'Bordering' Life: denying the right to live before being born

Meera Tiwari
Department of Social Science
University of East London
m.tiwari@uel.ac.uk

Dr Meera Tiwari is Reader (Associate Professor) in International Development Studies at the University of East London, where she is also programme leader for MSc NGO and Development Management. Her interconnected research interests are: Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals as a discourse for poverty reduction and policy pathways beyond 2015, exploring social and economic poverties within the Capability Approach in both Northern and Southern contexts and how can development work for the most vulnerable communities. She has conducted extensive primary research in rural India, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Her research in India includes User Perspective of Information and Communication Technologies in Rural India (Madhya Pradesh and Bihar); longitudinal study of women's self-help group network in Bihar to examine the impact of Livelihoods Policy frameworks on poverty reduction and the role of women's collectives in curbing alcoholism. She carried out a social impact evaluations in a number of countries including India for 'Save the Girl Child Project' run by the NGO Childreach International in India, in Lebanon on the impact of the education projects of faith based organisations for Syrian refugee children followed by evaluations Shelter Children projects in Brazil. Meera Tiwari's UKIERI funded project (2012-14) explored good practice in social cohesion in East London and Mumbai with Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. Her ongoing research is on examining the role of dignity in improving menstrual health outcomes in rural India. Meera Tiwari has published widely on these themes.

'Bordering' Life: denying the right to live before being born

Meera Tiwari

Abstract

This study pushes the boundaries of the border thinking discourse to examine grassroots perceptions of foeticide together with how women are valued in a society that is underpinned by preference for a male child. Using a bordering conceptual framework, the paper re-visits the female positionality within epistemic locations of culture and societal values in both colonial and the modern Indian context. Grounded in primary research in the state of Haryana that exhibits lowest female to male ratio at birth in the country, the analyses indicate rigid or at best sluggish movements in social norms as the key driver for India's declining sex ratio. The border thinking discourse further enables to situate the different aspects of female positionality and gender perceptions in the society into the specific domains of the bordering conceptual framework. This offers a novel approach to engage with social norms that border life and opportunities for females in the society.

Key words

Bordering, foeticide, sex ratio, gender norms, colonial and post-colonial gender perspective, India

'Bordering' Life: denying the right to live before being born

Meera Tiwari

Section 1: Introduction

India's declining child sex ratio from 927 girls born in 2001 to 918 per 1000 boys born in 2011 (945 girls born to 1000 boys in 1991) is situated within the 'border thinking' discourse in this paper. Taking cognizant of the epistemic locations of culture, societal values and female positionality in the Indian society, a bordering conceptual framework grounded in the 'border thinking' literature and the deliberations on power is developed. This framework is then deployed to examine the prevalence of foeticide and identify causes that lead to its persistence in the society. This process offers the potential to directly engage with specific issues to craft appropriate strategies for tackling the falling sex ratio in the country as well as for improving the efficacy of existing policies.

In the early 1990s Amartya Sen put forward the concept of 'Missing Women' based on the low ratio of women to men mostly in China and India. This ratio when compared with sex ratios in developed countries and translated into numbers indicated the number of women who would be alive if the ratio was normal. Sen (1990), (1992) estimated over a million 'missing women'. Within the comprehensive literature on infanticide trends in different societies (Dickemann 1981) hypothesised female-preferential infanticide. She indicated the male child preference and prevalence of infanticide in the Indian society for centuries. Within the last three census data points child sex ratio in the country continues to decline as indicated above. National policy makers and the research community have engaged with the issue and continue to do so through legislation, media and the rich literature on the subject. The declining trend though remains tenacious.

This study explores the grassroots perceptions of foeticide together with how girls and women are valued and norms that underpin the preference for a male child in the society. Re-visiting Sen's 'missing girls' and those that are added to this expanding pool of missing girls each year, the paper queries if this trend can be better understood within the discourse on bordering drawing on the concepts of 'border thinking' developed by (Anzaldua 1999) and (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006) amongst others. Within their wider conceptualisation, borders go beyond geographic to political, cultural and epistemic domains that are centred around the existence human beings. This in turn entails a multitude of complex human attributes anchored in specific societies. The paper pushes this conceptual boundary further to include the denial of the right to life as 'bordering life'.

The research for this paper is based on primary data from two peri-urban localities in the city of Hissar in the state of Haryana in India. This state has the lowest child sex ratio in the country with 830 girls born to 1000 boys as per the 2011 census. The present inquiry is part of a larger evaluation of 'Save the Girl Child' project launched in 2012 by an NGO Child Reach India (CRI) to combat this trend in the community.

The paper is organised in six sections. Following the introduction in the first section, section 2 develops a 'bordering' conceptual framework drawing on an overview and critique of the border thinking literature. The study deploys this framework to further the understanding of the persistence of foeticide in the Indian context. Section 3 offers the current context of foeticide in India locating it as a continuum of the infanticide discourse in the colonial debates. The section also examines the 'missing-girls' concept and how it is a

manifestation of the societal norms in the region. The methodology to engage with the grassroots perceptions of how women are valued in the society, what does preference for a male child in the society mean and what is it indicative of, are presented in section 4. The findings of the field research conducted for the NGO Childreach India (CRI) in 2015 analysed using the bordering conceptual framework are presented in section 5. The conclusions of the study are presented in section 6.

Section 2: Conceptions of 'Bordering'

This section develops a bordering framework that will be used to examine and further the understanding of the prevalence of foeticide in Northern India despite its constitutional illegality (UNPA 2016). The bordering framework draws on the literature on 'border thinking'. While relatively new, the border thinking literature is an expanding field comprising wide range of scrutiny and discourse from decolonial theorists, migration and gender studies. The salient features can be summarised in terms of five central concepts that include power, inferiority, epistemic difference, heirarchization and differential inclusion. These insights are grounded in early conceptions of 'border thinking' attributed to Anzaldu`a's (1999) work on decolonial theory. Gloria Anzaldua's narrative is located in the pre-colonial to colonial and current experiences of the Aztecs people that constitute the single tribe of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today. She draws attention to the US-Mexican physical border where she roots her conceptualisation of the 'border culture'. The border itself is created to separate 'safe' and 'unsafe' and distinguish between 'us' and 'them' through a dividing line. A power matrix defines the legitimate inhabitants versus the illegitimate inhabitants with those exercising power invariably being white communities or those aligned to them.

Several decolonial researchers have subsequently expanded Anzaldu`a's original conceptualisations. Mignolo and Tlostanova's (2006) contribution is considered to be one of the most significant in taking forward Anzaldu`a's work to situate 'border thinking' within both the geographic and the epistemic discourse. Drawing on the conceptual similarities between frontiers and borders, the authors first draw attention to frontiers as the line or point demarcating civilization on one side and wilderness, harsh landscape or barbarism on the other from the Middle Ages up to the 19th century. The logic of this classification can be contested specially with respect to the self–acquired authority to classify and to then enact the hierarchical socio-economic, cultural and political structures that manifest. The assumption here was the inferiority or the evil intents of the 'other'. While notions of barbarism and emptiness have largely ceased to shape the 'other' in the 21st century, the underpinning construction of the 'others' as people who do not think or theorize hence implying inferiority, is visible in the modern framing of epistemic differences.

Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) use the European Renaissance as the reference point of modernity. Further, they note that the theologically driven 'zero point' of observation, ignored and rejected other perspectives and the existence of other cultures and knowledge. Thus, creating the concept of the epistemic frontier. The Kantian thought attributes the Renaissance idea of Man to Western Christianity and Europe which were both dominated and driven by white male members in power (ibid, p. 2). The authors note the underpinning of a racial classification of the population by those in power.

Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) further explore border thinking and the border concept in terms of 'precarious employment', 'differential inclusion' and 'proliferation of borders' within transnational social spaces shaped by the interactions between migration, citizenship and labour markets. Border thinking thus goes beyond physical bounded spaces into the dynamics of exclusion and shifts in conception of inclusion. The authors call the latter 'differential inclusion' and trace its origins in the discourse that crosscuts feminist and

migration studies. Differential inclusion entails varying levels of acceptance, segmentation, discrimination and subordination within the same space or sphere (De Genova 2002, Mezzadra 2011).

Returning to the five concepts of border thinking discourse, the use of power is found to underpin all genres of border thinking. The notions of power here can be located in the pre-Foucauldian (Foucault 1991) conceptions of power as an instrument of coercion. Power as a repressive force driving exclusion and hierarchization that underpins 'border-thinking' is explored in depth by Lukes (2005) as the 'third dimension' of power. Focusing on the 'power over' where those in power deliberately enforce and manipulate the actions, thoughts and desires of the powerless. Thus, this form of power according to Lukes is held and exercised by those who possess it over those who don't. Gaventa (2006) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) take Lukes' three faces of power – visible, hidden and invisible further. Gaventa (ibid) uses the powercube model to illustrate the interplay and contrast between these different forms of power instead of an insular manifestation of each form.

The second concept that underpins border thinking is the notion of inferiority of the 'other'. This inferiority stems from assumptions of lesser abilities, especially cognitive and intellectual of the others. These in turn result in structural inequalities, unequal resource distribution and access to opportunities in life. The notion of 'power over' and internalisation of the consequences of domination perpetuate the continuity of 'othering'.

The third conceptual pillar of the border thinking is epistemic difference. This is closely entwined with othering and often one of its outcomes or actualising the perceptions of 'us' and 'them' where the 'other' or 'them' is considered an inferior or a lesser human being or race. Knowledge production, theorizing and intellectual attributes of the others, in turn, are seen to be feeble and lacking credibility. Hence the epistemic divide between the superior 'us' and the inferior 'them'.

The fourth concept that underpins border thinking is that of heirarchization. The genealogy of the word hierarchy is rooted in the Greek word *hierarkhia* meaning 'rule of high priest'. This alludes to a different set of societal norms and guidelines applicable to the priestly community and in particular to the senior most priest. Given the respect and reverence bestowed on members of priesthood in all civilisations since over four millennia to date, the separation of societal rules pertinent to this distinguished cohort suggests a ranking order of these traditions. This order is linked with the superior status enjoyed by the priests. Hierarchy thus represents a system that arranges rules, emotions or positions as above or below to one another based on certain criteria. Thus, different rules apply to different members of the society despite considerable flattening of societal structures in modern times. Ranking or prioritizing of either rules or societal status is understood best through Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943) and the caste system (Srinivas 1962, Dumont 1980, Jodhka 2015). While the former is a five-stage model of motivational needs illustrated as hierarchical levels in a pyramid, the latter is the blueprint for stratification of the Indian Hindu society since at least two millennia. The origins of the caste system can be traced to the closed hierarchical framing of division of labour through the four *varnas* with the *Brahmins* – the priests and scholars at the top, *Kshatriyas* – the soldiers and the political rulers in the next position, followed by *Vaishyas* – the trading community with *Shudras* – servants, artisans and those involved in cleaning, scavenging, skinning dead animals etc at the bottom of the societal strata. The access to opportunities, privileges and
benefits were largely mapped to this stratification. In modern India since independence in 1947, while there has been a concerted effort to disband and reject the caste system at the constitutional level, it continues to persist, albeit to a much lesser extent in urban India. One of the key consequences of this hierarchical stratification was the skewed access to opportunities, privileges and benefits in favour of the higher castes. Within border thinking, hierarchisation

stratifies 'us' and 'them' into further clearly demarcated categories underpinned by the driver for skewed access to resources that includes opportunities, privileges and benefits.

The final conceptual pillar of border thinking is the notion of differential inclusion. The concept has been extensively used to explain how the idea of social inclusion is a spectrum rather than a fixed bundle of actions. This resonates with Castles and Davidson (2000) degrees of 'belonging', implying variations in the level of acceptance and selective access to service provision. The practice is observed globally from Mezzadra's (2011) Fortress Europe and the US-Mexican border where certain labour markets are open but citizenship is restricted, the invisible boundaries in the interstate labour markets in India that pose challenges to accessing services by migrant labour and the Chinese system of household registration akin to domestic passport that regulates population distribution and rural-urban migration that denies rural population the same opportunities as the urban residents. Differential inclusion thus blurs the distinct boundaries between the internal and external. Thus, a person can be physically inside a bounded space, yet not fully enjoy the available service provision or be able to access the opportunities within this space.

These five features drawn from some of the key literatures in border thinking form the conceptual framework that underpins the definition of bordering in this study. The key driver for the bordering practice is the assumed epistemic asymmetry between us and the other/them. The conceptual pillars of border thinking then superimpose levels of influence within the normative structure of the society. Hence, bordering in the colonial context extended epistemic asymmetry into the domains of powerlessness through domination and coercion, imposed inferiority and differential inclusion. Thus, the inferior natives were denied privileges and opportunities such as not being allowed to travel in the first-class railway compartment or access certain hotels, restaurants, parks and institutions. The bordering practice within the Indian caste system on the other hand emphasised the epistemic asymmetry through hierarchization. This in turn enabled stratification of the society into clearly demarcated categories with skewed access to resources. The epistemic asymmetry in the case of migrant labour within the US-Mexican border, within the interstate labour markets in India as well as within the Chinese system of household registration manifests through differential inclusion. As noted earlier, differential inclusion allows a person to be physically inside a bounded space, but restrict him/her to fully enjoy the available service provision or access the opportunities within this space.

In summary, bordering alludes to the multi-layered process that embodies the five pillars of border thinking identified above, albeit in different proportions and intensity, shaped by the specific normative context.

Section 3: Infanticide to foeticide and the 'missing girls' concept

This section examines the genealogy of the term infanticide both within the global and the Indian colonial contexts. The Indian context is further investigated to understand the transition of the infanticide practice to foeticide in post-independence modern India. Insights from the bordering framework developed in the previous section are then deployed to further the understanding of the practices of infanticide and foeticide within the Indian society. The discussions also examine the 'missing girls' concept using the same framework.

The social interpretations of the term noted in the dictionary as 'the act of killing one's own child within a year of birth' especially by the mother, are hugely complex. The 'child' in the term more often than not refers to the female child as evidenced in both historic and current works of literatures. Dickemann's (1975) comprehensive review of the infanticide literature offers insightful argumentations grounded in history and culture. Several studies as noted in Dickemann's review examine and present infanticide as a population

limiting tool, including Malthus (1807) who noted its prevalence in India, China, Central Asia, Australia, the Pacific, the Americas as well as in ancient Greece and Rome. As also noted by Dickemann, Malthus highlighted the existence of infanticide in Asian cultures and other societies but ignored its practice in the European contexts. Instead, he clustered the European infanticide practice within the stressed contexts of warfare, famine and epidemics thus framing it as a positive check. Further, epistemic inferiorities in terms of location of culture, societal norms and a lesser 'them' underpin the disregard for cultural norms and use of the term 'savage society' by the Anglo –Saxon demographers. The term itself characterising societies with high natality and high mortality. Thus, while infanticide was practiced in both the Asian and the European contexts, the Asian societies were seen as epistemically inferior by the assumed power of European demographers in terms of the bordering framework.

Returning to the practice of infanticide itself, while the literature suggests its cultural sanction in ancient civilisations, medieval and post-medieval societies up to the early part of the 20th century, the dominant trend of the female child being killed calls for further investigation. Carr-Sander's (1922) extensive review of the infanticide data at the global level noted its existence in the Upper Paleolithic era but found quantitative evidence within the Chinese and the Indian contexts, both with removal of up to a third of the female off-springs. Within the pre-colonial Indian context, Vishwanath (2004) offers an insightful critique based on the archival records on female infanticide during the colonial period. This evidence, with records dating back from 1789 to the 1921 census firmly grounds the female infanticide within the traditions of the over two millennia old hierarchical caste system. The archives document a British revenue collector's revelation of infanticide in 1789 in North India. This lead to the uncovering of the extensive practice of female infanticide amongst the upper caste of Rajputs in the vast expanse of the undivided north, west and central India (ibid).

Further, official investigations into female infanticide during the 19th century revealed near absence of any female children amidst certain clans in Gujarat. Additionally, almost three fourths of the villages investigated in North India had far less female children than male and a fifth of the villages exhibited complete absence of female children under the age of five.

One can only agree with the colonial rulers for calling female infanticide 'inhumane' and passing the Female Infanticide Act of 1870 criminalising the practice. Vishwanath (ibid) draws attention to the deep rooted social structures, norms of dowry and caste restrictions of hypergamy, endogamy and exogamy linked with family status in particular amidst the upper castes. The castes that practised female infanticide justified it on the grounds that they could not afford large dowries in order to respect the complex social traditions of marrying a daughter. These rigid social structures faced with the colonial policies of freezing territorial expansion and stringent land revenue collection appear to have aggravated female infanticide. The Rajput clans with already skewed sex ratios were left with the choice of protecting their socio-economic status or finding large dowries to marry their daughters (Cohn 1987). Cohn's investigation suggests that these castes opted to maintain their socio-economic status further worsening the female to male child sex ratios. This could also be an explanation for the ineffectiveness of the Female Infanticide Act of 1870 to substantially change the prevalence of the practice.

The key insight here is not that female infanticide can be justified because of the rigid social compulsions or that it was made worse because of the colonial policies. Instead, two distinct thematic domains both of which fall within the bordering framework, emerge from the perspectives of the practicing castes and the colonial masters. First, the cultural sanction and social acceptance of destroying a female offspring indicates the society's perception of a female infant's life to be expendable. It also suggests that the female child was not valued in

the same way as a male child. Further, the socio-economic status was more important than the life of a daughter. These social norms and thinking indicate the female offspring being perceived as inferior or a lesser being than a male offspring pointing to the epistemic differences between a male and a female child conceptualised by the society. The female offspring was placed at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid within the family and the society, skewing access to opportunities, privileges and even the right to live, in favour of male offspring. Additionally, as the primary space where the notions of 'us' (males and male children) and 'them' (females and female children) were framed was within the bounds of the family unit, the female child would have experienced differential inclusion by physically being inside the family, yet not realising the potential to live a full life.

Second, the colonial efforts to stop the practice of female infanticide demonstrates the absence of engagement with the social context and disregard for local traditions albeit an obnoxious custom in this instance. Hence, while one cannot disagree with the objective of the effort or calling the practice inhuman, the effort appears to target the practice in isolation without any consideration of the social context which belonged to the lesser natives. This demonstrates a close fit within the bordering conceptual notions of epistemic difference and inferiority of the natives by the colonial rulers in India.

Vishwanath (2004) further notes the shift in the post-independence census data from 1947 onwards. The state wise trends increasingly reflect the persistence of the skewed sex ratio with the critical difference at birth ratio rather than under one or five years as observed within female infanticide. The practice of aborting a female foetus or foeticide appears to have replaced female infanticide in independent India. The literature and the census further point to the spread of the lower female to male ratio at birth amongst the lower castes as well in some regions of north and west India in particular (Dreze and Sen 1995, 156). This study suggests that the lower castes were increasingly morphing the upper castes with respect particularly to attitudes towards gender.

As noted in the Introduction to this paper, the term 'missing women' was first conceived by Amartya Sen (Sen 1990, 1992) based on the conspicuously low female to male sex ratio he observed in the context of China and India. Using Sen's methodology Anderson and Ray (2015) show that there are around 200 million missing women across the developing world. Within the Indian context a wide spectrum of rich literature has emerged since the 1980s and also following Sen's publications. The literature continues to re-enforce Dickemann's findings demonstrating the persistence of a social context in India that is underpinned with a preference for a male child Arnold, Choe, and Roy (1998), (Anderson 2012, Bongaarts 2013, Premi 2001). Sen in his most recent comments (2014) argues that the increasing access to new sex determining technologies since the 1980s has led to the 'high-tech manifestation of preference for boys' (Sen 2014). What remains unexplained is that while improvements in women's education have contributed to reductions in mortality and other societal discriminations against women, it has not influenced sex selective abortions. Sen further notes that educated mothers seem to exercise no discrimination between son and daughter but prefer to have sons. Thus, education alone is not able to shift this 'natality discrimination'. There is another peculiarity observed within the female-male ratios at birth with northern and western states exhibiting much lower ratios than European countries while the southern and eastern states have ratios comparable to European ratios. Education and per capita GDP do not appear to have bearing on this divide as some of the western states, in fact, have both high literacy and high income amongst the major states in India.

The subsequent research inquiries can be divided into two key thematic strands. The first is into estimations of female foetus abortions and state wise variations in the sex-ratio trend (Melhado 2011, Das Gupta 1997, Anderson and Ray 2015). Some studies show that up to 10 million female foetuses have been aborted in the last twenty years (Jha et al. 2006). The

second thematic inquiry examines survival (Deaton 1989, Subramanian and Deaton 1991) and social opportunities to girls in their childhood as compared with male children (Kumar 2010). An insightful collection of essays - 'Sex Selective Abortions in India: Gender, Society and New Reproductive Technologies' edited by Tulsi Patel (2007) examines a wide spectrum of reasons for the declining female to male child sex ratio in India. The introduction chapter of the book delves into an in-depth inquiry of societal influences and traditions that keep the 'preference for a male child' strong irrespective of education or wealth and lead to the use of new technologies for the termination of female foetuses. The reasons range from dowry practice, patriarchal culture, patrilineage, a belief that sons will look after in old age and tradition of sons performing the last rites.

A dominant theme that emerges in the literature is the deep-rooted tradition of preference for a male child in the Indian society. Literature focusing on deeper engagement with traditions that shape how women are valued in the society at the micro level, in particular is sparse. At the macro level within the Indian context, there appears to be universal agreement to address this tradition and the resulting foeticides - at least on paper. The policy framework in India to both recognise the negative impacts of some discriminatory social norms against women and the legal system to prevent and penalise the violations dates back to over six decades soon after the country's independence in 1947. The parliamentary deliberations in the 1950s led to the Hindu Succession Act in 1956 allowing women sole ownership of property and full rights to its disposal. In 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted by the parliament to curb and prohibit the giving and taking of dowry.

Unfortunately, there were no signs of abating either in the act of giving and taking dowry or the dowry related abuses in the years that followed. Both laws have undergone legislative amendments in the last two decades, but dowry abuses and deaths remain worryingly at high levels in some of the states in India. In all 25,000 deaths were reported in the country between 2012-2015 with over 50% occurring in just the three states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (Indian Express 2015). Other policy tools include the PC-PNDT Act - Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PNDT) of 1994 and its amendment in 2003 (PC-PNDT Act) to end foeticide. More recently, the national campaign to further empower women was launched in 2015 by the central government (GoI, 2015).

The focus of the current paper is on furthering understandings of the second thematic inquiry - survival and social opportunities to girls as compared with boys using the bordering framework developed in section 2. Much of the data for the latter domain in this study is drawn from the case study in Hissar in India. Given the generic prevalence of 'male-child' bias in the Indian society as shown in the literature, the norms and attitudes reflected in the field data in Hissar can be assumed to be a close representation of the larger societal norms in the Indian society.

Before moving on to outline the research methodology followed by the findings and analysis, a comparison between the pre-independence (colonial) and post-independence discourse on gender trends is deemed essential. Three key thematic strands can be identified that are common in the two periods spanning from early 1800s to 1947 (colonial) and 1947 to the present times in the 21st century. First, the societal preference for a male child grounded in the social norms of dowry, patriarchal culture and patrilineage, second the skewed female to male ratio against the female numbers and third an official policy structure to revert the trend. Further, in both contexts the skewed ratios persisted despite the penalties attached to the policy regimes. The first two common strands suggest that the female child continues to be placed within the bordering framework in terms of inferior 'them' and at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid within the family. Additionally, the normative and attitudinal social context towards gender relations has only marginally shifted in the span of over 200 years.

Several issues emerge from the third commonality. First, within the moral and constitutional constructs, the actions that result in the skewed sex ratio are considered criminal and carry legal penalties. Second, while the social context was disregarded in the colonial Female Infanticide Act 1870, there is some engagement with social norms such as the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the more recent Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE), the minimum legal age for marriage for girls since 1978 as well as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. The implementation of these legally binding policies though is often either feeble, laws are flouted or prove ineffective due to the deeply embedded centuries old traditions. This is evidenced by the prevalence of dowry and over 25 percent of girls being married before they turn 18, albeit a huge improvement from 47 percent a decade ago (UNICEF 2018, 4)

Section 4: Methodology

As noted in the Introduction to this paper in Section 1, the study aims to further understandings of drivers for the declining child sex ratio using the bordering conceptual framework. To do this, the paper investigates grassroots perceptions of how women and girls value themselves as well as how they are valued within the norms that underpin the perceptions of gender in the Indian society. The study also examines people's views on foeticide. As also pointed in the Introduction, this research is part of a larger evaluation of 'Save the Girl Child' project launched in 2012 by an NGO Child Reach India (CRI) to combat the declining sex ratio trend in the community in Hisaar in the state of Haryana. The CRI initiative aims to do this by engaging in a strategy that can bring about attitudinal shifts toward women in the community and increase the value placed upon girls and women in the communities targeted by the project.

The work of CRI focuses on empowering the girls and women and creating a social environment that respects an individual's right to birth. It does so through a range of activities within a multi-stakeholder approach that considers all members of the community as stakeholders - adolescent girls and boys, mothers, mothers-in-law, young and older men as well as key community persons. Local government, educators and health providers are also engaged in a variety of ways, particularly for advocacy and service provision purposes.

Data for the evaluation, while rooted in the relevant literature and evidence regarding gender issues, in particular, sex selection in India and Haryana state, was primarily collected through individual and group interviews. The respondents included married women, adolescent girls and boys and men, all of whom were participants of the project.

For the purposes of this paper, questions specifically on how women and girls view themselves, how others view them in the community, and grassroots understanding of why foeticide happens *only* are considered here. These questions are:

1. What are the biggest challenges that women face?
2. What do you think are the three most important rights that women have?
3. Why does feticide happen?
4. Are you aware of any legal provisions regarding termination of a pregnancy? If so, what?

Section 5: Findings and Analysis

The bordering conceptual framework (BCF) developed in section 2 is presented in Table 1 below. The responses to the four questions noted above are examined for whether and how these can be understood within the five conceptual pillars of border thinking that define bordering in this study.

Table 1 illustrates that the overall responses of men, women, adolescent girls and boys are grounded in the border thinking discourse with different aspects falling under the specific remits of the five conceptual pillars of the BCF. Thus, the power dimension of the BCF captures early marriage and concerns of rape, molestation and 'eve-teasing' (cat-calling or salacious remarks) as challenges faced by young women. In both issues, 'power over' as an instrument of coercion and domination is robustly evident. In the first instance, through actions of the male members to enforce child marriage, manipulating the powerless girls and flouting the laws. In the latter case, young men exercise power to make lurid and salacious remarks to girls or sexually assault women because of the assumed superior position of men in the society. Similarly, despite higher literacy of women and the legal marriageable age of 18 years, the male members in the family exercise power to take marriage decisions for girls as well as opinionate that there are too many girls in the society contrary to the evidence. The consequences of the declining sex ratio over the last two decades, especially in states like Haryana have manifested in shortage of brides (Raghavan 2015).

The second dimension of the BCF, 'othering' was found to be visible in responses to all of the four questions. Thus, young women found it challenging to continue their education because of being discriminated in the family over boys to access educational opportunities and to do house work. House chores are considered to be girls' main role and something boys should not be doing. Othering of female child is reflected in the strong preference for a male child by over half of men and over a third of women. Additionally, access to health and sex screening decisions are made by or approved by the male members and by women with assumed lesser abilities and cognition.

Table 1: Bordering conceptual framework (BCF)

Dimensions of BCF/field inquiry	Power: instrument of coercion, domination - 'power over'	Othering: notions of inferiority	Epistemic difference: inferior knowledge and ability of the other	Hierarchization: skewed access to resources & opportunities	Differential Inclusion: selective access to opportunities in family
1. Challenges women face	Early marriage Concerns of rape, molestation or 'eve-teasing'	Barriers to education: - discrimination in the family - girls needing to stay at home to do housework	Families don't want a girl child Girls have to do too much work at home Girls' education wasted investment	Dowry, Restriction of movements due to safety concerns, forcing to compromise aspirations and choices	Girls education good for better marriage only Girls not trusted, queried with suspicion if delayed, boys not queried re whereabouts
2. Women's most important rights	Marriage decision: taken by male family members (70%)	Health service access is man's right – only 8% m and 9% w said it is women's right	Equal right to inheritance but stigmatised if invoked	Only 3 % men thought women have a right to contraception and access to reproductive services	Girls' education valued much lower than boys' education
3. Why does foeticide happen	Too many girls	Preference for Male child: 55% men, 34% women said they preferred the first born to be a male	Boys look after parents in old age Boys carry on family name Only boys can perform last rites	Girls are under valued Dowry pressure if there are more daughters	Girls leave after marriage
4. Awareness of legal provisions re pregnancy termination	22% men aware of legal context re pregnancy termination just 8% women aware	Traditions take precedence over legal provisions: experienced male members decide not lesser females	Social norms and belief that place lesser values on female child impede practice of legal provision	Male members approve decision to access and seek support from health providers during pregnancy	Close to half of men & women aware of sex detection technologies & the PCPNDT Act. Men pay illegal service if already have girls

Source: Author's research

Epistemic difference, the third dimension of BCF encapsulates a range of data from responses to each of the four questions. One of the challenges women experienced was the family's wish to not have a female child as she is considered to have lesser value in the society. This is so because of the perceived inferior abilities of women and a poor return on the investment in their education in particular. Further, only a male child can perform duties considered of paramount importance within the social norms, including looking after parents in old age, family name through patrilineality and performing the last rites of the parents. The

significance of these acts in the society further reinforce the superior position of a male child in terms of abilities, knowledge and overall value compared with a female child. Hence, despite having equal rights to inheritance, women were scorned and stigmatised for invoking it on grounds of feeble understanding, greed and breaking up the family.

Hierarchization, the fourth dimension of BCF indicates how resources and opportunities are restricted and made available as per the perceived position of the child/person in the family and the society. The access to opportunities is thus skewed in favour of the child/person with a superior position. Dowry appears as a dominant theme within this domain. Originating from India's historic skewed inheritance laws pre-Hindu Succession Act in 2005, that routinely ended up in disinheritance of daughters, it was considered a means to allow the daughter a share in the parental wealth. Over the years, it is anything but the noted benign mechanism, instead seen as a payment to bridegroom's family in exchange for the daughter's hand in marriage. The dowry amount is likely to be linked with the societal status of the groom's family, his qualifications and his earnings. Despite increasing educational levels of the women and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, traditions of dowry continue. The resources and parental wealth are ring-fenced for the groom's family often posing financial hardships on the girl's family. Additionally, the girls' aspirations are not valued and frequently compromised due to restrictions on movement and financial constraints while boys are supported to achieve their aspirations.

The fifth dimension of BCF is differential inclusion that indicates selective access to opportunities and resources within the family. The data in Table 1 for this dimension shows that while both girls and boys are given the opportunity for education, the girls' education is not valued the same as the boys hence restricting them any additional expenses. Further, the girls' education is seen as more a means to finding a good marriage proposal and the need for additional expenses viewed as a waste, given the girls leave home after marriage. In another domain, while both girls and boys are allowed to meet friends and go out, the girls' do not enjoy the same level of trust from the parents as boys. If a girl is delayed, she is queried about her company, whereabouts and viewed with suspicion. The boys rarely or never experience such parental interrogation.

The overall findings of the CRI project indicate that despite the girls' increasing awareness of their rights and the policy context to protect and empower girls, social norms and traditions appear to slow down the progress. Table 1 captures responses that are shaped by socio-cultural context of the wider Indian society as well as that specific to the communities in Haryana. The responses lend to close mapping with the five dimensions of BCF. This then demonstrates a robust fit with the practice of bordering or bordering practice where the female child or adult is perceived a lesser member of the household and society than her male counterpart. The assumed epistemic asymmetry in this process, which is a manifestation of the normative landscape, leads to othering and differential inclusion of the female. While a female's habitat is within the same bounded space of the household and the larger society as the male member, she does not have access to the same opportunities. This is evident specifically in the restrictions posed on achieving her aspirations as compared with the male offspring. The overall outcomes of bordering a female within the research site in Hissar resonate closely with the colonial and post-independence discourse on gender relations (Vishwanath, 2004; Arnold F, 1998; Anderson, 2012; Bongaarts, 2013; Patel, 2007; Premi, 2001). The normative and attitudinal social context towards gender relations that appear to have only marginally shifted in the last 200 years, continue to place the females at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid within both the micro and the macro constructions of society.

The practice of bordering a female is grounded in the perception of being a lesser member of the household and society than her male counterpart as described above. This bordering practice manifests in natality discrimination using sex selecting technologies in

Haryana and elsewhere in the northern and western states in the country that exhibit lower sex ratios at birth. The Haryana study further corroborates the literature (Patel, 2007) regarding the causes for persistence of foeticide. It draws attention to the superior position of a male child through conventions of the patrilineage, the sons providing for old-age care of parents, only sons allowed to perform the last rites of parents and girls leaving the parental home after marriage. It is these aborted female foetuses that comprise Sen's missing girls as noted in the Introduction and section 3. The normative structure of the society thus denies these missing girls the right to live even before being born.

The following two attitudinal shifts deserve acknowledgement and offer hope for a positive transformation in the society with regards to gender relations. The first is the societal acceptance of educating girls albeit weak in several communities and with a much lower value attached than to boys' education, as substantiated in the Hissar findings. The study further indicated that education was enabling the girls to be aware of their rights regarding marriageable age, further education, access to maternal health support during pregnancy and finding a voice through collective measures to oppose imposition. This could, in turn, offer grassroots resistance to the bordering of females in the society. However, it remains unresolved as to why women's higher literacy has resulted in reductions in mortality and other discriminations but not influenced sex selective abortions (Sen, 2014). Hence, while education has resulted in mitigation of some of the bordering negativities, the preference for a male child remains tenacious. Second, the legal and constitutional rejection of the cultural sanction and social acceptance of destroying a female foetus with ever increasing severities, engagement with the social norms and an effort to improve implementation are positive steps forward.

India's sex ratio, particularly in the northern and western states, in future census data will be a strong indicator of how this generation of girls and boys are able to influence the social norm of male preference for a child.

Application of the bordering conceptual framework to further the understanding of prevalence of foeticide has enabled classification of causes that lead to under valuing of females in the society. These remain the key drivers for the persistence of foeticide and for the flouting of laws. This detailed disaggregation of the female positionality and grassroots understanding of why foeticide happens using the BCF then offers the potential to engage directly with the issue and craft appropriate strategies. Issues of power such as early marriage, sexual harassment, for example, may require a social approach along with stricter enforcement of legal penalties in order to shift the power dynamics. Similarly, perhaps a more intense, targeted hands-on campaign and engagement with the younger generation along with male and female adults to revisit the adverse consequences of the male preference societal norm may have better outcomes for stopping foeticide. The analysis using the BCF thus enables identification of specific societal domains to target instead of a generic women's empowerment policy.

Section 6: Conclusions

The falling sex ratio in India when examined within the bordering discourse, indicates the continuation of othering of the female child since its prevalence in the colonial era. Deeply rooted in the social structures, much of these norms continue to underpin the social context of the post-independence Indian societies that practice female othering in the current times. The field data on female positionality and perceptions of why foeticide persists when disaggregated using the bordering conceptual framework (BCF), demonstrates a close fit with all five dimensions of bordering. Thus, the power dimension of the BCF is present as an instrument of coercion and domination of females by the males, through under-age marriage

of girls and concerns of rape, molestation and 'eve-teasing'. Othering of the female child, the second dimension of BCF, is reflected in data through a strong preference for a male child by over half of men and over a third of women. The third dimension of BCF, the epistemic difference captures the perceived inferior abilities of women, social unacceptance of women to perform duties considered paramount such as the last rites of the parents and a poor return on the investment in their education in particular. Hierarchization, the fourth dimension of BCF captures the skewed access to resources and opportunities of the females in the society as compared with their male counterparts. This often resulted in the girls' aspirations not being valued and frequently compromised while boys are supported to achieve their aspirations. The last dimension of the BCF, the differential inclusion is visible in families where while both girls and boys are given the opportunity for education, but the girls' education is not valued the same as the boys.

This bordering taxonomy enables identification of specific issues and domains that can then be targeted with the appropriate policy rather than a generic policy for women's empowerment. The process also offers potential areas for further research into why the outcomes of improved education of women are becoming visible in addressing some dimensions of bordering but not in the societal norm of preference for a male child.

The outcome of female othering in independent India has increasingly manifested in foeticide. Further, infanticide was practised mostly within the higher castes during the colonial period as per the archival records, but in modern India the caste boundaries are much blurred with regards to foeticide practice (illegally) as evidenced by the falling sex ratio. Colonial and the independent India regimes put in legal provisions to stop the practice. Social and cultural norms are seen to be powerful drivers for shaping female othering, and it was disregard for these that appears to have worsened situation in the colonial times. The feeble engagement with the social norms in modern India can be much strengthened with focused analyses as offered by the bordering conceptual framework.

The 'missing women' of India may continue to be bordered from the opportunity to live unless the social context changes. Efforts into women's empowerment through the education of women and other domains have resulted in some attitudinal shifts, but the societal preference for a male child remains unchanged. Hence, while there is increasing acceptance and support for women's education and the women themselves value their empowered status and aspirations, worryingly these shifts are not reflected in the country's declining sex ratio. The policy and legislative context too have been progressive albeit with feeble track record of implementation. The rigidities of the social tradition regarding the role and value of women in the society appear to be posing the biggest challenge to averting the 'missing women' trend in India.

References:

Anderson, S and Debraj, R. 2012. "The Age Distribution of Missing Women." *Economic & Political Weekly* vol xlviI (Nos 47 & 48):87-95.

Anderson, S., and D. Ray. 2015. "Missing Women: Age and Disease." *Review of Economic Studies* 77:1262-1300.

Anzaldua, G.E. 1999. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Arnold, F., M.K. Choe, and T.K Roy. 1998. "Son Preference, the Family-Building Process and Child Mortality in India." *Population Studies* 52 (3):301-315.

Bongaarts, J. 2013. "The Implementation of Preferences for Male Offspring." *Population and Development Review* 39 (2):185-208.

Carr-Saunder, A.M. . 1922. *The Population Problem: a Study in Human Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford-Clarendon.

Castles, S. , and A Davidson. 2000. *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*. London: Macmillan.

Cohn, B.S. 1987. "Structural Change in Indian Rural Society 1596-1885." In *An Anthropologist among the Historian and Other Essays*, edited by B.S. Cohen, 343-422. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Das Gupta, M. and P.N. Mari Bhat 1997. "Fertility Decline and Increased Manifestation of Sex Bias in India." *Population Studies* 51 (3):307-315.

De Genova, N.P. 2002. "Migrant ''Illegality'' and Deportability in EverydayLife." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:419-47.

Deaton, A. 1989. "Looking for BoyGirl Discrimination in Household Expenditure Data." *World Bank Economic Review* 3:183-210.

Dickemann, M. 1975. "Demographic Consequences of Infanticide in Man." *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 6 (1):107-137.

Dickemann, M. 1981. "A Third Explanation for Female Infanticide." *Human Ecology* 9 (1):97-104.

Dreze, J., and A Sen. 1995. *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Dumont, L. 1980. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. . 1991. "Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison." In *The Foulcault Reader: An introduction to Foulcault's thought,*, edited by P. Rabinow. London: Penguin.

Gaventa, J. 2006. "Finding the spaces for change; a power analysis." *IDS Bulletin* 37 (5):23-33.

Indian Express. 2015. "Dowry Deaths." *Indian Express*. Accessed October, 2018. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/24771-dowry-deaths-reported-in-last-3-years-govt/.

Jha, P., R. Kumar, P. Vasa, N. Dhingra, D. Thiruchelvam, and R Moineddin. 2006. "Low Male-to-female Sex Ratio of Children Born in India: National Survey of 1.1 Million Households." *Lancet* 367:211-218.

Jodhka, S.S. 2015. "Caste on the Hill." *Economic and Political Weekly* 50 (21).

Kumar, K. 2010. "Culture, State and Girls: An Educational Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 45 (17):75-84.

Lukes, S. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. London: Mcmillan.

Malthus, T.R. 1807. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. 4th ed. London: Johnson.

Maslow, A.H. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50 (4):370-396.

Melhado, L. 2011. "Sex-Selective Abortions During Past Three Decades May Explain Absence of Millions of

Girls in India." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37 (2):162-163.

Mezzadra, S, and B Neilson. 2012. "Between Inclusionand Exclusion: On theTopology of GlobalSpace and Borders." *Theory, Culture & Society* 29 (4/5):58-75.

Mezzadra, S. . 2011. "The Gaze of Autonomy: Capitalism, Migration, and SocialStruggles." In *The Contested Politics of Mobility:Borderzones and Irregularity*, edited by V. Squire, 121-43. London: Routledge.

Mignolo, W. D., and M. V. Tlostanova. 2006. "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge." *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2):205-221.

Patel, T. 2007. *Sex-selective abortion in India: Gender, Society and Reproductive Technologies*. New Delhi: Sage.

Premi, Mahendra K. 2001. "The Missing Girl Child." *Economic and Political Weekly* 36 (21):1875-1880.

Raghavan, S. 2015. "There's a shortage of brides in India, and it's a problem." *Washington Post*. Accessed 20 July, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/10/theres-a-shortage-of-brides-in-india-and-its-a-problem/.

Sen, A. K. 1990. "More than 100 Million Women Are Missing." https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/12/20/more-than-100-million-women-are-missing/.

Sen, A. K. 1992. "Missing Women." *British Medical Journal* 304.

Sen, A. K. 2014. "The lost girls: Girls are still aborted in states with more educated women." *The Independent*. Accessed September, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/the-lost-girls-girls-are-still-aborted-in-states-with-more-educated-women-by-amartya-sen-9059544.html.

Srinivas, M.N. 1962. *Caste In Modern India And Other Essays*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House.

Subramanian, S, and A. Deaton. 1991. "Gender Effects in Indian Consumption Patterns." *Sarvekshana* 14:1-14.

UNICEF. 2018. Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Futures. edited by UNICEF.

UNPA. 2016. Pre-Conception And Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act, 1994. edited by Government of India Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund.

VeneKlasen, L, and V. Miller. 2002. *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Oklahama City: World Neighbors.

Vishwanath, L.S. 2004. "Female Infanticide: The Colonial Experience." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39 (22):2313-2318.