people cannot make these decisions. Therefore they are always negatively affected by this practice as it has “harmful associations” p.9</p> <p>-Uncritically adopts a human rights based approach to development, which underpins the framework and the justification/rational for acting up against this issue. Stresses the importance of realizing girls’ rights (p.8) and their capacity to act upon them – however and ironically enough girls were not consulted in the creation of this theory of change, which contradicts one of the fundamental principles of the CRC in promoting more child participation and decision making. They also neglect their participation in decision making to choose to marry – Waites (2005) question about to what extent we mean participation very present.</p> <p>-Addressed the cultural and contextual specificity of the practice and how therefore each context may need different sets of interventions. However, a similar recognition for the drivers and expressions of child marriage was missing from this document, such as how child marriage may happen under girls’ consent or how it may not only bring oppression and vulnerability, but a new set of acquired freedoms in certain</p>	<p>lives from around the world” reflect shared hopes and aspirations as teenagers today. This means that these dreams are both universal and timeless.</p> <p>⇒ It sets a standard to which measure a normal or abnormal adolescence.</p> <p>-The campaign is in social media, or platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google + which are hardly accessed by child brides themselves, or those in danger of being a child bride. This may create greater distance between the subjects of the campaign and those it is trying to help.</p> <p>-Moreover, it is contradictory how the toolkit in multiple occasions reinforces how “it is best to include girls themselves” p.9, while the engagement platform is one not very accessible to girls themselves → seems paradoxical</p> <p>- In the campaign poster, all the pictures were of women and girls of color, which sends a subliminal message about who is affected by this practice, or who the audience for this engagement campaign is.</p>	<p>marriage see the issue. It also assumes that the solution to child marriage cannot come from the countries that experience this practice themselves – the solution is to be found from the outside, rather than from within. Again a very colonial understanding and very contextually blind → this research instead raises the question about whose gaze really has to change? Are we always right? → clearly our way of seeing is accepted as the norm or “right” and left forever unproblematic</p> <p>- As a result, this also helps set a standard of acceptable norms, which are “positive”, as opposed to the “negative social norms” which are associated and underpin the prevalence of child marriage p.6 → diction here in using contrasts like negative vs. positive are key in reinforcing that established norm and discrediting the values of the developing world as negative, wrong and backwards. This is further emphasized when discussing the interphase between customary and national or statutory law, suggesting how when “customary laws and practice over and above the national law, communities may establish or reinforce existing behavioral or gender norms which may not be conducive to child protec-</p>
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	<p>contexts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strives to “create an environment that offers girls opportunities beyond the traditional roles envisaged for them” → therefore implies traditional roles are backwards and not good enough to attain girls fulfilment – very colonial thinking - Perpetuates understanding that children are helpless and dependent on their own – reinforces their position and responsibility on families and communities – whole part of the strategies of GNB global partnership consists on mobilizing families and communities - Girls do not have the capacity to give full consent or “choose” to marry – structures, which would allow this to happen do not exist. “Marriage should only take place with the free and full consent of both parties; this is rarely the case where one of the spouses is under the age of 18 ” p.5 → if they do they need the supervision of “structural support” because by themselves children do not have the maturity to engage in this practice. One of the objectives is to allow girls to always choose when and whom to marry – but girls are already choosing to marry and that is still problematized by them – so what they mean is that they want them to choose once they are old enough according to Western standards. Moreover, they say they want to “prevent children from marrying before the age of 18” and thus “ensure they acquire the 		<p>tion” p.9 = again establishes the moral superiority of international legislation and national law above customary or traditional ways of thinking and acting – colonial again!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentioned numerous times “mainstreaming” as a solution to the problem, and also as a way to increase funding and investment in the issue → while this maybe be beneficial, the concept of mainstreaming has been extensively criticized by feminists when it comes to gender issues for its tendency to further homogenizing an issue and blurring the complexities and specificities of a practice or issue behind generalized talk (see Cornwall book for example) - As the other texts, it also does not question whether in some contexts child marriage may bring positive things to girls’ lives and may not automatically end their dreams and future prospects. I does not question how certain key terms loose used in the text, like childhood, are very contextually defined and mediated, as well. In general, cultural specificity and relatively is widely ignored.
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	<p>skills, connections and capacities that child marriage impedes, and have the opportunity and freedom to thrive”</p> <p>p.9 → problem is that it ignores how those challenges can persist beyond the age of 18, because they are structural, and not a direct consequence of early marriage. They are, in fact, the cause for early marriage, therefore what is with the age emphasis?</p>		
<p>5. What effects are conducted by this representation of the problem?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neglect for cultural specificity of the practice and consequently the representation of an imagined child bride implicit in the theory of change → monolithic representation - Perpetuates the tendency to problematize the girl child herself instead of the structures that perpetuate child marriage → where poor education outcomes, poverty etc are understood of consequences to child marriage, rather than the causes. Children, particularly girls, perpetuated as victims and helpless in need of the help of the West -Boys and men do not deserve to be considered or paid attention to when studying and investing in child marriage → reinforces ideas of women and girls as victims, and neglect of boy and men as cause of the problem -The girl child continues to be seen as the hope for development and future of nations -Traditional role ascribed to girls constructed as the 	<p>-As a result of homogenizing adolescence and childhood, through a campaign that sets the norm of what 15 year olds should do on Western inspired ideas and experiences, subjectivities are erased and hidden behind bland talk about a homogenized and standardized childhood</p> <p>While is the end this may be harmless, given the objective of the campaign is to get countries to commit seriously and allocate resources to realizing objective 5.3 of the SGD, it still blurs power dynamics, assumptions and notions that made this representation possible.</p> <p>-In this case, girls in danger or victims of child marriage are constructed as close and similar to those targeted by the campaign. At the same time, however, they are silenced by the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children are consequently treated as passive victims and helpless in these situations. This then perpetuates an understanding of children a passive, rather than responsible and concerned agents -Moreover assumed a western understanding of children, which is presumably understood universally, but clearly may disagree with local cultural understandings. This is because while child marriage is understood as the “end” or “stunting” of childhood too prematurely, in other contexts this may be an acceptable passage into adulthood - Assumed aspect of child marriage are forced upon children – therefore in this context they are inherently unable to concept to such “adult-like” decisions. Again contradicts understandings of children as agents and decision-makers –

	<p>“problem”, holding girls back for fulfilling their potential and from societies to achieving modernity. Perpetuates representation of tradition and cultural practices as “backwards”.</p> <p>- This representation however, and the justifications given to the problem as well as the use of statistics and figures, helps reinforce the need to invest and work towards this problem. It helps legitimize the importance for development to focus on child marriage and gather international support to end this practice.</p>	<p>engagement platform to participate be outspoken. This not only silences their own experiences, but helps construct them as victims void of dreams and aspirations because of experiencing child marriage.</p>	<p>which is in fact strongly emphasized in a children rights framework → Waites (2005) question also relevant here about what we mean by allowing children to consent and where we mean that seriously → duality</p> <p>- Constructing girls as the hope of the future and the solution to development problems, by associating their own unfulfillment and caved future (due to child marriage) with the lack of progress and development failure of their entire country → the ONLY way forward for entire countries, and girls themselves, is to end child marriage. This is effective to gather national support behind the practice, but at the same time it places responsibility on girls to achieve countries development goals.... But it is regardless an overreach</p> <p>-More broadly, this the representation of this issue, as well as the proposed solutions stressed throughout the report, which are centered around increasing funding and the commitment of resources from the UK government on addressing this issue, suggests a colonial undertone, where child marriage is constructed as a development problem only foreign aid and expertise can fix → however, never a reconceptualization of the issue of</p>
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			more nuanced understanding of cultural specificity is suggested as a solution → rather mainstreaming (or more standardizing) and more investment in accordance to the theory of change suggested by GNB is the idea
6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?	<p>-Through this theory of change that guides most of Girls Not Brides platform and those organizations and bodies that form part of the campaign. This is to facilitate partnership and collaboration towards the common effort of ending child marriage. They explain how while investment “may take different forms”, and how everyone has a role to play to end child marriage as there is no single solution to this problem, work on multiple front has to take place to make significant progress towards the common world of “seeing a world free of child marriage”.</p> <p>-The theory of change highlights the areas where current programming is focused among the Girls not Brides members, and where further work is needed.</p> <p>-“It serves as a foundation to build consensus on actions needed to address child marriage and support married girls, in both the long and short-term” p.4</p>		-In UK international policy → which is huge because they give vast amounts of foreign aid, which is tied to agreements upon their own understanding of the issue, which is left unproblematic and contextually-fitted to the UK context

Question	Document 4 – Infographic Child Marriage: A global problem too long ignored	Document 5 – Infographic Child Marriage: A violation of Human Rights	Document 6 – Infographic We cannot ignore child marriage during humanitarian
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			crises
1. What's the problem represented to be?	-Child marriage is a global problem “that robs girls of every opportunity to thrive” and is a “human rights violation”. Consequently it “denies girls their <i>health, education</i> and the <i>choice</i> of when and whom to marry”	Child marriage violates basic human rights, since it means an “abrupt end to [girls’] childhood”	There is a connection between child marriage and humanitarian crises, where 8 out of 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are “fragile states”
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underline this representation of the problem?	<p>-Consistent with other documents, which also use a human rights framework to justify the need to act at the face of this practice.</p> <p>-Consistent use of diction such as “robs” / “violation” / “hindering” / “lacks”/ “ends”/ risk of death” / and “increased risk” help paint a very bleak picture about child marriage. Constructs it as the evil and end of girls’ lives or chances of becoming someone in their lives → this diction is also very consistent with that used in other documents.</p> <p>⇒ It symbolizes the end of their education- because they are more likely to drop out. This also inherently means the end of chances of earning an income and/or lifting their families from poverty, end of their decision-making role (so not empowered), possible end of their own health or that of their children</p> <p>⇒ Portrayed as a self-perpetuating cycle which is intercon-</p>	<p>-Child marriage is constructed as a violation of girls’ rights because it deprives girls from</p> <p>⇒ Girls would not choose to marry early if it was up to them, and consequently they are often pressured into marriage → this also means that they will engage in sexual activity too prematurely for their physical and emotional development – associated with a number of health risks and complications associated which motherhood</p> <p>⇒ Girls cannot give consent to marriage and they also hardly ever have a say in whom they marry – it is thus not a conscious and free decision they make, but rather one others make for them</p> <p>⇒ Girls are not ready for the responsibilities and commitment of marriage, and therefore they</p>	<p>- Situations that cause instability, such as conflict, displacements and natural disasters are said to increase girls’ vulnerability to child marriage because social and economic networks are often removed and families may find insecurity and poverty increase. In this context, the assumption is that families may view child marriage as a form of protection from violence and as a way to cope with poverty</p> <p>⇒ May paint families, for the first time actually, not as evil – but rather as wanting the best for their daughters in a situation of despair and insecurity. This rhetoric is often contradicted and not stressed enough, often suggesting how communities and traditional understandings about gender within families are partly responsible for the practice of</p>

	<p>nected and where one perpetuation leads to another.</p> <p>-Reinforcing through statistics how this is a “developing country” problem → located in the Third World.</p>	<p>are more in danger of violence within this marriage—maybe due to the power imbalances and lack of decision making</p> <p>⇒ Attaining school and marriage are mutually exclusive, therefore when girls marry they are forced to drop out of school to fulfil their new domestic tasks, meanwhile if they stay in school they are more likely to delay marriage → these is the relationship the discourse assumes</p> <p>- Multiple actors have a role today to both end or perpetuate child marriage, therefore collective effort involving governments, communities, parents and girls themselves have to be mobilized</p>	<p>child marriage.</p>
<p>3. How has this representation of the problem come about?</p>	<p>-Part of GNB theory of change → then helps justify the kinds of interventions or measures they suggest to correct child marriage</p>	<p>-Through the deployment and implementation of a human rights framework to justify interventions on a very wide variety of development problems → this has to do with a re-branding of development to move away from economic focuses but make them about human development and rights.</p>	
<p>4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be</p>	<p>-In the section “what does marriage mean for girls” all the explanations are extremely negative and only focus on the harmful aspect of the practice. This representation, thus silenc-</p>	<p>-Contradictions between human rights and national legislations, or even within children rights claims themselves with other development objectives → biggest tension is between</p>	<p>-Sometimes, however, these situations happen in every day life, even in the absence of conflict. However in those situations, girls are seldom invited to identify their</p>

thought about differently?	es other instances where child marriage is chosen, or may bring opportunities (which can be questioned and problematized themselves) → such as in Murphy-Graham and Leal's research (2016)	participation and sexuality -Limited applicability of some rights to specific contexts – universalism vs. cultural relativity debate → sometimes it makes these claims and these rights foreign to local contexts	vulnerabilities and risks of child marriage – at least in the other documents read. Therefore, why is conflict any different?
5. What effects are conducted by this representation of the problem?	-Perpetuates a very bleak understanding of child marriage, which obfuscates the cultural specificities behind this practice and the vast amount of diversity behind it. It creates a monolithic image of a universally applicable child bride, which is a single story of the causes and consequences of this practice.	-It helps see this practice as a violation that must end, otherwise it will end with girls' lives and fulfillments. It helps to draw attention and importance to the gravity of the situation – this framework has been extensively criticized by academia though = Ansell 2005	- Suggests listening to girls and involving their participation in identifying their vulnerability is fundamental to support them in context of crisis → this is one of the few times where their discouragement suggests this directly and as a part of understanding the context – usually this is often assumed, therefore it is good they are recognizing girls' role as a policy actor too
6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?	Very simplified message → has its pros because it is effective, but its simplicity is misleading and reducing and the diction could be changed to be more neutral and representative of all child marriage experiences	- Almost all development organizations are using a HR based approach to development	-Girls not Brides platform and among the countries from the network, particularly those categorised as “fragile states”

Question	Document 7 – Annual Report 2014
1. What's the problem represented to be?	Child marriage is a global threat to development and the wellbeing of girls and the international community needs to come together to protect the wellbeing of girls.
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underline this representation of the problem?	-Child marriage is a global development problem that is currently beating the efforts of the development community and it too multifactorial to be dealt with individually → they believe that team work is the way forward and the solution to many of the – strongly emphasized collaboration and coordination between various bodies. Diction about team work very persistent throughout the document = “partnership”/”united”/”working together”/”collective work”/”power of partnership” and also the importance and value of learning from each

	<p>other's successes and challenges p.1-2</p> <p>-Human rights framework underpins their work and is one of the guiding principles guiding their fight against child marriage → they believe that “in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we believe that 18 should be minimum age of marriage for boys and girls” p.1 – therefore they follow the straight 18 rule and have a western and universal understanding of what is childhood – also has implication for then how they perceive children's capability, maturity and participation. This assumption is definitely consistent with every other documents and in fact, HR play centre stage in their justification for why to intervene on this problem and their understanding of the issue. This framework is easily and widely mobilized to condemn child marriage on the basis of age fundamentally and on documents countries have signed, describing any marriage before a8 as being “married off too soon” → guided by a very western understanding of children and their sexuality</p> <p>-Nothing good or positive is ever thought of coming out of child marriage, and it is often referred to and constructed through very negative adjectives, overemphasizing the detriments of this practice =”devastating consequences” p.7 → “endangering their personal development and wellbeing” p.6 / “disempowered”/ “dependent” / “deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and safety” p.6 / “die” or “see their babies die” / “suffer physical, sexual and psychological violence” /”depression and mental health problems” p.6 → child marriage only brings about negative experiences for girls – usually this is done with reference to girls' educational, economic and health outcomes</p> <p>-Girls hold the key to the world's development and they can bring their entire community and countries forward → “system that undervalues the contribution of young women limits its own possibilities. In this way, child marriage drains countries of the innovation and potential that would enable them to thrive”p.6 → the idea of innovation to thrive suggests an understanding of child marriage in opposition to the idea of modernity, which is the place where these organizations assume countries want to be at.</p> <p>-Girls do not choose child marriage – they cannot because they are children and when they do they do no know what is best for them →”every girl has the right to lead the life that she chooses and that, by ending child marriage, we can achieve a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for all” p.4 → clearly suggests that girls would never choose to marry young --. Linked to their emphasis for the ending of child marriage and how child marriage ends lives</p>
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?	- Consistent with the Girls not Brides discourse and with a HRBA to development + the recent discourse and focus of development in girls and investing on them
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can	-Never question its own understanding and representation of the issue, where it comes from, what is it influenced by, how it could be different. Despite mentioning how “our strength is our diversity” p.5

<p>the 'problem' be thought about differently?</p>	<p>and different kinds of work, that does not translate into their own conceptualization of the issue → need to look inwards as an organization whose influence is very strong and own a certain monopoly over how child marriage is understood and addressed. This neglect is a contradiction is their mission statement where they claim to “encourage inclusive and informed discussion at all levels” p.1</p> <p>-Once again contradiction and limitations between the use of a HRBA and local contexts, and also between their interest and discourse of being interested in hearing from them and making them participate, but not in everything and always.</p> <p>-The challenges and concerns with child marriage is not the age of the child, but rather the structures that disadvantage girls and perpetuate “hold them back”, which are NOT inherent to marriage or age, but rather structural inequality, poverty, gender based violence and more. Even if a girl is married off at 18 or 36, if society still discriminates against women and does not believe in their potential, the risks and consequences for them will be the same.</p> <p>-The obsession with “ending” child marriage confuses the message about girls’ oppression and disadvantage and how that comes about – also how realistic is this goal? How are they planning to end child marriage when the international community refuses to engage with the issue in its totality and its full expression of diversity → makes it seem like it is a decision the developed world and the international community has taken ON BEHALF OF ALL CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THIS PRACTICE – patronizing and colonial – where are girls and their voices, should be THEIR decision. Again it silences those directly affected by this practice and makes decision on their behalf representing the whole</p> <p>- Girls alone cannot solve the world’s development problems because it is much more complex than that – structural and a balance of power – again sets an unrealistic expectation and it is just used to mobilize resources and investment in girls → plus girls themselves are CLEARLY not taken seriously in the discourse, as the findings from this research have come to show, so until organizations themselves and the international community do not change their representation and attitude towards girls things will not change.</p> <p>- Use choice very loosely, and only in terms that agree with the vision of the organizations → such as how they never engage with the idea that girls can choose to marry early or choose to be sexually active – this choice is always reflected in ways where girls choose NOT to marry</p>
<p>5. What effects are conducted by this representation of the problem?</p>	<p>-Stress on partnership and team work → in this sense child marriage is only understood and constructed as a problem only collaboration can fix → funding principle of Girls not Brides partnership and reason for why they are a network. For them, one of the main things holding international effort back is limited funding and lack of governmental support and commitment towards this topic and hence it is one of the main objectives of their initiative to cultivate and strengthen support on those two fronts = could explain why their message is</p>

	<p>simplified so so much</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a result of their commitment and appreciation for team work, the documents they create, which are to be shared with the members of the partnership, as supposed to help organizations overcome challenges, develop their own plans for action and make suggestions as to how to mobilize their expertise and resourced to end child marriage → therefore they have a lot of power and influence over the organizations that are part of their network – they see themselves as the ones that “inform the work of a wider movement” p.5 and are “increasingly recognized as a go-to hub on child marriage” p.5. Because of this they also have a lot of responsibility on the “truths” they create about child marriage and how they choose to represent the issue to a very diverse and far-reaching audience of influential actors. - As a result of the straight 18 rule, there is an obsession with ENDING child marriage, and making all girls in the world marry after 18 → this misses the real point and the danger of the real drivers of child marriage. Has also created panic and urgency around children’s sexuality which has led to campaign that completely shut down, like this other their sexuality and agency and decision making ability by only portraying child marriage as “endangering their personal development and wellbeing” p.6 → even though empirical research shows this is not always the case. - Understanding child marriage as the end to a girls’ life and bright future, then conveys the message that ending with child marriage is the only way to “enable every girls to thrive” p.1 → not only sets an unrealistic expectation but also demonstrates a limited understanding of how structures work... the danger for girls goes beyond marriage itself but how they are discriminated/ oppressed and patronized by society in general, including the international community in their approach. -Sets an unrealistic expectation of girls and problematized them, instead of structures and even the role of the international community -using choice in a way that only agrees with the organizations perspective is biased and unrealistic and distributed an inaccurate message about children’s agency which is not only contradictory to the same framework they claim to use – HRBA- but also it is patronizing and disagrees with the image of empowered and responsible girls they are trying to create as a way to prevent child marriage
<p>6. How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disputed and disrupted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Again within the network, partners, government officials, country representations, international organizations, civil society, grassroots and donors...a huge web of actors and key stakeholders → VERY widespread an influential – huge outreach - All images AGAIN are of women and girls of color... →alludes to who is a child bride according to girls not brides and where she comes from

