Conclusion

I have demonstrated in this book that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan arise from moral anxiety, escalation of interpersonal conflict into collective religious passions, contestation between (and among) state and nonstate actors over the authority to deliver legitimate punishment, and wider narratives of exclusivity and homogeneity engendered by the state. The violence related to blasphemy accusations is thus produced at multiple levels within society, ranging from interpersonal relationships to state policies. Individual and communal sensibilities are cultivated through wider religious and national narratives peddled by religious leaders, politicians and governments over time. State policies and narratives, on the other hand, reflect public concerns about the issue of blasphemy. It is this multiplicity of factors, locales of power and narratives that enflames blasphemy accusations and related violence in Pakistan.

Blasphemy accusations arise within interpersonal relationships disrupted by perceived transgressions of religious-cultural symbolic boundaries. These symbolic boundaries enthrone specific behaviours with respect to social hierarchies of caste, gender, socioeconomic status, religious identity and authority. Micro-transgressions of these symbolic boundaries within everyday interactions can be perceived and framed as blasphemy, but not all transgressions of religious, cultural and social norms lead to an accusation of blasphemy. Instead, familiar but vulnerable people are the ones against whom an accusation of transgressive behaviour gains public support. The accusers are motivated not only by personal rivalries, but also by their concern for displaying and maintaining personal purity. The purity of caste, ancestry, sexual behaviour and religious identity is central to the imagination and articulation of the offence of transgressive behaviour powerfully labelled as blasphemy. In most instances, several notions of purity are superimposed on to one another in perceptions of the offence of blasphemy.

In Pakistan, a nation defined by its religious devotion, the concern for purity is central to the lives of Muslims. This concern is inculcated by the imagining of Pakistan as the 'land of the pure'. While the imagining of an Islamic ideal is central to national identity, in practice, the ideals of religiosity are embedded within local conceptions of purity. Thus, the transgression of local ideals of purity is deemed morally deviant and perceived as a religious offence. Moral deviance can be based on religious difference or other forms of social nonconformity. Hence, it is the moral anxiety concerning individual and communal purity inculcated by national ideals and lived within the local sociocultural context that leads to blasphemy accusations. Blasphemy accusations are, therefore, neither a result of purely instrumental motives (as presented by, among others, Forte 1994; Gregory 2012; Jahangir and Jilani 2003; Julius 2016), nor grounded in a uniquely Islamic ethos (Mahmood 2009). Blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are also not simply the result of an exercise of freedom of speech by the accused to criticise religion, as proposed by Dobras (2009), Hayee (2012) and Khan (2015), among others. Instead, this book demonstrates that accusations of blasphemy are motivated by deep sociocultural understandings of offence and have both strategic and passionate drivers.

Accusations of blasphemy, however, do not automatically or inevitably lead to violent punishment. A certain congruity has to be established between the immediate offence (which may not be exclusively religious in nature) and broader religious symbols and identities. Religious leaders are usually the ones who convert interpersonal conflicts into communal and collective religious issues. Religious leaders are concerned with enhancing their own religious authority and/or the desire to purify their society. They strip the initial accusations of their immediate details and imbue them with wider religious symbolism and meaning. Once the interpersonal dimension of an accusation has been removed and figures of religious authority have established it as a religious offence, crowds are mobilised against the symbolic figure of the blasphemer, who represents the moral threat, the sin and the evil in society. Those who form the crowd are driven by their own moral anxieties about collective and national religious identities. The figure of a blasphemer is the impurity that has to be removed to realise the imagined community of 'the land of the pure'. It is the inherent impossibility of the imagined purity of the religious-national identity that further flames passions against the alleged blasphemer.

Ordinary Muslims who participate in violence are inspired by the dominant religious discourse that presents love for the Prophet as the key to rising in the religious ranks. Most significantly, it is the discourse of Sunni Barelwi religious scholars, who present love for the Prophet and the ability to defend his honour as central to Muslim identity. Loving the Prophet is understood as the only way to salvation by Muslims who are living with the guilt of being sinful. The religious discourse assures them that they will be absolved of their sins if they demonstrate passionate love for the Prophet, which is imagined in terms of physical reverence and bodily performances. This discourse glorifies the acts of killing and/or getting killed for the Prophet as the highest form of attachment to Him. Hence, ordinary Muslims living with a sense of guilt and insufficiency—a modern condition—are the ones who respond to the calls to defend the honour of the Prophet.

Nevertheless, despite the threat the alleged blasphemer poses to the collective identity, and despite the glorification of the act of killing a blasphemer, the implementation of violent punishment is contingent on the decisions of many other actors. Local powerholders, police, government officials, NGOs and the media all play a role in determining whether or not an accusation will lead to violent punishment of the blasphemer. These actors also have their own strategic and emotional interests in the issue. It is a culmination of decisions made by multiple actors with complex motivations that leads to anti-blasphemy violence. This book demonstrates the significance in the making of violence of religious leaders and other key actors (Brass 2003b), symbolic resources and metanarratives (Das 1990; Tambiah 1996), roused passions (Blom and Jaoul 2008; Kakar 1990) and anxieties about identity (Sidel 2006).

The violent punishment of alleged blasphemers can be carried out by state or nonstate actors, both claiming to represent the sovereign will of Allah. Pakistan's existing anti-blasphemy legislation claims to represent Islamic law and popular sentiment by prescribing punishments for those accused of blasphemy. However, owing to the perceived ineffectiveness of the state legal system in delivering abrupt and harsh punishments, and the perceived corruption of the ruling elite, the public does not always accept the state's right to deliver punishment. Alleged blasphemers can therefore be punished by nonstate actors who thus contest the state's claim to a monopoly over legitimate violence. A state of dispersed authority and multiple sovereignties is thus created (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Hansen 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2006). This is best understood

as an instance of legal pluralism (Benda-Beckmann 2009; Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986; Pirie 2013) in which the multiple systems of moral regulation not only contest but also coopt each other. State and nonstate punishments of blasphemers thus draw on the same sources of legitimacy, embedded in the dominant religious discourse and narratives of popular justice.

Within this context, religious leaders, politicians and government officials compete with one another to claim their own authority through support for the violent punishment of alleged blasphemers. Religious leaders-cum-politicians have been at the forefront of campaigns to present the problem of blasphemy as an existential threat to the identity of Pakistan, an avowed Islamic state. Consequently, every politician—religious or secular, conservative or progressive—has to deal with the question of blasphemy in one way or another. It is clear from numerous cases that supporting punishment for alleged blasphemers helps politicians, other public figures and even judges gain legitimacy and authority. It is no wonder that successive governments in Pakistan have spearheaded anti-blasphemy campaigns not only at the national but also at the international level in their efforts to establish themselves as the true guardians of Islam, protecting the honour of the Prophet Muhammad.

The political battles over the issue of blasphemy are enabled by the very foundation of the state of Pakistan on an exclusivist narrative. By claiming to represent the Muslims of South Asia, the will of Allah and Islamic law, the state has opened up a space for the contestation of what these claims mean. The state's attempts to define these ideals to achieve a homogeneous, uniform Muslim community have produced competing claims and widespread anxieties among the people. Within this context, blasphemy becomes one among many expressions of deep concern for the religious-political identity of Pakistan. The competing religious and political narratives about Pakistan's identity have established the issue of blasphemy as an indispensable focus for the state and anyone vying for state power. This contestation engenders greater anxiety among the common people who then engage in blasphemy accusations and violence against those who fall out of line and do not conform to their idealised standards of religiosity and purity. Hence, anti-blasphemy violence is produced at the individual, communal and national levels, interconnected in a complex network of mutually enforcing narratives, ideals and practices. The pervasiveness of the concern about blasphemy is a consequence of interrelated processes of self-making, community-making and state-making.

This study of blasphemy in Pakistan offers insights for broader questions of violence and moral conflict in societies. In particular, I contribute to the discussion in the anthropology of violence (for example, Blom and Jaoul 2008; Das 1990; Hinton 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Schinkel 2013; Sidel 2006; Tambiah 1996) and in the field of legal pluralism (for example, Benda-Beckmann 2009; Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986; Pirie 2013; Rouland and Planel 1994; Tamanaha 2001). Anthropologists of violence have been mostly concerned with the violence inherent to states and imperialist forces (structural violence), the motivations of actors (subjective violence), and the cultural idioms and symbolic resources on which both the immediate agents of violence and the institutions of power draw. This book contributes to this body of literature by providing ethnographic examples of how the subjective and the structural forms of violence are enmeshed and how various systems of meaning (religion, culture, nationalism) offer symbolic resources to the production of violence. I suggest that we look at these systems of meaning as interconnected and mutually reinforcing instead of as separate categories. Thus, instead of asking whether a particular instance of violence is religious, cultural or a result of modern nationalism, we should understand it as grounded in a complex, multilayered system of meaning in which religion, culture and nationalism are inseparable.

The field of legal pluralism has been concerned with the possibilities of the coexistence of multiple systems of moral regulation and legality in societies. I contribute to this body of literature by providing an example not only of coexistence but also of simultaneous contestation and cooptation of multiple systems of morality and justice. Moreover, my study highlights that multiple systems of legality (traditional or indigenous systems, Western legal systems) are not fixed entities. Instead, as in the case of Pakistan, the traditional and the modern/Western legal systems may influence each other in such a way that they both draw on the same sources and are built on similar assumptions. By bringing together the theoretical frameworks of the anthropology of violence and legal pluralism, this book provides an integrative approach to understanding violence and moral conflict in a society. I suggest that we move beyond the dichotomies of emotion/reason, legal/extralegal, traditional/Western and cultural/religious to gain a more nuanced understanding of violent conflict in societies. These dichotomies have dominated the literature for far too long and prevent us from understanding the complexity of motivations and meanings in people's lives.