

The UN Finally Identifies \223Harmful Customs.\224
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Anthropologists have taught us not to judge other cultures, but to recognize that no matter how strange, the custom served a reasonable function. Until now, UN agencies appeared to buy in to that notion, but at last, even they see the folly of this position.

As the Karzai government in Afghanistan attempts to \223dialogue\224 with the Taliban leadership, we are reminded that both the Taliban and the Afghan government stem from the largest Afghan tribe: the Pashtun. These fierce warriors have kept Afghanistan backward, violent, and safe from the currents of the modern world. This is their \223functional\224 value.

Their customs predate Islam, but because Islam itself has tribal roots, it is not hostile to tribal values. One Pashtun custom that the UN is now condemning as a \223harmful culture\224 is trading young girls as payment for elders\222 \223shameful\224 crimes. A

real case attracted the attention of the UN in February: an 8-year-old girl and her young cousin were snatched from their beds by thugs carrying AK-47s, claiming that the girls\222 uncle had run off with the wife of their warlord. For this crime, they took the girls in revenge, beating them daily for the dishonor that had been done to their boss. (The article did not say if they were raped, but I have little doubt of that.) The child, now 10, managed to escape and her family (uncharacteristically) went public. This custom is so common that it has a name: \223baddi.\224 Girl children are evidently regarded as fair game; they may be beaten, raped, traded, or married (a combination of all three practices).

While they are about it, the UN should also look at another hideous Pashtun custom: that men who can afford it buy \223beautiful young boys\224 for sex and for the entertainment of their male friends. They have a name for this too: bacha-bazi (playboys). This custom is not regarded as homosexual by the adults. The homosexuals are boys being used as if they were women. Islam says nothing, unfortunately, because using boys as sex objects is an ancient custom throughout the Muslim world. At one time, bordellos exploiting children of both sexes were not uncommon, even in Egypt, and was a notorious Ottoman Turkish practice.

In Egypt and North Africa, down through the desert, female children are \223circumcised\224 (genital mutilation that ruins their health for a lifetime, contributes to the childbirth death rate and sometimes bleeding to death on wedding nights). Women\222s groups have protested this horror for decades, and women representatives in the US and France have shamed their male colleagues into making this practice illegal. Immigrants who persist in violating their girl children this way are now subject to deportation.

Finally, one more monstrous custom that has had a surprising comeback in our time, pirates holding western captives for ransom. Now Egyptian Bedouin have reached far back into Muslim antiquity, holding poor Sudanese refugees fleeing the horror and hunger of their country, and torturing them daily until someone either pays ransom or the poor victim dies. Unfortunately this behavior cannot be dismissed as un-Islamic. The Prophet himself, during his later years as warlord, personally used torture to get his prisoners to tell where their treasures were hidden. For the next 1500 years, Muslim pirates terrorized and depopulated the Mediterranean for captives either to sell in their slave markets, or hold for ransom.

The UN should include these practices listed above as \223harmful customs.\224 However, even the first \223custom\224 that was declared illegal by the UN in 1952 is still in practice: slavery. It was a noble effort, but left out one important element: that the treatment of women, even in marriage, fits well the definition of slavery. The slave may not refuse any order, may not travel or even go out of the house without permission or without a chaperone, and may be killed for \223dishonoring\224 her master\222s family by trying to escape. That is the status of women in rural Afghanistan and Pakistan. The UN\222s slave laws really should include marriage, but imagine the howls of \223Islamophobia\224 if it did.

678 words

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