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Contemporary Temporary Marriage: A Blog-analysis of First-hand Experiences

By Sammy Badran[1] and Brian Turnbull[2]

Abstract

Within Islam, a temporary marriage generally implies a short-term marriage between a man and a woman that does not come with a long-term commitment and may or may not have an explicit, pre-established timeline or endpoint. The partial religious legitimation of temporary marriage via Islamic fatwas has recently revived the institution. Some suggest that the rising popularity is an attempt by individuals to fulfill sexual desires within the confines of a religiously-legitimized institution; while others argue that it can lead to exploitation and perhaps slavery of women and girls. Conclusions supporting both the positive and negative aspects of temporary marriage are largely anecdotal. There is an absence of systematic empirical work on this complex phenomenon, particularly with regards to its positive and negative effects on the women involved. This paper aims to answer how, and under what conditions, temporary marriage can be either exploitative or liberating for individual women. Our research utilizes first-hand accounts provided online to better understand how and why the institution of temporary marriage has been revived both within the MENA region and expanded into the West. We review narratives from individuals who have engaged in temporary marriages and analyze support for the competing views within the literature. Overall, we argue that temporary marriages can create a private space for the participants to feel better about their relationship, even if those outside still criticize and shame them. However, this private space also gives exploitative men more leeway to take advantage of their partner.

Keywords: Temporary Marriage, Islam, blog analysis, human trafficking

Introduction

Within Islam, a temporary marriage generally implies a short-term arrangement between a man and a woman that does not come with a long-term commitment and may or may not have an explicit, pre-established timeline or endpoint. As an Arab custom, temporary marriage pre-dates Islam (Schrage, 2013). Sunni and Shiite Muslims agree that temporary marriage was permitted by the Prophet Muhammad; however, 'there is disagreement over whether the practice was later

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forbidden by the second caliph Omar (Umar) or by the Prophet himself' (Schrage, 2013, p.108). With the expansion of temporary marriage since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, when the Islamist-Iranian state legitimized the practice, and subsequent Islamic fatwas (a ruling issued by Islamic law authorities) in support over the past decade, there has been a revival of the institution within the Middle East, North Africa region (MENA) and outside diasporas (Haeri, 2014; Jervis, 2005; Mervin, 2008).

Expectedly, opinions regarding this institution vary dramatically. Some suggest that temporary arrangements are useful as a trial-period, are economically more feasible than traditional marriage, allow individuals to fulfill sexual desires within a religious institution, and can help legitimize extramarital sexual relations (Haeri, 2014; Al-Nasr, 2011). Others recognize that the lack of permanent commitment often leads to a societal association with prostitution, and can facilitate the exploitation and slavery of women and girls (Mattar, 2001; Bradley, 2010).

Conclusions supporting both the positive and negative aspects of temporary marriage are largely anecdotal. There is an absence of empirical work on this complex phenomenon, particularly with regards to its effects on individual women. This paper aims to answer how, and under what conditions, temporary marriage can be either exploitative or liberating for the individual woman. Our research utilizes first-hand accounts to better understand why the institution of temporary marriage has been revived both within the MENA region and beyond. In the first section, we elaborate on what temporary marriage is and explain the different variants of the institution. In the second section, we discuss the use of temporary marriage to exploit women in the MENA region. In the third section, we put forth the arguments in support of the liberating potential of temporary marriage. Finally, we review first-hand narratives from individuals who have engaged in temporary marriages and analyze the support for these competing views. Overall, we argue that temporary marriages can create a private space for the participants to feel better about their relationship, even if those outside still criticize and shame them. However, this private space also gives exploitative men more leeway to take advantage of their partner.

What is Temporary Marriage?

Temporary marriage is generally believed to have originated from regional customs within the Arab Middle East associated with the traveling merchants, predominantly men, who would often engage with local women in *mut'ah* marriages (pleasure marriages) for a pre-established time (Heffening, 2013). After the marriage, the woman would go back to her family and the arrangement would end. With the arrival of Islam in the MENA region, many forms of marriage were banned for a time, but mut'ah has maintained some controversial legitimacy within a debate that continues to this day.

The legitimacy of temporary marriages became a point of contestation between Sunnis and Shiites. Sunnis have generally rejected the practice, as they believe that the Prophet Muhammad banned it. Shiites tend to be more supportive, as they argue that the third caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab wrongfully banned the institution (Sindawi, 2013, p. 34). This disagreement is still evident today between the two sects. For instance, children born from such marriages within Shiite communities typically adopt the father's name and are considered legitimate, whereas similar children in the Sunni community are likely to be considered illegitimate and socially shunned. Still, even among Shias, temporary marriages are often criticized as legitimized prostitution (Heffening, 2013).

Although the vast majority of Sunni Islamic scholars agree that mut'ah marriages are forbidden, there have been recent scholars who disagree. A recent Sunni offshoot has been the *misyar* marriage (traveler's marriage), which was initially seen as a solution primarily for divorcees, who could use this form of marriage to have sexual relationships within the tenets of Islam (Sindawi, 2013, p.86). These arrangements have also been referred to as summer marriages, as they typically occur during summer vacations. Similar to mut'ah marriages, misyar marriages do not require the groom to provide a house or maintenance for the bride, but the financial rights that the bride forgoes can be reinstated later on if both partners agree to it. Finally, unlike mut'ah arrangements, the length of a misyar marriage is not always predetermined, it can be very short or longer, but still lacks any long-term commitment. However, only the man can issue a verbal divorce to end it (Sindawi, 2013). In social English-language discourse today outside of academic and religious circles, the terms 'mut'ah', 'misyar', and 'temporary marriage' are now often used interchangeably, therefore we will specify when possible, and revert to 'temporary marriage' when it is not clear which specific arrangement is being referred to.

There are parallels and differences between the variants of temporary marriage and the traditional Islamic *nik'ah* marriage, which entails long-term commitment. A nik'ah marriage is a formal contract that requires mutual consent and two witnesses. Mut'ah, misyar and nik'ah arrangements should all be contractual agreements consented to by the free will of both the bride and groom. However, mut'ah and misyar marriages can be verbally-consented contractual agreements, while traditional nik'ah marriage contracts are typically only valid in written format. Furthermore, a dowry, or payment by the groom to the bride, is a requirement in mut'ah, misyar, and nik'ah marriages. However, outside of Saudi Arabia there is generally no witness requirement for mut'ah or misyar marriages, which are required for nik'ah arrangements. After the dowry/bride-price is paid, women within mut'ah and misyar arrangements are not required to be financially supported by their husbands (Haeri, 1992, p.211). As temporary spouses often do not live together, this can leave the woman without any support during and after the temporary arrangement. Nik'ah marriages are accepted across Islam, while mut'ah marriages are generally practiced by the Twelver Shia sect, the largest branch of Shia Islam, and misyar marriages are practiced by some Sunni Muslims, primarily from the Arab Gulf (Haeri, 1992).

Legitimization and the Fatwa-Matchmaker Nexus

As there is no explicit mention of mut'ah or misyar marriages within the Koran, fatwas are the main source of legitimizing the practice. On April 10, 2006, a fatwa issued by the Islamic Jurisprudence Assembly in Mecca declared misyar 'as a legal form of marriage' (Doe, 2008, p.14). The fatwa stated that when a woman agrees to a misyar marriage, she 'relinquishes her rights to housing and support and accepts that her husband may visit her in her home whenever he likes' (Ende, 2010, p.656). For many Saudi men, the removal of these protections made temporary marriage arrangements much more attractive than the more restrictive traditional marriage, with up to a 50 percent increase in temporary marriages following the 2006 fatwa (Al Hakeem, 2006). Following this announcement, Saudi matchmakers have been able to market temporary marriages to a broad range of ages and partners. Dankowitz (2006) reported that one Saudi matchmaker claimed: 'Since the publication of the fatwa permitting misyar marriages, she had received at least 15-20 requests per day from men of various ages for such marriages'.

The 2006 fatwa also influenced Islamic policy in Egypt: 'The Saudi influence on the Egyptian legists of Al-Azhar can also be clearly seen in the former Chief Mufti of Egypt…who

has stated that travel marriage is a product of necessity in some societies' (Sindawi, 2013, p.99). However, other fatwas have established conditions for temporary marriages that make them less useful for transient arrangements. The late Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheik Ibn Baaz, released a fatwa in 2014 suggesting that temporary marriage must abide by Sharia, and there must be witnesses to legitimize a marriage. Moreover, there must be a public declaration of marriage; it cannot be hidden (Islam Q and A, 2017). Other religious authorities have directly contradicted the 2006 fatwa. In 2009, a Saudi sheik declared on live television that temporary marriages, with their intention of divorce, are forbidden under Islam (Halwari, 2009).

These conflicting religious statements on temporary marriage illustrate the uncertain status of temporary marriage arrangements within Islam, particularly among Sunnis. However, this uncertainty also allows individuals to perhaps pick and choose the set of rules they want to legitimize their behavior with. For those who want to engage in a temporary arrangement, they can find an official authority who has endorsed it, as multiple Islamic scholars have concurred with the 2006 fatwa. One Islamic consultant even declared on Saudi television that misyar arrangements were 'important so that men do not fall into prostitution during their travel abroad' (Bradley, 2010, p. 103).

With the expansion of temporary marriage arrangements following its subjective religious legitimization, concerns have risen about its potential to exploit vulnerable women. Exploitation becomes more likely when matchmakers facilitate these marriages by locating vulnerable populations who are willing to engage in the arrangements, usually in return for compensation to the woman or her family. Various news outlets have reported an increasing number of wealthy men from Saudi Arabia traveling to impoverished areas in various countries throughout the region, especially Egypt, with the intention of marrying women and girls as young as eleven (Mcgrath, 2013). These Saudi men appear to be using the matchmaker services to facilitate misyar arrangements with young women from specific impoverished Egyptian villages (IRIN, 2013). Within these villages, 'brokers' sometimes approach the Saudi tourists with pictures of potential mates, negotiate a price, and then the women/girls are invited for an interview with the potential 'husband' (El-Gawhary, 1995, p. 27). Third-party matchmakers even maintain clandestine phone numbers which direct a caller to a message that informs the interested party of prices for virgin and nonvirgin girls and women (Bradley, 2010, p.103). There are multiple reports of Saudi citizens who have bought these girls from their fathers for long periods during the summer. After these girls have been sexually exploited, the men verbally divorce them and return home. An Egyptian government official claimed that some girls have engaged in sixty temporary marriages by the time they are eighteen and that 'most of the marriages last for just a couple of days or weeks' (Fisher, 2013).

The exploitative effects of temporary marriages are repeatedly mentioned in the US State Department's 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report* for Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. More recently, vulnerable refugee populations escaping the Syrian Civil War have faced increasingly predatory temporary arrangements. The 2014 *TIP Report* indicated that Syrian women and often young girls are 'forced into 'pleasure marriages' or 'temporary marriages'—for prostitution or sexual exploitation—by men from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries' (U.S. Department of State, 2014, p. 366). The clients are often wealthy men from Gulf countries who 'pay thousands of dollars to matchmakers to marry teenage Syrian girls' (U.S. Department of State, 2014, p. 366). These marriages are facilitated through matchmakers, websites, and advertisements (Luck, 2012). Accounts from the exploited include a 14-year-old Syrian girl who was sold by her father to a Saudi man for a one-

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month period. The victim recalls that the Saudi man beat her and used her as a sex slave (Hubbard, 2006). In another case, a Yemeni victim was sold to a Saudi man by her father when she was 16 years old. The man used the girl for sex, then divorced her a month after the marriage via a letter in the mail (IRIN, 2005). Opinions within the Syrian refugee communities vary. Within the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, some see temporary marriages with wealthy men from the Gulf as an opportunity: 'Bashar destroyed our home and our lives…with my marriage; we can start over in a new country with a new life'. Others within the same camp view the trend negatively and say they will not allow wealthy foreigners to purchase Syrian women (Luck, 2012).

While Sunni Saudi men have evidently made use of misyar arrangements, temporary marriages are still generally more accepted within Shia communities. The Shia spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has been supportive of temporary marriages and helped legalize temporary marriage in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime (IRIN, 2005). According to one NGO in 2006, since 2003 'more than 300 temporary marriages occur daily in Kerbala, Najaf and Basra, Iraq's three main Shi'ite cities. The first-hand experience of an Iraqi widow sums up a common scenario for women exploited by temporary marriages: 'I was his sexual slave for one month and then he just said my time had expired and left. He slept with me every day for a week and then went back to his wife, leaving me pregnant without any help…Today, I'm considered a prostitute by society' (IRIN, 2006). As an institution, temporary marriages have been expanding in both legitimacy and use, and it has been well documented that this can enable the exploitation of vulnerable women. However, other work has argued that the institution can be positive.

The Liberating Potential of Temporary Marriages?

Regarding the use of temporary marriage in the MENA region, it is important to distinguish between temporary marriage arrangements carried out domestically and transnationally. As the literature above discussed, when conducted transnationally, temporary marriage often facilitates exploitation. In these cases, foreign women abroad are purchased for the primary purpose of sexual exploitation, occurring either in the victim's country, or in the client's country after the woman is purchased and brought there. These women are then usually divorced after a short period and return to their home (Al-Nasr, 2011). However, temporary marriages conducted domestically may be more utility-based. Couples often engage in these temporary arrangements to be together in a more religiously acceptable manner, while simultaneously postponing the increasingly unaffordable expenses associated with a traditional nik'ah marriage. In many Gulf countries, traditional marriage is becoming increasingly inaccessible due to the rising costs associated with weddings, dowries, and housing prices across the region. The average cost of a wedding in the U.A.E. has risen to about U.S. $82,000 in the past decade, an enormous expense for the average family. These costs have forced some to consider temporary marriages at least in the short-term, since this type of marriage does not necessitate a wedding or the purchase of a house (Al-Nasr, 2011, p. 49).

The literature has also made speculative arguments on the potential societal benefits of temporary marriages. Hoodfar (2010) believes that most temporary marriage arrangements in Egypt are 'not exploitative', as they are often composed of young students who are in love and do not have the financial means to have a long-term marriage (cited in Włodek-Biernat, 2010). Hoodfar has also argued that most women who decide to accept a temporary marriage are economically independent and often consider themselves liberated from the restrictions of the more traditional route to marriage. Still, she acknowledges that if the short-term arrangement does

not become a long-term one, then the woman and any resulting children can be stigmatized within predominantly Sunni Egypt. Al Nasr (2011) also suggests that temporary marriages may be a useful utilitarian response to men and women seeking a way to satiate their sexuality in a more legitimate manner. Iranian feminist Shahla Sherkat agrees, 'First, relations between young men and women will become a little bit freer,...Second, they can satisfy their sexual needs. Third, sex will become depoliticized. Fourth, they will use up some of the energy they are putting into street demonstrations. Finally, our society's obsession with virginity will disappear' (cited in Sciolino, 2000). Sherkat hopes that temporary marriages may provide a more religiously and thus societally-acceptable bridge to an environment where younger people can engage in sexual relationships with less need for secrecy, which simultaneously could make sexually-restrictive policies a less effective tool for politicians to mobilize votes.

Overall, the literature has shown that temporary marriage arrangements can and have been used to exploit vulnerable women and girls, particularly when occurring transnationally. Furthermore, women are often stigmatized when they participate in a temporary marriage and are no longer deemed as viable marriage partners if a temporary marriage does not become a long-term marriage. Others have argued that temporary marriages have the potential to be a positive alternative to an increasingly economically inaccessible traditional marriage and may provide a degree of liberation for women living within repressive societies. However, the literature overall is primarily based on government and NGO reports, and anecdotal academic work. There is little systematic research based in empirical data, which makes developing any real conclusions on the benefits and drawbacks of temporary marriage as an institution difficult. To partially overcome the difficulty of collecting data on an institution that is socially stigmatized, and thus kept secret, we have looked to anonymous accounts provided over social media to add needed nuance and understanding to this debate.

Methodology

We ask the question: *How, and under what conditions, can temporary marriage be either exploitative or liberating for individual women?* To begin to answer this, we have gathered data on how temporary marriage is used in contemporary Islamic communities from those who have experienced it firsthand and provided their experiences online in the form of blog postings. Our data was gathered from 10 blogging sites used by individuals to discuss religious and marriage issues within Islam online (appendix available online, see link at end). We limited our collection to postings in English by individuals who explicitly mentioned either previously or currently being involved in a temporary marriage. Although most blog posts specifically mentioned 'mut'ah', some mention 'misyar', while others just used 'temporary marriage'. We treated each term as referring to a general concept of temporary marriage, an arrangement that may or may not have a set period prior to the agreement, but always falls below the traditional nik'ah marriage in terms of expected permanence. This definition is broad enough to encompass both mut'ah and misyar temporary marriages, and also allows us to include narratives that only refer to 'temporary marriage'. Narratives on these sites that did not explicitly mention 'mut'ah', 'misyar', or 'temporary marriage' were not collected.

As these postings tended to evolve into conversations between multiple participants sharing their stories, we gathered scattered posts by the same author into one overall narrative per author. In total, we gathered fifteen narratives from ten women and five men who collectively made 45 posts online from 2004 at the earliest to 2015 at the latest. These posts varied from 1500 word

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narratives recounting past experiences to shorter, 30 word responses to previous posts. A few mentioned following either Shia or Sunni Islam, but not enough to include religion as a factor in our analysis. These are public posts available to anyone who visits these blog sites. Furthermore, all of the authors have used aliases, provided no location information beyond country on occasion, and we avoided quoting any narratives that provided any personal identifying information. Finally, all data is stored on an encrypted cloud drive accessible only by the two authors of this study.

A conventional content analysis was conducted in two steps. The first step coded the manifest content – the actual phrases of the authors (Berg, 2004). These codes were inductively derived from the accounts themselves using open coding. We focused on phrases that provided information on our main areas of interest – who the authors were, why they engaged in a temporary marriage, how they felt about their experience, how long it lasted, and the result of the arrangement. Across these five areas we developed 17 codes that were then grouped into categorical themes that were the basis of our discussion (see appendix for list). Each of these codes were used only once per narrative to indicate the presence of that theme within that story. For example, if the author mentions feeling shame within their story, 'feelings of shame' is coded one time for that narrative, even if mentioned multiple times. We also avoided inferring themes simply from the presence of another theme. For example, just because a woman mentioned that it 'felt like prostitution', we didn't automatically code it as a 'sexual relationship', without explicit mention of a sexual relationship. Furthermore, we only code information if provided in the first person. For example, when a man mentioned that his former partner felt exploited by the arrangement, we did not code this story with the 'feeling exploited' theme because he gave the account, not his partner.

The second step of the content analysis focused on coding the latent content of each author's story, which was based on the perceived underlying tone of the overall narrative (Berg, 2004). The tone of each narrative was coded into three categories: positive, neutral, or negative. A narrative was coded as positive if an author stated that they enjoyed the experience, would engage in a temporary marriage again or otherwise described the experience as overall beneficial. A narrative was coded as negative if the author stated that they disliked the experience, expressed regret, or used other negative language to describe their overall experience. If neither positive nor negative language was used to describe their overall experience, or if we felt their description was inconclusive or ambivalent, we coded the story as neutral.

Limits

Many of these blogging sites appear to be used by partners either seeking outside counsel or to give advice to others who have engaged in a temporary marriage. Consequently, these narratives generally appear to be written by the author either after the experience or in a difficult part of the relationship. Therefore, their positive or negative portrayal of the overall temporary marriage experience is likely biased by recent events preceding their blog post, particularly by how their relationship was going or had ended. Those who were describing a past relationship that ended in a permanent marriage tended to be positive, whereas those that ended in separation were more neutral or negative. Similarly, those who were going through a difficult part of their relationship at that time tended to convey an overall negative experience.

Eight of the fifteen accounts were given by individuals who were initially not Muslim but whose partners were, with seven of these eventually converting to Islam as part of the temporary marriage process. The introduction of individuals not traditionally part of these communities could bring in a host of other issues that were not directly connected to temporary marriage as an

institution, but still could have complicated and strained these relationships with regards to familial and societal acceptance.

As two male researchers who have no personal experience with temporary marriage or those who have engaged in it, we have focused our analysis of the manifest content on the actual statements of the authors and attempted to minimize the inference of conclusions based on what we think the authors might have experienced. We try to report on only what was directly said. This becomes more problematic for our analysis of the latent content, as we attempt to infer whether the author's overall experience was positive or negative, despite us not having personal experience with the author or the subject matter, but we try to minimize our bias by again focusing on the actual language used. Nonetheless, our perception of the positivity or negativity of a word could differ from what the author intended. We hope that researchers with a more personal understanding of the situations these narratives describe will take this research further and provide new perspectives more suitable than our own.

Findings of the Content Analysis

Our content analysis developed four categorical manifest themes – *feelings of shame*, *exploitation*, *legitimation of dating/sex*, and *looking for a future marriage partner*. We will first discuss feelings of shame and exploitation, then move to the use of temporary marriage to legitimize dating/sex and facilitate finding a future marriage partner. Throughout our analysis we discuss the cross-occurrence of manifest themes with the underlying latent theme of overall experience (positive, neutral, negative). Certain manifest themes tended to occur more in overall negative narratives, while others occurred more in overall positive narratives (see appendix for chart).

Feeling Ashamed

The most powerful theme that emerged from these stories was the pervasive feeling of shame, particularly by women. Five of the ten stories by women mentioned feeling ashamed both during and after the temporary marriage experience. Unsurprisingly, these all corresponded to an overall negative experience. Feelings of shame tended to stem from a 'loss of honor' or 'dignity' over time. These feelings seemed to emerge after an extended period as the non-permanent nature of the relationship became more apparent to the woman. Some reported the feelings of shame emerging once they found out their partner had engaged with similar relationships with other women, either before their current relationship or simultaneously.

The development of a sexual relationship appears to be a dominant theme that precedes feelings of shame and a negative overall experience. Many of the negative narratives reported that the relationship was sexual in nature, while none of the positive narratives mentioned sex. This certainly does not mean that the positive narratives were purely non-sexual, but the connection between sex and negative emotions such as shame is undeniably common. Sex within a temporary marriage was often associated with feeling a loss of honor and dignity, particularly for women. One narrative from a teenage college student lamented her previous temporary arrangement: 'I was in Mut'a for four years. As time went by, I learnt that I had lost my honor and dignity to someone who had done this to several other girls. Allah helped me open my eyes and realize what I had gotten myself into'.[3] Another narrative exposed how one woman felt after engaging in a

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[3] See http://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/muta_story.htm

temporary marriage: 'I had lots of regrets for all of this, and I felt embarrassed and disgusted and to top it off the first man lied to me about so many things, to manipulate me into only listening to him and doing what he wanted for his sick and perverted reasons'.[4] Similarly, another Western Muslim woman who had engaged in various temporary marriages detailed how she felt ashamed after family members were informed of their relationship:

> We entered into this marriage for a month period and then went our separate ways. Since then I have repeated the 'Muta' many times with his other Muslim friends of different age. I recently mentioned this to my sister who was horrified and said that this type of marriage is nothing but an indirect method of prostitution. I feel guilty now for having repeated sexual affairs with different Muslim boys.[5]

It is notable that none of the men reported feelings of shame. One man did mention his concerns regarding whether the temporary marriage was 'halal/legal', whereas one woman mentioned dwelling on the 'sin' of 'sleeping with a man, being with a man, speaking to a man and having a child with a man who I am legally not married to'.[6] Another woman said the experience felt 'very similar to prostitution'.[7]

For some women, feelings of shame did not necessarily originate internally. Following Chase and Walker's (2012) findings in their investigation of poverty in the UK, shame is often co-constructed by both the individual's own 'personal sense of inadequacy' and the 'perceived negative assessment of them by others'. A 'symbiotic relationship' is generated between the shame assigned by the individual themselves and the shame assigned by outside actors and society (p. 743). We found evidence of both in our analysis. As discussed, internally many of the women mentioned feeling guilty or ashamed for having engaged in a sexual relationship or allowing themselves to be exploited. From the outside, some reported feeling shamed by their own family or the family of their partner, or anticipating shame from close friends and associates. One woman described being forced by her partner to hide in the bathroom 'when his friends show up unexpectedly', or having to 'duck down in his car when they drove past someone'.[8] Another with a child from a temporary marriage recounted being told that she should feel ashamed for 'bringing a bastard child into this world'.[9] However, despite the common imposition of societal shame, many women refused to follow suit and acknowledge the shame internally. Many female authors insisted they were doing nothing wrong or were misled/exploited by their partner and thus do not feel ashamed for their actions. One author argued that she would do it again, that the problems within temporary marriage 'result from society's failure to properly support the good use of the institution', not from the practice itself.[10] Societal shame is mentioned by women across the board, in positive, neutral, and negative experiences. Furthermore, facing shame does not necessarily break the relationship, particularly when the woman insists that she feels personally unashamed, as several of the narratives mentioning shame still ended in permanent marriage.

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[4] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/my-fourth-marriage-is-unravelling-because-of-suspicion-and-lack-of-trust/
[5] See https://www.interfaithshaadi.org/blog/?p=4759
[6] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/mutah-marriage/
[7] See http://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/muta_story.htm
[8] See http://www.mutah.com/sistermd.htm
[9] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/is-nikah-mutah-forbidden-in-islam/
[10] See http://www.mutah.com/sistermd.htm

Exploitation

Feelings of shame often resulted from feelings of exploitation by the partner. As with shame, the feelings of exploitation also tended to correspond with either a sexual relationship or in another case, at least feeling 'like a prostitute'.[11] One woman even reported being offered by their temporary spouse to friends for money.[12] These feelings were also exclusively reported by women. These women described becoming 'victims to the concept of mut'ah'.[13] Feeling exploited seems to correspond with length of time as well, several of the women who reported feeling exploited also pointed out that they had been in the temporary marriage for several years. One woman's feeling of exploitation immediately followed the discovery that her partner had been unfaithful:

> …Seven months into my pregnancy someone close to me had mentioned that Mu'tah was not a marriage accepted in Islam anymore, and that with Mu'tah a child is not supposed to be conceived. I broke down, this was the father of my child, i had slept with him, i had moved and changed my whole life to make a new one with him, i had trusted in Allah and i gave up everything i had just to do the right thing for once in my life. Finding out that i was not married meant that everything around me was a LIE![14]

Another woman reported that she discovered her partner was simultaneously married and 'was only after sex',[15] while another woman, who was involved in several exploitative temporary marriages, dwelled on their sexual nature as the source of the exploitation.[16] The potential for relationships to become exploitative may be increased by how temporary marriages are viewed by society. One woman argues that:

> Ladies, myself included, were looking for Mutah marriage to lead toward Permanent Nikah marriage. But sometimes the brothers weren't thinking the same thing. Obviously, some of these brothers did things that Islam doesn't support, but I think they were in part led to that by the way society looks down upon people who do Mutah marriage. Further, if any fellow has less than noble intentions in doing temporary marriage, he usually gets away with it because society doesn't support those who perform Mutah marriage lawfully and with good intention but instead tries to keep all of it under the rug.[17]

Societal norms and censures that may discourage or punish exploitative behavior by men in more acceptable public relationships likely do not have the same effect in temporary marriages. Given the clandestine nature and disreputable status of the arrangement, the exploitation can remain private. Exploited women are less likely to come forward, and men may feel more unconstrained in doing what they want.

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[11] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/is-nikah-mutah-forbidden-in-islam/
[12] See http://www.interfaithshaadi.org/blog/?p=4759
[13] See http://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/muta_story.htm
[14] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/mutah-marriage/
[15] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/my-fourth-marriage-is-unravelling-because-of-suspicion-and-lack-of-trust/
[16] See http://www.zawaj.com/askbilqis/mutah-marriage/
[17] See http://www.mutah.com/sistermd.htm

Legitimation of Dating/Sex and Future Marriage Partners

Many of the narratives described individuals who were interested in a relationship (often a sexual relationship), but not a permanent marriage. However, these authors were generally concerned as to whether such behavior was acceptable, permissible, and/or appropriate within Islam. Furthermore, dating was also used within these temporary arrangements as a method of finding someone that may end up becoming permanent. Five of the narratives described relationships that lasted for over a year, some for several years, whereas two shorter accounts lasted for a month and a weekend. One woman described her experience as 'halal dating' and stated that 'it enabled us to live together and be emotionally, mentally and physically intimate and get to know each other properly whilst we decided if we had something that we could make permanent'.[18] A male convert to Islam also felt that temporary marriage was a way to continue a girlfriend/boyfriend relationship within a religiously-acceptable institution: 'When we became Muslim, both around the same time roughly, we entered into muta'a to be able to continue our relationship in a halal way. We set a muta'a contract of 18 months, to last through to the time when we would contract a nikah'.[19]

Despite using temporary marriage to legitimately date, many relationships were not entirely open. As described in the shame section, these couples still described having to sneak in and out of their homes, and trying to avoid being seen together in public. If they did venture into public together they could face interrogation by their acquaintances and often found it difficult to explain their situation. One woman recounted that 'people asked questions for which we had no answers. For in Iran there was no term for what we were to one another. The word "girlfriend" simply didn't exist'.[20]

An account by another woman described a situation that mirrored perhaps the ideal dating experience–meeting at university, six months of temporary marriage, finding an apartment together, and eventual permanent marriage with children, with no mention of societal or familial pressure.[21] Another account by a man describes his use of temporary marriage for a legitimate sexual experience over a weekend with an apparently willing partner. He went on further to describe future, non-sexual temporary arrangements that he credits for improving his understanding of women, the 'complex human dimensions, the experiences women go through in daily lives, how things which seem so trivial for us men have such deep meaning for women'.[22] This experience and shared understanding could be a notable benefit of temporary marriage, as it is with dating in general. Many women and men who live in more conservative societies that discourage significant interaction between the sexes prior to marriage are forced to develop this crucial understanding and experience with their partner during the marriage itself.

Based on these accounts, the ability of temporary marriage to legitimize a premarital relationship seems to be effective primarily for the couple, with a much weaker effect on the outside judgment of their acquaintances, families, and society in general. Despite temporary marriage often being presented by a partner as a 'magical piece of paper that would allow me to spend time, openly, with him, sharing the same benches, sleeping in the same hotel rooms, without fear',[23] it often seems to have had little influence on the perceptions of others. Women still

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[18] See http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234997650-mutah-experiences/

[19] See http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234997650-mutah-experiences/

[20] See http://www.dailylife.com.au/life-and-love/real-life/my-temporary-marriage-in-tehran-20150731-giokuz.html

[21] See http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234997650-mutah-experiences/

[22] See http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234997650-mutah-experiences/?page=5

[23] See http://www.dailylife.com.au/life-and-love/love-sex-and-relationships/tehran-bride-20150730-gioa47.html

described the stiff resistance of families to such unusual and still inappropriate arrangements and relationships. None of the accounts described a situation where their relationship suddenly became acceptable to those around them. No one mentioned how they signaled to society their legitimate arrangement (ring, announcement, etc.) either, so it is unclear how engaging in a temporary marriage would dampen public shaming. Instead these arrangements appear to be primarily used to assuage the concerns of at least one of the partners, typically stemming from their desire to adhere to Islamic rules and norms regarding male/female relationships. Even one woman who described herself initially as a devout Christian, found the temporary arrangement with a Muslim man appealing to her conservative Christian ideals as well.[24]

Another interesting account shows a slightly different use of temporary marriage. A man living in a Western country described how temporary marriage was used with his partner (both recently converted to Islam) to give them time to prepare their families for their eventual marriage. Their parents were not ready for them to get married, wanting them to date for a time, but the couple didn't feel comfortable dating without being at least temporarily married. He goes on to explain that 'in the Western world, it's not a normal thing to get married before dating for a few years',[25] and their Western families were not prepared for the much faster marriage process more common in Islamic societies.

Accounts given by women who entered into the temporary marriage with the intent of making it permanent still complain of their partner not 'thinking the same thing'.[26] This likely refers to the situations that ended in separation and/or exploitation, where women who originally thought the arrangement would lead to a healthy permanent arrangement began to see themselves as being exploited by their partner for temporary satisfaction. Interestingly, one woman argues that one of the reasons these temporary marriages don't succeed is because of 'the way society looks down upon people who do mut'ah marriage',[27] and alluding to the ability of men to escape censure and exploit their partners due to the secretive nature of the arrangement.

Overall, narratives that mentioned the manifest theme of dating legitimation tended to be latently coded as positive, and those who mentioned seeking a legitimate sexual relationship were both positive and neutral, but none negative. Finally, of those who entered the relationship looking for a permanent marriage partner, five were latently coded positive, with only one negative. Three of these resulted in a permanent marriage; while one other foresees a permanent marriage in the near future.

Conclusion

Our analysis has provided insight into how temporary marriage arrangements have been used contemporarily, and how experiences within these arrangements can differ across individuals. As the literature describes, temporary marriage can provide a way for couples to gradually adapt traditional customs and norms to the dynamic modern lifestyle. Still, the arrangements also create a space that often allows men to exploit women and encourages the imposition of shame upon the participants, particularly women. Our review of these blogs has described what a very difficult experience it can be for most of these women. In many of these accounts, despite engaging in a temporary marriage, the arrangement provides little relief from the societal and familial stigmas

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[24] See http://www.naseeb.com/journals/whats-wrong-with-mutah-a-true-story-33124
[25] See http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234997650-mutah-experiences/
[26] See http://www.naseeb.com/journals/whats-wrong-with-mutah-a-true-story-33124
[27] See http://www.mutah.com/sistermd.htm

that are regularly attached to such pre-marital relationships, stigmas that tend to be attached to women and not men. Furthermore, the clandestine nature of these relationships also creates an environment where men often feel free to exploit their partners, without real fear of any societal retribution or censure. Nevertheless, as Hoodfar (2010) argues, it appears that temporary marriages can be a stepping stone in a gradual adaptation of rigid marital structures to a more open arrangement that may provide more agency for the partners, especially women. These arrangements, even when negative, generally have an end-point (although factors such as shame and stigma may follow a woman and her children for life). This endpoint may make it easier for women to get out of abusive and exploitative relationships than if they were traditionally married.

These arrangements may also help each partner get a better understanding and improved expectation of what a more permanent relationship would entail. Several of these accounts detail the use of temporary marriage as a useful tool that has enabled partners to remain together and simplify their lifestyle while simultaneously remaining true (at least in their own minds) to the tenants of their religion. Following this, the most valuable benefit for the partners involved in a temporary marriage may be the self-legitimation of the relationship. In each of these accounts, one or both of the partners wanted to start or continue a relationship, but were concerned about the appropriateness of their behavior. It does appear that temporary marriage can create a private space for the participants to feel better about themselves and about their relationship, even if those outside still criticize and shame them. The dark side of this arrangement is that this private space is indeed quite secret, and therefore exploitative men have more leeway to take advantage of their partner.

While we have not generated any firm conclusions, we hope that this research will trigger further analysis. We have not been able to directly support or challenge several of the discussions within the literature, such as differences in the use of temporary marriage between Sunnis and Shias, or the actual procedure participants follow to enact their temporary arrangement. Only one author mentioned consulting a priest, otherwise they appear to be mainly ad hoc arrangements created by the partners on their own. Another fruitful avenue of research would be an investigation of how the couple defines the rules and structure of the temporary relationship. Several of the women said that everything they knew initially about temporary marriage came from their male partner. Asymmetric information in such arrangements could make exploitation easier, as these men can define the structure of the relationship as they please. As they got deeper into these relationships, some of the women came to these blogs to get more information. Critically, researchers should expand the search into MENA-language sources, and beyond blogs to gain information on those who don't have computer access. The most vulnerable populations to exploitation, the poor and oppressed, will often be unable to access these mediums. Other creative means of gathering will be required to continue to develop a more comprehensive understanding of temporary marriage into the future.

Appendix available at:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fgJWG9qG3QyXRkhF3fGYbILz_7MzOAcmsUOfr_EArBw/edit?usp=sharing

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