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Muslim Marriages in Accra, Ghana: A Perspective on Minority/Majority Relations, Gender, and Social Mobility

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Abstract

Muslims in Ghana form a significant minority of nearly eighteen percent of the total population of over twenty-five million people. Out of this number exists a small minority of Shi'i Muslims among the dominant Sunni group. This article considers marriage practices between the minority Shi'i and majority Sunni groups with relevance to gender and social mobility. Relying on field data gathered between 2014 and 2020 through interviews, informal conversations as well as the usage of an informant, the article demonstrates how the minority situates itself in relation to the majority group with respect to marriage as a social practice. The article argues that the minority negotiates its space within the context of the majority with respect to continuing and sustaining some traditions while placing some other practices into a contextual perspective. Furthermore, the article contends that mobility takes place in the lives of both men and women; however, Muslim men have some advantage over Muslim women.

1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a significant institution in Muslim societies. Among adherents of both the *Sunni* and *Shi'i* interpretations of Islam, the predominant notion of marriage is one which is legally patterned as a contract between a man and a woman. The contract in essence sells a woman's reproductive parts without granting ownership of a woman's complete being as in the instance of slavery. A marriage becomes established when consummation takes place. Following this, spousal rights and obligations are activated wherein a husband is expected to play the role of provider in return for a wife's obedience and sexual availability. This interpretation of the meaning and function of marriage is widespread in Muslim societies. These features are the same irrespective of whether the marriage is non fixed-term (also known as *mut'a*[1], predominantly practiced among *Shi'i*) or fixed-term marriage (Ali, 2006, 2010; Mir-Hosseini, 2009, 2015; Issaka-Toure, 2016). Aside from the normative non fixed-term marriage and the temporary or *mut'a* fixed-term marriage, other types of

marriages abound in different Muslim societies and cultures known in Mauritania as *sirriyya* (Fortier, 2011) marriage, Kenyan *siri* marriage (Alidou, 2013), the *urfi* marriage of Egypt (Fortier, 2011), *misyar* of Saudi Arabia (Fortier, 2011), and *Fatiha* marriage of Morocco (Fortier, 2011). As the literature suggests, people decide to go for such marriages because of reasons ranging from expensive cost of marriage, sociocultural acceptance of polygyny, individual choices as well as serving the sexual needs of travelling men. The dominant feature of these marriages is that they evade certain particular social norms or legal rules. In addition, while some of these marriages maintain some prevailing perspectives about the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, others do not.

Notwithstanding the constraints these gendered roles and expectations may present, the question of how marriage generates or limits social mobility is vital to this article (Heath, 1981; Prais, 1955; Chester, 1978; Phelan, 2006). Socially mobility is a sociological analysis of how individuals move from one strata of a

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society to the other. In this sense, mobility usually denotes a process of movement and change in either individuals or societies (White *et al.*, 2018). As a result, two important words are vital for understanding how social mobility is understood; mobility and structure. These words are interlinked in relation to how mobility takes place in both the lives of individuals and societies in the sense that society serves as the reservoir, which stores mobility and so mobility of its individuals cannot be taken in isolation. However, there are two varying meanings. While mobility has to do with a process of change in the lives of individuals, structure refers to the organization of a society as well as the relationship between the elements of a society and its organization (Breiger, 1990; Slootman, 2018; Padget, 1990; Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1987). Individuals, therefore, form the basic elements of each society and they have a dialectic relationship with the organization of a particular society. Therefore, per the literature there is a direct link between individual agency and structure and through such relationships a society keeps reproducing its structure through the practices of its individual members (Slootman, 2018). This position, which has been termed by sociologists as social relational approach in the study of social mobility, is the one that this article utilizes as a particular frame of analyzing how marital practices and choices have the capability to generate mobility or limit it and not the entirety of what is encapsulated in the term social mobility. This particular relational approach is significant for this work as it shows the significance of how individuals within societies relate with one another through the ways they engage a social structure. The relational dimension of social mobility raises critical questions concerning the labor market approach as the latter has the tendency of devaluing the society -or structure- within which mobility is actually taking place. In this sense, the social relational approach to the study of mobility builds on the two images of mobility studies: "individualistic and state control" (Padget, 1990: 27-58). While individualistic pertains to self-interested and shifting- with respect to how individual interests impacts their choices, state control imposes process of control and manipulation from the above. Using this line of argument, a society therefore becomes the container, which holds a particular content; thus, it is the structure which generates mobility or limit it, but the reverse is impossible (Padget, 1990). In this article therefore, the Muslim community is the society or structure while individual Muslims are the subjects of social mobility. Thus, the Muslim community has the capability of generating mobility and limiting it at the same time.

Despite the crucial intervention of such studies, others have yet added that maintaining one's social position or class within societies is a continuous struggle. For an individual to remain in such class means they have to work in a continuous struggle in order not to drop. However, several factors including education, gender and race may play a part in either going upward or downward in social strata. In addition, due to the existence of classes in each and every society; individuals have to face challenges and make some negotiations because individuals would want to either

maintain or reconstruct a kind of identity which gives them a sense of belonging. To this extent, such studies have elaborated on the interplay between class-consciousness and social mobility with regard to the ways in which class-consciousness affects social mobility (Roth, 2019; Haaber Ihle, 2008). In other words, inequality in social structures will always exist at different levels. While some other recent studies have emphasized the enduring existence of inequality and hence a continuous struggle to move from a lower class to a higher one; there is simultaneously the emphasis that individuals who have moved from lower class to upper class demonstrate relational commitment in terms of having a sense of belonging to both classes (Pastore, 1982; Slootman, 2018). In this article therefore, the Muslim community represents the idea of a society or a community, which has different classes and marital choices and practices is the lens chosen for examining social mobility. Here, social mobility refers to individuals' transition into marriage.

This article interrogates the issue of gender and marriage practices among *Sunni* majority and *Shi'i* minority Muslim groups with specific reference to the tension and cooperation at play in how marriage affects social mobility. The study is linked to the questions and debates that surround "proper" Islamic religious practice and the capacity of a marginalized group to express divergent views and practices on dominant discourses in their communities. In this regard, this article is related to the situatedness of minority views on marriage practices within the context of a majority *Sunni* Muslim group. Studies on how Muslims relate to others in Africa have largely been focused on issues of Muslims in multi-religious settings (Soares, 2006; Jansen and Meyer, 2016; Nolte and Akinjobi, 2017a, 2017b; Jansen, 2017). While these studies are significant to understanding multi-religious settings in Africa, they do not offer much reflection on the issue of Muslim minority situations. On the other hand, the few studies on Muslim minority in Africa have to do with Muslims' shift from marginalization to playing an active role in the politics of nation-building and self-assertive identity as a minority (Leinweber, 2012). Other studies have similarly asserted that Muslim minorities in Africa have focused on Muslims' positionality in politics and democratization process (Mwakimako and Willis, 2016; Schulz, 2013; Soi, 2016).

Like these previous studies on Muslim minorities in Africa, this study is located in a Muslim minority country (GSS, 2012). However, this study diverges in that its focus is not how the Muslim minority relates or not to the majority population. Rather, the discussion takes as its point of departure the ways in which the *Shi'i* sub minority within the larger Muslim minority engages the majority *Sunni* group using the particular lens of marriage practices and the debates surrounding them. The paper also probes social mobility by examining the kinds of marriages in which Muslim women become involved. Thus, this article builds on existing literature on Muslim marriages in West Africa with specific reference to inter-Islamic groups. While

the studies on Muslim marriages in West Africa have focused their attention on law, gender, masculinity and state-community relations, the current article adds another dimension that is particular to inter-Islamic groups (Alidou and Alidou, 2009; Soares, 2009; Taiyari and Occhiani 2010; Schulz and Janson, 2017). Lastly, this article provides additional perspective on the *Shi'i* in Ghana on whom there are very few studies conducted.

The article is grounded on an extensive field research conducted over several months from 2014 to 2020 in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The study is focused on Accra because it is the center of *Shi'ism* in the entire country, with three suburbs in Accra-Nima, Mamobi and Accra-New-Town- being the dominant locales of *Shi'i* activities. Indeed, Mamobi is where the first *Shi'i* mosque in Ghana was founded by the late Sheikh Bansi. Thus, it is not surprising that Mamobi and its surrounding neighborhoods became the hub of *Shi'i* activities in the city of Accra.[2] I used different methods in collecting data including personal observations, use of a male informant, personal narratives, interviews and informal conversations. It was specifically significant to use male informant as a bridge to have access to information about sexual mores of men who were unwilling to share their sexual practices with an unknown woman- the researcher. Besides, it is men who are not only well informed about *mut'a* marriages but are also connected to other *Shi'i* men who engaged in the practice of *mut'a* marriages.

2   HISTORY OF ISLAM IN GHANA: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Sunni Islam has a lengthy history in Ghana, and its adherents are the nation's majority Muslim group. Dominant subgroups within *Sunni* expressions of Islam in Ghana are the long established *Tijaniyya* group and the *Ahlu Sunna*-Wahabi school of Islamic thought which emerged in the post-independence era as a competitor to the *Tijaniyya* (Hiskette, 1980; Kramer, 1992; Iddrisu, 2012) *Shi'i* Islam was introduced into Ghana in the 1980s and forms a sub-minority group apart from the majority *Sunni*. As such, two Islamic groups in Ghana are *Sunni* and *Shi'i*.[3] This late introduction of *Shi'i* into the country is not the reason for their lack of dominance in the Ghanaian Islamic religious landscape, however. Rather, this is a result of theological reasons. It has been indicated elsewhere that despite their enormous efforts to break through and become a competing Islamic religious group, their message has not been well received (Dumbe, 2013). Previous studies on Islam in Ghana examined its origins in the country to inter-religious dialogue and intra-Islamic conflicts in the setting (Sey, 1970; Samwini, 2006). Other studies have focused on historical development and socio-religious roles played by the Islamic religious groups as well as Islamic education, gender and Muslim leadership (Pontzen, 2014; Pellow, 1987). Yet other studies have looked at social practices such as marriage among Ghanaian Muslims (Agyare Appiah, 2011; Issaka-Toure, 2018; Sean, 2018). The literature on Muslim marriage covers a wide range of issues including gender and inter-faith marriages; this article builds on the

conversation by giving a perspective on inter-Muslim group marriage practices and social mobility.

The Muslim population in Ghana is nearly eighteen percent (GSS, 2012). It is significant to indicate that the population data does not give a detailed number of each Islamic group and neither *Sunni* nor *Shi'i* leaders have records of the exact or approximate number of their members. Muslims' group affiliation, as I observed through my interlocutors, either comes from some Muslims verbally indicating whether they are either *Sunni* or *Shi'i* or from my inference of their group belonging through their expressions and practices. This notwithstanding, I wanted to know the numerical strength of *Shi'i* Muslims in order to have a fair idea of their representation. However, my checks about the membership of *Shi'i* has not yielded any results because there is not a properly laid down leadership and organizational structure. Its membership is based on individual commitment and practices of *Shi'i* Islam without obligation to any organized structure. This state of affairs emanates from the fact that, there is no central authority as well as a central figure and offices to regulate and manage *Shi'i* affairs in the country. This is also the case for *Sunni* Muslims as I gathered from the field.[4]

Shi'ism as an Islamic practice in Ghana traces its roots in the country to the late 1980s when Sheikh Bansi and some other graduates from Islamic theological seminaries in Iran returned and nurtured the group's foundation through their activities. Concurrent with this development, *Shi'ism* was further spread in Ghana through the direct engagement of both Iranian governmental and non-governmental agencies; their involvement in various cultural, educational, health and agricultural activities made their presence felt much more in the country's developmental domain than through conversion (Dumbe, 2013).

3   SUNNI- SHI'I MARRIAGES AS A SITE OF COOPERATION AND TENSION

In this section, the discussion dwells on the process and practice of *Sunni-Shi'i* non fixed-term marriages from the perspectives of both *Sunni* and *Shi'i* Muslims. Before doing that, the section pays attention to the nature of the relationship between *Sunni* and *Shi'i* in order to contextualize the discussion on inter-Muslim group marriages. This is particularly important to establish the understanding of the relationship as both a site of tension and of cooperation. It is important to note that elsewhere beyond this study, *Sunni-Shi'i* relationships could vary from tense to harmonious. For example, tensions abound between the two groups in the context of politics, yet there could be peaceful coexistence in the realm of marriage. Such sources have indicated that, there is not much difference in relation to legal postulations/positions on some social practices like marriage (Saleh and Kraetzschmar, 2015; Haddad, 2016; Badareen, 2016; Brooke, 2017). To this end, this section contributes to the academic discussions on the nature of religious pluralism in West Africa. These studies on religious pluralism in West Africa have presented

parallel ideas such as moments of encounters and peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Christians and other faiths including adherents of African traditional religions (Soares, 2017; Jansen and Meyer, 2016). Through the lens of intra-Islamic group marriages this article adds another layer to the literature by examining the ways in which people in different groups of the same religion coexist with one another. Additionally, the section highlights social mobility in marital choices and practices of Muslims.

The foremost observation I made on the field of research was that only Muslim men are the first converts to *Shi'i* group of Islam. This happens predominantly through a *Shi'i* based Islamic educational institution in Accra called Majmah Ahlul-Bait which is owned by the Ahlul Bayt Foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This institution is only for young Muslim men and furthermore all its teachers are men of *Shi'i* orientation and practices. Young Muslim men with *Sunni* backgrounds enroll in this institution to acquire higher Islamic education. Some of these students become Islamic scholars/leaders -called malamai (singular malam)- after their three-year training. In the process of acquiring Islamic knowledge in this *Shi'i* institution, many of them are converted and very few remain *Sunni*. Such converts might decide to either keep their conversion to themselves and the *Shi'i* community or be completely open about it. Further, my field research revealed that the reason for it being a male only institution is because of the pattern of Islamic knowledge acquisition and transmission in a social context where men have the formal and socially acceptable privilege to acquire Islamic knowledge and transmit it. Also, my observations and interactions with *Shi'is* concerning this trend revealed that the acquisition of Islamic knowledge in the system of higher Islamic education is male biased due to the Islamic culture of segregation. This was confirmed through what I observed concerning the acquisition of higher Islamic learning among *Sunni* Muslims. Thus, it is not only the *Shi'i* institution of Islamic higher learning, which has this characteristic. It only followed suit of the existing tradition of Islamic learning. Besides Majmah Ahlul-Bait, there are other schools and vocational institutions established by *Shi'i* in various parts of the country including a female only high school and a vocational training school in different suburbs of Accra. However, in these institutions, there is no religious training as emphasis is laid on vocational training or secular curriculum.

What the above data reveals is the connection between Islamic knowledge acquisition and conversion to *Shi'i* Islam. This interconnectedness comes in the ways in which the minority *Shi'i* group has situated or positioned itself within the majority *Sunni* group with respect to Islamic tradition of knowledge acquisition and transmission. As the data suggests, the existing culture of Muslim learning and knowledge transmission is linked to the prevalent idea of segregation between Muslim men and women. Consequently, it is apt to present a logical assessment of this trend the *Shi'i* have

also adopted as one which does not destabilize the existing learning culture. Instead, it forms a way in which intra-Muslim groups interact in their shared notion of a common culture of Islamic knowledge acquisition and transmission. Additionally, one can also see how gender impacts Islamic knowledge acquisition and transmission in the formal and socially acceptable manner.

Moreover, the field research revealed that there exists some form of tension between the *Sunni* majority and *Shi'i* minority because of the perception among some *Sunni* Muslims that *Shi'i* are not 'good' Muslims. This particular position is illustrated by some Muslims' decision not to follow a *Shi'i* malam for congregational prayers for example. Tension is also felt in isolated polemics between younger *Shi'i* and *Sunni* malamai. These polemics arise due to the stance of some *Shi'i* malamai about the events that occurred immediately after the demise of the Prophet of Islam, painting the first three caliphs after the Prophet's demise in derogatory terms that are offensive to some *Sunni* malamai. Two malamai can be mentioned as examples- Malam Abdul Rauf Fofana- a *Sunni* of Salafi orientation and Malam Suleman Bamba- a *Shi'i* malam. While the polemical positions of these malamai persist on the one hand, on the other it does not negatively impact the communal relationship between their followers. Again, it is important to emphasize that older top *Shi'i* Islamic leaders do not engage in such polemics. Rather, they have cordial relationship with leaders of the *Sunni* majority. The isolated polemical positions can be viewed as a rare case in terms of the ways the *Shi'i* minority has positioned itself among *Sunni* majority counterparts. The latter argument can be advanced by the fact that the polemics do not translate into communal instability between the *Sunni* majority and *Shi'i* minority. In this wise, these polemical viewpoints can be viewed as generational and are not really relevant to the particular detail of this article. Rather it indicates that the deep-seated schism that existed in the early years after the demise of the Prophet of Islam is still persisting in different way in another historical context (Aghaie, 2005).

Before delving deep into the majority/minority relations with respect to intra-group marriages, it is vital to demonstrate what the data says first about the general perception of Muslims on marriage. Marriage is highly regarded by all Muslims and it is seen as the only legitimate way of expressing one's sexual needs in Islamic terms. From the angle of my interlocutors, almost all adults are expected to marry and most adults either are married or have been married before. Only a very few adults never marry in their lifetime. To be married is so vital to Muslims because it is part of the sunnah- (prophetic example). Muslims are highly encouraged to emulate. However, this means differently for men and women. If a man remains unmarried it is either people would speculate if he is "healthy" especially if he is not seen with women suspected to be in sexual relationship with. If it is a woman however, the question is different. A woman in a marriageable age

who is not married is automatically labeled a prostitute. In this regard, I gathered that, every Muslim aspires to get married and those who are married struggle to maintain their marriages. As such divorce and remarriage as well as polygyny is very common. There is also the case for some women to continue with a marriage they are not satisfied with. Memuna (fake name) for example tells me that she feels trapped in her marriage because she has lost interest in her marriage but does not want to move out and be labeled a prostitute if she does not find a new man to remarry. However, Sani (fake name) informs me that he was not really into his first wife at some point that is why he went in for his second wife. Given the enormous weight given to marriage in Muslim understanding, there is some form of pressure on especially women to be married. The first angle of pressure comes from the community while second emanates from parents. In fact, the data says that it is the pride of every father to "hand over" his daughter to a man in marriage so that she does not bring shame to the family if she remains unmarried for a long time. Here shame means either a lady is labeled a prostitute, or she may have a child out of wedlock. The first remark, which comes from the data is that marriage is perceived to be a transition in one's life and therefore one can say that it is a kind of social mobility. What the data demonstrate is that marriage is seen as a social structure in which men and women have different classes within the perspective of their religion. This perspective is however gendered in terms of what marriage means for men and women. While men on the one hand can freely transition from monogamy to polygyny; women do not have such chance. Thus, the gendered perspectives and expectations on men and women gives men some easy access to mobility within the context of their marriage choices and practices while it is not the case for women. In other words, in the Muslim community, men belong to a higher social stratum while women are lower in relation to the perception of the community on marriage and choices available for women. Again, we can see how women have to negotiate their choices and maintain their class as married women because of class consciousness. In this regard, it is therefore apt to say that being a woman means one is in a lower class of society per this data and for a woman to be unmarried is a further drop in such social structure. To this end, through the engagement, negotiations and choices of individual men and women, the structure keeps reproducing itself. In this sense, the manner in which the community in this context views marriage presents the idea that marriage in itself is a kind of social structure in which men's belonging to the upper strata is a given while women who by virtue of their gendered expectations and roles have to go through constant struggle and negotiation.

When it comes to *Sunni-Shi'i* marriages, the research data revealed that there is both tension and cooperation in Muslims' intra-group marriages. Regarding tension, two words are important for our understanding. These are resistance and rejection. Resistance takes place and usually comes to an end, then a marriage takes place. Some families resist their

daughters marrying *Shi'i* men even if they are in love if a man's sectarian affiliation is already known. Moreover, if a man comes from a family which is known to be *Shi'i,* then tension might arise because the man's background is already known even if the man does not express it. If a man's group affiliation is unknown, resistance would not arise. As I understood from my interlocutors, tension arises because while the parties understand each other without arguing over the Islamic group differences, families do not. Consequently, the significant role of kinship in marriage arrangements mounts pressure on such individuals. Rahman (not his real name) shared with me that he nearly changed his mind concerning getting married to his wife because of the way her family perceived him as a *Shi'i.* Hawa's (not her real name) family also resisted her marriage to Musa (not his real name) because he was *Shi'i.* Sadly Musa passed on during the process. It is evident, then, that while resistance takes place, it does not go to the level of complete rejection in the majority of the cases. This is because the reason for resistance is mainly seen as minimal; the *Shi'i* do not have a different Prophet or Quran and so then the point of convergence is greater than the thin line of division. Thus, rejection rarely occurs, as the case of Aliu and Zulay illustrates, it can happen. Aliu (fake name) and Zulay (fake name) could not get married because Zulay's father did not want to have a meeting with Aliu to initiate the marriage process because Aliu is a *Shi'i.* As a result, Zulay withdrew from Aliu's proposal. Despite Zulay's insistence that she withdrew because of her father's opposition, people in the community have speculated that there were issues beyond that as the philosophical lines of division were thin and there was the great possibility of Zulay's father eventually consenting. Therefore, in this case, which appear to be a clear instance of resistance escalating to rejection, other factors may be involved. In Aliu and Zulay's case, speculations were that Aliu's financial status as well as Zulay's own dissatisfaction with Aliu were the real reasons behind the dissolution of the relationship.

In the main, this observation from the data concerning the tension that could arise reflects the fact of the perceived differences between Islamic groups. While this tension exists on the one hand, it does not also indicate it affects intra-Islamic group marriages on the other as there were several intra-Muslim group couples I encountered on the field. In fact, the field research also indicated that some of the *Shi'i* men converted after their marriages to *Sunni* women yet there was no divorce because a husband had converted from *Sunni* to *Shi'i.* Moreover, the experiences of the interlocutors demonstrate that families play a significant role in making inter-Muslim group marriages possible. Thus, the position of some *Sunni* families resisting/rejecting *Shi'i* suitors for their daughters raise questions on intra-Muslim group relationship. This issue is first and foremost connected to the pattern of conversion to *Shi'i* in the context. Therefore, the result is that it is only *Shi'i* men who would be victims of marginalization by the majority group. Although this is also linked to female marginalization regarding

knowledge acquisition and conversion, one cannot also neglect the other factor of female marginalization- family's resistance to female choices. Moreover, this is also a subtle way of rejecting *Shi'i* Islam. At the end, this is closely linked to the idea of the relational dimension of social mobility. In this regard, men seem to propose to women and women's consent is not enough without having consent from others, particularly their fathers. While female withdrawal constitutes a curtailment of how social relations impact women's marital choices, it again emphasizes the limitation of Muslim women's mobility just because they are women. With this stance, it is significant to reflect on the broader ideas of encounters and cooperation between *Sunni*s and *Shi'i* occupying the same social space, Accra. While the former appears in an elusive way, the latter appears in ways that can potentially limit the nature of cooperation between the groups. In other words, groups can share the same social space without any significant encounters, but such relationships face some difficulty in transgressing certain boundaries. Thus, the marginalization of a Muslim sub-minority and women is entrenched because of kinship networks. Moreover, Muslim men's conversion to *Shi'i* is a particular kind of men's mobility when it is viewed within the lens of change or movement. However, this leads to a disadvantage -resistance/rejection- when the need arises for them to marry women of *Sunni* background.

This notwithstanding, there are moments of cooperation when it comes to some families' approach to *Sunni-Shi'i* marriages from the onset. Some families do not care about a person being *Shi'i* or *Sunni* and for such families there is no issue with regard to a man's affiliation to a particular group; instead emphasis is placed on a man's affiliation to Islam. For such families, giving out a daughter to a Muslim man takes the center stage. The fact of some Muslim families not paying attention to one's Islamic affiliation illustrates the nature of the representation of dialogical relationship between the groups. As this stands, group positionality of individuals is disregarded in favor of what it means for a person to be a Muslim. This invariably draws our attention to the fact that the issue of majority versus minority does not arise in this instance. Moreover, such moves make mobility easy for both Muslim men and women in the long run.

The details of the processes leading to Muslim marriages is however a moment of cooperation. These are not peculiar to a particular group. The initial stage of Muslim marriage preparation is the meeting of a would be couple. Such meeting could come from they themselves meeting and developing interest in one another. These relationships, colloquially called boy-girl relationships, are usually hidden from families for a while before being revealed, usually to the nuclear family and more specifically, the mother of female. The opening up of such relationship is when a girl discusses the relationship with her mother and shares the intention of marriage. The mother could either show interest or otherwise after having detailed discussion with her daughter. If a mother wishes to take it further, she

invites the man home- this is usually a sign of consent. In most cases, the mother would want to meet the man separately and have a short discussion before involving the father of the lady. If the mother meets a daughter's suitor and is satisfied, she discusses with the father on behalf of their daughter due to the culture of shyness and modesty. If the direct parents are not around, then the aunt of the lady and an uncle who serve as guardians play such role. This whole process is called "going home" and at this stage the preparation is not publicized except for a very few close people who may be either close family or friends of the family. In cases where a lady meets a would-be husband through family relations, parents or acquaintance there is usually not long period of courtship before the man "goes home" because he may be somewhat already "known". In other cases, where a man is only known by the relation who introduced the parties, courtship could take a longer period. In cases of arranged marriages where parents or guardians are involved, some form of courtship takes place between the couple in order for the two parties to come to an agreement before formally involving families.

It is important to emphasize that the research uncovered that parental consent is very significant and may prevent marriages from taking place. I gathered that, consent from parents especially a father carries more weight. If a mother consents and a father does not, then negotiation has to take place. Some mothers may find ways of convincing their husbands to consent to their daughter's/son's choice. Others may go to the extent of involving family elders. If a father is adamant, then a daughter/son may withdraw completely on grounds of the "baraka" -blessing- of her father because in case there is any turbulence in her marriage then she would have the support of her natal family. Mothers may usually not go ahead without the consent of a father especially if they are still together as a couple. But if they are divorced as I discovered, some mothers have gone ahead to organize their daughters'/sons' marriages without the "baraka" blessing of the fathers. In particular, I understood from my interlocutors that the issue of consent is so heavy on daughters than sons. This is because of the provisionary roles of husbands to wives. As a result, if a husband decides to neglect his wife or even goes for an additional wife, then the natal family's support would be badly needed. In actual fact, I uncovered that there were instances where both sons and daughters had to withdraw from getting married to their chosen partners due to lack of parental consent. Even in case where a man and a woman decide to have a child or two with the aim that parental consent could happen because the latter would want to cover the "shame": Iddi and Sala's experiences speak to this fact. After having a child with Sala, Iddi's parents did not consent so he withdrew. At this point Sala had to be a single mother and carry the "shame" together with her natal family.

After a man "goes home" and the parents or guardians formally approve of such relationship, then the next stage, called "greetings", takes place. Irrespective of how they met, this is the first stage of

publicizing a relationship. Here, a man's family visits a woman's family on a man's behalf to formalize a relationship. Usually, some representatives from both extended families -usually men at this stage- with or without the parents or guardians meet at a designated home which is not always the home of the parents or guardians of a bride. The male representatives of the man would meet the male representatives of the woman. A man's family would traditionally go with a calabash of kola nuts and a token of money, which represent the formal introduction. Nowadays, a bag or two of sweets in their wrappers usually replace the kola nuts. However, the tradition is still called "they have presented kola nuts", which is to say the relationship between a couple has, through the visit, been socially accepted. The money and Kola nuts/sweets are shared in small amounts to the extended family members. This is an indication of witness so that everybody is aware that a man and a woman are in a relationship and soon would get married. These days, as I gathered, some people may not get either money or sweet, but would either be informed verbally in person or through telephone call because families are usually larger than the amount of money and kola nuts or sweets presented.

The next stage is the provision of *leefe*.[5] Sometimes, a groom's mother may provide the entire accessories for the *leefe* as a special gift to usher him into majority. If a man has been married before or he is adding a second, third or fourth wife, it is usually his bill alone. If the bride has been married before then the bill is minimal because there is usually not an elaborate wedding ceremony neither is the provision of *leefe* also always made. The educational backgrounds of the couple as well as their families may play a part to some extent. Sometimes, the bride's family may request elaborate *leefe* from a man and his family. The *leefe* provision may cause some financial stress on a man who does not come from a wealthy family or when he himself does not have much to offer. After the *leefe* has been arranged, then women representatives from a man's family do the presentation of the *leefe* to women representatives of the bride. In some instances, *leefe* is presented to the bride after all preparations are set for the wedding. In other cases, *leefe* is presented before the preparation of the wedding. The provision of *leefe* is almost a rule for maidens except for a very few marriages that such provision is not made. Where a man and his family may not be able to present an elaborate *leefe*, some brides or their mothers may assist if they have some preferences a man is not able to afford. This is kept as a secret either between the bride and the groom and or the mother of the bride. This takes place because the presentation of the *leefe* is sometimes a space to show off financial strength of a man or his family and also indicate that a maiden has been fortunate. This notwithstanding, some families would just accept whatever a man's family presents as *leefe* and pray for the *Baraka* -blessings- of a marriage. As I observed on the field, the items of *leefe* a man and his family present may represent some form of socioeconomic transition of a bride. If the *leefe* is elaborate, then it implies a woman is transitioning into a

different socioeconomic class. It is after the provision of *leefe* that a date is set for a wedding to be organized.

The socioeconomic background of the couple plays a significant role in that it involves the question of how elaborate they would want the wedding to be, and this involves time and money. If a man has never been married before and either he or his family has strong economic backgrounds, then he could either finance it alone or mainly with some help from his family including the provision of *leefe*. In some instances, a man's family would decide to foot the entire bill on behalf of a groom including the provision of *leefe*. Wedding ceremonies are usually organized by a bride's family. On the said date, the family of a groom meets with that of a bride alongside friends and family to finalize the process. Previously the bride and the groom were not present and their representatives, usually men, stood for them. This however is changing. The ceremony is usually held on a weekend. It is almost a custom that wedding ceremonies are held Sundays late mornings. This ceremony is an all-men affair. While men are in charge of this aspect, the women are busy with catering and serving arrangements for well-wishers after the wedding ceremony. Wedding ceremonies could either take place in a house, mosque or on a street. A wedding ceremony may also, depending on the financial capability of either the couple or their families, take place at a hired event center. Sometimes, a man may rent the venue and hand it over to a bride's family since the real organization of the wedding is in the hands of a bride's family. A wedding ceremony is officiated by malamai. It starts with an opening prayer from a lead malam. After an opening prayer, introductory remarks are made. Then they invite the guardians or *wali* of the bride and the groom even if the bride and the groom are present. Then the officiating malam will give a short sermon on the relevance of marriage before formally "tying the knot" upon getting the *sadaki* or bridal wealth from the *wali* of a groom. Then the amount of the *sadaki* is mentioned to the audience before "tying the knot". "Tying the knot" involves mentioning that a father of a lady has given his daughter to the father of a groom to be given to his son. Then with this statement the officiating malam will mention that the purpose of the gathering has been fulfilled by the consent of both the *wali* of the groom and the bride and therefore all conditions for a marriage have been met and so they "tie the knot". After this a short verse of the Quran is recited together with all present and the officiating malam mentions that the "knot has been tied" between a man and a woman. It is vital to mention as a result of the field research that women do not play the role of *wali* even if a bride's father is not around. In such instances a male relative would stand in place. The *sadaki* is usually money. This money is afterwards then handed to the *wali* of the bride which would be later given to the bride. Then after "tying the knot" and reciting a short Quranic verse together with the people present, the officiating malam gives another short sermon, this time about the roles and responsibilities of a Muslim couple. After this ceremony ends and the men are served either by women or selected male youth, the rest of the day is for

celebration, which is mainly a women's affair until it is time for *maghrib* or evening prayers.

The details of the stages of Muslim marriages elaborated above are the same, irrespective of whether the couple and their families are *Sunni* or *Shi'i*. In this sense, there is no point of departure from the norm by the *Shi'i* minority. This therefore becomes another space for cooperation, facilitated by common cultural practices. Ahmed (not his real name), a *Shi'i* Muslim man confirmed to me that though he is a *Shi'i* the process of his marriage did not differ from what is done by *Sunni* Muslims. In fact, Ahmed related to me that he is the only *Shi'i* in his family. Besides, he provided a very moderate bride wealth based on his financial strength. Ahmed, I found out during my research, was not the only man to give a moderate bride wealth; it has become a general trend among both groups. Ahmed added that the celebration of his wedding did not have any group coloration; it was just like any other celebration of Muslim wedding.

Other interlocutors' lived experiences displayed harmony between *Sunni* and *Shi'i* Muslims in relation to their socio-legal and religious practices pertaining to marriage. In the narrative below Mariam (not her real name) shares her experience, providing another lens to understand *Sunni-Shi'i* relationships:

> I did not know about different groups of Muslims in terms of some practices aside from *Ahlusunna* [Wahabi thought] and *Tijaniyya*. What I knew was that I should perform my daily rituals and fasting plus going to hajj [Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca] if I can. It was when I married my husband twenty years ago that he taught me Islam in its proper sense. This did not occur when we met. We courted for a while. We did all the necessities to facilitate our marriage. All the procedures were followed from introduction to bride wealth payment, and *leefe* provision, except that we did not have any public celebration. So, like I said it was my husband who showed me *Shi'i*. He gave me the history and then taught me the practices and the theological reasons. As time passed, I joined him to pray and later I started performing some of the rituals that would describe one a *Shi'i* in our community. It is strange to my people [kinsmen], but I am convinced of what I am doing.[6]

In both Ahmed's and Mariam's experiences, different levels of envisioning the nature of cooperation between *Sunni* majority and *Shi'i* minority come to the fore. The first is the cultural process of a Muslim marriage processes depicted by, "going home", "presenting kola", "*leefe*" and the celebration of inter-Muslim group weddings. With regard to these cultural aspects, the idea of minority position does not arise because it does not impact their cultural practices related to marriage. In short, this is only a situation of cultural sustenance and continuity. This is because the minority status has not destabilized already established cultural practices even though conversion to *Shi'ism* has taken place. In the same vein, although bride wealth is an aspect of legal postulation of Muslim marriages irrespective of group differences, it also presents itself in the same manner of cultural sustenance because the minority has followed the pattern of providing moderate bride wealth.

It is vital to mention how the issue of consent present itself differently for men and women before one transitions into marriage. This is ultimately linked to how easy or hard it is for men and women to be mobile within a community which is structured on strict gendered terms. In addition, it indicates how relational dimension of social mobility is particularly relevant for Muslim women. The dimension of gender concerning "tying the knot" is important for further reflection. It is evident in the above that female leadership in terms of Muslim marriage process is not visible. The indication from the data is that men play the actual role of marriage processes and in actual fact female role is only supportive. This gendered perspective also hints at how marriage itself appears as a transitionary move hence a moment of social mobility which is facilitated by men's roles. In fact the statement "that a man gives his daughter to another man to be given to his son" attest to this. Even marriage process is in the main dominated by men, from father/guardians' consent to *wali* to the role of malamai. Beyond this, mobility comes in the sense of seeing the marriage process as a moment of transitioning in one's social status. We can now see that this period is a special moment where families and friends gather to effect such a move. Yet, a Muslim woman's transition into a wealthier family through marriage did not always have impact on her actual status, I discovered. Despite the assumption that an elaborate *leefe* is a signal of the shift in a woman's socioeconomic status, this is not always the case in reality. Mariama's (fake name) marriage to Sule, a wealthy businessman did not change her economic status and she has to work hard to fend for herself and support the family income since husband does not release enough money to sustain the family.[7] In addition, it was evident from my field observation and discussions that when women get married, they take their relationship with both their immediate families and that of their husbands seriously because, as I discovered, these ties give them some form of security through sense of belonging.

Additionally, an instance of cooperation comes when the couples are settled. As my interlocutors opined, wives expected husbands to provide financial and security needs while wives are expected to engage in domestic services. These roles are generally the expectations of Muslims whether one is *Sunni* or *Shi'i*. Moreover, the research revealed that there is a *Shi'i* women's group, which is composed of the wives of *Shi'i* men. This group serves as a space of sharing and support. To a large extent, such women have converted to *Shi'i* except a few of them who are comfortable with other people's Islamic practices and beliefs. From the field data, conversion of such women happened as they dialogue about Islam and acquire Islamic knowledge

from their husbands. This occurred because many of the women do not have adequate Islamic education. This angle of the data opens a window of understanding intra-group perspective concerning marital roles and responsibilities of couples. The empirical evidence above gives a clear picture of Muslim couples' expected roles and responsibilities which is not differentiated by group. What this point of convergence between *Sunni* and *Shi'i* Muslims tells us is ultimately a way of broadening our understanding on intra-Muslim relationship regarding marriage. In the above, there is also the indication of how patterns of Islamic knowledge acquisition are interlinked to conversion. Thus, women are converted through marriage. The continuous engagement between the two groups is also highlighted by women's group formation which is an indication of cooperation between *Sunni* and *Shi'i* Muslims in the same social space. Besides this lies the ways in which a supposed marginalized group -Muslim women- find comforting communities for support.

4   SEX AS A CONSUMABLE GOOD? MUT'A MARRIAGES IN ACCRA

Before delving into the conversation of this section, it is vital to note that *mut'a* marriage is not one of the marriages explicated in the legal discussions in Ghana (Opoku, 1978; Offei, 2018). *Mut'a* is a contrast of non fixed-term marriage which has been discussed above and the discussion in this section will demonstrate this in detail. *Mut'a* is an ancient Arab marriage custom, which crept into Islam. However, it is a kind of marriage which is not accepted by *Sunni* Islam. *Shi'i* Islam accepts it in general except for a few differences on legal rulings within the different *Shi'i* sub-schools of thought. Academic conversation around the practice of *mut'a* among Muslims has argued that *mut'a* falls within marriage and prostitution because of the manner in which *Shi'i* religious authorities defined its legal boundaries in likeness to lease or hire. It is in the light of this theoretical discussion that the title of this section emerges. What these studies indicate is that, the logic behind *mut'a* is one in which the contract differs from non fixed-term marriage and different from modern form of prostitution. Aside from such theoretical observations, some empirical studies on *mut'a* have broadened our understanding on the manner in which social practices, norms and laws regulate women's bodies in addition to how women themselves confront, defend or negotiate the terms of such norms, laws and practices in relation to *mut'a* (Koya 1978, Floor, 1988; Nagar, 2000; Shrage, 2013; Haeri, 1985, 1989). In this vein, this section examines the nature of *mut'a* marriages in ways that it is linked to *Sunni-Shi'i* perspectives and practices as well as women's social mobility.

Two contradictory positions occur concerning *mut'a* marriages. The general position of the *Sunni* majority group is exemplified by a *Sunni* Islamic authority; Malam Imrana emphatically states that *mut'a* is completely *haram*, or illegitimate, in Islam. Expounding on particular differences between *Sunni* Islam and *Shi'i* Islam,[8] Malam Imrana's comment is a general one that cuts across all the *Sunni* groups, transcending even to the 'ordinary' *Sunni* Muslim who, it is not strange to hear, also claim categorically that *mut'a* is *haram*. For *Sunni* men and women, *mut'a* is invariably legitimizing prostitution in the name of Islam.[9] However, *Shi'i* Muslims hold a contrary position. According to *Shi'i* malamai, *mut'a* is a legitimate Islamic marriage, which however, is practiced within some defined remits such as during travel. Generally, *Shi'i* in Accra believe that *mut'a* is a religious prescription; however, they do not think it is justifiably applicable to the context of Accra. These two opposing positions on the practice of *mut'a* marriage are the basis of disagreement between the understanding and practice of *mut'a* marriage. Aside the theological position of the two groups, the field data unveiled that social perception makes it difficult for it to be put in practice because Muslim women -irrespective of *Sunni* or *Shi'i*- reject this marriage option as they consider it a way of selling their bodies. Additionally, the aftermath of *mut'a* marriage contains a lot of uncertainty. Thus, Muslim women's chance to remarry in a non fixed-term marriage after a publicised *mut'a* marriage becomes difficult due to the attached stigma. As such Muslim men would generally not approach Muslim women with such a marriage proposal.

Nevertheless, my field research uncovered isolated cases of *mut'a* marriages in the Accra context. The first involved two university students who had a secret *mut'a* marriage, which lasted three years and transformed into a non fixed-term marriage before they eventually divorced. The man agreed to the woman's request to make this union secret in order to protect the woman from social stigma and also not to erode her chances of marriage. This particular marriage, between a *Shi'i* man and a *Sunni* woman, was kept a secret except for a very few friends and was entered into as the young couple did not want to commit *zina*-fornication. The second case of *mut'a* my informant told me about involved a supposed divorcee Muslim woman. Her experience evokes the gendered patterns of Muslim divorces in Accra Issaka-Toure (2022) has termed "I divorce him, but he said he has not divorced me."[10] Thus, in this particular case, the *Sunni* woman in question had engaged in a symbolic divorce from her first husband and then entered into a secret *mut'a* marriage with a *Shi'i* man. Notably, in both cases of *mut'a* marriage, the women did not cohabit with their husbands. It also emerged from the field data that these practitioners of *mut'a* marriages did not want to disclose whether or not they really followed the details of *mut'a* especially pertaining to its financial arrangements, etc.[11] The reason for this, my informant said, was because they wanted to as much as possible keep their marriage a secret.

The *mut'a* marriages between the two *Sunni* women and *Shi'i* men is an indication of how Muslims of different groups occupying the same social space engage one another despite the persistent general disagreement on Islam's position on *mut'a* among Muslims. It is a vivid example of cooperation, albeit unconventional, between individual men and women of

the prevalent Muslim groups. Ideas of the proper ways of being Muslim in relation to *mut'a* marriage practice has not affected its implementation by *Shi'i* men and *Sunni* women. In essence, the practice raises questions about the contests over the legitimacy or otherwise of *mut'a* marriages. This can be seen as a practical way of contesting a dominant view of the *Sunni* majority. In another vein, it is also a way in which Muslim women as a marginalized group confront Islamic norms and this negotiation is implicitly connected to women's social mobility through marriage choices.

According to the data, sexual relationships (colloquially called boy/girl friendship) is even more overlooked than *mut'a* marriages by both *Sunni* and *Shi'i* Muslims. Per the society's understanding of *mut'a*, it then becomes difficult to practice *mut'a* in the public gaze. This explains why the two *Sunni* women kept their *mut'a* marriages secret. Thus, not only does *mut'a* itself appears as a questionable practice in legal terms of the *Sunni* majority and places such practice as illegitimate, it also affects women's social mobility in relation to marriage choices. This at the end, speaks to how marginalized groups- *Shi'i* and women- position themselves in relation to proper Islamic practices within a specific context. In other words, the terms of secret *mut'a* marriages by Muslims is a depiction of evading social norms and practice by Muslim men and women. This is directly connected to the broader academic discourse of the logic behind *mut'a* as a kind of marriage, which falls in between marriage and prostitution with respect to perception and practice. While it is on the one hand, considered a kind of prostitution in disguise according to *Sunni* Muslims as well as women's rejection, it is also on the other hand, a form of marriage from both the angle of practitioners and *Shi'i* Islamic view on it. However, if *mut'a* serves as prostitution, then, how about condoning boy/girl sexual relationship? This particular question was answered in my field data in this way: it is usually expected that the terms of boy/girl sexual relationship could end up in a non fixed-term marriage while *mut'a* from the onset is prostitution because of the understanding that men have to pay women for the provision of sexual pleasure. This perspective of the data raises some issues for theoretical reflections. In particular, the assumption that boy/girl sexual relations have the potential of culminating in non fixed-term marriage is flawed and could be related to *mut'a* in the sense of it being labeled as prostitution. As I discovered, not all of such relationships ended in any form of marriage and in many of the cases, some form of financial provision is expected from men. The only difference is that *mut'a's* terms are Islamically laid down by the *Shi'i* group. In this wise, both fall within the theoretical boundaries of *mut'a* as a kind of marriage, which falls between marriage and prostitution. However, society overlooks the one and completely rejects the other.

This draws our attention to understanding how minority legal positions can be downgraded in favor of some other sexual mores. In essence, this contestation over the legality of *mut'a* is about proper ways of Islamic religious practice. While it is usually common for contestation to arise in religious matters, the legal basis of *mut'a* within Islam is situated within the context of majority and minority coexistence. This is invariably connected not only delegitimizing some Islamic practices by majority, but it is also linked to how the views and positions of the minority on religious practices are marginalized. However, the marginalization has not prevented the minority from expressing its views on the proper ways of doing things in Islam albeit in the face of vehement opposition. In this regard, the minority has contextualized their views on *mut'a*. Even if the majority rejects the minority's positions on *mut'a*, the minority still has a place to speak. In other words, it is a contest of ideas without encountering the other. This contestation of ideas in relation to the practice of *mut'a* between minority and majority makes us rethink whether the minority position on Islamic matters is one that is introducing another variant of Muslim marriage practice in Accra.

Another level of practicing *mut'a* marriage revealed through the field data is marriage between foreign Muslim nationals, mostly Lebanese, and non-Muslim Ghanaians. These men are usually businessmen who do not travel with their wives unlike Iranian *Shi'i* men who come to Ghana either as expatriate workers in Iranian organizations or as businessmen. As it stands, some Ghanaian *Shi'i* men who are associates of the *Shi'i* community have been approached by such Lebanese businessmen to find Muslim women for the purpose of *mut'a* marriage without success yet later found their ways around it with non-Muslim women. The excerpt below speaks to this fact:

Rose said:

> My partner is a *Shi'i* from Lebanon. He is a businessman. I met him through a friend and when we started talking, we got along and finally agreed to be together- but not married in my view. He told me that he has performed the Islamic rites of marriage that will last his entire two year stay in Accra. We agreed that we live together, and he supports me financially. This he fulfilled. For me I know he is my partner and not a husband but, on his side, because he is a Muslim and he does not want to fornicate he performed the marriage between the two of us. When the two years elapsed, he had to stay again for another one year, so he performed the marriage again. You see [referring to me, the author] it is a short thing he does in our bedroom. This I cannot explain further because I am not a Muslim. He told me that it's a kind of marriage in *Shi'i* Islam to avoid fornication. I realized it was about sexual pleasure, so I never thought of making babies because when his time is up, I will be left with a child to raise alone. You know irrespective of being a Muslim or not in Ghana, it is a problem to raise a fatherless child. There is a lot of stigma[12].

Rose further disclosed to me that, Muslim women would not accept this kind of partnership because it is a form of fornication according to Islam but for her it does not matter in any sense. In fact, besides Rose, there are other non-Muslim women who are in such partnership with Lebanese *Shi'i* men. This position of Muslim women's -whether *Sunni* or *Shi'i*- rejection of the practice explains why non-Muslim women are the target of *mut'a* marriage. Thus, Muslim women's confrontation of *mut'a* marriage is a representation of women's self-ascribed identity. Rose's experience of *mut'a* above shows how she perceives her relationship with her partner as purely sexual partnership without any religious inclination. Her partner, however, views it as a kind of Islamic marriage- *mut'a*. While she is open about the relationship and raise critical questions concerning some decisions on having children in such a union, Muslim women are not open and do not cohabit with their supposed married partners. This speaks to how women of different religions-Islam or others-have different levels of social mobility even if such a marriage appears ambiguous and raises a further question on women's mobility beyond the confines of Muslim women. While non-Muslim women can freely make choices without any contestation, Muslim women cannot freely do that. Finally, it is important to indicate that my interlocutors of *Shi'i* background have raised some questions as to whether the rules of *mut'a* are followed. In some ways this can be a valid question as expressed in the above *mut'a* marriages. In the case of Rose, she was not part of the performance of the *mut'a* ritual. In that of the two Muslim women, their terms of negotiating *mut'a* marriages make it impossible to tell whether all rules were followed.

5 CONCLUSION

This article has considered how the Muslim sub-minority group in Accra has positioned itself vis-a-vis the majority. As a sub-minority, their presence is felt through education and conversion. This is evidently indicated in how they have established educational institutions for young men and women with different aims. While the educational institution of males is geared towards Islamic education, which translates into Muslim leadership training, that of female education is not. This is connected to the ways in which female mobility within the understanding of Islamic learning culture is curtailed because of its difference in aims. In this realm, the minority positioned itself within the existing practice of the context. The nature of minority-majority relations in this article can be understood in two different ways: kinship networks and marital relationships. While it was not out of the ordinary to be a *Shi'i*-minority within Sunni dominated kinship network or marriage between a *Shi'i* male convert whose marriage has not ended because of conversion, it is not always the case when it comes to starting a marriage between a *Shi'i* man and a *Sunni* woman. Despite the fact of some families not having issues with engaging the minority in marital relationships, others do have problems at the initial stages to the point of rejection, even if this is very rare. Besides this, the

presence or position of the minority felt at a polemical level in the existence of two groups within a setting. Even if this polemical stand is only isolated, it represents the fact that their presence and utterances evoke some disagreement at some point. This does not however translate into destabilizing the existing status quo with regard to the pattern of Islamic higher education and knowledge transmission. Further, the socio-legal practice of non fixed-term marriage of both groups is the same. The result is that in terms of socio-legal and educational pursuits, the minority has situated itself as identical with the majority. The one outstanding factor which keeps the minority differentiated from the majority is their view on fixed-term marriage or *mut'a*. This view forms part of a particular identity marker of the minority even if the idea is placed within the context of the practicality of *mut'a* in the Islamic religious landscape of Accra Muslims. To this end, the particular ways in which the rules of *mut'a* are followed are intertwined with how social realities impact minority's views to be put to practice. The contest of ideas and prevailing acceptance of *mut'a* presents it as a contrast to non fixed-term marriage.

Throughout the article the discussion of how social mobility takes place is couched around what it means for men and women. For women, the society both makes it possible for mobility to take place and at the same time limits it. In this instance, women's mobility occurs through negotiations with men. For men however social mobility can take place in multiple arenas-polygyny, monogamy and *mut'a*. Finally, the manner in which the sub-minority in Accra situates itself contributes to the study of Muslim minority in Africa in two different ways. The first has do with the issue of identity in connection to what makes the *Shi'i* distinct from the *Sunni* majority, yet this sort of difference or identity has not resulted into any form of encounter between the two groups. The second has to do with how a sub minority in a context has positioned itself in relation to social practice of marriage with regard to cultural sustenance and legal norms of non fixed-term Muslim marriages. In the final analysis concerning minority and majority Muslim group's relations, this article has demonstrated how the minority negotiates its place among a majority group.

NOTES

1. This is a kind of temporary marriage practiced in the Gulf region, mainly by *Shi'i* Muslims. For broader discussion on the illegal practices of such see John R. Bradley, *Behind the Veil of Vice: The Business and Culture of Sex in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

2. Observation from the field.

3. I gathered from the field that, the first presence of *Shi'i*sm was felt in the late 1980s through the activities of the late Sheikh Bansi who was recognised by *Shi'i*tes as the first national leader of the *Shi'i* group in Ghana. He was the first Ghanaian Islamic scholar who studied in Iran and upon his return to Ghana, he built the foundation for *Shi'i* Islam through his collaboration with the Lebanese expatriate *Shi'i* community in Ghana. With this support the

first *Shi'i* mosque which served for several years as the hub of *Shi'i* activities was built in 1989 at Mamobi, Accra.

4. Elicited from the field.

5. Cultural provision of female accessories such as clothes, jewelleries, bags, shoes, henna etc. They are provided by a groom through his family to the bride through her family. These accessories are handed over to the bride after the finalization of the wedding process. Pronounced "lee-fay".

6. Interviewed in Hausa language, Accra, 10th March 2014.

7. Informal discussion, Mamobi, Accra, 19th April 2015.

8. Interview, Malam Imrana, Accra, December 28, 2020.

9. An Islamic legal concept that denotes prohibition.

10. The study lays out the symbolic ways Muslim women in Accra have found to access divorce without their husbands' consent. This divorce initiated by women is contested by men in a religious climate that otherwise makes it easy for Muslim men to divorce their wives and not vice versa. Fulera Issaka-Toure, "'I Divorced Him but He Said He Has not Divorced Me': Gendered Perspectives on Muslim Divorce in Accra, Ghana", in *Islamic Divorce in a Global World: Everyday Realities and Practices in the 21st Century*, ed. E. Stiles and U. Yakin, forthcoming.

11. Just as in non fixed-term marriages, point of meeting and coming to agreement is first, then financial arrangement and time frame as well as tying the knot. Tying the knot is only a short ceremony between a man and a woman. Consent is not needed from any parent or guardian.

12. Interviewed in Twi language, Lapaz, Accra, February 6th, 2014.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I declare that this research was carried by me following strict academic guidelines. Any error that might occur is my responsibility.

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