In South Asia we are at a critical juncture in the post-colonial history where countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are participating in the hegemonic global capitalist order of production and consumption, whilst also grappling with the rise of fundamentalism(s) on questions of national and group identity, models of development or integration into global capitalism. We see various political and socio-economic forces claiming legitimacy and even superiority of their epistemic traditions. What all fundamentalisms share (including the Eurocentric one) is the premise that there is only a single epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality. It is in this context of multiple-fundamentalism(s) around relations of economic and cultural (re)production in South Asia that we situate the need for ‘Border thinking’.

For Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006:208) “Borders are not only geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic...the very concept of border implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power (e.g. structured by the imperial and colonial differences).” Viewed in this way borders are not an outcome of natural or divine historical processes in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (i.e. in the imaginary of Western and Atlantic capitalist empires). Within the intellectual traditions of thinking/practicing decolonisation we contend that border thinking involves two main tasks. Firstly, it brings to the fore situated, ‘lived’, ‘southern’, ‘subaltern’ understandings of the world (Connell, 2006). ‘Lived’ here is in the sense of the experiences of those who have been excluded from the production of knowledge by ‘colonial’ modernity (Mayblin undated). Secondly, border thinking disrupts taken for granted ‘colonial’ identity categories through which knowledge is produced and organized. Theories that rely on notions of gender, class, race, (as well as nation, caste, religion, ethnicity, etc.) then become problematic because they rely to ascribing essentialist attributes to their members. Cornwall and Lindisfame, (2011:38) say “category creation itself is an act of power,” to change this asymmetrical global colonial power structure the decolonisation project needs to challenge, re-frame and re-order some of these categories of analysis. Understood in this way decolonisation involves an engagement with global times that is no longer premised either on Eurocentrism, modernization theory or other forms of Western universalism, or on Third Worldism, nativism and parochially anti-Western views (Pietrese and Parikh, 1997).

As gender permeates the discourses and enactments of colonization and is an inseparable part of creating ‘others’ through the coloniality of power, the construction and performance of gender and gender relations has been paramount to the process of decolonisation (Schiwy, 2007). This special issue invites contributions to extend and apply the concept of ‘border thinking’ to assess the politics of gender in South Asia. In particular, we want to focus on decolonising knowledge of gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality in South Asia by acknowledging non-Eurocentric sources and geopolitical locations of knowledge production. We want to stress Mohanty’s (2003) proposition of being attentive to borders of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality, while also learning to transcend them and creating an expansive and inclusive vision of gender in modern South Asia.

The goal is not to write a unified theory of gender from Southern sources, but rather to create spaces of theoretical discussion with many more voices and wider and deeper agendas (Connell,
2014:539). This will help recognise the violent gendered history of colonisation, complex post-colonial gender structures, critique of South Asian feminist movements driven by upper-class, upper-caste women and marginalisation of minority women’s voices. Contemporary post-colonial writings of South Asian scholars rarely frame their work in the language of decolonisation, but they are increasingly beginning to write from varied geographic and epistemic locations/sites of knowledge production as well as combining Southern and Northern theories of gender. Phadke et al (2011) conceptualise a radical shift from a politics of safety to a politics of pleasure by demanding that we examine what it means for women’s citizenship to have ‘fun’ in public spaces. While decolonisation is not an explicit project of theirs, Gilbertson (2018) and Chatterjee (2018) attends to the diversity of young feminisms in Delhi, and their implications for understandings tensions within contemporary feminism. In her study of affluent middle class women in Bangladesh Hussein (2018) provides a forceful critique of understanding South Asian woman as a monolithic group oppressed by social structures of poverty, capitalist exploitation, religious fundamentalism and nationalist politics. She highlights these women’s political struggles through the concept of ‘new woman’, a symbolically produced subjecthood which challenges normative practices of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and class; self-constructing their identities as global neoliberal subjects. Hussain’s (2019) study on Muslim girls’ education in the north-east Indian state of Assam challenges the solely cultural explanations of educational backwardness by mapping out the cultural and economic process of normalisation of a gendered, ethnic/linguistic ‘other’ in multi-cultural educational contexts in India, highlighting issues of not only geographical border, but also borders of identity such as class, religion, ethnicity and language.

Given the diversity of issues and histories of gender relation in South Asia, it is impossible to aspire a comprehensive coverage of gender issues at the border of identity categories and epistemic locations in the collection. By focussing on the concepts of ‘border thinking’ we broadly want to ask: How does ‘border thinking’ and decolonisation of feminist theory change the way we think about gender in South Asia? How are modern/colonial constructs of gender sustained and contested in contemporary South Asia? How can we produce gender/feminist theory beyond the North-South divide? In what ways do scholars from the North working on the South (and vice versa) produce epistemic knowledge? In this era of transnational mobility how do we conceptualise gendered modernity? Are there any continuities and discontinuities between concepts of gendered modernity across epistemic locations (geographical or identity)?

We invite papers exploring (but not limited to) the following topics:

- Review of modernity from the borders of race, gender, ethnicity, caste and sexuality
- Reconfigurations of class and gender in national, transnational, and diasporic spaces
- Gendered fundamentalism(s): religious or secular
- Feminist movements, subaltern movements, and transgressive practices, including emerging movements claiming women’s place in public spaces
- Gendered violence
- Development and anti-development perspectives on gender
- Gender and labour in new times
- ‘Southern theory’ (Connell, 2014) or appropriations of ‘Northern theory’ by theorists of the Global South.
- ‘New’ representations of South Asian women in films and popular media in South Asian countries and in the West.
Papers (6000-7000 words) and inquiries should be sent to Nazia Hussein at Nazia.Hussein@bcu.ac.uk or Saba Hussain at S.Hussain.10@warwick.ac.uk by Sunday 30 September, 2018. Decisions will be confirmed by Friday 30 November, 2018.