

Introduction

WAITHOOD

GENDER, EDUCATION, AND GLOBAL DELAYS IN MARRIAGE AND CHILDBEARING

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In many societies around the world, young men and women are waiting longer and longer to marry and have children. These delays in marriage and childbearing are growing—and they are global in nature. For instance, in the United States, the Pew Research Center reports that the share of Americans living without a partner has increased, especially among young adults (Fry 2017). Today, about six-in-ten American adults (61 percent) under the age of thirty-five are now living without a spouse or a partner. Of these un-partnered adults, about six-in-ten (58 percent) have never been married. Another Pew Research Center survey shows that about six-in-ten American adults (61 percent) between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine are childless, with about four-in-ten (37 percent) saying that they never expect to have children (Livingston and Horowitz 2018).

Although less pronounced in many other societies, these delays in marriage and childbearing are increasing globally. In a study using a variety of international data sets, demographer Philip N. Cohen (2013) shows that marriage delay, as well as an overall reduction in the marriage rate, is occurring worldwide, particularly in well-to-do countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Japan, and the United States. However, marriage delays and declines are not just found in

the Global North. Today, 89 percent of the world's population lives in a country with falling marriage rates. These changes in marriage are part of what Cohen (2013) calls a "package of demographic changes," including higher education, higher incomes, and lower rates of fertility.

Indeed, total fertility rates (TFRs) have plummeted in most countries since the 1980s, including, for example, across the Muslim world, where sharp declines in TFRs since the 1980s have been characterized as a "quiet revolution . . . hiding in plain sight" (Eberstadt and Shah 2012; see also Inhorn 2018 for Arab world trends). Today, roughly half the world's population lives in societies with TFRs below replacement level (Roser 2016). This includes the "ultra-low fertility" societies of East Asia, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore (Chan, Jones, and Straughan 2008). In these societies, ultra-low birth rates have precipitated a sense of national reproductive crisis, with women potentially blamed for failing to marry and waiting too long to conceive. Yet, these Asia-Pacific nations are emblematic of wider global patterns, whereby the "richest" people have the "lowest" fertility rates, including in much of Western Europe (Roser 2016).

Overall, this global delay and decline in marriage and childbearing has been characterized as "one of the most fundamental social changes that [has] happened in human history" (Roser 2016). But the question is: Why? Why are so many young people around the world waiting to marry and have children—and, in some cases, never marrying at all? Are these delays intentional (e.g., for education) and positive (e.g., for a sense of individual autonomy and personal fulfillment)? Or are there obstacles in the way to marriage and childbearing (e.g., lack of employment opportunities) that lead to prolonged waiting and youth frustration?

In this volume, we examine the multifarious experiences of young people around the world who are living in a state of *wait-hood*, which, in the most general sense, refers to an extended period of young adulthood in which young men and women are waiting to marry and have children, sometimes delaying indefinitely, and sometimes opting out altogether. Wait-hood may be intentional, unintentional, or some combination of both. From the standpoint of intentionality, wait-hood may be planned and experienced in aspirational terms, as when young women put off marriage and childbearing to pursue their educations and careers. But wait-hood, in its original meaning, refers to unintentional delays in marriage and

childbearing due to political and economic realities that force young people into a state of deferred adulthood.

This latter meaning of *waithood* was first forwarded by the political scientist and ethnographer Diane Singerman, who originally coined the term. Viewing the rates of education and marriage across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Singerman (2007, 2013) used the term “*waithood*” to refer to a widespread pattern of delayed marriage and—because marriage is culturally linked to social adulthood—delayed adulthood. As Singerman argued, the pattern is not socially or affectively neutral: it has resulted in considerable youth frustration and societal concern across much of the MENA region. In her foundational work, Singerman observed that in countries like Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Morocco, young people are obtaining higher levels of education than ever before, but that education is not leading to higher levels of employment.

While her research focuses on youth in general, Singerman emphasizes the experiences of young men, highlighting the failures both of national governments to supply sufficiently remunerative employment opportunities and educational systems to adequately prepare young men for the jobs that exist (see also Dhillon and Yousef 2011; Honwana 2014). Across the Middle East and North Africa, the skyrocketing expense of marriage and housing has combined with cultural norms enjoining young people to live at home until they marry. The effect is a situation of prolonged dependence on parents as young people are forced to wait—for jobs, for housing, for marriage, and for families of their own (Singerman and Ibrahim 2003). It is not surprising that at least some young men find this liminal period between adolescence and adulthood a time of boredom and despair (see Schielke 2008, 2015). No less seriously, political observers voice concern that this shift in patterns of marriage and social adulthood creates dangerous possibilities for youth unrest and even radicalization (Khosravi 2017).

As depicted in several chapters in this volume, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, young men’s marriage delay is often a by-product of an economic and political situation that makes finding work and saving for marriage difficult, if not impossible. While a pattern of later age of marriage for men is nothing new, neoliberal policies of economic restructuring in many societies within the Global South have pushed young men into a position of unintended, unwelcome, and extended *waithood*—or a prolongation of the period of time between adolescence and the achievement of full adulthood,

which is typically associated with marriage and the establishment of a family of one's own.

At the same time, and sometimes even in the same cultural context, there are young men who view this waitthood period more productively—as a space for personal exploration and self-improvement. Writing on waitthood in Africa, anthropologist Alcinda Honwana (2014: 20) has astutely observed that the waitthood phenomenon represents “the contradictions of modernity, in which young people’s opportunities and expectations are simultaneously broadened and constrained.” As shown in this volume, young men in Africa may use the waitthood period to pursue education, employment opportunities, friendship, and self-development, thereby clarifying their future aspirations and formulating new self-identifications. Indeed, this combination of social disappointment and aspirational achievement may characterize waitthood in many late-modern contexts, particularly for young men.

However, one of the key insights of this volume is that the waitthood period may be experienced quite differently by women, which, in turn, has broader social, cultural, and affective consequences and significance. One of the “quiet revolutions” occurring in the world today for women is their educational achievement, with women students outperforming their male peers in higher education in more than one-third of the world’s nations (Inhorn et al. 2018; Inhorn, Chapter 15, this volume). As educational opportunities have become more widely available, young men and especially young women have taken advantage of these opportunities, with concomitant delays in marriage and childbearing as a result (cf. Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Jones 2005).

The most striking consequence of women’s educational achievement is the later age for women at first marriage—or, more consequentially, no marriage at all. During the three-decade period from the 1980s through the 2000s, marriage rates among educated women between the ages of thirty and thirty-four plummeted around the world. As demographer Philip Cohen (2013) puts it simply, “Women with more education are less likely to be married.”

What many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, however, is that the “higher education means lower marriage” equation for women has not come without significant social and cultural consequences. An unanticipated and often worrying effect of women’s educational achievements—which is often coupled with men’s waning educational achievements in many societies, including in the United States (Autor and Wasserman 2013)—is that many well-educated

women who would like to be married face a smaller pool of well-educated men. The result is that the identification of an appropriate marital partner—namely, one who shares a vision of marriage as a joint project and is willing to accept a more equitable household arrangement—has become increasingly difficult for educated women around the globe. The fact that “older” educated women in countries such as China are deemed unmarriageable—and referred to in such callous terms as “surplus women,” “unmarketable women,” “leftover women,” or, if they have PhDs, the “third gender”—bespeaks the often significant social and personal challenges that educated women face in their efforts to marry (Lake 2018).

Today, long-standing patterns of hypergamy (or women marrying “up”) in most societies are being challenged by a pattern of hypogamy (or women marrying “down”). New patterns of hypogamy most often involve a woman marrying a man who has less education; however, in some cases, they may also involve a man who is younger or less economically secure. In yet other cultural contexts, the pattern involves women reaching across previously circumscribed ethnic, racial, or religious divides for possible marriage partners (Ortega and Hergovich 2017).

Having said this, in many countries of the world, women’s educational achievements have also gone hand-in-hand with new visions of conjugality and shifting marital arrangements. In many societies today, parentally arranged marriages are giving way to self-choice of partner and the “modern” desire among many youth for a romantic, companionate marital relationship (Ahearn 2001; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Inhorn 2012). These aspirations are often buttressed by other social changes, including access to new social media technologies and the development of consumer cultures including Western-style cafés, shopping malls, and multiplex movie theaters that facilitate intimate encounters.

The postponement of marriage and the prolongation of unmarried singlehood have also led to a noticeable reconfiguration of courtship and dating practices and the emergence of new types of partnerships. This trend assumes multiple forms, and can be seen in, among other things, the growth of online dating and matchmaking services, multiple romantic/sexual partners, unmarried cohabitation, polyamory (i.e., multiple committed relationships), and both temporary and unofficial marriage. At times, these emergent forms of partnership and conjugality—with or without legal marriage—are viewed as a marriage “crisis,” a cause for alarm and moral panic on the part of politicians, religious leaders, and societies’ moral authorities.

Yet, however morally questionable and varied their local forms, these transformations have involved a profoundly important shift in gender norms and expectations. That shift involves the recognition of the value of educating not only sons but also daughters, of allowing them to wait for marriage as they pursue their educational goals, and of encouraging them to work outside of the home, even after marriage (Adely 2012; Smith-Hefner 2019). Where educational opportunities are open to both young men and young women, women have often moved exceptionally quickly to take advantage of these opportunities. And where there are available employment opportunities for educated women—and where parents recognize the benefits of their daughters' employment—women have put their educations to work.

The complicated constellation of factors that lead young women to delay marriage—and, typically, childbearing—emerges in interesting and sometimes surprising ways. Not uncommonly, the change toward waiting entails a far-reaching shift in gender norms, social identity, and intimate relations. The shift in identity and sociality involves a movement away from a primary focus on social and familial responsibility to a concern with personal fulfillment and some degree and variety of self-actualization.

Having said this, in the many areas of the Global South where educational achievement does not easily translate into employment opportunities—and, equally important, where reigning cultural and religious sensibilities assign primary responsibility for family support to men—men may well experience the status, honor, and economic disappointments of *waithood* disproportionately and with particularly stigmatizing effects (Wyrod 2016). Non-employment or under-employment is a major hurdle for young men hoping to achieve social maturity through marriage. *Waithood's* effects are compounded and are particularly debilitating in those contexts where marriage costs are exceptionally high, pushing its achievement out of reach for ever-growing numbers of men.

A partial solution to the challenge may include temporary labor migration, where such opportunities exist. Alternately or in addition, the situation may be momentarily neutralized through the pursuit of even more higher education, or simply by biding one's time networking with peers, killing time playing sports and drinking, and otherwise dealing with the liminal hardship of "wait frustration" (cf. Schielke 2015). As a pervasive and pressing social phenomenon, then, *waithood* not only reshapes the always multidimensional and socially momentous transition from youth to adulthood, it is also

linked to urgent existential issues of gendered status and social recognition, concerns that extend beyond securing a job to social life and civic participation more broadly (Honwana 2014).

The chapters in this volume employ the *waithood* concept as a guiding frame for rich ethnographic studies of young men's and young women's lives in various states of *waithood* across the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the United States. In this volume, we adopt an expansive view of "*waithood*," with a focus on both agency and constraint. In some areas of the world, waiting before marriage and childbearing is deliberate, and signals a significant reshaping of the perceived social and cultural desirability of marriage and the acceptability of permanent singlehood. This is certainly true today in many parts of Europe and North America, but also in countries such as Iran (Chapter 10, this volume) or Rwanda (Chapter 6, this volume). However, as shown in the majority of the chapters in this volume, even in areas of the world where marriage delays are occurring and overall marriage rates are declining, the institution of marriage is still viewed favorably by most women (and men), and is culturally and sometimes religiously linked to childbearing. In such cases, men and women may not be opting out of marriage, but rather are forced out by social, economic, and political conditions that constrain young people's options and agency.

As these chapters clearly show, this important distinction between agency and constraint is evident between those areas of the world where *waithood* is largely involuntary and young people have little choice but to wait (for a job, an opportunity, a partner) and those areas of the world where marriage delay and *waithood* involve a significant measure of social and individual choice. While many young people may prioritize education, self-development, and employment across varied social contexts to strategize and maximize their available options, other young people find themselves "*stuck*" (Sommers 2012) and must find creative ways to bide their time while waiting for opportunities that may never materialize.

The studies in this volume reveal that whether voluntary or involuntary, the phenomenon of youth *waithood* necessitates a recognition of its consequences: a profound reconfiguration of gender and family roles; newly emergent forms of courtship, marriage, and intimate relationships; and the real possibilities of permanent singlehood and childlessness. The chapters in this volume thus speak to four major themes: 1) the frustrations of *waithood* and the struggles for dignity in nation-states where political-economic circum-

stances hinder the achievement of adulthood, especially for men; 2) the ways in which educational opportunities, especially for young women, have led to new aspirations, including desires to defer marriage and motherhood until later (or more radically to forego them completely); 3) the ways in which marriage deferrals are leading to fundamental shifts in women's (and men's) social lives, including permanent states of singlehood, especially among educated women; and 4) the impact of delayed marriage on delays in childbearing, especially among educated women, who may eventually experience frustration in their inability to find partners and to become mothers at later ages.

In each of the fifteen chapters in this volume, the authors, most of whom are anthropologists, offer original concepts to help describe and nuance our understandings of waithood in the diverse societies represented in this volume. In Table 0.1, entitled, "Waithood: A New Conceptual Vocabulary," we provide a summarizing overview of these chapters, the ethnographic locations of the authors' studies, and the attending conceptual frameworks they offer. Table 0.1 is thus designed to introduce readers to the new conceptual vocabulary offered throughout this volume, including the locations of these key concepts.

Table 0.1. Waithood: A New Conceptual Vocabulary.

Term	Author(s)	Countries	Definition
Active waithood	McLean	Sierra Leone	Young men's (<i>youthmen's</i>) particular investments in planning and striving for educated futures in preparation for a better life; because education is a highly valued life goal, seeking education while waiting to become a full adult is seen as a way to escape poverty and obtain a better future
Conjugal conundrums	Thornton	Dominican Republic	Marriage in the Caribbean is religiously valorized but difficult to enact, especially among impoverished male Christian converts who, by virtue of competing obligations, are precariously situated between the authoritative prescriptions of the church and powerful sociocultural and economic imperatives that discourage the adoption of marriage and the nuclear family model

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Term	Author(s)	Countries	Definition
Delayed adulthood	Masquelier	Niger	Young men's inability to reach maturity despite being of age, while also practicing time management to embrace delays, fill time, and prepare for the future; this occurs through receiving emotional and material support from peers, exchanging information about jobs, training opportunities, and other resources to orient themselves toward possible futures; thus, young men aim to shatter the temporality of aimless deferral and recreate a sense of purposeful waiting
Emergent waitthood	Berry	Guatemala	The places and moments where marriage practices are changing for women, and the ways in which institutions (including the state and NGOs) are shaping marriage practices and reproduction differently; institutions may create conflicting or harmonizing incentives and pressures on women's marital and reproductive lives; however, through these institutional influences, some young women are modeling new possibilities for life trajectories beyond the household and into public and professional spheres
Extended singlehood	Smith-Hefner	Indonesia	Young people in a context of universal marriage nonetheless pursuing higher education, employment, and "self-development," while delaying marriage and extending the period of singlehood, the effects of which are more significant for women who may age out of the "market" and face difficulties identifying a suitable, equally well-educated match
Female reproductive temporality	Vialle	France	Women wait to become mothers because they envisage a reproductive temporality that is based not only on biological, but also social, relational, and temporal factors; women thus seek to satisfy a number of conditions that they deem necessary in order to welcome and raise children, within a temporality that they consider both socially and biologically appropriate

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Term	Author(s)	Countries	Definition
Giving oneself time	Sadrudin	Rwanda	How young and aspiring women negotiate their womanhood in the wake of sweeping transformations in norms around marriage, education, and gender; “giving oneself time” can be understood as a liminal and aspirational period in which young women belonging to a privileged professional segment of Rwandan society “find themselves” as they contemplate marriage and, to some extent, motherhood
Intentional waithood	Conclusion	Global	In societies where economic and political constraints are not so pronounced and stressful, young people take advantage of opportunities to postpone marriage and childbearing by choice; this phenomenon is significantly gendered, as educational and employment opportunities become more widely available for women around the world
Never-marriedness	Lamb	India	The condition of never having married, putting never-married single women into a unique and anomalous social category, different from separated, divorced, and widowed women; positioned outside the norm, never-married single women see features of their society not easily recognized by others—systems of gender and sexuality, kinship and marriage, and social class—which they must both work within and strive to redefine as they endeavor to achieve forms of everyday well-being and belonging without being married
Politics of waithood	Singerman	Middle East (specifically Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia)	Young people are engaging in a politics of waithood as they demand dignity and an end to economic and political marginalization; the financial and social challenges of waithood and its liminal status have fueled these political demands, taking a most obvious turn during the Arab Spring
Postponed adulthood	Schulz	Uganda	A deeply paradoxical set of challenges whereby young men frame their aspirations and struggles to attain

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Table 0.1. *continued*

Term	Author(s)	Countries	Definition
			seniority status as a matter of blocked occupational opportunities on one hand, and, on the other, of the double bind of obligatory marriage and the deeply risky nature of marital intimacy
Refusing to settle	Adely	Jordan	The experiences of single women who have migrated for professional opportunities, who have lived on their own for as much as a decade and are beginning to reckon with the long-term possibilities of staying single; as time passes, many become concerned about finding a suitable partner and marrying, but on their own terms; they insist on living a life of dignity
Reproductive waithood	Inhorn	United States	The condition of women waiting to become mothers, both intentionally (on their paths to professional fulfillment) and unintentionally (because of the difficulties they face in finding a committed reproductive partner); compelling evidence suggests that educated women's growing use of egg freezing reflects unintended reproductive waithood, which, in turn, is tied to gender-based disparities in men's and women's educational achievements, with women surpassing men around the globe
Tactics of marriage delay	Howlett	China	A wide array of interpersonal strategies that people in many cultural contexts pursue to negotiate between the personal and the social in the domain of marriage decisions; the tactics of marriage delay include efforts to avoid bad marriages as well as efforts to achieve emotional and personal fulfillment while waiting for good ones; in some cases, people reject marriage, but more frequently they feel excluded from it, due to hypergamic norms, increasing social inequality, and the rising costs of marriage and childrearing; in addition, queer-identified individuals often face legal exclusion even as they come under pressure to enter "marriages of convenience"

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Term	Author(s)	Countries	Definition
Unintentional waithood	Conclusion	Global	The plight of young people in re- source-poor settings, where increasing numbers of young men and women are being forced to delay marriage and family formation, with profound consequences for their gender identity and social welfare
Voluntary waithood	Babadi	Iran	When the motive behind young peo- ples' extended singlehood is psycho- logical and not economic; with the continued economic and emotional support of their parents, middle-class young people are enjoying their period of singlehood, engaging in self-exploration and identity forma- tion by pursuing higher education, travelling, part-time exploratory ca- reers, and dating; they also tend to be cynical about marriage (given parents' problematic marital relationships), as well as their own idealist require- ments for the perfect partner
Waithood	Introduction	Global	The term originally introduced by Diane Singerman to describe an ex- tended period of young adulthood in which marriage and childbearing are delayed, sometimes indefinitely, thereby preventing the transition to full adulthood; waithood, in its orig- inal meaning, refers to unintended delays, which are often due to polit- ical and economic realities that force young people into a state of deferred adulthood; but, increasingly, wait- hood is planned and aspirational, as when young women around the globe delay marriage and childbearing to pursue their educations and careers
Waithood choice	San Román	Spain	Many women using ART waited to become mothers not because of ma- terial constraints but by personal choice; choosing to wait does not pre- vent them from feeling completely adult, nor affect the belief that they can procreate later, after doing other things that they also want to do (such as travelling or "enjoying life"); how- ever, when "the right time" for moth- erhood comes, women may find that their opportunities to reproduce "nat- urally" have diminished

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Part I. Waithood, Statehood, and the Struggle for Dignity

In Chapter 1, “Youth, Economics, and the Politics of Waithood: The Struggle for Dignity in the Middle East and North Africa,” Diane Singerman updates her original path-breaking waithood argument and sets out a framework for the three chapters that follow in this section—all of which take up young people’s responses to state policies that have presented serious roadblocks to their achieving full adulthood. Singerman’s chapter offers important new data from Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, which indicate that economic policies and poor-quality education continue to pose challenges for young people and have resulted in considerable social precarity, not least of which is widespread and extended marriage delays. Across MENA countries, there is still evidence of a “marital imperative” which closely links marriage to the achievement of adult status. Adding to its urgency, marriage in this region of the world is considered to be the only context for legitimate sex. As Singerman notes, this does not necessarily prevent young people from engaging in intimate relationships, but it places them at risk of social and familial disapproval—and in some countries possible legal punishment—if they do. Yet marriage continues to be a high-risk endeavor for young people—one in which large sums of money are expended, particularly by the groom and his family. Singerman cites 2012 statistics from Egypt to argue that, although there has been some reduction in the costs associated with marriage, expenses can still easily require five to eight years of a young man’s wages.

Very high rates of youth unemployment across the MENA region—in some countries approaching 40 percent—have only exacerbated this pattern of marriage delay. Young people have pursued higher education as a strategy for addressing the labor market, but because of the poor quality of schooling and dearth of available positions, even a college degree cannot guarantee a secure job. Singerman points out that an unemployed man is not only considered an unacceptable marriage partner; his situation will likely result in his being unable to accumulate the considerable funds required to pay for marriage and, with it, complete the transition to social adulthood.

Singerman’s larger interest goes beyond the demographics and economics of delayed marriage, however, to the broader *politics of waithood* and in particular the state’s response to young people’s plight. Across the MENA region, the “demand for dignity” (*karama*) is a rallying cry for youth movements seeking social and economic

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justice. States have not been consistently sensitive to youth demands, but young people's continuing calls for recognition and social justice have had some success, particularly with regard to women's rights. Singerman is careful to point out that these achievements are not solely the product of the aspirations and efforts of disaffected youth; rather, they build on and reinforce larger grassroots movements. Her insight is nonetheless deeply important, emphasizing the need to recognize the desires of young people for dignity, as well as their potential for social change as they endeavor to not only improve their own lives but participate in their nation's development.

In Chapter 2, "Trusting Is a Dicey Affair": Muslim Youth, Gender Relations, and Future-Making in Southwestern Uganda," Dorothea E. Schulz takes up the role of the state as well in her examination of postponed adulthood, or the predicament of unemployed young men in Mbarara, Uganda, as they struggle to achieve seniority status amid blocked occupational opportunities, while at the same time, they face the "risky" double bind of obligatory Muslim marriage. In Uganda, neoliberal reforms and economic restructuring have led to growing disparities between the rich and "ordinary folks" and between younger and older generations. Young men are blamed by their elders for sitting around doing little or nothing to improve their lives. However, Mbarara youth describe their situation as one of "stuckness"—the result of having limited opportunities and few basic assets on which to draw. As members of a religious minority, Muslim men face multiple hurdles to the achievement of masculine adulthood. Although they pursue higher education and obtain university degrees, Schulz emphasizes that the poor quality of Muslim-founded schools makes their graduates non-competitive for the few jobs that are available.

While Ugandan men accept or even desire a wife who is willing to work and contribute income to the household, a Muslim man is nonetheless expected to be the main support for his family and dependents. As in Egypt, young men in Uganda view marriage as risky—a "dicey affair"—because of the considerable costs involved, but also because of the perceived "untrustworthiness" of women, linked by many young men to women's recent educational and economic gains. As a result of these and other influences, Ugandan women are depicted as "demanding" and "difficult to satisfy," a perception that only exacerbates men's fears of being unable to adequately provide. But Schulz finds that, in contrast to arguments that would frame the problem as one of young people embracing a neoliberal self that emphasizes individual above community and kin,

young men are drawing on their social relations as possible sources of sponsorship and advancement. Young Muslim men also look to their religion as a frame of normative reference that fosters some measure of accountability and trust—not just in financial dealings but in spousal relations as well.

Themes of failed economic policies and their effects on frustrated youth are also critical to an understanding of the situation of young, educated Nigeriens. In Chapter 3, “Waiting at the *Fada*: Young Men, ‘Tea Circles,’ and Delayed Adulthood in Niger,” Adeline Masquelier explores the lives of recent male graduates who had hoped to secure white-collar jobs only to discover that their higher education has decreased their employment opportunities. As in the Ugandan example, structural adjustment programs and economic reforms have widened social inequalities and have severely restricted the options for young job-seekers; “greedy elders” are also viewed as an obstacle to employment, wealth, and social maturity.

In urban Niger, then, young men are forced into *delayed adulthood*—unable to find jobs despite their educations, unable to marry as they wait for financial security, and unable to achieve adult status in the community of senior men. And although it is considered below their status as educated “intellectuals,” they struggle to cobble together piecemeal or part-time work when they can. Much of their waiting time, however, is spent in *fadas*, or neighborhood tea circles, where they gather to strategize imagined futures. Masquelier describes this time spent in the *fadas* as “purposeful waiting,” a time when young men carefully brew tea and talk, and in the process regain some control over how time unfolds. In the *fadas*, young men offer each other a measure of support lacking in their broader social lives, support that takes the form of gestures of respect and recognition, advice on sex and romance, and even, on occasion, financial assistance.

In the final chapter in this section, Chapter 4 on “Emergent Wait-hood: Institutions and Marriage Delays among Mayan Women in Guatemala,” Nicole S. Berry explores the effects of various institutions at state and local levels on the experience of wait-hood and marriage delays for Indigenous Mayan women. Berry considers state policies, as well as those of local community groups and foreign non-governmental organizations, as they attempt to frame Indigenous women’s roles and futures, especially with regard to marriage and reproduction. She identifies the moment as one of *emergent wait-hood*, that is, a period of dramatic social and cultural change when at least some women are pursuing education and work and, in the process,

delaying marriage and conception. Although limited in number, these women model new possibilities for life trajectories beyond the household and into public and professional spheres. Berry's study highlights the importance of recognizing multiple and shifting institutional pressures and their effects over time on the emergence and experience of waitthood for Guatemalan women.

Part II. Gender, Education, and the Aspiration for Autonomy

Building on themes introduced in Part I—particularly the contributions of the state and of state policies that directly or indirectly play a role in supporting marriage delays among youth—the chapters in Part II focus more specifically on the educational piece of the waitthood puzzle. Young people pursue education both as a strategy of self-development and social advancement and as a way of biding time while waiting for the political and economic situation to improve. Even in situations where a diploma does not translate directly into desired employment, it may translate into enhanced status and recognition and an increased sense of self-worth. Like their male counterparts, young women seek higher education for all of these reasons, often with the additional hope of contributing to the support of their families and achieving an important measure of autonomy. Young women may use marital delays in pursuit of education as a strategy as well as a tactic to improve their economic situation and life possibilities by waiting to identify the best possible marital match.

In Chapter 5, "Active Waitthood: *Youthmen*, Fatherhood, and Men's Educational Aspirations in Sierra Leone," Kristen E. McLean presents the picture of a country emerging from a protracted civil war and repeated economic and health crises, where young men struggle to move forward in their lives with limited means. The term "*youthmen*" is used in Sierra Leone to describe young men living in a liminal state, not yet able to obtain the necessary capital to marry and achieve the formal status of adults. In this context, McLean argues, education is increasingly valued not only for the future possibilities it offers but for providing a sense of agency in an otherwise precarious context. Pursuing further education as a form of *active waitthood* is seen as the means by which a young man may transition from a *youthman* to a proper man. Indeed, education is linked not only to future employment possibilities, but also to modernity and a sense of "becoming somebody."

And yet, despite education's promise, a young man's educational trajectory is not uncommonly derailed by unexpected fatherhood. Unlike the context of *waithood* described by Singerman for young people in MENA countries, where non-marriage (at least in the ideal) precludes sexual activity and pregnancy, young men in rural Sierra Leone not infrequently produce children outside of wedlock while still in high school or university. Although the young man in question may be unable to afford the cost of a wedding, fathers of illegitimate children are nonetheless expected to be responsible and to provide support for both the child and the child's mother. Often, the financial burden proves too heavy to bear and the young man may be forced to leave school to seek employment. In such cases, fathers may shift their focus from their own education to that of their children as a means of carving out a dignified future as proud fathers of educated offspring.

Education is also a highly valued asset in post-genocide Rwanda, but factors into young women's experience of *waithood* in rather different ways from those described for the *youthmen* of Sierra Leone. Aalyia Feroz Ali Sadruddin's Chapter 6 on "'Giving Oneself Time': Marriage and Motherhood in Urban Rwanda," focuses on the situation of young professional women in Kigali, Rwanda, who have deliberately postponed marriage to pursue higher education and careers. Rwanda is unique among post-conflict areas in that women's social and political roles and participation have increased dramatically in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide that left the nation with a population estimated to be 70 percent female. The women in Sadruddin's study are all in their thirties, unmarried, and work in a wide range of fields, including medicine, law, architecture, and data analysis. All of them, moreover, are the primary breadwinners for their natal families.

Rather than emphasizing marriage and childbearing, these women focus on work and the capacity to support their families as critical markers of adulthood and of self-worth. They uniformly described their liminal, unmarried state as *giving oneself time*. That is, they do not view *waithood* as something imposed upon them but embrace it as an important phase in their life course. Not only does their singlehood allow them the time to pursue an education and career, but it also affords them the space to come to know themselves better and to prepare themselves to make the best possible choices when they do decide to marry. Sadruddin argues that the decision to postpone marriage and motherhood on the part of these young women should not be seen as a form of resistance to traditional ex-

pectations. Rather, in “taking time” for themselves, they embrace waitthood as a transitional period of preparation for these momentous next steps in life, including future marriages and motherhood.

The final two chapters in this section by Zachary M. Howlett and Nancy J. Smith-Hefner address the issue of “over-educated,” “older” women and the difficulties they face in identifying an appropriate marriage partner. In both cases—and similar to the youth described by McLean and Sadruddin—women may see waitthood as a space for self-cultivation and advancement, but most have not altogether given up on the idea of marriage.

Zachary M. Howlett’s Chapter 7 on “Tactics of Marriage Delay in China: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and ‘Leftover Women,’” focuses on the experiences of educated rural-to-urban migrant women. Howlett places rural women’s pursuit of education within a broader context of *tactics of marriage delay* among women striving to reconcile traditional gender demands of filial responsibility to parents with their own desires for autonomy, self-determination, and a companionate marriage. These young women—still unmarried in their late twenties—are often labeled by others with the derogatory epithet “leftover.” In many cases, however, they use education as a strategy to escape the oppressive gender norms of their rural communities. Education is among the “delay tactics” identified by Howlett as the means by which young women avoid parental pressure to marry, while they improve their situation and search for a suitable partner—one who will ideally not impose patriarchal gender expectations with regard to childcare and housework and will hopefully not be physically abusive.

Other common tactics for marriage delay include renting a temporary, “counterfeit” boyfriend to introduce to parents on the holidays and developing a “virtual relationship” via computer games and online media. However, the most common tactic for women’s marriage delay is “hitting an edge ball,” which Howlett describes as a strategy of “conformity in resistance.” In this case, conformity references the high value placed on education among Chinese. Women draw on ideals that link filial piety to academic excellence and use their continuing educational success both to underscore their filial obedience to parents and to further delay marriage, while carving out a space for personal autonomy.

The final chapter in this section on gender and education is Chapter 8, “Too Educated to Marry? Muslim Women and Extended Singlehood in Indonesia.” In it, Nancy J. Smith-Hefner offers a similar example of women delaying marriage in Indonesia to pursue educa-

tion and employment, while balancing concerns of responsibility to family and, in this case, religious piety. She considers the situation of Muslim Javanese university students and the growing influence of varieties of Islam on the shape and experience of youth waitthood. Over the past several decades, average age at first marriage has risen considerably among Javanese, particularly among Muslim women, many of whom have entered a state of *extended singlehood*. Mothers who were forced to quit school and marry at a young age now encourage their daughters to delay marriage in order to finish school and go to work, so that they will not depend on their husbands and can help support their natal families and siblings. Statistics confirm that Indonesian women are in fact going to work, and at much higher rates than women in other Muslim-majority countries such as Jordan or Egypt.

As elsewhere in the Global South, youth in Indonesia—even pious Muslim youth—have also embraced the ideal of romantic love as the proper foundation for a modern, companionate marriage. However, a growing body of conservative Muslim clerics and religion teachers and a flourishing Muslim youth literature insist that unchaperoned premarital familiarization is sinful and can easily lead to fornication. Smith-Hefner finds that a surprising number of contemporary Javanese youth say they reject modern dating as immoral. Many postpone engaging in relationships with the opposite sex until they have achieved their academic and career goals. When they finally turn to marriage, women find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. Many have moved away from their natal communities, a traditional source of marriage candidates. Sometimes referred to as a “marriage crisis,” “older” educated women also face a narrowing pool of equally well-educated marriageable men willing to negotiate work and family roles within a companionate marriage. Smith-Hefner considers the appeal for educated Javanese women of Muslim marriage bureaus, brokers, and matchmakers, who have stepped in to quickly match educated Muslim women with partners for marriage “without dating”—and sometimes with less-educated Muslim men.

Part III. Delayed Marriage and the Meanings of Singlehood

The four chapters that make up Part III of the volume offer a somewhat different angle on marriage delay from that presented in earlier chapters. They address contexts in which waitthood is accompanied

by marriage delays that were not necessarily a goal or intended outcome. In these examples, marriage may exist as an ideal, but may not be considered a feasible solution to other competing social, personal, or economic concerns. In such contexts, young people express a marked ambivalence toward marriage and may feel that singlehood is on balance more fulfilling than what marriage seems to offer. In other cases, singlehood is simply extended for so long that marriage simply never happens.

In Chapter 9, “Conjugal Conundrums: Conversion and Marriage Delay in the Contemporary Caribbean,” Brendan Jamal Thornton looks at marriage delay in the Dominican Republic, where formal marriage is “not always perceived as sensible or even worthwhile” and is often avoided completely in favor of more informal arrangements. Legal marriage exists in the Dominican Republic as an ideal and is encouraged by the Church (particularly the growing Pentecostal Christian community) as the only morally acceptable option. Nonetheless, childbirth often happens outside of marriage and is considered natural and without social disgrace. Formal marriage offers a woman stability and respectability, but it is only practical if her husband is able to provide.

Legal marriage also offers respectability and security for Dominican men. But for many it comes at too high a cost. Thornton describes the divided and multiple masculine obligations a man often shoulders: obligations to his wife and children, to his family of origin, to his male friends, and to children that he may have fathered with other women. For both men and women, then, more flexible, informal unions are preferable to the legal ties of formal marriage, and despite the efforts of the church, informal unions remain the norm. However, Thornton addresses the *conjugal conundrums* faced by young impoverished male Christian converts, who, by virtue of competing obligations, are precariously situated between the prescription to marry by the Church, and powerful sociocultural and economic imperatives that simultaneously discourage the institution of marriage and the nuclear family model.

Mehrdad Babadi’s Chapter 10, “Between Cynicism and Idealism: Voluntary Waithood in Iran,” picks up on this theme of widespread ambivalence toward marriage among urban middle-class Iranian youth. In Iran as elsewhere, age at first marriage is rising and is correlated with higher levels of education. The young people in Babadi’s study are the sons and daughters of parents who saw their own hopes for personal and economic advancement dashed by the realities of life in post-revolutionary Iran. Iranian parents

have shifted their hopes and aspirations onto their children and are willing to support them both emotionally and financially for as long as they are able. Not uncommonly, they urge their children *not* to marry too early and to take the time instead to explore life in its different dimensions—including relationships with the opposite sex.

Despite the efforts of the Islamic state to address what it views as the moral turpitude of the current generation, most of the young people in Babadi's study describe having had several intimate relationships of varying degrees of seriousness. In discussing their relationships, young people express both extremely high expectations and cynicism regarding the possibility of their achieving long-lasting happiness and stability. They point to the high levels of divorce and marital dissatisfaction in their parents' generation and worry about the difficulties of finding the perfect mate. Babadi thus argues that the phenomenon of marriage delay in this case is best described as *voluntary waitthood*, with many young middle-class Iranians making a deliberate decision to put off marriage until sometime in the indefinite future. While they may eventually marry, young Iranians have prioritized individualistic goals of educational advancement, professional development, and self-actualization, taking advantage of their parents' support to do so.

In the two final chapters in this section, Fida Adely and Sarah Lamb consider the predicament of women in Jordan and in India who, for a variety of different reasons, find themselves single—and then must strategize to come to terms with their unmarried status. In both Jordan and India, single women must struggle against a situation in which marriage is a given, women living on their own are an anomaly, and the reputations of single women are a focus of gossip and public concern.

Adely's Chapter 11, "Refusing to Settle: Migration among Single Professional Women in Jordan," highlights the experiences of single Jordanian women who have migrated from their provincial homes to the capital city of Amman for work. These women are educated professionals, many with degrees in technical fields. They come to the city for the purpose of employment and frequently encounter opportunities for further education and even greater mobility. One expected side-effect of this experience is the postponement of marriage. While migration to the city hypothetically offers the women a larger pool of marriage partners and increases the likelihood of their meeting someone interested in developing a companionate relationship, the women report encountering prejudices related to class differences and biases against their provincial backgrounds.

As they approach their late twenties and early thirties, however, many of the women in Adely's study report facing increasing pressure from their families to marry. But in interviews they insist that they would not marry just to marry—"they would not settle." The women explained that their experiences living on their own had significantly changed what they wanted from marriage and made it harder for them to "tie the knot." And because they were working and had their own income, they had the security of knowing that they could take care of themselves financially whatever the case. Adely describes their situation aptly as *refusing to settle*: that is, these Jordanian women might marry if an appropriate candidate appeared, but they were not willing to give up their hard-earned gains just for the sake of marriage.

Sarah Lamb's Chapter 12, "Never-Married Women in India: Gendered Life Courses, Desires, and Identities in Flux," also focuses on single women who have never married, in this case, in the context of West Bengal, India. Lamb explores in ethnographic detail single women's life histories and aspirations, their reasons for not marrying, and their navigations through their singlehood status. She does so through the stories of four older Bengali women who have reached a permanent state of *never-marriedness*. The women come from varied backgrounds. Medha is from a very poor, rural family but had managed to become a college professor. Indrani received her PhD in electrical engineering in the United States; after holding a high-salaried job for some years in New York City, she returned to Kolkata to care for her ailing grandmother. Sukhi-di, now seventy-six, was the third of twelve children. She pursued her education up to the BA level and had held several important professional positions that involved her travelling around rural Bengal. Subhagi came from a very poor family as well as a disadvantaged class; she worked all her life as a day-laborer and never married despite repeated offers.

In their narratives and in those of the other women in her study, Lamb finds that women rarely articulate their aspirations in terms of a drive for individual independence or desire to live alone. Their stories thus complicate understandings of the autonomous individual at the heart of much public discourse on the rise of singlehood in modern societies. In their narratives, women place particular emphasis on their desires to work to support their (extended) families—and their taking considerable satisfaction in being able to do so. Lamb argues that what these women seek is new forms of recognition, belonging, and intimate sociality beyond the conventions of

marriage. The women's stories illustrate how they attempt to do so through a variety of means: cultivating longstanding ties to natal kin, finding ways to adopt a child of their own, living with non-kin, and cultivating recognition and collegiality through meaningful work.

Part IV. Delayed Childbearing and the Quest for Motherhood

In the final section of this volume, the attention turns to how delays in marriage have also led to delays in childbearing—and what these delays mean for women's paths to motherhood. In many societies around the globe, a woman's age at first childbirth is increasing, often due to her pursuit of education and career, and concomitant delays in marriage, as described in earlier chapters. But when the cost of delayed marriage is the loss of a woman's reproductive potential, the results can be devastating and technological solutions difficult.

The three chapters in this section of the volume assess these issues in both Europe and North America, where educated women have been delaying first pregnancies, often beyond the point where they can easily conceive. As shown in these chapters, the reasons for delayed childbearing—along with increasing age-related infertility—are not straightforward. For instance, childbearing delay cannot be “blamed” on women's educational achievement alone. Nor can assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) necessarily solve the infertility problems brought on when women reach an age where ovarian reserve (i.e., the number of high-quality eggs) begins to decline.

The issue of blame is taken up directly in Chapter 13, “Blamed for Delay: French Norms and Practices of ART in the Context of Increasing Age-Related Female Infertility.” In it, Manon Vialle examines the increasing demand for ARTs in France, largely due to the infertility problems experienced by women in their late thirties and early forties. Yet, in France, state-subsidized ARTs are restricted to “therapeutic” applications, usually in cases where young married couples are struggling to conceive due to “pathological” problems such as blocked fallopian tubes or premature menopause. The varied reasons why older women may have “put off” conception are rarely considered in this restrictive French reproductive regime, which Manon describes as both conservative and reactionary.

Yet, as Manon shows in her study of French women, all of them in their forties, women's personal hurdles to childbearing can be

quite substantial, making women feel “unready to mother.” Manon explores these multiple factors affecting what she calls *female reproductive temporality*—the fact that reproductive timing is not only biological, but also social, relational, and material in nature. For example, many French women wait to become mothers because they cannot find a partner, or one who is also “ready” to become a father. Serious material considerations, including the high cost of raising a child in major French cities, also comes into play, as do women’s perceptions that their own bodies still “feel young,” even when serious ovarian aging is already underway. By exploring the many factors that lead older French women into ART clinics, Manon argues persuasively that the French model of ART is seriously out of touch with the present-day realities of French women’s reproductive lives.

Chapter 14, “Waiting Too Long to Mother: Involuntary Childlessness and Assisted Reproduction in Contemporary Spain,” offers a somewhat different perspective on why women in Spain are also waiting—sometimes too long—to become mothers. Beatriz San Román explores Spain’s changing fertility regime, one in which motherhood has shifted from an “inescapable fate” of women’s lives to something that women can now choose to do—or not. Spanish fertility rates have been in sharp decline since the 1970s, with the mean age of Spanish women at first birth now one of the highest in the European Union. This delay in childbearing has mainly been attributed to structural factors, such as unfavorable working conditions, low wages, and job instability. However, this structural analysis of delayed childbearing may be missing the point when it comes to social and affective dimensions of Spanish women’s contemporary existences.

Through an analysis of Spanish national fertility survey data, as well as in-depth interviews with Spanish women who have resorted to ARTs after struggling with age-related fertility issues, San Román argues that postponing motherhood may, in fact, be a *wait-hood choice*. For many Spanish women, the decision to put off childbearing has been made not on the basis of material constraints, but rather as a means of achieving other life goals and forms of personal fulfillment, most of them linked to the consumption of goods and services. However, like many of the French women in Vialle’s study, Spanish women may have inaccurate knowledge of the female reproductive lifespan; thus, women’s wait-hood “choice” may result in the “shock” of unexpected infertility. In such cases, the mother’s “choices” are restricted, especially as child adoption has become in-

creasingly difficult in Spain. Thus, “waiting too long to mother” may lead to great uncertainty, with motherhood only achieved through the use of donor eggs.

The final chapter of this volume, Chapter 15, “The Egg Freezing Revolution? Gender, Education, and Reproductive Waithood in the United States,” by Marcia C. Inhorn returns to issues of gender and education, asking how they might be linked to women’s fertility postponement. Over the past decade, single American professional women in their late thirties and early forties have increasingly turned to a new ART called oocyte cryopreservation (aka, egg freezing) as a way to preserve their fertility. Media reports often suggest that these women’s “selfish” educational and career ambitions are the main reason why they are using egg freezing to intentionally “delay,” “defer,” or “postpone” their childbearing. However, an in-depth ethnographic study of more than one hundred American women who turned to egg freezing shows that women themselves offer a quite different interpretation. In fact, the main reason why women were freezing their eggs was due to the lack of a stable partner with whom to pursue marriage and childbearing. Although most women said that they felt empowered and relieved to have frozen their eggs in order to preserve their remaining reproductive potential, they also lamented the fact that men were so hard to find.

As Inhorn argues, this “man deficit” (Birger 2015), and thus the growing momentum toward egg freezing, bespeaks an underlying but little discussed global reality: namely, women are now outstripping men in higher education by the millions, resulting in the lack of equally educated partners with whom to pursue marriage and childbearing. As shown in this chapter, these gender-based educational disparities are occurring in more than one-third of the world’s nations, not only in the United States. Thus, as women rise in their educational pursuits, they will increasingly face a dearth of comparably educated men, which—if they want educational parity in their marital partnerships—will affect their future reproductive trajectories. In short, although egg freezing has been touted for its “revolutionary” potential—namely, as an empowering technology that creates new career options and family formations—egg freezing may in fact be a costly technological concession, whereby educated women are literally “buying time” while experiencing *reproductive waithood* beyond their individual control.

In conclusion, these chapters point to the inextricable entanglements between gender, education, employment, marriage, parent-

hood, and their “delays,” which have major impacts on the lives and well-being of young people in virtually all societies around the globe. To our knowledge, this is the first systematic ethnographic exploration and comparison of waithood, as it plays out in its many forms on almost every continent. The lives of young people are very much at stake in this discussion of waithood. Thus, it is incumbent upon scholars to explore the “waithood” state of being, among young people whose path to adulthood has—for one reason or another—been put on hold.

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