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Introduction

ANNELIES MOORS

YAFA SHANNEIK

There has been renewed attention in academia and beyond for Muslim marriages in Muslim-majority countries as well as in settings where Muslims are a minority, in the Global North and in the Global South (Afary 2009; Foblets et al. 2014; Grillo 2015; Hasso 2010; Jones and Shanneik 2020; Mir-Hosseini 1993; Moors forthcoming; Shrage 2013). Especially in settings where such marriages have become the focus of public debate, this has engendered a growing body of research. The subjects addressed include unregistered marriages (Akthar et al. 2018; Arabi 2001; Latte Abdallah 2009; Moors et al. 2018), polygamous marriages (Charsley and Liversage 2013; Majeed 2015; Van Wichelen 2009), early/late marriages and singlehood (Johnson 2010; Singerman and Ibrahim 2003; Zbeidy 2018), transnational marriages (Charsley 2013; Schmidt 2011; Sportel 2013), forced marriages (Anitha and Gill 2011; Razack 2004; Welchman 2011), and temporary marriages (Haeri 1989; see further below).

Except for publications on temporary marriages, such research has by and large focused on Sunni Muslim marriages. It is true that after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran more attention has been paid to Shi'a Islam in general, centering on such topics as the historical development of Shi'a Islam (Ayoub 2005; Cole 2002), Shi'a politics and sectarianism (Clarke and Kuenkler 2018; Mattiesen 2013), transnational dimensions of Shi'ism (Gholami 2015, 2018; Scharbrodt 2018), the formation of Shi'a Islamist movements (Louër 2008), and Shi'a ritual practices (Flaskerud 2014; Khosronejad 2014; Shanneik 2017; Spellman 2004). However, very little academic work has engaged with Shi'a marriages, and those studies have, moreover, by and large remained limited to Iran (Afary 2009; Mir-Hosseini 1993). This volume thereby makes important contributions to research on Shi'a Muslims through shifting the focus to marriage practices in those settings that have remained unrepresented in Shi'a studies. This volume fills this gap in academic research by engaging with Shi'a Muslim marriages and

relationships in Pakistan, Oman, Indonesia, Norway, and the Netherlands as well as Iran.¹

This volume sets out to make a substantial contribution to research about Shi'a Muslim marriages, with a focus on how Shi'a Muslims enter into marriage. As marriage is a central institution for the reproduction of families, ethnic and religious groups, and nations, a wide variety of parties are invested in encouraging, transforming, or contesting particular kinds of marriages. The contributors to this volume present the multiple and sometimes divergent points of view of those interested and involved in the process of getting married, such as parents and other kin, religious authorities, state and non-state actors, and the young couples themselves. These marriages not only need to be contextualized within the framework of the nation-state, but also must take into account local communities as well as transnational networks and global connections.

With this contribution we gain insight into the global dynamics of Shi'a marriages in a wide range of contexts. Hegland focuses on long-term changes in marriage practices in an Iranian village, while Walter discusses new dating practices of the Shi'a in northernmost Pakistan. Safar writes about dower and wedding practices among three Shi'a communities in Oman, and Bøe focuses on the function of the dower among well-educated Iranian migrants to Norway. Nisa discusses temporary marriages among the Shi'a minority in Indonesia, while Girard analyzes the discourse of Iranian students in the Netherlands on various forms of relationships. Asgarilaleh and Moors focus on the function of temporary marriage in the case of third-party gametes donation in Iran.

Engaging with such a geographical variety of cases, this volume offers a novel comparative perspective on the diverse marriage practices among Shi'a Muslims in different parts of the world. This includes settings where Shi'a Muslims are the religious majority (Iran), where they are a religious minority within a Muslim-majority context (Pakistan, Oman, and Indonesia), and where they are a minority within a Muslim minority context (Norway and the Netherlands). Shi'a Muslims in these various locations are also related to such communities elsewhere through transnational networks produced through migratory movements of students, traders, and professionals. Thereby, this volume further engages with Shi'a marriage practices embedded within wider contexts of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism and their effect on the changing nature of Muslim marriage practices. It highlights variations and negotiations of individuals' and communities' norms and values in relation to Muslim family lives, spouses' relationships, and gender dynamics. Discussing the multiple forms of belonging implicated in these marriages, the contributions simultaneously provide broader insights into the shifting position of Shi'a Muslims in a rapidly changing world of sectarian violence. Before further positioning the contributions to this volume, we first present a brief note on the historical development of Shi'a Islam.

The Shi'a Context

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, disputes arouse around who would succeed him and rule over the Muslim community after him. Shi'a Muslims believe that this ruler should have been someone from the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*), who are believed to have a special spiritual and socioreligious standings in society to lead the Muslim community after the Prophet's death. They also believe that the Prophet appointed, during his lifetime, his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and first Imam. Sunnis, however, believe the successor should be appointed from the Companions of the Prophet and accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph. Ali however became only the fourth appointed caliph. Ali's son Husayn launched a revolt against the Umayyad's ruling caliph Yazid and was killed together with his entourage on the plain of Karbala (south of Iraq) in 680 CE. This battle became a symbol of Shi'a persecution and oppression and plays a central role in Shi'a collective identity and sectarian disputes.

Shi'a Muslims constitute a minority within Islam, with Twelver Shi'a being the largest denomination within Shi'ism. Twelver Shi'is believe in a patrilineal line of succession of the twelve Imams with the last imam believed to have gone into hiding as a child and will appear as the Islamic savior, *Mahdi*, at the end of times (Haider 2014). Shi'a communities are found around the world as a minority within a Sunni majority context, such as in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Oman, and Yemen. In Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan Shi'a Muslims form the majority but have not always been in power but rather have been ruled and marginalized by the minority Sunni population, such as in Bahrain and, until 2003, in Iraq (Matthiesen 2013).

Religious and spiritual authority is central to Twelver Shi'ism. Every individual is meant to follow and emulate the religious guidance of one senior cleric, also referred to as the source of emulation (*marja' al-taqlid*, *maraje' al-taqlid* [pl.]) (Walbridge 2001).² The most senior and most widely followed *marja' al-taqlid* is the Iranian-born Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Sistani (b. 1930), whose network spreads across the world (Rizvi 2018). These senior clerics set the rules of Shi'a *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and with the influence, and to a certain extent involvement, of individuals and civil society, they initiate the process of *ijtihad* in which legal reasoning is found for new legal questions.³ Boundaries and parameters regarding marriage and sexuality are negotiated and dictated by these senior Shi'a clerics. They also determine how norms are defined, which may also be translated into state law in Shi'a-majority countries.

Although all contributions to this volume focus on Twelver Shi'a Muslims, the latter adhere to diverse *maraji' al-taqlid* and also follow various customary practices. They use different terms in relation to marriage processes and understandings of marriage practices. Therefore, in this introduction we do not establish a glossary to homogenize Shi'a terms and practices. Rather, this volume

illustrates the diversity of individuals' and communities' understandings of terms and practices influenced by global but also local socioreligious, economic, and political contexts.

Shi'a Marriages: Diverse Practices, Multiple Belongings

Whereas this volume engages with Shi'a marriages, we recognize that there is considerable overlap in how Sunni and Shi'a Muslims enter into marriage. For those living in Muslim-majority settings, Muslim family law regulates their personal status and marital relations. Muslim marriages follow a contractual approach that is in many ways similar for Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Only after a marriage contract is concluded can sexual intercourse be considered religiously and often also legally permitted (Welchman 2007). As for every contract, offer and acceptance are required; that is, both spouses need to consent to enter into the marriage. Many but not all Islamic scholars also consider the approval of the marriage guardian (*wali*) of the bride necessary. For Shi'a Muslims in particular this depends on the *marja' al-taqlid* the couple follows and on whether the bride is entering into her first marriage or has previously been married (Afary 2009; Haeri 1989). A dower, presented by the groom to the bride—known as *mahr* in Arabic or as *mehriyeh* in Persian—is part of the marriage contract. Whereas in Sunni Islam the presence of two witnesses is needed for the contract to be valid, for Shi'a Muslims this is not required by every *marja' al-taqlid*, although it is often recommended. The other main difference between Sunni and Shi'a marriage regulations is that the Shi'a allow for temporary marriages (*mut'a* or, in Persian, *sigheh*), that is, a marriage concluded for a specific period of time. Publications on Shi'a marriages have almost without exception focused on this contested practice. This volume, in contrast, engages with Shi'a marriages in a broader manner and hence also includes Shi'a permanent marriages. Moreover, scholars of temporary marriages place these in the context of the wider array of forms that conjugal relationships may take or point to the multiple and at times novel meanings that temporary marriages have acquired.

Taken together, the contributions to this volume start from an approach that empirically investigates how in specific settings particular forms of identification and difference matter. This means that whereas the focus in this volume is on Shi'a marriages, we do not a priori assume that religious affiliation is the main determinant of Shi'a Muslims' actions or their primary form of identification and belonging. As the various contributions indicate, the extent to which Shi'a Muslims enact a commitment to religious practice varies considerably. For instance, Bøe's work on Iranian migrants in Norway indicates that for her interlocutors it is important to delink national identity from religion, while the Omani Shi'a with whom Safar did research underline how Shi'a Islam is part and parcel of their communal identities.

This volume analyzes to what extent and in which ways Shi'a Muslims participate in, negotiate, or contest religious aspects of marriage and how their marriage practices simultaneously shape and are shaped by other forms of identification and belonging, such as nationality, ethnicity, generation, and class. In Norway the focus is on practices of largely secular well-educated Iranian migrants, while in Oman the Shi'a minority is divided into ethnic groups that also take up different class positions. In Iran the life courses of different generations are markedly divergent, in Pakistan the focus is on emerging practices of Shi'a minority youth, while in Indonesia the views of Shi'a students differ from those of Shi'a elites. Among Iranian students in the Netherlands differences in religiosity matter, and in Iran religious authorities and biomedical experts hold a variety of views on marriage and gametes donation. Moreover, the contributors to this volume not only engage with the impact of national and subnational identifications but also pay attention to how global mobility and transnational relations matter in the field of Shi'a marriages. A number of contributions focus on the marriage ideals and practices of migrants, expatriate traders, and international students. Global connections are, however, produced not only by mobile people but also through mobile ideas, such as Shi'a religious concepts that traveled from Iran to Indonesia and elsewhere in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. In other words, this volume engages with Shi'a marriage concepts and practices that are also embedded within contexts of mobility and transnationalism.

All contributions to this volume are based on longer-term empirical field research with Shi'a Muslims. The coherence of this volume is constituted not only through its focus on Shi'a marriages but also by the particular themes highlighted and the ways in which they are in conversation with each other. The volume is divided into three main parts. The first two parts (four chapters) engage with marriage trends and practices that are not specifically Shi'a in a doctrinal sense. The themes they focus on—shifts in generational and gender relations, new forms of dating, and trends in dower registration—are also present among Sunni Muslims. Yet as these contributions indicate, these practices may nonetheless gain a Shi'a connotation because they are accompanied by Shi'a rituals (as with marriage celebrations in Oman), function as a Shi'a identity marker (as with dating practices in Pakistan and with dower practices in Oman), or because our interlocutors need to engage with Shi'a normative structures (as in Iran after the Islamic Revolution or for Iranian migrants in Norway who may want to return to Iran). The third part (three chapters), in contrast, directly engages with a specifically Twelver Shi'a religious institution—temporary marriage. Avoiding an essentialist reading of this institution, this volume shows the very different ways in which these marriages function, how the motivations for women to enter into these marriages and the meanings they attribute to them vary widely, both in Iran and in a minority setting such as Indonesia, and how young Iranians evaluate these marriages in the context of other forms of

relationships. In the following sections we bring these contributions into conversation with each other along three thematic lines: gender and generational shifts in dating and marriage; the dower, signifying religion, ethnicity, and class; and temporary marriages as a flexible and controversial institution.

Gender and Generation: New Dating and Marriage Practices

In the Middle East, as elsewhere, major socioeconomic and political transformations, such as nation-state formation, have been accompanied by shifts in household composition, family relations, and the conclusion of marriages (Kandiyoti 1996). By the early twentieth century, among the modernizing middle classes, the ideal of companionate marriages had emerged together with that of nuclear households, centering on the new male citizen, his domesticated wife, and their children (Abu-Lughod 1998; Najmabadi 1993). Gradually, in many locations, processes of urbanization, the spread of education and wage labor, and transnational migration have also lessened the dependence of the younger generation on their elders and have enabled a greater say of the younger generation in the selection of spouses (Latte Abdallah 2009; Moors 1995; Hasso 2010).

This has also engendered a shift in ideals about marriages that is more complex than simply a transition from arranged to love marriage. It is true that marriages arranged by parents in which the parties have at most met each other briefly in the company of others have lost much of their appeal. However, the concept of romantic love has been present in the past as well, while in the case of present-day marriages family involvement and material considerations may also matter both in the Global North and the Global South (Zelizer 2000). An emergent pattern in the Middle East has been a shift toward more companionate forms of marriage that may simultaneously still be presented as arranged (Hart 2007). In strictly religious circles, where gender segregation is considered desirable, the term “Islamic marriage” is sometimes used to refer to marriages where the spouses do not date freely and where religious commitment may matter more than material interests and family concerns (Moors 2013).

The first two chapters focus on changing marriage relations in a village near Shiraz in Iran (Hegland) and on the emergence of forms of dating in a Shi'a community in Gilgit-Baltistan, in northernmost Pakistan (Walter). Whereas both take the wider context of generational change into consideration, their style of writing is very different. Hegland uses very broad strokes to analyze wider processes of change, also paying attention to its effects on the older generation, while Walter describes emerging dating practices among young people in depth and with much detail.

Hegland's contribution is particularly interesting because she did her initial fieldwork in the village prior to the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Describing in general terms how these rural households were organized at the time, she

underlines the strong generational and gender hierarchies. Young men were dependent on their fathers and women married very young and moved in with their in-laws, living in extended family households. Whereas in the early part of their life cycle these young women were highly dependent on their mothers-in-law, once they had children themselves they gradually gained a stronger position and expected, in turn, to become respected mothers-in-law.

It became evident that this cycle had broken down when she returned for fieldwork after the turn of the century. Urbanization, education (for men and for women), and work outside of agriculture (for men) had made sons far less dependent on their fathers and young women more mobile, while ages at marriage had also risen. With the growing importance of consumer culture and status linked to material wealth, marriage had become far more expensive, with most of the costs borne by the side of the groom and sometimes also that of the bride. Not only did these costs entail the dowry, gold jewelry, and the increasingly ostentatious wedding parties but brides were also increasingly reluctant to live with their in-laws. Instead, they had come to expect to move into a fully furnished house of their own.

In the case of Iran, the question then arises of how such longer term trends relate to state policies in this Shi'a-majority setting. Under Pahlavi rule, in particular among the middle classes, a strong discourse had emerged about modernization and gender equality along Western lines. After the Islamic Revolution, more conservative ideas about gender relations were promoted. Comparing this with Hegland's findings, it is evident that neither the family law reforms under Pahlavi rule nor the policies of the Islamic regime to promote greater gender segregation had much impact in the village where she did research. Instead, during the past decades the local acceptance of women's mobility and cross-gender relationships has increased, families have become smaller, and the authority of the older generation has weakened.

Longer-term changes were also important in Gilgit-Baltistan in northernmost Pakistan, as Walter points out. These included development schemes, new highways, increased education and mobility, as well as access to satellite TV and video clips (from India) and to mobile phones. This has engendered the emergence of a dating culture, with the mobile phone as an important means of connectivity. A wider range of ideas about love, romance, and marriage, influenced not only by romantic notions of Bollywood but also by Islamic concepts, has transformed the interactions of young couples in the period between concluding the Islamic marriage contract (*nikah*) and the wedding celebration (after which the couple will start to live together). Previously this period was a time of avoidance with especially the girls shy and reluctant to interact with their future husbands. More recently, stricter Islamic (rather than customary) views that after concluding the marriage contract avoidance is unnecessary have gained in strength. Also, the meaning of love has changed. Whereas earlier love referred to

passion and the loss of the self, which stood in tense relation to ideals of women's self-discipline and respectability, more recently love has become redefined as conjugal love, as companionship leading to mutual attachment and affection.

Such a longish interval between concluding the marriage contract and celebrating the wedding is also present in other, non-Shi'a contexts, both in Muslim-majority settings (Zbeidy 2018) and in Europe (Moors 2013). Among more conservative Sunni Muslims a marriage contract may be concluded relatively early, with the period up to the wedding functioning as some kind of dating period. In Gilgit-Baltistan, however, Sunni Muslims celebrated the signing of the contract and the wedding very closely together. In that area, then, this practice was specific for Shi'a Muslims and hence functioned also as a marker of Shi'a identity.

Dower Practices: Signifying Religion, Ethnicity, and Class

As mentioned previously, the dower is an intrinsic element of a Muslim marriage contract. It refers to the money, goods, and services that the groom agrees to provide the bride with upon marriage.⁴ In some settings it is common to register both an amount that is to be paid up front (the prompt dower, due when the contract is concluded) and an amount that is deferred to widowhood or repudiation (the deferred dower). The amounts registered in marriage contracts may vary from an exceedingly small, largely symbolic amounts to very substantial sums of money. What is registered is always relational and depends on a host of factors, such as class, level of education, age, and other personal characteristics (having been married previously) of the spouses. Amounts often tend to be lower if there is already a strong relation of trust between the parties concerned (such as in the case of endogamous marriages).

Historically, two major shifts in dower registrations and payments have been reported. One marked a strong inflation of the amounts agreed upon, the other the registration of only a symbolic sum of money. There may, however, also be considerable differences between the amounts registered and what the groom's side pays in practice. When, as has been the case in Iran, large amounts that husbands will not be able to pay have been registered, the dower does not function as a source of women's economic security, but rather women may use their husband's indebtedness as a bargaining tool to strengthen their position in the case of divorce (Mir-Hosseini 1993). Registering a very small dower, in contrast, often functions as a claim to modernity and status, but this does not mean that the bride receives fewer gifts than she would have otherwise (Moors 2008). Whereas some women activists have been critical of the dower system, considering it as an old-fashioned institution and comparing it to the sale of women, others have argued that especially for women with limited access to other financial resources, such as a well-paying job, it may function as a source of economic security.

The “marriage crisis” (referring to men unable to marry because of the high costs of marriage) is often seen as the effect of women’s desire for a high dowry. However, it is not only the dowry that engenders such problems (Kholoussy 2010; Singerman and Ibrahim 2003). As Hegland’s contribution indicates, wedding parties have become highly commercialized and hence are far more expensive than previously was the case, while especially the costs of housing, which is the responsibility of the groom, have increased tremendously. Some state and non-state actors have expressed concerns that such high costs of marriage have engendered late marriage and singlehood among women and have encouraged men to marry foreign women who demand less. Especially in the Gulf States, with their very small national populations, attempts have been made to support men who marry local women by setting up a marriage fund (Hasso 2010), while elsewhere marriage costs are cut by organizing mass weddings (Jad 2009).

The two contributions of this volume that engage with the dowry focus on very different settings. Safar analyzes the dowry and marriage rituals among the small Shi’a minority in Oman, pointing to how these rituals produce both a sense of community and internal differentiations among the Shi’a. Bøe discusses how the Iranian Shi’a minority in Norway may reject, transform, or confirm the dowry, signifying it as an expression of an Iranian-style belonging. Both cases exemplify the ways in which religion, ethnic/national belonging, and class positions are in various and complex ways intertwined.

In Oman, dowry practices and festivities among the small Shi’a minority both set it apart from the Sunni and Ibadi Omanis and enact internal differentiations among the Shi’a depending on their ethnic background (Indian, Arab, or Iranian), which to some extent overlaps with status and class positions. The agreed-upon dowry among the Shi’a is comparatively low. This is especially the case among those from Indian backgrounds (the Lawatiya), who often hold prominent political and economic positions. Their marriages tend to be endogamous, with only a small, symbolic amount registered as dowry. Next to this, Shi’a belonging is also expressed in the ritual of presenting gifts to the bride at a private women-only party, with specific Shi’a ritualistic elements, such as decorations, prayers, and recitations in honor of the Prophet and the Shi’a imams. Among the well-off the wedding ceremony has become an occasion where class and status are celebrated, as it has become highly commercialized, with a celebration held in a wedding hall and the bride wearing an expensive white bridal gown. This stands in contrast to how among the poorer Shi’a of Iranian backgrounds (the ‘Ajam) celebrations of mass weddings have emerged, supported by charitable organizations that help to cut the costs.

Among migrants of Iranian backgrounds in Norway who are generally well educated, often consider themselves nonreligious, and are critical of the Islamic regime, many evaluate the dowry negatively. They consider it an old-fashioned institution that contravenes gender equality and the ideal of marriage on the

basis of love. Nonetheless, many still include some form of dower when they enter into a marriage, in order to turn it into an Iranian-style marriage. Here Iranian-style does not refer to religious affiliation but expresses a sense of cultural belonging. This is evident in how they signify dower rituals as part of their historical heritage or family tradition. Especially women who do not intend to return to Iran and have an income of their own often opt for a symbolic gift instead of a large sum of money. For those who want to go back, it remains necessary to register their marriage within the Iranian system (with its mandatory dower), as the legal and financial protection this entails is still important.

The ways in which individuals (re)signify dower practices, rituals, and festivities may or may not have a religious connotation. Both in Norway and in Oman the Shi'a are a minority, and in both cases ethnicity matters, but in very different ways. Whereas many Iranians in Norway ideologically reject the dower, they not only include some form of dower for pragmatic reasons but also resignify the dower as part of their national cultural heritage, rather than as a religious practice. In Oman, where the Shi'a are a religious minority in a Muslim-majority setting, the Shi'a resignify dower practices that are in and of themselves not specifically Shi'a into markers of both Shi'a religious and ethnic identification through the accompanying Shi'a rituals.

Temporary Marriage: A Flexible and Controversial Institution

In contrast to a permanent marriage contract, a temporary marriage includes a clause that the marriage is for a particular duration, which is customarily understood to vary from one hour to ninety-nine years. At the end of the contract, no divorce procedures are needed.⁵ When a man enters into such a marriage he has to pay a sum of money to his temporary wife, but he does not have maintenance obligations toward her, and the parties do not inherit from each other.⁶ Children born out of such a marriage are legitimate, with the same rights to maintenance and inheritance as those born in a permanent marriage. However, as temporary marriages are often not registered and kept secret, if a man denies the marriage it is very difficult to prove its existence and hence the filiation of children (Yas-seri et al. 2019).

Temporary marriages are a flexible and, for many, controversial Twelver Shi'a institution and prohibited within Sunni Islam.⁷ Yet Twelver Shi'a Muslims also hold divergent views on this institution and use it for a variety of aims. Historically, temporary marriages were popular with traveling merchants and pilgrims when they were away from home (Haeri 1989). During the Pahlavi reign this institution became increasingly marginalized, as it did not fit with its project of modernization along Western lines. After the Islamic Revolution, in contrast, the regime attempted to revive the practice, considering temporary marriages both as an opportunity for young war widows to remarry and as a progressive Islamic

institution suitable for young couples not yet able to enter into a permanent marriage that may function as an alternative to cohabitation (Haeri 1992).

Women hold a variety of perspectives on the desirability of such marriages. Many secular, urban, middle-class women consider temporary marriage as a relic of the past, as a threat to the stability of the family, as a cover for forms of prostitution, and, more generally, as an institution that is detrimental to the position of women (Haeri 1992). Some young people use it instrumentally to avoid interference by the morality police and to circumvent state regulation (Afary 2009). It may, however, be risky for young women to enter into such marriages. Especially in circles where women are expected to be a virgin when marrying, it may jeopardize their chances of a respectable permanent marriage, while those who enter into a temporary marriage hoping to achieve a meaningful and affectionate relation and companionship may well be disappointed (Haeri 1989). Still, for lower-class divorced women a temporary marriage can be an option to escape the marginality of their status, while for better-off divorced or widowed women a temporary marriage may be socially acceptable (Afary 2009).

Whereas structurally such marriages often concern relationships that are strongly unequal in terms of gender and class, with older wealthy men marrying young, poor women as temporary wives (Moruzzi and Sadeghi 2006), recent explorative research also indicates that some of these temporary marriages become committed longer-term relationships. These include marriages of middle-aged widowed or divorced men and women who seek companionship and intimacy but do not want to go through a permanent marriage and young, never-married adults who enter into a temporary marriage to legitimate an intimate, companionate relationship while postponing a permanent marriage as they prefer to first pursue their education and begin their professional career (Aghajanian et al. 2018). Young people who are not very concerned about religious rules may, in contrast, opt to enter into an intimate relationship without any kind of marriage.

Whereas sexuality is often foregrounded in the case of temporary marriages, that is, their function to legitimate a sexual relationship, there is also a form of temporary marriage that is explicitly nonsexual (Haeri 1989). Often such nonsexual temporary marriages are concluded to avoid the rules of gender segregation, such as when unrelated men and women need to travel together on a pilgrimage or a tourist trip, or in the case of employment that entails close social contact. In strictly religious families, nonsexual temporary marriage may also be used by couples during their engagement to allow for some intimacy (but not for a full sexual relationship), enabling them to spend time together, without concerns that their relationship would, in their own eyes and in those of their social circle, be sinful.

Three contributions to this volume engage with very different forms of temporary marriages, both sexual and nonsexual, with different aims, including

procreation, and within different settings. Nisa discusses temporary marriages in Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country, where Shi'a Muslims constitute a small religious minority that has increasingly come under attack. Asgarilaleh and Moors focus on how in Iran temporary marriages have been used as a mechanism for procreation in the case of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), while Girard analyzes how Iranian students in the Netherlands discuss temporary marriages within the context of a range of other possible relationships.

In Indonesia, as Nisa explains, there are both Shi'a communities with a long-standing presence and those, often university students, who have more recently turned to Shi'a Islam in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. With the growing animosity of Sunni groups toward this Shi'a presence, temporary marriages have become a highly controversial issue, rejected by some as a form of "halal prostitution." Among Shi'a youth, in contrast, these marriages are often popular as a means to avoid illicit sexual relationships for those not yet able or ready to go through the complicated process of a permanent marriage. Some couples may also enter into a temporary marriage while completing their studies, as a means to get to know each other before entering into a permanent marriage, often with the permission of their families. Shi'a elites, in turn, express criticism of temporary marriages because of their concern that they may harm the reputation of the Shi'a in an already tense situation. Fearing such criticism, couples may well hide the fact that they have entered into such a marriage.

Girard, in turn, investigates how Iranian students in the Netherlands evaluate temporary marriage compared to other relationships, such as permanent marriage, the boyfriend-girlfriend relation, and "white marriages" (*ejdewaj-e sefid* in Persian). These students consider a temporary marriage as more acceptable in the case of single men who want to avoid sinning than with men who are already married. Moreover, they are generally more positive about a nonsexual temporary marriage. Those students who regard themselves as less religious tend to consider temporary marriage as an outdated institution. They regard a girlfriend-boyfriend relationship associated with love rather than with sexuality as permissible and also argue in favor of white marriages, a term used for cohabitation, which they also link to romantic relationships. Using concepts such as love, sex, sin, modernity, and gender equality, their arguments fit well with a wider discourse that highly values companionate marriages, based on love and partnership.

Asgarilaleh and Moors trace how in Iran temporary marriage and third-party gametes and embryo donation have become entangled and disentangled in the course of time. The use of such marriages in the case of third-party donation (what they label as "laboratory *sigheh*") may be considered a new form of nonsexual temporary marriage that aims not at sexual pleasure but at procreation. Whereas some *maraji'* do not require any kind of marriage for gametes donation if there is no gaze or touch, others argue for the need for a temporary marriage for the duration of conception in the laboratory. Yet entering into such a laboratory

sigheh precludes gametes donation by close kin because of the incest taboo. In the case of stranger donors another problem emerges—the tension between concluding a temporary marriage and the desire for confidentiality, as the donors of the gametes are considered the legal parents. Proposed solutions differ: some biomedical experts argue for developing a stronger bioethical perspective, broadening the scope for social parenthood, while others agree with the tactical use of Islamic formats such as milk kinship and temporary marriage.

In spite of their differences, these cases also point to some common ground. In all cases there is a more positive valuation of temporary marriage if it is non-sexual or concluded as a step toward a permanent marriage. Temporary marriages that are not explicitly linked to sexuality are very much part of the turn toward love-based, more companionate relationships, with those who are less religious also in favor of other types of nonmarital relationships. Interestingly, this fits well with debates among young Sunni Muslims about unregistered marriages, whereas in some settings among the more religious such marriages are similarly employed to allow for a period of getting to know each other (Moors 2013). Those who are less concerned about religious rules may reject such marriages in favor of more equal forms of relationships, including cohabitation (Kolman 2018). In other words, a quintessential Shi'a institution such as temporary marriage is affected by broader societal trends that impact both Sunni and Shi'a marriages.

To conclude, what does this volume as a whole contribute to studies of marriage and Shi'a Islam? In popular debate, especially when tensions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are increasing, Shi'a marriages are often reduced to temporary marriages, which are then, in turn, labeled as a form of women's exploitation. Scholars focusing on religious doctrine and legal regulations also tend to highlight differences between Sunni and Shi'a Islam. The ethnographic approach the authors of this volume work with and the wide range of settings where they conducted their research enable a more layered and nuanced view of Shi'a marriages. Their contributions indicate that in many respects Sunni and Shi'a marriages are alike. Those entering into marriage have similar concerns and considerations both with respect to the material aspects of marriage as well as in view of personal and affective relations. The contributions on temporary marriages show the wide range of motivations of those entering into such marriages as well as the different ways in which their social circle and society at large evaluate these marriages.

Whereas it is evident that socioeconomic processes of change have generally allowed the younger generation more say in their marriages, how they enter into marriage is by no means given. An ethnographic approach is helpful as it does not a priori foreground the religious but investigates whether and how religion matters. This becomes visible at various moments in the process of contracting a marriage, such as with respect to the forms of dating they consider licit, whether they would consider alternative relationships acceptable, how

dower arrangements are negotiated and valued, and what kinds of celebrations are held. There is a wide range of views both among religious authorities as well as among laypeople on these issues, and social practices fluctuate in concert but also in contrast to legal and theological frameworks.

Finally, the contributions to this volume also convincingly show the need to take into account the multiple positionings and identifications of the parties concerned. Being part of a Shi'a community may be framed in terms of religious belonging but also ethnic or national belonging. Some may, moreover, resignify being Shi'a as a cultural rather than religious heritage. Being Shi'a may bind people together and even connect them through transnational ties, while other axes of differentiation, such as ethnicity or class, may produce internal divisions within Shi'a communities. Whereas outcomes are unpredictable, entering into marriage is always intimately entangled in these multiple forms of belonging.

NOTES

1. As we are covering a diverse range of countries with their own languages and dialects, this volume does not follow a particular system of transliteration.
2. Individual believers may change the particular *marja'* they follow or follow different scholars (see Shanneik 2013).
3. Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi is one of the senior clerics who supported the involvement of laypeople in the process of *ijtihad*. For more on this, see Razavian (2015).
4. According to Islamic scholars, the dower is either a condition for the validity of a marriage or an effect of a marriage (Welchman 2007).
5. The woman needs, however, to complete a waiting period prior to a next marriage in order to ascertain paternity in the case of pregnancy.
6. The Qur'anic term for the payment to the bride in the case of temporary marriage is *'ajr*, and for permanent marriage *mahr* or, in Farsi, *mehriyeh*. However, many Shi'a scholars and laypeople use the term *mahr* in both cases (Haeri 1989, 220n6). On *mahr* within the Gulf context, see Safar (2015, 2018).
7. Sunni authorities agree that temporary marriage was permitted at the time of the Prophet Muhammad but that the second caliph Omar had prohibited it in the seventh century. The Shi'a hold the opinion that since the Prophet did not ban temporary marriages, it is not permissible to forbid it (Yasseri et al. 2019, 73).

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