



Pokot men forcibly lead a girl to be married to a member of their community 7 December 2014 after the group came to take her from her family home, about fifty miles from the town of Marigat, Kenya. As Pokot tradition dictates, the future husband arrived to her family home with a group of men to collect the girl and with the last settled dowry of livestock for the girl's family. In this case, twenty goats, three camels, and ten cows had been given during a period of several weeks, and ten more cows were to be given the morning the girl was taken to her new home. The girl was unaware of the marriage arrangements that her father had made; the family said that if they had told her in advance she might have run away from home. In the Pokot tradition, parents give their daughters as wives usually at the beginning of their adolescence, after an initiation ceremony marking their passing over into womanhood. (Photo by Siegfried Modola, Reuters)

# The Neglected Role of Brideprice in Catalyzing Instability and Violent Conflict

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Strapped to a gurney and visibly shaken by the bloodied bodies of his fellow terrorists strewn about him, Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, aged twenty-one, begged his police interrogators to turn off their cameras. They refused, and Kasab's recorded confession provided the world with a glimpse into the motivations behind the four days of attacks in Mumbai, India, which claimed an estimated 164 lives and wounded more than three hundred in November 2008. Shedding light on the individual motivations of the young men behind the massacre, Kasab explained that he "joined the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba only for money."<sup>1</sup> His was not solely an individual decision, however, and the money he earned from participating in the attacks was not intended to be discretionary income. According to Kasab, his father had urged him to join so that Kasab and his siblings could afford to marry.<sup>2</sup>

Kasab recounted that his father had told him his participation would mean that the family would no longer be poor and that they would be able to pay the costs



Ajmal Amir Kasab, shown here during the November 2008 attacks at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station in Mumbai, India. One of the ten terrorists involved in the attacks, Kasab was found guilty of eighty offenses in May 2010, including numerous counts of murder, waging war against India, and possessing explosives. For four of these counts, he was sentenced to death and was hanged in 2012. (Image from railway station security footage)

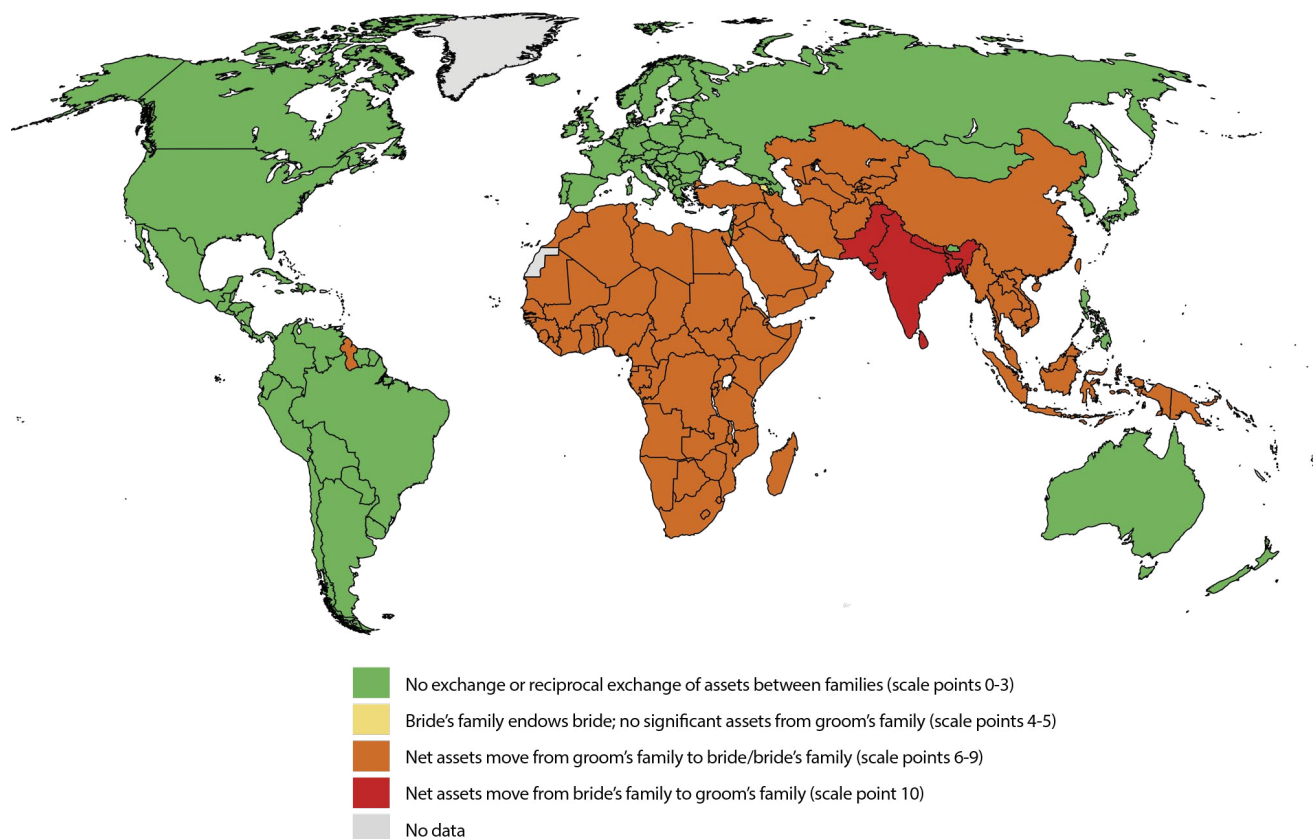


Members of the Mumbai Police interrogate Ajmal Amir Kasab while he lies in a hospital bed immediately after his capture in 2008. During the interview, he reportedly stated that his father had essentially sold him to the Pakistan terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba to obtain money to support their family. (Screenshot from YouTube video)

required to finalize a marriage contract. One of the police officers, seemingly ignoring Kasab's response, pressed, "So you came here for jihad? Is that right?" Crying, Kasab asks, "What jihad?" Lashkar deposited the promised money in his father's account after the successful attack; for his participation, Kasab was hanged in 2012 by the Indian government. Whether his siblings were subsequently able to contract marriages as a result of the funds provided by Lashkar-e-Taiba remains unknown.

In many ways, Kasab's story lends itself to the narrative that terrorist recruitment is more a function of poverty and a lack of opportunity for young men than ideology or religion. Indeed, Kasab joined Lashkar-e-Taiba's network while engaged in petty criminality and working as a laborer for a mere sixty cents a day. But

poverty alone cannot explain participation in such organized groups because the vast majority of poor people do not turn to violence.<sup>3</sup> Rather, poverty and social marginalization must manifest themselves in particularly vexing ways for grievances to lead to such terrible violence.



(Graphic by the WomanStats Project, <http://womanstats.org>)

**Figure. Brideprice/Dowry/Wedding Costs (Type and Prevalence)  
Scaled 2016**

Kasab's confession points to one such factor which we explore in this article. Across much of the world, especially in the shatterbelts (regions caught between stronger colliding external cultural-political forces) of the global south, customary law requires young men and their families to pay a brideprice in order to marry.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, we identify the role of marriage market obstruction caused by inflationary brideprice as an additional factor beyond those already identified in the literature as predisposing young men to become involved in organized group violence for political purposes, including terrorism, rebellion, intergroup aggression, raiding, and insurrection.

In many cultures, marriage is much more than a social formality; it marks the transition to culturally defined manhood. When marriage includes brideprice, it is also an expensive economic transaction. In these cultures, females are exchanged between kinship groups in return for assets, whether those assets be cash or cattle or gold or other goods that serve as

currency in the society. The figure above highlights the prevalence of this arrangement in the twenty-first century; in a sense, the world is divided by this custom into almost two equal parts.

## Marriage in Patrilineal Cultures

Patrilineality is a social system wherein persons are accounted kin through the male (or agnatic) line.<sup>5</sup> A millennium ago, the overwhelming majority of societies were organized along patrilineal lines. In the twenty-first century, by contrast, the international system is comprised of states the societies of which are arrayed along a spectrum from non-patrilineality to strong patrilineality.

Patrilineality is, at heart, a security provision mechanism. In an anarchic world, patrilineality solves the social cooperation problem for a given group of men, providing them with natural allies in conflict situations because trust is created by blood ties among male group members. That is, the first priority in

assuring human group security requires managing male propensity for risk-taking, violence, and aggression and harnessing these predispositions for pro-group ends, lest they destroy the group.

With its focus on prioritizing male kinship, patrilineality is the solution to which human societies have, generally speaking, historically resorted, with the vast majority of traditional societies organized along agnatic lines. In a sense, the purpose of patrilineality is to create a fraternal alliance system of brothers, cousins, sons, uncles, and fathers capable of countering threats to the group. While it is not the only means of creating fraternity—fraternity can also be created in matrilineal societies, or somewhat less successfully through ideological ties—patrilineality is the most straightforward and robust means of achieving the fraternal alliance necessary to provide security for a group.<sup>6</sup>

Under such patriline systems, women move between kinship groups in exogamous marriage (a social arrangement where marriage is allowed only outside a social group) and thus, in a sense, are not full kin in patrilineal societies. Therefore, in such systems, where patrilocal marriage becomes the norm, a bride moves to her in-laws' household and the patriline (male line of descent) retains all significant assets, particularly land and livestock. This system provides not just physical security for men, but economic security is afforded by the system to extended male kin groups related by blood. However, this situation typically precludes any significant property rights or marital rights for women. Women, therefore, suffer from a lack of both physical and economic security in a patrilineal system.

This system of social organization is still widely in use, especially in areas in which the U.S. military may be expected to operate in the foreseeable future. In a context where states are virtually nonexistent, such as in Somalia, or weak and incapable of providing security for citizens, or alternatively where they are profoundly indifferent to human security, the most viable alternative for an individual is to rely on extended kin groups for basic security needs instead of institutions viewed skeptically by many as artificial creations such as national state governments.

Consequently, males' status in patrilineal societies is strongly linked to marriage. Not only does marriage mark the transition to manhood in patrilineal societies, but it establishes an individual male as a source

of lineage and inheritance within the larger patriline and the culture it engenders. The marriage imperative is thus deeply felt among males in such cultures. And yet marriage is unobtainable without assets. In its 2006 report "The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development," the World Bank observed:

The main social requirement for achieving manhood in Sub-Saharan Africa—for being a man—is attaining some level of financial independence, employment, or income, and subsequently starting a family. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, bride price is commonplace, and thus marriage and family formation are directly tied to having income or property.<sup>7</sup>

These conclusions and descriptions are generalizable to many societies, but take on an intensified meaning in more strongly patrilineal societies. Although it is possible to be unmarried and still be regarded as an adult man in, say, the United States, it is not possible in a strongly patrilineal society. Marriage, then, is obligatory for men living in such societies. It is through marriage that men maintain a kindred "presence" in the lineage into the future by having legitimate male offspring.

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It is also the only way to claim a just share of the patriline's assets and rents, which are distributed to families and not individuals. Further, in this context males are not considered to be full adults until they marry. Only then will they have a significant voice in the male collective, making marriage an important socialization ritual in addition to a valuable economic practice.

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Additionally, marriage in patrilineal societies is largely regarded as a business transaction between families and will be accompanied by asset exchange, wherein brideprice offsets the cost to the natal family of raising the bride.<sup>8</sup> The consequences for women that grow out of this system, however, are deeply detrimental to their security and status. In addition to patrilocal marriage and lack of female property rights mentioned, these societies are characterized by arranged marriage in the patriline's interest, without regard for the personal welfare or desires of the female. This often results in a relatively low age of marriage for girls, a profound underinvestment in female human capital, an intense son preference resulting in passive neglect of girl children or active female infanticide/sex-selective abortion, a highly inequitable family and personal status law favoring men, and, chronically high levels of violence against women as a means to enforce the imposition of the patrilineal system on often recalcitrant women.

Consider the findings of a report by a Tanzanian women's organization following an extensive survey that "due to brideprice," women suffer "insults, sexual abuse, battery, denial of their rights to own property, being overworked, and having to bear a large number of children." In addition, the report noted that "women also complained of some men's tendency to reclaim the bride price when marriages broke up, saying fear of this outcome forced women to cling to their marriages even when abused."<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere we have argued that patrilineality, though arguably effective in providing individual security for men in many circumstances, produces, generally speaking, an inherently unstable society prone to violent conflict and rentierism.<sup>10</sup> While historically prevalent, patrilineality is linked to a host of destabilizing tendencies—which have also been historically prevalent—such as food insecurity, demographic insecurity, annihilative violence, economic predation, and corruption.<sup>11</sup> Though understanding the broad-ranging effects of patrilineality on security is our overall research aim, in this essay we examine but one component of the patrilineal syndrome—brideprice—and trace its destabilizing effects on society.<sup>12</sup>

## **Brideprice and Marriage Market Obstruction**

In patrilineal systems, brideprice becomes, in essence, an obligatory tax on young men, payable to

older men. The young man's father and male kindred may help him pay the tax, but the intergenerational nature of the tax should be understood, especially as regards poor young men whose male relatives may likewise be too poor to help. The framing of brideprice as a tax and of marital exchange as a market eschews the kind of moralizing that often accompanies discussions of unfamiliar social rituals and clarifies the functioning of this market.

Important in this conceptualization is evidence that brideprice acts as a flat tax. For the most part, brideprice is pegged to what is considered the "going rate" within the society at any given timepoint. The brideprice is nudged slightly upward or downward at the margin according to the status of the bride's kin, but it is not influenced greatly by the status of the man responsible for paying it. If the cost of brideprice rises, it will rise for every man, rich or poor. The flat-tax nature of brideprice has been noted across geographically diverse areas such as Afghanistan, China, and Kenya.<sup>13</sup>

The tendency toward a consistent brideprice within a community is understandable. Jack Goody suggests, "in bridewealth systems, standard payments are more common; their role in a societal exchange puts pressure toward similarity."<sup>14</sup> The reason is that men pay for their sons' brideprices by first collecting the brideprice for their daughters. Such transactions are another force pushing down the age of marriage among girls in brideprice societies, in addition to the desire to stop providing for daughters who, socially, will become the responsibility of another family.

Unless a family is very wealthy, daughters in general must be married off first so that the family can accumulate enough assets to pay the sons' brideprices. Quoting anthropologist Lucy Mair, Goody remarks, "when cattle payments are made, the marriage of girls tends to be early for the same reason that that of men is late—that a girl's marriage increases her father's herd while that of a young man diminishes it.' ... [M]en chafe at the delay, girls at the speed."<sup>15</sup>

If brideprice were not standardized within the society, families could not count on the brideprices brought in by their daughters being sufficient to cover the costs of marrying their sons. Thus, over time, a fairly consistent brideprice emerges for the community at any given time, though the actual cost may vary somewhat over time depending on local conditions.



Many accounts suggest that men are highly sensitive to any new trends in brideprice, and also that the societal brideprice level is easily pushed upward, but very difficult to push downward. Quoting Mair once more, Goody notes, “Every father fears being left in the lurch by finding that the bridewealth, which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get him a daughter-in-law; therefore he is always on the lookout for any signs of a rise in the rate, and tends to raise his demands whenever he hears of other fathers doing so. This mean in general terms, that *individual* cases of over-payment produce a *general* rise in the rate all around.”<sup>16</sup>

Almost universally, then, where it is practiced, the amount required for an acceptable brideprice rises continually over time. The result of this persistent brideprice inflation is that marriage is either delayed or even put out of reach for many young men, particularly in situations of economic stagnation and/or rising inequality. A summary of the average brideprice from a number of different periods and countries found that the burden equated to as much as twelve to twenty times the per capita holdings of large livestock or two to four times gross household income.<sup>17</sup> As

A photo uploaded to Facebook 7 August 2016 reputedly shows brideprice items for a woman from Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. (Photo reputedly from the Facebook account of Pastor Abasiubong Tom of Nigeria)

Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson note in a 2010 essay on marriage market obstruction and suicide terrorism in Islamic societies:

Delayed marriage has become a new norm in the Middle East. For example, in Egypt, one study documents that families of young adult males must save five to seven years to pay for their sons’ marriages. From 2000 to 2004, wedding costs in Egypt rose 25 percent. As a result, the average marriage age for Egyptian men has risen sharply, from the early twenties to the late twenties and early thirties. In one study, nearly 25 percent of young adult males in Egypt had not married by age twenty-seven; the average age was thirty-one. In poverty-stricken Afghanistan, wedding costs for young men average \$12,000–\$20,000. In

Saudi Arabia, men usually are unable to marry before age twenty-nine; often they marry only in their mid-thirties. In Iran, 38 percent of twenty-five-year-old to twenty-nine-year-old men are unmarried. Across the Middle East, only about 50 percent of twenty-five-year-old to twenty-nine-year-old men are married, the lowest percentage for this group in the developing world. Whether in Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, or the United Arab Emirates, the exorbitant costs of marriage have delayed the age at which Muslim men marry.<sup>18</sup>

display of that higher status even in societies where women’s labor is not valuable (such as in the United Arab Emirates [UAE]).

A final source of marriage market distortion is often common in brideprice societies: higher female mortality. Given both low investments in women’s health and the early age of marriage for girls in these societies, maternal mortality rates in most patrilineal societies tend to be egregiously high.<sup>21</sup> If a young wife dies in childbirth, the logic of the patrilineal syndrome dictates that she will need to be replaced, usually by a girl the same age the first wife was when she married.

**Table. Cross Tabulation of Brideprice (Yes/No) with (Rounded) Global Peace Index (GPI), 2016 (N=163)**

Global Peace Index (1 is most peaceful)					
Brideprice	1	2	3	4	Total
No (0)	16	53	8	0	<b>77</b>
Yes (1)	0	68	14	4	<b>86</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>163</b>

(Graphic by authors)

Given the tendency toward brideprice inflation, an unequal distribution of wealth will amplify market distortions by facilitating polygyny (multiple wives).<sup>19</sup> Wealthy men are able to pay even when poor men cannot, and since additional wives produce greater wealth for their husband both through their productive labor and through the birth of additional daughters who will fetch a brideprice for their father, brideprice inflation may cause a rise in the average number of wives in the households of such wealthy men. This, too, feeds into the predisposition to push down the age of marriage for girls where brideprice is present. Goody remarks,

Polygyny ... is made possible by the differential marriage age, early for girls, later for men. Bridewealth and polygyny play into each other’s hands. ... [T]he two institutions appear to reinforce each other.”<sup>20</sup>

Polygyny is also, of course, a marker of higher status within the society, and sought after for purposes of

Despite the economic cost of having to pay brideprice once again when a woman dies in childbirth, adequate attention to the physical wellbeing of women and girls is often not culturally supported within the society.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, brideprice helps to reinforce and justify this underinvestment in women. As a women’s rights activist in Uganda noted, women “cannot negotiate safer sex because of brideprice. They cannot limit the number of children that they have because of brideprice. They cannot go to school and do their own thing because they were bought.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, both polygyny and higher rates of post-marriage female mortality in effect increase the ratio of marriageable males to marriageable females. Sometimes this scarcity produces extreme downward pressure on the marriage age of girls in a given society, with some marrying off girls as young as eight.<sup>24</sup> In most societies, however, the alteration in sex ratio results in a greater number of young men unable to find wives, even if they could afford the brideprice.



Putting these three forces in play—brideprice as a flat tax on young men that they cannot refuse to pay without profoundly adverse social consequence, a tax that is notoriously prone to inflation; brideprice as catalyzing polygyny among the wealthier segments of society; and, high female mortality due to devaluation of women's lives—it becomes clear that this patrilineal syndrome is primed to produce chronic marriage market obstruction. And, marriage market obstruction, in turn, can be an important factor driving young men to join violent groups.

## Brideprice as a Driving Force behind Political Violence

The flat and inflationary nature of brideprice guarantees that poor young men will be very hard-pressed to marry. Like Ajmal Kasab, they may not be able to raise the funds for brideprice without resorting to desperate measures. These young men are not taking up arms against the institution of brideprice. Rather, at the individual level, a young man engages in violence to become more successful within the patrilineal system. At the group level, it is merely the identity of the men who dominate that sociopolitical system that the group wishes to change, and not the system of male-bonded security provision itself: the recruits hope to replace those wealthy, powerful men with themselves one day.

Furthermore, if a family has many sons, it may strive mightily to get that first son married, but then the younger, higher birth-order sons (such as the third, fourth, and fifth sons) are typically expected to find their own sources of funding to pay brideprice. As Goody notes, these younger sons often “leav[e] the countryside to swell the growing population of the towns. ... [I]t is people with a high bridewealth payment that have the highest rates of labor migration.”<sup>25</sup> In sum, then, the marriage market in brideprice societies is thus obstructed specifically for poor young men and sons of higher birth orders.

## Young Male Grievance

High levels of grievance open up an opportunity for anti-establishment groups to exploit young men attempting to gain the status and the assets to afford to marry. Delayed marriage and, also importantly, the threat that one may never father a son in a culture defined by patrilineality, are common elements exploited by groups seeking young adult men interested in redressing the injustice they feel on a personal level, by force if necessary.

It is fascinating to see how many terrorist and rebel groups are so very concerned about the marriage prospects of the young men in their ranks. For example, Diane Singerman notes, “To mobilize supporters, there were many reports of radical Islamist groups in Egypt in the 1990s arranging extremely low-cost marriages among the group's members.”<sup>26</sup> The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) did the same way back in the 1970s with the Black September subgroup, offering its members brides, cash, apartments in Beirut, and even a baby bonus of \$5,000 if they had a baby within a year of marriage.<sup>27</sup> Taghreed El-Khodary has written that in the past decade, “ Hamas leaders have turned to matchmaking, bringing together single fighters and widows, and providing dowries and wedding parties for the many here who cannot afford such trappings of matrimony.”<sup>28</sup>

The Islamic State also provided its foreign fighters with opportunities to marry that they may not have had in their own country. In one such campaign, the group offered “its fighters a \$1,500 bonus to go toward a starter home along with a free honeymoon in their stronghold city of Raqqa.”<sup>29</sup> Ariel Ahram found that “ISIS foreign fighters paid \$10,000 dowries to the families of their brides,” suggesting that the group was attracting foreign fighters by promising resources (and available women) to marry.<sup>30</sup> Esther Mokuwa and her colleagues have described a greater ease of rebel recruitment in areas with higher rates of polygyny in Sierra Leone, as impoverished young men have no hope of marriage in areas where wealthy older men monopolize many wives.<sup>31</sup>

Here is one way to see this connection: we performed a cross tabulation between those same variables, with brideprice here discretized as a simple “yes” or “no” indicating whether any form of brideprice is practiced, and the Global Peace Index discretized by rounding to the nearest whole-number scale point. Such a metric allows comparison between nations and the ability to draw conclusions about the effect of a brideprice system on levels of peacefulness as measured by the index.

The results are striking (see table, page 40). No society with brideprice fell in the most peaceful quartile of this sample of 163 nation-states. No society without brideprice fell in the least peaceful quartile of the sample. Below we offer one case study to illustrate this linkage in this excerpt, and there are two more to read in our original article.



## Bachelors to Boko Haram: How Brideprice Bolstered Recruitment in Nigeria

Inflationary brideprice in northern Nigeria led to, and then continued to fuel, the rise of the Salafi-jihadist group Boko Haram. Boko Haram first gained international attention following its abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, a town in the northeastern state of Borno in Nigeria in April 2014. While this episode, and the international community's rallying behind the campaign to #BringBackOurGirls, thrust the group onto the global agendas of Western countries and human rights advocates for the first time, the group has been active for more than a decade. At present Boko Haram-related actions have claimed more than fifty thousand lives and led to the displacement of an estimated 2.8 million people throughout the Lake Chad Basin, making it one of the most lethal insurgencies in Africa and one of the most dire humanitarian situations in the world.<sup>32</sup> The insurgency continues to engage in destructive bombing campaigns and has thwarted the government's efforts to exercise control over much of Borno State. The group has also expanded its activities into neighboring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, drawing on existing trade and kinship networks.

Part of Boko Haram's recruitment strategy is organizing inexpensive weddings for members of the group, a practice that dates back to the group's establishment under Mohammad Yusuf. These marriages likely would not have occurred without Boko Haram's facilitation, and many of the recruits were young men marginalized by rising brideprice, underemployment precluding asset accumulation for paying brideprice, and polygamy-related bride scarcity.<sup>33</sup>

As in other contexts, brideprice in the Lake Chad Basin serves to "partially socialize younger men into their mature economic roles."<sup>34</sup> The region's marriage market is a reward system that incentivizes men to become economically productive in order to be socially significant; in short, economic success is rewarded through the ability to take a wife (or wives) and receive social status. Though the past three decades witnessed changes in Lake Chad Basin social norms, S. P. Renya's observation about the nearby Bama ethnic group in 1985 still holds true: "the crucial point is that the spoils of deference cannot begin to accrue to a man until he has married."<sup>35</sup> Within the social strata, the older, married men receive the

most respect, then younger, married men, and lastly unmarried men. As Reyna describes,

There are gatherings of men that convene in each ward every day. Though informal, these sessions play a vital role in communicating information and formulating opinions about affairs that touch village and ward. Mature, married men sit on cushions or stools in the center of large mats laid out beneath trees. Younger, married men sit on these mats, but on the edges and without stools or cushions. Young, unmarried men sit in the dirt beside the mat.<sup>36</sup>

This sort of social hierarchy also appears in anthropological accounts of the Kanuri ethnic group. Members of the group are thought to have made up a significant proportion of Boko Haram and leadership, particularly in the early years of the group's activities.

Among the Kanuri and other ethnic groups in the Lake Chad Basin, prestige is tied to the size of a man's family and household unit (which includes his family and other members of the community who live under his care), further incentivizing the taking of multiple wives and the expansion of patronage systems. Because of this incentive to have a large household, young men are often taken under the wing of a local "big man"—a man of wealth and social status who acts as a patron. In exchange for the youth's loyalty and labor, he is helped in the process of finding, courting, and affording a wife.<sup>37</sup> One account of the Kanuris found that, in traditional Kanuri political organization, these young men were so subordinate to their patron until they married that, lacking his support, the young men would not have a place to take their meals. Only after taking a wife is a young man able to act as a "real man," exercising autonomy and accumulating social capital.<sup>38</sup>

In northern Nigeria, obtaining the financial resources to pay brideprice has become increasingly difficult since the country's oil wealth disincentivized investment in the manufacturing sector, making non-agricultural, non-oil sector employment difficult to obtain. As a result, youth unemployment has been a constant issue in the region; and, less discussed than the economic ramifications of this shift is the impact of the lack of jobs on the psychology of unemployed young men.

A 2015 survey found that for 57 percent of Nigerian men "insufficient income" was a source of stress; 44

percent were stressed as a result of “not having enough work.” Despite these economic stressors, 98 percent of men reported that “bride price is important and should remain” and 29 percent reported that “a real man in Nigeria is one with many wives,” despite the associated

at this time “the Toshì became monetized and progressively included the funding for the Turaren wuta (scents) and kayan lalle (henna),” which are used by the women in the wedding ceremony.<sup>43</sup> The sheikh continued, “These were later included in the brideprice that



economic burdens of these practices.<sup>39</sup> These high percentages are all the more striking when one considers that the survey included regions in Nigeria where polygamy is not widely practiced as well as regions with higher employment statistics and annual incomes.<sup>40</sup>

In the communities surrounding Maiduguri, where Boko Haram was founded, the cost of “items required for the successful celebration kept changing in tune with inflation over the years.”<sup>41</sup> The marriage ceremony in the area is ornate and involved. The Kanuri and Shuwa Arabs, two significant ethnic groups in the area, “primarily demand payment of dowries in gold coins.”<sup>42</sup> Increases in the price of gold also make it difficult for young men to pay brideprice in the traditional fashion and residents noted the strain this places on communities.

The turn of the millennium also corresponded with shifts in the marriage practice called Toshì, which literally means “blocking,” in which the fiancé, often with his family’s support, provides gifts to the fiancée and her family to express interest and ward off other suitors. According to a spiritual leader in Maiduguri,

Several female students are displayed under guard in a Boko Haram video after their April 2014 abduction from a government secondary boarding school located in the Nigerian town of Chibok. Boko Haram, a Jihadi terrorist group affiliated with the Islamic State, abducted approximately 270 girls ranging in age from sixteen to eighteen. Many of the girls were reportedly forced into marriage with Boko Haram members or were sold as slaves. The reported brideprice for those who were selected for marriage was about US\$12. Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram’s leader, stated in the video that the girls should not have been in school in the first place but rather should have been married. Approximately fifty of the girls have subsequently either escaped, or have been released, with more than two hundred still missing. (Screenshot from Boko Haram YouTube video; photo caption information from “Boko Haram ‘To Sell’ Nigeria Girls Abducted from Chibok,” BBC, 5 May 2014, accessed 19 December 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27283383>)

resulted in a spike in the brideprice in the 2000s.<sup>44</sup> It was in this period that “economic hardship began playing a role in the marriage processes in Borno.”<sup>45</sup>

It was also during this period that Boko Haram came into its own, with founder Yusuf breaking away

from his former patron, Ja'far Adams, and establishing his own mosque in 2002. Yusuf had been in charge of the youth wing of Adams's politically connected Salafist group because of his skill in mobilizing youth support. In exchange for mobilizing political support for then governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff, Adams and Yusuf influenced the terms under which Borno State adopted and implemented sharia law. Yusuf was influential in the appointment of the minister of religious affairs for Borno State. Yet, over time Yusuf became increasingly frustrated by perceived inadequacies in the implementation of sharia law. This frustration would eventually lead him to reject the legitimacy of the secular government of Nigeria (at the state and federal levels) and Western institutions and influences. Loosely translated, the moniker "Boko Haram" means, "Western education is forbidden."

In the early days of Boko Haram, Yusuf provided the types of social services that Borno State, the federal government, and traditional authorities had failed to supply. These included not only education and access to farmland, but also the arranging of marriages for young men. A resident of Markas, the neighborhood where Yusuf established his Ibn Tamiyyah mosque, recalled that in just a few years, Yusuf had facilitated more than five hundred weddings. The group also provided support for young men to become "okada drivers"—a popular, affordable motorbike taxi service. Some of these men were thus able to afford the traditional brideprice because of this new source of income, arranged by Boko Haram.

In this era, Boko Haram was relatively nonviolent, and instances of its aggression were targeted at local political and religious figures who criticized the group's religious interpretations rejecting the government's legitimacy. Violence ramped up, however, when the police began cracking down on the okada drivers, who claimed that the required use of protective helmets interfered with their religious head-dressings and were an excuse to target them. In 2009, government forces killed seven hundred suspected Boko Haram members in a massive security sweep in Maiduguri that included door-to-door raids and the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf. Following this crackdown, the group went underground for a year or so before reemerging with a deepened sense of grievance and a new leader—Abubaker Shekau.<sup>46</sup>

Under Shekau, Boko Haram became engaged in a wholesale war against the Nigerian state. Through raids on rural territory, suicide bombings, attacks on military posts, and the bombings of cities, the insurgency has killed more than 50,000 people and displaced more than 2.8 million.<sup>47</sup> Hundreds of suicide bombers have detonated their devices against civilian targets such as bus stations and markets, killing thousands of people.<sup>48</sup> In rural areas, the fear of Boko Haram has been so pervasive that farmers have left their fields fallow for several seasons, contributing to a regional food security crisis thought to have affected 11 million people in the Lake Chad Basin. The World Bank estimates that Boko Haram has caused \$9 billion worth of damage throughout the country's north since 2010.<sup>49</sup>

Under Shekau, Boko Haram also began abducting women to be "wives" of insurgents, in many cases, merely kidnapped sex slaves. Amnesty International estimated in 2015 that the group had abducted more than two thousand women and it is likely that the figure has risen since then. In interviews, women who voluntarily joined Boko Haram reported that they were often attracted to the group because the bride-price, though smaller than those accompanying "traditional" weddings, was paid directly to the women, not to their fathers. At least in the beginning, however, a token brideprice was left for the fathers of kidnapped girls: one man recounted how Boko Haram kidnapped girls in his community, "tossing 5,000 Naira [about \$25] on the floor as a bride price." In another account,

Bawagana, a shy 15-year-old living in Sanda Kyarimi camp, one of the official internally displaced people (IDP) sites, said that a Boko Haram fighter had come to her home in Dikwa, 90 kilometres east of Maiduguri, and asked "Do you love me?" Of course I answered, "no!" she said, with her eyes fixed on the ground. The boy got very angry and said: "If you do not come with me, I will kill your father, but if you come with me I will let him live." I followed to save my father. The boy left 10,000 naira (about \$50) on the floor. It was a bride price in Boko Haram's eyes.<sup>50</sup>

Those familiar with Boko Haram's practices explain that wives are used to reward fighters for their service and to cultivate loyalty. A fifteen-year-old who worked as a driver for Boko Haram before defecting to the Civilian



Joint Task Force, a vigilante group that assists the government's forces against Boko Haram, reported that "wives are 'earned,' they are a reward for those who stay six months." Once you have proven your commitment to the group, "if you see someone who you like, you can pick the wife you want."<sup>51</sup> The women themselves are often groomed before they are eligible to be taken as wives by members of the group; this may involve days of what is termed Quranic education, in which they are subjected to lectures on Boko Haram's ideologies.

Women who were married before Boko Haram abducted them are told to forget their "infidel" husbands and accept a Boko Haram husband. Though the abductions of women and girls as "wives" are often discussed by the media as cases of purely sexual and physical violence, reports suggest that the process of marrying an insurgent is always formalized for purposes of legitimation. The fifteen-year-old driver-turned-vigilante reported that the marriages are often accompanied by a large ceremony; the young man observed that the weddings in Boko Haram were "like a regular marriage."<sup>52</sup>

Since its founding as a dissident sect through its transformation into the most lethal insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa, Boko Haram has recognized the importance of marriage to young men, and capitalized on their marriage grievances caused by brideprice inflation. By providing access to wives, and thus a sense of self as a "real man," Boko Haram has gained a following of 3,000–5,000 young men with shockingly few reports of defection. "These men can take a wife at no extra charge," explained Kaka, a young woman orphaned, captured, and raped by Boko Haram members. "Usually it is very expensive to take a wife, very hard to get married, but not now."<sup>53</sup>

The intergenerational nature of the brideprice tax, coupled with other frustrations of the region's youth, has galvanized young men to obtain wives (and social standing) through alternative means that have destabilized the state and augmented the power of antistate groups, the most visible of which is Boko Haram. Without taking into account the effect of brideprice, one cannot fully understand why Boko Haram emerged, why it persists, how it acts—and how it could be undermined.

## Conclusion

This analysis offers two important takeaways. First, no comprehensive security analysis of many of today's

conflicts can be complete without an examination of how the structuration of male/female relations affects those conflicts. How those relations are structured has cascading effects on macro-level state phenomena, as the case of brideprice demonstrates. Marriage market obstruction, fueled by brideprice and polygyny, can destabilize nations by incentivizing violence and facilitating recruitment into insurgent groups.

As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted in 2012, "The subjugation of women is a threat to the common security of our world and to the national security of our country."<sup>54</sup> Gender lenses such as the one offered here significantly enhance situational awareness. One State Department official, after reading our original article, made the following comment confidentially:

[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. 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. I got a bit exasperated with his insistence on it being a serious issue and showed him research about how many Americans go into extreme debt to have the "dream wedding" making the argument of who are we as foreigners to tell people how to spend their money—I was certainly moralizing.<sup>55</sup>

A second major takeaway of our analysis is that even though marriage is a deeply socialized practice, governments are not powerless; they can act to mitigate heightened risk of destabilization due to brideprice inflation, as the Saudis have done (the Saudi case is detailed in our

original article).<sup>56</sup> Given the linkages among brideprice inflation, grievance, and violent conflict, governments can, for example, place caps on brideprices or subsidize marriage costs to avoid marriage market obstruction. Initiatives to end child marriage and make it harder to contract polygynous marriages take on even greater significance once their relevance to national stability and security are recognized. This sort of regulation is a market intervention that not only protects the rights of

girls and women but also inhibits the market's tendency toward concentration and inequality.

Seeing brideprice for the hard security matter it is in many shatterbelts where spillover threats easily destabilize entire regions illuminates the roots of issues that characterize the sociopolitical landscape where military intervention by great powers may one day be contemplated. The time has come to recognize what has been hiding in plain sight. ■

## Notes

1. Vikas Bajaj and Lydia Polgreen, "Suspect Stirs Mumbai Court by Confessing," *The New York Times* (website), 20 July 2009, accessed 14 November 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/world/asia/21india.html>.

2. "Mumbai Gunman Video," Channel 4 Exclusive, n.d., accessed 14 November 2017, <http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid1184614595?bctid=27874456001>.

3. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (November 2003), doi: [10.3386/w9074](https://doi.org/10.3386/w9074).

4. The term brideprice refers to an overall net transfer of assets from the groom's family to the bride's family. This includes brideprice, bridewealth, and bride-service. It also includes dowry, such as the custom of *mahr*, which is not to be confused with dowry, which term refers to an overall net transfer of assets from the bride's family to the groom's family.

5. Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2013).

6. For example, some matrilineal systems also practice brideprice, such as in Melanesia. While patrilineality makes male control over assets, women, and power more straightforward, males are still able to exert almost the same level of control in brideprice-practicing matrilineal societies, and brideprice plays a catalyzing role in grievance and violence in these societies, as well. We are indebted to Sue Ingram of the Australian National University for this insight. Additionally, ideology as a basis for fraternity is not as sturdy a foundation for fraternity, which is why some ideologically-based groups attempt to shore up that fraternity with marriages that make men not only ideological brothers but also in-laws and therefore kin. Osama bin Laden, for example, attempted to have his top lieutenants marry sisters to better ensure they would remain loyal to each other (see note 18, Thayer and Hudson, op cit.).

7. Ian Bannon and Maria C. Correia, *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 161, accessed 13 November 2017, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/7029>.

8. If we turn our attention from brideprice to dowry for a moment, dowry is intended to offset the cost to the groom's family of feeding and sheltering the bride, who is viewed as nonproductive (i.e., only reproductive).

9. "Human Rights Study links Payment of Bride Price to Abuse of Women," IRIN (website), 16 May 2006, accessed 13 November 2017, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/59032/tanzania-study-links-payment-bride-price-abuse-women>.

10. Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, "Clan Governance and State Stability: The Relationship between Female Subordination and Political Order," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (August 2015): 535–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000271>. "Rentierism" refers to an economic system based on appropriation of resources that produce rents, which rents are then used to govern and control society. Rentier powers govern, in the first place, through corruption.

11. Ibid.

12. Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, and Rebecca Nielsen, *The First Political Order: Sex, Governance, and National Security*, book manuscript in preparation.

13. Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, "Clan Governance."

14. Jack Goody and S. J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 18.

15. Ibid., 10.

16. Ibid., 5, emphasis in the original.

17. Siwan Anderson, "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 151–74, doi: [10.1257/jep.21.4.151](https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.21.4.151).

18. Bradley A. Thayer and Valerie M. Hudson, "Sex and the Shaheed: Insights from the Life Sciences on Islamic Suicide Terrorism," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 54, doi: [10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.37](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.37).

19. Polygyny is also a custom which has not died out to the extent some would imagine; see here for a visual representation of the prevalence of polygyny in the world today: "Prevalence of Polygyny Scale, Mapped," WomanStats Project (website), accessed 14 November 2017, <http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/PW-SCALE-1-2016.png>.

20. Goody and Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry*, 10.

21. That is not the case in some patrilineal societies. For example, in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, there are sufficient resources to justify the expense of investing in maternal health care. Furthermore, the average age of marriage has been creeping upwards in these societies. For both these reasons, maternal mortality in these Gulf States tends to be relatively lower than in other patrilineal cultures. China, too, has made a successful push toward lowering maternal mortality rates, and it strictly regulates both age of marriage and fertility.

22. This is one of those phenomena that are difficult to explain in solely economic terms. While in some regions with brideprice, childhood sex ratios are normal (such as sub-Saharan Africa), indicating that families understand the economic value of keeping girls

alive until married, in other regions with brideprice, childhood sex ratios are abnormal and favor males (such as Pakistan, Albania, and other countries).

23. Jessica Heckert and Madeline Short Fabric, "Improving Data Concerning Women's Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Studies in Family Planning* 44, no. 3 (September 2013): 335.

24. Cynthia Gorney, "Too Young to Wed: The Secret World of Child Brides," *National Geographic* (website), June 2011, accessed 14 November 2017, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/06/child-brides/gorney-text/1>; George Thomas, "India's Innocent: Secret Weddings of Child Brides," *CBN News* (website), 24 August 2015, accessed 14 November 2017, <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2012/june/innocence-lost-indias-children-marrying-at-age-8>.

25. Goody and Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry*, 8–9.

26. Diane Singerman, "The Economic Imperatives of Marriage: Emerging Practices and Identities among Youth in the Middle East" (Dubai, UAE: Wolfensohn Center for Development, Dubai School of Government, September 2007), 49, accessed 14 November 2017, [http://www.meyi.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32012989/singerman\\_-\\_the\\_economic\\_imperatives\\_of\\_marriage\\_-\\_emerging\\_practices\\_and\\_identities\\_among\\_youth\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_east.pdf](http://www.meyi.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32012989/singerman_-_the_economic_imperatives_of_marriage_-_emerging_practices_and_identities_among_youth_in_the_middle_east.pdf).

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29. "ISIS Fighters Get Marriage Bonus, Including Honeymoon," *CBS News* (website), 26 May 2015, accessed 13 November 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-fighters-get-marriage-bonuses-including-honeymoon/>.

30. Ariel I. Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," *Survival* 57, no. 3 (May 2015): 57–78.

31. Esther Mokuwa, Maarten Voors, Erwin Bulte, and Paul Richards, "Peasant Grievance and Insurgency in Sierra Leone: Judicial Serfdom as a Driver of Conflict," *African Affairs* 110, no. 440 (July 2011): 339–66, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr019>.

32. Nigeria Social Violence Project, "Social Violence in Nigeria" (datasets, Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2016), accessed 14 November 2017, <http://www.connectsaisafrica.org/research/african-studies-publications/social-violence-nigeria/>.

33. Hilary Matfess (fieldwork, North East Region, Nigeria: 2015–2016).

34. S. P. Reyna, "Bridewealth Revisited: Socialization and the Reproduction of Labor in a Domestic African Economy," Working Paper no. 80 (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 1985), 1, accessed 14 November 2017, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNA-AX355.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNA-AX355.pdf).

35. Ibid., 9.

36. Ibid., 8.

37. Ronald Cohen, "Marriage Instability among the Kanuri of Northern Nigeria," *American Anthropologist* 63, no. 6 (December 1961): 1231–49.

38. Ronald Cohen, "The Analysis of Conflict in Hierarchical Systems: An Example from Kanuri Political Organization," *Anthropologica* 4, no. 1 (1962): 87–120.

39. If brideprice is quick to rise, why is it so resistant to falling? First is the issue of social face and standing in the male hierarchy. Which man wants to be the first who accepts a lower-than-normal brideprice for his daughter? Similarly, perhaps to a lesser degree, which family wants to be the first to pay a lower price for a bride, signaling their economic incapacity? Second is the economic calculus: those who have already paid the going rate, and those who have daughters of marriageable age, will see their investment degraded by lowered brideprice and will resist any decrease. Voices 4 Change, *Being a Man in Nigeria: Perceptions and Realities* (London: UK Department for International Development, 2015), 22, accessed 13 November 2017, [www.v4c-nigeria.com/being-a-man-in-nigeria-perceptions-and-realities/](http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/being-a-man-in-nigeria-perceptions-and-realities/).

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41. Khalifa Abulfathi, interview by Hilary Matfess, 2016.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

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53. Matfess, "Boko Haram is Enslaving Women."

54. Hillary Clinton, "Remarks at the TEDWomen Conference," (speech, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington, DC, 8 December 2010), accessed 13 November 2017, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/12/152671.htm>.

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