

**Prof. Kathryn Spellman Poots and Shabbir Agha-Abbas**

## Temporary Marriage in the 21st Century: Legal and Intersectional Approaches in Diasporic Spaces

### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper will critically engage with the ways in which this contested form of marriage has fluctuated historically and spatially into the 21st century. The various uses and abuses of temporary marriage – a highly controversial and stigmatised practice – continue to be practiced, exoticized and called into question in Muslim and non-Muslim societies around the globe.

Focusing on Muslim diasporic spaces the paper will explore, question, and uncover historical trajectories leading to complex and contradictory religious rulings, representations, and practices of temporary marriages in Western contexts. As these histories continue to shape diasporic discourses and practices, it will also demonstrate how they are being re-examined and reworked anew by Shīʿīs and Sunnis, across genders, generations, class, and ethnicities.

The paper will examine the origins of temporary marriage in Islam, beginning with different forms of marriages in pre-Islamic times, through to the institutionalisation of temporary marriage in Shīʿī jurisprudence. Within this framework, we examine different ethnic, sectarian, and doctrinal approaches and how they have continued to evolve as an alternative/addition to permanent marriage across time and place. Finally, against this background, looking ethnographically across generations at communities in London and New York, we will see how this contested gendered practice takes on and signifies cultural, religious, and political meanings and in turn informs diasporic subjectivities. Serving as a point of entry into broader issues of marriage and body politics, this study demonstrates that temporary marriage is not a descriptive, objective category, but an analytical tool to navigate gender relations in diasporic spaces. this study demonstrates that temporary marriage is not a descriptive, objective category, but an analytical tool to navigate gender relations in diasporic spaces.



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### **BIO:**

Prof. Kathryn Spellman Poots is on the faculty at both Columbia University and the Aga Khan University in London. She received her Master's and PhD in Sociology from Birkbeck College, University of London. Her work, mainly ethnographic, centres on Muslim diasporas, transnational networks, gender relations and cultural hybridity. Her publications include the monograph: *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain*; and the edited volumes: *Gender, Governance & Islam*; *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*; and *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*. Kathryn also works with organizations that focus on the rights and experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, including the UNHRC (Geneva), UNESCO (Paris), and the International Rescue Committee.



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Shabbir Agha-Abbas is a doctoral student in the University of Arizona's Persian and Iranian Studies program. He acquired a Master's in Islamic Studies from Columbia University, as well as a Master's in Religion from Rutgers University. His research focuses on the intellectual history of Twelver Shīʿism in the Persianate world, particularly North India. Concerning his written work, he has contributed to the forthcoming *Marxism in Muslim Contexts* volume with a chapter titled *"Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr"*, and the *"Social Problem"* (2020). Additionally, Shabbir is a trained manuscript cataloguer, having worked for the Muslim World Manuscript project, and a manuscript-subject editor for the online resource, *Hazine*. In his spare time, he translates Indo-Persian poetry, expounding upon theological themes found therein.