

June 29th 2021 | 17:00h



"A 'Sacred' Illness or a 'Life-threatening' Infectious Disease: Measles with Multiple Narratives in Pakistan's Sindh Province"

Online discussion with Inayat Ali

Based on long-term ethnographic research conducted in 2014, this paper focuses on two measles outbreaks that occurred in 2012-13 in Pakistan—particularly affecting Sindh Province—during which thousands of children contracted the virus, and several hundred died. Due to their scale, these outbreaks received significant attention from a complex array of stakeholders—from international to national to regional and local—who enacted their authority and displayed their interwoven yet competing narratives and agendas around measles. For local people, measles is a necessary “sacred” illness and for government and global stakeholders, e.g., World Health Organization, it is a “life-threatening” infectious disease. Focusing on these narratives, I describe and explain local rituals used to deal with measles in Sindh and explore the government/biomedical vaccination campaigns, including local people’s perceptions of these vaccinations. I analyze both as rituals of containment. I ask how various stakeholders—local people, the Pakistani government, and WHO—negotiate these impacts and what factors—e.g., politics, mistrust, structured disparities—lie behind these contestations. I argue that measles outbreaks are, on the one hand, a result of several chronic and syndemic disparities, such as the improper distribution of economic resources, inadequate and ineffective healthcare facilities, and lack of local awareness about the benefits of vaccination. These inequalities occur at local, national, and global levels. On the other hand, measles as an analytical window to the world offers a view into the domain of human relationships, where an interplay between these levels occurs, narratives are formulated, and inequalities are produced and maintained.

The discussion will be held online. Please register via E-mail to sophie.hansal@univie.ac.at and use the following link to participate: <https://univie.zoom.us/j/93072371811?pwd=WDgyQlpWNFREczhYZZNaa2I5UW9qQT09> (Meeting-ID: 930 7237 1811 | Passcode: 246943)



Inayat Ali PhD is a Research Fellow at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria. His doctoral degree is in sociocultural anthropology with a medical anthropology specialization and a geographical focus on Pakistan. His PhD project studied measles and vaccination in Sindh Province, Pakistan. He explores, analyzes, and illuminates the interplay between health, disease, structured disparities, geopolitics, and biopolitics. Currently, he is working on COVID-19 in Pakistan, and on two books (under contract): (a) *Negotiating the Pandemic: Cultural, National, and Individual Constructions of COVID-19*. London: Routledge and (b) *Contesting Measles and Vaccination: Cultural Beliefs, Structured Vulnerabilities, Mistrust, and Geopolitics in Pakistan*. London: Routledge.