

Too Much Testosterone?

“A Surplus of Men, A Deficit of Peace” by Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, in *International Security* (Spring 2002), MIT Press Journals, 5 Cambridge Center, 4th Fl., Cambridge, Mass. 02142-1493.

In medieval Portugal, only the firstborn sons of noblemen could inherit land and property, depriving their younger brothers not only of wealth but any possibility of marriage. These solo “cadets” were a cause of turmoil at home and the fuel for Portugal’s vigorous imperial expansion abroad. By the mid-16th century, almost 25 percent of Portugal’s male nobles were dying in battle—which may not have entirely displeased Portugal’s monarchs, who were trying to maintain stability at home.

Hudson, a political scientist at Brigham Young University, and Den Boer, a doctoral student at the University of Kent at Canterbury in Britain, fear there’s a parallel between the Portuguese past and present-day developments in China and India,

where sex-determined abortions and female infanticide have produced an unnatural surplus of young men. China, with a total population of 1.3 billion, has 13 million more males than females in the 15–34 age group, while India, with a total population of one billion, has an oversupply of nearly 16 million. The surpluses will roughly double by 2020, Hudson and Den Boer project.

These unattached men pose at least as great a threat—probably greater—to domestic tranquility as the Portuguese cadets did and increase the danger of international conflict. “In a marriage market where women are scarce and thus able to ‘marry up,’” the authors write, the “surplus” young men will be societal “losers”—likely “to come from the lowest socioeconomic class” and to be

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Sikkim’s Silences

English was supposed to be the most abundant language in the world. All those words like gestalt and pasta and déjà vu, welcomed in from other languages. But no matter how many words it adopted, English could never seem to liberate itself from the logic of its own construction. I was the English teacher, but looking back, I don’t think I truly appreciated the difficulty of what we were trying to accomplish, which was to enable those kids to express their own worldview in English.

Sikkimese was a language without sentences, sometimes without subjects, and spoken mostly in the passive voice. It was a language that constantly pointed out the inadequacy of words and sang the praises of silence. Once, I made a list of different ways to say “keep quiet” and got up to twelve without any effort at all.

Sometimes I thought this appreciation of silence was the effect of Buddhism trickling down into the language, but at other times I thought it was due to the steep terrain. All the huffing and puffing up and down mountains made talking seem superfluous. Or maybe it was the way that things, even ordinary things like cars and boats, became so imbued with life that what seemed like mythical stories to me were perfectly normal to the kids in my classes. It wasn’t just people from long ago who had flown or turned into rainbows or learned the languages of birds. It was someone’s aunt or grandfather or cousin. Who would care about talking if it were possible to fly or dissolve into a rainbow instead?

—Maria Lauenstein, a Massachusetts writer, and former English teacher in Sikkim, an Indian state in the Himalayas, in *Ruminator Review* (Fall 2002)

rootless transients, unemployed or underemployed. In other words, they are doubly prone to vice and violence.

Hudson and Den Boer believe there's a relationship between violence against women within a society and violence "within and between" societies. "Exaggerated gender inequality," they argue, leads to heightened internal instability.

Even if begun now, efforts to reduce female infanticide and abortion for sex selection would not right the gender imbalance "for a generation or more." Hudson and Den Boer worry that the problem may undermine democracy in India and halt its

progress in China. There's some evidence that the regimes in both countries are already resorting to some of the time-honored means of thinning the ranks of violence-prone young men: recruiting them into police or military units, involving them in massive and dangerous public-works projects, and dispatching them overseas as colonists or migrant workers. Beijing, for example, is expanding its People's Armed Police and filling its ranks with what one observer calls "the dregs." Or, like the monarchs of 16th-century Portugal, the two governments may be tempted to send their surplus young men abroad "to die in some glorious national cause far from home."

The Resilient Swedish Model

"Globalization and Taxation: Challenges to the Swedish Welfare State" by Sven Steinmo, in *Comparative Political Studies* (Sept. 2002), SAGE Publications Ltd., 6 Bonhill St., London EC2A 4PU, England.

In the early 1990s, the future looked bleak for the vaunted "Swedish model." To compete internationally, many predicted, Sweden would have to cut taxes and reduce its famously lavish welfare state. It hasn't worked out that way, reports Steinmo, a political scientist at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The Swedish model featured "very high marginal tax rates softened with very deep tax loopholes," he notes. Personal income and consumption were heavily taxed, but capital gains and corporate income were not. The Swedish government showered socialist corporations with tax incentives to invest at home.

By 1990, taxes had reached more than 60 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Expanding government programs and rising public employee wages had driven up tax rates, and inflation had pushed ordinary taxpayers into the upper tax brackets. Meanwhile, leading industries—mining, steel, shipbuilding, and automaking—faced growing foreign competition. Swedish employers complained that the tax incentive system made it hard to shift low-skill work abroad and "focus their Swedish investment where Sweden had a comparative advantage (i.e., where highly specialized skills were needed)," says Steinmo.

In 1991, Carl Bildt's new center-right government introduced what was called the "tax reform of the century." Income tax rates were cut across the board; the top rate dropped from more than 80 percent to 50 percent. "Tax expenditures" (aka loopholes) were hacked back. Bildt cut the marginal tax rate on corporate profits, and all capital income faced a flat 30 percent rate.

"Tax levels were still quite high," Steinmo says, but it appeared to many observers that "the public commitment to maintaining a progressive tax system" had vanished. Then a grinding recession drove the unemployment rate, which since World War II had never been higher than four percent, into double digits. Even so, when the long-ruling Social Democrats returned to office under Ingvar Carlsson in 1994, they began trimming certain social welfare benefits.

But the Swedish model was secure. The welfare cuts were not deep, and Carlsson raised the top marginal income-tax rate on the richest Swedes even as he cut the value-added tax on food by half. Tax revenues, especially from capital gains, *increased* during the decade. The government's share of GDP has dropped only a few percentage points, to around 57 percent. Reports of the death of the Swedish welfare state were, it seems, greatly exaggerated.