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## Response to Article Review 97

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**Response to Laura Sjoberg's review of Valerie Hudson and Hilary Matfess, "In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict," *International Security* 42.1 (2017):** <https://issforum.org/articlereviews/97-brideprice>

Response by **Valerie M. Hudson, Hilary Matfess, and Kaylee Hodgson**

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<https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR97-Response.pdf>

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**W**e are thankful to the editors of H-Diplo/ISSF for giving us the chance to respond to Laura Sjoberg's critique of "In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict."<sup>1</sup> Criticism often improves and hones arguments, so we welcome it. We feel that the structuration of male-female relations within a society has profound ramifications for that society's horizon of stability, resilience, and security, and that the practice of brideprice is an excellent example of that linkage.

Sjoberg's comments develop a primary and a secondary theme: the primary one is that there is insufficient empirical warrant for our argument; the secondary theme has to do for the most part with normative problems. Valerie Hudson and Hilary Matfess first address the secondary themes in part one of this response; in part two Hudson and Kaylee Hodgson address the empirical warrant based upon new research; and we conclude with discussion of an ongoing research agenda.

### **Part One: Authors' Response by Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess**

#### *Secondary Discussion Points*

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, "In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Terrorism," *International Security* 42:1 (Summer 2017): 7-40; the review is available at <https://issforum.org/articlereviews/97-brideprice>.

Sjoberg's secondary points have to do with normative and literature considerations. Here we respond briefly to those that seem most important.

First, Sjoberg argues that our article reveals a "tendency to set up the United States as the constitutive other which does not practice brideprices and therefore engages in less violence." But we certainly do not set up the U.S. as any type of norm. We mention the U.S. and its NATO allies as security actors that may not recognize the salience of brideprice because their cultures have not encoded those practices in the modern era. Nor do we set up Christianity as an ideal, contra Sjoberg's claim that we present it as a "mitigating influence." We simply point out that even though Christian sects typically inveigh against brideprice, it nonetheless becomes socially obligatory when living in brideprice-practicing cultures, and we see this in sub-Saharan Africa.

Second Sjoberg argues that our evidence from Pakistan is irrelevant because "dowry practices exist—that is, where the bride's family pays the groom's family, rather than as a place where men pay a brideprice." In fact, Pakistan practices both dowry and brideprice. Pakistan is scaled a 10 because whenever any dowry is practiced, it is conceptualized in our scaling rubric as being a step beyond brideprice in terms of its potential effects. Furthermore, brideprice includes what are in certain cultures called "wedding costs," but these wedding costs may amount to the equivalent of several years' income and represent a de facto component of brideprice, and are thus strictly controlled in some countries as a result, such as in Saudi Arabia. So, yes, the Mumbai bomber was legitimately concerned about the cost of marriage.

Third, Sjoberg argues that there are more and better explanations for what leads to individual radicalization, and that there is no strong empirical relationship between poverty and the decision to engage in violence. The literature on radicalization does point to factors such as deprivation, identity and socialization as being important influences.<sup>2</sup> But the larger point being made is that gender-related variables are often overlooked in this literature. Also, the studies of poverty and terrorism are interesting, but we offer an argument that there is an extraordinary gender-specific poverty, or rather, resource deprivation, imposed by certain societies that is not accounted for by overall measures of poverty.

Fourth, Sjoberg criticizes our article for using an anecdote about a confession, citing a "significant literature in criminology [that] suggests that confessions are unreliable, and those confessing are likely to glorify their motives even as they are truthful about their behavior." Yes, confessions are unreliable because the confessors wish to "glorify" their motives. However, we are not sure in this case how admitting one does not have enough money to marry is glorious. Further, there is an observable consistency across the case studies presented: over and over again, on-the-ground observers point to brideprice as a factor predisposing to male grievance across societies that encode the practice, as abundantly detailed in our article.

Fifth, Sjoberg claims our work relies on outdated sources, including Jack Goody's 1973 study. But Goody's work is the foundational work on brideprice, just as Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) is the foundational work on neo-realism.<sup>3</sup> The logical fallacy of presentism would suggest that more recent works have greater scholarly value, but a fallacy it remains. We are presently writing a book on brideprice that will be of even more recent vintage than all the works cited—will that make our book the best source on

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<sup>2</sup> See, to give but one example, John Horgan's *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (1979).

brideprice? Clearly that is the wrong yardstick. Goody remains the foundational theoretical work for the time being, with later works adumbrating and nuancing his arguments through additional empirical observations.

Sixth, Sjoberg is critical of what she views as the securitization of the status of women in our article. She claims that our article “makes an argument for the instrumentalization of women’s lives,” and that securitization will lead to militarization. Frankly, however, all depends on whether the security of women is in fact linked to the security of states. If it is, then international support for initiatives such as increasing the legal age at which girls can marry to 18 across the international system is justifiable—and such an initiative includes no militarized efforts at all. In effect, the security of women/security of states thesis is a blow against the stance that militarization would be a superior option to achieve security. This applies to brideprice, as well—there are initiatives in several brideprice-practicing nations to end the practice, which would be salutary for women and at the same time remove the structural goad towards violence that we observe brideprice producing. Women in Zimbabwe, for example, have recently urged the supreme court of that country to deem brideprice unconstitutional.<sup>4</sup> Good for them; the international community should render any (non-military) assistance requested in pursuit of this worthy aim.

Finally, Sjoberg’s review implies that our race is an issue because our work is supposedly of a piece with “the idea of white men saving brown women from brown men.” We respond by simply pointing out that Sjoberg is a white woman, too, and has penned several works that discuss what is happening with women who are not of her race.<sup>5</sup> Many of the founders of Feminist Security Studies such as Cynthia Enloe, Spike Peterson, Christine Sylvester, Carol Cohn, and Ann Tickner were also of one particular race, but have spoken persuasively to the condition of women cross-nationally. Academic freedom values free discussion of research regardless of identity.

## **Part II: Response by Valerie M. Hudson and Kaylee Hodgson**

### *Empirical Warrant*

The aim of the IS article was to propose that brideprice be examined for its relationship with stability and conflict; the IS article was intended as a plausibility probe only, a conceptual first step in developing and illustrating the argument. In connection with a related research project funded by the Minerva Initiative/DoD, Hudson and Kaylee Hodgson undertook a large-N multivariate analysis of the role of brideprice in explaining the variance in measures of stability, conflict, and terror.<sup>6</sup> This goes far beyond what we were able to present in the IS article, and we are happy to summarize it here. Of course Sjoberg had no

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Nemukuyu, “Woman wants lobola abolished,” *The Herald* (Zimbabwe), November 2, 2017; <https://www.herald.co.zw/woman-wants-lobola-abolished/>

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Women as Wartime Rapists* (New York University Press, 2016) and (with Caron Gentry), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (Zed Books, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> This material is based upon work supported by, or in part by, the U.S. Army Research Laboratory and the U.S. Army Research Office through the Department of Defense Minerva Research Initiative under grant number W911NF-14-1-0532 and the Andrew Carnegie Corporation. All views expressed are those of the authors alone.

access to these findings when she wrote the review; we offer our findings here in the interests of addressing the issue of empirical warrant and pointing to future avenues of research.

Our 13-point scale of brideprice/dowry was scaled after collection of a copious amount of raw data from credentialed sources, including country experts, and was implemented using a detailed rubric by three persons whose country scale point assignments had to be unanimous to be accepted. Once that scale was in hand, we undertook multivariate analysis (controlling for seven variables not related to brideprice, such as modernization, colonial status, and ethnic fractionalization, among others) to determine if brideprice emerged as a significant variable when examining multiple outcome measures of stability, regime type, conflict, and terror as dependent variables. The brideprice/dowry scale has an N of 176, and excludes nations with population less than 200,000, meaning that this sample includes 99% of the human population. Some outcome measures did not fully cover our sample of 176 countries, so in particular analyses the N size for the multivariate analysis was lower than 176.

Because of the large N size, we used a very stringent cut-off point for significance, 0.005. That is not 0.05, it is 0.005, meaning less than a 0.5% chance of a Type I error. Because of the large number of potential outcome measures, we used factor analysis to cluster outcome measures where that was possible, so the results below include both single outcome measures and clustered outcome measures. Because our manuscript is in preparation, we present only a summary list here, and not the full multivariate regression tables (to be included in the publication). All models yielded “as expected” directionality for the Brideprice/Dowry scale, meaning that countries higher on this scale also scored worse on the outcome measure, and the Brideprice/Dowry scale’s effect size was also the largest or second largest in the model for every one of these outcome measures.

### **Outcome Measures for which Brideprice/Dowry Emerged Significant in Multivariate Modeling Using 0.005 as p-value**

(Note: All variables are freely accessible online from the sources listed.)

- 1) Global Terror Index (Heritage Foundation, 2016), N=163
- 2) Terrorism Impact (Vision of Humanity, 2017), N=163
- 3) Political Terrorism Scale (The Political Terror Scale, 2016), N=174
- 4) Terror/Conflict/Disappearance (Human Freedom Index, 2016), N=157
- 5) Societal Violence Scale (The Political Terror Scale, 2014), N=173
- 6) Military Expenditures and Weapons Imports Cluster (Includes Military Expenditures as % of GDP (World Bank, 2016), Military Expenditures (subcomponent of Global Peace Index, 2017), Weapons Imports (Vision of Humanity, 2017)), N=153
- 7) Internal Conflict Cluster (includes Deaths from Internal Conflict (Vision of Humanity, 2017), Internal Conflict Fought (Vision of Humanity, 2017), Global Terrorism Index (Heritage Foundation, 2016), and Terrorism Incidents (Vision of Humanity, 2016)), N=163

- 8) Violence and Instability Cluster (includes States of Concern to the International Community, Brinton, 2011), Group Grievance (Fund for Peace, 2014), Intensity of Internal Conflicts (Vision of Humanity, 2017), Trafficking of Women (WomanStats, 2015), Violent Demonstrations (Vision of Humanity, 2017), Women's Mobility (WomanStats, 2017), Relations with Neighboring Countries (Vision of Humanity, 2017), Political Terror Scale (The Political Terror Scale, 2016)), N=145
- 9) Government System and Effectiveness Cluster (includes World Bank Government Effectiveness Scale (World Bank, 2015), Functioning of Government Scale (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015), Democratic Political Culture Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015), Political System Type (Freedom Rising, World Values Survey, 2013), and Equal Protection Index (V-Dem Annual Report, 2016)), N=150
- 10) Security, Stability, and Legitimacy Cluster (includes Reliance on Security Apparatus (subcomponent of Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace, 2016), Political Instability (vision of Humanity, 2017), State Legitimacy (subcomponent of Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace, 2016), and the Global Peace Index (Vision of Humanity, 2017)), N=158
- 11) Lack of Freedom Cluster (includes Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2016) and Freedom House Index of Political Rights (Freedom House, 2016)), N=170
- 12) Freedom of Religion and Inclusiveness Cluster (includes Freedom of Religion (Social Progress Index, 2016) and Deliberative Component Index (V-Dem Annual Report, 2016)), N=164
- 13) Civil Liberties, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, N=165
- 14) Regime Type, Freedom Rising (World Values Survey), 2013, N=168
- 15) Government Participation of Women, The WomanStats Project, 2016, N=176
- 16) Freedom to Establish Religion, Human Freedom Index, 2016, N=133
- 17) Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace, 2016, N=172

These results are robust to substitutions in control variables. To summarize the findings, there is ample empirical warrant for the proposition that the societal practice of brideprice is associated with worse outcomes in terms of regime type, government effectiveness, internal conflict, terrorism, reliance on militarization, political liberties, and stability.

Of course we make no assertion that brideprice is the only explanation for instability, insecurity, autocracy, etc.; that would be foolish, for many factors are involved and our own multivariate modeling identified variables other than brideprice which are also significantly related. Nevertheless, brideprice was found to be a consistently significant factor in explaining the variance in these outcome measures, and we assert this is because the practice creates a chronic structural goad within the society—a goad applied directly to young men, a conflict-salient subpopulation. Such strong empirical results justify follow-up studies of both a qualitative and quantitative nature, probing in particular for scope conditions.

### **Part III: Looking forward by Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess**

In conclusion, there is strong empirical warrant for the proposition that brideprice serves as a structural goad predisposing societies to worse outcomes on a wide variety of measures of security, stability, and even regime type. We encourage scholars to undertake their own examinations of this linkage.

Feminist Security Studies offers a set of alternative lenses for seeing the roots of national and international security. In the classroom, we often observe our students experiencing an ‘aha’ moment when, for the first time, they ‘see’ the link between what is happening with women and what is happening with nation-states. As scholars, we try to engender those same moments among our fellow researchers and also among policymakers. Thus Hudson and Matfess were heartened to receive the following message from a State Department Foreign Service Officer after their article was published:

[Your article] brought back to mind a conversation I had with one of my Afghan colleagues a few years ago when I was stationed in Kabul. He was exasperated by the insanely high, and ever rising costs, of weddings in Afghanistan. I really didn’t understand what the big deal was. He wanted the government to intervene and thought we in the Embassy should get involved in the conversation.... I got a bit exasperated with his insistence on it being a serious issue... At that time, we, the ever so enlightened American political officers, viewed it through the lens of cultural pressures to put on a good party, as a poverty issue, or discussed it in the terms of women’s rights and social issues and cultural norms. We never linked it to national security implications and for me, this research provides the vocabulary necessary. You rightly point out the importance of taking the emotion and moralizing out of it and counting it as an important variable that has a place in the policy conversation.”<sup>7</sup>

Feminist Security Studies has the potential to make this type of tangible difference in our collective sight, one we hope might move us in the direction of a more secure world.

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<sup>7</sup> A. Tenny, private correspondence, 3 August 2017.