

Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture

Bioethics Links

Themes related to gender and ethics form the locus of the December 2016 edition of Bioethics Links. In the lead article, Ms. Anika Khan and Dr. Farhat Moazam write about sessions in CBEC's academic module on Gender and Ethics that focused on developing an understanding of transgender lives. Continuing with the theme of gender, personal narratives by CBEC alumni, Dr. Faisal Khan and Dr. Rubina Naqvi, relate encounters with patients in which gender and culture intersect to create moral conflicts and dilemmas.

Editor

Conversations with transgenders of Pakistan

*Anika Khan and Farhat Moazam**

Pakistani media has been highlighting the plight of transgenders in the country and a number of newspaper reports have appeared recently about widespread discrimination, hostility, and verbal and physical violence towards them. In the recent past transgenders have faced brutal attacks and, denied timely medical intervention, have lost their lives. This attitude towards transgenders rests on a binary understanding equating biological sex to gender and a rigid categorization of female and male, women and men. Any variation from this rigid schema is perceived as a wilful aberration, individuals who choose to live in "unnatural" ways. Pakistani society, including many healthcare professionals, seem unaware of emerging studies which reveal that some individuals can experience gender dysphoria (sometimes beginning in childhood), a condition in which their emotional and psychological identity as male or female is opposite to their biological sex.

The last contact module of CBEC's academic year in December focuses on Gender and Ethics and in previous years it has included an introduction to the complexities of understanding transgenders. This year however, it was decided to expand the module to explore human construction of gender and how this determines an individual's place in

society and her or his access to the public sphere. Connected to this, for the first time, a number of sessions were devoted to help students develop a deeper understanding of transgender as a concept, and its historical, religious, and legal underpinnings. In order to move beyond abstract discussions to lived realities, CBEC invited transgender individuals to meet with the students in flesh, to talk about their lives, to narrate their difficulties and aspirations in their own voices.

The first conversation was a moving encounter with a male transgender who when asked to introduce himself stated poignantly, "You can decide 'who' I am after my conversation with you." *Continued on page 3*



School girls reclaiming public space, Pakistani style!

*Senior Lecturer, CBEC; Professor and Chairperson, CBEC

Hidden Layers

*Faisal Rasheed Khan**

It is ironic how everyday happenings put you in situations that you seem to have mastered and surety can give way to uncertainty. It was one such incident that made me challenge my own understanding of diversity that exists in our society in Pakistan. It was a humid monsoon morning when a tall, well-built man peeped through a small opening in my clinic's door. He walked in hesitantly and silently. The reason for his reluctance became clearer as a young woman walked in at his heels with a shy and reluctant gait. She was clad in *shalwar qameez* with a Balochi shawl wrapped around her. They both appeared to be of Pashtun origin. He wanted a psychological consultation for his daughter who he said had been quiet and withdrawn since many days. The father's anxiety was lessened when I called in a female chaperon and asked him to wait outside while I interviewed his daughter.

At first her manner was evasive with monosyllabic replies to my enquiries. There was definitely something which I was unable to discover that was troubling this lady. As her defenses gradually lessened, she started narrating her ambition to pursue further studies after completing F.Sc (class 12). She told me that she had been a brilliant student throughout her matriculation and intermediate studies in the schools in her village. She had always been highly motivated to pursue higher education despite parental disapproval due to cultural prohibitions against educating women. However her father had been supportive of her with his only condition being that she could follow her desires as long as she did not have to travel outside the village for her studies. That is where the problem began. She now wanted to get admission to a degree college but her father was against this because the University demanded the national

identification card of the mother, a card that had never been made because of tribal norms.

I was flabbergasted at this reasoning or the lack thereof behind such thinking. My immediate reaction was to call the father in and tell him to stop this villainous attitude. I thought to myself that this is the twenty-first century which believes in logic and rationality above all else and this ancient belief was crushing his daughter's ambitions. The young woman sat helpless in front of me, resigned to her fate. She knew that her fate was written, that she could not dare break the norms. As a doctor, I considered it my professional duty to play a part in helping the family by counseling the father to find a way out and allay his daughter's distress.

The father sat in the chair with an imposing, composed manner as I spoke with him. He had an idea about what was brewing inside his daughter's mind. He listened to me. Then with the compassion of a father and the seriousness of a tribesman he started telling his side of the story. They belonged to a Pashtun tribe from Balochistan which did not allow their women to go outside the house alone even when clad in a *burqa* (garment covering the body including the face). Going outside and getting photographed for an ID card would be turning long held traditions right on their head. It was something which was not only socially unacceptable but also a great personal obstacle for him to cross. He said, "Doctor sahib, she is my favourite daughter but I can't go against my family values. I can't dissociate myself from my roots otherwise I will be as broken a person as one can ever be. My vulnerability will lead to the disruption of my entire family."

He spoke with such balance and sensitivity that it became difficult for me to dismiss his account altogether. I could see his fatherly desire to help his daughter but I could also see years of traditional values in *Continued on page 4*

*PGD Alumnus 2014, Assistant Professor, Psychiatry, Al-Nafees Medical College, Islamabad

“Conversations with transgenders of Pakistan” from page 1

Describing a life coloured by rejection and loneliness, he remarked, “No one ever accepted me...I never accepted myself.” Born biologically female, he identified himself as a boy from childhood, a practice that his family initially accepted, perhaps finding it amusing in a very young child. He recalled his shock and feelings of revulsion when his parents asked him to wear a *dupatta* (scarf worn by females) when he turned thirteen. He told them that girls and not boys wore *dupattas* and continued to wear male attire despite his family's increasing antagonism towards what they now perceived as deviant behaviour. He narrated how devastated he felt when he began to menstruate, and that he made four attempts to kill himself over the subsequent years. “Girls always seemed to like me. They felt safe with me. I would accompany them when they went to the bazaar to protect them,” he said with a smile. He recounted his heartbreak at witnessing the marriage of a woman he particularly liked. She was divorced a few years later and he is now taking care of her, planning to find a suitable husband for her. Asked by one of the students why he did not tell her about his feelings for her, he replied sadly, “I have nothing to offer her.”

This session was followed by a conversation with two members of the *Khawaja Sira* community in Karachi. The term *Khawaja Sira* has long roots that can be traced to ancient Jewish, Muslim, Persian and other Middle Eastern civilizations, and referred initially to castrated men who were administrators put in charge of female dwellings. In recent times however the term *Khawaja Sira* within South Asian countries denotes female transgenders who subsist as dancers during celebrations of birth of children, weddings, etc. and are now increasingly turning to begging or walking the streets as sex workers. Social pariahs, they have been deprived of the most basic legal

rights including a national identity card, the ownership of which is a prerequisite to exercising citizenship rights such as voting and inheritance. In 2012, Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that members of the *Khawaja Sira* community are citizens of the country with equal rights to others, and that they be issued national identity cards acknowledging a “third gender” as a legal entity. In practice, however, this ruling is yet to be implemented.

The *Khawaja Sira*, Ms. Bindiya Rana, who interacted with students is a prominent public figure, a well known transgender activist working for the rights of her community. She is also the first from her community to participate in a local election in Karachi (which she lost). In her talk, delivered with flair and caustic humour, Ms. Rana highlighted the social ostracism transgenders continue to face in every facet of their lives including when they approach physicians and hospitals for medical care. She recounted the humiliation they faced when they applied for national identity cards and were asked to undergo medical tests to establish their sex, something no other citizen is required to undertake. In response, the *Khawaja Sira* community protested on the streets and although this condition was subsequently removed, the uphill battle for legal identity and rights for transgenders continues. In Ms. Rana's words, in the preoccupation with male and female we forget *insaniyat* (humanity). She remarked, “We are humans like you.” The second *Khawaja Sira* guest was a young student currently studying for a law degree. She recounted how she left her native town Lahore because of the harassment she faced in college and that she is now studying in Karachi where she is accepted by her teachers.

For CBEC students and *Continued on page 4*

“Conversations with transgenders” from page 3

faculty, meeting the transgender guests was revelatory bringing home an increased awareness of the difficulties faced by individuals who fall outside the circle of what society considers normal. The impact of sitting across the table from transgender individuals and listening to their stories in their own voices was a moving experience. A topic that may seem distant and esoteric became tangible and real when examined through personal narratives of pain and deprivation.

“Hidden Layers” from page 2

his eyes; values that had shaped his life and provided him support. To him, detaching himself from these would be paramount to uprooting his identity and exposing him and his family to an unknown world. With our shirts drenched in sweat, minds trapped in numbness and hearts burdened with emotions, he and I sat there contemplating the options.

This encounter kept re-playing itself in my mind during my drive back home. I acknowledged the naivety and insensitivity that had crept into my dealings while handling a complex psychosocial issue. I now saw myself caught in a dilemma - how to do the best for my patient while simultaneously considering the cultural and traditional underpinnings of the situation. The two cannot be dissociated I thought. They require deeper introspection than our ways of looking at health problems.

**CBEC’s Gender and Ethics Module:
Girls at *Dhabas***



“Girls at *Dhabas*” movement session during CBEC’s academic module on Gender and Ethics, December 9, 2016

“Girls at *Dhabas*” (roadside teashops), is an online feminist movement that has gained visibility in social media in Pakistan and India. The movement aims to reclaim women's access to public spaces where their movement has become increasingly proscribed. In CBEC's December 2016 module on Gender and Ethics, Ms. Sadia Khatri and Dr. Shumaila Hashmi (pictured above) who are members of the Girls at *Dhabas* movement were invited to talk about their endeavors and successes in increasing women’s participation in the public sphere, and to engage in a discussion with CBEC faculty and students.



Ms. Anika Khan presents a token of appreciation on behalf of CBEC to Ms. Rumana Husain

Ms. Rumana Husain, author of *Karachiwala: a Subcontinent within a City* spoke at CBEC's Ethics and Culture Hour on September 3, 2016. Her talk, accompanied by slides of photographs that illustrate Karachi's social diversity, was followed by a question and answer session.

Celebrating International Women's Day

*Rubina Naqvi**

Today it was 8th March; they say it is International Women's Day. While on my way to the hospital this morning I received a message on WhatsApp, "You've got everything...to take the world in your stride. Happy Women's Day!" As usual I reached the hospital and started my routine rounds at the female section of our hospital. During the round, I approached a young woman who was new to the ward. Her age, at a guess, would be 18 to 19 years. She smiled at me though I could see it was hard on her. I smiled back and addressed her with the name written in her case records. I asked her where she had come from and was informed that she came from a small village near a famous town in the interior of the Sindh province. My next question was, "Have you been to school?" and she said, "Never." I discovered that she was the eldest among four sisters and one brother. Her father was a poor man who worked as a cook for the police department in the village.

The young woman was admitted in the hospital because of kidney failure. Talking to her, I found out that she had gotten married a year ago and was her husband's second wife. She was three months pregnant when her husband called a *dai* (local midwife) to abort the pregnancy. He already had six children from his first wife and wanted no more. Over the next two days, the *dai* made several attempts to abort the foetus, before finally declaring "success." By this time this young woman had high grade fever and had completely stopped urinating. She was taken to the nearby district hospital where some injectable medications and fluids were given to her, but there was still no urine output. Doctors at the district hospital finally referred her to our hospital in the 'big city,' labeling her as "kidney failure."

She arrived at our hospital in a state of shock, requiring dialysis on arrival as well as antibiotics and medications to support her blood pressure. An exploratory laparotomy showed that her uterus was gangrenous and there was no option but to remove it, and an ultrasound examination of her kidneys suggested that they were unlikely to recover their function. At the age of 18 or 19, not only had she lost the capacity to become a mother, she would also remain on dialysis for the rest of her life, looking to her relatives for the donation of a kidney. As for dialysis, she would have to travel to a medical centre where it could be done three times per week. Who would be willing to travel to town with her three times every week for her dialysis? I stood by her side, struggling within myself and contemplating the irony of the WhatsApp message: "You've got everything....to take the world in your stride!"



October 2016: The rooftop of a submerged building is just visible on the surface of the Attabad Lake.

In January 2010, a huge landslide in Gilgit-Baltistan dammed the Hunza River, creating a lake that completely submerged the Attabad village. On their way to run an ethics workshop in Gilgit, CBEC faculty photographed the beautifully serene yet deadly Attabad Lake.

*PGD Alumnus 2006, Professor, Department of Nephrology, SIUT

**Collaborative Workshop, CBEC, Karachi and CBMH, Indonesia
October 17 to 19, 2016, Yogyakarta, Indonesia**

The Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture (CBEC) SIUT, and The Centre of Bioethics and Medical Humanities (CBMH) of the University of Gadjah Mada in Indonesia entered into a collaboration to conduct two workshops in their Centres in Yogyakarta and Karachi. This collaboration was facilitated by Dr. Beth Rivin, Adjunct Research Associate Professor, Bioethics and Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle, who is also Visiting Professor at the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta.

CBEC and CBMH are currently the only Centres dedicated to bioethics education and research in their respective countries, Pakistan with a population of 200 million and Indonesia with 250 million inhabitants. The first collaborative workshop between the two, in October 2016, was held in the picturesque city of Yogyakarta. The nine member CBEC delegation included faculty members Dr. Farhat Moazam, Dr. Aamir Jafarey, Ms. Anika Khan, Dr. Bushra Shirazi, Dr. Nida Wahid Bashir and Research Assistant Ms. Sualeha Shekhani. Accompanying them were CBEC Associate Faculty Dr. Saima Pervaiz Iqbal from Islamabad, and CBEC PGD alumni Dr. Mariam Hassan and Dr. Natasha Anwar from Lahore.

The objective of the workshop was for the Centres to learn about each other's experiences in teaching and researching bioethics in two Muslim majority countries with different social, cultural and legal environments. The first day's sessions focused on sharing information about the functioning of each Centre and understanding the scope of each other's activities. The subsequent two days were devoted to hands-on sessions in which CBEC faculty and alumni described their experiences in translating bioethics theory into practice and led animated discussions on research and clinical ethical dilemmas and the

ways in which they are shaped by indigenous values and social and religious systems. Members from CBMH also acquainted the audience about the activities at their Centre, including the development and practice of bioethics curriculum in Indonesia. They also spoke about their aspirations to expand bioethics education within their country. In the closing session of the last day faculty of both Centres met to discuss the content, format, and organization of the second collaborative workshop which will take place in CBEC in Karachi in the first half of 2017.

Each day, academic sessions were followed by cultural and culinary forays organized by the hosts who displayed the legendary Jogja (as Yogyakarta is affectionately called) hospitality towards their guests. One evening the guests were treated to a spectacular legendary Ramayana Ballet at a beautiful Hindu temple. On the second day of the workshop, a 4.00 am trip to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Borobudur Temple was organized to experience the sunrise of a lifetime.



CBEC delegates with their hosts, Dr. Yati Soenarto (seated, first from right) and Dr. Beth Rivin (seated, first from left) at the picturesque site of the Abhayagiri restaurant, set within a Buddhist complex that includes a temple and a hostel.

CBEC graduates PGD students, Class of 2016



PGD (Class of 2016) students: (left to right) Haron Mongare, Saima Naz, Stephen Muhudhia, Aruna Dawani, Muhammad Fayyaz, Saleha Anwar, Abeer Salim, Qudsia Hassan, Fasiha Sohail and Madiha Farhan

In December 2016, CBEC completed its seventh Postgraduate Diploma in Biomedical Ethics (PGD) cycle. In the fourth and final module of the PGD year, ten students gave their written exam and presented their Bioethics Projects to a team of internal and external examiners. Students will implement their Projects (listed below) in their parent institutions in 2017, their first step as teachers of bioethics.

Saleha Anwar

Radiologist, Liaquat National Medical College and Hospital, Karachi

Project: "Introduction of Bioethics to Radiology Residents at Liaquat National Hospital A Series Of Interactive Sessions"

Aruna Dawani

General Surgeon, Ziauddin University, Karachi

Project: "Introducing Bioethics to Residents in Ziauddin University (Clifton Campus)"

Madiha Farhan

Nurse, Patel Hospital, Karachi

Project: "Introduction of Biomedical Ethics to Nurses of Tabba Kidney Institute"

Muhammad Fayyaz

Physician, Pakistan Army, Dera Ghazi Khan

Project: "Introduction of Biomedical Ethics to Physicians & Paramedics at Garrison Medical Centre, DGK"

Abeer Salim Habib

Dentist & Administrator, Patel Hospital, Karachi.

Project: "Introductory Course on Biomedical Ethics for Postgraduate Trainees at Patel Hospital"

Qudsia Hassan

Forensic Physician, Ziauddin University, Karachi

Project: "Introduction of Bioethics to 3rd Year medical students at Clifton Campus, ZU"

Haron Mongare

Administrator, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI), Nairobi, Kenya

Project: "Introduction of Ethics of Research Data Management to Postgraduate Students at KEMRI Graduate School of Health Sciences"

Saima Naz Mohsin

Researcher, Pakistan Medical Research Council (PMRC), Lahore

Project: "Teaching Research Ethics to Medical Laboratory Scientists at Shaikh Zayed Medical Complex"

Stephen Ombok Muhudhia

Consultant Paediatrician, The Nairobi Hospital, Nairobi, Kenya

Project: "Introduction To Clinical Ethics: Lecture Series on Clinical Ethics to Doctors at Gertrude's Children's Hospital, Nairobi"

Fasiha Sohail

Physician, Ziauddin University, Karachi

Project: "Teaching Basic Concepts of Biomedical Ethics to Postgraduate Trainees (Kemari Campus)"

Bioethics Workshop at University of Health Sciences, Lahore September 19 and 20, 2016



Dr. Moazam takes a session during the workshop on research ethics conducted at the University of Health Sciences in Lahore on September 19 and 20, 2016.

CBEC faculty was invited to conduct a workshop on research ethics at the University of Health Sciences, Lahore. In addition to Dr. Moazam and Dr. Jafarey, two PGD alumni from Lahore, Dr. Natasha Anwar and Dr. Mariam Hassan, facilitated this workshop. About 22 people participated in the workshop with a few from a couple of other institutions in Punjab. Participants consisted mainly of basic scientists, with some representatives from clinical and nursing fields. Basic concepts related to research ethics were highlighted with ample use of videos that CBEC has produced. On the second day, the students were given a composite case that they critiqued as IRB members, with Dr. Natasha Anwar role playing the Principal Investigator.

Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture
Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation
5th Floor, Dewan Farooq Medical Complex,
Karachi 74200, Pakistan
Phone:(92 21) 9921 6957

Email: cbec.siut@gmail.com www.siut.org/bioethics

“Reason and Revelation: A monumental philosophical problem” September 3, 2016



Dr. Nomanul Haq leads a discussion on the sources of knowledge at the CBEC Forum on September 3, 2016.

In an interesting CBEC Forum on September 3, 2016, Dr. Syed Nomanul Haq, erudite scholar and professor at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, gave a talk on the sources of eternal truth, using the book *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as a starting point for his discourse. The book was originally written in Arabic in Andalus, Muslim Spain, in the 12th century by theologian and philosopher, Ibn Tufayl. In the book, Ibn Tufayl used the fictional character of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (Alive, son of Awake) born on an island and reared by a gazelle, to discuss a fundamental philosophical question: Is knowledge - whether spiritual or temporal - attained through reason or revelation? According to Dr. Nomanul Haq, this seminal work of fiction has influenced numerous writers and thinkers down the centuries. Its impact is visible in works as diverse as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. His talk was followed by a rich group discussion that explored the tensions between reason and religion, sources of knowledge, and the quest to understand human existence on this planet.