

Introduction

On 13 April 2017, I was in California for a conference titled ‘Public Life of Injury in South Asia’ at Stanford University. I had flown in from Australia the previous day and the next day I was going to present my paper on the public understanding of nonstate violence against those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan. As I sat in my accommodation making some last-minute changes to my presentation and ruminating over the Stanford University campus that I had visited earlier that day, I heard the terrible news that would forever mark my memory of that trip. At another university campus, in the north of Pakistan, a 23-year-old student had been lynched by his fellow students in broad daylight. Not only that, the lynching was filmed by the participants and videos of it were circulating on social media. I watched one of the videos, despite the graphic content warning. The image of Mashal Khan’s lifeless body being kicked, stoned and lynched as the crowd cheered and chanted slogans made me forget about my presentation. I could not work any further, and I could not sleep that night.

Mashal Khan was a journalism student at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, Pakistan. He was lynched after allegations were made against him of ‘publishing blasphemous content online’ (Akbar 2017a). Just before the incident, the university had announced on its online notice board that Khan along with two other students was under investigation for ‘blasphemous activities carried out’ by them and was banned from entering the university premises (Akbar 2017a). A month earlier, the Government of Pakistan had started a crackdown on blasphemous online content following an order issued by the Islamabad High Court (HRW 2017). However, nothing had been reported to police prior to Mashal Khan’s lynching. After the incident, some screenshots of Facebook comments on a profile displaying Khan’s picture were circulated that were considered insulting towards the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. The Judicial Inquiry Committee that was formed after the incident found

that the said profile did not belong to Mashal Khan and no evidence of blasphemy was found against him (Firdous 2017). The committee also reported that Mashal Khan's murder was premeditated by leaders of the student union, who were threatened by Khan's critique of the university's administration (Firdous 2017). In an interview with a local TV channel only a few days before his lynching, Khan had spoken up against the corruption within the university administration and highlighted the illegal activities carried out on campus (Akbar 2017b). Thus, the judicial inquiry report concluded that Khan's murder was a result of the malicious intentions and rivalry of his fellow students and the university administration (Firdous 2017).

The findings of the report in Khan's case reflect what many analysts, academics and human rights organisations have already pointed out: the instrumental use of Pakistan's blasphemy laws to settle personal scores (for example, Amnesty International 2016; Gregory 2012; HRW 2018; Julius 2016; Siddique and Hayat 2008). However, in Khan's case, the state's blasphemy laws were not even mobilised; instead, members of the public took it on themselves to execute 'justice'. If we ignore state law for the moment and look at blasphemy accusations themselves as a means of settling personal scores, we need to explain why Khan's rivals chose such accusations as *the method* by which to be rid of him. One explanation is that blasphemy accusations are an *effective method* to get rid of one's rivals. Spreading rumours of blasphemy against Khan was indeed effective in mobilising a crowd big enough that the 20 policemen present at the scene could not prevent the lynching (Akbar 2017a). It was efficacious in keeping clerics from leading Mashal Khan's funeral prayers and his neighbours from participating in his funeral (Dawn News 2017). It was also successful in ensuring that the perpetrators of the lynching had support and were later hailed as heroes and lovers of the Prophet (Bibi 2018; Khan and Constable 2018). However, what rendered the blasphemy accusations effective, what enthused the crowd, what inhibited local residents from participating in Khan's funeral and what led to glorification of the perpetrators of violence remain unexplained. It is the power of blasphemy accusations to incite and exalt violence against the accused that I aim to address in this book.

Mashal Khan's case is not the first nor will it be the last of its kind. There were more than 1,500 reported cases of blasphemy accusations and 75 incidents of nonstate killings following blasphemy accusations between 1987 and 2017 (Ahmed 2018). The effectiveness of such accusations

in putting an end to the normal life of the accused, in glorifying the perpetrators of violence and in permitting the disregard of the courts of law when it comes to punishing the perpetrators is a common trend in cases of blasphemy accusations (see, for example, Rumi 2018; Shakir 2015). Even if the accused manages to escape vigilante action, they may spend the rest of their lives in hiding or languishing in prison, afraid that anyone, including the police supposedly responsible for their safety, may kill them at any time (ICJ 2015: 7). Some of the killers of those accused of blasphemy have been turned into saints, have shrines erected in their memory and are revered by masses of devotees (Hashim 2017b). Even if the perpetrators of nonstate violence against those accused of blasphemy are tried and found guilty in court, they are glorified by large sections of the public (Khan 2011: 51–52; Philippon 2014: 290; Suleman 2018: 9). And even when an alleged blasphemer has been proved innocent in court, they will be punished by the public (Amnesty International 2016: 42). There is thus a symbolic power associated with blasphemy accusations in Pakistan that is beyond that of the law. This book explores the meanings that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violent action hold for the perpetrators, their supporters and society in general. More specifically, I am looking for the sources of legitimacy, authority and morality that render blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence not only effective, but also sacrosanct in the eyes of the people.

I argue that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence are not only strategic means to achieve malicious ends, but also *meaningful* phenomena for the social actors involved. By focusing on interpersonal relationships between the accused and the accusers, I contend that such accusations are triggered by perceived transgressions of social hierarchies and religious-cultural notions of purity among people known to each other. Through ethnographic examples, I demonstrate that most accusations are motivated simultaneously by religious-cultural ideals, emotion and personal rivalries. However, once accusations of blasphemy have been made, regardless of the initial motives of the accusers, they quickly escalate into a shared religious concern, inciting passionate responses from a much wider audience of believers living with anxieties about their faith, their religious and national identities and the purity of their society. To the mobilised crowds, the accused becomes a symbolic figure, ‘the impure other’, who threatens national, communal and individual purity. The violent punishment of ‘the impure other’ that follows is, however, not inevitable; rather, it is orchestrated and enabled by various actors motivated by both reason and passion.

Some of these actors are key proponents of ideas of popular justice. By promoting nonstate punishment of alleged blasphemers, the agents of popular justice contest the state's sole authority over legitimate violence and its sovereignty in representing Islamic ideals. I argue that blasphemy-related violence is political contestation through which the state's interpretation and implementation of justice are challenged by those competing with the state in the shared religious-political sphere. The state and nonstate proponents of justice draw on the same sources of legitimacy and sovereignty in claiming to represent Islamic principles of justice. Consequently, the assertions by proponents of nonstate violence become enshrined in the state's foundations and its laws. This book thus reworks accepted analytical dichotomies of reason/emotion, culture/religion, traditional/Western, state/nonstate and legal/extralegal to extend our understanding of the upsurge of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan.

Background and context

To fully grasp the meanings associated with blasphemy accusations and subsequent violent action, it is pertinent to first understand what it means to blaspheme in Pakistan, who is offended and what are the characteristics of those who offend. I therefore begin by explaining these key concepts below.

What is blasphemy in Pakistan?

Blasphemy—the English word—does not correspond to any of the local language words or terms used to describe religious offences; neither is the word blasphemy used in the legislation concerning religious offences. It is, however, used by lawyers in their discourse and by judges in their official judgements, which are often in English—one of Pakistan's official languages. The word blasphemy is also commonly used by local and international media and human rights organisations. Consequently, this word has become popular among the English-speaking sections of Pakistani society. Nevertheless, given there is no local term that accurately corresponds to the word blasphemy, we must ask: exactly what phenomenon is being referred to when we say 'blasphemy in Pakistan'? To answer this question, I will look at two aspects of the problem: the offence according to the legislation and public understandings of it. Before I discuss the differences between the two, it must be noted that

both state and nonstate understandings of the offence are extensions of each other as the legislation has evolved in response to public demands and has in turn shaped public understanding.

The offence according to the legislation

The offence according to state law is enshrined in the Pakistan Penal Code (1860) under Chapter XV, titled ‘Offences relating to religion’. This chapter comprises Sections 295 to 298; Sections 295 and 298 have three subsections each. Some of the clauses (295, 295-A, 296, 297, 298) were part of British colonial legislation. First codified in 1860 by Lord Macaulay, they were meant to control what were thought to be the emotional and irrational masses of the Indian Subcontinent (Ahmed 2009). Section 295 and Subsection 295-A prohibit *acts* of defiling places of worship and injuring the religious feelings of any person belonging to any religion. Section 296 forbids disturbing religious assembly and Section 297 criminalises trespassing on burial sites. Section 298 criminalises *words* that hurt the religious feelings of others. These clauses were aimed to prevent discord between different religious communities and are seen by analysts as a tool of governance devised to ‘reserve the right for the colonial state to demarcate and govern the boundaries’ between different social groups on the Subcontinent (Saeed 2013: 245). Of these clauses, 295-A was added in 1927 in response to a major controversy after a Hindu publisher published a book allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad (Stephens 2014).

The remaining clauses (295-B, 295-C, 298-A, 298-B, 298-C) were added after the creation of Pakistan, by military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq between 1980 and 1986. These clauses are more specific and protect the religious feelings of Muslims exclusively. They prohibit defiling of the Holy Quran and use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Prophet Muhammad, his wives, family, companions and the first four Caliphs of Islam. The last two clauses (298-B and 298-C) categorically prohibit Ahmadis—who self-identify as Muslims—from calling themselves Muslims, using Muslim names and titles, using any the Islamic practices and propagating their faith. The earlier passages inherited from the British legislation had a consideration for *intent* to hurt religious feelings as a crucial component to them. The later clauses added by Zia-ul-Haq do not consider intent in punishing acts or words that may be deemed

hurtful and insulting to Muslims. The amended legislation also prescribes much harsher punishments, including the death penalty, for the offences described (see the Appendix for the full text of the clauses).

The original legislation was written in English, as is the current Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) because English remains one of the official languages of the state. The English words used in the legislation for the offence being discussed include injuring, defiling, insulting, desecrating, damaging, misusing, posing (as Muslims), outraging and using derogatory remarks. Some of these words—for example, desecrating—do indeed overlap with the meanings of blasphemy according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.¹ Nonetheless, it appears that the phenomenon being talked about is not merely sacrilegious, it is also connected to people's feelings and perceptions. Hurting people's feelings or undermining their perceptions is as significant an offence, if not more so, as hurting the Prophet or other Holy personages. The language of Pakistani law, however, remains vague and does not clearly define *what* is deemed hurtful and insulting (Siddique and Hayat 2008: 359). To better understand the nature and definition of the offence under consideration, it is therefore pertinent to investigate the meanings people associate with it.

The offence in public consciousness

The Urdu terms associated with the offences referred to as 'blasphemy' offer some insights into the public understanding of these offences. I studied a range of sources—religious publications, sermons, political banners and pamphlets, the statements of accusers and witnesses in the courts—to trace the words and phrases most commonly used to refer to the offences concerning religion and other related fields. The most recurrent words and phrases people use are: *gustaakhi*, *bey-hurmati*, *tauheen-e-risaalat*, *namoos-e-risaalat*, *shaan-e-rasool*, *hurmat-e-rasool*, *ghayoor*, *ghairatmand* and other derivatives of these terms (see Table 1 for a summary of literal meanings).²

1 'Blasphemy', in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is defined as: 'The action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk'.

2 Translations of all foreign words in this book are my own unless otherwise specified. Translations of Urdu words and phrases used by others I quote in this book are also mine (presented inside square brackets within the quotes).

Table 1. Frequently used Urdu terms in relation to the offence of blasphemy and their meanings

Urdu term	Meaning
<i>Gustaakhi</i>	Irreverence
<i>Bey-hurmati</i>	Sacrilege
<i>Tauheen-e-risaalat</i>	Insult to the Prophet
<i>Namoos-e-risaalat</i>	Honour of the Prophet
<i>Shaan-e-rasool</i>	Grace/pride of the Prophet
<i>Hurmat-e-rasool</i>	Sanctity of the Prophet
<i>Ghayoor/ghairatmand</i>	Honourable

Notes: Words in green define the offence; words in blue refer to what is at stake when the offence of *tauheen-e-risaalat* is committed; words in yellow refer to the honour of faithful Muslims who punish offenders.

These terms can be grouped into three broad categories. The first category (shaded green) contains words defining the offence: *gustaakhi*, *bey-hurmati* and *tauheen-e-risaalat*. These are the terms in the local language closest to what I have been referring to as ‘blasphemy’. These three words are used in slightly different contexts: *gustaakhi* is often committed against holy personalities, *bey-hurmati* is usually committed against physical objects and places considered holy³ and *tauheen-e-risaalat* is specifically an insult to the Prophet. Insults to God or to abstract ideas, such as sacred norms related to religion, do not form specific categories (unlike the Western concept of blasphemy in which the immediate connotation is insult to God). This does not mean that the insult to God or to abstract ideas is not offensive; rather, it is most often seen in terms of an insult to either certain personalities (most importantly, the Prophet) or sacred objects or places. There is a hierarchy of insults/offences in the first category, the highest offence being an insult to the Prophet. Insults to other holy personalities and physical objects and places can, however, be described as being in effect an insult to the Prophet and this increases the intensity and seriousness of the offence. The second category of words (shaded blue) refers to what is at stake when the offence of *tauheen-e-risaalat* is committed: the honour and sanctity of the Prophet. Again, other offences can very easily be framed as an attack on the honour of the Prophet—for example, sacrilege of the Quran can be described as an offence against the honour of the Prophet because the Quran was revealed to the Prophet.

3 The reverence of holy objects and places is more a South Asian phenomenon, expressed by South Asian Muslims and other religious communities in South Asia.

The third category of words (shaded yellow) refers to the honour of those faithful Muslims who safeguard holy personalities, the holy objects and the holy Prophet by punishing offenders. Let us now consider some of the specific connotations of each of these terms to understand the sociocultural context of the offence.

Gustaakhi, *bey-hurmati* and *taubeen-e-risaalat* are the words most frequently used to refer to acts and words of disrespect or insult towards Islam and its holy personalities. However, they all have very specific connotations. The word *gustaakhi* usually means irreverence, impudence or insolence. It is most commonly used in the context of hierarchical relations. For example, a father is considered higher than his son and should be approached with certain reverence by his son. Any act or expression not conforming to the expected behaviour of a son towards a father will be termed *gustaakhi*. Given the context of hierarchical relations, *gustaakhi* is more a form of transgression than an insult. The one who commits *gustaakhi* is called *gustaakh*. Nevertheless, *gustaakh-e-rasool* is a common term used to refer to those accused of ‘insulting’ the Prophet, *rasool* being the Urdu word for Prophet.

The term *bey-hurmati* is derived from the word *hurmat*, which means honour and dignity in common usage. The prefix *bey* is similar to the English prefix ‘dis’; the term *bey-hurmati* thus means dishonour or disrespect. *Hurmat* is derived from the Arabic root *h-r-m*, which is considered one of the most ambiguous terms in that language (Marmon 1995: 6). Derivatives of this root have various meanings, including ‘sacred’, ‘inviolable’, ‘forbidden’ and ‘taboo’ (Marmon 1995: 6). Words derived from *h-r-m* may also have rather disparate connotations—for example, they may refer to ‘unlawfulness’ as per Islamic law, on the one hand, and ‘veneration’ of sacred objects on the other (Schick 2010: 69). Thus, the root *h-r-m* refers to sacredness, honour and respect, on the one hand, and to forbidden and illegitimate acts according to Islamic moral principles on the other.⁴ The term *hurmat*, derived from this root, has connotations most commonly associated with sacredness, honour and respect. *Bey-hurmati* thus means sacrilege, dishonour or disrespect.

4 The word *haram* derived from the root *h-r-m*, for example, is used for a man’s wives and other women of the household whose honour and respect must be protected (Schick 2010: 70), as well as for illicit and prohibited acts and foods, such as alcohol, pork and extramarital sex (Adamec 2009). It is used to refer both to women who a man is sexually allowed (his wives, slave girls) and to women with whom sexual relations are prohibited (mother, sister). It is used for sacred sites, such as the house of Allah, Kaaba, in Mecca and for acts that are forbidden inside those sacred sites, such as shedding blood.

Interestingly, *bey-hurmati* of a sacred or honoured entity (space or object) is often caused by approaching it without taking proper ritualistic procedures into account—for example, entering the house of God without ablution—or by crossing certain boundaries prescribed by various religious interpretations. Again, the underlying offence is a transgression of perceived boundaries.

Tauheen means ‘insult’ and *risaalat* means ‘prophethood’ (of the Prophet Muhammad in this context). Thus, *tauheen-e-risaalat* means insult to the Prophet Muhammad. Compared with *gustaakhi* and *bey-hurmati*, *tauheen* has a more direct connotation of insult. It is also the most commonly used of the three terms; however, it is used specifically in relation to the Prophet Muhammad. The term *tauheen-e-risaalat* evokes the strongest of emotions and hence is used to intensify an offence in public discourse even if the original offence is not an insult to the Prophet. The public political discourse concerning the issue of ‘blasphemy’ is centred on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet is thus central to the conception of what people refer to as ‘blasphemy’ in Pakistan, even though most of the offences are not directly against the Prophet. Together, these three terms—*gustaakhi*, *bey-hurmati* and *tauheen*—suggest that the offence being discussed is the insult, disrespect or dishonour of a revered personality, object or order, as well as a transgression of perceived boundaries and hierarchies.

Namoos-e-risaalat, *shaan-e-rasool* and *hurmat-e-rasool* are frequently used to refer to the honour, dignity and respect of the Prophet Muhammad. I have already mentioned the meanings of *risaalat* (the prophethood of Muhammad) and *rasool* (the Prophet). *Namoos* means honour; *shaan* means dignity, grace and pride; and *hurmat* also means honour and respect, as already discussed. While the actual cases of religious offences range from presumed disrespect of printed Arabic words on pamphlets and banners to misspelling the name of Muhammad, the public discourse is centred on the honour of the Prophet. This is because various forms of perceived insults and transgressions can be understood and portrayed, in effect, as insults to the Prophet. For example, an insult to the beard of a Muslim man can be described as an insult to the Prophet since the beard is a symbol associated with the Prophet. Thus, the actual accusations can be quite arbitrary but have the potential to be framed as an insult to the Prophet. Once the offence is framed as an insult to the Prophet, its severity and intensity are increased significantly, and the discourse is built

around the honour of the Prophet. Therefore, it is important to highlight the centrality of the honour of the Prophet as far as the popular meaning and discourse of blasphemy in the local language are concerned.

Honour is an extremely important value in the South Asian culture in general, and even more so in the Punjabi culture where I conducted my research. Honour needs to be maintained, protected and actively reemphasised to establish a man's worth as honourable. A man's honour is usually associated with the standing of the women of the house, and transgressions against one's women are punished through several means, including honour killings of the transgressors. The underlying assumption is that an honourable man is supposed to protect his honour (which is associated with women's sexuality in this case), and as a part of his duty to protect he must punish the transgressors. There are similar reasoning and value systems behind protecting the honour of the Prophet and punishing the transgressors and offenders of the Prophet. It can be argued that the honour of the Prophet is in effect the honour of Muslim men—associated with the Prophet as it is associated with women's sexuality—which needs to be protected.

Ghayoor and *ghairatmand* are two other terms frequently used in the context of religious offences. The word *ghayoor* refers to a person (usually a man) who has due concern for honour, who knows how to protect that honour and is capable of doing so. Hence, a *ghayoor* or *ghairatmand* (synonymous) man will go to any length to defend and emphasise his honour, which in this case is associated with the honour of the Prophet: *namoos-e-risaalat*, *shaan-e-rasool*, *hurmat-e-rasool*. The words *ghayoor* and *ghairatmand* are frequently used to mobilise people to punish the alleged transgressors and to refer to those who have successfully done so. The usage of these words further indicates that it is the honour of the defenders that is under threat rather than the honour of the Prophet. Those who believe in punishing the ones who insult the Prophet do indeed proclaim that the Prophet does not need protection or defending, but being his faithful and *ghayoor* followers, it is the test of *their* faith whether or not they punish the transgressors. They believe that the Prophet is above the attacks and criticisms of people, but as believers, *their* loyalty to the Prophet requires affirmation by punishing offenders.

The public discourse on blasphemy thus highlights two important principles that constitute the meaning and social reality of the phenomenon within the context of the local language: honour and transgression. Why, then, do I use the word 'blasphemy' in this book?

If there was one particular word or term in the local language to describe the offence, I would have defined it first and then used it throughout the rest of my writing. Instead, there are multiple words and terms, each with their specific connotations, none of which captures the whole essence of the offence on its own. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, I choose to use the term blasphemy in this book, as it is a word conveniently understood in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, it should be understood within the context of local meanings I have discussed here. The word blasphemy in this book therefore means disrespect, dishonour and transgression, particularly in relation to sacred persons and objects. While these meanings overlap with and are reflected in the legislation, they cannot be reduced to the same. They incorporate a wider public understanding of morality, which is centred on honour, symbolic social-physical boundaries and hierarchies.

Consideration of the public discourse further highlights that the public meanings associated with the offence are also vague and open to interpretation and manipulation—just like the legal definitions of the offence according to the state. Both aspects (legislative and public meanings) remain imprecise as to *what* constitutes insult, disrespect or transgression. The very vagueness of the relevant legislation as well as of public meanings of blasphemy forms the basis for ongoing contestation between the state and the public—and between various sections of the public—as to what can or cannot be deemed blasphemous. The open-endedness of the meanings of the offence also means that practically anything—from sexual transgressions to mere existence as a member of a minority community—can be framed as a religious offence, as this book demonstrates.

Who are the public?

To whom am I referring with the word ‘public’ when I talk about the public consciousness or the public meanings of an offence? It would be wrong to assume that all Pakistanis agree with the public meanings of blasphemy discussed here. It would also be wrong to assume that all Pakistanis support violent punishment of blasphemers. Who, then, is offended and who believes in punishing the offenders? This question is hard to answer statistically, specifically for those who *do not* support the punishment of blasphemers, because their lack of support can itself be construed as support for blasphemy, therefore inducing silence on their behalf. We can get some clues about the number of those who *do* support the idea of the

offence and the punishment of blasphemers and are politically active in their support. The most recent figures are from the 2018 general elections in Pakistan in which a political party specifically rallying for the cause of violently punishing blasphemers, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), emerged as the fifth-most popular party nationwide and third-most popular in Punjab (ECP 2018). The party bagged more than 2.2 million of the roughly 50 million votes cast in the general election (FAFEN 2018).

The winning party of the 2018 elections, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), had also previously supported the punishment of blasphemers within Pakistan and protested against blasphemy in an international context within the first few weeks of its election (Barker 2018; Crisp and Farmer 2018). The former ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN), which was the runner-up in the 2018 elections, has also supported punishment of blasphemy on various occasions (Zaidi 2017). This does not imply that all supporters of these political parties unanimously support the punishment of blasphemy. However, it does indicate the central importance of the issue of blasphemy in the popular consciousness of Pakistani people such that all major political parties *must* cater to this concern at some point—in one way or another. It is safe to say that there is significant public support for the punishment of blasphemers in Pakistan and that this support is not limited to what some studies describe as radical, extremist or militant religious groups (Forte 1994: 35; Hayee 2012: 51; Saiya 2016). Instead, supporters of anti-blasphemy violence are present in almost all sections of society, and include those who are seen as moderate or progressive Muslims.

Different sections of society support different means of punishment of blasphemers. There are those who support only state punishment of the accused; others support state *and* nonstate punishment. There are also those whose opinions vary on a case-by-case basis. Hence, there are varying levels of concern about blasphemy and multiple positions among the supporters of punishment for blasphemers. Regardless, my research shows that most Pakistanis are offended with respect to their religious and moral beliefs at some point, although varying in their perception of what constitutes the threshold of offence, and most support retribution in one form or another when that threshold is reached. This book is mostly concerned with those who support violent punishment of blasphemers, whether by the state or by nonstate actors.

It must also be noted that there is a growing number of people who sympathise with the accused and the victims of violence. Those who disagree with the violent punishment of the accused are certainly not as organised as the supporters of violent punishment but there are a significant number of such voices. Like the supporters of violent punishment, those who sympathise with the victims of blasphemy-related violence are also present in all sections of society. I have had discussions with people from diverse backgrounds such as those with no formal education, housewives, taxi-drivers, lawyers and university professors who condemn violence against those accused of blasphemy. There are also local activists and organisations that are actively campaigning against blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan. However, those who oppose violent action against the accused have never been able to mobilise in numbers comparable with those who have publicly demonstrated their support for violent punishment of alleged blasphemers.

Who are the accused?

As mentioned earlier, more than 1,500 cases of blasphemy accusations and 75 incidents of nonstate killings following such accusations were reported between 1987 and 2017. To put these numbers in context, it is pertinent to point out that there were only 10 cases reported between 1927 and 1986 under the British-era legislation (Dawn News 2010). The number of accusations has risen sharply since the amendments made to the law by General Zia-ul-Haq (Rumi 2018: 327). However, it should also be noted that these figures do not represent the actual number of incidents, as there are many cases that are never reported or taken to a court of law. Incidents of nonstate violence against those accused of blasphemy have also risen since the amendments to the law (Rumi 2018: 327). In fact, all the killings following blasphemy accusations in Pakistan so far have been carried out by nonstate actors. While the state prescribes the death penalty for various offences related to religion and the courts have sentenced several people to death, none has so far been executed by the state.

In terms of geographical distribution, 74 per cent of all reported cases have been in Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, which is home to 55 per cent of the country's total population (Jacob 2018). However, notwithstanding its large population, Punjab stands out as the most likely locus of blasphemy-related incidents. This is not surprising as Punjab is also the hub of most active religious organisations, particularly

the Barelwis, who are at the forefront of anti-blasphemy campaigns in Pakistan. Barelwis are the largest subsect of the majority Sunni Muslims in Pakistan, followed by Deobandis, Ahl-e-Hadith and various other Sunni subsects (Suleman 2018: 6). Of the 95 per cent Muslim population of Pakistan, Sunnis make up somewhere between 75 and 80 per cent of all Muslims according to unofficial estimates; the remainder are mostly Shia Muslims (Suleman 2018: 6). Rivalries between sects and various groups within each sect are common and are often the basis of blasphemy accusations.

According to data collected by the Centre for Social Justice in Lahore, 46.48 per cent of the 1,549 cases of blasphemy reported between 1987 and 2017 were against Muslims (Ahmed 2018). The data do not differentiate between different Muslim sects, but my survey of individual cases suggests that minority sects, such as Shias, are more likely than others to be accused of blasphemy. Even rivalries between subsects, such as between Barelwis and Deobandis, often lead to blasphemy accusations. More than 50 per cent of all the cases are, however, against non-Muslims, who form less than 5 per cent of Pakistan's total population. Christians, who represent 1.50 to 1.59 per cent of the total population of Pakistan, were accused in 15.4 per cent of the total cases. The most striking figures, however, are for the Ahmadis, who form roughly 0.25 per cent of Pakistan's population but are accused in 33.31 per cent of all the blasphemy cases in Pakistan (see Table 2).

The data for nonstate killings of the accused tell a slightly different story. While Muslims are still the largest group, forming 52 per cent of all the accused killed so far, Christians and Ahmadis make up 31 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively, of the total number of reported killings (see Table 2). These numbers imply that, while Ahmadis are most likely to be accused, Christians are more likely to be killed after an accusation of blasphemy. One potential explanation for this discrepancy may be that Ahmadis generally belong to higher socioeconomic sections of society than Christians in Pakistan, which means they have more resources available to escape vigilante action compared with Christians. Nevertheless, the figures presented so far indicate that religious minorities are disproportionately affected by blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan.

Table 2. Distribution of persons accused and killed by religious identity in Pakistan, 1987–2017

Religion	Total no. accused	Percentage of total accused (1,549)	Total no. killed	Percentage of total killed (75)	Percentage of total population
Muslim	720	46.48	39	52.00	95–98
Ahmadi	516	33.31	9	12.00	0.25
Christian	238	15.36	23	30.67	1.5–1.59
Hindu	31	2.00	2	2.67	1.6
Other	44	2.84	2	2.67	n.a.

n.a. not available

Existing studies and gaps in research

The issue of blasphemy in Pakistan has received significant academic attention in recent years. In this section, I aim to trace major trends in the existing literature and lay out my own theoretical framework for the rest of this book. I will start with literature specific to the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan and move to bodies of more general literature that are relevant to the topic.

Instrumental use of blasphemy laws

As the numbers in the previous section indicate, certain minority groups are disproportionately affected by blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence. The discriminate use of blasphemy laws against religious minorities in Pakistan has been demonstrated—and argued against—by several existing studies of the issue. Many of these studies highlight flaws in the design of, and procedural inadequacies associated with, the Pakistani legislation, rendering both the form and the function of anti-blasphemy laws problematic (see, for example, Forte 1994; Gregory 2012; Jahangir and Jilani 2003; Julius 2016; Rumi 2018; Siddique and Hayat 2008). This body of literature shows that the design of the legislation concerning blasphemy is inherently flawed as it does not take into account the intent of the accused. Moreover, due to a lack of adequate safeguards, the laws lend themselves to abuse against the vulnerable in society. The emphasis of this critique has been on the discriminatory nature of the laws, as well as their instrumentalisation to target certain sections of society, particularly religious minorities. The use of the blasphemy laws against vulnerable

people is a valid issue; however, these studies largely fail to explain *why* certain groups are targeted by blasphemy accusations and *why* accusations of blasphemy—and not of any other offence, for instance, adultery—are instrumentalised to settle personal scores.

There are some exceptions. For example, Rumi (2018: 334) points to the identity of Pakistan as ‘an Islamic fortress pitted against the outsider-infidel’ and draws attention to national narratives that glorify past acts of violence against alleged blasphemers as enabling the present violence in the name of blasphemy. I expand this argument to propose that certain religious minorities and groups are targeted by blasphemy accusations because they represent the face of the *other* and are perceived as a threat to the imagining of the self, the community and the state for Pakistani Muslims. There is a significant lack of literature that looks into microlevel interpersonal dimensions of the issue to understand what leads people to accuse someone of blasphemy and engage in violent action. One noteworthy exception is Asad Ali Ahmed’s (2009) ethnographic work in contemporary Pakistan in which he demonstrates how everyday conflicts between different sects—two subsets of Sunnis, in his case study—find expression in the form of blasphemy accusations. I take this project further by presenting more ethnographic examples of how various conflicts in people’s everyday lives—which may not be religious in nature—lead to blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence. I propose that blasphemy accusations are chosen as *the method* by the individuals involved in making accusations due to the symbolic power of blasphemy embedded in the prevalent religious-national narratives, as Rumi (2018) pointed out.

Freedom of speech and moral injury

Another body of existing studies looks at the (il)legitimacy of Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws in the context of international law, which is binding on Pakistan (see, for example, Bohlander 2012; Dobras 2009; Hayee 2012; Khan 2015; Uddin 2011). The authors of these studies see freedom of expression as an inalienable right of every individual and assess the credibility of the limitations imposed on individuals in the name of religion. They argue that Pakistan’s blasphemy laws violate the principle of universal human rights by allowing and promoting religious violence. Asma T. Uddin (2011), for example, argues that instead of justifying the use of blasphemy laws to silence dissent in maintaining public order, the Government of Pakistan should take responsibility to confront and curtail

violent elements. She asserts that religion, like all other political and/or cultural ideologies, is open to criticism and thus critical views of religion should not be treated as blasphemous. Similarly, Dobras (2009: 360) opposes the Pakistani Government's stance that 'Islamic law supersedes international human rights' and that 'freedom of speech and expression never justify offending religious feelings' (p. 359). While arguing that it is the believer who merits the right to protection, not the religion or belief itself, she relies heavily on the element of 'intent' in any expression. Hence, she contends that 'punishing speech that involves no hateful intent violates freedom of expression' (Dobras 2009: 356). Along similar lines and making a case for freedom of speech and human rights, Bohlander (2012) argues that blasphemy cases and trials in Pakistan constitute crimes against humanity.

The idea of freedom of speech as the basis for understanding blasphemy has been criticised, most strongly by Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad in their work on secularism in Western societies. Asad (2009) argued that the concept of freedom of speech is not neutral; rather, it is a product of the specific historical developments in Western political thought. He also suggested that those in power decide what is allowed under the concept of 'freedom of speech' (Asad 2009: 54). Mahmood (2009: 70), in her essay on Muslims' reactions to Danish cartoons published in 2005, argued that the notion of freedom of speech dismisses the 'moral injury' experienced by Muslims. She described this moral injury as emanating from 'the perception that one's being grounded as it is in a relationship of dependency with the Prophet, has been shaken' (Mahmood 2009: 78). The perceived offence, she argued, was not against a religious commandment but 'against a structure of affect, a habitus, that feels wounded' (Mahmood 2009: 78). I agree with Mahmood and Asad that the concept of freedom of speech is too reductive and Western-centric to comprehend the issue of blasphemy. In fact, the notion of freedom of speech is even more problematic in the case of Pakistan because it assumes that those who are accused of blasphemy are punished for exercising their freedom of speech to criticise the religion of Islam, which is not true in most cases. As already mentioned, blasphemy accusations in Pakistan can be triggered by perceived transgressions that are not at all religious in nature and even by the mere existence of some people as different. Furthermore, as Mahmood (2009) demonstrated, the idea of freedom of speech does not consider moral and affective dimensions that are crucial to understanding how blasphemy is perceived and the reactions it provokes.

Nonetheless, Mahmood's and Asad's critiques also have their limitations when it comes to understanding the issue of blasphemy within the specific context of Pakistan. Mahmood (2009: 89) herself noted that her argument concerned majority–minority power relations in the European context. According to her, Muslims as a minority in European countries are understood through the normative lens specific to Western religious and political thought. In the case of Pakistan, however, Muslims are a majority and their sentiments are recognised and protected by the dominant political and legal structures. Therefore, the moral injury of the *minority* Muslim community in Europe cannot be equated with the moral injury of the *majority* Muslim community in Pakistan, whose religious sentiments are protected by law. There is a different set of power relations in Pakistan in which moral injury to Muslims is not a marginalised phenomenon; rather, it is the dominant mode of social control against those who are deemed to be different or transgressive. Moreover, in most instances of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, it is not the same essentialised religious ethos of the Muslims, as described by Mahmood, that is at stake. While the mobilisation for violent action against those accused of blasphemy indeed revolves around the personality of the Prophet Muhammad and invokes the specific ways of relating to the Prophet that Mahmood discussed, the initial accusations are triggered by a much wider and more culturally specific moral framework.

This book demonstrates how norms related to sexual behaviour, social hierarchy and purity are subsumed within this wider moral framework. Thus, while the ideas of moral injury and the affective dimensions of this injury are extremely important to understanding blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan, the moral system is not as bounded (connected to the Prophet) and universal (shared with Muslims across the globe) as Mahmood's work depicted. In fact, the moral framework of Pakistani Muslims within which the blasphemy accusations take place may be closer to the sociocultural ethos of non-Muslim communities within South Asia than to Muslim communities around the world. Interestingly, as the discussion in Chapter 2 will demonstrate, the proponents of anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan themselves demand their sentiments be recognised as belonging to a unique religious ethos, as argued by Mahmood. Hence, I find that, while Mahmood's argument aligns with the vocalised arguments of those who support anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan, it is not supported by the ethnographic details of individual incidents of such

accusations. My research shows that blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are based on moral injury that corresponds to specific sociocultural moral frameworks rather than a universal religious morality.

A more useful conception of ‘moral threat’ was offered by Hassner (2011: 24) in his description of the hurt felt by Muslims in response to the Danish cartoons. While Mahmood (2009) had located the moral injury experienced by Muslims in the distinct subjectivities enshrined in their Islamic ethos, Hassner (2011: 29) described the same in more general terms of symbolic boundaries such as purity/danger and sacred/profane that are present in all societies and the transgression of which may be perceived as moral injury. The notion of symbolic boundaries encompasses social, cultural, religious and political ideas on which a group draws to distinguish itself from its *others*. From this point of view, any threat to the preconceived notions of the group’s identity (and its purity) can lead to moral injury of the group in question. Hassner used this theoretical framework to study Muslims’ reactions to blasphemous cartoons at a macro level, focusing on several Muslim countries. I also find the framework of symbolic boundaries useful in understanding blasphemy accusations in response to microtransgressions within interpersonal relationships in Pakistan. I demonstrate in this book how the cultural notions of purity/impurity, sacred/profane and the social hierarchies/boundaries based on such symbolic structures enable the blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence to take place.

There are a few other issues in the literature discussed so far that I would like to address. First, there is an exclusive focus on state law in the literature concerning the instrumental use of ‘blasphemy laws’ as well as the studies looking at Pakistan’s legislation within the context of international law. As already mentioned, many blasphemy accusations are not even taken to court, and, so far, all of the blasphemy-related killings in Pakistan have been carried out by nonstate actors. Therefore, any study of blasphemy in Pakistan must go beyond the legislation and its failures. Second, there seems to be a rift between instrumental use and moral/affective responses as explanations of anti-blasphemy violence. The literature that focuses on the instrumental use of blasphemy laws largely ignores the aspects of moral outrage and affective dimensions of the conflict, and the studies focusing on moral injury or moral threat seem to exclude the possibility of the instrumental use of blasphemy accusations. The instrumental use argument seems to be privileging *reason*, whereas the moral injury argument locates the issue within the realm of *emotion*. Admittedly, these

are two different bodies of literature dealing with two distinct contexts: the literature on the cases of blasphemy *within* Pakistan mostly looks at the instrumental use and the literature on the issue of blasphemy in a global or European context focuses on the moral injury of Muslims. Nevertheless, I believe that both reason and emotion—instrumental use and moral threat—are crucial to understanding accusations of blasphemy and related violence within Pakistan.

Beyond state law

The case of Mashal Khan, discussed at the beginning of this Introduction, shows that blasphemy accusations and subsequent violent punishment have legitimacy beyond the law in Pakistan. Pakistan's legal system is not the only, or even the superior, source of authority that legitimises punishment of those accused of blasphemy. There are a few studies that have looked at the wider sociopolitical dimensions of the issue—beyond the laws of the state. For example, Hoffman (2014) analyses the role of social pressure and vigilantism in influencing the outcome of blasphemy cases in Pakistan. He sees the prevalence of violence and vigilantism as the 'extra-legal system of blasphemy law enforcement' (Hoffman 2014: 371). While he acknowledges and emphasises the role of vigilantism and 'extralegal' action, he still sees these phenomena with reference to the blasphemy laws. In seeing vigilante action as a mechanism of blasphemy law enforcement, he assumes that state law is the foremost and ultimate source of authority and legitimacy for violence. Such analyses are based on a law-centric approach that takes the laws of the modern nation-state (a Western category) as the reference point to understand conflict in a society. This approach does not help us understand the wider legitimacy of the punishment of alleged blasphemers delivered outside and beyond the law of the state.

Moving beyond the law-centric approaches, this book investigates the broader understandings of legitimacy, justice and authority among the accusers, killers, their supporters and wider society in Pakistan through the lens of *legal pluralism*. Legal pluralism is a theoretical paradigm based on the premise that any society has a multiplicity of forms of law present within it (Rouland and Planel 1994: 51). Theorists of legal pluralism have argued that Western legal systems and those imposed or inspired by the West are not the only moral systems through which people govern and order their lives (Fitzpatrick 1983; Griffiths 1986). Legal anthropologists

have also argued against law-centric approaches to understanding and engaging with the diverse social-moral systems of people even if they belong to the same ‘class of phenomena’ as modern law (Pirie 2013: 7–9). Hence, the nation-state’s legal system is not the *only* system of authority, morality and legitimacy in a society. There are usually multiple sources of morality and legitimacy within a society, which may overlap, contradict or overtly clash with the state’s legal system at any point (Tamanaha 2001). From this perspective, accusations of blasphemy and subsequent violence against the accused in Pakistan must be seen as situated in a broader public domain of justice, morality and legitimacy rather than simply the domain of state law. I argue that, while state laws reflect and extend public morality concerning the issue of blasphemy, the latter cannot be reduced to state law and legality.

Legal anthropologists have also criticised the exclusive use of the terms ‘law’ and ‘legal’ for the state’s systems of moral regulation as state-centric. For example, Hoebel (1954) argued for inclusion of nonstate systems of moral regulation in the definition of law. According to him, a:

social norm is legal if its neglect or infraction is regularly met, in threat or in fact, by the application of physical force by an individual or group possessing the socially recognised privilege of so acting. (Hoebel 1954: 28)

Other scholars, such as Woodman (1998: 45), understand law as ‘a continuum which runs from the clearest forms of state law to the vaguest form of informal social control’. According to these definitions, the punishment of alleged blasphemers by nonstate actors would be considered a legal and legitimate form of social control in the minds of the proponents of such punishment. While I agree that we should not limit our understanding of law and legality to that of the state, I also find all-encompassing definitions of law more obscuring than explanatory in understanding different positions, conflicts and contestations of moral systems in a society. In this book, I deal with contestations, overlaps and cooptations of multiple ideas of justice, legality and legitimacy. Therefore, instead of describing all of these competing ideals as ‘law’, I will differentiate between different forms of legality as either *state* or *nonstate*.

While legal pluralism is a helpful theoretical tool with which to understand nonstate violence against those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan, it is mainly a descriptive theory. That is, while it helps us understand the causes of and motivations behind nonstate violence without restricting

our analysis to state law, it does not suggest any resolution of the conflict between state and nonstate ideals of justice. There has been a tendency in legal anthropology to idealise nonstate justice systems to some extent—a position that assumes an inherent agreement among all local people about what customary law is (Benda-Beckmann 2009: 50). However, as Harris (1996: 6) argued, ‘it would be romantic to idealise local, customary morality and demonise state law’ because custom is ambiguous:

[O]n the one hand it represents the possibility of acts of violence against women, against ethnic minorities, against those whose actions have offended the local powerholders; on the other hand it invokes local values against an alien and imposing state.

Similarly, as Benda-Beckmann (2009: 50) highlighted, customary or ‘folk’ law is often ‘the law of local elites and/or the senior male population’. In the case of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, the sanction of public morality applies to those who offend local powerholders or religious elites. In such situations, ‘state law is the only defence of subordinate groups or individuals who transgress local moral norms and values’ and ‘the “rule of law” becomes a defence against tyranny’ (Harris 1996: 6). Hence, I use the theory of legal pluralism as a descriptive, but *not* normative, framework. It is not to say that the nonstate justice system is somehow worse—more violent—than the state legal system; rather, the point is to emphasise that it is simply *another* manifestation of violence that is already enshrined in Pakistan’s legal system. The state legal system reflects public morality insofar as it prescribes violent punishment for those accused of blasphemy, but it does not hold a monopoly on identifying blasphemy and delivering punishment. Therefore, while it is helpful to look at the state and nonstate sources of legitimacy and authority, I do not intend to endorse or idealise the existing situation of *legal pluralism* with respect to the punishment of blasphemy in Pakistan.

Beyond the reason–emotion dichotomy

As mentioned earlier, most studies locate the causes of blasphemy-related violence in either reason or emotion. It is either rational actors strategically choosing to instrumentalise blasphemy accusations to settle their personal scores or emotive actors driven by moral outrage rooted in their exceptional religious ethos. My research in Pakistan shows that, in most cases of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence, the

actors are driven by rational and emotive elements at the same time. There are some studies that incorporate both cognitive and emotive aspects in their analyses. For example, Blom (2008) interviewed protestors from an anti-Danish cartoon rally in Lahore in 2006 and wrote about the affective dimensions of their motivations. She suggested that we should look beyond the ‘emblematic figure of an outraged protestor’—what she called the stigmatised Muslim ‘rage boy’—to gain deeper understanding of individual subjectivities (Blom 2008: 1). She argued that participation in anti-blasphemy protests is driven by affect and emotion, cognitive understanding of the situation and public performance of emotions (Blom 2008: 2). She has published similar work on ‘outraged communities’ in the broader context of South Asia that describes ‘outrage’ as a ‘juncture between the moral and the emotional realm’ and argues that ‘instigating, staging, and managing this “righteous anger” is a crucial dimension’ in mobilisation around cultural symbols in South Asia (Blom and Jaoul 2008: 7–8). According to these arguments, affect (bodily or visceral responses), emotion (bodily responses imbued with meaning), cognition (thought processes used to make sense of the world) and morality (shared world views) are all interdependent. Dispelling the reason–emotion dichotomy, Blom and Jaoul write:

Some false dualisms certainly need to be clarified. The first dualism is the debatable opposition between emotions and reason, as if only one or the other could shape behaviour at any one time. This disjunction, inherited from the rational actor perspective, proves to be fragile, because ostensibly any rational calculus also implies a range of affects. (Blom and Jaoul 2008: 13)

In the same vein, studies of collective violence in South Asia and beyond have argued that participants’ motivations lie simultaneously in the realms of emotion and reason. For example, Veena Das (1990: 25) contended that communal violence is both highly organised and emotionally charged. Similarly, Tambiah (1996: 284) and Sidel (2006: 13) have demonstrated in their studies of ethnic and religious violence that the aggressors are usually motivated by both strategic or instrumental goals and emotional attachments to cultural symbols. While these studies focus mostly on collective action, which is an important aspect of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan, they do not deal with the intersubjective experiences leading to blasphemy accusations and driving individuals to carry out punishment of alleged blasphemers. I find the notion that emotion and cognition are mutually constitutive helpful in understanding not only the

collective violence, but also the motivations of individual accusers and aggressors in cases of blasphemy in Pakistan. This book demonstrates that elements of strategic or instrumental use and moral outrage can be found in most instances of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence.

Subjective and structural forms of violence

So far, I have focused on individual subjectivities in the formation of violence. However, individual subjectivity—‘the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power’ (Das and Kleinman 2000: 1)—is also embedded in wider political and economic processes. My arguments in this book are built on the crucial premise that violence is meaningful action within a sociopolitical domain. As Schröder and Schmidt (2001: 19) argued, violence is ‘performed as well as imagined by reflexive, socially positioned human beings under specific historical conditions for concrete reasons’. The performance of violence is necessitated, conditioned and legitimised within given structural constraints. Žižek (2008: 9–15) argued that we are so engrossed in the immediacy of the ‘subjective violence’ (violence carried out by visible subjects) that we effectively ignore the violence inherent in the system, the violence that is not visible because it is *designed* to escape our eyes, the violence he calls ‘objective violence’. Žižek thus described systemic or objective violence as one of the three types of violence he identified—the other two being subjective and symbolic. Schinkel (2013) also gave a similar classification of ‘regimes of violence’, which he called ‘*trias violentiae*’—namely, private, state and structural violence. Both Žižek and Schinkel are concerned with violence inherent in the foundations of the state, in the all-encompassing systems such as capitalism and neoliberalism, and its manifestations within private or visible spheres.

The violence inherent in the ideology and foundation of the state of Pakistan, as well as within the existing structures of power at national and global levels, is of crucial significance to understanding violence related to blasphemy in the everyday lives of common people. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argued that the violence of the everyday/ordinary is not entirely separate from the violence of the extraordinary; there is, rather, a continuum between its structural and its everyday forms. Following this argument, I demonstrate in this book how the structural and the everyday forms of violence not only manifest in each other, but also constantly construct each other in the case of blasphemy accusations

and related violence in Pakistan. I focus on multiple locales of power and authority: the state, religious leaders and local and regional powerholders in intersubjective relationships.

To sum up, in this book, I take the premise that blasphemy-related violence is meaningful at both subjective and structural levels. At the subjective level, the immediate perpetrators of violence are driven by both emotion and reason. The subjective violence is embedded in culturally specific idioms and also reflects interpersonal power relations. The legitimacy of the subjective meanings of violence is not confined to the state legal system; rather, it is based on wider understandings of morality and justice. At the structural level, the violence is a manifestation of the state's claims to represent public morality and shared religious ideals. It reflects the systemic construction of certain cultural, religious and political identities as central to the project of the nation-state. It is also a consequence of larger forces of modernity, globalisation and the neoliberal world order. This book demonstrates how subjective and structural forms of violence enable and reinforce each other.

I borrow from the fields of anthropology of law, anthropology of emotions and affect, anthropology of violence and critical theory to construct my arguments. However, to limit myself to any of these disciplinary categories would be to reduce a complex phenomenon to only a few of its many dimensions. This book looks at collective action and motivational processes, escalation, resolution of conflict in society, statecraft and discursive production of religious-political ideology, processes of self-making and community-building, as well as the wider dynamics of global politics. This is indeed a massive task, as Skoggard and Waterston (2015: 117) put it:

We anthropologists have probably set ourselves up for the impossible: to capture lived experience, emotionality, and perception; small and large-scale interactivity; intimacy; and sociality, power, politics, and ever-changing material conditions of social life without reducing one to the other.

However, this contextualisation and attention to the interconnectedness of various aspects of a phenomenon are what make the anthropological perspective valuable. Keeping that in mind, I aim to study the symbolic power of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence in Pakistan and offer an anthropological perspective to the existing scholarship on the

issue. This book by no means covers the entire breadth and complexity of the problem, but I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussions and provide more ethnographic material on which to build future research.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I, comprising Chapters 1 and 2, describes the broad religious-nationalistic landscape of Pakistan within which blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence take place. Chapter 1 establishes the historical context necessary to understand the problem of blasphemy in contemporary Pakistan. I highlight the processes of self-making, community-making and state-making—from precolonial times to the present day—that have led to the widespread uncertainties and moral anxieties among Pakistani Muslims. The discussion deals with the concepts of modernity, nationalism and globalisation, and their impact on shaping the popular consciousness in Pakistani society. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the current issue of blasphemy-related violence in Pakistan is a product of specific historical and political contingencies. Chapter 2 highlights the prevalent religious discourse and politics that shape public morality around the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan. Through a study of religious publications, sermons and my interviews with religious scholars, I demonstrate how political competition over legitimacy and moral authority affects the positions of religious scholars and politicians on the punishment of blasphemy, and how these positions shape public religious thought amid widespread uncertainty and moral anxiety. The aim of this chapter is to unpack the religious aspect of the issue of blasphemy, as it is the prime justification given by the proponents of violence against the accused.

Part II, comprising Chapters 3 and 4, focuses on the everyday, the subjective and the lived aspects of blasphemy accusations and subsequent violence. Chapter 3 focuses on microlevel interactions between people to demonstrate how everyday conflicts (religious or otherwise) lead to blasphemy accusations. Based on my ethnographic research, this chapter shows that most of the accusations—and subsequent violence—take place among people who are already known to each other. I describe how familiarity and interpersonal power relations are crucial to understanding individual accusations. The aim of this chapter is to understand people's motivations—beyond personal rivalries—in accusing known others of blasphemy and examine the symbolic value of these accusations to those involved. Chapter 4 explains how the accusations, once made, are transformed from interpersonal to communal conflict and how various actors contribute to the making of the violence. The aim of this chapter is

to show that accusations do not automatically—and inevitably—lead to violence and that various actors in addition to the accuser determine the outcome of the conflict once it has escalated.

Part III, comprising Chapters 5 and 6, focuses on the issues of legality and the legitimacy of different forms of punishment for those accused of blasphemy. Chapter 5 demonstrates how the state's claim to a monopoly over legitimate violence is contested by narratives of popular justice when it comes to the punishment of alleged blasphemers. The aim of this chapter is to contest the popular understandings of legitimacy—associated with the state legal system—and demonstrate that wider understandings of morality, justice and authority determine the accepted ways of punishing those accused of blasphemy. Chapter 6 analyses the discourse of two groups that exist at the nexus of the state and the society: lawyers and judges. I present my ethnographic study of a specific group of lawyers who support both state and nonstate punishments of blasphemers. I discuss the sources of legitimacy on which these lawyers draw to construct coherent narratives in which state and nonstate punishments are not dissonant but exist on a continuum of legitimacy. I also discuss the discourse of judges to highlight how they construct the legitimacy of state punishment of blasphemy while also endorsing narratives that glorify nonstate punishment. This chapter shows that state and nonstate systems of justice are not entirely contradictory; rather, they are extensions of each other. The aim of this chapter is to show how state and public morality shape each other and operate in a system of shared sovereignty in Pakistan.

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