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WELCOME TO OUR PARTICULARLY EVIL PLACE

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Who's killing the little girls?

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING

by Peter Schwartzman

This article is dedicated to my two lovely daughters, Camellia and Juniper.

What if I told you that nearly 100 million females were deliberately killed in the 20th Century and almost no one knows (or talks) about it?

Back in 1993, while in graduate school, I came across an article in *Scientific American* entitled, "The Economics of Life and Death." Dr. Amartya Sen, its author, wasn't someone who I had been introduced to before, yet his conclusions were striking. (Just a few years later he received the Nobel Prize in Economics.) By analyzing longevity and mortality rates by nationality, gender and race, Sen was able to show that many poor countries are doing as well or better than wealthy ones.

While this conclusion provided direct evidence that "wealth" isn't necessary for the attainment of a relatively high quality of well-being, the more startling statistic came out of Sen's comparison of national population sex ratios (defined as the

number of males divided by the number of females in a population; a birth sex ratio, alternatively, compares the numbers of each sex at birth). Shockingly, Sen suggested that there were nearly 100 million "missing" females in the world. Given that this number is larger than the total death counts of World War I (~15 million) and World War II (~50 million) combined, I was stunned. How could this happen? And, how could so little attention be paid to this matter? More than ten years since my first exposure to Sen, I decided to look into it.

Sex ratios are a bit more complicated than they first appear. Biologically speaking, babies are more likely to be male — "normal" birth sex ratios range between 100 and 107 (males for every 100 females) — but since males are also more likely to die prematurely as infants (especially in the first 6 months) and since men have shorter life expectancies, over time a population will have more females than males. Population sex ratios are normally in the range 94-102. These values are clearly smaller than the corresponding birth sex ratios indicative of the expected shift to more females with time (Banister).

Numbers outside "normal" ranges are a subject of interest to environmental scholars. These thinkers are interested in human population issues in general often from the perspective of the pressure that humans exert on the environment — via resource extraction and waste production —

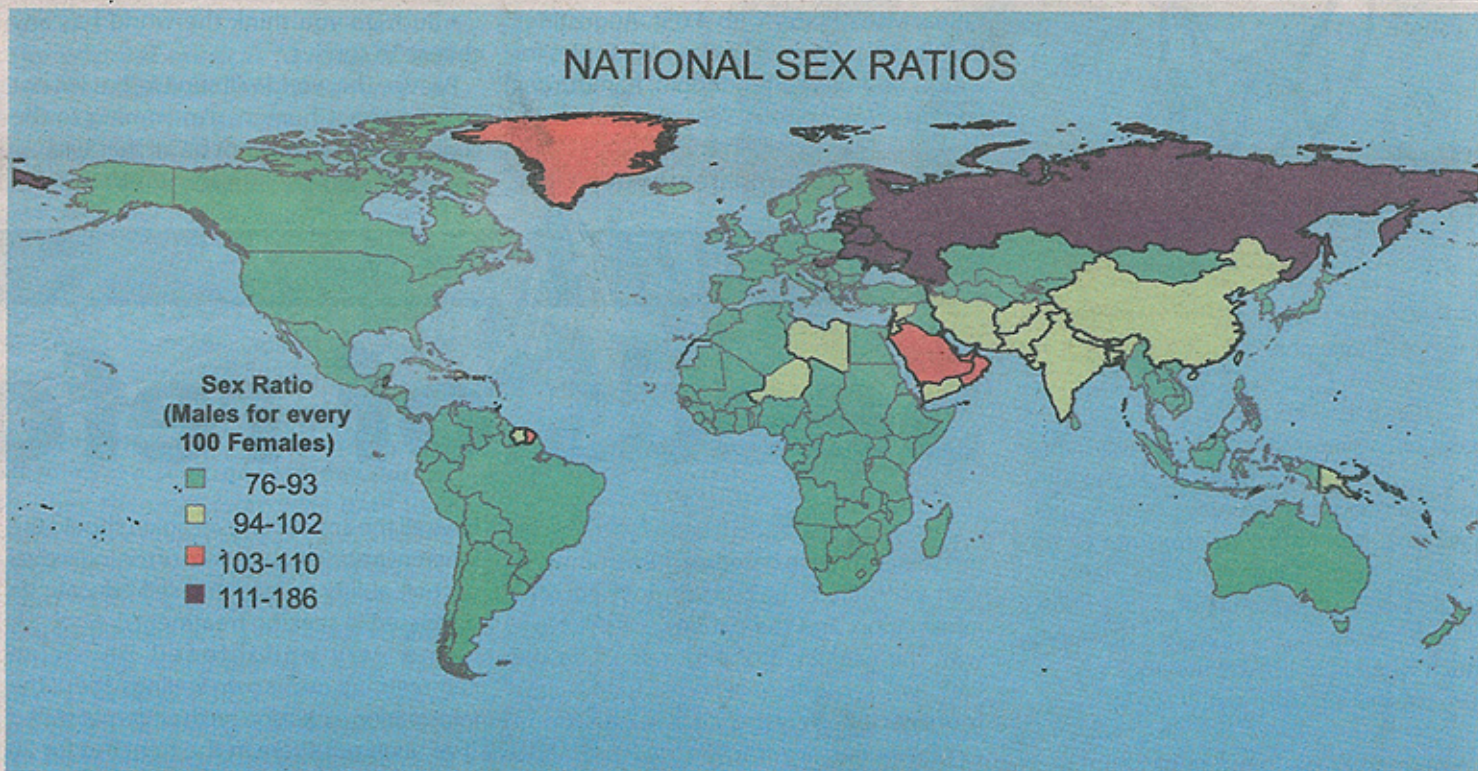
and the humaneness of any attempts to curb population growth. More specifically, they have reason to think that sex ratios can provide valuable information about the health and equality found within a community or nation.

Population sex ratios above 102 (or below 94) indicate that something other than biological factors are involved. Researchers have determined that many nations have sex ratio values deviating from this range,

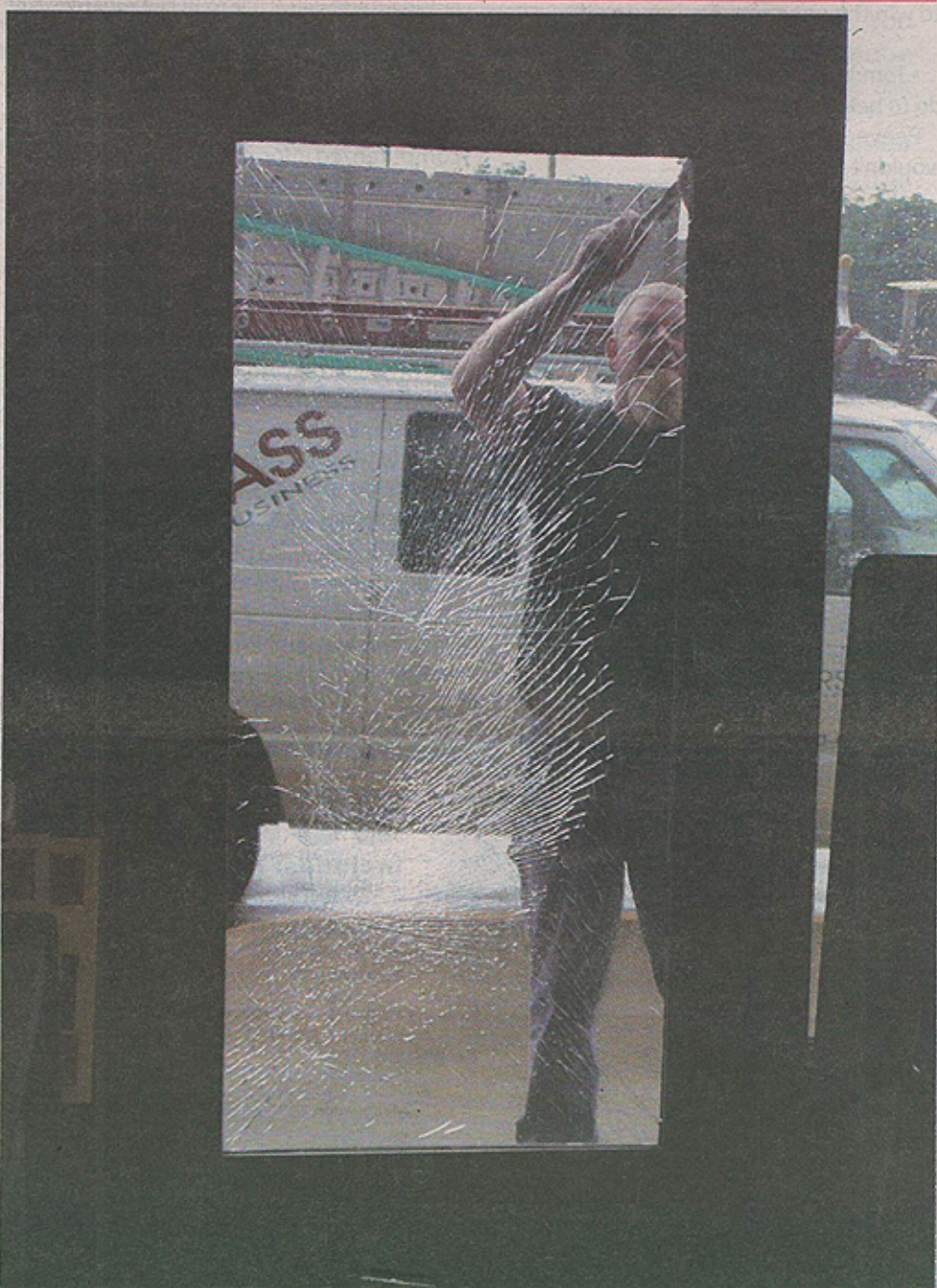
and most fall in the direction of extra males (rather than extra females). These results appear to be driven by cultural preferences for boys (and men) over girls (and women).

What are the specific sex ratio figures for nations that are deviating from the norm? The accompanying figure presents the population sex ratios for the nations of the world (based on data provided by

See SEX RATIOS, page 16



Last week's storm didn't knock out Galesburg's power for any length of time — like it did in St. Louis — but it did some damage. The tree below split and spread across Michigan Ave. and the safety glass on the door of Steve's Smith & Allen Garage sounded like a gun being fired when it shattered.



SEX RATIOS, from page 1

the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency); four categories are included to capture the types of deviation that exist. As shown in the figure, sex ratios vary considerably across nations and the variations have a strong geographic signature. Notice that the countries with the most "male-dominant" ratios are located in the Middle East and include, Saudia Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

While the ratios observed among these nations may be the most lopsided, the nations where females are "missing" from the population in greatest number include the countries of China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. These six Asian countries, where about 43 percent of the current world population currently lives, deviate from "normal" by 68.1 million females (assuming the widely accepted healthy population sex ratio of 96, observed in most of Europe and North America). (In contrast, the six Middle Eastern nations cited above have 2.4 million fewer females than are expected.)

Globally the total number of "missing" women is obviously higher than 68 million since there are many more countries with sex ratios above normal (i.e., 102); there are 60 such countries (out of 221 provided in the CIA data set). As many as 100 million females are "missing." Where did they go? (Caveat: obviously there are many countries — primarily in Eastern Europe and Russia — which have serious male shortages. This appears to be a function of much lower life expectancies for men as a result of alcohol and tobacco abuse — likely exacerbated by recent economic and political turmoil in these nations. Additionally, here in the U.S. we have immediate reason to be concerned about sex ratios when one considers that the number of boy babies born in industrialized nations has been going down recently. Davis *et al.* attribute this trend to environmental contaminants — specifically synthetic pesticides and dioxin.)

Based on the numbers provided and additional scholarly research, there exists compelling evidence that the seemingly innocent social practice of preferring boys to girls has resulted in a silent mass genocide. There have been many studies done recently on this subject and they

have been nearly unequivocal in their conclusions — humans in many countries around the world are reducing the number of female children they have in deliberate and inhumane ways.

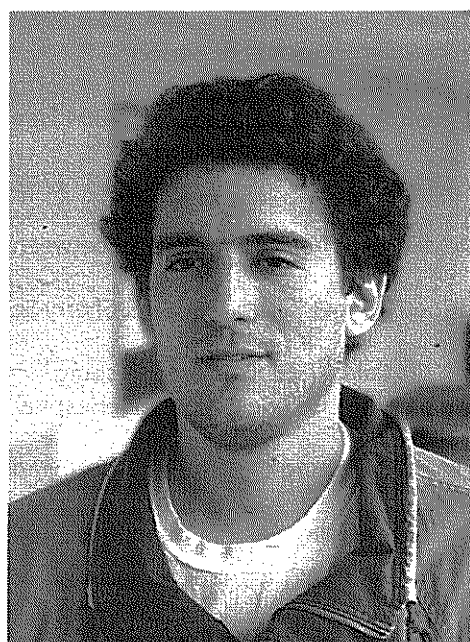
This reduction takes many forms. In China, most "unwanted" girl fetuses are aborted during pregnancy (rather than at birth), a practice that has become fairly routine since inexpensive ultrasound devices became widely available beginning in the 1980s (Hesketh *et al.*).

Infanticide (the deliberate killing of a child after it is born) is still practiced in China but is much less frequent now than at earlier times (Banister).

(When talking about killing females through abortion, I feel obliged to say that I believe all women have the right to choose to have a safe abortion, within the first five months of pregnancy, but I do feel uncomfortable if women are using information about the sex of the future child in making this decision. Using the word "kill" here may be inappropriate depending on what a person's feelings are regarding aspects of abortion. I personally think "kill" becomes more appropriate when an abortion is done because a fetus is determined to be a female. Reasonable people might appropriate a less piercing term. In any case, the responsibility for these deaths clearly goes beyond the specific woman involved, especially when social forces are so strong.)

Fetal sex-selection is also widespread in India as well (despite being illegal for over two decades) (Cosh; Jha). Another factor contributing to the disproportionate number of boys is the neglect that many girls receive in the area of medical treatment and nutritional support. Girls are more likely to remain home despite severe illness and less likely to be fed properly as well. This practice contributes to higher childhood fatality rates for girls. Lastly, girls are much more likely to be given up for adoption, yet these numbers are relatively low compared to other contributors covered here; notice, that nearly all Chinese babies adopted in the U.S. are girls (Pomfret).

(One additional caveat before proceeding: Not much is said here about the Middle Eastern countries that have the greatest disparity in sex distribution. Surprisingly, little is said about this in the literature I



reviewed. Apparently, the sheer size of China's and India's population motivates researchers to investigate these countries almost exclusively. However, initial evidence suggests that similar forces are at work — e.g., discriminate sex-selection — in Middle Eastern nations as well. More research on this question is certainly warranted.)

Why are people "choosing" boys over girls? This preference has historical roots in patriarchal societies the world over. The historical forces that created situations where the economic and social advantage afforded to males have only persisted in many modern nations. China, the country where the number of the "missing" females is largest, is still a patrilineal society where inheritance passes from generation to generation along only male lines. This puts great pressure on people to have sons.

China has had a national policy known as the "One Child" policy since the late 1970s. While a very convoluted law which has been applied differently in rural and urban areas, it has increased the importance of having a male child as a first born (since this may likely be the only child a family will have). Driven largely by economic penalties to those that disobey, the law's presence has coincided with increased sex-selective abortion. Apparently, before the widespread availability and use of ultrasound technology, China went through a period (1953-1964) when girls were found in "normal" proportion; interestingly, as well, this period was preceded by a significant period when female infanticide was quite common in China (Banister). Interestingly, the social forces that promote the reduction in girls seems to wear off once the child reaches 4 years of age because a "normal" life-expectancy is observed for both sexes beyond this point (Bannister).

In India, boy-preference is very strong largely because of the dominance of a dowry system which demands that a marriage of a daughter requires a sizeable financial gift be given by the bride's family to the groom's family. An "innocent" ritual appears to provide a sufficient impetus for promoting the killing of girls (near or at birth).

The deeper one looks into the story surrounding the "missing" females, the more horrific things get. With a relative lack of females in many societies, there is extra incentive for women (and calling most of them women, from a Western standard is a stretch, since many are below 18 years of age) to be smuggled from neighboring countries and bought as wives, concubines, or prostitutes.

In India, wives can be purchased for as little \$1,000 (Sisodia). Women in China are being kidnapped in large numbers as well — "110,000 were freed during a crackdown" in 2000 alone (Pomfret). Male-dominant societies may also fuel militaristic insecurities. In a new book (*Bare Branches: Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population*) put out by MIT Press, two political scientists argue that the surplus of

males in India and China will likely result in a huge build up of their armies which may be sufficient to provoke these nations into aggressive military actions (Glenn).

Given that the sex ratios reported here indicate many sizeable deviations from "normal," might there be a "natural" (biological) phenomenon which may account for them? Two pieces of evidence suggest that the numbers provided earlier are reasonable estimates, albeit a little too high.

Underreporting of Chinese girls, particularly when there exist economic incentives to have only one child, has played a role in creating "missing" females but not one of any great significance (Hesketh), particularly because many males are underreported as well (Pomfret).

A recent study written by Emily Oster finds that Hepatitis B carriers tend to have fewer girls. And since Hepatitis B carriers are found in high percentages in Asia, more boys are being born. This phenomenon may explain up to half of the "missing" females. (At this point, Oster's findings are very controversial and the verdict is still out on their long term relevance.)

There is no doubt that sex ratios deserve much more attention in our society. If tens of millions of girls are being selectively killed or neglected (to the point of death), shouldn't this be a practice that we want to see eradicated?

What can we do about it? I am not sure, but I think spreading the information is a start. Beyond that, perhaps citizens can demand that countries violating human rights should be sanctioned in some way. If things remain as they are, according to Khalid Malik, the U.N. resident coordinator in China, "as many as 60 million more women could be 'missing' from China's population" as early as 2014 (Glenn). Thus, there is no time to lose to get this issue on the front burner and in the minds and hearts of people throughout the world. It is a topic that has gone unrecognized for far too long.

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2nd Annual Galesburg Boys Basketball Golf Outing

Sunday, August 27, 2006
Laurel Greens Golf Club
7 a.m. Shotgun Start

The Galesburg Boys Basketball Program will be hosting its 2nd annual golf outing to help raise funds for the program. Last year was a huge success and fun was had by all. Proceeds will again go to assist with equipment, uniform and travel expenses.

The outing will be a preferred ball event with four-person teams. The fee, which includes 18 holes, cart, catered dinner and a chance for prizes, is \$50/golfer or \$200/team.

Event Schedule

6:30 - 7:00 am Registration
7:00 am Shotgun Start
approx. 11:30 am Lunch/Prizes

Team Registration

Player #1 (captain)	Player #2
E-mail	Player #3
Address	Player #4
Phone	

Please send registration forms (checks made payable to Galesburg Boys Basketball) and payment by August 21st to:

Jeff Houston
111 Ivy Lane
Knoxville, IL 61448

If you have any questions or for more information, please contact Coach Houston at (309) 289-6736 or Eric Smith at (309) 255-8085

Additional forms and golf outing information may be found at www.streaks.org.