

Karachi Kid

A love letter to mothers and children living behind
an iron curtain

A documentary project through the lens of a father

Kashif Jamal Javaid

Raja - Kakri Ground, Lyari

Raja, what did you do for me just now?

I made a pigeon fly

Can you do it again and in a much faster way to make them all fly?

Yes, they'll fly.

What's the name of this place?

Kakri ground

Let's go make kakri out of these pigeons.

Shukria (thank you) Janab. Yes, let's do it!



Karachi Kid is a documentary project through the lens of a father. In 2019 I returned to Karachi to understand why orphans are often looked down upon and why adoption is illegal in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

I began my exploration at the Edhi orphanages where I spent time with the children. On the first day I didn't speak much. I wanted to honor the sacredness of the suffering these sentient beings have been subjected to. My silence made the kids curious. Once I was accepted, I initiated play.



My opening line was: “Oye gunju kisnay bola?” (Oye, who called me Baldie?) and “Mujko mota kisnay bola!?” (Who called me fat?) I then pointed my finger at each one of them and one by one they said “Nahi” (No) or “Manay nahi bola” (I didn't) until I pointed to this one kid who responded “Haan manay bola” (Yes I called you that). I pretended to be angry in a Charlie Chaplin manner. He smiled and then they all smiled. I chased them down the hallway.

Each day as I was leaving, one particular kid always asked me “Ub kub aao gay?” (When will you visit again?) and I would reply “Kal ayoonga Chotu” (Tomorrow Lil Man). At the end of my last visit, that kid asked again “Ub kub aao gay?” (When will you visit again?). With my back to them, I said “Pata Nahi ” (Don’t know) and tears fell as I walked away. I still ask myself, how can I find homes for all of them? Why do people label them bad? Why is adoption not encouraged?

When my wife and I became parents years ago, I was agonized by a true believer for giving my adopted son my family name. He claimed Islam does not allow it. I was hurt and confused by this religious declaration and the indecency of someone to even make such a hurtful and insulting remark. To my despair, others echoed that the Quran and Sunnah does not allow adoption and that family names cannot be given to a child. This then became my point of departure from Islam and the Muslim community at large. Governed under the Sharia Law, The Islamic Republic of Pakistan does not allow adoption. The law is based on a revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad when he was questioned for marrying his fourth of thirteen wives, Zaynab, the divorced wife of his adopted son Zayad.

The Quran (33:37) So when Zayd had no longer any need for her, We married her to you in order that there not be upon the believers any discomfort concerning the wives of their adopted sons when they no longer have need of them. And ever is the command of Allah accomplished.

With such deep roots, there is hatred towards orphans in Pakistan. Muslims also condemn those from within who choose to adopt.

Even the late Maulana Abdul Sattar Edhi and Bilquis Edhi received numerous death threats for placing baby cots outside Edhi Centers throughout Pakistan. Baby Cots is an initiative that Bilquis Edhi launched when Pakistan had started experiencing a large number of infanticides. Fundamentalists believe that the orphans are a product of zinah (unlawful sexual intercourse) and the Baby Cots initiative to be a further enabler.

In Pakistan, there is an invisible iron curtain behind which women and children are tortured and killed. An unwed pregnant woman is not accepted by her family. Hospitals will not let an unmarried woman abort her fetus unless a Wali (male guardian) is present and approves. Such an abortion is considered an illegal abortion as the father is unknown.

The Quran (21:91 and 66:12) says that Allah blew through his angel into Maryam and she, although being chaste, bore Isa without any father.

I also had discussions with a gynecologist, a community doctor, and a director of news operations of a reputable TV channel. Listening to these front line professionals gave me a deeper understanding of the reasons why this iron curtain looms over the lives of people in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

My name is Abu Haris, father of Haris and this is my truth.

1/25/2022

“There was opposition to the orphanage from the religious hardliners.” - Maulana

“Extremists said by looking after the children, we were encouraging people to have babies outside of marriage. We had so many threats, we still do today.” - Mummy



Edhi Baby Cot - Don't kill, just leave the baby in baby cot. You committed one sin already, why commit a second sin.
Life belongs to Allah.









Happiness is viral. Just look at these kids, not playing but happy.



Putting two and two together. One of the kids at the Methadar Orphanage



Sign in the background reads: Goats for Charity are available. Get them slaughtered in front of you. Reminded me of Isaac.





























Going to prayer hall in a single file led by the Big Brother



Hurry to the prayer. Hurry to the prayer.
Hurry to salvation. Hurry to salvation.
God is Great! God is Great!



I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah



I asked Allah to forgive me. Forgive you for what? Forgive me so that I can go back home.

Quran figure Zayd is a literary construct, says scholar

By Linda B. Glaser | May 27, 2014

Adoption is forbidden in Islam, yet for approximately 15 years Muhammad had an adopted son, Zayd, known as “the Beloved of the Messenger of God.” Zayd was the first adult male to become a Muslim and the only Muslim apart from Muhammad to be mentioned by name in the Quran.

Although Zayd is a little-known and marginal figure in the standard account of the rise of Islam, he was originally a key figure in the Islamic foundation narrative, according to David S. Powers, professor of Near Eastern studies. His new book, “Zayd” (University of Pennsylvania Press, part of the “Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion” series) aims to restore Zayd’s place in history.

Much of Zayd’s biography comprises after-the-fact literary constructions driven by political and theological imperatives, contends Powers, and the figure of Zayd is modeled on characters in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

As a youth Zayd is like Joseph, albeit with a twist: Unlike the biblical figure who welcomed family reunification, Zayd rejected his birth family in favor of his slave master, explains Powers. Just as Dammesek Eliezer, Abraham’s trusted servant, became his master’s surrogate son and heir, after being freed Zayd became Muhammad’s adopted son and heir. Like Ishmael, Zayd was repudiated by his adoptive father. Like Uriah the Hittite, he was sent to certain death on a battlefield in southern Jordan by the man who fell in love with his wife. *And like Isaac and Jesus, Zayd became a prototype of the martyr who gains immortality as a consequence of his willingness to lay down his life for the sake of his God, his prophet and his religion.*

“Zayd may have been a real historical person,” says Powers, “but there is little or no correlation between the historical person and the spectacular figure we read about in the Islamic sources.”

Zayd was absolutely devoted to the prophet who had freed him. Muhammad was equally devoted to Zayd, says Powers: When Zayd wanted to marry Zaynab, a woman above his class, Muhammad helped arrange the marriage. When Zayd later wanted to divorce Zaynab, his father tried to help, but *Muhammad fell in love with Zaynab himself. The ever-loyal Zayd divorced his wife so that his father might marry her. As a reward for this selfless act, Zayd was unadopted – repudiated – by Muhammad.*

The real reason for this story, according to Powers, was to create a pretext for Muhammad to unadopt Zayd, thereby ensuring that Muhammad would be sonless.

Had Zayd continued to be Muhammad’s son, he would have inherited the mantle of prophecy,” explains Powers. *“In order to secure the theological doctrine that Muhammad was not just another prophet but the last prophet, it was necessary to ‘sacrifice’ Zayd – and, along the way, to abolish the institution of adoption.”*

Powers’ research highlights the complex interplay between biblical, post-biblical and Islamic narratives, a subject that is attracting increasing attention from historians of late antiquity.

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Source: <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2014/05/quran-figure-zayd-literary-construct-says-scholar>



Khair Mohammad: Edhi Graveyard, Moach Goth

He told me that infanticide has reduced but still happens.



There are 77,000 graves here. 1,000 to 1,200 infant graves were made within 5 - 6 years.



Most infant graves are washed away in Monsoons.



We don't have a record keeping system. We just put a rock on the grave to indicate it's a gravesite. No one ever comes specially for the infants.



Only once did a young woman come looking for the grave of her child. Based on when the girl had died, Khair Mohammad's son showed her three graves indicating that one must be her daughter's. She got all tree graves built properly to memorialize her daughter's grave with two other unknowns.



Ayra daughter of Samad. Birth 13 August 2014





Khalefa Sajjat: Shrine of Manghopir & Crocodile Sanctuary

Baba Fareed Gungh Shakar gave these crocodiles as a gift to Baba Mungopir. These crocodiles are the remnants of our Sufis. We consider these crocodiles muqaddas (sacred).



Hatchlings have to be removed and raised away from the crocodile pond or else they'll be eaten.

It's every Pakistani's responsibility to serve them and care for them together.

OBGYN: Taj Medical

Taj and Civil Hospital gets a lot of cases with abortions gone wrong at home or by mid-wives. A girl was brought in with her intestines hanging from her vagina. She died.

A girl was brought in by family suspecting she was pregnant. Her brother said, tell me if she's pregnant and I'll kill her here myself right now. The doctor lied and told the family that she has large fibroids and delivered the baby prematurely under a false fibroid removal surgery. Baby was handed to a family from abroad.

A pregnancy out of wedlock is an illegal pregnancy and subsequently an illegal abortion if needed.

It's the lower class that has this issue at large. Lower class also thinks the more the kids, the more earnings they'll bring in as Allah allocates every child's livelihood and well being when they are born. Family Planning has also been attributed to be Anti-Islam - a tactic of the West to eradicate the Muslim race.

Many men want full satisfaction from their wives. Besides majority of men believe condoms are not allowed in Islam.

Most uneducated Phatans keep their wives pregnant constantly. One woman came to Taj Medical to deliver her 13th child.

Even in Middle Class Pakistani families, teenagers aren't allowed to discuss personal matters with their parents. If a girl starts to meet a boy, she knows she can't talk about him at home. Even sex education is stigmatized.



Community Doctor: Liaquat Library Area

At one point there were a lot of infanticides. Babies used to be found in garbage piles. This happened more in the slums. As cell phone cameras and technology became available, such news started to be broadcasted in real time. Also now a lot of people are willing to adopt.

Every time a pregnancy was found to be the reason for sickness, the girls acted shocked and denied it. Families will take them back and try to eliminate pregnancies at home. Once unsuccessful, the girls were brought back to the clinic with bruises specially in the abdomen area.

I cared for five pregnant girls. Arranged an apartment far away from home, each time for nine months. Coordinated with adoptive families and handed over the babies upon delivery. All five were taken abroad and living a good life.

Only once, a girl returned a couple of weeks later to ask how the baby was. I told her that the baby is well and there's nothing else he could tell her.

Our culture is such that when we meet others we intentionally ask questions that will hurt the person's feelings.

After four months, abortion is not allowed in Islam.

No one will knowingly marry a girl who has gotten pregnant without being married. Men here don't even marry widows.



Media in Pakistan has checks and balances from numerous opposing and competing forces. Politicians, Clerics, Army and Rangers; everyone wants their content, their message televised.

Birth Control and Condom Commercials have led to Anti-Islamic protests and riots in the past.

Infanticide, illegal abortion facilities, violence against women and children are very sensitive topics to be on air. Media outlets have been deemed Anti-Pakistani and banned for highlighting these issues.

It's easy to deny and say there is no problem. You can talk to anyone about homeless kids or infanticide, you'll be told that India has more homeless kids and much higher infanticide rate.

Denying and deflecting is easier because if we accept that there is a problem then we'll have to charge those who have committed these crimes. It is not always a boyfriend who impregnated a girl or a prostitute who went to get an abortion. There are many cases in which a girl was raped by her father or a family member or a mullah or a teacher.

Question: Did any woman ever ask for her story to be broadcasted that she was forced by her father and family to give up her child upon birth? Did anyone cry for help for being raped by a family member?

Answer: Such a thing is not permissible in Pakistan as culture doesn't allow it.

Question: If someone comes looking tomorrow, will you help them find their biological mother?

Answer: We will do everything possible.





Nawab (uncle of Subhan): Banaras Colony - Orangi



Nawab told me that Subhan's father is a drug addict and takes away his sister's earnings to buy drugs. Subhan is struggling. He runs away from school and madrasa. Says he doesn't want to be educated.



As I continued talking to Nawab, we realized that Subhan had snuck out, leaving his slippers behind.



Being his maternal uncle, I keep him here with me to protect him from falling in the wrong hands.



Amjad: Lyari

I am a mazdoor, a day laborer. It's black powder from the large bags I carry from delivery trucks into the depot. It will clear up once I shower he said.





How can anyone live without getting married?



Rizwan Abdul Ghani: A fellow day labour on his day off. Look at our working conditions. We don't even know if we'll make money the next day or not. None of us have homes, who will marry us?



Maali Faqir Mohammad: Chawat shop owner, Lyari

Because of encouragement from Dr. Adeeb Rizvi and Dr. Fareeda, my fate changed. With their support, I was able to educate my children, and our quality of life has improved.



Abbas: I have two boys and a girl. Plans to not have more kids. I don't want to create hardship for more children that I can't afford to raise.
Government should reach cities and rural areas to see the desperation of the poor.



Shabir Ahmad, Bolton Market

I had tried family planning but I have two daughters. I am hopeful that Allah will give me one boy and then I'll stop. Son or Daughter, just one more baby and after that I'll stop.



Raam Ji: Kakri Ground, Lyari

He is unemployed and was there with his daughter and son to get food from a nearby Edhi food distribution location. He has five kids. When asked why he thinks there are a lot of homeless kids on the streets, he replied: “I have decided to overlook it and ignore it because I can’t think about it.”



A letter to “The Mother”



By Faiza Javaid
Mother's Day 2019

Today after a lot of thinking and gathering the courage, I am writing this letter to "The Mother" I will always be grateful to. Today we all are celebrating Mother's Day and I want to write a Thank You letter to the mother who made me a mother. Yes this letter is to the biological mother of my son. He is turning 13 soon and I am so thankful to the mother I know nothing about but still feel so close to. Every year around my son's birthday I pray for her, for her health and mental peace. I want you to know your sacrifice was not wasted. Our son is the most precious person in his parent's lives. Without any doubt believe me that part of your body is now a part of my soul. I didn't carry him for nine months in my tummy but I did carry him in my heart way before he came into our lives. He was in my heart when I went through laparoscopies in hope of getting cyst free so I can conceive him, he was in my heart when I went through laparotomy in hope of getting pregnant right away. He was in my heart when I went through three unsuccessful IVF cycles and every time my husband would give me a shot in my tummy with trembling hands. He was in my heart the first time I heard the word "infertility" and I knew I will become a mother one day. He was in my heart when my husband was trying to convince me to adopt and as a mother I was already protecting him thinking what if others do not accept him and it took me two years to realize that no matter what the world will think he will be "mine".

I have no idea about what you went through all this time. I don't even know if you are aware that you gave birth to a very beautiful child - our son. Sometimes I wonder about his facial expressions if he resembles you in any way or if he acts in a certain way that he inherited from you. Trust me I am so grateful for you and all I want you to know how much he is loved, not just by his parents but everyone around him, his grandparents from both sides, his uncles and aunts, his cousins, his niece and nephews. Our son is exactly the child I always dreamt of - A BOY, one mischievous boy full of naughtiness but also caring, kind and generous. He loves me a lot but I love him more. Sometimes when he is sad I wonder if he is thinking about you. Yes he knows that you gave him birth, you kept him in your tummy and I kept him in my heart. I totally understand and respect if he thinks about you. He is a part of you and this makes me realize how beautiful it is to share this bond with you. It is so difficult for a mother to share her son with anyone, even sometimes it is hard to share the child with the father. Yes I do feel left out when my son plays with his father and our whole house gets so loud with their screams while playing tickle bugs (a tickling game they invented). But I am willing to share him with you for the rest of my life as I know I am a mother because of you and there is no way I can take away your motherhood and your relationship with our son.

Happy Mother's Day

Always your grateful!















