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Beyond the Sipahs, Jaishs and Lashkars
Sectarian Violence in Pakistan as Reproduction of Exclusivist
Sectarian Discourse

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: *Pakistan, sectarianism, sectarian violence, identity politics, sectarian discourse, religious violence*

This research project examines sectarianism and sectarian violence in Pakistan between 1996-2005. It represents a departure from the security-focused research on sectarianism and provides contemporary analysis of sectarian violence by contextualising it. This thesis distinguishes sectarianism as an analytical concept from sectarianism as a phenomenon in Pakistan. The existing literature on sectarianism and sectarianism in the Pakistani context is critically examined, and this research is located within that body of knowledge.

In this thesis, sectarian violence is understood as being conducted to reproduce and reinforce exclusivist sectarian discourse. This premise is analysed through the framework of identity formation and identity politics, and spatial understandings of identities.

The study examines the locations of sectarian violence in Pakistan, and analyses the spaces where sectarian identity discourse is enforced and maintained through violence. Consequently, the concept of sacred space and sacred time are analysed as locations of sectarian violence. The contestations of public space by competing identity discourses, and the spatial manifestations of those competing identities are analysed.

This dissertation also attempts to draw out whether sectarian violence is only located within and through the organised sectarian groups, or whether the sectarian violence indicates wider fault lines in the Pakistani society.

Papalle ja Purolalle
To Pappa and Purola

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Abbreviations

ASS	Anjuman-e Sipah-e Sahaba
ASWJ	Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat
ATF	Anti-Terrorism Force
FANA	Federally Administered Northern Areas
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FCR	Frontier Crimes Regulations
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
IJT	Islami Jamiat –e-Talaba
ISO	Imamia Student Organisation; Shia Student Organisation
JUI	Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi; Army of Jhangvi
MNA	Member of the Pakistani National Assembly
NA	Northern Areas
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
TJP	Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan; Jafria Movement Pakistan
TNJV	Tehrik-e-Nafaz Fiqh-e-Jafria
PIPS	Pak Institute for Peace Studies
PPP	Pakistan People’s Party
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal
SMP	Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan; Army of Muhammad

ST	Sunni Tehreek
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan; Army of the Companions of the Prophet Pakistan
SSP	Senior Superintendent of Police
TKN	The Tehrik-e Khatam-e Nabuwat

Glossary

<i>alam</i>	flag, banner
<i>alim</i> (pl. <i>ulama</i>)	learned person; specialist in Islamic legal and religious studies
<i>Ashura</i>	celebration on the tenth day of the religious month of Muharram
<i>bidah</i>	innovation
<i>biraderi</i>	patri-linear kinship networks
<i>Eid Milad-un-Nabi</i>	birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad
<i>fatwa</i>	legal opinion given by a religious scholar
<i>figh</i>	religious jurisprudence
<i>firqah</i>	sect
<i>imam</i>	prayer leader
<i>imambargha</i>	Shia place of worship
<i>jihad</i>	struggle, holy war
<i>kachcha</i> house	mud house
<i>kafir</i>	infidel
<i>Kalma Tayyaba</i>	declaration of faith in Islam
<i>khateeb</i>	orator, person who delivers the Friday sermon at a mosque
<i>khitabat</i>	firebrand sermon
<i>madhhab</i>	school of law
<i>madrasa</i>	a collegiate mosque, religious seminary
<i>majlis</i>	assembly, religious gathering

<i>maktab</i>	part-time religious institution
<i>malang</i>	an ordinary person, tramp or ascetic
<i>matam</i>	mourning that is usually accompanied by breast-beating
<i>maulana</i>	title of respect for a learned religious scholar
<i>mohalla</i>	neighbourhood
<i>Muharram</i>	first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The month of mourning to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain
<i>mujahir</i>	immigrant, refugee
<i>mulla</i>	religious teacher
<i>Naat Khawani</i>	religious poetry recital
<i>namaz</i>	prayer
<i>namazi</i>	person who prays
<i>Namoos-e-Sahaba</i>	the honor of the Prophet's Companions
<i>Nauroz</i>	Persian New Year
<i>nifaz</i>	implementation, enforcement
<i>nikah</i>	marriage
<i>Nizam-e-Mustafa</i>	Islamic system
<i>qom</i>	ethnicity
<i>radd</i>	refutation
<i>Sahaba</i>	companions of the Prophet or those who were alive during his time
<i>shar</i>	mischief
<i>Shuhada-e-Islam</i>	martyrs of Islam

<i>tabarra</i>	the controversial incantation for “condemning” or “cursing” the enemies of the Prophet’s family
<i>tabligh</i>	public proselytizing event
<i>tehsil</i>	an administrative area, sub-division
<i>ulama</i>	men of knowledge, religious scholars; see <i>alim</i>
<i>ummah</i>	community of Muslims
<i>Ushr</i>	tithe or tenth; the land tax levied on the produce of agricultural land
<i>Wafaq</i>	Islamic school board
<i>wajib-ul-qatl</i>	worthy of killing
<i>zakat</i>	obligatory alms that constitute one of the five pillars of Islam
<i>Zuljinnah</i>	refers to the horse used by Hussain in the battle of Karbala

A Note on Transliteration and Translation

I have mostly used John L. Esposito's *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (2003) for the translation of words relating to Islam. Transliterated words are in italics within the text except for those used as a label or a title, such as, Sunni, Shia, Ahmadi, etc. I have generally pluralized words by adding an "s" to the end of the words unless the plural itself is as important or commonly known, such as, *ulama* is the plural of *alim*. The text provides short translations of the words in brackets but only after the first time a word is used. Those transliterated words used can be found in a glossary in the beginning of the thesis for reference.

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Introduction

Learning about Sectarian Violence

I was sitting at the office in Islamabad in October 2003, going through the newspapers of the day, when I first read about sectarian violence. The headlines in all the papers announced the death of Azam Tariq, right at the heart of the capital. Tariq was a member of the Pakistani Parliament (MNA) and a leader of a group called Millat-el-Islamia, an incarnation of an organisation called Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). He was returning from his constituency in Jhang to attend the National Assembly session that day when three attackers intercepted Tariq's car and fired with their AK-47s before escaping in their white Pajero. I had recently started working at the embassy of Finland, my first employment after finishing my master's degree in international conflict analysis. I immediately had the feeling that this murder, an incident of violence, was different to the ones that had filled the newspapers until that day.

I was puzzled by the word *sectarianism*, which I repeatedly read from the reports and analyses of the murder. I must admit, I did not know what that term meant. I was surprised that with my background in international relations and peace and conflict studies, I had never come across the term in the academic literature, conferences, or interactions. Now, this significant killing

was termed *sectarian* in the Pakistani media. In a country with a myriad of different labels for and explanations of violence, this was something new, unfamiliar. It was also interesting that part of the well-orchestrated and planned killing seemed to be the *visibility* of the act, that it was perpetrated during bright daylight, on the busy road connecting Islamabad to Rawalpindi, right in front of the Pakistani government.

After this incident, I started to learn about sectarianism. I wanted to know what the term meant and why it was a relevant description for some of the ongoing violence in Pakistan. This quest for knowledge took me to a long journey of discovery. Learning about sectarianism, as it turned out, was a good way to learn about Pakistan, Islam, and how Islam is lived in Pakistan. Sectarianism, as a phenomenon, is multifaceted and complex, but it is perhaps appropriate that I chose sectarian violence as the focus of my doctoral research. Reading about the murder of Azam Tariq then started a process that has resulted in this thesis, and one could say that it is an unplanned and accidental outcome of an act of sectarian violence.

During the research process, I used the opportunity to learn about sectarianism as a phenomenon more broadly than just the precise focus of the thesis. I reached out to a variety of people, academic and nonacademics, who had knowledge on sectarianism and sectarian violence. I also participated in religious festivals, like the *Ashura*, as well as visited religious sites and madrasas. And as I learnt more, I also got to know more about Azam Tariz; his story seemed to be linked to various aspects of the sectarian

phenomenon. When I researched previous violent incidents related to sectarianism, I discovered that that fateful day in October wasn't the first time Azam Tariq's life had been in danger. In fact, there had been several previous attempts on his life, something that he prided himself with as *badges of honour*, which merely increased his status as an SSP leader. His constituency of Jhang, I soon learnt, was the epicentre of sectarianism in Pakistan if one truly wanted to understand the social organisation and mobilisation around the sectarian agenda. Tariq's personal story also linked the sectarian phenomenon to the madrasa and mosque institutions, as he quickly made his way from a madrasa student to a prayer leader and preacher in the mosque he found in Karachi. His ascension in the ranks of Deobandi, the group—a story closely related to the killings of other sectarian leaders—offered an insight into the internal dynamics of sectarian organisations. And as I was sitting with some local members of Sipah-e-Sahaba in Peshawar and listening to their views, in a small shop selling vinegar, I could hear the echoes of Azam Tariq's rhetoric as they presented their version of sectarian discourse.

Sabar ki baat hai¹

That ambition I have cherished in my mind for more than forty years. I have collected books and materials for it. I have visited places, undertaken journeys, taken notes, sought the society of men, and tried to explore their thoughts and hearts in order to equip myself for the

¹ "It is a matter of patience."

² Later I discovered that there are academic analyses examining this precise reaction. See,

task. Sometimes I have considered it too stupendous for me [...] Then I have blamed myself for lack of courage [...]" (Yusuf Ali, 1934: vi)

It is easy for me to identify with the journey Yusuf Ali took to translate the Quran. Writing this thesis has been a long process—both from the point of view of the learning that needed to happen to be able to confidently say something about sectarianism in Pakistan and of getting the idea for this thesis for it to be completed. During the process, I have lived in four different countries, studied Urdu, taught in the Government College University (Lahore), and had full-time work in promoting understanding and dialogue between Western and predominantly Muslim societies. Carrying this research to different settings and locations has made the period of researching and writing longer, but it has also enabled me to subject my thinking to different audiences, thus contributing to the learning process.

Often when I spoke about my research topic to people both in and outside of Pakistan, I was told sectarianism does not exist. At times this took the form of vehement denial of the existence of sectarianism altogether. Possibly the strong reaction was of my being a Westerner, a white woman interested in the world of Islam through divisions and violence, perhaps not only fitting but reinforcing and confirming the stereotype of the West's understanding of and interest in Islam only as a religion of violence. As summed up by Iftikhar Malik,

The prevalent images of Islam as a violent religio-political ideology, with gun toting hordes of bearded men, chest beating and bleeding mourning crowds of groups of terrorists and suicide bombers engaged in bomb blasts and killing sprees have become pervasive in the Western popular consciousness and elitist discourse. (Malik, 2005: 41)

A common reaction after hearing my research focus was also to insist on the unity of Islam. There are no Shias or Sunnis, I was told, but Muslims. The insistence on unity, instead of discussing the evident differences, felt somehow important, and it seemed like a reaction to something much broader than my personal research process.² There was something else there, too, in the silence and unwillingness to discuss the topic, in the will to deny the phenomenon or religious differences into nonexistence. It seemed that these reactions stemmed not only from a tiredness of the West's fascination of Islam through divisions and violence but also, perhaps more importantly, from processes and contestations that were ongoing within Islam. One discussion I had with some Pakistani academics about my choice of research and the complex phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan resulted in me receiving a present the day after. A Quran translated by Yusuf Ali was brought to me, accompanied with an empathetic appeal: learn about sectarianism and violence, but if you want to know real Islam, read this. Having been in the middle of a research process where the competing narratives on "true Islam" were at the heart of the matter, this was a powerful statement on how those particular people felt about those contestations.

² Later I discovered that there are academic analyses examining this precise reaction. See, for example, Nelson (2006 & 2009).

I also encountered the same denial of sectarianism in the academic literature that claimed sectarianism did not exist in the Pakistani society but was the domain of extremist and violent sectarian groups. The academic literature in peace and conflict studies also often reflected this by focusing on sectarian groups and the violent manifestations of sectarianism, as well as the reasons why the groups, and the violence, had the form they did in today's Pakistan. This thesis did not want to settle with the premise that sectarianism existed only in the minds and through the guns of sectarian extremists. With my research, and analysis, I wanted to go beyond the *Sipahs*, *Jaishs*, and *Lashkars*.

Research Focus

This thesis reflects not only my interest in Pakistan and sectarianism but also the different academic interests I have had as an academic. While studying philosophy of social sciences as a BA student in Finland, I learned about the aesthetics of violence in Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1999), and this powerful book helped me realise that violence is much more than just a method of causing physical harm. While navigating the puzzle that is the Old City of Jerusalem when I was studying in the Hebrew University in Israel, I came across the idea of communication of group identities in locations where the boundaries of those communities are not visible by any concrete demarcating lines or objects. The four different parts of the Old City were not separated by

any physical dividing elements, but the display of symbols belonging to the communities living in the city clearly signalled whose area you had wandered into.

This work draws from the literature on conflict analysis, identity conflicts, and human geography, which I have been interested in during my academic career. Thus the research is explicitly interdisciplinary, drawing from a variety of academic approaches and fields of research in order to incorporate a range of disciplinary perspectives. Sociological studies on identities and their formation, the understandings of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts as well as communal and sectarian conflicts in peace and conflict studies, the field of human geography, and theological and sociological studies in Islam have all contributed to the research.

Very little has been written on sectarianism, particularly in South Asia, in the peace and conflict studies discipline. Moreover, there are only few researchers that have done fieldwork on the topic. The first aim of this thesis is to contribute to the body of literature on sectarian conflicts and violence in the peace and conflict studies and highlight the importance of further understanding of this phenomenon in the discipline. This work also aims to clarify what is meant by sectarianism and sectarian violence or conflict, especially in the context of Pakistan. By engaging with the definition of sectarianism, and attempting to find a functioning analytical definition, this thesis contributes to the academic understanding of sectarianism by creating conceptual clarity of the term. With the research, we have a better

understanding of what is meant exactly when we talk about sectarianism, both as a more general state of conflict or tension and especially as a type of violence used (sectarian violence). The thesis, thus, distinguishes the term *sectarianism* from the phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan. It will first engage with the conceptual analysis of the term, then place it in the context of Pakistan.

The focus of the thesis is to examine sectarian violence in Pakistan as spatialised identity politics. The research talks about how identities are formed particularly in violent conflicts, and by using the concept of *border*, the spatialised forms of identities are then explored. The thesis then talks about the spatial uses of violence and, finally, *locates* sectarian violence in Pakistan through an analysis of the data collected.

Research of political Islam is currently very high profile and widely followed, both in media and in academia. This study will not join the branch of that research that has received the most media coverage i.e., of radical Islam or Islamic fundamentalism, since it focuses more on continuous, long-term political identification and the use of violence related to sectarian group identities within Pakistan. The research will draw from those studies, though, and is not totally removed from that discourse. Indeed, the studies on Islamic fundamentalism or terrorism explore the use of certain identity frameworks as sources of political justification and as bases for political action. More explicitly, this research draws from the methods used to analyse terrorism, and violent terrorist acts. Also, at least some of the sectarian groups in

Pakistan are linked with the groups that are labelled as *terrorist groups* or *extremist groups* in the Middle East and South Asia, linking this study to the global study of political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, even though this is not the explicit or intended framework of this work. In fact, this research wants to distance itself from the security-centric approaches to sectarianism and sectarian violence, to offer an alternative way to approach, discuss, and analyse sectarian violence.

Most importantly, this thesis contributes to the understanding of sectarian violence in Pakistan. It accomplishes it by not reducing violent sectarian incidents to statistics and trends but by *contextualising* violence, looking into the details of the violent incidents. With analysing sectarian violence in Pakistan, placing it as the focus of the study, this thesis has a different emphasis from majority of the studies done on sectarianism. By analysing these incidents by using a method of analysis not widely used when analysing violence in Pakistan, this research also contributes to the understanding of the ways violence in general and sectarian violence in particular are possible to analyse.

This thesis does not presume to provide an exhaustive account of sectarianism or sectarian conflicts—or sectarian violence for that matter—in Pakistan. As observed by Naveeda Khan in her doctoral thesis,

[E]ach strand of sectarian politics, from the rise of anti-Shia Sunni militancy in Punjab to the rise of *jihadi* groups to aid Kashmiri self-

determination, has its own specificity. This specificity needs to be spelled out so that we do not fall into the fallacy of assuming a condition of undifferentiated sectarianism across the nation over the fifty plus years of Pakistan's existence. (Khan, 2003: 6)

Taking into account the complex nature of the research subject, as well as the location this subject is studied in, this thesis is critical of any attempts to produce or *uncover* the truth about sectarianism and sectarian violence in Pakistan. This work wants to explicitly state that the research presented in this thesis provides *an understanding* of sectarian violence, stemming from a particular research framework and approach.

There are several limitations of the research because of its scope, focus, and approach, as well as the positionality of the researcher. The sectarian phenomenon is embedded in a complex terrain of regional, national, and local processes with a myriad reinforcing and sustaining elements. Even though those processes and elements are mapped in this thesis, it is impossible to explore those political, ideological, and economic processes and elements in-depth. The current literature on sectarianism in Pakistan offers much more on the history and regional context of sectarianism, or the genealogy and functioning of *sectarian groups* that could be explored here. There is also a body of literature that could have contributed to the understanding of sectarian violence but is not included here due to the focus of this research, such as literature on Shias in Pakistan and the subcontinent.

Furthermore, since physical, or direct, violence is merely one form of violence, the existence of other forms of violence related to sectarian conflicts is recognised, such as structural violence and *violence of the word* (Galtung, 1996). But it has not been possible to discuss at length all the structural elements of sectarian violence or the different mechanisations of *violence of the word*, two areas that would warrant further research. Second, the data set used for analysis itself is limited in the sense that it is not exhaustive of all the violent incidents during the researched period. But since the principal focus is not to track the absolute figures of incidents or victims of sectarian violence or the quantitative change in violence, the data gathered is valid as a foundation for analysis.

Overall, this thesis resides at the intersection of different academic disciplines, bringing those different understandings of sectarianism, identities, and violence from those disciplines together to form a unique multifaceted synthesis.

Research Hypothesis

Both the thesis analytical framework and the hypothesis are outcomes of preliminary research work carried out by first getting acquainted with sectarianism in Pakistan through primary and secondary sources and, later on, by critically analysing the existing academic literature on the subject.

This is the **hypothesis** at the core of the research: “Sectarian violence in Pakistan is conducted to reproduce and reinforce exclusivist sectarian discourse.”

The hypothesis emerges from a specific theoretical orientation, as is evident in its formulation. The research is anchored in the social constructivism theory, inviting the research to investigate not only the political and social dimensions of sectarian conflicts but the communicative dimension as well. The central argument of this thesis, stemming from observations from the review of the literature, is that sectarian violence plays a part in maintaining and enforcing exclusivist identity discourse in Pakistan. Violence now is tied to exclusivist identity discourse as per the definition of the concept of sectarianism. Discourse is seen in terms of enabling but also limiting the array of discursive choices that can be made, thus at the same time enabling and limiting violent practises within that discourse.

This process of reproducing and reinforcing exclusivist sectarian discourse is done through the processes of building, enforcing and maintaining identity borders. The task for the research, then, is to *locate* sectarian violence: What are the spaces of sectarian violence? Where are the identity borders drawn, enforced, and maintained? And most importantly, through what spaces does sectarian violence communicate that discourse?

There are also supplementary questions arising from the literature that inform the analysis of this thesis:

- What does the term *sectarian* mean exactly?

Specifically, what is the definition of the term, and what are the conceptual implications when using that term in academic analysis, particularly when studying violence? How is the term *sectarian* tangential to the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan?

- Are violent sectarian conflicts the domain only of established militant sectarian groups?

In other words, are the violent incidents analysed in this thesis perpetrated only by militant sectarian groups, or do they reflect wider sectarian fault lines in Pakistan?

- And finally, what is the significance of the locations of sectarian violence to exclusivist sectarian discourse?

In order to inform the answers to these questions, the thesis offers a thorough analysis of the academic literature related to the research subject, as well as the theoretical framework selected. This study also developed an analytical framework to gather and analyse relevant data to successfully explore the validity of the hypothesis.

Thesis Structure

The exploration starts with chapter 1, “Violence, Identity, and Politics: The Theoretical Context,” which builds the theoretical framework and premises for the analysis. It introduces the concept of identity and explores the process of identity formation through the process of building and maintaining borders. The chapter then examines how identity is related to violence and what mechanisms are at work when identities are in conflict. It also discusses the spatiality of identities, conceptualising the *location of violence* as a research focus. The chapter concludes with an exploration of identity politics and how—through the concepts of borders, identity, and communication—sectarian violence in Pakistan can be researched.

The concept of *sectarianism* is the focus of chapter 2, “The Coordinates of Sectarianism: Defining Sectarianism and Exclusivist Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan.” It discusses the definitions of sectarianism used in the literature in peace and conflict studies and explores in-depth what the term conceptually signifies. The chapter examines how the term relates with religion, with Islamic divisions, and how it can acquire a systemic character. In the second part of the chapter, the term *sectarianism* is placed in the Pakistani context. It looks at what sectarianism has meant for the academics that have analysed the phenomenon in Pakistan and how it is approached in the literature. Specifically, sectarianism in the current literature is analysed in the contexts of political opportunism and the process of Islamisation. The formation and

development of sectarian discourse is discussed at length, to understand the multitude of processes and actors the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan today is inherently linked to. Finally, the chapter offers an overview of one of those processes that have contributed to sectarianism—namely, migration.

The next chapter, “Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: View from the Literature,” looks at the current academic understanding of sectarian violence. It describes how sectarian violence has been approached by previous studies and what relationship violence is thought to have with the phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan. The chapter maps the beginning of organised forms of sectarian violence, as well as the regional and national elements that sustain and enable this violence. Particular attention is paid to madrasa and mosque institutions and the role of the state in enabling and facilitating a permissive environment for violence to exist. The chapter then explores what the literature says about the modes of violence and how the academic body of knowledge has attempted to explain why sectarian conflicts in Pakistan have taken violent forms. Finally, the effects of sectarian violence are explored by examining how protracted violence has changed social relations and the *fabric of Pakistani society*, as well as how that violence has transformed public space in Pakistani polity.

We then turn to the praxis of devising and conducting research in Pakistan. Chapter 4, “Methodology: Researching Sectarian Violence in Pakistan,” introduces the methodological framework underpinning this research. It discusses the considerations that led to the chosen methodology and

methods and how those were subjected to considerations for personal safety and what is feasible to study in the context of Pakistan. The chapter outlines the process and limitations of data collection and finally discusses the principles guiding the data analysis process.

Chapter 5, “Violence as Reproduction of Exclusivist Sectarian Identity Discourse,” introduces the role both violence and religion can have in creating exclusivist sectarian identity discourses in Pakistan. The difference both violence and religion can create is explored through the existing studies on Pakistan, with examples on the type of mechanisms at work. The chapter then turns to analyse the locations of sectarian violence, as the current literature depicts them, and the importance and significance assigned to those locations.

“Locating Sectarian Violence in Pakistan 1996–2005,” chapter 6, includes the analysis from the data collected. It starts with a brief introduction to the data collected and the limitations that the data and the method of analysis place on the process of analysis. The chapter then presents and discusses the spaces of sectarian violence that emerged in the analysis and the significance of those spaces.

Finally, the research is completed with “Conclusions,” in which the questions presented at the beginning of this research and the key findings of the analysis are reiterated. The implications of the findings are discussed, as well as the limitations of studying sectarian violence using this analytical

framework and method of analysis. “Conclusions” also assess the contributions of this research to the body of knowledge on sectarian violence in Pakistan. And finally, the thesis concludes with an exploration of areas for further research.

Chapter 1

Violence, Identity and Politics: The Theoretical Context

Some borders are being dismantled, some renegotiated, and yet others – new ones – are being erected. The real socio-political questions concerns less, perhaps, the *degree* of openness/closure (and the consequent question of how on earth one might even begin to measure it), than the *terms* on which that openness/closure is established. Against what are boundaries erected? What are the relations within which the attempt to deny (and admit) entry is carried out? What are the power-geometries here; and do they demand a political response? (Massey, 2005: 179)

Introduction

This chapter will formulate the theoretical basis for this research on sectarian violence, introducing some of the key concepts that the analysis relies on. It starts with the premise that identity politics can offer a valid method to analyse

sectarianism³. Sectarian groups can thus be analysed as identity-related groups in peace and conflict studies, drawing from the vast literature of identities in conflict.

The analysis of this chapter does not press identity beyond its explanatory weight, but rather tries to locate its proper place in the current conflict typology. Sectarian conflicts cannot be reduced to conflicting identity claims, or the long and complex conflict histories explained by identities only. In conflict analysis, single-factor explanations are in general thought as inadequate. For this reason the term 'identity-related conflict' is preferred instead of 'identity conflict'⁴ to point out that identity is hardly ever the only aspect of a conflict, which almost always includes other explanatory motives, including political and economic claims. Identity is not an independent variable but there is a "close relationship between interest and identity aspects" (Leatherman, 1999: 193), and identity-claims are almost every time formulated in political language. Often the continuous conflict dynamics emphasise the identity claims. Thus, the root causes of conflicts are important, but at least as important are the conflict dynamics and history, and the conflict process in which identity-factor is usually escalated.

This chapter will discuss – and problematise - the relationship between violence, identity, and politics, and furthermore the function and location of violence in identity-related conflicts. It highlights the notion of *the border* as an

³ Using identity politics in this context is not a new idea, see for example, Brass (1979).

⁴ Understandably the term 'identity conflict' can be seen as too simplistic, and therefore, inviting criticism. But, at the same time, the term 'identity-related conflict' highlights that identity is a crucial feature in these conflicts and cannot be ignored in their analysis.

essential element in understanding the conflicts in general, and analysing the violence used in those conflicts in particular. First, the chapter is looking at identity and its formation. The role of violence is included in the analysis by looking what is behind the term identity politics. This part of the analysis is done with reference to ethnic and religious identity discourses. Next, the analysis highlights the concept of border and what it means for the analysis of violence in general, and its implications for the study of violence in identity-related sectarian conflicts. As noted by Doreen Massey in the quote above, the concept of border is looked at as the *process* of negotiating and erecting borders, and what are the 'power geometrics' and terms that condition this process of openness and closure – or inclusion and exclusion. Lastly, the chapter concludes with outlining some pragmatic steps of researching sectarian violence through the framework of identity-related conflicts.

In order to understand the triangular relationship between violence, identity and politics, the chapter will begin with exploring the idea of formation of identities.

Identity Explained: Dichotomic Basis

For Zygmunt Bauman, identity is a fortress that is always under siege: from the very beginning it is threatened by enemies, weakening of strength and loosing of control. Because identity is built like a fortress and always under continuous threat, it is often fragile and unsure of itself. Identity stands or falls

with the safety and strength of its borders. (Bauman, 1996: 161) This analogy illustrates the most fundamental feature of identity, that is the separation of “us” (those belonging to the identity, now inside the fortress) from “them” (those outside that identity, threatening the fortress). Between, there is a border⁵. These categorisations, forming the basis of identity, mean in fact the construction of borders (Paasi, 1999: 81).

Categories are a common way of viewing the existing reality⁶, making borders decisive in creating order in the world. One of the main functions of a border is to define and form social space, by delineating and lining territorial spaces. Another important function is the formation and maintaining of different, especially national and ethnic, identity-groups. (Jukarainen, 2000: 3) Borders and frontiers have throughout the history had the function of “selection”: borders form the definitional and concrete reference, founding what is inside and what is outside, what can come in and what has to stay out (Eva, 1999: 34). Thus, borders are multi-dimensional closing in and out, not just territories but also social entities. Border is the point or line in space where two entities meet (Conversi, 1999: 557), it is also a place where interaction is refused or limited, making it a place of power⁷. Identity is always dependent on the existence of the other, and it is built in interaction between the two. Thus, borders have to be maintained with certain acts and discourses that emphasise the other (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 598).

⁵ The term boundary is also widely used in this context. Both of the terms have slightly different theoretical underpinnings, but are used to illustrate the same phenomenon.

⁶ About categorical thinking see Caygill (1993).

⁷ Construction of identities is inherently linked to *social action* and the question of power. “Our constructions of the world are therefore bound up with power relations because they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others.” (Burr, 2003: 5) See also Knott (2005).

But it is not only the other that has an effect on the border. The content it bounds inside shapes the borders as well, like those who cross the border or are prevented from crossing it. Container and contents are mutually forming (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 594), in a dialectic relationship. This emphasises, that borders are not just lines on the ground, but foremost, actualisation of social practices and discourses. Borders can be thought as a process, existing in socio-cultural action. (Paasi, 1999: 72, 75) Identity, then, has to be understood in the context of tripartite relations between the border construing the identity, the content, and the others shaping that border.

Comparison of identity to fortress describes the group identity in the situation of conflict, where collective identity gets different status than in the time of peace. In a time of conflict, the identity is crucially under threat, highlighting the consciousness of protecting its existence. The more the identity is perceived as threatened, the more it demands protection and the more it is being fortified. Outside threat legitimises even violent acts against this threat. Identity is considered stable when the forces that guarantee its existence are stronger than the enemies that are constructed in the process of strengthening the identity (Bauman, 1996: 162).

Even though the need for identity is common to the whole humanity, consciousness of the *feeling* of it as a need is not universal. That feeling grows stronger the more there identity is competed, or the more the feeling of the identity safety is shaken. That is why it is pursued the most when it seems

weak and feeble. (Bauman, 1996: 162) Borders are not building only identity but security as well. The threat of otherness is projected and territorialised outside as a means of protecting the identity of the “sameness” (Sucharov, 1999: 189). That is why the stress on borders is normally an indicator of deep feeling of threat and instability (Conversi, 1999: 554-5).

The other element of identity implicated in the Bauman’s conception⁸ is that identity is socially constructed and produced through social construction of borders. This view of social construction claims that (a) identity has no authentic content (essence) and (b) identities are never complete, but always in the process of being made. One cannot present any legitimate basis from what identity *a priori* is composed of. Social constructionism is challenging the ideas of identity being naturally given, and that it is produced purely by acts of individual will (Calhoun, 1994: 13). Even though there is space for selection, it does not imply that it is totally free. Identities are always located in the context of institutional or social continuities, which provide the frames, as containers of social rules, which makes identities both sustainable and meaningful (Jabri, 1996: 130).

⁸ Whereas social constructionist view of identity is most widely used both in sociology and social sciences today, there are alternative ways to view identities. Identities can be seen, for example, as being constituted from fixed, primordial elements that determine the behaviour of those within the identity-group. Primordial identities are fiercely contested in the current literature of those disciplines.

Identities and Violence

Vivienne Jabri's main argument in her book "Discourses on Violence" states that violent conflict arises from the "individual's membership of bounded communities constituted through discursive and institutional dividing lines" (Jabri, 1996: 120). According to that argument, violent conflict is constituted around the construction of a discourse of exclusion, referring to dichotomous representations of the self and other, found at the heart of identity. Jabri claims, that exclusionist discourses are not merely manifest in specific situations of violent conflict, but are deeply embedded in discursive and institutional practises which are reconstituted through every practice of exclusion (Jabri, 1996: 131). This links the violent conflict to the normal state of identity, both of them involving discourses of exclusion, which aim to typify a diversity of individuals into well-defined exclusionist categories. Both constitute structures of violence based on segmentation and opposition. (Jabri, 1996: 138)

Because exclusionist discourse is deeply embedded in identities, the argument Jabri makes would seem to imply that violence is inherent in the way people exist in the world: violence is an inherent characteristics of the ontology of self-formation. But these dichotomies (outside-inside, self-other) are implications of categorical thinking⁹, that we cannot overcome (Calhoun, 1994: 19), violence so being included in every exclusive category made by

⁹ World with no borders separating the self would be totalitarian, consisting only sameness. See, for example, Shapiro (1997).

human beings, including it also in every identity formation. But if every identity formation is inherently violent, what does it imply of violent conflict formulated around identity?

This idea of inherent violence in itself does not explain why some identities are involved in conflicts, and others are not. It also fails to address the question why some conflicts are not involving the aspect of identity although the parties have distinctly separate identities. In the end, the argument does not explain the involvement of violence in a certain conflict; it only refers to the possibility of violent conflict because of the exclusionary politics of identity. This echoes one of the deepest arguments about human nature: whether it is inherently aggressive or not¹⁰. Even though one would have the answer it would not serve as an explanatory factor, failing to address the fact that some people act aggressively in some situations, and some do not. So, when Jabri uncovers the ontology of identity formation, it needs additional arguments to explain the occurrence of violent identity conflicts.

It also has to be noted that if Jabri's premises are true, and violence is built into the formation of identities, it does not mean that every identity will formulate itself using violence. Identities, as well as borders have essential, and positive functions. Border is a special type of institution, its important function being the forming of structures and normative practices of human interaction, and then to reduce the uncertainty and increase ontological security (Paasi, 1999: 75, 80). Borders are offering a safe haven from

¹⁰ For this debate, see for example, Rapoport (1989).

discrimination, creating the basis of security and identity (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 596).

Identity Politics – Politicization of Identity

For identity to be in the core of the conflict it has to be *politicized*. When politicized, identity is giving a basis for action that is politically determined. Now one can talk about identity politics (in comparison to passive identity) because identity is not necessarily in the background or basis of political action. (Linjakumpu, 1999: 61, 75) Identity politics seeks to facilitate political action through a focus on unity (identity) rather than difference. It also prevents political action by limiting the ways in which both differences and commonalities can be understood. (Phoenix, 1998: 871-2)

Borders between social entities are always political in the wide sense of the meaning. As a way of organising social space, it is not only important to know where the border is located, but through what kind of practices and resistance this border was built (Paasi, 1999: 76). One has to discover what are the political processes through which the identity is formed by borders, and what actors and structures are meaningful in the formation at that political moment. It is this context that defines identity as meaningful and shows the importance of identity in forming the political reality. (Linjakumpu, 1999: 61) One has to look at the context where, why and how identity is politicized, and why it is raised to the centre of the political practices.

The recent literature on identity conflicts – or identity-related conflicts – has focused on conflicts formed around the idea of ethnicity. Whereas nationality, language or religion can act as a similar identity-marker more theorising has been done in relation to ethnic conflicts in peace and conflict studies. The analysis will draw on the politicization of identity from both the ethnic identity discourse and its religious counterpart. Many of the conflict regions with violent identity-related conflicts (former Yugoslavia, Kashmir Valley, Rwanda) had been showcases of the ability of different religious, ethnic and linguistic groups to live together. What happens in the process that raises identities to the core of the conflict, and what initiates it?

Conflict dynamics in identity-related conflicts

There are two main arguments about identities in conflict, namely that the identity is created within the conflict (in the case of ethnicity, ethno-genesis¹¹) or it is awoken by the conflict (ethnic persistence).¹² Identity built with exclusion does not depend on objective linguistic, cultural or religious differences but the subjective experience of those differences. In this sense identity, whether it is national or communal, is contingent and relative. (Bulmer, 1998) Regardless of the origin, this debate is secondary to the fact

¹¹ Ethnogenesis is based on social constructionist view, stressing social/political construction of 'imagined communities' through the identification of ethnic subjects with the system of cultural representations which is also a structure of power, embedded in, and reproducing, specific social relations. (Bloul, 1999)

¹² More about the debate see Conversi (1999).

that identity is nevertheless politicized in the conflict. Common assumption is, however, that the group identity is defined and reformulated in conflict rather than being a “pre-existing” cause of it.

It has been argued, that conflict is intrinsic to the definition of ethnic groups (Agnew, 1999: 54). What is in the heart of intractable ethnic conflict is not only the exclusionist basis of identity, but also the fact that ethnicity is dynamically reproduced through the mutual exclusivity of competing territorial, and ontological claims (Agnew, 1994: 51). The same can be said about sectarian groups in conflict. Whereas ethnic identity includes rhetoric of cultural purity, which transforms the heterogeneous contents of any discourse of collective identity into a pure, primordial essence of identity, sectarian religious identity claims include similar claims on the purity of faith. (Bloul, 1999) These claims are also attached to territorial claims. This means these identities are not only exclusionist, but seek to invalidate the other by creating existential threat for them, attaching the idea of a pure identity to a territorial basis. This mechanism can be found, for example, in the purification of a territory¹³. These identities can be thus considered racial for they include hierarchies of belonging, stating normative preferences over one particular identity.

But what is noteworthy in ethnic violence is that it often occurs when there are few cultural markers accessible to differentiate between entities. When groups in conflict share too many elements of the same culture, difficulties in their self-definition may emerge. One option then, is to use violence as a means of

¹³ Good account on this “demographic engineering” can be found in the article by John McGarry (1998). See also Kaldor (1999: 98-100).

border building. (Conversi, 1999: 583) So, rather than leaning on existing differences in identities, conflict is a way of creating them. Later analysis of sectarian violence tries to find out whether the same is true for sectarian identity groups and the violence between them. Most important, though, is to recognize that mobilisation around identities can be seen as a paramount process of border-building, and systematic use of violence as a separating, dichotomising tool (Conversi, 1999: 564, 570). Conflict, and the use of violence, also reinforces the negative stereotypes of the other, acting as a further legitimization of the use of violence. Now identity discourse is better understood as a discourse of self-legitimation produced by the violence it appears to merely represent (Campbell, 1999: 86). Conceiving of violence as a form of political inscription and transcription, rather than the product of a “psychogenetic” cause, highlights its constitutive role in identity politics. Violence in identity-related conflicts, understood as a deliberate border-imposing mechanism, is a powerful argument against commonplace ‘ancient hatred’ interpretations of those types of conflicts. (Conversi, 1999: 573)

Border-building may then be a quite independent process from existing, objective cultural differences (Conversi, 1999: 573). But what initiates this process? Daniele Conversi stresses the role of externally imposed violence that causes the border-building and centrally imposed character of borders (Conversi, 1999: 572-3). The “standard” explanation by the instrumentalist school claims that in a world of scarce resources and high communication, individuals find it useful and necessary to form collective units for the pursuit of wealth, power and prestige; elites and individual leaders in their competition

with other leaderships for power and resources need to mobilize followers for success; and bases like class, ethnicity or religion afford convenient 'sites' for mobilization. (Smith, 1986: 65) In short, emerging issues take on an increasingly ethnic or religious character because political leaders find it relatively easy to mobilize populations by stimulating a sense of collective identity. (Carment & James, 1997: 1) The process of politicization of identity is thought to be initiated either by national or international actors, ethnic entrepreneurs, who articulate beliefs in kinship bonds and common destiny, and who mobilize and organize groups to press group claims. (Sisk, 1996: 16-7) These different actors (military and political leaders, populists) working as an entrepreneur seek to make political capital out of the chosen identity (Sherrer, 1999: 57).

But the simple dichotomy of an essentialist approach and instrumentalism to identities do not offer adequate understanding of these conflicts. When the essentialist explanations have been mostly rejected, the instrumentalist view is overemphasised in international relations theory and peace and conflict analyses. The view is based on the rational choice theory which in its extreme form reduces identification to cost-benefit –oriented choices (Väyrynen, 1999: 128). However, although not natural, given or fixed, ethnic, religious and other identities are not to be reduced to strategies and politics only. There *are* existential dimensions involved (Lindholm Schultz, 1999: 231), and they should not be forgotten in the expense of the role of the rationality, which is overtly emphasized in the process.

Even though it is hard, or impossible, to show one centre point where identity is politicized¹⁴, these views seem to confirm, that invoking identity needs some kind of active political initiative. As Kathryn Manzo notes, “human races can transmute into ethnic groups through political selection” (Manzo, 1996: 3). Religion and ethnicity, as terms, are more widely used to describe a variety of forms of mobilization, which ultimately relate to the autonomous existence of specifically ethnic or religious forms of socialization. That is why speaking about the politicization of ethnicity seems tautological, as noted by Sherrer, for what is happening is politicization of identity, taking an ethnic form (Sherrer, 1999: 57). Identities in conflict should be judged in terms of the relationship with the other they embody. Emphasis should be on the discursive practices, constructing space and identity, on the ways that self-other relationships are framed and played out¹⁵ (Shapiro, 1997: 31).

Spatiality of Identities

Concept of a border encourages us to look at identity as an essentially spatial concept: identity is both produced and expressed through space. Space is now understood as *active* and *dynamic*. It is not “merely a passive, abstract arena on which things happen” (Keith & Pile, 1993: 2). There is a significant body of literature on the concept of space and how it is constructed or

¹⁴ As Jabri pointed out: “The categorisation of self and other is not a product of cognition and information processing, but derives from discursive and institutional continuities which are reproduced through every categorisation act.” (Jabri, 1996: 127)

¹⁵ This could be done according to the framework suggested by William Bloom: (1) delineating the factors and circumstances which work towards evoking a shared identity; (2) delineating the factors and circumstances in which people who share the same group identity may act towards enhancing or defending it; (3) explicating the relationship between this mass psychological dynamic and the political environment. (Bloom, 1990: 23.)

produced.¹⁶ For the purpose of this study it is not essential to dive into this literature in-depth but to highlight that spaces, as conceptualized by Doreen Massey (1993, 2005) are essentially *relational*. They are constructed out of interrelations, “as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions”. (Massey, 1993: 155) Social relations exist in and through spaces where those relations are actively produced, and negotiated. (Massey, 2005: 154, 193; Knott, 2005: 15) Space is not only highly active but also politically enabling as a result of the fact that it is created out of social relations. “Space, as relational and as the sphere of multiplicity, is both an essential part of the character of, and perpetually reconfigured through, political engagement.” (Massey, 2005: 183) Space is by its very nature full of “power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation”. (Massey, 1993: 142, 156) Spaces should then be considered also as lived practices with symbolic meanings and significance. (Massey, 1993: 143)

The spaces of expressing identities and identity discourses make them also *competing spaces*. Spaces become the forces of dislocation and resistance as well as social organization. These spaces set for reproduction and re-enactment of identity are also spaces set for violence, according to the premises of this work. Violence has the capacity to organize social space and with this organizational capacity comes power: use of violence is then a *show* of power but also *an act* of power in an attempt to re-organize and affect spaces: social spaces and spaces of identity formation and maintenance. This

¹⁶ See for example Lefebvre (1991) or Soja (1996).

work, then, wants to situate sectarian violence, and those spaces of reproduction of the exclusivist identity discourses.

Borders and Communication

Identity borders are not necessarily unconditionally exclusive, nor do they necessarily build strong dichotomies (Jukarainen, 2000: 4). Identity is a common mechanism to superimpose unity on differentiation, but it need not to be formalised in explicitly aggressive forms (Conversi, 1999: 569). Since borders are socially constructed, they are contextual phenomena (Paasi, 1999: 72). The term border¹⁷ brings forth the wide scope and various meanings of the term. Borders can be avenues or obstacles, protective and capturing, spaces of possibility and insecurity, conflict and contact, competition and cooperation. These dichotomies can change depending on time and space, and they can be true at the same time for those operating continuously in two different spaces. (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 595-596) Borders can exist at the same time in various levels of spatiality and different practices, for example in culture, politics and economy (Paasi, 1999: 73). Borders have thus both material and symbolic usages. They can take a very clear physical form, the Berlin wall or the Israeli separation wall being extreme examples, or remain invisible. Even though they may be physically invisible,

¹⁷ The use of the term border in different languages: In German, there is only one term (*granze*), whereas in French there are four: *frontière*, *front* (military), *limite* and *marche*; In Spanish there are three words: *frontera*, *marca* ja *limite*; as well as in English: *frontier*, *boundary* and *border*. All of these terms have different connotations, although in English the terms are used interchangeably. *Frontier*-word has the widest scope of reference, when *boundary* has the most specific meaning. (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 603.)

they are typically carriers of wider symbolism, material representations of history and the current situation. (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999: 595)

Borders do not only separate social groups and communities but also transmit contacts between them (Paasi, 1999: 80). Now border does not present itself as a barrier, or as a limiting element but as a space of interpretation and interaction between two different entities (Zureik, 2001: 220). Besides being limiting and delineating, a border is also a meeting point of two those entities, a place of change and exchange (of things, people, ideas) – a place for interaction. Borders are not only the physical borders of a state but also areas of margins where people negotiate practices and meanings that are attached to their belonging to a certain group (Wilson & Donnan, 1998: 9).

The 'real' meaning and interpretation of the borders is in a process of a dialogue within the identity-group. The meanings of a border differ depending on the person and the context, and various actors are used to define their meaning and content, based on various intentions (Tronvoll, 1999). For example, military leaders and heads of state produce representations and thoughts on the meaning of the borders (Paasi, 1999: 81). It is important to note, that socially constructed border is also subject to change. Thus, borders can be thought as *processes*, existing in socio-cultural action (Paasi, 1999: 72; 75).

The structural element of borders

Vivienne Jabri notes in her book *Discourses on Violence* that exclusionist identity discourses are not merely manifest in specific situations of violent conflict but are deeply embedded in discursive and institutional practises which are reconstituted through every practice of exclusion (Jabri, 1996: 131). The categorisation of self and other is not a product of cognition and information processing, but derives from discursive and institutional continuities, which are reproduced through every categorisation act. The implications of categorisation are of central importance in understanding processes which legitimate violence in situation of conflict. (Jabri, 1996: 127) This means we can only have identity, or concepts like security, if there is a body of typified actions, mediated by structures, from which to draw in order to make sense. As we can only do language – speak – if we can draw on what is already done. (McSweeney, 1999: 166)

In societies with protracted identity-related conflicts, those identities in conflict become institutionalised. For Alan C. Tidwell, the threat that challenges identity makes the defence of it become integrated into identity. The end result being, that the conflict becomes profoundly embedded in the very essence of those engaged in it. (Tidwell, 1998: 136) Also, the borders that separate the identity-groups can become institutionalised, as well as the social practices upholding and reproducing them. The borders can be now located in the various expressions of social narratives creating meanings to borders, as in various institutions like school, media, literature, ceremonies

etc. (Paasi, 1999: 76), again emphasising the non-material quality of borders. Often these spatial as well as non-spatial borders are also upheld by religious, historical and exclusive structures of state ideology (Falah, 1996: 825).

Violence as communicative and performative act

As noted above, identity does not necessarily have to be formed around, or with violence. But when violence is part of the identity building how does it manifest itself?

When identity is threatened, by either real or imagined threat, and the feeling of ontological security is shaken, the mechanism of rigidification, a psychological response to threat, comes to work. In this process, more and more minor characteristics about the other becomes threatening. Constructing the other becomes an aggressive process, where the other is increasingly perceived as and treated like someone entirely different from self. Rigidification, then, is a process of crystallizing what is constructed as self and not-self, serving the purpose of separating the other from self, in essence, putting distance between the self and the threat. (Northrup, 1989: 70.) In effect, rigidification involves increasing efforts to secure the borders of the self, through separation and polarization (Northrup, 1989: 71).

In protracted conflicts building and defending strong, rigid borders is a part of conflict behaviour. In relation to the constructed other there is a need to

maintain a distance, which is usually legitimized by security. This distance can be pursued through physical separation (fence, wall), but it actualises also through the lack of trust, limiting interaction and communication (Bulmer, 1998). It can also actualise through activities and discourses emphasizing “the other” (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 598).

According to the social constructivist nature of identity, important element in the building and maintaining of the distinct identities is the *communication*¹⁸ of those identities, and the separating border, both to the other and to the self¹⁹, as well as to the wider society. (Rönquist, 1999: 150)

These communicative acts can be summarised by using the term *discourse*, referring to “practices which form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourse refers to sets of organised meanings (which can include images as well as words) on a given theme. The term has been used to emphasise “the organised way in which meanings cohere around an assumed central proposition, which gives them their value and significance”. (Hollway & Jeffreson, 2000: 14) The things that people communicate, then, can be thought of as instances of discourses, as occasions where particular discourses are given the opportunity to construct an event in a certain way. (Burr, 2003: 66) Now, the above-mentioned communicative acts are those ‘instances’ of discourses that are constructing not only events but also identities.

¹⁸ Instead of the concept of ‘text’ as the focus of analysis that is widely used in social constructivism I prefer to use ‘communication’ in this context. Communication emphasises the intersubjective nature of identity and its social construction.

¹⁹ Drawing borders create also a dynamics of inner homogenisation being part of creating the image of the ideal identity (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999: 596; 598).

Communication now has to be understood in a wide sense of the term, including verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as societal action. This communication is done in a specific but at the same time changing societal environment, (Rönnquist, 1999: 150) and the communicative acts are played out in public sphere²⁰. This communication can use conventional verbal forms like speeches, *fatwas* and political manifestos, but identities can also be communicated in other forms like wall-writings, and slogans.

Symbols are an effective way to communicate a specific identity. Especially divided societies are often filled with symbols (nationalist, religious, etc.) that enforce the feeling of belonging to an area and legitimate the ownership of that particular space. These non-verbal acts of communication can take the form of flags, turbans, or other distinctively meaning-laden symbols. They are also a part of the process of making the invisible borders between identity-groups more communicable. (Kuusisto, 2001: 59). Symbols are expressions of certain narratives, which create meanings to borders and identities, and acts as references to the other. These narratives help to uphold the borders and are then linked also to conflicts on those borders. (Paasi, 1999: 76) Often symbolised local borders are a part of a larger, ongoing, identity struggle (Kuusisto, 2001: 64).

Violence can be understood as the extreme form of identity communication – it is not only creating the border between identities but also communicating

²⁰ The symbolic orders and interpretative schemes upon which identity is based constitute “public” or political space (Jabri, 1996: 158).

that border to 'the other'. The violent acts that identity groups perform can be seen as a form of this communication for it is action that is allowed and justified by referring to the identity in question. And like all human action, can be seen as "both symbolic and technical, that is, it simultaneously communicates something and accomplishes something". (Lincoln, 2003: 90) Thus, the use of violence goes way beyond that of being a dispute resolution method: it is a *performative act*, creating a special place and space to perform the act of violence to communicate the identity discourse to the 'other'. In sectarianism, violence can be seen as the ultimate border-building mechanism being part of enforcing and maintaining the exclusionist sectarian discourse.

The communication of identities does not necessarily require an active involvement of members of identity-groups. As mentioned above, exclusive identity formations can be institutionalised, especially in protracted conflicts. As borders, also these communicative acts can be institutionalised, for example working through the physical structures of control²¹. When thinking of sectarianism as an already established characteristic of the society, the nature of the violence also changes. The sectarian system no longer requires large amounts violence to maintain itself²². Just an occasional act of violence will be enough to sustain the border that is already enforced and fortified.

²¹ Often these would be set up by a state, or an actor with similar position in a society.

²² See for example Liechty & Clegg (2001: 12).

Towards the Praxis – the Context of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

If social (group) identities are constructed and maintained through the construction of borders these conflicting identities can be researched by analysing those borders, and the practices through which they are maintained. In effect, this means that in a general level, this research looks at the discursive practices on constructing space and identity, and on the ways that self-other relationships are framed and played out. More specifically, the research looks at the agency and the location of violence.

The above analysis also indicate why the location or space of violence can have other functions than being merely the inadvertent space of intended harm: it is a space that is both enforcing and constructing that same sectarian discourse that justified the violent act towards the 'other'.

This research is interested in how sectarian conflict and specifically violence exists spatially, and informs the spatial forms of social relations between the conflicting parties. As observed by Ravinder Kaur in the context of religious violence: "A significant, though often neglected, aspect of religious violence is the rearrangement of urban spaces in favour of the dominant groups." (Kaur, 2005: 36) Violence, now, can reconstitute relations among parties, change social hierarchies, and organize social space accordingly. Conflict and its violent forms are not only a reflection on underlying social structures and conditions but strongly re-constituting and re-arranging them. It also can affect social space where the different forms of interactions between the groups are

played out. The structuring role of violence was also recognized in the context of communal violence by Tambiah: "Violence shapes the urban space of ethnic enclaves, barriers, shatter zones, liminal areas, barricades; it has become a mode of gaining or losing urban space, and of displacing, moving, and resettling populations." (Tambiah, 1996: 223)

The purpose of the use of violence, then, goes beyond that of being a method of inflicting terror and causing casualties. Instead, it is part of the exclusionist sectarian discourse, and a performative act, form of interaction aimed at affecting shared social space. What we need to study, then, is the *location of violence* – which are the spaces and locations where these identity borders are enforced in sectarian conflict? Violence and its different forms like destruction of property, or sacred symbols, "thereby transformation of spatial practices, provides significant insight into societal transformations". (Kaur, 2005: 36) This attempt to dominate public space by violence and the exclusionary discourses that legitimate the violence is what enables this research to study that violence. As expressed by Ravinder Kaur:

The sites of violence often become sites of purification where undesirable elements – members of the 'other' community, their property and places of worship – are ritually removed and boxed in ghetto-like locations. (Kaur, 2005: 36)

The focus of the analysis is, then, to look at these 'sites of violence' and what is it that the violence, and the exclusionary discourse, attempts to remove or purify of 'the other'.

For violence to perform the function of border maintaining and identity communication it is conditioned by being justifiable in the sectarian discourse. This affects the possible location of violence, for it also needs to fulfil its communicative function within the sectarian discourse. In other words, if sectarian exclusivist identity discourse can be used and mobilised for various purposes, it also limits possible political and violent action, since they have to fall within the sectarian discourse and to be able to be legitimated within its parameters. Thus, the locations of this violence are not randomly selected but should fall within the parameters of that discourse. Spaces closely related to the other's identity are favoured targets, helping to create ontological threat to the other, as well as maximise violence's communicative value. Targeting places of worship of the other sect, mosques and *imambarghas*, or religious processions, is one example. This method of targeting sacred spaces and sacred time is one of the strongest border-reinforcing and communicating mechanisms, especially if the locations embody what is thought as being outside the realm of the pure understanding of identity, now something not belonging to 'true Islam'.

One of the key authors on religious violence, Mark Juergensmeyer in his studies on religious terrorism talks about violence in this context as a form of performance. He identifies as a characteristic of religious acts of violence the

symbolic and dramatic aspect of acts of religious terrorism, reflecting the sense in which they refer to something “beyond their immediate target”. (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 125) This makes the acts of violence themselves significant, independent of what they accomplish or fail to accomplish in strategic terms, as they are expressive as well as instrumental. (Mahmood, 1999: 79, 81) The role of symbolism in violence is not, however, only a feature of religious violence. It is analysed, for example, also in the context of communal violence (Tambiah, 1996: 231). This study is also not denying a role of political strategy being part of this public performance of sectarian violence – it does not perceive these violent acts as merely symbolic. As argued by Wellman:

[R]eligion and politics are structurally linked; symbolic and social boundaries are always related. No act is only symbolic but arises out of a complex latticework of cultural and political layers or persuasion, power and force. Social and political forces are by definition entangled in our symbolic language. Thus to disconnect these layers creates abstractions. (Wellman, 2007: 9)

By focusing on violence as a performative act it is not to downplay or trivialise the fact that sectarian violent acts entail loss of life and that it has devastating effects on all sects and communities involved, either directly or indirectly.

By using *aesthetics of violence* – or the ‘drama of violence’ to use Juergensmeyer’s term – using public space for big, striking acts of violence to

both convey a message and do harm the groups communicate their 'message' and sectarian discourse to the other group and to the wider public. (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 124) Again, this notion of aesthetic of violence is not a new concept, or tied to the modern conception of terrorism, whether religiously or politically motivated. The Italian writer Machiavelli in 1532 guided the reader in his work 'Prince' on how strategic, and public use of violence is an effective form of communicating the intended message (now political power and authority) to the public. When Remirro de Orco's body was displayed cut in two pieces on the piazza at Cesena, Cesare Borgia had sent a strong and vivid message to the people of Romagna by using strategic and public violent act. (Machiavelli, 1999: 25)

Violence as a performative and communicative act highlights three components of that act: First, what is being communicated by the act of violence; second, what are the forms and locations of that communication, i.e. the stage; and third, who the communication is intended to, i.e. the audience. As previously seen, within this analytical framework, what is being communicated by violence is the exclusivist sectarian discourse and the task of this research is to find the forms and locations of that communication.

The third component, the audience the violence attempts to reach is an important part of performance violence which is "designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect" making the audience part of what occurs (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 126). Stephen Cohen has analysed the concept of 'audience' in the context of violence in Pakistan. According to him,

this audience is composed of three groups of people: the enemy, bystanders and the potential recruits. (Cohen, 2006: 193) Hurting the enemy, according to Cohen, is both a goal in itself and a means of forcing the enemy to change its policies (in the case of India in Kashmir for example), or even to leave Pakistan or change its religious beliefs, which for Cohen is the purpose of sectarian violence within Pakistan. (Cohen, 2006: 193) Now, the 'enemy' as the members of the other sect, is not necessarily seen as primarily being forced to change religious beliefs as the result of violence, but violence is re-signifying the religious difference. Similarly, if the aim of sectarian violence is not the purifying the public or shared space of the 'other' at least it aims at changing the use of that space considerably, and claiming authority over it. The second group, the "bystanders," constitutes the largest audience according to Cohen. For terrorists, the goal is to use an extreme act to change the way in which this group sees reality and to be able to shock and gain attention the level of terror has to increase over time. (Cohen, 2006: 193) The analysis of the ways violence affect on these bystanders is out of the scope of this thesis, but in the culture of violence in Pakistan, with several forms of violence existing in the everyday lives of the Pakistanis, it is perhaps good to point out that both striking violent acts and ongoing violence – as well as the threat of them – encountered in everyday lives of Pakistanis do have a role. Also, the third group adding to the concept of audience for Cohen is not analysed here. Very little is known about how efficient recruitment strategy violent acts factually are.

With media and informal networks the audience can consist of a much larger group of people than the immediate group experiencing the violent incident, perhaps also affecting the form of violence to enhance the drama of the performance to ensure it being broadcasted in the news and taken up by the media. With new technologies the concept of audience has significantly changed. Violent incidents can be posted and seen online both by the perpetrators and the victims. (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012; Tufail, 2012)

Within the context of sectarian violence, the communication is done not only by attacking religious spaces but also by pursuing targets who are related to the core of 'the other's' identity, and which guarantee a certain amount of publicity for the attack (Irfani, 2004: 157). Thus, the violence is not 'irrational' but part of regularised conduct of sectarian politics. It is also very effective, for it targets the fundamental values, sense of security and self-definition of those communities. By analysing data on sectarian incidents we can see if sectarian violence follows this model, and whether it confirms the assumed relationship between space, religion (in relation to sectarian identity) and violence.

Other forms of communication of sectarian identities are also noted in the analysis of violence, although not placed at the centre of it. When the communication is often not in the conventional forms of a text, for example, there is a need to be creative in 'finding' the different ways the communication is done. It is not feasible for this research to tackle all of the forms of

communication, excluding things like material published by different sectarian organisations in forms of tapes, books and pamphlets from its realm.

Violence is a strong organizer of social space and method of communicating ones identity, and the main focus of this research, but there are other spatial forms of communicating sectarian identities. Since those sectarian identities are embedded in the society and include territorialized ontological claims, communication can be found in various forms in urban and rural spaces. One of the most common forms is the use of religious slogans and wall chalkings marking that space, like “Live like Ali, die like Hussain!” or “kafir kafir Shia kafir!” as well as display of religious sectarian symbols, or other signifiers of identities.

To conclude, it is important to emphasize that to situate violence, or to analyse the locations of sectarian violence this research draws from the methods used to analyse violence in the context of terrorism, especially those terrorist acts that are related to religious discourse. Despite of this ‘methodological borrowing’ this research wants to distance itself from the analyses of sectarianism and sectarian violence that categorise them as ‘terrorism’. The popularity of this discourse is evident also in writing on sectarianism, but it is essentially limiting, and distracting definition of sectarian violence. Production of fear and terror is inevitably part of the aim of sectarian violence but as already seen in this thesis, sectarian violence should not be reduced to this, and the main focus of this study is to look at the other functions of the violence.

Conclusions

Forming an identity is a process of categorical thinking, organising the world into dichotomies. It is a process of separating the self from the other. Even though this ontological basis of identity would be inherently violent, we can't go outside that categorical thinking. Violence as a latent discourse in identity formation requires additional factors in explaining the occurrence of identity politics and violent conflicts, where the question of identity is legitimising the use of violence. Discourse of exclusion does not totally explain the dynamics in identity-related conflicts, nor the form the violence takes in those conflicts. Socially constructed identity needs to be raised in the heart of conflict through politicization, that is an active political initiative. Violence is often used as an extreme form of border-building when there is little real differences between the self and the other. Identity, violence and politics have now a mutually reinforcing relationship. Still, this has to be considered as a departure from what is normal identity formation. Indeed, not all identities form themselves using violence, nor not identities are politicized. But the dynamics of this tripartite mechanism has to be understood in order to comprehend the basis of identity and conflicts.

Religious (or ethnic) divisions and differences are not inherently bad or problematic. They become problematic when religious identities have exclusionist political agendas and hierarchical notions of existence, as is the case with sectarianism. By using identity politics as an analysing tool more deliberate focus can be put on finding out how the identity discourse in

question is maintained and by whom, as well as for what purpose it is mobilised, and more specifically, how the identity is communicated. The main analysis of the thesis will focus on the role of violence as a border creating and reinforcing mechanism and how it is used to communicate the differing identity-claims. Violence, then, is both a creator of sectarian difference, and means to communicate those differences.

Chapter 2

The Coordinates of Sectarianism: Defining Sectarianism and Exclusivist Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan

Introduction

In today's world, the internal divisions in the Muslim *ummah* (community) can be seen to be involved in violent conflicts in various parts of the Muslim world, making knowledge of the complex inner landscape of Islam more relevant than ever to academics and policy makers alike. The terms *sect* and *sectarianism* are more widely used in the language of world politics than ever before. This is also reflected in the growing use of the terms in the peace and conflict studies literature, where sectarianism—especially its violent forms—is finally being recognised as a potent force of conflicts.

This newly found attention has not necessarily been matched with analytical development and the definition of the term *sectarianism*. Instead, the term is used to brand various types of violence and conflicts, often ignoring the complex conflict terrain within which they exist. Especially in escalated, violent conflicts, labelling something as *sectarian* can distort the conflict analysis more than offer an explanation. Thus, there is a need for peace and conflict studies to clearly define the conceptual coordinates of sectarianism and draw on other disciplines—such as sociology of religion—when the discipline's own

body of literature is still underdeveloped. This need for a definition is noted and acknowledged in this thesis, giving it the analytical attention it deserves. The analysis will, consequently, be multidisciplinary throughout the thesis. This chapter discusses sectarianism as a concept, specifically in peace and conflict studies and in the Islamic context. The focus will be *conceptual*—separating sectarianism, for the purpose of the analysis, from the context in which it always exists. With a theoretical study of sectarianism, the chapter tries to uncover the inner logic and dynamics at work in this type of social organisation and action, shedding light also on its boundaries. After a conceptual analysis, sectarianism is placed in the Pakistani context, looking at how the phenomenon is approached and defined in the literature, particularly in relation to exclusivist sectarian discourse.

Sectarianism: Definitions

To date, the most serious efforts to define sectarianism in peace and conflict studies have been conducted in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland. (See, for example, McTernan, 2003; Liechty & Clegg, 2001.) These analyses of sectarianism are valuable, but invariably limited in their usefulness for being attached to Western culture and especially to the realm of Christianity, itself a product of a certain cultural context. Most of these definitions are aware of these limitations and do not try to cover sectarianism as a universal phenomenon.

For Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, whose work is situated in Northern Ireland, sectarianism is “rigid adherence to a particular religious sect” (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 102–3). The Religions and Development Research Programme, conducted by an international consortium of academic institutions, extends the definition: “[S]ectarianism’ refers to a rigid adherence, excessive attachment or undue favoring of a particular sect, party or denomination” (Religions and Development Research Programme, 2005).²³ This definition highlights the fact that sectarianism is not necessarily tied to what is termed as a *sect* in Islam’s or any other religion’s organisation. Sect is, of course, essentially a Western concept relying on the Christian religious organisation.

The religious organisation in Islam can be described by using the same basic concepts as in other religions. The different religious bodies in Islam can be divided into denominations, sects, and cults (Sedgwick, 2004: 289). In practise, there are two major denominations within Islam, the Sunnis and the Shia²⁴ (Sedgwick, 2000: 201). Looking through the lens of Arabic, the closest Arabic term to *denomination* is *madhhab*,²⁵ a term normally but inadequately translated as “school of law”²⁶ (Sedgwick, 2000: 201). There are five generally recognised *madhhabs* in Islam, four Sunni (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali) and one Shia (called Ja’fari). For most purposes, the four Sunni

²³ The programme is an international research partnership that ran in the years 2005–2010 and explored the links between religion, development, and poverty reduction. It has four focus countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Tanzania.

²⁴ “Historically, the Shi’a originated as a sect [...], but the split between them and the Sunnis occurred so long ago that for almost all purposes the Shi’a can be regarded as a denomination in their own right.” (Sedgwick, 2000: 201)

²⁵ “A *madhhab* is a denomination in the sense that any Muslim is born into one or other of the *madhhabs*: on certain points his family follows the rulings of one *madhhab* (or rather, of scholars from that *madhhab*) rather than one of the other three.” (Sedgwick, 2000: 201)

²⁶ The term is closely linked to the concept of *fiqh*, religious judisprudence.

madhhabs together form one denomination, since “the differences between them have almost no theological or sociological significance.” There are more important differences between the four Sunni *madhhabs* and the Shia *madhhab* (Sedgwick, 2000: 201).

But because the definition of sectarianism relates to more broad religious bodies than merely sects, the Sunni-Shia conflict can be termed as sectarianism even though they, strictly speaking, are not sects but denominations—or schools of law in Islam. In fact, the term *denominationalism*²⁷ is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *sectarianism*, although it can also refer to a more general division or subdivision of a religion (Christiano et al., 2002).

As noted by Jeff Kenney (2002), sects and sectarian typologies reflect the political culture they exist in, and transferring the methodological tools to analyse one culture's sectarian formations to another creates “inherent, and often insurmountable, interpretive challenges” (Kenney, 2002: 137). The definition of Liechty and Clegg highlights that this does not mean that the terms wouldn't have any significance at all in conflict analysis outside the realms of Christianity and the Western world; these terms can be operational in other contexts.

²⁷ “The term ‘denominationalism’ was first employed in the late seventeenth century by those groups of Christians in England who dissented from the established Church of England, but considered themselves to be entirely loyal to the British state. [...] The term was introduced to counter the pejorative term *sect*, which in popular use had the sense of deviant or undesirable practices (somewhat as the term *cult* does today)” (Christiano et al., 2002: 99). Today, the term is commonly used to describe the American Christian religious organization. For more on denominationalism and the concept of denomination, see, for example, Ruthven (2012).

The definition of sectarianism by the Religions and Development Research Programme continues:

It [sectarianism] often implies denunciation of, and discrimination or even violence against, those outside the sect. The term is most often used to refer to religious sectarianism, involving conflict between members of different religions or denominations of the same religion on the basis of adherence to particular religious dogmas. It is also frequently used to refer to political sectarianism, generally on the part of a tight-knit political faction or party. (Religions and Development Research Programme, 2005)²⁸

This definition speaks of the *outward-oriented nature* of sectarianism, of the meaning attached to belonging to a religious body, and the negative attitude towards others outside it. This is confirmed by Liechty and Clegg:

Sectarianism is a system of attitudes, actions, beliefs, and structures which arises as distorted expressions of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity, and the free expression of difference and is expressed in destructive patterns of relating. (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 102–3)

At the core of their definition is the notion that all sectarianism can be understood as *a destructive way of dealing with difference* (Liechty & Clegg,

²⁸ For the author, the term is most useful when tied to religious discourse and organization as opposed to a merely political one. For an examination of the term outside the religious discourse, see Margalit (2008).

2001: 152). Here the outward-oriented nature is framed with the concept of identity, which is placed in a sociocultural context. And what is placed in the centre of the definition is *action*—how that identity, or difference, is expressed and negatively communicated to others. In their study, Liechty and Clegg also emphasise how sectarianism is always tied to religion since it “is the factor that makes an attitude, an action, a belief, or a structure specifically sectarian—as opposed to being simply generally bad or destructive” (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 38). This is a departure from the inclusion of the concept of political sectarianism to what *sectarianism* is, as per the definition of the Religions and Development Research Programme.

These definitions of sectarianism are equally about the group’s or the individual’s attitude or relation towards others (sects or other religious bodies), as about the group or individual itself. Sectarian claims are always political in the wide sense of the meaning, but sectarianism is most problematic when armed with exclusivist claims and infused with politics, as we will see when addressing the development of exclusivist sectarian discourse in Pakistan later in this chapter. This kind of violent exclusivist form of sectarianism is also in the heart of the public image of what sectarianism means.

Sectarianism and Religion

Religion, according to Liechty and Clegg, is a decisive factor in labelling something as sectarian. As with the discussion on terrorism, though, there is a great debate about how much explanatory weight can be put on religion when trying to analyse and explain the phenomenon.

In general, when sectarianism is discussed, the “role of religion receives little attention; remarkably little, given that the popular understanding of sectarianism associates it with a destructive mingling of religion and politics” (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 22). This is true in both Western and Muslim worlds, as well as in the Pakistani context. It is striking that since 9/11, the study of religion has changed, and religiously related violence is rarely perceived as an either/or choice between religion and other factors. Instead, religion is mostly perceived as having *a role* in a phenomenon, and the scope of that role varies greatly. Religion can be seen as merely a boundary maker, signifying the boundaries of the conflicting parties without any significant content or influence on the *real* dividing factors (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 51). Or, following the popular metaphor, religion is viewed as a *mask*, “which the analyst unhesitatingly tears away” (Kepel, 2005: 233) to discover the real factors at work.

One compelling explanation for this understanding is the various ways in which religion is understood. Religion is now often equated with religious

doctrine, with which a conclusion is easily reached that a conflict like in Northern Ireland is not religious since it is not a doctrinal dispute, or the aim is not to create a religious social entity. (See, for example, Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 50.) Analysts using this view of religion also usually see politics and religion as separate spheres. Although the separation of the two can always be debated, the separation functions better for certain styles of religiosity—above all, Protestantism, which easily becomes the implicit model of religion *per se* (Lincoln, 2003: 1). This interpretation of religion is necessarily inadequate, though, and as an explanation hides more than it reveals.

In his excellent account of religion after 9/11, Bruce Lincoln (2003) defines religion as including the following four domains: (i) a *discourse* whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status; (ii) a *set of practises* whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practises are connected; (iii) a *community* whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practises; and (iv) an *institution* that regulates religious discourse, practises, and a community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value (Lincoln, 2003: 5–7). With this definition, it is easy to see how religion transcends religious doctrine, and how it overlaps with politics. Religion is not purely a matter of belief and worship; it exists in the wider social and political spheres and has social and political implications. Islam,

especially, is an example of a religion that is more of a holistic system of life rather than “just” religion.

When it comes to sectarianism, the role of religion may be immediate or diffuse and distant, but it must be present if something is to be described as sectarian (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 39). The working of a sectarian group or body is always attached to a religious discourse. And religious discourse can have a “persuasive project”—it can attach practise to discourse by defining it as religiously sanctioned and, thus, can provide justification to ethnic or political claims (Lincoln, 2003: 11; Appleby, 2000: 61). But the explanatory weight of religion shouldn’t be stretched too far either. Sectarianism is a complex phenomenon involving a variety of factors and has effects reaching considerably wider than the religious doctrinal disputes. Nevertheless, the cultural context in Muslim societies highlights the need to take religion into the analyses. For some analysts, sectarian discourses are politicised because the language and symbols of Islam have become the cultural medium through which modern Muslims accommodate change. Understanding sects (or denominations) in the Islamic world, then, requires sensitivity to the role that religion has played, and is playing, in Muslim societies (Kenney, 2002). With this definition of religion and sectarianism in mind, one has to be very careful when erasing religion from the analysis of sectarianism or its possible contributing factors.

Sectarianism and Religion in the Pakistani Context

The literature on sectarianism in Pakistan is also almost unanimous in its assigned role to religion—or rather in its denial of religion having a role in sectarianism at all. Even though the term *sectarianism* as a concept is inherently tied to religion, it is also essentially dynamic and not confined to the religious realm. What seems to be imperative to the majority of authors when discussing sectarianism in Pakistan is to emphasise that religion exists in the name only—the conflicts or power struggles are usually not *about* religion. Religion may be the “new political currency” that could be used when lacking other assets (Gragre, 2009: 136), or a vehicle for mobilisation. But the grievances and goals “behind the sectarian action” are economic, social, and political (Nasr, 2002 & 2006), and the “sectarian discourse of power and its underlying paradigm of politics” are not related to religion. Nasr continues:

Sectarianism must, however, be understood as a form of ‘ethnic’ posturing, one that combines Islamist and ethnic discourses of power. It is tied to Islamism in that its foundational identity is defined in Islamic terms, and the ideological world-view of Islamism also controls the politics of sectarianism, although sectarianism places greater emphasis on Sunni or Shia purity as opposed to establishment of a universal Islamic orthodoxy. Still, the sectarian discourse of power and its underlying paradigm of politics are ‘ethnic’. (Nasr, 2002: 86)

The analysis of sectarianism would indeed miss the point if it was only about theology or doctrinal differences, but in the analyses, there is a very limited

space for religion.²⁹ Instead, “[t]he dynamics of sectarian strife demonstrate that religion is nothing more than a pretext. Above all, the conflict is the reflection of socio-economic tensions that pervade a society in transition, and an expression of the complex trajectories of modernization” (Abou Zahab, 2009: 173). Religion exists in the *form* of sectarianism, not in its content, the real content often being *power* or *power struggle*. There are also some more nuanced interpretations in the literature: “The conflict is neither a simple revitalization of religion, nor simply a reflection of an underlying social structure” (Manger, 1999: 21). What the literature does not analyse is whether categories like *social change* or *modernisation* can be fully separated from the realm of religion in a country like Pakistan. The literature is also vague in its concept of *power*—power in itself is hardly an adequate explanatory factor but one that always exists in a specific context and is relational (power over what? power in relation to what?). In the literature, sectarian conflicts in Pakistan are about control of economic niches, competition in trade, control of urban territory, cultural influence, and about local or regional power.³⁰ (See, for example, Tambiah, 1996: 164; Jaffrelot, 2002: 34; Behuria, 2004: 162) But even though only through form, they can also be about religion. This is common in conflicts in general, which can never be fully explained by a single-cause explanation, and none of these explanations are mutually exclusive.

²⁹ For an example where religion is discussed, see Syed (2001).

³⁰ Too often power is cited as an explanation for a conflict. But conflicts can be thought to be always about power. The crucial question then is what type of power? Is it for more funding, political influence, religious legitimacy, for example?

If not denied as having any role in the religious realm, sectarianism, then, can be seen “as a major vehicle of religious change. The effort of urban sectarian organizations to extend their influence in the countryside [...] and ‘reforming’ styles of religious life there signifies [...] the growth of a new, urban, text-based and relatively standardized religious identity among people hitherto acquainted only with local forms of religious belief and practice” (Zaman, 1998: 690). Indeed, sectarian conflicts and sectarianism in general constantly interact with broader issues concerning the place of Islam in Pakistan, which aspires to be, in some sense, an “Islamic state” (Waseem, 2010: 38).

Sectarianism’s Systemic Nature

One of the key contributions of Liechty and Clegg is highlighting the systemic nature of sectarianism in societies where sectarianism is protracted and has become a characteristic of the society. Sectarianism as a *system* implies that a process of institutionalisation has taken place. This process results in, for example, sectarianism being maintained not only by those individuals and groups who incite sectarianism by speeches or those who perpetrate sectarian violence but everybody whose actions reinforce sectarian agenda, without necessarily having the intention of being ‘sectarian’. It also means that the reactions to sectarian tensions and violence become automatised and structuralised—for example, resulting in segregated living patterns in the society (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 9, 12–13).

This makes sectarianism efficient since it does not require any direct or active response; that it is not actively opposed or countered is enough to maintain it. In fact, the systemic features of sectarianism are rarely addressed since they are less visible than, for example, violent acts. And as Liechty and Clegg claim, sectarianism penetrates all religiously motivated boundary (or identity) maintenance. Even though the motivation would not be sectarian, worship, education, and marriages exclusively within one's own sect, by falling within the boundaries set by sectarianism, can end up strengthening the sectarian divide (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 13–14).

This dimension is important if one tries to address the problem of sectarianism. The analysis has to look further than studying violent forms of sectarianism or sectarian groups perpetrating the violence, which are the most visible part of the sectarian *system*. It also has implications for the use of violence and, equally important, how the society and other sects react to that violence. The systemic nature of sectarianism will be considered in more detail in the following section, where sectarianism is placed in the Pakistani context.

In short, sectarianism is an exclusivist group identity of a religious body that can also be classified simultaneously as a political or militant entity. That group identity is imbued with negative attitude towards its environment, leading often to (social/political) action in the form of denunciation of, and discrimination or even violence against, those outside the sect. And as we will see later on, this action in conflict situations is often directed to the ones

seemingly closest to that group identity.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that belonging to a religious body, whether it is a sect or something else, is not in itself sectarian, nor are religious divisions in general bad or problematic. Sectarianism, like fundamentalism, is usually not a self-descriptive term but is attached to a social group by outside observers.

Definitions of *Sectarianism* in the Pakistani Context

The Shia-Sunni conflict is at once a struggle for the soul of Islam—a great war of competing theologies and conceptions of sacred history—and a manifestation of the kind of tribal wars of ethnicities and identities, so seemingly archaic at times, yet so surprisingly vital, with which humanity has become wearily familiar. Faith and identity converge in this conflict, and their combined power goes a long way to explain why, despite the periods of coexistence, the struggle has lasted so long and retains such urgency and significance. It is not just a hoary religious dispute, a fossilized set piece from the early years of Islam's unfolding, but a contemporary clash of identities. Theological and historical disagreements fuel it, but so do today's concerns with power, subjugation, freedom, and equality, not to mention regional conflicts and foreign intrigues. It is, paradoxically, a very old, very modern conflict. (Nasr, 2006: 20)

There is a vast body of literature relevant to sectarianism in Pakistan, although sectarianism itself is still not often the main focus of the analysis. It is featured, for example, as a relevant factor when exploring the fashionable topic of Islamic extremism in South Asia. Whereas the majority of the analysis done on sectarianism is by security and policy analysts—often as part of mapping exercises of the most potent security threats related to the region—the above quote from Vali Nasr sums up the complex terrain within which sectarianism in Pakistan exists. It extends the need to look beyond the security or policy frameworks if one attempts to understand the conjuncture where past disagreements and present political configurations and faith and identity converge to form what is today called “sectarian conflict,” or sectarianism, in Pakistan. This part of the chapter focuses on those academic works that specifically are about explaining sectarianism, looking at how academic writers have approached the complex phenomenon, and what frameworks of explanation have dominated the analyses.

Most of the literature on sectarianism in Pakistan—even the academic research—fails to define the term *sectarianism*, or to explain the dynamics implied in the term, and what those assumptions embedded in it mean in the Pakistani context.³¹ The most common usage of the term is an often-repeated statement on sectarianism, referring to the conflict (or relations) between the Sunni and Shia traditions. Majority of the academic writing on sectarianism recognises that these two groups are not homogenous, having their own

³¹ One of the rare attempts to approach the term “from the definitional point of view” is based on Wikipedia and *The Oxford English Dictionary*. See Ahmar (2010).

subsects, local variants, and different schools of thought. The terms *Sunni* and *Shia* encompass groups with widely differing interpretations of religion and religious rituals. For example, in Pakistan, there are many Shia sects—such as the Ismailis (Sixers), the Ithna Asharis (Twelvers), the Bohras, the Zaidis, and the Nizaris. Sunnis in South Asia include groups like the Brelvis,³² the Deobandis,³³ and the Ahle Hadith.³⁴ The term *Shia* in this thesis refers primarily to the Ithna Ashari, or the Twelver Shia, which forms the majority of Shias in Pakistan. Because of this plurality, it is important to note that the broad Sunni-Shia division ultimately has limited explanatory power (Mir, 2010).

Especially when talking about the violent forms of sectarianism, the conflict is often specified as being between the Deobandis and Shias, the Deobandis having “appropriated the term Sunni for themselves” (ICG, 2005: 2; Abou Zahab, 2002b: 77; Fair, 2008: 77). Even more specifically, the conflict is seen to be between the Deobandis and the Ithna Ashari, or the Twelver Shia (Abou Zahab, 2002; Ahmed, 2011). Some authors have started to extend the term *sectarianism* to intra-Sunni conflicts,³⁵ particularly the conflict and violence between the Deobandis and the Brelvis, claiming the divide between different Sunni subsects being equally wide as the divide from Shias³⁶ (ICG, 2005: 3; Fair, 2008; Ahmed, 2011). This expansion in the definition reflects the

³² Founded in Northern India in 1880s, based on the writings of Maulana Ahmad Reza Khan Bareilvi (Esposito, 2003: 10).

³³ Debandis refer to Indo-Pakistani reformist ulama movement centered in the Dar al-Ulum of Deoband, founded in 1867 (Esposito, 2003: 66).

³⁴ For more on these different sects and subsects, see, for example, S. H. Nasr (2004).

³⁵ Christine Fair also mentions inter-Shia violence, without going into details of that violence. (Fair, 2008: 77)

³⁶ This is not to say that there would not be “ecumenical collaboration” between the groups if needed!

evolvment of the sectarian phenomenon and the more prominent role violence currently plays in intra-Sunni conflicts, as noted by Moonis Ahmar:

In the recent past, in Pakistan, the sectarian conflict got more complicated when different Sunni sects began to squabble over leadership and parochial interpretation of Islam by some of the leaders of the Deobandi and Brelevi schools. In the wake of these changes in the dimension of the sectarian conflict, the Shi'a-Sunni conflict got marginalized whereas, inter-Sunni conflicts assumed prominence. (Ahmar, 2010: 55)

The change in the definition is fundamental in highlighting the complexity of the sectarian terrain in Pakistan (Samad, 2007: 172–3). Thus, looking at sectarianism in Pakistan only as a Shia-Sunni problem is too simplistic, as it is to assume that there is only one *sectarian conflict*.

Sectarianism in Pakistan: View from the Literature

While the academic texts on sectarianism have shied away from looking into the conceptual background of the term, or what the term itself implies in the Pakistani context, they have attempted to define sectarianism by describing the phenomenon through investigating its roots, outlining those historical conjunctures where sectarianism has been reinforced, and listing the contributing factors that have made sectarianism what it is in today's Pakistan.

This *descriptive definition* and approach has become widely accepted, majority of the writing on sectarianism recycling the same arguments and authors, reinforcing its authoritative position. (See, for example, Hussain, 2008; Grare, 2009; Nasr, 2000.)

The writing on sectarianism in Pakistan is anchored broadly to three key processes underlying most—if not all—of the analyses: (1) the state formation process and all the competing ideas of Pakistan (Rais, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2002; About Zahab, 2002); (2) processes of Islamisation, especially vis-à-vis the Pakistani state (Talbot, 2005; ICG, 2005); and (3) evolution of communal identities and identity politics (Nasr, 2002; Kamran, 2008; Zaman, 1998). All these processes are very much interlinked and intertwined. Next we will have a closer look at some themes—some more prominent and some less emphasised—emerging from the literature related to the key questions of this research.

Political Opportunism: The Process of Islamisation

One overarching theme in the academic studies on sectarianism is political opportunism—the *use of sectarianism*—both in national politics and in the regional political arena. The main opportunist is General Zia-ul-Haq, the army chief who declared the third martial law in Pakistan in 1977, acting as the head of the state until his death. In most analyses, the Zia era (1977–1988) signals the beginning of sectarianism in Pakistan, as we now understand it,

particularly organised and violent forms of sectarianism and religious militancy³⁷ (Talbot, 2007: 159). Of course, Zia capitalised on processes that started before him (Cohen, 2006), and even though his era marks an important time in the evolution of the sectarian phenomenon, the mechanisms of how this occurred are often simplified in the literature.

The most important *vehicle* for Zia's opportunism—significantly affecting the nature of sectarianism—was his *Islamisation* process. This project, *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (Islamic System), although claiming to “manifest a universal Islamic vision” (Nasr, 2002: 88; see also Behuria, 2004: 159), was not accommodating the different Islamic traditions alive in Pakistan. Instead, it was based on, and promoted, a very specific Sunni interpretation of Islamic theology and law in a bid to take over “structures of authority—especially at the local level—through Islamisation. This meant defining Pakistan as a Sunni state, which in turn meant charging sectarian forces to penetrate rural structures of authority” (Nasr, 2000: 176).

As argued by Mumtaz Ahmad, Zia's Islamic reforms were “peripheral”—they didn't threaten the real power holders of “an oligarchy dominated by the military and civil bureaucracy” and rather trivialised the Islamisation process by depoliticizing a large segment of the *ulama* (religious scholars) and drafting Islamic parties to take part in this process (Ahmad, 1998: 103–4). They provided “Islamic credentials to the military rulers [...] by accepting these inconsequential measures as true and genuine Islamic reforms” (Ahmad,

³⁷ This is further explored in the next chapter.

1998: 106). This, according to Ahmad, emphasised “certain external apparatuses of religion” with increased importance of the use of Islamic symbolism and enforcement of “orthodox practices and traditional rituals of Islam as public policies” (Ahmad, 1998: 107). Rather than the *Islamisation* of the Pakistani state and society *per se*, what followed were significant changes in power structures and dynamics, particularly in the local contestations of power in the changing sociopolitical environments—and assertive public use of Islamic symbols. Both are important components of the evolution of sectarianism and are of particular interest to this study. According to the literature, the state establishment, namely, the army and security agencies, as well as various governments after Zia (both military and civilian) have continued this political opportunism vis-à-vis sectarianism, sectarian conflicts, groups, and divisions, with both domestic and international goals (Samad, 2007; Talbot, 2005; Haleem, 2003; Grare, 2009; Jalal, 2008).

Looking at the policies and political decisions of the various Pakistani governments in this context is out of the scope of this work, but this example of how the Pakistani leadership has tried to co-opt the SSP to participate in the political system illustrates the type of domestic political opportunism in question. During the military rule of Pervez Musharraf, Azam Tariq, the SSP leader, was permitted to run for the 2002 national elections, even though he was in detention at the time for involvement in various terrorist acts and SSP had been banned in 2002. Having won a seat in the National Assembly, he was released from prison. Following his release, he supported the government, which needed his vote to form a ruling coalition. To retain Tariq’s

critical support, Islamabad even ignored warrants for his arrest, including those issued under antiterrorism laws in July 2000 (Abbas, 2004; ICG, 2004; Kamran, 2008). These types of political compromises and opportunistic tactics, engaged in by both political and military rulers, continue to empower sectarian groups and impact the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan (Abbas, 2010; Haqqani, 2006). They also suggest that the state has an important role and is an active agency in sectarianism, a premise that is explored further in this and the following chapters.

Sectarian opportunism has not been the exclusive tool of Pakistani political actors: the involvement of various regional players is well documented.³⁸ According to the literature, Pakistan has been one of the locations of the Saudi Arabian and Iranian relocated *proxy war*, where the Saudi government attempted to counter the *Shia threat* posed by the growing influence of Shia politics and Shia Islam after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Indeed, the brand of Sunni Islam Zia's *Islamising* process wanted to assert was "inspired and underwritten by Saudi Arabia" (Toor, 2011: 160). Countering the threat of the revived Shia identity, power-hungry Iran and its growing regional influence also impacted the sectarian organisation in Pakistan, and eventually the formation of *sectarian groups*—such as the SSP (Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan)—whose functions included countering these threats. The Shia organisation, on the other hand, drew from this Shia revival and was centred on the expressions of that empowered identity and, in addition, acted as the counterforce to the mobilised Deobandi groups. And as Pakistan's character

³⁸ See, for example, Talbot (2007), Nasr (2002), and Abou Zahab (2002).

as an Islamic state became more established, that sectarian organisation, particularly sectarian groups, resorted to a variation of the “Islam in danger” theme, focusing on supposed threats to their interests or to Islam as interpreted by them (Haqqani, 2006). These threat perceptions have had an impact not only on political opportunism but also on the politicising or *radicalisation* of sectarian identities in Pakistan. As noted by Qasim Zaman, it is “possible to discover sectarian identity by perceiving, or imagining, the existence of threats to it” (Zaman, 1998: 690). Thus, these threat perceptions in national, regional, and local levels provide an interesting—and valid—but less researched framework for understanding sectarianism (Chandran, 2008: 7).

What is noteworthy when thinking about the possibility of political opportunism both in the regional and the national levels is that sectarianism found political relevance “because it so effectively relates regional power alignments to specific political constituencies in Pakistan” (Nasr, 2000: 173). The conditions in the Pakistani polity then enabled the influence of this regional context; it found the political relevance to be able to be influential. But, as noted by Mariam Abou Zahab, “[t]hese explanations are obviously relevant but the external environment has perhaps been no more than the enabling factor which gave scale and sustenance to the sectarian phenomenon” (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 79). Thus, while the regional context³⁹ is important in understanding sectarianism in Pakistan, it is also essential to understand the limits of the instrumentalist explanations of regional political opportunism and

³⁹ The regional context is further discussed in the next chapter, with specific focus on how this regional context facilitated and influenced sectarian violence. Additionally, the important Afghan context is added to the analysis.

the regional actors' ability to implement their proxy war, or agendas, in Pakistan. Pakistan's power configurations and contestations, as well as how the regional players and events were *perceived* in Pakistan, are all important in this account.

Discourse of Exclusion

The investigation of how the discourse of exclusion has evolved and been sustained in Pakistan is critical in attempts to understand the sectarian phenomenon in today's Pakistan, and in trying to answer the key questions this research postulates. In the literature, this theme of exclusion provides also an opening for religious discourse to emerge when analysing sectarianism, and assessing its relation to the political contestations in Pakistan, both in the local and the national levels. Sectarianism, when analysed in this framework, is placed in the context of the changes in the Islamic tradition in South Asia in the past hundred or so years, and especially the pressure to *standardise* the creed (Zaman, 2002).

More broadly, the definition of "what it means to be Muslim" is important not only in relation to local and regional power struggles but also for Islamic societies in general. Often, this is understood in relation to the challenges Islamic societies face when confronted with the challenges of modernity. Particularly, the prime locus for this has not been seen to be in the "confrontation between Islam and the West" but in tensions between local

forms of worship and forms of the faith that are exclusivist, transnational, and Pan-Islamist (Pinault, 2008: x). A full examination of the relationship of sectarian discourses in Pakistan and in other predominantly Muslim societies is out of the scope of this research, but the existence of this context needs to be acknowledged.

The definition of *Muslim* has been at the core of nation building, as is the quest for true national identity since the birth of Pakistan—when, according to Khaled Ahmed, it began by “positing only two permissible identities in the state: the Muslim and the non-Muslim” (Ahmed, 2011: xv). The fact that this question of definition of Muslim has been answered in exclusive terms provides the backstory for the phenomenon of sectarianism, explaining how the political and religious organisations took the form they did and came to function as sustaining and enabling sectarian identities and discourse. It also illustrates how exclusivist sectarian claims found institutional forms in the Pakistani state.

The space for that exclusivist discourse to emerge was first initiated by the struggle the liberal-democratic order—as projected for the country to ensure the rights of all ethnic and religious groups—faced with the newly emerging centralised and authoritative state of Pakistan (Rashid, 1996). The discourse was first articulated in the 1950s, when Islam in Pakistan was first defined in *exclusive terms* with the call to declare Ahmadis (Qadianis) as non-Muslims. The Majlis-e Ahrar-e Islam (Society of Free Muslims) wanted Ahmadis to be defined as a non-Islamic sect and its converts be treated as heretics and

apostates (Haqqani, 2006; Kamran, 2008; 66). The Ahmadis are a group named after a Punjabi Muslim, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (c. 1835–1908), who believed he was the divine instrument for the reform and revival of Islam⁴⁰ (Sedgwick, 2000: 210). Controversially, Ahmad “had come to regard and describe himself as a variety of prophet” (Sedgwick, 2000: 225), bringing forth the question of the finality of Prophethood, conflicting with mainstream Islam and its basic tenets. One of the central locations of organised protests against Ahmadis was Jhang, in central Punjab. After partition, the Ahmedi community relocated their religious headquarters from Qadian in Indian Punjab to Rabwa near Chiniot, a Tehsil (subdivision) of Jhang in Central Punjab in Pakistan (Sedgwick, 2000: 225). This mobilisation against them culminated in the formation of the Tehrik-e-Khatam-e-Nabuwat (TKN), an anti-Ahmadi movement, after the government banned Majlis-e Ahrar-e Islam in 1954 (Hasan, 2011; Zaman: 1998).

Even though the call to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslims was rejected in the 1950s, “the first challenge to a consolidated Muslim identity” (Haqqani, 2006) was presented, and the social and political organisations against Ahmadis—the new groupings that had formed through that movement—had their first experience in pressure politics. The demand to denounce Ahmadis as non-Muslims “remained the focal point for Islamisation of the state” as Pakistan continued the process of defining its Muslim identity (Jalal, 2008: 271). The anti-Ahmadi movement was more successful in advocating its exclusivist agenda in June 1974, when the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1973–

⁴⁰ For further information on Ahmadis, see, for example, Gualtieri (2004) and Valentine (2008).

1977) officially declared Ahmadis a non-Muslim minority with a constitutional amendment. This “seriously and irreversibly damaged the secular fabric of Pakistani society and state” (Toor, 2011: 124) as well as undermined the foundation of the Pakistani nation-state in “affirming an exclusionary conception of citizenship” (Jalal, 2008: 272). By using a constitutional amendment to define a sect as an un-Islamic minority, it also changed the role the state could play vis-à-vis the exclusivist discourse. Now that the *Islamic state* in Pakistan had established the right to determine who was and was not a true Muslim, religious identity and religious correctness became larger issues in Pakistan’s political discourse⁴¹ (Haqqani, 2006).

Implications for the Shia Community

Both Sunni and Shia leaders had been part of the anti-Ahmadi movement (Behuria, 2004: 158). The joining of forces of Shias and Sunnis in the case of Ahmadis might have reinforced the view of inter-sectarian harmony between the main denominations of Islam. But as noted by Ashok K. Behuria, “the passion for ‘exclusivity’ has a tendency to metastasise, sub-divide, emphasise inter-group differences and crystallise around ethno-cultural religious identities in plural societies” (Behuria, 2004: 158–9). The anti-Ahmadi movement served as a prototype for the anti-Shia movement and created the dynamics and language of exclusion with which to promote further exclusivist claims on Islam (Kamran, 2008: 67). This dynamics of exclusion is significant in “a state

⁴¹ Some authors also discuss the exclusionary state policies in the case of West Pakistan and the Bengalis in relation to the development of exclusivist sectarian discourse. For more, see, for example, Rashid (1996) and Toor (2011).

which professes to be guided by the fundamental principles of Islam” as it “contributed to sectarian discourse by forcefully raising, and keeping alive, such questions as who a Muslim ‘really’ is (irrespective of one’s own claims in that regard) and what position he (and those who are not Muslim, or are not recognized as such) will have in that state” (Zaman, 1998: 692). It also opened up a space for contestations of power and the emergence of power brokers who had, or could gain, “the street power to pronounce any Pakistani a non-Muslim” (Jalal, 2008: 273). With the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims, a process was initiated where the constitutional definition of a Muslim was then extended to further demand the exclusion of Shias (and then later other Sunni sects) from what could be called *Muslim* in Pakistan (Zaman, 1998: 692; Kamran, 2008: 67; Ahmar, 2010: 55–6).

This exclusivist discourse against the Shia was formulated and fomented by religious scholars and thinkers—like Haqq Nawaz Jhangvi (who later found the SPP) and Israr Ahmad and Allamah Ihsan Ilahi Zahir (the chief of Jamiat Ulema-e Ahle Hadith). The anti-Ahmadi movement thus provided the anti-Shia front with some of their most potent leadership and model for organisation around the sectarian agenda. TKN became a forerunner of the SSP, and many its leaders, including Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, were members and supporters of TKN. The argumentation of those religious scholars and leaders culminated in the demand for a similar constitutional decree pronouncing Shias as apostates, further defining the exclusivist discourse, and producing a new style and language used within that discourse (Nasr, 2000: 160; Kamran, 2008: 67; Zaman, 1998: 692). This also began the process of transformation

of doctrinal and theological disputes into communal ones, the antagonistic discourse becoming increasingly focused on the Shia as a people and not Shiism as an interpretation of Islam (Nasr, 2000: 160).

The Zia Period

The discourse of exclusion changed significantly during the Zia period and with his systematic efforts to establish a Sunni-Hanafi state, as briefly explored above. The dynamic of exclusion that had informed state policy moved “under Zia from the periphery to centre-stage,” becoming the most serious conflict over his Islamisation process (Rashid, 1996; Ahmad, 1998: 108).

This conflict came to a culmination point in June 1980, when General Zia introduced an ordinance requiring the payment of *ushr* (a religious tax) and *zakat* (religious charity). This attempt to enforce what was seen as a Sunni law was met with resistance by the Shia, who wanted to follow their jurisprudence (Ja’fari fiqh) and thus a different interpretation of *zakat*. This resistance was turned into a display of street power by an organised march in Islamabad in July 1980. The three-day demonstration was orchestrated by several different Shia groups⁴² and was seen as a crucial factor in empowering the Shia of Pakistan, developing a more assertive Shia identity, supported by the successful Iranian Revolution the year before. It also led to

⁴² Namely, Wifaq-i-Ulema-i-Shia (the Federation of Shia Clerics), a small group of Shia ulema, Tehrik-e-Nafaz Fiqh-e-Jafria (TNFJ), and the Imamia Students Organization (ISO). (Abbas, 2010: 32)

the Shia organisation further reflecting this revived identity⁴³ (Abbas, 2010: 32; Kamran, 2008; Zaman, 1998). Faced with agitation by Shias, Zia was forced to exempt them from the compulsory payment of *zakat* and *ushr*. Soon after Zia's defeat, there was an increase in denouncing the Shia as heretics, in the anti-Shia rhetoric, and in publishing of anti-Shia material (Abou Zahab, 2007; ICG, 2005). It also led to violent attacks on the Shia in Karachi in 1983 (Abbas, 2010: 33). This episode reinforced the exclusivist discourse, and it also further changed the role of the state in its relation to the process of Islamisation, where it became "not only more Islamized, but it was also now adopting a sectarian preference within the Islamic context" (Haqqani, 2006). By allowing Shias to be exempted from *zakat* and all those aspects of his Islamisation process that contravened Shia law, Zia was seen to concede the universalism of his Islamism. It also recognised Shia communal rights, "thus legitimating sectarian posturing" (Nasr, 2000: 176).

The sectarian forces worked to advance the exclusivist discourse. The space for the Ahmadi community to practise their religion in public was limited further in 1984, when the future SSP members helped to formulate legal provisions that penalised any Ahmadi that might try to "assert their faith publicly" (Pinault, 2008: 69). By further defining the role of Ahmadis in the Pakistani state, the move reinforced the exclusivist discourse by allowing it to define the use of public space in Pakistan. By reserving public space and the use of symbols of Islam in that space for those who were defined as *Muslims* by the Pakistani state, the exclusivist discourse found institutional application and enforcement

⁴³ The Imamia Students Organization (ISO) was at the forefront of this politicisation, and the story of the organisation provides a fascinating account on this identity mobilisation. For detailed accounts, see Abou Zahab (2007) and Abbas (2010).

in an unprecedented way and a new realm of the Pakistani society to claim.

Unsurprisingly, there have later been attempts to define the use of public space similarly for Shias. In 1992, as a member of the National Assembly, SSP's Azam Tariq attempted to introduce *Namoos-e-Sahaba* ("the honour of the Prophet's Companions") bill. The aim of this legislative move was to extend Ordinance 195, the current blasphemy law (which mandates death for anyone dishonouring the Prophet Muhammad's name), so as to inflict capital punishment on individuals found guilty of insulting the Prophet's Companions—clearly an attempt to forbid the Shia practise of *tabarra* (cursing) (Pinault, 2008: 68; Hasan, 2011: 83–4). Limiting public space for Shia rituals, particularly Muharram, was not the ultimate goal of this proposed legislation, but it was hoped to "lay ground for the declaration of Shias as non-Muslims as the Shias were actively involved in the vilification of some companions of the Prophet" (Hasan, 2011: 83–4).

The Pakistani State and Sectarian Discourse

In the literature, the list of culprits sowing the "seeds of decay"⁴⁴ to help sectarianism flourish is long. It often focuses more on the active agents of inciting and sustaining sectarianism. The literature is rather quiet on the *passive culprits*: those factors and structures enabling and sustaining

⁴⁴ The term is borrowed from Khan (2004).

sectarianism without active participation or a visible role. Before turning to explore the role violence plays in enforcing and maintaining the exclusivist discourse, the chapter will explore factors that have facilitated and sustained exclusivist sectarian discourse—and continue to do so—according to the current literature.

The role of the Pakistani state in providing space for and being agential in reproducing exclusivist discourse, as outlined above, clearly indicates that *the state* is not a neutral space or actor when it comes to sectarianism and sectarian differences. This pattern of politics that “combines ideological puritanism with communal exclusivism [...] has found ways to relate its demands to vested political, social and criminal interests, it has become both entrenched in the political process, and found new functions in society and politics” (Nasr, 2002: 109).

Sectarianism, thus, has established an institutional base in politics, and one of the most worrying aspects of this *institutionalisation* of sectarianism is indeed the close, even *symbiotic*, relationship of sectarian groups with mainstream religio-political organisations and the blurring of the line between the two, as well as the role sectarian mobilisation plays in both local and provincial politics. Particularly, SSP has pursued both theological and political confrontations with Shias and continues to play a political role, participating in electoral politics, as we saw above (Pinault, 2008: 68; Siddiqa, 2013: 6; Irfani, 2004: 163).

The fact that exclusivist sectarian discourse has made inroads into being institutionalised in Pakistan is of significance when the attention is turned to understanding the power of that discourse and, even more so, to trying to counter that discourse. As observed by Saadia Toor, the “institutional power behind specific ideological projects is far more significant than the inherent persuasiveness of the ideas they embody” (Toor, 2011: 3). Not to overemphasise the scope of this institutionalisation, however, it needs to be observed that Pakistan’s ruling institutions, including many mainstream political parties—such as the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the various Muslim League parties—have been, by and large, *nonsectarian* (despite their engagement in political opportunism vis-à-vis sectarian organisations and groups). Also, in civil and military services, professionalism and the corporate interests of the military and the higher civil service have usually prevailed over sectarian affiliations (Ahmed, 2003: 61).

But the Islamisation—or Sunnification—process under Zia involved significant changes to the structure of the state. The most obvious example of this, according to Saadia Toor, was the permeation of the judico-legal system through *Islamic* provisions and laws. The establishment of parallel shariat courts and the placement and promotion of Sunni religious conservatives within the judiciary—all contributed towards the increasing conservatism of the judicial system (Toor, 2011: 160). This, in addition to other forms of institutionalisation, creates the possibility and potential of sectarian discourse to change the hierarchical patterns of social relations, not only through

violence, but “even more significantly, through legal, institutional and constitutional changes” (Waseem, 2010: 16).⁴⁵ Indeed, the importance of a sect can be found in a myriad of mutually reinforcing factors in Pakistani society—for example, in the organisation of education or the legal system in the country. The use of blasphemy laws is an important example of how the court system is used for sectarian purposes.⁴⁶ According to the International Crisis Group, religious bias is also built into other official procedures, and social discrimination based on a sectarian identity is not uncommon (ICG, 2005: 6, 25). All these factors help sectarianism to function without the intention of individuals, groups, or communities to be *sectarian*.

The above account on state practises and policies related to the emergence of exclusivist sectarian discourse is merely an introduction to the complex and multifaceted process in question. But by enabling the space for that sectarian discourse to exist, by making it possible for that discourse to have political significance, and, indeed, by eventually engaging in the process of sectarian identity mobilisation, the state is an agential party to what is called *sectarianism* in Pakistan. This involvement of the state and the law to instrumentalise and sustain sectarian discourse renders it more difficult for a counterdiscourse to emerge and leaves civil society less likely to challenge the appropriation of the state (Rashid, 1996). The way this has affected the state-society relationship, changing political rationalities and political

⁴⁵ An important area for future research on sectarianism is the *perceived* sectarian interest of state and government policies. Nosheen Ali refers to this as the “perpetual paranoia of ‘sectarian interests’ at work in government affairs” and believes that this stems from the actual discriminatory practice implemented by Pakistani governments (Ali, 2010: 749).

⁴⁶ For more details, see, for example, Rais (2004).

possibilities (particularly the absence of strong counterdiscourses) within the Pakistani polity is an area calling for further research.

Sectarianism and Migration

At another intersection of the various themes in the literature on sectarianism is migration. This less emphasised but important theme highlights the complexity of the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan. Migration—both internal and external—has shaped sectarianism in a multitude of ways, again bringing forth the interplay of regional and national contexts in understanding the sectarian phenomenon.

Punjab and Gulf Migration

The large-scale migration of Pakistani workers to the Gulf and Arab states in the 1970s and the 1980s, and the return of that population in the late 1980s and 1990s, helped to facilitate the introduction of different religious interpretations to the traditionally “more pluralist, low-church religion.” Furthermore, with the return of the labour migrants came significant social and economic changes to the Pakistani society. According to Zaman, the timing of the emergence of a sectarian organisation at the same time as the return of these labour migrants is probably not without significance. This organisation was linked, and responded to, the search of an urban religious identity

coupled with a quest for middle-class status for a broader societal group, which those migrants were a part of (Ahmed, 2007: 82–3; Zaman, 1998: 708–10).

The migrant flow from the Indian Punjab emigrating after the partition is also an important factor in explaining the sectarian phenomenon. The migrants from East Punjab were largely Sunnis, belonging to the Deobandi sect (Raman, 2002). With their Deobandi beliefs, they brought with them a more puritanical brand of Islam, something not favoured before in the area, strengthening the Deobandi community in Pakistan. The strengthening of the Deobandi brand of Islam is also related to the proliferation of Tablighi Jamaat,⁴⁷ “by far the greatest preaching organization in the Muslims world,” originating from the Deobandi tradition. Those ‘converted’ by the Jamaat became staunch Deobandis with anti-Shia sentiments (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 85; Lieven, 2011: 129). There were also Shia refugees from India, albeit less in numbers. Nevertheless, they strengthened the Shia communities all across Pakistan, especially in the urban centres of Punjab and Sindh. This resulted, for example, in the increase in the size and number of Shia religious processions in Pakistan in the 1950s (Abbas, 2010: 20).

The importance of migration to the development of sectarian discourse can be seen in specific locations—like Jhang in Punjab, which is often characterised as the birthplace of sectarianism in Pakistan. Besides the abovementioned transfer of the headquarters of the Ahmadi community to Jhang, the arrival of

⁴⁷ Tablighi Jamaat was founded in India in the 1920s. For more on Tablighi Jamaat, see, for example, Jalal (2009), Hedges (2008), and Rana (2009).

migrants from East Punjab changed the traditional economic and class configurations. The emergence of a new middle class engaged in a power struggle with the traditional landowning elite, which in Jhang was predominantly Shia. This middle class, according to Mariam Abou Zahab, was “compelled to use anti-Shia rhetoric” and found the sectarian organisations as vehicles for advancing their political interests. Abou Zahab then sees sectarianism in Jhang in a context where the traditional power structures were unable to accommodate the rapid social and economic change, and left the emergence of a new class without representation in a local system of power (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 79,80). Whereas for Qasim Zaman the arrival of migrant labour from the Gulf might have been tangential to the emergence of a sectarian organisation, Abou Zahab concludes in her research that the Sunni-Shia conflict in Jhang is essentially an issue of class where “sect has become an identity marker, a temporary refuge and a platform to articulate grievances and get access to power” (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 80).⁴⁸

Another author who has conducted extensive research on Jhang, Tahir Kamran, on the other hand, looks at the local power contestations there as an intersection and competition between urban sectarian mobilisation and traditional rural *biraderi* (kinship) politics. Kamran also explores sectarianism in the context of a rising commercial class in Jhang City, drawn largely from local shopkeepers, some of them returned workers from the Gulf, and East

⁴⁸ Ayesha Siddiqi has countered some of Mariam Abou Zahab’s findings by claiming that the available land data in Jhang does not support this theory, as there are a larger number of Sunni landowners than their Shia counterparts. She also disputes the idea of the Sunni-Shia conflict being an extension of class conflict, because if that were true, “there would be violence in other parts of the province as well such as Sargodha where there are important Shiite landowners in the rural parts of the division” (Siddiqi, 2013: 30).

Punjab migrants, and how they sought political opportunities to match their economic power. This group also provided the key base of support for SSP, being influential in advancing and supporting the institutionalisation of sectarian discourse in Jhang. It is not surprising, then, that most of the influential SSP leaders—barring Haq Nawaz himself and to a far lesser extent Shaykh Hakim Ali—were from the migrants' community (Kamran, 2008).

Whether the sectarian conflict in Jhang is a class issue, a group contestation related to balancing the political and the economic powers, or a tension between the traditional rural and new urban forms of power and influence is not the main focus of research. It appears that all those frameworks are valid in assessing the developments and changes that took place in Jhang, illustrating the complex processes at play in the *sectarian phenomenon*. Sectarianism and sectarian conflicts are multifaceted and complex, allowing multiple analytical approaches to be used. What is noteworthy for this research, and in understanding the development of sectarian discourse, is that sectarian discourse in Jhang was both formulated around and because of the new sociopolitical situation, and it was also something that the migrants brought with them, alongside their “redefined religious identity that was militantly Sunni and regarded Shia as ‘the other’” (Kamran, 2008: 76). The inextricably complex contestations in Jhang are framed in terms of confrontationist sectarian identities, contributing to the development of sectarianism, and exclusivist sectarian discourse in a very powerful way (Ahmad Ali, 2000; Kamran, 2008; Rashid, 1996).

Afghan and Internal Migration

The migration of Afghan refugees to the western border areas (like Kurram) of Pakistan and to the rest of the country, as well as the internal migration of Pathans from NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [KPK]),⁴⁹ also changed the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan by introducing and asserting other interpretations of Islam and by changing the demography of various locations—similarly changing the social, economic, political, and religious outlooks of those localities (Chandran, 2008: 7; Abou Zahab, 2009: 8). The city of Karachi is an important example of how demographic changes have been instrumental in sectarian identity mobilisation and aiding the protracted violent conflicts ongoing in the city. To assess the immensely complex situation in Karachi is out of the scope of this research,⁵⁰ but that complexity highlights the difficulty in defining sectarian conflicts—or other conflicts—in Pakistan, as was already seen with the case of Jhang. The urban struggles in the city of *muhajirs* (migrants) are partly explained by the conflicts Pathan migration and the ascendancy of the community linked to Sunni orthodoxy and militancy triggered with the Muhajirs, the dominant ethnic community in the city in the mid-1980s. These conflicts can be termed both ethnic and sectarian, either of these explanatory frameworks negating each other (Gayer, 2003: 3; Nasr, 2000: 183–4).

⁴⁹ The name of the Province was changed in 2010.

⁵⁰ For more on the conflicts in Karachi, see, for example, Budhani et al. (2010) and Gayer (2007).

Sunni settlers from NWFP and Punjab also changed the demographic outlook in Gilgit, in Gilgit-Baltistan (previously called the Northern Areas), contributing to the sectarian conflicts. Several authors note the role of the Pakistani state and its active involvement in efforts to alter the demographic profile of Gilgit–Baltistan, the only administrative unit with a Shia majority in Pakistan,⁵¹ significantly changing also the sectarian outlook (Khan, 2002; Ali, 2008 & 2010). Interestingly, the International Crisis Group contributes the increasing sectarian tensions to developing infrastructure. Following the construction of the Karakoram Highway in 1986 and the opening of trade through the China border, Sunni settlers from NWFP and Punjab established businesses in Gilgit, altering its demographic balance and inviting Shia resentment (ICG, 2007: 16).

What these examples on migration and sectarianism highlight are the applicability and relevance of sectarian differences and discourse. Studies on sectarianism in the localities mentioned above—especially Jhang, Gilgit, Kurram, and Karachi—show how sectarian divisions are often superimposed on ethnic, linguistic, class, and *biraderi* divisions and on political fissures (Haleem, 2003; Kamran, 2008; Ahmad Ali, 2000). These studies, by placing sectarianism in a local context, contribute especially to “revealing the complex interplay between different sources of political identity and mobilization in Pakistan” as well as the variety of factors that make *sectarianism* the valid form of mobilisation in those contexts (Kamran, 2008: 57–8). Within Pakistan,

⁵¹ The ambiguous administrative status of the Northern Areas is thought to have resulted partly because if made a province, such an entity would have a Shia majority and would be the only Shia-majority province in the country. (Nasr, 2006: 159–160)

sectarian organisation is competing with other forms of social organisation in vastly different sociopolitical settings. What then makes that form of organisation and mobilisation relevant and successful in those different settings? Furthermore, often the local conflict configurations do not match issues contested at the macrolevel. The literature does not offer simple solutions to this question. According to Khaled Ahmed, the rise of the SSP in Jhang is located in a complex sociological matrix but outside Jhang, from Quetta to Kurram Agency and the Northern Areas, it is located firmly within the ideological paradigm of Pakistan and its logical progression towards a hard-line Sunni state (Ahmed, 2011: 34). It is then the state project that enables the sectarian difference and discourse to find relevance in different sociopolitical settings. Ahmed Rashid sees a role in the functioning of sectarian groups and the way they project local issues as part of a larger concern. In the case of a sectarian group such as the SSP, the local problem and power contestations are consciously linked to the international arena of Shia-Sunni confrontation by reference to Iran and Saudi Arabia and the battle for the soul of the Muslim world (Rashid, 1996). It is clear that there is a space for further research both on the role migration in its variety of forms plays in the sectarian phenomenon, as well as on how and why sectarian discourse finds relevance in the local, the supralocal, and the national levels in Pakistan.

Minoritisation and Sectarian Discourse

Further important conclusions from these accounts on the effect of migration in different localities to the sectarian phenomenon and sectarian discourse are the process of minoritisation and the applicability and relevance of sectarian discourse.

Most, if not all, of the locations of sectarian conflict in Pakistan (particularly Jhang, Gilgit, and Kurram in KPK) are locations where the usual minority Shia–majority Sunni balance is reversed, either by demographics (like in Gilgit or Kurram) and/or by relative economic power (like in Jhang). Sectarianism in those localities is tied to efforts, through local governance, to address these perceived imbalances, for example, by intentional state intervention or demographic changes.

Overall, there are no precise figures on the percentage of Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan. In fact, this is a contentious issue, being reflected in the broad range of often-politicised estimates offered. For example, the estimate on the Shia population in Pakistan ranges from 2.5 percent (according to anti-Shia organisations) to 25 percent (according to the Shia organisation Tehrik-i-Jafriya) (Ahmed, 2003: 57). The lack of any official statistics allows both groups to offer their own inflated statistics (Malik, 2005: 205). According to ICG:

By official estimates, 96 per cent of Pakistan's population is Muslim. There is no official data on sectarian identity since the state prefers to paint a picture of religious homogeneity to justify having adopted Islam

as the official religion. By an unofficial estimate, 75 to 80 per cent of the Muslim population is Sunni and 15 to 20 per cent Shia. (ICG, 2005: 2)

These vastly different, competing estimates are related to exclusivist sectarian discourse and the status of the Shia community in Pakistan. The exclusivist discourse, if not successful in bringing forth the official declaration of Shias as non-Muslims, can work towards the minoritisation of the community. It is important to emphasise that the concept of *minority* is essentially different to “what is less in numbers” in this context, as minority status brings with it both legal and political consequences. As observed by Iftikhar Malik, “[t]he Shias, inclusive of Ismailis and Zikris, are Muslim communities per se, who are deeply disturbed over Sunni demands to designate them as minorities given the accompanying stigma and marginalization” (Malik, 2005: 221). In a country basing itself on religious majoritarianism, to be termed as *minority* would mean a significantly changed status and changed meanings for the community in the Pakistani polity.

Conclusions

Sectarianism as a concept has been rarely defined in the academic literature in peace and conflict studies. This definition, however, is crucial when trying to academically analyse sectarianism and sectarian conflicts, as it helps us understand the dynamics and nature of the phenomenon. Sectarianism, in short, is an exclusivist group identity of a religious body that can be classified

simultaneously also as a political or militant entity. At the core of the definition is *action* and the outward-oriented nature of sectarianism—of the meaning attached to belonging to a religious body and the negative attitude towards others outside it. Important for analysis of sectarian conflicts is the notion that sectarianism is most problematic when it is armed with exclusivist claims and infused with politics.

When placed in the Pakistani context, sectarianism is mostly analysed in the security and international relations disciplines. The literature offers mostly a descriptive definition of the phenomenon, relying on few key authors. The writing on sectarianism in Pakistan is anchored broadly to three key, interlinked processes underlying most—if not all—of the analysis: (1) the state formation process and all the competing ideas of Pakistan; (2) processes of Islamisation, especially vis-à-vis the Pakistani state; and (3) evolution of communal identities and identity politics. What is evident from the literature is the complexity of the sectarian terrain in Pakistan—the explaining and sustaining factors of sectarianism are multifaceted, its structural continuums are deeply embedded in the Pakistani state, and there is a multitude of sectarian conflicts in different localities in Pakistan.

The complexity of the sectarian phenomenon is also apparent in the development of exclusivist sectarian discourse. Having been first articulated and formulated in the anti-Ahmadi campaign, it later on fed off from General Zia's Islamisation process and the state's practises and policies in enabling the discourse to have political relevance. The discourse sits firmly within the

regional framework that shaped it both through material support and ideological stimulus. The intriguing interplay of regional, national, and local contexts in influencing the sectarian phenomenon in Pakistan can also be approached with the framework of migration and how the different forms of international and internal migration have facilitated the introduction of new interpretations of Islam, ideological underpinnings, as well as new forms of community relations through demographic changes.

Next, with this context of sectarianism in mind, we will place *sectarian violence* at the centre of the analysis. The next chapter will have a closer look at how violence is understood in the literature on sectarianism in Pakistan and the meanings attached to the use of violence in sectarian conflicts.

Chapter 3

Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: View from the Literature

At the beginning of my time in Pakistan, I could not distinguish between the various forms of violence I encountered and I was astonished and appalled by much that I read, saw and reported. Then, after a year or so, I found myself becoming more habituated to the brutality that was so much a part of the life of the country and began to see its variety. (Burke, 2007: 32)

Sectarian violence, as well as sectarian conflicts, in Pakistan exists in a complex web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing forms of violence and militancy. As reflected by Jason Burke in the above quote, it is often difficult to separate these intertwined violent practises, even for analytical purposes. This chapter will take a look at the academic understandings of sectarian violence, the contexts in which it is analysed, and what role that violence is assigned. Even though some of the literature talks about intra-Sunni violence and recognises this as sectarian violence, most analysts refer to Shia-Sunni violence when analysing sectarian violence, following the popular definition of sectarianism in Pakistan as seen in the previous chapter (Grare, 2009; Abbas, 2002; Abou Zahab, 2002). This chapter, and thesis, while recognising the

intra-Sunni aspect of sectarianism and sectarian violence, will limit its focus on the violence between Sunnis and Shias.

As is the case with the analyses of the sectarian phenomenon more generally, a lot of the examination done on sectarian violence is done within the security framework, with a particular focus on militant sectarian groups. While discussing what the literature says about sectarian violence within the security framework, this chapter will also study whether there are any alternative definitions of violence and whether, for academic writers, the violence exists outside the framework of sectarian groups.

This chapter takes a look at sectarian violence as it is analysed in the academic literature, also paying attention to why it is difficult to distinguish between the various forms of violence and violent practises. First, it explores the understandings the current literature has of sectarian violence and how organised sectarian violence started in Pakistan. Next, the focus is on mapping the elements that sustain and enable violence. Particularly, the roles of *violence of the word* and the Pakistani state are discussed. Finally, the chapter turns to look at violence as posited by the theoretical framework and if the literature offers any observations on border construction and maintenance as a result of protracted violence.

What Violence?

Even more than with the general studies on sectarianism, majority of the academic and policy analysts interested in sectarian violence come from the security field or write for a security-related audience. This is reflected in the analyses, where violence is often understood as its most visible physical forms of deadly incidents and where sectarian violence itself is often equated and conflated with sectarian conflict. (See, for example, Ahmad Ali, 2000; Irfani, 2004.) Many analyses trying to understand the growth of sectarian violence thus follow the explanations for the growth of sectarianism—often also because the difference between sectarian conflicts and the violence used in those conflicts is not clear. It also reflects a limited understanding of conflicts in general, sometimes taking away from the richness and validity of the studies. Therefore, violence in the literature is also frequently reduced to the genealogy of sectarian groups, outlines of dates of the most prominent violent acts, and numbers of casualties that perished in those acts. There are a lot of statistics showing the increasing (or decreasing) number of casualties. Violence, then, in many of those analyses is presented as lists of the most notable or most lethal incidents (Behuria, 2004; Roul, 2005; Hussain, 2008). Violence is showcased and examined through those incidents, through the most prominent targets and most novel methods of violence.

Because of this equation of sectarian violence to sectarian conflicts, there are certain factors and elements that are well documented and researched in the literature—the beginning of organised sectarian violence, the changing trends

in violence with the evolution of targets and changing patterns and modes of operation, and the hallmarks of sectarian violence with the introduction of new methods of violence or weapons. The regional context of sectarian violence is also recognised as relevant and widely researched. From the literature, we can also track how sectarian violence has evolved geographically and how it has become more lethal, with the intention to cause “maximum damage” (Hussain, 2002: 89–89). Let us now turn to examine more closely what the existing literature says about these themes.

The Beginning of Organised Sectarian Violence

The first serious incident of Sunni-Shia violence in Pakistan, according to Hassan Abbas, occurred in 1956, during the time when the exclusivist discourse was also being formulated and shaped in Pakistan. A demand from a group of Sunni leaders in the Punjab Province to ban Muharram processions was met with resistance from the Shia *ulema*, and a local crisis ensued. It was successfully resolved with the help of political leaders and government functionaries, and no one was killed in the incident (Abbas, 2010: 20). There had also been other localised disputes, particularly around Muharram processions,⁵² but the literature assigns the start of the current form of sectarian violence to the 1980s, when that violence significantly changed—both qualitatively and quantitatively.

⁵² See, for example, Tambiah (1996: 164).

This change is attributed to the organisation of various new groups to promote the sectarian agenda and discourse. Sawad-e Azam Ahle Sunnat (Greater Unity of the Sunnis) was founded in 1980 by Maulana Saleemullah Khan, a Deobandi cleric, around the exclusivist demands of Pakistan to be declared a Sunni state and Shias being officially declared non-Muslims. Sawad-e Azam followers were later responsible for attacking Shia neighbourhoods and religious gatherings in sectarian riots in Karachi.⁵³ A turning point that changed the nature of sectarian violence for Mariam Abou Zahab was the murder of Arif Hussain Al-Hussaini, the head of Tehrik-e-Nafaz Fiqh-e-Jafria Pakistan (TNFJ), in Peshawar on August 5, 1988. The killing of the first Turi Shia leader from Parachinar, Kurram, was “the first of a long series of sectarian killings” (Abou Zahab, 2002: 5). For other authors, like Tahir Kamran and Zahir Hussain, the chain of sectarian killings started a year earlier with the murder of Allama Ehsan Elahi Zaheer, the head of Jamiat Ulema-e-Ahle Hadith. The Shias were accused of being involved, having been the major focus of Allama Zahir’s fiery speeches (Ahmad Ali, 2000; Ahmed, 2011; Hussain, 2008; Kamran, 2008). Azmat Abbas observes, however, that this does not imply that sect-related killings started towards the very end of Zia’s era. The spread of sectarian violence had started during Zia’s period, and it became uncontrollable with the death of the military ruler just a few days after the murder of Al-Hussaini, in August 17, 1988 (Abbas, 2002: 31).

Indeed, both killings were pointing towards a pattern that was expanded to an unprecedented level after the murder of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the founder of

⁵³ There were also anti-Shia riots seen in Punjab, particularly in Lahore in 1986 (Rashid, 1996).

the SSP, in February 1990, outside his home in Jhang by two gunmen on a motorcycle. Violent sectarian clashes broke out that resulted in dozens of casualties, then spread to other parts of the Punjab Province (Rashid, 1996; Hussain, 2008: 3; Kamran, 2008: 55–57). The SSP was established either in 1984 or 1985 (authors differ on the date) under the leadership of Jhangvi in Jhang, Pakistan’s Central Punjab Province⁵⁴ (Haqqani, 2006; Nasr, 2000: 171; Lieven, 2011: 293).⁵⁵ The SSP started a program of anti-Shia attacks, making Jhang the focal location of the new organised sectarian violence. Despite there being other locations of violent incidents (like Karachi) or even long-standing disputes, such as in the Tribal Areas between Sunnis and Shias,⁵⁶ the Central and Southern Punjab—particularly Jhang—has been seen as the birthplace of violent sectarianism and from where it spread to other parts of Pakistan (Hussain, 2008: 96; Grare, 2009: 144; ICG, 2005: 13). This emphasises how the narrative of sectarian violence in Pakistan is tied to the *organisation* around sectarian discourse, not examining the relationship of that discourse to the previous violent incidents—like riots—or continuing conflict in Kurram in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas.

The Shia militancy in Pakistan dates back to the early 1980s, and the formation of the previously mentioned TNFJ⁵⁷ (the militant Shia organisation)

⁵⁴ SSP was originally named Anjuman-e Sipah-e Sahaba (ASS), or Society of the Army of the Prophet’s Companions. According to Husain Haqqani, once the unfortunate English connotation of the abbreviation became apparent to the militia leaders, the name was changed to SSP (Haqqani, 2006).

⁵⁵ Other *founding fathers* of SSP include Maulana Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqi, Maulana Eesar-ul-Haq Qasmi, and Maulana Azam Tariq (Rashid, 1996). Several authors offer different details on the birth of SSP. For more information on SSP, see, for example, Khaled (2011).

⁵⁶ According to Mariam Abou Zahab, Pakistan’s Tribal Areas have seen Sunni-Shia violence since the 1930s (Abou Zahab, 2009: 2).

⁵⁷ TNFJ was renamed Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP, the Jafri Movement of Pakistan) in 1993, thus removing the word *nifaz*, which in Urdu means “implementation.” With this move, Allama

was centred around Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP, Army of Muhammad), formed in 1993⁵⁸ (Abbas, 2002: 25; Rashid, 1996). It was founded by Ghulam Raza Naqvi, who declared that he wanted to set up a Quds force of both Sunnis and Shias to liberate Palestine and protect the Shia community in Pakistan (Abou Zahab, 2002: 5; Abbas, 2002: 25). But in practise, SMP did little more than retaliate for SSP's assaults on Shia by killing SSP leaders and cadres and occasionally attacking Deobandi mosques in reprisal for attacks on Shia mosques. The group also suffered a severe blow only a few years after its formation, when Allama Murid Abbas Yazdani, SMP's patron-in-chief, was assassinated in 1996 and one of SMP's hit men was arrested, attributing the murder of Yazdani to the orders of Ghulam Raza Naqvi. The same year, the Punjab Police also raided SMP's stronghold in Thokar Niaz Beg in Lahore, furthering the decline of the group⁵⁹ (Abbas, 2002: 26; Ahmed, 2011: 141, 143; Haqqani, 2006).

In the mid-1990s, most likely in 1994,⁶⁰ the SSP split into two groups, with some of its leaders forming Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ, Jhangvi's Army), so named to commemorate the memory of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi (Abbas, 2002: 22; Siddiqi, 2013: 6). Riaz Basra, SSP's former information secretary, set up LJ after accusing the SSP's leadership of not fulfilling Haq Nawaz Jhangvi's

Sajid Naqvi, who followed Hussaini as the leader of the organization, wanted to appear less provocative to Sunnis (Abbas, 2010: 37).

⁵⁸ Again, there are different views as to the details of the birth of SMP. Vali Nasr, for example, dates it to 1991, almost a year after the murder of SSP leader Jhangvi (Nasr 2000, 171). And according to Rashid, it was created by Maulana Mureed Abbas Yazdani (Rashid, 1996).

⁵⁹ Different authors debate whether this decline led to the total disintegration of SMP. Yunus Samad claims that by 1998, SMP had disintegrated due to a concentrated campaign by the police and other agencies. Many of its members were either jailed or in exile in Iran or Southern Lebanon (Samad, 2007: 172). This is disputed, for example, by Azmat Abbas (Abbas, 2002: 27).

⁶⁰ As before, authors differ on the exact year and details of the formation of LJ. According to Tahir Kamran, LJ was formed in 1996 (Kamran, 2008: 80).

mission. It has also been argued that the establishment of a separate, more violent group was done with the SSP leadership to form a separate platform to advance a sectarian agenda (Abbas, 2002: 23). Indeed, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi was “uncompromisingly violent” (Haqqani, 2006) and operated so successfully that it is assigned the title of “the most violent sectarian militant organization that has ever existed in Pakistan” (Abbas, 2002: 22).

Fundamentally, these sectarian militant groups are a product of “factionalising of the existing politico-religious parties” (Rashid, 1996) and, as such, are the offspring of sectarian parties and organisations. The latter provides ideological inspiration for violence, which is carried out by paramilitary groups (Kamran, 2008: 3). Although it is debatable whether these groups were formed for the sole purpose of violence, it may at least partly “be more of a division of labour arrangement wherein the primarily political is separated from the primarily militant so that each side can work effectively in its own sphere” (Rashid, 1996).

If many academic writers on sectarianism do not differentiate between sectarian violence and sectarian conflict, it is equally common to equate sectarian violence with sectarian groups, especially the SSP, LJ, and SMP (Irfani, 2004; Abbas, 2002; Mir, 2005). These groups are also understood to be the sole perpetrators of sectarian violence. Whether or not all *sectarian violence* can be attributed to these organisations, they have a significant role in understanding what that violence means in Pakistan, what forms that violence takes, and the power of sectarian discourse that violence advances.

As observed by Qasim Zaman, these organisations are a “new and powerful means at once of fostering sectarian identities and of expressing them, frequently with the threat or the actual use of violence” (Zaman, 1998: 690).

Sustaining Elements of Sectarian Violence

The analyses of sectarian violence in Pakistan centre on the elements enabling sectarian violence, the factors that support and sustain it, and how those have evolved over time. Even though these analyses usually focus on the violence perpetrated by sectarian groups, and what factors provide these groups “‘operational spaces’ to function and grow” (Abou Zahab, 2007: 7), uncovering these elements gives an important insight into the role sectarian violence plays in the Pakistani state and society.

Violence does not exist without supportive elements in the society. These supportive factors and systems are not confined within the borders of Pakistan but extend to neighbouring countries and regional politics. They can also be found in existing institutions within the Pakistani society, as well as in the action and inaction of the Pakistani state. There are both protective architectures as well as enabling ones, providing both active and nonactive support for those *operational spaces* to exist.

Regional and Local Support

The regional context and how it has facilitated sectarian violence is widely researched. Especially the current forms of sectarian violence are seen in the regional context of the rise of the Afghan War, the Taliban and Talibanisation, and the convergence of different militant and jihadi groups. (See, for example, Abou Zahab, 2002 & 2009.) Sectarian violence is clearly embedded in the different border-defying structures of violence and closely linked to, or a part of, jihadi violence, (Budhani et al., 2010; Grare, 2009), terrorist networks, and “dizzily diverse universe of Pakistani Islamic militancy” (Roul, 2005).

The Afghan War is seen as the most significant regional contributor to sectarian violence with the “supply of manpower, military training, weapons, networking and funds,” not only affecting the level and intensity of sectarian violence, but also facilitating the qualitative change in the modes of violence (Grare, 2007: 141, 144; Abou Zahab, 2002). Ian Talbot sums up the legacies that the Afghan conflict left for the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan:

First, the leakage of weapons intended for the *mujahideen* resulted in the growth of what has been termed the “Kalashnikov culture” in Pakistan. This enabled militant sectarian organizations to readily take on a paramilitary character. [...] The fire-power of sectarian groups far exceeded that of a corrupt and demoralized police force. [...] Second, the Afghan War created links between elements of the Pakistani Army, the Inter-Services Intelligence, and Islamic militants. This provided the

latter with invaluable training. It also ensued a degree of immunity if they turned from *jihad* to wage sectarian violence within Pakistan. [...] Third, the collapse of the state in Afghanistan created the conditions in which military training camps could be established. [...] Fourth, Sunni extremism within Pakistan was encouraged by the Taliban's rise to power. [...] They shared a commitment to Sunni orthodoxy and a hostility to the Shias. (Talbot, 2007: 161–2)

Talbot highlights how the Afghan conflict contributed by providing not only material support affecting the operational competency of sectarian groups—like weapons, fighters, and training—but also institutional support in the form of backing of state elements or the Taliban. Also, other types of links were established that are of crucial importance in understanding sectarian violence. Sectarian militancy is not the province of a few militants acting in isolation. The members of groups like LJ consisted mainly of Afghan jihad veterans, who were attracted to the sectarian group able to employ them. These linkages resulted, for example, in SSP fighters also attacking Shia targets in Afghanistan (Haqqani, 2006; Kamran, 2008; Samad, 2007). The overlapping membership with a host of Deobandi militant groups, as well as the Deobandi Islamist political party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), meant that “these Deobandi groups are strongly rooted to an archipelago of Deobandi madrassah and mosques, which also produced the Afghan, and later the Pakistan, Taliban” (Fair et al., 2010: 507). With these linkages come a large regional support network and an affiliation with the Afghan Taliban (Rashid, 2001; ICG, 2005; Fair et al., 2010: 507).

Where the Afghan context was crucial for the Sunni sectarian groups, the Shia group SMP relied on support from Iran. Besides material support, Iran offered safe havens for SMP militants once Pakistan's law enforcement and intelligence agencies started targeting the group more aggressively in the early 1990s. But by the mid-1990s, the SMP had already lost most of its Iranian support. Iran stopped financing Pakistani Shias because it was counterproductive and it feared a backlash of Sunni militancy in Iranian Balochistan, alongside the border it shares with Pakistan (Abbas, 2010: 37–8; Abou Zahab, 2002: 117; Samad, 2007: 172).

Funding has been the most obvious and direct form of regional support for sectarian violence. Most of these outfits got their initial funding from the Middle East and the Gulf, as a part of the relocated *proxy war* between Saudi Arabia and Iran discussed in the previous chapter. As noted by Khaled Ahmed, “this money did not start the killings; it simply helped the two sides do the killings more efficiently” (Ahmed, 2011: 115). Later on, the groups funded their activities increasingly with resources generated from their own operations and help from segments of the state (Siddiqi, 2013: 6; Rashid, 1996). The role of this regional support—as with the case of funding—to sectarian groups and violence has evolved. Some of the key factors in the *emergence* of sectarian violence in Pakistan, such as the support from the Middle East, are now of reduced importance; whereas others, such as the *war against terrorism*, have become more prominent (Grare, 2009: 131).

The role of local support has also evolved and gained increasing importance, although relatively little research has been done on those bases and networks of local support. According to the literature, this local support consists mostly of material assistance and sympathy of influential people from major communities (Rais, 2009: 126). In Jhang, where detailed studies have been conducted on SSP's support base, a sizable proportion of urban traders and shopkeepers have continued to fund the SSP. Even though some argue that many of these groups no longer condone the violence associated with the party, supporting SSP is a matter of buying security (Rashid, 1996; Abou Zahab, 2010). The support for sectarian groups and violence, then, is reciprocated, and it helps to form mutually beneficial relationships (which may evolve over time with significant changes to their utility or functionality).⁶¹ The bazaar merchants not only contributed financially to these groups but also added weight to their sectarian agenda through their ability to shut down the markets and bring people out on the streets for demonstrations (Toor, 2011: 161). Other examples of these mutually beneficial local relationships include the role of the landed elite in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This landed elite in many instances provided protection for sectarian and criminal networks. In return, it received financial benefits from criminal activities and used sectarian forces as private militias (Nasr, 2000: 181). According to the literature, sectarian groups are also involved in settling local disputes, extorting money, and land grabbing, particularly in the urban areas of

⁶¹ There can also be negative consequences of these relationships. Rashid notes that there may have been some decline in middle-class, particularly the trader/shopkeeper communities, support for the SSP over recent years as a result of the economic consequences of sectarian strife (Rashid, 1996).

Pakistan (Siddiq, 2013: 17; Abbas, 2002: 36). In his book *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, Anatol Lieven gives an account of a conversation with a local police in Jhang confirming cases where local Sunni businessmen paid the SSP or LJ to kill Shia creditors or other Shia rivals in business disputes (Lieven, 2011: 293).

Sectarian violence is also interlinked with criminal networks, both in the regional and the national contexts. Sectarian groups have partnered with drug traffickers in mutually benefiting partnerships, replicating the economic and political relationships between militant groups and drug traffickers in Afghanistan (Nasr, 2000: 180). The narcotic groups provided “financial benefits, expertise and resources in perpetuating violence” (Samad, 2007: 173). They also gave operational assistance, like physical protection, by giving shelter for wanted criminals. In return, sectarian groups were able to provide *a religious cover* for criminal activities, thus protecting criminal networks. According to Vali Nasr, there are also cases where the criminals have actually set up sectarian organisations as fronts for criminal activities (Nasr, 2000: 151, 180; Abbas, 2002: 37). Criminal activities also became a source of funding for sectarian groups. Armed robberies, kidnapping for ransom, smuggling and sale of illicit weapons, and extorting protection money are among the means with which the groups sustain themselves, further blurring the line between criminal networks and militant sectarian groups (Abbas, 2002: 37). Also, the participation of criminals in sectarian violence has helped escalate that violence, for hardened criminals have been more willing to target places of worship—like mosques—and have generally been

“more willing to kill” (Nasr, 2000: 180–1). The result, as observed by Nasr, is an Islamisation of criminal activity and a criminalisation of segments of Islamism in Pakistan (Nasr, 2000: 180).

In general, networks of local support are identified by many analysts as being crucial for sectarian violence, not only through funding, but also in the operational level of violence. Particularly, the success of violent attacks relies on sympathetic and supportive local elements that help the perpetrators by providing local knowledge, assistance with operational logistics, and helping the attackers escape law enforcement afterwards. The existence of these local support networks somewhat contradicts the claims that sectarianism hasn’t penetrated the grassroots or community level of Pakistani society—a claim that is further analysed later on in this chapter. (See, for example, Samad, 2007; Hussain, 2008.)

All these factors illustrate the complex web of interrelated and interdependent forms of violence. Sectarian violence, if defined by violence perpetrated by sectarian groups, is clearly involved in the enterprise of violence that extends beyond “just” targeting their sectarian rivals. The groups are engaged in a competition of funds and superiority, trying to “out-do each other in rhetoric and violence” (Kamran, 2008: 152). The internal logic of the functioning of sectarian groups—survival and competition—thus has a direct effect on violence, which in turn has affected sectarian organisations and their structures (Abbas, 2002: 39). The interests—political, financial, and

ideological—of funders, criminal networks, and local power brokers are also shaping violence. As noted by Frederic Grare, “sectarian violence, therefore, rapidly acquired a dynamic of its own” when a large number of people—from local personal rivalries to regional criminal networks—became linked to the enterprise of violence (Grare, 2009: 136–7).

After examining the *enterprise of violence* and the complex web of elements enabling and sustaining it, it is important to highlight the difference between *sectarian violence* as defined by this thesis and *violence perpetrated by militant sectarian groups*, the latter being a much wider phenomenon in scope, including a broader range of targets and functions beyond the advancement of sectarian discourse. The fact that such a thing as *enterprise of violence* has formed around militant sectarian groups points towards the growing autonomy of violence as a self-legitimizing and self-sustaining sphere in Pakistan. In the words of Maulana Ajmal Qadri from the Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUI), “Sectarian violence has become a culture and it is here to stay” (Abbas, 1998; quoted in Abou Zahab, 2002b: 88).

Madrasa Networks

The mosque and *madrasa* institutions are important—and contentious—factors in the literature, looking at the ways both sectarian discourse and sectarian violence are sustained in Pakistan. (See, for example, Rahman,

2003 & 1998; Fair, 2008; Grare, 2009; Ali, 2009.) Madrasas⁶² are now defined as religious schools or seminaries attended on a full-time basis, emphasising their role as a substitute (not supplement) to Pakistan's mainstream public and private schools. The definition differentiates madrasas from Quranic schools, or *maktabs*, which are part-time religious institutions where children read and recite the Quran only at a very elementary level.⁶³ A madrasa offers a more organised institutional structure and different academic levels of religious studies (Siddique, 2009: 9; Puri, 2010: 52).

Madrasas, and to a lesser degree the mosque institution, feature prominently in the analysis not only because of the ideologies and interpretations of Islam sustained and spread via their networks but also because they are important signifiers of sectarianism due to their inherently sectarian structure—every sect has their own mosques and madrasas associated with them. The majority of Pakistani madrasas are affiliated with one of the five Islamic school boards, or *wafaq*: three Sunni madrasa boards (Deobandi, Bareilvi, Ahle-Hadith), one for Shia, and one for Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) (Siddique, 2009: 9; Nasr, 2000). Madrasas and mosques are also spaces for contested power both locally and nationally, whether it is the power struggle(s) of the *ulama*, control for an authority of a locality, or “a competition between various Islamic and Islamist institutional and intellectual traditions for the control of the

⁶² *Madrasa* is an Arabic term (*madrasah*). The plural of the term is *madaris*. As with the other transliterated terms in this thesis, the English plural *madrasas* is used. For more on the term, see Esposito (2003: 184).

⁶³ Religious education also takes place in public schools, under private tutors, in part-time mosque schools, and in various kinds of private schools.

Islamization process” (Nasr, 2000).

The importance of these institutions and the emphasis placed on them in the literature warrant a closer look at the ways they support, sustain, and facilitate sectarian violence—and at the same time, more generally, exclusivist sectarian discourse.

Madrasas and Sectarian Violence

Even though most authors are careful of not overstretching the *madrasa argument*,⁶⁴ some recent studies have taken a step further and challenged the previous literature on its simplistic assumptions on the links between madrasas and especially the violent forms of sectarianism (Rahman, 2005; Evans, 2008). Ayesha Siddiqa, on the other hand, identifies a tendency in recent years to disregard madrasas as insignificant—or less important as previously thought—when it comes to sectarian and other forms of militancy in Pakistan (Siddiqa, 2013: 21). Indeed, if Pakistan’s madrasas are posited to be the breeding and recruitment places of militants, it is necessary to problematise this relationship in the light of recent research.

For example, the profiles of sectarian activists involved in violent incidents show that a number of them had no religious education and had never been to a madrasa (Rashid, 1996; Siddique, 2009). Christine Fair has explored the

⁶⁴ In the words of Grare, “Still, the link between sectarian violence, international terrorism and *madrassas* should not be overestimated” (Grare, 2009: 138).

operational benefits madrasa education provides and found that it offers only limited utility for several types of violent operations, and for the operational needs of militant groups. Madrasa graduates may be suitable for only certain kinds of violent attacks and hence preferred only in some operations, but not all, depending on the type of operation or attack. The graduates may not be the first choice of sectarian groups when selecting candidates for operations, or the madrasa education might not be the only selection criteria (Fair, 2007: 110). Despite the recruiters of sectarian groups often seeking unskilled and unemployed madrasa students for their operations, a madrasa education—or background in general—does not guarantee their candidacy (Fair, 2007; Siddique, 2009: 8).

Despite the limited explanatory power this relationship provides for sectarian violence, “the limited empirical research so far carried out on the connection between Pakistani madrassas and Islamic extremism find a positive relationship between religious seminaries and sectarian violence” (Siddique, 2009: 28). There are other noneducational functions that contribute to this positive relationship, which are of equal interest to this research. Madrasas provide, and are, functional spaces when looking at the operational level of sectarian violence. They serve as transit points and safe havens providing hospitality for militants. They—along with mosques and public proselytizing events (tabligh)—are also spaces for interaction where militant groups, religious ideologues, and potential recruits can interact. They also have an outward-looking role in their community, where they are generating public support for violence. They thus have different contributory roles in the buildup

and execution of violent acts beyond supplying manpower, relevant education, or training (Puri, 2010: 52, 63–4; Fair, 2007: 108).

This diversity of purpose and function makes the madrasa institution difficult to evaluate in relation to both sectarianism and sectarian violence. For example, the number of madrasas directly supporting violence and being involved in militant activities is highly debated.⁶⁵ Even though the exact scope of this support is unknown, the various functions the madrasa network has in relation to violent sectarian conflicts highlight the importance of the institution in supporting and sustaining sectarian violence.

Violence of the Word

Madrasa Education

The network of mosques and madrasas has been instrumental “in extending the scope of sectarian causes to ever larger numbers of people, and to areas where these may not have been immediately felt before or where the social and economic contexts in which sectarian (or other) conflict takes place is different” (Zaman, 2002: 131). According to Qasim Zaman, this has ensured the creation of supralocal sectarian communities “whose members can relate, and react, to the tribulations of their sectarian kin anywhere, irrespective of local context” (Zaman, 2002: 131). Madrasa and mosque institutions have

⁶⁵ For this debate, see, for example, Riaz (2005), Siddique (2009), Evans (2008), and Fair (2008).

been instrumental in reproducing the ideology and discourse in which sectarian conflict has its moorings. This reproduction is done in several different ways using a variety of means. Often these institutions themselves have a sectarian orientation, as observed above, which they impart to their students through the content of teaching, materials produced and disseminated (either by writing, audio, or through loudspeakers), or *fatwas* (religious edicts) issued (Ahmed, 2006 & 2007; Pinault, 2008; Rashid, 1996).

Christine Fair argues that madrasa education is inherently sectarian because its principal “objective is to produce students who share and agree with the sectarian worldview espoused by a particular board” (Fair, 2008: 77).⁶⁶ The International Crisis Group report is aligned with Fair’s argument, stating that every madrasa has its own variant of the curriculum they use to base their teaching on, each of the madrasa boards supporting curriculums that are “mutually conflicting and characteristically sectarian” (ICG, 2007b: 14). But violent Islamist texts—that is, those advocating violent jihad against other religious sects—are not traditionally part of the madrasa curriculums (Siddique, 2009: 11–12).

Within the overall teaching imparted by the madrasa institution, Qandeel Siddique downplays the role of textbooks in helping shape the students’ mind-

⁶⁶ There are also madrasas in Pakistan that actively work against the exclusivist sectarian discourse. Based on the visits by the author to some madrasas in the Peshawar area in KPK in 2008, it was discovered, for example, that some of them had a program of visiting religious scholars from other sects as a part of their syllabuses. This does merely provide anecdotal evidence on the existence of active work done to counter the exclusivist sectarian discourse in Pakistani madrasas, but it illustrates a counterpoint to consider when assessing the role of madrasas in relation to sectarian violence and reproduction of sectarian discourse.

sets to a particular religious and sectarian interpretation of Islam. For Siddique, it is primarily the transmission of oral lectures (held in Urdu or Pashto) that are internalised by the students and are more important for the advancement of the sectarian agenda (Siddique, 2009: 12). Besides the madrasa curriculum and the textbooks used, militant pamphlets and magazines are also circulated in madrasas, also those openly aligned with particular militant groups (Siddique, 2009: 12). This is a common practise amongst many madrasas in Pakistan, and a significant amount of this literature is targeted against other sects (Riaz, 2005). Also, *radd*—or refutation of other sects, subsects, and “heretical” beliefs and philosophies—is an *integral part* of some madrasas⁶⁷ (Siddique, 2009: 11; Riaz, 2005: 19–20). Through the vilification of other beliefs and stressing the importance of safeguarding the purity of the greater Muslim community, students learn to defend their own tradition’s worldview (Fair, 2008: 77; Siddique, 2009: 31). All these factors—curriculum, material circulated and produced in madrasas, and the practise of *radd*—offer an illustration of the ways sectarian discourse is reproduced in the madrasa institution. The list is not exhaustive, however, and the concept of *violence of the word* is much broader.

To balance the view of a madrasa education’s role in contributing to sectarian discourse and the sectarian understanding of Islam, it is important to note that public education has also been called to negatively contribute to the discourse. The Shia community has been conscious of the “version” of Islam

⁶⁷ The number of those madrasas that engage in the practise of *radd* is highly contested as before, making it difficult to evaluate how common these practises are within the madrasa/mosque networks.

portrayed in public school textbooks (and demanding changes accordingly) since the 1950s (Abbas, 2010: 20). Perhaps the most famous case where sectarian conflict intersected with the portrayal of Islam in public school education was the “textbook controversy” in Gilgit in Gilgit-Baltistan, where in 2004–2005, the Islamic content of public school textbooks became the source of the most intense Shia-Sunni conflict the region has witnessed in the last two decades.⁶⁸ (Ali, 2008) Even though a detailed examination of Pakistan’s public school sector and the way the teaching, textbooks, and narratives of Islam in that sector relate to sectarian discourse is out of the scope of this work, this relationship deserves much more attention in the future (Fair, 2007: 110). The relationship between secular education and sectarianism should not be unproblematised in the studies of sectarianism in Pakistan, and as Nosheen Ali observes, secular education doesn’t constitute an entirely nonsectarian setting (Ali, 2008).

Fatwas and Speeches

Another method the madrasa institution contributes to the *violence of the word* and sectarian discourse involves the speeches made by the *ulama* and the *fatwas*, or religious edicts, they have issued. Several authors have explored the impact these have on sectarian violence. Despite the links between the two not being obvious or straightforward, the speeches and *fatwas* are referred to as the *violence of the word* (Ahmed, 2007 & 2008; Marsden, 2005; Ahmad, 1998; Grare, 2009). Generally, it is recognised that the practise of

⁶⁸ For a detailed account on this controversy, please see Ali (2008 & 2010).

issuing edicts against other groups by madrasa leaders is not an uncommon practise (Siddique, 2009: 36) and that they fuel and exacerbate violence. At the core of that *violence of the word* is the reproduction of the most damaging form of exclusionary sectarian discourse—inciting followers to eliminate members of the other sect, invariably categorised as enemies of Islam⁶⁹ (Grare, 2009: 131; Ahmad, 1998).

Many sectarian leaders are well known for their sermons and speeches. Haq Nawaz Jhangvi's speeches are widely spread both in print and in audio, and because of Azam Tariq's provocative anti-Shia rhetoric, his followers dubbed him "a man who could ignite fire in water" (Tohid, 2003). In fact, Tariq was advised "to use [his] powers of speech as a weapon," and he developed the art of delivering firebrand sermons (*khitabat*) (Tohid, 2003). Madrasas, then, do not only produce potential militant recruits, or students with sectarian mind-sets. They also produce "religious entrepreneurs" who justify violence and contribute to communities of support (Fair, 2007: 110).

Indeed, it is not only the content of the *violence of the word* that is important to understanding sectarian violence or the power of sectarian discourse. It is also about the active agency of those who give those fiery speeches, produce *fatwas*, and broadcast on illegal radio stations. Violence has empowered not only sectarian groups as actors but also the *mullas* (religious teachers) who found that they made greater impact when backed by threats of violence (Grare, 2009; Khan, 2003). In chapter 2, we saw how sectarian conflicts more

⁶⁹ It is important to also note that there are religious leaders who issue fatwas *against* violence.

generally have impacted and played a part in the processes of contesting Islamist discourses in Pakistan (Nasr, 2000: 140). Violence, as a specific part of sectarian conflicts, also had a role in these processes.

With the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan, the *ulama* went from “being a relic of the past to being a gun-toting instigator of sectarian violence and a fearful portent of the future” (Khan, 2003: 46). Moreover, allegiance to violence was locally empowering. The clergy found that their sermons had a much greater impact if they were backed by real threats and violence—hence their constant ‘rage’ posture (Grare, 2009: 136–7). More broadly, these sectarian conflicts have produced new patterns of interaction between *ulama* and Islamists, giving rise to discourses of power among them, which have been important in giving shape to a new style of Islamist activism, as militants struggle to assert their domination of their religious communities and gain control of Islamist discourse (Nasr, 2000: 140).⁷⁰

Violence of the Word Online

Through the madrasa and mosque networks, sectarian discourse has spread far and wide in Pakistan, as noted above. Cassettes, loudspeakers of mosques, illegal radio stations, printed pamphlets, books, and collections of *fatwas* have also spread the discourse. Those are still in use, but in the recent decade, new technologies have added to the arsenal of ways to spread the violence of the word: websites, computer disks, and mass e-mailing, amongst

⁷⁰ For more on the changing role of the *ulama*, see, for example, Nasr (2010).

others. There is very little academic research yet done on the role of these new technologies, specifically in relation to sectarianism in Pakistan, but there are some conclusions that can be drawn from the existing literature.

The violence of the word has an increasing online existence. There are articles posted on websites or forums, audio lectures and speeches, or like-minded groups meeting in various Internet chat rooms. For example, books, speeches, and audio messages of various sectarian leaders can be found on the web, and many of the print publications—like monthly magazines—produced by sectarian groups are now online (Siddique, 2009: 33; Tufail, 2012). Also, *mullas* have taken to the Internet and maintain websites that offer religious opinions on subjects ranging from politics to matters of faith (ICG, 2007b: 15). Both Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and SSP are active online and run a vibrant media campaign using sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Tufail, 2012). In general, the nature of the posts is either inciting violence against Shias (and to a lesser degree against Ahmadis) or promoting the activities of the organisations. Tweets and posts invite their readers to various events and conferences organised by LJ and SSP in different Pakistani towns, urge followers to watch live webcasts of speeches delivered by their leaders, or direct readers to newspaper reports about statements of Islamic clerics in Pakistan and abroad (Tufail, 2012). For example, a tweet dated October 2, 2011, from LJ's main Twitter account (@Jhangvi) urged its followers to watch the live webcast of the *Shuhada-e-Islam* (Martyrs of Islam) Conference on October 6, 2011, in Islamabad, marking the martyrdom of Maulana Azam Tariq (Tufail, 2012). SSP is suspected of being active in a chat

room on Paltalk, where madrasa lecturers also come to give talks (Siddique, 2009: 33).

New technologies are widening the scope and reach of sectarian groups and discourse and are further transforming the role of *ulama* and sectarian leaders. The use of the Internet has also created new spaces of activity and self-understanding for various groups, becoming a means to draw together divergent traditions as well as like-minded groups by making them accessible to individuals all over the world (Naef & Sahabi, 2007: 8). Despite the fact that the number of both computer and social media users remain limited in Pakistan, new technologies offer new methods of reproducing and maintaining sectarian discourse, and its significance is expected to increase in the future. It makes it possible for the traditional authorities of that discourse to reach wider audiences, but they can also be challenged in their authority status. With new technologies, it is possible for new contestations of the authorship of exclusivist sectarian discourse to emerge, particularly with the global reach of those technologies.

State and Violence

The role of the Pakistani state, and the different state actors, is of paramount importance when thinking of the sustaining elements of sectarian violence. The role of the state in both providing active support and contributing to

operational spaces has already been referred to several times when discussing the formation and evolution of sectarian discourse and political opportunism in the previous chapter.

A lot has been written on state involvement in the birth and growth of sectarian groups, particularly vis-à-vis the Afghan conflict (see, for example, Abou Zahab, 2002; Abou Zahab & Roy, 2004), and the national contestations of power politics between governments, security agencies, and the army. Several authors claim the existence of evidence of the security agencies keeping sectarian violence on the boil by supporting various groups to pressurise and delegitimise Pakistani governments that were becoming too independent (Ahmed, 2011; Haqqani, 2006; Talbot, 2005). Whether this sponsorship can be extended to the various Pakistani governments is a more contested idea. According to Anatol Lieven, unlike with the jihadi groups fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan, there has been no evidence of Pakistani governments backing the anti-Shia militants since General Zia's time (Lieven, 2011: 294). It's unclear, however, how much leverage—and indeed what leverage—security agencies (and the Pakistani state) had with sectarian groups and how much they were able to direct the actions of those groups for their own strategic purposes, particularly, as seen above, that security agencies' interests were not the only ones affecting sectarian groups' violent agendas.

As observed above, sectarian groups in Pakistan do not operate outside the

state apparatus, but they take part in it. Their parent parties function in the parliamentary framework of politics, acting both as pressure groups and as a protective umbrella (Talbot, 2005; Waseem, 2007).

In addition to active support, the role of the Pakistani state can also be examined through looking at the preventive measures taken and institutional systems put in place against sectarian violence. Various governments have tried to 'crack down' sectarian groups. During Nawaz Sharif's second term as prime minister in 1997–1999, he initiated an operation against sectarian groups and pushed through a new antiterrorism law in the parliament. Pervez Musharraf's administration banned several militant organisations. First, SMP along with LJ were banned in August 2001, then the Shia party Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP) and SSP in January 2002. Both these government actions were followed by a swift response: LJ attempted to kill Nawaz Sharif in January 1999, blowing up a bridge on the Lahore-Raiwind Road shortly before the then prime minister was due to pass by. A few weeks after Musharraf's announcement of the ban of TJP and SSP, Rawalpindi, the city where the army headquarters are located in, was attacked just a few miles from his office (Nasr, 2000: 185; Malik, 2005: 208; Lieven, 2011: 294). Banning of the organisations changed very little in the long run. The banned sectarian groups continued to operate under new names.⁷¹ For example, SSP now operates under the banner of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), headed by SSP leader Maulana Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi. In fact, the old names

⁷¹ After the ban in 2002, SSP was renamed Millet-e-Islami, which was again banned later in the same year (ICG, 2005: 3).

are still widely used, both by the groups as well as their supporters. Also, since the groups are most commonly known by these names and monikers, they are also still widely used in the media and in academic writing.

If the reintroduction of democracy in Pakistan after Zia ul-Haq's death was followed by an increase in sectarian violence (Hasan, 2011: 85), it is also noted that sectarian violence "continued unabated even after the military take-over in 1999, and the international campaign against terror in 2001" (Malik, 2005: 208). There are then no convincing arguments for or against a specific form of government in relation to the proliferation of sectarian violence.

Law Enforcement and Judiciary

The state's inefficiency to deal with sectarian groups and militants does not depend solely on government action (or inaction). Particularly, the role of law enforcement and judiciary are highlighted as key factors in contributing to the free operation of sectarian groups and the continuation of violence.

The police has been claimed to be passive in its efforts to pursue cases against sectarian activists, reacting only after a high-profile incident and then rounding up suspects that might be quietly released soon after. This can stem from a fear of retaliation; police officers have been amongst the high-profile targets of sectarian groups. The police also plays a crucial role in investigating violent sectarian incidents and preparing evidence for court cases. These

processes are affected by a lack of capacity to collect evidence, relevant training, and the lack of information sharing between various agencies (ICG, 2005: 23; Siddiqa, 2013: 37). Also, the perception of police action towards sectarian groups plays a role. The authorities in Pakistan find it difficult to crack down on activities that are associated with organisations that operate in the name of Islam and claim to be defending its interests. Police action against them can be seen as harassment of the 'true servants of the faith' and thus faces resistance from local communities (Nasr, 2000: 180).

The role of the judiciary is equally important. The judicial process of dealing with sectarian cases is marred by intimidation, both of judges and witnesses, making the court system often unsuccessful in trying sectarian cases (ICG, 2005: 23; Rashid, 1996). Also, judges have become the target of threats and are therefore hesitant to hear cases involving religious militants. Securing judges and witnesses, as well as the judicial process itself, has meant that in antiterrorism courts, judges presiding over cases of sectarian militancy are often forced to hold trials in jails (ICG, 2005: 23). And when sectarian militants are tried, it doesn't automatically translate into a reduced role in the leadership or reduction in sectarian violence. When Usman Saifullah Kurd and Shafiq Rehman, the two most senior leaders of LJ in Balochistan, were kept in the Anti-Terrorism Force (ATF) prison in Quetta during Musharraf's nationwide operation against LJ in 2007, incidences of sectarian violence in the province decreased to near zero (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 19).⁷²

⁷² Minority Support Pakistan reports that later both Kurd and Rehman, despite having been sentenced to death and life in prison, respectively, "simply vanished from their cells in the middle of the night, walked outside, were swopped up by a waiting vehicle and whisked off

But during the imprisonment of Azam Tariq, he continued to act in his role, and his orders were “equally effective when he was in jail,” making no difference to the statistics of the ongoing violence (Ahmed, 2001). The lack of a systematic counterforce to sectarian militants and a reliable state system able to process these crimes has a significant impact, not only on the existence of those *operational spaces* for sectarian militants, but also on how the Pakistani state is perceived. The state appears weak, unable to protect its citizens, and there is a general lack of trust in the law enforcement and judicial processes in relation to sectarian violence. Consequently, when violence has reached a critical stage, and the governments in power have been unable to deal with the situation, the military steps in to restore order. This has happened on several occasions: in 1992 in Peshawar, in 1995 in Parachinar, and in August 1997 and March 1998 in the North-West Frontier Province. However, these operations were limited; the military merely imposed a cease-fire and ended the ongoing violence (Nasr, 2000: 182).

This inefficiency and inability to catch the perpetrators of sectarian violence has at times led to frustration of the police—as well as the political leadership. In 1998–1999, the Punjab Police with Shahbaz Sharif as the chief minister killed several sectarian militants in what was called “police encounters” (Abbas, 2002: 19). Once his selection to the political office was confirmed, the Nawaz government took a hard-line approach against sectarian militancy and applied *shortcut methods* to deal with the situation. When courts especially

the compound” (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 19).

set up to deal with sectarian terrorism failed to produce the desired results, the government tacitly approved the killing of sectarian terrorists in these police encounters (Abbas, 2002: 24).⁷³ As a result, from September 1998 to the removal of the Sharif government by the military in October 1999, the Punjab Police killed dozens of sectarian terrorists belonging to the Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in what the police termed “shoot-outs.” However, both the organisations alleged that the shoot-outs in which their militants were killed were dubious. The strategy, though unlawful, turned out to be a great success, and the number of violent sect-motivated incidents decreased significantly (Abbas, 2002: 45). Anatol Lieven confirms this by referring to his discussion with a police officer in Jhang District in 2002. During this discussion, the police officer freely admitted that the difficulty of getting convictions means that if the police get an order to deal firmly with some sectarian leaders, their response often is to kill them⁷⁴ (Lieven, 2011: 295). These *police encounters* might be an effective short-term strategy to deal with sectarian militants whom the law enforcement and judicial process is unable to reliably try and convict. Essentially, however, it further expands the *enterprise of sectarian violence*, making the state agential in one more way to contribute to sectarian conflicts and escalating the culture of violence.

The weakened role of the state in relation to sectarian violence and sectarian militant groups does not stem only from the state’s failure to enforce laws. Sectarian organisations, and sectarian violence, have challenged the

⁷³ According to Azmat Abbas, the Punjab police have always been notorious for killing suspected outlaws in dubious encounters, but before this, they had never used these *encounters* against the activists of sectarian organizations (Abbas, 2002: 44–45).

⁷⁴ The term *encounter* is still used in the Pakistani media to describe unclear shooting incidents with militants and criminals where the police have been involved.

Pakistani state, competing with state presence both at the local and the national levels. By attacking Shia targets, who besides being Shia are also state functionaries like municipal officials and community leaders, sectarian groups have combined their attacks on the state with the killing of Shias. For example, from January to May in 1997, 75 Shia community leaders were killed in a systematic attempt to remove Shias from positions of authority (Nars, 2006: 166). According to Vali Nasr, this strategy was designed to enable the appointment of Sunni officials, who would also be more favourably disposed towards strengthening the power structure of sectarian groups and their parent organisations (Nasr, 2000: 183). Thus, by being able to operate without impunity and by targeting state institutions, it is clear that sectarianism and sectarian violence also inform state-society relations (Rashid, 1996). By inaction and failing to address these conflicts, the Pakistani state enables a permissive environment that allows militant groups and the *enterprise of violence* to function and grow (Ahmed, 2011: 115). It is thus pertinent to agree with Naveeda Khan, who says, “[S]ectarian politics and violence originates in part from the Pakistani state’s policies and projects” (Khan, 2003: 211).

The Modes of Violence

According to the literature, the birth of sectarian groups not only started organised sectarian violence but also substantially changed the nature of such violence. The changing patterns of violence; selection of targets; and

introduction of new modes of operation, violence, or weapons reflect the elements and processes sustaining that violence and the interests guiding the *enterprise of violence*. From the literature, we can also track how sectarian violence has evolved geographically and how it has become increasingly lethal, with the intention to cause “maximum damage” (Hussain, 2002: 89–99).

Until 1995, around the time of the forming of LJ, the targeted killings were mostly limited to leaders and activists of both sects, as well as each other’s hit men (Abou Zahab, 2002: 5). From then onwards, symbols of state authority were included in the target list, including senior government functionaries, police officers, and judges (Rashid, 1996; Abou Zahab, 2002: 5). Violence also started to target ordinary citizens, just for being Sunni or Shia. Tit-for-tat killings also targeted high-profile members of the two communities—like doctors, lawyers, traders, and intellectuals (Abou Zahab, 2002: 5; Syed, 2001: 253). The pattern of target killing by the Shia became rare, but when it happened, the target was usually a very prominent Sunni cleric (Ahmed, 2011: xxiii). Midnineties were also when attacks on mosques and mourners in cemeteries, religious processions, and public spaces were included in the soft targets. By default, anyone even remotely connected to the other sect became a target in these indiscriminate attacks (Irfani, 2004: 157; Abbas, 2002: 33; ICG, 2005: 13).

Sectarian violence took a very different form in the cities of Parachinar and Hangu in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, where the long-standing

disputes over ownership of forests, hills, land, and water resources between the Sunni and Shia tribes have at times virtually taken the form of a tribal civil war, with the army and paramilitary forces having to be called in to restore order, as discussed above (Irfani, 2004: 154; Abou Zahab, 2009: 2).

Even though the academic literature doesn't offer an in-depth analysis on why these particular targets were chosen, there are some general explanations for certain categories of targets. The fact that sectarian violence also targets state functionaries—and the Pakistani state via them—was discussed above. The fact that sectarianism is embedded in the regional context is visible through the targets of sectarian groups. For Sunni sectarian militants, Pakistan's Shia groups and Iran were closely linked, and they sought to involve Iran directly through attacking Iranian targets, like Iranian diplomats, military personnel, and Iranian cultural centres. Also, this explains why only Ithna Ashari Shias, who are seen most linked to Iran, are killed, while other Shia sects—like Ismailis and Bohras—have so far been exempt from violence (Abou Zahab, 2002; Ahmed, 2003; 2011; Haqqani, 2006; Nasr, 2000). Khaled Ahmed also assigns the targeting of Shias to a rumour that Iran was funding Shia terrorists through Pakistan's Shia doctors. This meant that “the most prominent doctors were earmarked for death” (Ahmed, 2011: 170).

Both SSP and LJ are identified to have similar modes of operation. The groups have two general modes of attack: assassinations and massacres. Massacres are typically executed with an SSP or LJ cadre opening fire on large gatherings of Shias at mosques, at wedding parades, or during

important Shia religious celebrations (Fair, 2004: 110). Assassinations, or targeted killings, are based on a simple formula. The attackers would wait in crowded commercial areas, usually outside the workplaces of their intended victims, quickly open fire on them, and then disappear into the crowd (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 14).

Suicide bombing was used the first time in July 2003, in an attack on an *imambargah* in Quetta during Friday prayers, adding a new dimension to the modes of sectarian violence (Hussain, 2008: 90; Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 15). Both Shias and Sunnis started deploying suicide bombers to inflict maximum casualties. Mosques, religious processions, and rallies became the prime targets of suicide attacks. Unlike suicide bombers elsewhere, who simply detonated their explosive-strapped bodies, Pakistani militants hurled grenades and fired on the crowd before blowing themselves up, in order to cause maximum damage (Hussain, 2008: 98–99). Both the choice of weapons and type of operations show growing professionalism of militant sectarian groups. The availability of sophisticated arms—such as rocket launchers, hand grenades, and highly explosive devices—and the increase in operational know-how have ensured that over the course of time, sectarian violence has become significantly more lethal (Grare, 2009: 144–5; Rashid, 1996; Abbas, 2002: 34).

From the literature and the accounts of violence it offers, we can sum up the characteristics of sectarian violence as portrayed by the literature. Essentially,

sectarian violence is *public*—it is conducted in public, not private, spaces.⁷⁵ It is *urban*, originating from and concentrating on cities (Fair, 2004). Violence is *asymmetric*, for many more Shias than Sunnis have been killed. Shias are killed more often and in larger numbers (Syed, 2001: 253; Ahmed, 2011: 150, 160). This asymmetry is explained by the strength of the Sunni-Deobandi combine, which was, and still is, simply too strong to be countered by Shia organisations (Ahmed, 2011: 150). Besides significant differences in organisational capacity, this asymmetry is also explained by the absence or rarity of mass killings by Shia groups (Siddiq, 2013: 8). As explained by Khaled Ahmed:

The thinking behind this pattern of killing is that the Shia are not many in Pakistan and can be ‘finished off’ if killed *en masse*. Therefore, the targeting of Shias is motivated by numbers to be killed; on the other hand, the Sunnis cannot be killed *en masse* because of their overwhelming numbers. (Ahmed, 2011: 160)

Sectarian violence is also *purposive* and is rarely ad hoc but premeditated and planned (Talbot, 2007: xiv). This violence is heterogeneous in a sense that its motivation and form vary, but those violent incidents “occur within a context in which violence is purposive” (Talbot, 2007: xiv), and there is “a great amount of sophistry and selectivity in sectarian terrorists acts” (Malik, 2005: 206). And finally, sectarian violence is *conditioned* by the *enterprise of violence*: the internal logic of competition and survival of sectarian militant

⁷⁵ Magnus Marsden has researched the role of nonpublic places in determining the nature of sectarian conflict in Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Marsden, 2005).

groups; the incentives of those attempting to *use* these groups for their own agendas; and the local, national, and regional elements and processes that help those groups function.

Explaining Sectarian Violence

After narrating how sectarian violence came to be, and how it is sustained in Pakistan, the literature has attempted to explain *why* sectarian violence exists: Why have sectarian tensions and conflicts turned violent? What are the motivations and the instigators of that violence? None of the analysts explain violence as stemming from the original split between Shias and Sunnis, but it is seen as a product of the conditions in modern Pakistan, originating from the *raison d'être* of sectarian groups and, to some extent, of their parent organisations. The explanations of violence are tied to an instrumental understanding of violence: violence is seen as a tool, a means to an end, a way to pressurise and intimidate—as well as to eliminate and kill.⁷⁶ Violence is also seen as a form of self-defence. Militant Shia groups turn to violence to defend their community, as a response to the Deobandi groups' violent threats (Abbas, 2010: 5). Violence perpetrated by Deobandi militant groups, on the other hand, is a response to the more general *Shia threat* and then, more precisely, a retaliation to the killings done by Shia groups. As observed by Qasim Zaman, “violence by sectarian opponents only reinforces their perception of the threat from the ‘other’” and thus reinforce their justification for *safeguarding* their existence (Zaman, 1998: 712). Violent attacks are also

⁷⁶ See, for example, Ahmed (2011: xxvi-xxvii).

a show of power demonstrating the groups' abilities to retaliate and to *defend*. Violence, both perpetrated and targeted against one's own community or group, then, guarantees the *functional utility* of militant groups, particularly in an environment where the state can't be trusted to provide security (Kamran, 2008: 11; Rashid, 1996). These explanations and analyses of sectarian violence are very much tied to the framework of militant sectarian groups, reducing the violence to a phenomenon related to the existence and functioning of organised sectarian forces. This framework allows the analysts to claim that sectarian violence is not a communitarian phenomenon. There are, however, exceptions to this—namely, those areas where “concentrations of Shia settlements have the ability to strike back and settle scores” (Ahmed, 2011: xxx).

Some authors have also explained the utility of violence by referring to larger societal processes *lying behind* the violence.⁷⁷ Some of these explanations are unconvincing or too broad. For example, sectarian violence has been explained as the only outlet for the Pakistani youth to “express themselves” (ICG, 2007: 15) or as a way to express discontent (Abou Zahab, 2009: 168). According to these explanations, violence has its roots in socioeconomic inequities and it is ‘merely’ perpetuated by sectarian groups.

Violence has also been seen to stem from the overall competition between Sunnis and Shias and the aim of both to assert their dominance on the *other*.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Talbot (2005) and Chandran (2008).

Sectarian violence has become an important medium of this dominance, alongside the control of Islamist discourse and the redefinition of state-society relations (Nasr, 2000). The existence of sectarian violence is also attributed to a general spread of violence, the increase of the means of perpetrating that violence, and an overall decline of civility in the political culture of Pakistan (Syed, 2001: 260). But how this dominance is achieved—the mechanisations of this process—or how this *general spread of violence* has taken a specifically sectarian form have not been fully explored. Despite their different views as to the cause, most authors endorse identical processual models of sectarian violence, emphasising violence as a tool (or utility) or a derivative symptom.

To see sectarian violence as a surface expression of “deeper” socioeconomic and/or ideological contexts portrays violence as a surface effect of the perceived origin that legitimates violence by empowering social actors. The acts of violence themselves are rarely seen as carrying significance. Violence, now, is “denuded of any intrinsic semantic or causal character” (Feldman, 1991: 19–20). In short, violence, in these explanations, is meant to transform socioeconomic inequities or ideological contexts or discourses, but the transformative role of *violence itself*, particularly protracted violence, is not adequately recognised or analysed. By subordinating violence to prior ideological formations and not treating violent practises as developing those formations, important factors in the escalation and development of sectarian violence are overlooked. With instrumental explanations of violence and by reducing that violence to a surface-level symptom, violence is denied

transformative status as “residual institution, with its own symbolic and performative authority” (Feldman, 1991: 21). Next, the chapter turns to examine the effects of sectarian violence and whether the transformative status of violence is present in the literature discussing the ways it has impacted the relationship between Sunnis and Shias, as well as the spatial organisations and practises of those communities in Pakistan.

Effects of Sectarian Violence

Violence and Social Relations

Only few academic works are interested in the existence and effects of violence in the community level. Violence of this character is not the main focus of international security or policy analysts, and access to researching this type of violence is difficult. Partly this lack of research on a community level can also be explained by the understanding that “the hatred, hostility, and violence between sectarian groups have not trickled down to the popular level. At the local and neighbourhood levels, the relationships between Shia and Sunni communities remain largely unaffected by what transpires between the militants who claim to represent them” (Ahmad, 1998: 113). This popular assertion sees that sectarianism has remained mostly as an occasionally violent political phenomenon, perpetrated by sectarian groups, and it has not spread to the grassroots or to the community level. The commonalities of the same culture and the same language outweigh the surface-level differences,

and the two communities continue to live peacefully together in the same neighbourhoods (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 78). This separation of sectarianism as a distinct and mostly unconnected sphere from the community level is contested by the fact that sectarian organisations, like SSP, run vibrant organisations at the grassroots level and are also involved in community work (Tufail, 2012). There is still very little documentation on this community-level presence of sectarianism and sectarian organisations and the roles they play in those communities.

The literature also offers only cursory remarks on the responses that violence has elicited. For Marian Abou Zahab, the Pakistani society seems to have learned to cope with sectarian violence, for it does not resist either physically or intellectually (Abou Zahab, 2002b: 88). Vali Nasr, already in 2000, observed that militant Sunni groups have succeeded in creating a specific consciousness about the “Shia problem” in Islamist discourse, thus hardening attitudes about Shiism (Nasr, 2000: 165). At the same time, the literature tells us that the majority of the members of the Shia and Sunni communities have watched sectarian killings with awe and disgust. The violence perpetrated in the name of Islam is “responded to with a communitarian disgust and sheer despair” (Malik, 2005: 75). This horror that sectarian violence triggers in those communities is coupled with the sympathy and support of some elements in the same communities, without which that violence could not have flourished as it had, as explored before.

Khaled Ahmed, interestingly, thinks that the claim of sectarianism not affecting the community level is proved by the pattern of violence and its asymmetric nature:

It is often said that the people of Pakistan are not sectarian. This is meant to point to the lack of a general anti-Shia animus at the popular level. Yet, Pakistan has seen a lot of sectarian violence in recent years. The truth of the above statement is substantiated by the pattern of killings: the Sunnis kill Shias at large, targeting congregations, and the Shias target-kill—with some exceptions—the self-proclaimed anti-Shia clerics. This pattern tells us that the Shias are aware that the Sunni majority does not hate them. (Ahmed, 2007: 61)

Previously, the same point made by Ahmed on the pattern of violence and the absence of Sunni mass killings proved the sectarian militants' wish to eliminate the Shia and the lack of the possibility for the Shia to do so. Nevertheless, it is difficult to substantiate a claim on whole communities based on patterns of violence allegedly perpetrated by only a small segment of those communities.

Some authors, like Rasul Bakhsh Rais, speak of “structured intolerance at the societal level” (Rais, 2009: 116), but rarely has an analysis had a closer look at whether sectarianism in general and sectarian violence in particular have really had an impact in communities, although that impact has occasionally been recognised in a general level as damaging the fabric of society (Samad,

2007: 170). Also, what type this impact is, is also not usually addressed. This claim on violence relates to another persisting statement on Sunni-Shia relations more broadly in Pakistan. These relations, in general, have been amicable, or “normal”—or existed with some ‘latent tension’ until the arrival of General Zia (Ahmad, 1998; Ahmed, 2011; Abbas, 2010: 5; Lieven, 2011: 191). Unfortunately, there is little hard evidence to back this strong claim, and it is contradicted by the few studies that look at sectarianism and sectarian violence and their impact on the community level. General community relations are of course very difficult to research and verify.

Fair, Malthora, and Shapiro in their research based on a survey of 6,000 Pakistanis tried to gauge the pervasiveness of Shia-Sunni bigotry. They asked the respondents which of the two, Sunnis or Shias, are better followers of Islam. The researchers found that fewer than one in three of those surveyed answered that “both are equal.” Most (65 percent) did admit that they believed Sunni Muslims are “better followers of Islam.” Three percent indicated that Shias are better followers, consistent with the distribution of Shias in the sample. The researchers concluded that since nearly two in three of their respondents believed Sunnis to be better Muslims, Pakistan’s sectarian conflicts “should not be surprising” (Fair et al., 2010: 506). Although these results do not mean problematised relations between the two groups or an automatic endorsement or approval of violence against ‘the other’, it “would appear that Pakistanis overwhelmingly see themselves as Sunni Muslims” (except for Shias, of course) rather than members of a particular interpretative tradition, and most respondents clearly believe that Sunnis are better Muslims

than Shias are. Given that Shias remain vulnerable to sectarian conflicts and violence, this perception is potentially problematic (Fair et al., 2010: 506). More generally, the researchers draw the conclusion that “while most Pakistanis do not identify with a sectarian identity, a majority do appear to be highly engaged with their faith and do harbor anti-Shia sentiments” (Fair et al., 2010: 506). How representative the sample used in the research is of the Sunni and Shia communities is difficult to gauge without further studies on this matter,⁷⁸ but the findings point towards reassessing perceptions of the ‘other’ and the relationship in general, as they might not be as unproblematised as the majority of the literature portrays them to be, particularly after protracted violent conflicts ongoing in Pakistan.

Most of the studies that zoom to the *local contexts* of sectarianism, like Jhang, trying to contextualise the phenomenon in a particular locality, also remain in the sociopolitical level. The literature usually only briefly mentions the *social fabric* of those locations, is mute of the level of interpersonal relationships or the streets of Pakistani cities or villages. It says nothing about how the phenomenon manifests itself there, how it is experienced by the people, and the transformative power of sectarian violence. For these studies, one has to turn to anthropology. There, the literature talks about the lived sectarian experience from the point of view of a village, a specific *mohalla* (neighbourhood), or an individual, offering a welcome balance to the security- and sectarian-group-focused narrative on sectarianism.

⁷⁸ For a similar study but with a very different sample, see Rahman (2007).

In other words, this research introduces the *lived experience of the sectarian divide* to the literature on sectarianism.⁷⁹ This addition of *the personal* brings in stories of fear, concealment, pressure, and intimidation—all of which are absent in the main body of literature on sectarianism. In these accounts, sectarianism also stops being a male-only phenomenon, where women are nonexistent and nonpartisan. (See, for example, Marsden, 2005; Ali, 2010; Varley, 2010.) For these studies, sectarian violence does exist in the grassroots level and has clearly affected the relationships between Sunnis and Shias, contesting the claims that those relationships are “normal” and unaffected by the violence.

Finally, to recognise that the Sunni-Shia relationship in Pakistan is perhaps not as unproblematised as the literature tells us doesn’t mean that violence, or intolerance, is a routinised feature of that relationship. There are Muslims in Pakistan who are critical both of the deployment of sectarian discourses and the increasingly violent nature of relations between the country’s diverse Muslim communities.

Transformation and Securitisation of Space

Even though the academic literature in peace and conflict studies on sectarian violence does not analyse in-depth the effects of sectarian violence in Pakistani communities, it is clear that “the destructive impact of sectarian

⁷⁹ This theme is further explored in chapter 5.

violence goes far beyond its body count” (Irfani, 2004: 164) and that there is a psychological dimension of sectarian violence (Talbot, 2007: 167). Academic writers use different languages when describing these effects, depending on their theoretical approach, but sectarian violence is seen as reinforcing community stereotypes (Talbot, 2007: xiii), hardening sectarian identities (Marsden, 2005: 17; Nasr, 2000: 165), polarizing communities (Ali, 2010: 749), or increasing the sect consciousness (Ahmed, 2006: 184–5).

To relate these described effects to the theoretical framework of border construction as a result of a protracted violent conflict, it is important to see whether the literature talks about those *borders*—both material and immaterial—in addition to general Sunni-Shia relations. The literature accounts for changes in social practises signalling forms of separation of the two communities. The sectarian difference is visible in changed interactions patterns, such as the decrease of intersect marriages (Marsden, 2005: 250; Ahmed, 2011: xxiii). The existence and hardening of borders between the sects also take more concrete, visible forms. It can be seen in internal migration, Shias migrating to other cities (or even abroad), particularly from locations of protracted violent conflicts, such as Parachinar and Quetta (Abou Zahab, 2009; ICG, 2005). Those protracted conflicts have also resulted in changing territorial identifications and settlement patterns (Ali, 2010: 749; Ase, 1999: 64, 67–70; Ahmed, 2011: 179). This highlights the structuring role of sectarian violence, making the changed perception of ‘the other’ visible and tangible. This spatial transformation due to sectarian violence is crucial for

understanding both the power of exclusivist sectarian discourse and the transformative role violence plays.

In addition to Shias moving from one Pakistani city to another, there has been internal movement within cities. Khaled Ahmed and Abou Zahab use the term *ghettoisation* to illustrate this movement—forced or voluntary—of Shias to enclaves (Abou Zahab, 2009: 5; Ahmed, 2011: xxiii). In ghettoisation, previously mixed areas of Sunni and Shia settlements turn into separate concentrations of communities within a locality. In the history of sectarianism, Parachinar establishes the rule of ghettoisation, which later can be seen in Gilgit in Gilgit-Baltistan, Quetta in Balochistan, and to some extent in the cities of Kohat, Jhang, D. I. Khan, and Karachi (Ahmed, 2011: 179). The impetuses for this concrete separation of communities are manifold, but one of the major reasons is the threat perceptions experienced by the Shias. Ghettoisation can also be an active attempt of Shia communities to protect themselves.

What happened in the Shia Hazara community in Quetta in 2011 illustrates this process of ghettoisation—and the effects of protracted sectarian violence. As narrated by the Minority Support Pakistan, the community started the construction of security check posts and physical barriers at all points into and out of the two main Hazara neighbourhoods in the city. This not only resulted in the further ghettoisation of already-separate neighbourhoods, but it also affected the movement of the occupants of that locality, enhancing the sense of confinement (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 2). This construction, according to the Minority Support Pakistan, was done because the Shias felt

unsafe even in their community and were “left with no other options” (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 20). They took protecting their community a step further by establishing private security schemes and armed self-defence militias. This was a reaction to a failed attempt to bomb Hazara Eidgah, a courtyard/meeting place busy with the members of the community, in August 2011. The 200-kilogram car bomb failed to reach the target but managed to kill over ten Shias at the heart of Mari Abad, in the Hazara neighbourhood of central Quetta. A private security system, Nadir Security, staffed the neighbourhood check posts with retired Hazara police officers and privately trained Hazara guards. The scheme continued effectively for two months until later on that year the police intervened, complaining that “the Hazara had become ‘a state within a state’” (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 20).

While offering a sense of security for the residents, these separate neighbourhoods and enclaves make these communities easy targets, attracting violence and continuing the cycle of violence (Abou Zahab, 2009: 5; Ahmed, 2011: xxiii). These enclaves, or separate *mohallas*, are at the same time a result of sectarian violence, both actual and anticipated, and perpetuating that violence. They emerge by internal migration, as a way to deal with perceived insecurity, while also creating a possible space to target those communities, making that space agential in generating more violence and sustaining sectarian conflicts. Furthermore, the above example of private security and militias in securing that space is alarming and speaks of the depth of perceived threat in those communities, as well as the lack of trust for the state to provide the needed security.

This transformation and securitizing of space is not exclusive to the enclave or *mohalla* in question; there are also implications to the use and perception of public space. The reluctance of the male residents of those Quetta Hazara neighbourhoods who work as day labourers and merchants to use public transportation and leave their own enclaves signals changed perceptions of that public space, which should in theory be neutral and nonsectarian (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 7). According to Khaled Ahmed, most of the Shia drivers of the Northern Areas Transport Corporation that drive buses between the Northern Areas and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa refused to get on the buses because they feared attacks on the way as the buses passed through Sunni-dominated areas, like Kohistan and Diamer (Ahmed, 2011: 196).

Adding to the reluctance and anxiety of using public spaces are the ways sectarian militants have identified and singled out Shias in some recent violent incidents in those public spaces. From the summer of 2007 onwards, sectarian militants have stopped vehicles and identified Shias by asking for their ID cards or asking them to remove their shirts to see whether there are marks left on their backs by Muharram rituals. This tactic has been used for targeting regular Shia travellers, Shia army and paramilitary officers, and Shia pilgrims (Abou Zahab, 2009: 9; Abou Zahab, 2009b: 4). This departs from the previously used methods of violence, where the targets have been previously identified and selected for targeted killings or Shias have been killed because of their presence in a location specific to Shia ritual or worship. Now anyone

using public space that happens to cross paths with sectarian militants can be a potential target, changing the nature of sectarian violence yet again.⁸⁰

These examples highlight the idea of sectarian geography: how localities with larger-than-average Shia populations are organised and how this organisation and fragmentation “facilitates a multifaceted competitive sectarianism” (Varley, 2010: 64). This sectarian geography also extends beyond the community enclaves to include the use of public space—something that exclusivist sectarian discourse has tried to define and has successfully defined for the Ahmadi community, as we saw in the previous chapter.

These processes of transformation and securitizing of space also affect the perceptions of how one can protect, and bring a sense of security, to one’s community. The enclaves are spaces that create “paradoxes of security and insecurity” (Kaker, 2013). The perceived security through segregation (Kaker, 2013; Gayer, 2003) actually means further hardening of the community borders and the protection of those borders, rather than seeing the borders—and the separation they produce—as problematic and a source of insecurity.

The need to protect and secure public space is also a challenge for the state: it will have to not only provide safety for the communities but also ensure that militant groups and exclusivist sectarian discourse are not defining and determining the use of public space (Ahmed, 2011: xxxii; Mujtaba, 2011: 44).

⁸⁰ There is material available online that teaches LJ followers to identify Shias, for example, by their surnames (Tufail, 2012).

Furthermore, if the example discussed above of private militias formed to protect those enclaves are duplicated in the future, and the communities assert control over the borders of their community spaces, it leads to further challenges for existing state-society relations. This social organisation—border drawing—along sectarian lines should also be of interest to security analysts, as it signals deeper penetration of sectarian conflicts in the Pakistani society and enables a certain type of conflict dynamics and violence. The way these conflicts affect the use of public space can significantly change the polity of Pakistan in the future.

Violence of the Everyday

To conclude this examination on what the existing literature tells us about sectarian violence, we examine the concept of violence present in those studies that focus on examining how sectarian discourse is present in everyday life, in personal and territorial identification, and in a multitude of everyday interactions (Ase, 1999: 64). What is needed, according to these studies, to make sense of sectarianism is the investigations of “the everyday forms through which religious conflict is produced, as well as the specific political contexts in which religious identities are created and shaped” (Ali, 2010: 738). These analyses challenge the “approaches to the study of sectarian conflict in Pakistan that [...] over emphasise both the instrumentality of ‘the state’ and so-called ‘extremist’ and armed ‘Islamist’ groups in determining the nature of the relationships between Muslims in Pakistan who

claim affiliation to a diverse array of Islamic doctrinal traditions” (Marsden, 2005: 245). Instead, these researches show how in some localities, daily lives are penetrated by sectarian considerations, and how a sectarian divide is constructed during the course of the daily lives of people experiencing that difference.

These studies also offer examples of the *violence of the everyday* (Ali, 2010: 742; Varley, 2010). There is no involvement of organised religious groups and often no physical violence. Sectarian tension is created and manifested, for example, through the invocation of epithets and an unexpected ridicule of sectarian identity (Ali, 2010: 741). Nosheen Ali accounts an incident of *violence of the everyday* that took place in Gilgit, in 2006 after an army public school introduced biodata forms for teachers and students alike, asking for their sectarian affiliations. The senior head teacher of that school narrated a case to Ali arising out of the situation created by those forms and the sensitive information they were inquiring about. Because of the forms, the children started to talk about sects, without necessarily knowing what they meant. When a boy in class 2 discovered that one of his classmates was Shia, he beat him up. Apparently, he had heard at home that “Shia people are bad, and should be beaten up” (Ali, 2010: 724). Ali provocatively calls this incident a case of *sectarian violence*, to underscore and ask why such discursively and physically violent encounters at the micropolitical level are silenced in normative analyses of sectarianism. For her, attention to such encounters is critical in understanding the deployment of sectarian discourse in practise and in grasping the intimate production and experience of sectarian conflict.

Moreover, micropractises of sectarian hostility embody a *violence of the everyday*, which serves to constitute the very conditions of the possibility for dramatic eruptions of collective violence (Ali, 2010: 742).

Conclusions

Distinguishing between various forms of violence is challenging in Pakistan. This chapter looked at how sectarian violence is embedded in a complex web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing forms of violence and militancy. Those elements that sustain violence link the phenomenon of sectarian violence to regional, national, and local contexts and a myriad of different actors and agendas involved in that violence. These sustaining elements and actors produce and ensure *operational spaces* for sectarian groups to exist and function. They also provide crucial operational support for militants. With the entanglement of sectarian violence to other forms of militancy and crime, the *enterprise of violence* extends its reach much wider than violence perpetrated “merely” against sectarian adversaries. That enterprise is also conditioned by the internal logic of the functioning of those groups and partners in crime: violence is also about competition and survival and about establishing one’s superiority in violence.

With the complex contexts and interrelated forms of violence in mind, the analyses of sectarian violence carefully avoid monocausal explanations of that violence. The story of sectarian violence in Pakistan is, however,

integrally linked and equated with sectarian groups to the extent that the violence is reduced to a phenomenon related to the existence and functioning of those organised sectarian forces. Organised forms of violence started with targeted killings of high-profile leaders of those groups, the organisation around the sectarian agendas then producing the impetus for the current forms of violence and also its first victims. This equation of sectarian violence to sectarian groups is explored in chapter 6, where the findings of the data analysis—the locations of violence—are presented.

One of the main culprits in the literature for both fostering militants and maintaining sectarian discourse is the madrasa and mosque institutions. Inherently sectarian organisations and the production of the *violence of the word* in various forms are seen as playing an important role in the overall sectarian phenomenon. This role is likely to further develop in the future, as new technologies enable the spread and reproduction of sectarian discourse in an unprecedented way. Also the partisanship of the Pakistani state in sectarian violence is unquestionable. Political opportunism and government inaction, inefficiency of government institutions, alongside with active support are crucial in creating a permissive environment for that violence to flourish.

The explanations of *why violence?* in the literature are tied to an instrumental understanding of violence: violence is essentially seen as a tool, a means to an end, a way to pressurise and intimidate—as well as to eliminate and kill. The acts of violence themselves are rarely seen as carrying significance or

being agential. Therefore, the explanations of violence think of violence as a derivative symptom, reducing it to a dependent variable, a mere consequence of other processes. The transformative role of *violence itself*, particularly protracted violence, is not often recognised or analysed, but it is inadvertently examined when the literature discusses the relationship between the Sunni and Shia communities, which today are not as unproblematised as before, particularly in locations with a long history of violent sectarian conflicts. The literature also offers us examples of transformation and securitisation of space as a result of sectarian violence. The organisation of communities into separate enclaves, and even the forming of private militias to protect those enclaves, takes us back to Zygmunt Bauman's metaphor of a fortress and how the perceived need to defend that fortress emphasises the borders built to protect one's identity, creating paradoxes of security and insecurity, while trusting the provision of security through segregation.

This transformative role of violence is further explored in chapter 5, where the concept of *difference* both violence and religion create in sectarian conflicts is further analysed. The next chapter is going to have a look at the methodology that informed the research design and the methods used to conduct this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology: Researching Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

Introduction

It is true that, while I merely observed the behaviour of others, I found little basis in it for certainty, and I noticed almost as much diversity as I had done earlier among the opinions of philosophers (Descartes, 1968: 33).

This chapter introduces the methodological framework underpinning this research and outlines the considerations that led to the selection of the methodology and methods. When researching a sensitive subject such as violence in a location with genuine security threats, those considerations are never purely theoretical; they also stem from a careful assessment of what is feasible and safe.

The chapter starts with a brief discussion about how the basic research premises guide the selection of methodology and what direction, in turn, the methodology points to when choosing the appropriate methods. This chapter then maps the journey of conducting research in Pakistan, with special focus on how the dangers in the field were taken into account and negotiated.

The focus then turns to the data collection and analysis. The source of the data is introduced, with the process of selecting, recording, and formatting the data. A further selection process of the original collected data is then outlined with details of what is left out of the final data analysed and why. A careful assessment on the limitations of the collected data is included, to be reflexive on the restrictions that the collected data places on the data analysis phase. Lastly, the chapter introduces the variables used for analysis and then briefly explains the principles guiding the data analysis process.

The process of selecting the final methodology and the methods for data collection and analysis follows the hermeneutic circle. The process shows how all research is guided by the theoretical commitments following the research premises. At the same time, it emphasises that research is also inevitably *situational* and *contextual*: who is the researcher; what are the background, values, and assumptions they bring to the research process; and how do those relate to what is being researched. This relationship and the interplay of the different elements of that relationship not only inform the methods chosen but also play a significant role in data collection and analysis.

Methodology: The Analytical Framework of the Research

Based on the theoretical assumptions, as outlined in chapter 1, the research is firmly anchored in the social constructivist theory of knowledge. The research looks at violence as a method of forming and maintaining exclusivist

sectarian identities through the creation of borders. These ontological assumptions of identities being constructed in a shared action fit with the broad theoretical premises characterising social constructivism.

Social constructivism as an approach is known to avoid easy definitions (see, for example, Burr, 2003, “What Is Social Constructivism”), but the basic tenet of the approach argues that reality is socially constructed. Because of this, the main aim of the researcher was to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge constituting the research subject (Robson, 2002: 27).

If, as this thesis assumes, social (group) identities are constructed and maintained through the construction of borders, these identities can be researched by analysing those borders and the practises through which they are maintained. Instead of the concept of *text* as the focus of analysis that is widely used in social constructivism, this research uses *communication* in this context. The borders are communicated to *the other* as well as to the wider society by different communicative acts, those acts being an important part of the border building and maintaining. Communication emphasises the intersubjective nature of identity and the process of *social* construction. It also places the emphasis on *processes* rather than structures. As Burr writes,

The aim of social enquiry is removed from questions about the nature of people or society towards a consideration of how certain

phenomena or forms of knowledge are achieved by people in interaction. (Burr, 2003: 9)

In effect, this means that this research looks at discursive practises on constructing space and identity and on the ways that self-other relationships are framed, played out, and communicated through violent sectarian acts.

This communication (of identities) can take a variety of forms. Verbal communication can happen in conventional forms—such as speeches, political manifestos, etc.—but it can also take other forms, such as wall writing. Communication also occurs nonverbally, for example, by showing identity-related symbols—such as flags. The specific form of this *communication* that this thesis is interested in is violent acts against *the other*. These communicative acts can be summarised by using the term *discourse*, referring to “practices that form the objects of which they speak,” as was defined in chapter 1 (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourse refers to sets of organised meanings (which can include images as well as words) on a given theme. The term has been used to emphasise “the organised way in which meanings cohere around an assumed central proposition, which gives them their value and significance” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 14). What is being communicated, then, can be thought of as instances of discourses, as occasions where particular discourses are given the opportunity to construct an event in a certain way (Burr, 2003: 66). Now, the aforementioned communicative acts are those *instances* of discourses that are constructing not only events but also identities.

Social constructivism as a methodological framework does not inform the research on any particular research methods per se because there are no particular methods that are intrinsically social constructivist. However, because it is interested in *meaning* (of discourses), the qualitative methods are seen to offer more appropriate tools for research within this framework (Burr, 2003: 24).

There are a variety of methods that are used to analyse communication. Content analysis, for example, entails the systematic examination of forms of communication to objectively document patterns. It involves establishing categories followed by counting the number of instances when those categories are used in a particular item of text, allowing the researcher to obtain a quantitative description (Rossman & Rallis, 2003: 198; Silverman, 1993: 59). Some of these principles can also be applied in this research, despite the fact that communication is now understood in a very untraditional manner, in the form of extreme human interaction.

Social constructivism argues that the way discourses construct our experience can be examined by *deconstructing* these communications, taking them apart, and showing how they work (Burr, 2003: 18). This idea of deconstructions is at the core of the research design of this thesis. Furthermore, as observed by Rossman and Rallis, “The words or objects themselves are less important than when and where they are used and the meaning we attach to them: what is the process by which meaning is

transmitted?” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003: 101). Clearly, the focus of the research now is not to quantify *communication* by certain categories; what is more important is to look at the contextualised *process* of communication, particularly the temporal *when* and the spatial *where*. This approach points towards the interpretive data analysis methods within textual or documental realities as possibilities to use in the research. However, within that category, there are various methods based on different methodological and theoretical assumptions as well as different research practises.

Any academic study that places violence as its central concept and as the main focus of research must go through a careful assessment process of not only what is interesting—and important—to find out through the process of academic analysis but also what is *feasible*. The researcher’s own position and background vis-à-vis the research topic and the context of the research in question do create parameters for what is safe, efficient, ethical, and achievable.

This chapter now details the process of selecting the research design and conducting the data collection starting from these two premises: (1) what data are required to answer the research questions and to assess the hypothesis as informed by the theoretical assumptions of this thesis and (2) what data are accessible safely and reliably for a white European female researcher researching a sensitive subject in the context of Pakistan.

Qualitative versus Quantitative Approach When Studying Violence

Where sectarianism as a phenomenon is usually presented with qualitative accounts, sectarian violence is mostly approached quantitatively. Sectarian incidents are turned into numbers, and victims of those violent acts are turned into body counts, which then are summed up, compared, and contrasted.⁸¹

The aim of this research was not to distance the violent incidents to quantifiable occurrences but to look at them more closely. The research assigns significance to the violent incidents and places them at the core of the analysis in a way not representable by numbers. The aim was to *contextualise violence* and look at it as a method of reproducing or reinforcing identity borders and studying its locations and forms and its temporalities and spaces. This strongly points towards *qualitative* research as a methodology to be used, since it “is ‘situational’ or contextual, often based on a single case study and its particular circumstances rather than replication or generalisation” (Morvaridi, 11).

In addition, although the emphasis of this research is on qualitative data and qualitative analysis, the collected data also allow some space for quantitative analysis, as seen below. For example, the data reveal information on the frequency and quantity of violent sectarian attacks in Pakistan or in other locations, such as provinces or districts, although these numbers are not what the research aims to produce.

⁸¹ See, for example, Hussain (2010).

The Researcher and the Researched

Long before the research design is ready, a researcher assesses the conditionalities of studying the chosen research topic. It is not only about deciding what the appropriate methodology and methods are but also about what the practical realities of doing research in the location selected are and how the researcher himself/herself influences the equation. The author had firsthand experience of the complex societal realities in Pakistan and how, coupled with the difficult security situation, that could affect conducting research in the country. It was vital to plan the research design in a way that would ensure personal safety as much as possible in a country like Pakistan, with constantly changing political and security settings.

Any fieldwork in Pakistan related to sectarian violence is necessarily—to some extent—unstructured and unpredictable. As noted by Mariam Abou Zahab (2006), who is among the few Western people (and maybe the only woman) who are actively conducting research in Pakistan on sectarianism, “You can only see what is feasible when you are in Pakistan.” She emphasised the practical limitations of data collection, stating that it is very hard to predict what will happen in the field. She also added that when researching this type of topic, “you have to accept that there are things that you will never know” (Abou Zahab, 2006). The circumstances in the field are also changing fast, making it impossible to predict whether a research design would be feasible for a certain period. In this research, then, the scientific ideal of controlled and structured research—an idea at the very core of

scientific inquiry in general—is aimed at with a research design that does not rely on access to the perpetrators or subjects of sectarian violence.

Although the research is archive based, there is also a period of fieldwork, or “being in the field.” It was deemed important for the validity of the research to collect the data *in* Pakistan (this is discussed further below). By being in Pakistan, it was clear that the element of physical danger was part of the process of doing research, although the element had been minimised as much as possible through the research design itself. Taking care of *personal safety*⁸² is an imperative in this research setting to avoid any potential threats arising from being situated in Pakistan. This *ambient danger*, as called by Stanko and Lee (2002), occurs “when the researcher is exposed to otherwise avoidable dangers simply from having to be in a dangerous setting for the research to be carried out” (Stanko & Lee, 2002: 4). Being familiar with Pakistan and living in the country, the author had some prior knowledge on how to negotiate and anticipate these ambient dangers. But even with careful planning and keeping updated on the security situation, it is impossible to fully avoid these situations or close calls in Pakistan. Indeed, there were several occasions during the field period when these *ambient dangers* were present.⁸³

⁸² The concept of personal safety in doing research is discussed further by Knox & Monaghan (2002).

⁸³ The morning of Christmas day in 2008 started with a sound of a low-intensity bomb going off in the author’s locality in Lahore, with one casualty later reported. The author successfully resisted one robbery attempt and attended an event in Lahore where three low-intensity bombs exploded. But threats to personal safety can also come in unexpected forms. Perhaps the most surprising example of this is being attacked by a kite, a bird of prey, while sitting at the roof top terrace of the author’s residence in Lahore.

Although these threats to personal safety do not necessarily result in physical harm and injuries,⁸⁴ they can take the form of emotional danger. As noted by Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, emotional danger can affect researchers in two ways: “first, through destabilising personal identity and second, through providing greater insight into the research process” (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000a: 4). In this case, the author experienced both of the effects, gaining understanding of the practical realities of conducting research in a dangerous setting.⁸⁵

Being in the field made it possible to test some assumptions on doing research in Pakistan on a sensitive subject such as sectarian violence as a white European female, especially in relation to the sectarian groups and people closely related to violence. This experience confirmed Mariam Abou Zahab’s notion of interviewing the leaders of sectarian groups being “disappointing” for they tend to present the same discourse in interviews as they do to the media, it being extremely rare that they deviate from the official line of rhetoric or reveal other previously unpublished information. It was also evident that some of the people linked to violence in one way or another did regard the author as a “propaganda tool,” as further elaborated by Jipson and Litton (2001). The value of reaching out to those groups for academic research purposes is then questionable at best (Abou Zahab, 2006). Although negotiating access to subjects related to sectarianism is potentially difficult and dangerous, being a female is an advantage in this process. As confirmed

⁸⁴ The encounter with the kite did lead to a mild concussion!

⁸⁵ It was certainly draining to have to incorporate constant security assessments into daily life and to realise that those close calls are sometimes very close indeed. It was also a very vivid way to get a view of the lived realities of people living in Pakistan and what their daily lives consist of.

by Mariam Abou Zahab, it is easier for a woman to do fieldwork in Pakistan, where you are culturally more protected compared with men (Abou Zahab, 2006). In addition, being from a neutral and relatively unknown country such as Finland also helped. The position of the author in the research process was also crucial in this regard: emphasising explicitly that the research interests stem from the academia (and particularly from peace studies) instead of government agencies, for example. Although this theoretically means that a peace researcher—being explicitly value-laden (research *for* peace) with clear normative commitment to peace—is far away from the positivistic ideal of a neutral, objective, and impartial fact finder and instead pursues certain values and ideologies, it was easier to appear neutral in interactions and in the overall research process in Pakistan (Schmid, 1968: 217, 220).

After the period in the field, it was evident that researching sectarianism with alternative research designs *is* possible, with foresight and proper planning, albeit it being difficult and more unpredictable. Conducting this research was then a lesson learned not only about the phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan but also about doing research in a complex and insecure place as a white European female with limited Urdu skills.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Source

There are a variety of comprehensive data sources and databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database (GTD),⁸⁶ which records terrorist incidents around the world. The possibility to collect accurate and reliable information on violent sectarian incidents from open-source data sources is very limited. The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) is the biggest open-source web-based data source available on terrorism; low-intensity warfare; and ethnic, communal, and sectarian conflicts in South Asia. It is maintained by the Institute for Conflict Management in India. The data, according to the portal, are gathered from news sources. It is difficult to assess the reliability of the data and the data collection methods used because they are not presented in the web portal. In addition, the data-presentation method varies by year. From 2010 onwards, sectarian incidents are presented with clear categories and variables, but before that year, the data are in the form of partial descriptive news arranged chronologically.

There are also records of sectarian incidents being collected by the Pakistani police and the Pakistani courts, but whether they are comprehensive or accurate, or indeed accessible, remains a question. The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) has also developed a database⁸⁷ on conflict and security issues at the national level with variables related to sectarianism (“sectarian clashes” and “terrorist attacks by sectarian groups,” or “sectarian-

⁸⁶ GTD is an open-source database maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. It is the world’s largest database on terrorism incidents.

⁸⁷ For details on the database, see <http://san-pips.com/app/database/index.php?id=3>.

related terrorist attacks”). The PIPS database is not an open source, however, but needs a paid membership to access the data.

One possibility to collect data on violent sectarian incidents is to go directly to the newspaper archives. Because not all Pakistan newspapers have online archives and those with back issues in online format are available for different periods, this option would have meant going through the paper archives of the different newspapers, which is very time consuming and raises a question on efficiency. It would have also meant having to decide what is a “violent sectarian incident,” imposing the researcher’s own framing and understanding to the process of recording the data. From the point of view of the research and its objectivity, it was thought important to have that framing done by an impartial Pakistani entity.

The only impartial body in Pakistan that systematically collects records on violent sectarian incidents and whose records are freely available for researchers is the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). This high-profile nongovernment organisation (NGO) working for the promotion and implementation of human rights in Pakistan was established in 1987 and has (and has had) prominent lawyers, thinkers, and advocates as employees and office holders. As noted by Iftikhar Malik, the organisation is a nationwide, nonsectarian, and nonprofit think tank that has done laudable work throughout its existence (Malik, 2005: 150, 225). Part of the organisation’s mission is to collect information on human rights abuses and issues relevant to human rights and minorities in Pakistan. This information is then analysed yearly in

their annual reports.⁸⁸ The NGO also produces other written publications as part of their advocacy work, frequently holds seminars and workshops, and conducts fact-finding missions throughout the country.

Data Format

The archives of the HRCP, or reference section as the organisation calls it, are located in its secretariat office in Lahore, Garden Town. The archives store information in the form of newspaper clippings categorised chronologically in books for each year. The organisation gathers news items related to sectarianism, not only news about violent sectarian incidents. As mentioned above, the categorisation of what is *sectarian* is made by the HRCP, allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of that framing while going over the collected data. The fact that the organisation gathers news on sectarianism more broadly means that to be able to record the data on sectarian incidents, you have to sift through a lot of other news items all centred on the theme of sectarianism.

Going through the news items collected in this manner was more time consuming but also much more rewarding. It permitted observations about sectarianism not possible through already-processed data from databanks and thus greatly contributed to the overall understanding of sectarianism as a phenomenon. It also allowed our understanding to broaden on all the actors

⁸⁸ For these annual reports, please see <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/publications/annual-reports/>.

linked to the phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan and the roles they played in it.

Conducting the data collection in the HRCP archives not only enabled acquiring the context of sectarian violence but also provided context to the research process. By recording the data in the reference section, something that is an inherently solitary work got injected with social interaction, and it was possible to observe the methods used to collect and categorise the data in the archives firsthand.⁸⁹ Having a long-term association with the organisation also provided the opportunity to get to know the works of an NGO in Pakistan and the people working in this field. The author was also invited to participate in meetings and workshops organised by the HRCP, providing intellectual company and valuable contacts, enriching the research experience tremendously.

As mentioned above, going through the sectarian news in this format allowed the context of the violent incidents to be present. The archives included news about meetings on sectarianism, opinions, and statements of various political figures. The clippings informed the researcher about the political rhetoric on sectarianism and the favourite euphemisms used for the phenomenon both by the politicians and media alike.⁹⁰ Other significant and recurring news items were Muharram preparations, banning or booking of ulema, rallies, protests,

⁸⁹ Going through the yearbooks on sectarianism and sitting in the same grey plastic chair at the far-left corner of the reference section also gave the author a window to the daily life of a small Pakistani office, which the author is very grateful for.

⁹⁰ For example, the euphemism favoured by the media in 1997 was to talk about “sectarianism as a virus.”

and arrests. This context, however informative, is not the focus of the research.

Limitations of the Data

Despite all the advantages of using the HRCP's archives on sectarianism, the collected data are not without limitations. These limitations can relate to both media's reporting on news related to sectarianism in general and sectarian violence in particular and the HRCP's data collection methods.

Despite violence and violent incidents typically being the type of news that are well reported by the media, one cannot assume this for all categories of violence. It is important to be aware that the media in Pakistan might have the tendency to report certain types of violent incidents while not being interested in, and thus leaving out, others that could be categorised as *sectarian violence*. Big striking acts of violence are sure to be reported and widely publicised, but whether all low-level and community-level violence crosses the print threshold is uncertain. The possibility of media bias cannot be fully ruled out either. Furthermore, the media in Pakistan has its own restrictions about publishing material, although it is likely not to affect the reporting of violent sectarian incidents extensively. When President Musharraf banned some of the sectarian groups in 2001 and 2002, there was also a restriction placed on the media. They were not allowed to publish material such as statements from those banned groups. This most likely had an effect on the media's reporting on sectarian news in general, but it is unlikely to have affected the publishing

of violent incidents. Overall, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the data collected from the HRCP's archives do also depend on the media's ability and willingness to report all sectarian incidents as accurately as possible.

The second element limiting the data collection relates to the HRCP archive's data collection methods. The person in charge of the sectarian news files collects the news items by going through the day's newspapers and cutting out the relevant news items, then gluing them into the relevant yearbook. This method relies on the personnel of the HRCP archives to systematically spot sectarian-related news and record them in the yearbooks. With this human element in mind, it was evident that the archives did not include absolutely every news item published about sectarianism or sectarian violence. Thus, the data collected from the archives do not include every violent sectarian incident from the selected period. Although the data set attempts to be as accurate and as comprehensive as possible to be able to test the hypothesis and answer research questions, the analysis does not have to cover *all* violent incidents of that period. What is more important than to achieve a quantitatively perfect data set is for the data to be *representative* of all the possible violent sectarian cases and typical of its kind (Knox & Monaghan, 2002).

The majority of the news items collected and archived by the HRCP were from English-language newspapers. Table 1 provides details on the newspapers that were used by the HRCP for their data collection on news related to sectarianism. The table shows that HRCP included all major English

dailies, particularly *Dawn*, *Daily Times*, the *News*, and the *Nation*, in their data collection. The fact that news items from Urdu dailies were not present in the archives raises a question on a potential news bias. Because of the author's limited Urdu skills, any data collected from Urdu newspapers would have been left out from the analysis even if such data were available. It is important to keep this data limitation in mind when thinking about the validity of the data: the focus of the research is not explanations of violence or the perpetrators but the locations and spaces of that violence as well as the methods used. It is safe to assume that these details are similar with the Urdu news or at least very close to the English news reporting.

Although it is impossible to verify, there is a possibility that the definition of what is considered as *sectarian news* might have changed as the person in charge of collecting the news items has changed, although there are specific guidelines for the selection of news items, which all the personnel working in the HRCP archives are following.

Table 1. Newspapers used by the HRCP archives in 1996–2005.

<i>Business Recorder</i>
<i>Dawn</i> (the Karachi edition of <i>Dawn</i> was also occasionally used)
<i>Daily Times</i>
<i>Frontier Post</i>
<i>Muslim</i>
<i>The Nation</i>
<i>The News</i> (the Rawalpindi edition of the <i>News</i> was also occasionally used)
<i>The Statesman</i>

Source: Data collection

Time Period

The HRCP's archives on sectarian news start from the year 1996. This was also selected as the starting point of the data collected for the thesis. Because the older sources on sectarianism are harder to gain access to, particularly outside Pakistan, and thus are not often featured in the analyses on sectarian violence, the researcher chose to start the researched period from as early as the data allowed. The data collection period spanned five months, from September 2008 to January 2009. The year 2008 was the last year with a complete yearbook in the HRCP archives by the time data recording was finished. However, it was not deemed necessary by the researcher to include

all the data available in the reference section for the purposes of the analysis. A period significantly longer than ten years was acknowledged to create a very lengthy analysis process, without creating additional value to the ability to answer the research questions. Thus, 2005 was selected as the final year to be included in the data set.

The period from 1996 to 2005 provides the analysis process news items from ten years of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. It is a long-enough period for the analysis to be valid, but it also corresponds with some major events in the story of sectarianism in Pakistan, and the qualitative and quantitative changes in sectarian violence are discussed in chapter 3. The exact *beginning* of sectarian violence is debatable and not commonly agreed on, but analysts usually date the start of organised sectarian violence to the mid-1980s, with a major escalation of that violence occurring in the mid-1990s. This escalation was related to the emergence of sectarian groups, as detailed in chapter 3. In particular, the birth of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) in the mid-1990s changed not only sectarian violence and but also militancy in Pakistan in later years. By analysing sectarian violence starting from 1996, the collected data are able to track the emergence of the LJ as an actor in the field of sectarian violence and to record incidents after the major qualitative and quantitative change in violence has taken place. What the analysis of the selected data is not able to do, however, is to compare the data on sectarian incidents before the organisation entered the sectarian scene. The analysed period also covers both military and civilian rule and the banning of sectarian organisations in 2001 and 2002.

Recording of Data

Data from the HRCP's archives was recorded in notebooks by hand because the use of computers was not practical in the archives section, mostly because of the difficult access to power from the workstation and constant electricity cuts, which would have affected the reliability of computers as a recording tool. The data collected in the notebooks was then electronically transferred into the data set.

The notes include a wide selection of news items, not just those focusing on sectarian violence, but only those related to violence are included in the data set. Because the focus of the research is Sunni-Shia violence, only these incidents were included in the final data set, excluding the following categories from the analysis:

- Violence against Ahmadis or Christians: The HRCP has separate archived files for violence against minorities, but there were few news items related to the Ahmadi and the Christian communities in the sectarian files as well.
- Kashmir: The analysis focuses on the four provinces of Pakistan as well as Gilgit–Baltistan (formerly called the Federally Administered Northern Areas or FANA) and does not cover sectarian violence in Kashmir.

- Violence with the police, especially *encounters* with the police: These *encounters* were discussed in chapter 3 as a category linked to sectarian violence.
- Securitisation of sensitive places and events in preparation for possible violence: This category is briefly discussed in the analysis of sectarian violence, but news items on security plans (especially in preparation for Muharram), the police, and other security force deployments in different areas are not included in the analysis.
- Speculations about perpetrators: After the most violent incident, there are speculations by different political and religious actors and by the families of the victims on who was behind the attacks.
- Bringing alleged perpetrators to justice: These are news items on arrests, court cases, and convictions in violent sectarian cases.
- Action initiated by violence: Often, after violent incidents, there are reactions by the groups or communities involved. Very often, these reactions are patterned, including closing of shops and markets, demonstrations, and protests. These are not included in the data set unless the reactions themselves have been violent.
- Nonnews items: The data collected in the archives include a variety of pieces *referring* to sectarian violence without reporting those incidents. These pieces—such as editorials, opinion-editorials, and analyses—are not included in the data set except few selected cases when they contain relevant information in the categories chosen that is not obtained from other news items reporting that incident in question.

Despite that the above categories were not included in the analysis phase, they provide a view of the *enterprise of violence* discussed in chapter 3. Sectarian violence as a category is much broader than Sunni-Shia violence, with a complex web of different actors and processes involved, existing in local, supralocal, and regional contexts simultaneously.

When it was evident that news items were not recorded in the archives (another news source referred to incidents not included in the yearbook, for example) or that there was only partial information on the incident (news items reported the casualty figure after an incident rather than reporting the incident itself, for example), online newspaper archives were used to gather further information if available. Similarly, when in the archives there were news items of an incident from only one newspaper, the information of that news item was verified from the online archives of other newspapers also used by the HRCP archives, if possible. These additions are all noted down in the data set. This *triangulation* of data helped to create some flexibility with the data collection by not being limited to the information found in the HRCP archives. It ensured that as reliable and accurate data as possible were included in the data set. (Macdonald, 2001: 208)

Research Variables

To be able to test the research hypothesis, the following variables were included in the data set and were later analysed:

- Location of violence: For locating the incidents geographically, details of the locations were recorded with as much detail as the news items allowed. *Location* in this study does not only refer to the geographical location of an incident but also refers to the *type* of location of an incident (mosque, local residence, procession, for examples).
- Target and victims: This refers to information on the (intended) target and those who were killed in the incident.
- Methods: This refers to the method or methods of violence that were used in the incident.
- Time: Rather than referring to the exact time of an incident, *time* here signifies whether there are any specific temporal elements attached to the violent sectarian acts.

These variables ensure that there are adequate and accurate data to assess the research hypothesis. They also ensure that the research is designed in such a way that the data gathered from the archives—and from the online newspaper archives—do not have to be verified by using other sources. There is no need, for example, to verify *agency*—that is, who was really behind the violent acts. There is also no need to verify *motivation*—that is, why was violence perpetrated—behind the violent acts. Both *agency* and *motivation* are highly debated in analyses on sectarian incidents both by the media and by analysts, and getting reliable information on those categories

would be nearly impossible to do. All these chosen variables and their significance for the research are discussed at length in the next chapter.

Data Analysis

What is needed, then, is to adjust these methods to the existing realities of where and how the data was collected, and use them to “bring the data together in meaningful way.” (Wilkinson, 2000: 77)

The process of data analysis resembles the idea of understanding as a “hermeneutic circle.” You enter the analysis with few prethought variables, but their number and content are subject to change as the understanding of the subject deepens with the analysis.⁹¹

In many ways, data analysis has already started in a research project long before the researcher enters the field or the actual analysis stage is reached. Researchers analyse the data that are around them (data that are mostly in the secondary form, such as literature and newspapers) once the research project starts, although that analysis is not necessarily very systematic. This has an effect on the research process by influencing how the research subject is seen in general and what methodologies and data collection methods are

⁹¹ Hermeneutics originates from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, “to interpret,” and it argues that explaining a phenomenon is always tied to the understanding we have of it. Thus, the analysis model has to be revised during the analysis process and, as Nigel King advises, should be looked at by outside advisers with knowledge of the field. (King, 1999: 122)

chosen. As long as researchers are aware of this continuous role of data analysis, it is possible to be reflective of this in the research process and account for this in the final analysis.

It is also important to be aware of one's own position as a researcher in relation to data analysis. When looking at sectarian violence as a form of *communication*, the author, as a non-Pakistani researcher, imposes her own understanding of what *communication* is to the collected data. This raises a question on the validity of the analysis vis-à-vis the ability to *really* understand the complex and foreign terrain of sectarianism in Pakistan. This question was raised during the research period in the field. The only response that justified the researcher's position and the research design was to point towards the value of plurality in academic research and the need for the *outsider perspective* in that plurality. As noted by Rossman and Rallis, a qualitative researcher assumes that analysing and interpreting the data and representing the findings are filtered through his or her own personal biography, which is situated in a specific sociopolitical, historic moment (Rossman & Rallis, 2003: 11). This combination of a unique educational background, personal biography, and skill set enables researchers to produce new understandings on the research subject, despite—and because of—being an outsider to the research context. This dichotomy of insider and outsider researchers and the advantages and disadvantages of these positions are further elaborated by Hermann (2001).

In practical terms, the process of data analysis started with the input of data

from the handwritten notes to the first version of the data set. The second stage was to organise and categorise the data and exclude those news items that were not related to the core of the analysis, the Sunni-Shia violence (as described previously in this chapter). While organising and categorising the data, preliminary notes were taken of data observations, which helped to further formulate key themes arising from the analysis at later stages. These notes were kept separate from the collected data but were useful in identifying the emerging themes and patterns from the data. The next step was to reassess the validity of the variables chosen in relation to the hypothesis. The data were then further analysed, and locations, methods, targets, and times of violent incidents were looked at within the theoretical framework and assumptions of this research.

Conclusions

The research on the discursive practises on constructing space and identity and on the ways that self-other relationships are communicated through violent sectarian acts shares theoretical assumptions with the social constructivist theory of knowledge, which is interested in shared meanings and knowledge constructed in social interaction. When studying a sensitive topic such as sectarian violence, it is important that not only theoretical considerations enter the process of selecting the research design. The commitment to personal safety is paramount, although risks are impossible to

fully avoid in a location such as Pakistan. There are serious security issues involved with just being in that locality. The research design, stemming from the constructivist theory, then has to cater for both what data are required and what data are (safely) accessible.

Although risks involved in conducting research can be minimised through the research design, with forethought and planning and with a careful positioning of the researcher while in the field, there is still a possibility that *ambient danger* does create unexpected situations and affects personal safety. This can have a negative effect on the researcher but can also help in understanding the research context and the research subject in question. The rationale of investigating violence through collecting data from the HRCP archives was a result of an assessment of not only what data were relevant for a novel approach to study sectarian violence but also what research design would be feasible to conduct in a research environment like Pakistan.

The conditionalities of collecting the data and the limitations of the data itself create parameters on what is possible to know in the research. Despite the limitations that the data collected from the HRCP archives placed on the analysis, it has one important advantage: the categorisation of what is a violent sectarian incident was done by the organisation, not by the researcher. This was crucial to avoid imposing the author's understanding of that categorisation on the data collection and later on to the analysis of that data. The archives also had the advantage of having collected data starting from

the year 1996, allowing the analysis to include a period of sectarian violence not accessible otherwise.

During the first data selection process, it was clear that the collected data included a vast amount of news items not directly related to Sunni-Shia violence. Despite excluding those from the final data analysis, they point towards the scope of the sectarian *violent enterprise* and the need to look at this context when trying to understand sectarian violence in Pakistan. With this in mind, the next chapter discusses the idea of violence as a form of communication and how it is communicating the discourse of exclusivist group identity—the sectarian difference—particularly in relation to the research variables of location, targets, and time of violence.

Chapter 5

Violence as Reproduction of Exclusivist Sectarian Identity

Discourse

Introduction

So far we have looked at the theoretical understanding of identity and the construction of identities through borders in chapter 1. We also touched upon the way sectarianism, as a specific way of dealing with difference, and violence are related to identity formation and maintenance. Now these concepts and relationships are analysed in more detail, specifically in the context of Pakistan and exclusivist sectarian discourse.

The chapter starts with exploring the impact violence can have in creating borders and changing the meaning of sectarian differences between different identity groups. Then it will analyse the specific type of difference that is created when it is tied to a religious discourse, how that differs from other identity signifiers, and the type of differences they create. The chapter also touches upon the discussion of religion and violence and how this study is situated within that framework.

Lastly, this chapter will turn to look at the concept of location of violence—the spatiality and temporality of violence—and relate it to the idea of violence as a

performative act. This section introduces the variables of location and time used in the data analysis with more detail. Finally, the chapter locates sectarian violence in sacred spaces and discusses their relevance in sectarian conflicts. The victims of targeted killings on locations of violence are also examined.

The Difference that Violence Makes

In sectarianism, as previously stated, violence can be seen as a border-building mechanism between the different groups in conflict. Through the creation of borders, violence can both try to magnify difference with the *other* and minimise the difference by projecting a false sense of homogeneity on their own group (Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 152). Sectarian violence can thus occur to *create* difference, especially in cases when groups in conflict share the same culture and perhaps also other group identities and identity markers. Conflict and violence can then serve as a means of enforcing a border and creating the *required* difference to separate the identities from each other. This mechanism of 'violence as a creator a difference' should not be overstated, however. Conflict and violence cannot build borders unless some kind of division, or difference, exists a priori, but violence can effectively problematise and change the nature and meaning of those divisions and differences.

Tor Ase (1999) has examined sectarian difference in his sociological study on Sunnis and Shias and the violent sectarian conflict in Gilgit, Gilgit–Baltistan

Pakistan. The region first witnessed sectarian strife during General Zia's time, creating a legacy of decades of sectarian conflict and tension. As previously mentioned, Gilgit is one of those locations in Pakistan where the usual Shia-Sunni demographic balance is reversed, Gilgit-Baltistan being the only Shia-majority political unit in the country. This demographic balance was affected by the migration of Sunnis to the area, and it is claimed that this change was actively pursued by the Pakistani state to counter the *Shia threat*. In addition, the state policies, in relation to the constitutional status of the region, and the centralised administration and limited political rights of the residents have contributed to sectarian conflict in the area (ICG, 2007).

As described by Ase, "The situation in Gilgit must be described in terms of *resignification of principles* of social differentiation. Formerly, the population was differentiated according to principles other than religious affiliation, on the basis of language and ethnicity (from the Arabic *qawm*)" (Ase, 1999: 63). He then pursues to explain the change in emphasis on group signifiers and why sectarian difference—or theology—has become the dominant form of social differentiation. Ase's analysis highlights the importance to distance the concept of identity formation from thinking of identity—whether group or individual—as singular but rather as *identities*.⁹²

This is further explored in other research locating sectarian difference in the multiplicity of identities, again in the context of the city of Gilgit. In his study on identity discourses and processes of identity formation in Gilgit, Martin

⁹² This also relates to the discussion in chapter 2, whether sectarian conflicts are actually class, ethnic, or *biraderi* conflicts.

Sökefeld analysed five “dimensions of difference”: religion, *qom* (ethnicity), clan, locality, and language (Sökefeld, 2010: 238). He uses three related terms that together make up a concept of identity: *multiplicity*, *difference*, and *intersectionality*. Multiplicity denotes that identity exists only as identities and not in the singular. It is “formed through a plurality of relationships of belonging and otherness.” Intersectionality, for Sökefeld, points to the fact that the different identities (or the various differences) characterising an individual are not unrelated among themselves (Sökefeld, 2010: 235, 236). He then goes on to show the fluidity of these differences and the various meanings they can acquire in different “momentary positions” (Sökefeld, 2010: 239).

Nosheen Ali traces the change in the meaning of sectarian difference and the consequences of that change, again in Gilgit, since the 1970s and sees the processes that have enabled the production of sectarian difference and made it politically significant, stemming from the state practises in the area (Ali, 2008: 28, 30). Both Ali and Sökefeld note how, with the resignification of sectarian difference, that difference produces the tendency to define, understand, and interpret other nonreligious matters as well as disputes and conflicts overall through a sectarian lens (Sökefeld, 2010: 251; Ali, 2010: 745).

Although this study focuses on violence and its role in identity formation and maintenance, it does not want to claim that violence, or violent conflict, is the only method of resignification of principles of social differentiation or the only form of border maintenance between the different identities. Both Ali (2010) and Marsden (2005) talk at length about how religious difference is

experienced, negotiated, and reproduced in everyday life. In the context of these studies, *sectarianism* is not the domain of militant and organised sectarian groups or dependent solely on the variety of forms of violence.

These studies are important in showing how individual and group identities are interlinked when talking about the significance of sectarian difference. Through other identities, belonging to a sect is intertwined with belonging to different ethnic or linguistic groups or being affiliated politically, for example. They also highlight that sectarian difference is not the only difference each individual—and group—has to negotiate when thinking about their identity. However, especially with a protracted violent conflict, sectarian difference can become dominant, through which other matters are then perceived. These studies are also, within their own context, accounts against the essentialist understandings of identity and what is termed as *sectarian identity* or *difference*. The meaning and consequence of sectarian difference change; they are not static. Therefore, they are also changeable, both in being significant or less significant as compared with the other *differences*.

What is noteworthy for this thesis is the tension between the terms used in these studies, quoted above, and the analysis conducted here. Whereas Ali produces a variety of examples to challenge the understanding of *sectarian identity* as “inherently exclusionary and antagonistic” and that “differences between sects naturally lead to conflict” (Ali, 2008: 28; Ali, 2010: 747), Ase and Sökefeld talk about theological or religious differences instead. The difference in terminology is significant because sectarianism is now defined as

a way to deal with difference, as a rigid way to adhere to a group identity—in other words, as a group attitude related to a group identity rather than as a group identity itself. Thus, belonging to a sect does not equal sectarian identity. The theoretical examination of the term *sectarian* reveals that sectarian discourse *is* inherently, or as per definition, exclusivist and antagonistic, whereas being a Sunni or Shia, or of any other sect (or denomination) in Islam or other religions, is not. It is crucial to make—and emphasise—this distinction to maintain conceptual clarity. It is also vital to highlight it in order not to be seen promoting essentialised understandings of religious identities.

There can, however, exist “the illusion of singular identity” or the emphasis and insistence on theological or religious difference being the single most important difference by those supporting and promoting sectarian discourse (Sen, 2006: 175).

Religion and Violence

Equally important to the analysis of the role of religion in relation to identity formation and as *the significant difference* is to examine the debate over *religion and violence* and locate this study in that debate, especially when this research draws some of the methods used to analyse violence from that body of academic research.

There is ever-growing academic literature on violence and religion. The significance of that body of literature changed in the Western academia after the dramatic events of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. Since then, academic analysis, especially in international relations and peace and conflict studies, has had to get accustomed to religion as an uncomfortable but often unavoidable variable in analysis. In addition, although a significant amount of that analysis is centred on trying to understand the 9/11 attacks and the processes that led to them, the research done on the relationship of violence and religion has contributed greatly to the understanding of the nuances and the contextuality of that relationship.

There are a few seminal works that are central in their contribution to this exploration of the relationship: Hector Avalos's *Fighting Words* (2005), Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God* (2003), and Bruce Lincoln's *Holy Terrors* (2003), to name a few. Most of the current research does not treat either religion or violence as ahistorical concepts but locates them, and their relationship, within historical and cultural contexts. They also mostly reject the universalised category of *religion* and are aware of the a priori epistemological considerations of those traces and assumptions that are being carried forward when we use terms such as *religion* and *violence* in different contexts (King, 2007: 230).

Without getting too drawn into the discussion of how religion relates to violence, it is essential to highlight what in that relationship is critical for this study. Religion as an identity-forming mechanism that constructs and

mobilises individuals and groups is also widely recognised and researched (see, for example, Wellman, 2007) in the context of Pakistan.⁹³ This relationship of religion, identity borders, and their potential for conflict and even violence is recognised, but the causality of that relationship is contested. Some researchers, such as Wellman (2007), would assert that “religion does create social and symbolic boundaries and that these often do lead to conflict and, more rarely, to violence” (Wellman, 2007: 10). Although this study, in the context of Pakistan, thinks that violence can create the borders along the lines of religious difference, these borders, then, carry the potential for further conflict and violence.

This points towards the idea of *active agency* in producing borders and that the construction of identities is inherently linked to *social action* as well as the question of power. The relationship between religion and power has been endlessly debated and is further obscured by the complex relationship between religion and identity. Power, coercion, and religion are structurally linked (Wellman, 2007) as “our constructions of the world are therefore bound up with power relations because they have implications for what is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others” (Burr, 2003: 5). This is illustrated by a decree issued by Sunni Maulana Rashed Ahmed:

Undoubtedly, Shias are Kafirs, there is no doubt about this. They including literate, illiterate, man, woman or child are of the same belief

⁹³ Religion as a mechanism to mobilise for violence has been explored in detail, for example, by Abou Zahab (2004).

so they are all infidels. Shias are more dangerous than other non-Muslims because they are entrenched in Muslim communities and are trying to destroy this world and the world to come. May God protect us from their shar [mischief]. (Shah, 2003: 15)

By defining Shias as *kafirs*, making sure at the same time that all Shias are included in this category without exceptions, Maulana Ahmed is permitting a certain kind of action towards Shias. Some Islamic law traditions do not oblige Muslims to use the same peaceful laws of coexistence with infidels, which apply to other categories of people. In fact, when the enemy is labelled as *kafir*, the symbolic implication is to define the conflict as *jihad*,⁹⁴ and the need to protect *true Islam* against nonbelievers arises. Thus, Maulana Ahmed is permitting the use of violence by this definition or at least opening violence as an option (Ase, 1999: 61).

As observed by Waseem, “In the case of sectarianism in Pakistan, the enmeshing of violence and identity formation has all along underscored the conflict” (Waseem, 2010: 25). Religion provides the discourse of difference enforced by sectarian conflict and violence. It is important to emphasise that this study does not think that this means that religion in general—or in the specific context of Pakistan—does always lead to violence. However, it offers the potential for it, as do other ways to construct identities. In addition, as religion can mobilise groups for violence, it can also mobilise groups for peace. Violence, in a similar manner, can also act as a unifying factor,

⁹⁴ The word *jihad* comes from the Arabic root meaning “to strive,” to exert,” or ‘to fight.’ The exact meaning depends on context (Esposito, 2003: 157–8).

although it is looked at as a dichotomising tool in this study. Therefore, this research wants to distance its analysis from what is understood as *religious violence* or *violence in the name of god* and talk about the sectarian violence analysed here as *violence related to religious discourse*. Although it draws from the literature of *religious violence* some of its concepts of analysing sectarian violence, it does not want to claim that religion is able to explain the phenomenon of sectarian violence in totality. In fact, the aim is to *locate violence* and assess how these locations of violence correspond to that *religious difference* that violence is assumed to create and enforce.

Religious divisions and differences are not inherently bad or problematic. They become problematic when religious identities have exclusivist political agendas and hierarchical notions of existence, as is the case with sectarianism. An example of this exclusivist political agenda with an explicit hierarchical understanding of spatial existence is in an open letter that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi distributed to Shia Hazara⁹⁵ residents in Mari Abad, Quetta:

All Shias are wajib-ul-qatl (worthy of killing). We will rid Pakistan of [this] unclean people. Pakistan means land of the pure, and the Shias have no right to be here. We have the fatwa and signatures of the

⁹⁵ "The Shia Hazara people of Pakistan, are a Persian-speaking ethnicity of predominantly Mongolian descent that emigrated from central Afghanistan to Pakistan beginning in the 1890s. They are not to be confused with the Hindko-speaking and predominantly Sunni Hazara (*Hazarewal*) of Northeast Pakistan, a native population of Indo-Aryan descent" (Minority Support Pakistan 2012: 6). For more on Hazaras, see, for example, Alessandro Monsutti (2007).

revered ulema in which the Shias have been declared kaafir. Just as our fighters have waged a successful jihad against the Shia-Hazaras in Afghanistan, our mission [in Pakistan] is the abolition of this impure sect and people, the Shias and the Shia-Hazaras, from every city, every village, every nook and corner of Pakistan. Like in the past, [our] successful Jihad against the Hazaras in Pakistan and, in particular, in Quetta is ongoing and will continue [in the future]. We will make Pakistan their graveyard—their houses will be destroyed by bombs and suicide bombers. We will only rest when we fly the flag of true Islam on this land. Our fighters and suicide bombers have [already] successfully operated in Parachinar, and are awaiting orders to operate across Pakistan. Jihad against the Shia-Hazaras has now become our duty. Our suicide bombers have successfully operated in Hazara Town on May 6, and now our next target is your houses in Alamdar Road.

The Principal, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Pakistan
(Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 12)

The one-page photocopied letter was distributed anonymously at night on the streets of Mari Abad in August 2011. In the letter, the upholders of “true Islam” vow to perform a purification of space, now the whole Pakistan, of the impure Shias. For this, they have the backing of the “revered” ulema, which have confirmed Shias as *kaafir*, infidels, who are a justified target of their jihad. This letter—an example of the *violence of the word*—does not only incite violence,

but it also justifies violence with very powerful patronage. To disagree with this argument is to disagree not only with the power of violence and the militant LJ⁹⁶ but also with the “revered *ulema*.” It is, essentially, a disagreement with a powerful sectarian discourse.⁹⁷

Protracted Violence

If sectarian discourse is already an established characteristic of society and the conflict protracted, the nature of violence also changes. The sectarian system no longer requires large amounts of violence to maintain itself. (See, for example, Liechty & Clegg, 2001: 12.) Just an occasional act of violence will be enough to sustain the boundary that is already enforced and fortified. Based on the literature, violence is thought to be routinised and ritualised (Tambiah, 1996). Thus, violence is not *irrational* but part of the regularised conduct of sectarian politics. Such violence is up to a point *purposive*, *ritualised*, and *repetitive*, as noted by Tambiah (1996). It is therefore “a central experience in the defining self-perception of collectivities and their expectations of social intercourse” (Tambiah, 1996: 323). Violence is also very effective, in relation to communicating exclusivist sectarian discourse, for it targets the fundamental values and self-definition of those communities

⁹⁶ Ahmed Rashid offers an additional, complementary explanation for this dedication of sectarian groups being the upholders of “true Islam.” According to him, sectarian groups are vying to prove themselves the standard bearers of Islam and being closer to “true Islam” by displaying extreme hostility and intolerance to those designated as being un-Islamic by virtue of belonging to religious minorities and minority sects (Rashid, 1996).

⁹⁷ Several weeks later, the LJ followed through on its threat to attack Hazaras in their homes when it detonated a massive car bomb on a crowded street near the Hazara Eid-Gah of Mari Abad in Quetta (Minority Support Pakistan, 2012: 12).

involved. Violence also triggers and breeds further violence in protracted violent sectarian conflict. What is developed is *semiotics of violence*, where a specific discourse of violence with its own logic, techniques, strategies, and objectivities is understood by the conflicting parties as well as anticipated and counteracted (Tambiah, 1996: 223).

In protracted violent conflicts, the number of attacks or actual incidents of violence do not necessarily determine the extent of societal outreach and influence of the perpetrators of sectarian violence or the exclusivist discourse they promote (Siddiq, 2013: 17–8). Sometimes, no actual violence is needed; a mere perceived threat is enough to cause the wanted effect. An interesting but less researched theme illustrates this point: the role of rumours. As the acts of violence against Shias have risen over the years, uncorroborated rumours of planned or failed attacks have spread rapidly within the communities experiencing the conflict (Karmon, 2006). For example, Tor Ase accounts how a rumour spreading in the Sunni areas of Gilgit assumed that Sunni women and children were being slaughtered by Shias in and around the city. Later, this proved to be false, but it immediately mobilised the Sunnis to come to the rescue of their fellow believers (Ase, 1999: 58). A very different example on the mobilising role of rumour occurred in the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) operation in Islamabad in July 2007. The militants entrenched in the mosque were made to believe that the army soldiers who led the assault were all Shia. From the summer of 2007 onwards, the Shia in the army and the paramilitary forces have become a

direct target of violence⁹⁸ (Abou Zahab, 2009b: 4). In a location with a long history of violence, rumours on violence can be a part of maintaining sectarian discourse and difference without the actual use of violence.

The Difference that Religion Makes

Although the relationship of religion to the concept of sectarianism was briefly discussed earlier in chapter 2, it is also important to assess its relationship to *sectarian difference* and violence in Pakistan and how it relates to the idea of exclusivist identity discourse.

The studies referred to above talk about the process of change in the multiplicity of individual and group identities that people in Gilgit hold because of the protracted violent conflict in the area. Religious identity became the most important identity in many contexts, and religious affiliation was mentioned the most when the people participating in the research were asked about their most important identity (Sökefeld, 2010: 242). This was also coupled with a “dominant tendency to view and assess people foremost as members of a sect within Islam” (Ali, 2010: 745). Often, religious difference is thought to be qualitatively different from other differences or group identities because of its connection to divinity and the fact that it draws from sacred texts, such as the Quran and Hadiths, which are seen as authoritative and whose position of authority is nonnegotiable. In the words of Leif Manger,

⁹⁸ For more on the role of rumour, see, for example, Das (2007) and Varley (2010).

Couching the conflict in the idiom of Sunnis versus Shi'is brings particular dimensions to the conflict. Like the early Muslims, the Sunnis and the Shi'is of Gilgit do not see themselves as being part of an 'orthodoxy-heterodoxy' dichotomy within Islam or that the Shi'a position is more 'political,' which would be in line with academic views on this matter. As Muslim believers, their position is seen not as sectarian or political, but as the rightful position, representing universal, theological legitimacy. This explains why religious symbols are so charged with meaning, and hence so effective as mobilizing tools, and it explains why they added such heat to the conflict in Gilgit. (Manger, 1999: 21)

This idea of a universal, theological legitimacy in relation to religious identities has direct implications on understanding sectarianism, which operates within the religious domain. This seemingly nonnegotiable difference can be used to legitimate violence and the need to differentiate from *the other*. This also connects exclusivist sectarian discourse to the enemy discourse of the current militant Islamism. That discourse has categorised two main enemies, as can be identified, for example, from the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden: "The corrupt and corrupting West" and the internal enemy of Islam, or "the traitors within" (Lincoln, 2003). Sectarian groups operating in Pakistan do acknowledge both of these *enemies*, and they can act against both, as has been the case with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, but the main enemy discourse is always directed at the

competing sect, the *enemy within*. As noted above, when the groups lack radical differentiative elements, they have to be created or resignified, conflict and violence being one of the extreme ways of doing this. This also means that the role of violence as a border-enforcing mechanism is increasingly important. To use the words of a member of Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan,

It is a two-track jihad. The external enemy is known, his intentions against Islam and Muslims are no secret. But the internal enemy posing as Muslims, as Shias and others do, is more dangerous. Stopping internal enemies are our priority.⁹⁹
(ICG, 2005: 5)

Thus, enemy discourse can portray ‘the other’ as rebels against the divine order of which the sect or community is the instantiation, thereby constituting them as a “danger to God and community alike” (Lincoln, 2003: 35). When the Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan united their forces in the anti-Ahmadi campaign in the 1970s, this exclusivist thinking was being formulated and strongly promoted, as discussed in chapter 2. Still today, Ahmadis cannot build their places of worship looking like mosques or call them as such (Rais, 2004: 456), nor are they allowed to use or display Islamic symbols, thus reinforcing the perceived difference in a very strong, explicit manner. By forcing Ahmadis out of mainstream Islam, violence against them became more “legitimate,” and it has increased since then (Rais, 2004: 461).

⁹⁹ ICG interview with Mohammad Anwar, former SSP activist, Faisalabad, August 2004.

The literature on sectarianism offers us two useful examples of the existence of this exclusivist discourse—the process of defining by practise of exclusion what Islam is and who in Pakistan can call themselves Muslim—operating at both group and individual levels. These examples also illustrate how this discourse is tied to the idea of a “true Muslim” and how Deobandi Islam seems to have hijacked the idea of *being a Muslim* in Pakistan.

Qasim Zaman (2002) discusses the Sipah-i-Sahaba in the context of Jhang and how in their view the landed gentry of Jhang not only exploits the peasantry in social and economic terms but has also led them astray in matters of the faith. For Zaman, SSP’s rhetoric seems to evoke the image of an “original” Sunnism: the people should be rescued from the influence of Shia faith and be brought back to Islam. “They must, in short, be made (or remade) Sunnis” (Zaman, 2002: 120). David Pinault in his book *Notes from the Fortune-Telling Parrot* retells a story he heard about a healer in Sindh named Ali Sher Haydari. He was described as “an ex-Shia who’s now become a Muslim.” A boy who had fallen from a roof and was about to die was brought to Ali Haydari. Ali wrote out a *ta’wiz* (spell), the gist of which was a sentence stating “the Shias are *kafirs*.” Apparently, Pinault was told, God was so pleased with this spell that he “allowed the boy to be healed” (Pinault, 2008: 158).

This idea of a “true Muslim” formed in exclusionary processes helps to create what Zaman calls “supralocal sectarian communities” whose “members can relate, and react, to the tribulations of their sectarian kin anywhere,

irrespective of local context” (Zaman, 2002: 131). This sectarian community is supralocal even as it is constantly reinforced by local conditions and grievances (Zaman, 2002: 131). One can rightfully ask whether this exclusivist and rigid definition of Islam is a strong-enough force to change the local interpretations and understandings of Islam existing in Pakistan. This, however, has not been studied in relation to sectarianism in Pakistan, although this trend is hinted at in some academic studies. For example, Tor Ase notes that in Gilgit–Baltistan, the discourse on Islam has become less local and more a part of the national discourse, as result of the protracted sectarian conflict (Ase, 1999: 78).

Although this theorisation is useful when studying sectarianism in Pakistan, the notion of collective identity cannot be too simplistic. If religion in sectarianism is the key element in separating the different groups, the explanatory weight of theology and theological differences cannot be pushed: the theological considerations may play a relatively small part in distinguishing the rival communities. In addition, despite the salience of religious difference, it still is subject to multiplicity and intersectionality, to use Sökefeld’s terms (Sökefeld, 2010: 239). However, those communities define—and experience—their collective identity in terms of religion. As was shown by Sökefeld, “the dispute forced people in Gilgit to increasingly identify themselves either as Sunnis or Shias” (Sökefeld, 2010: 240). Religious differences were ascribed to heightened symbolic significance and put to work in social processes (Ase, 1999: 78).

It is impossible to locate the exact role of religion as compared with other *differences* any identity group negotiates in their social context, especially because those roles are not static but can vary depending on location and time of the analysis as well as the situation of the identity group in question. As observed by Tor Ase, “We have to go beyond religion in order to grasp the process of resignification that has taken place in Gilgit. Symbolic processes are always contextual; likewise, the religious discourse in Gilgit yields no meaning unless it is situated in time and place” (Ase, 1999: 63). What is important, however, is to recognise religion’s ability to create differences, symbolic and social borders that include and exclude, and that these borders, once established, can create tensions that differentiate the self from others, one group from another. Although “religion is not unique in how it functions in the human enterprise,” it is an immensely effective and powerful border maker and marker (Wellman, 2007: 5, 7).

Next, we will turn to look at the concept of location of violence—the spatiality and temporality of violence—more closely. This location will be the key theme of what is analysed from the collected data; thus, a detailed account of what is meant exactly by the *location of violence* is needed. The next section also introduces with more detail the variables used in the analysis.

Location of Violence

The place of violence, the space where violence happens, is the location where the borders are constructed and manipulated to include and exclude (Knott, 2005: 18). The location, or space of violence, is then not merely a passive conjuncture of time and physical geographic location where violence occurs. It is an expression of spatialised politics of identity as well as an identity politics of place (Keith & Pile, 1993: 2). In that space are intertwined contestations of spaces, particularly public space, the politics of identities, and the communication of these to the audiences. Conflicts tied to religious discourse are then often not only about space but also about the centrality of space (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 134). Next, we will look into the locations of sectarian violence already recognised and discussed in the literature. Most recognised and examined violent sectarian acts are those targeting religious places and rituals, which are at the core of expressing religious identities.

Violence and Religious Places

There are places that are outside the ordinary, but yet they are as ordinary as other places. Because they are outside the ordinary, they are powerful. They exert their power on human imagination. Because they are ordinary, they can be visited and inhabited. (Friedland & Hecht, 2006: 35)

Among the most important locations for sectarian violence in Pakistan are sacred spaces.¹⁰⁰ These are spaces with specific religious significance particularly to the sect or religion in question. Sacred spaces are not expected to be the only locations of sectarian violence, but their significance in the context of sectarian conflicts is highlighted in the literature, and their role as signifiers of identities authorises a closer examination of why they would be discernible locations of sectarian violence.

All religions have their *sacred spaces*, as noted by Appleby (2000): “Sacred spaces function in part as territorial markers, heavily fortified reminders that the religious community, while geographically diffuse and otherworldly in its spiritual orientation, is not indifferent to the question of peoplehood and land” (Appleby, 2000: 61). Sacred spaces can be permanent constructions—such as mosques, churches, or shrines—or they can be temporarily formed through religious rituals. Space is then used as a medium in which religion is situated, as religious groups and individuals produce sacred spaces using religious symbols and rituals. “Ritual *takes place*, and *makes place*” as this sacred-making behaviour brings about sacred space, not vice versa (Knott, 2005: 43). Thus, sacred spaces are at the same time ordinary places, such as streets, parks, courtyards, as well as places outside the ordinary, as postulated by Friedland and Hecht in the quote above. This highlights that religion, by being inherently social, must express itself and exist in and through space. In addition, spaces themselves may be constituted and constructed by socioreligious relations (Knott, 2005: 15). The location, or

¹⁰⁰ For in-detail exploration of the meaning and definition of sacred space, see, for example, Hassner, 2009.

spaces of violence, can then inform us of the understanding on the configuration of religious relations in social geography and thus is a significant factor in analysing sectarian violence.

The occasion of Ashura, on the tenth day of the religious month of Muharram, has been the location for violence since before independence (Tambiah, 1996: 164). The mourning processions on Ashura, in which Shias lament the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his companions in the Battle of Karbala, are the most important bones of contention of all the Shia ritual practises, as observed by Sökefeld (Sökefeld, 2010: 240). The negative Sunni response to these rituals has often been focused on the practise of *tabarra* (the cursing of Muawiya, Aisha, and others, who are believed to have conspired against the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali in incantations) and *matam* (mourning usually accompanied by breast-beating). For Sunnis, this means dishonoring the *Sahaba* (companions of the Prophet), whom Sunnis revere. Muharram, for some Shias, is the ideal time for this cursing because it demands allegiance to the Prophet's family and condemnation of those who caused suffering to that family. *Matam*, especially the bloodier manifestations of self-flagellation, is the second element of Sunni disapproval because self-flagellation violates Sunni notions of public decorum and ritual purity, and it is seen as an excessive, and thus un-Islamic, mourning of Hussain. These specific points of Shia rituals are focused on in justifying anti-Shia violence by the militant Sunni organisations (Pinault, 2008: 65; Hyder, 2006: 82).

Religious processions on festival or religiously important days acting as triggering events for clashes and violence highlights the notion of processions as an integral medium, and indeed a primary form, in which a tense religiopolitical issue is enacted (Tambiah, 1996: 241). *Ashura* and the other religious rituals underscore Shia distinctiveness from Sunnis. It is a time when the Shias announce who they are and when the Sunnis, by condemning and protesting or using violence against those religious rituals, also announce their objection to those Shia practises (Nasr, 2006: 32). Again, we come back to the notion of power and how it links to the conception of space, as such central places are also symbols of power and the act of violence claims them in a symbolic way. These momentary assertions of possession of those significant locations are also expressions of power to control those locations, “when in fact most of the time they do not control them at all” (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 134–5).

It is easy to see these religious rituals as spaces of enactment of one’s identity or as *moments* in the intersection of configured social relations. They are also forcing an audience by public display of religious rituals that are an integral part of the religious identity in question, thus asserting communal identities as well as enacting them. In the words of Pinault, “Shias I interviewed in Pakistan [...] emphasized the importance of performing their rituals in public, for the express purpose of asserting Shia communal presence and Shia solidarity” (Pinault, 2008: 65). In Sunni-majority Pakistan, “it is hard to overstate the assertive quality of public Shia rituals,” as for most

Shia groups, they are a fundamental element of identity construction and self-affirmation (Pinault, 2008: 65; Naef & Sahabi, 2007: 7).¹⁰¹

Processions and other religious rituals point towards the *temporal* element of sacred space or spaces related to religion and religious identity. It is not only the location of these rituals that constitutes sacred space but also the timing of those rituals. *Dramatic time*—the date or season when violence takes place—is part of the violence performance, especially with the religious calendar, where there are centralities in time as well as space (Juergensmeyer, 2003: 135). For Tambiah (1996), the religious or festival calendar can channel and direct the shape, expression, timing, and spatial location of violence (Tambiah, 1996: 240, 310). Not only is the symbolic significance of that violence then most obvious, but those places are often crowded with potential victims (Nasr, 2006: 166).

Processions and religious rituals mark the community or identity borders with public displays of that identity. Processions and marches are “colonialising” the community margins, and often, the demand or request for new routes—attempt to acquire new space—for those processions are met with fierce resistance for this precise reason. But processions and religious rituals are not the only forms of sacred space that sectarian violence could situate in. Very little is said about mosques as signifiers of religious identity in the context of sectarian conflicts as compared with the aforementioned rituals. (See, for example, Pinault, 2008; Khan, 2003; Mujtaba, 2011.)

¹⁰¹ Despite the emphasis here on these rituals for Shia identity, Sunnis also are known to participate in them, although to a lesser degree after protracted sectarian conflicts. For more about Muharram processions, see Abou Zahab (2008).

Again, when analysing sacred space as the possible location of sectarian violence, the purpose is not to overemphasise the *religious* in sectarian conflicts or even attacks on sacred space. As noted by Lincoln (2003), no practise is inherently religious, but a practise may acquire a religious character when connected to religious discourse that constitutes them as such (Lincoln, 2003: 6). Perhaps religion or theological considerations are not the sole discourse for violence, but it features in the *form of violence* and the location that violence situates in.

For the purpose of analysis, one important observation needs to be made explicitly. As was seen in chapter 3, sectarian violence is characterised by its being imbalanced—violence against Shias being more common than Shia violence against Sunnis. And above, we have mainly discussed Shia rituals and their role in triggering sectarian violence. As observed by Raman (2005), the attacks by the Shias have avoided Sunni places of worship. This is something that is looked upon in the data analysis. It is expected that the locations of violence against Sunnis and against Shias will have qualitative differences.

Although the importance of sacred spaces—such as mosques or *imambarghas* (Shia place of worship) or religious processions—is recognised, it is not assumed that it is the only space of sectarian violence, but it is one of its most visible forms, opening up the possibility of anyone belonging to the competing sect to be a target. This method of targeting sacred spaces and

sacred time is one of the strongest boundary-reinforcing and communication mechanisms. It is important, then, to repeat that targeting religious or sacred spaces is more than simple military tactics, with the importance resonating with meanings far beyond the strategic (Mahmood, 1999: 82).

Although this research assumes and expects the locations of violence to be religious places and spaces, it does not anticipate that these are the *only* locations of sectarian violence. In fact, finding how closely violence follows these expected—and perhaps evident—locations is something to be seen in the analysis. This research is also interested in finding out unexpected locations of violence, hoping they will reveal something new about the way sectarian identity is expressed and enforced.

Individuals as Locations of Violence

As noted earlier, it is not assumed that locations of sectarian violence are limited to religious or sacred spaces. This view is also supported by the literature, although very little analysis can be found on the targets of sectarian violence or their role in the overall phenomenon of sectarianism, as was discussed in chapter 3. It is assumed that sectarian violence targets *Shias* and *Sunnis*, but what that means exactly and how those categories are present in actual violence are things not touched upon in the analyses.

Besides attacks on religious and sacred spaces, the literature mentions targeting of individuals, specifically the leading ulama or doctors, lawyers, and

traders. From the literature, we get very little clues as to *why* these specific targets have been selected. Some possible explanations mentioned are the attempt to gain publicity with violence acts and the strategic value through that visibility (Irfani, 2004: 157). Or the victims are considered as “trophies of violence” (Zaman, 2002: 133), perhaps to be attacked because they *can* be targeted. The killing of community leaders is also mentioned as an effective way to spread fear and terror (Abou Zahab, 2002: 88; Mujtaba, 2011: 41). The symbolic value of these categories of people who have been targeted and how they are linked—if they are—to the sectarian discourse are rarely discussed. This is briefly touched upon by Tor Ase, who concluded that “symbolically competent persons” are linked to the process of reemphasising differences in Gilgit—that is, making the sectarian difference more significant than before (Ase, 1999: 78). Mariam Abou Zahab quotes a Sipah-e-Sahaba militant’s reply when he was asked why his group specifically targeted doctors, lawyers, and traders: “It is useless to kill the *malangs* [the ordinary people].¹⁰² We kill people who pollute their minds” (Abou Zahab, 2002: 88). This points towards the idea that these targets have been chosen not only for their importance for the *other* community, both as community leaders and as having symbolic value, but also for their relevance in the maintenance of that identity group and their identity discourse. The location, or spaces of violence, can then be thought of as including important individuals for the identity groups in question, as instantiations of the *other* identity and whose symbolic value is an incentive to commit violent sectarian acts (Black, 2007: 180).

¹⁰² The term *malang* is translated by Abou Zahab as “the ordinary people” in this context, but it can also be translated as a tramp or ascetic.

The next chapter, with the analysis of the data, will discover if these targets mentioned by the literature will be present in the data and how strong their overall presence is as compared with other targets and locations of violence. If the sectarian identity discourse can be used and mobilised for various purposes, it also limits possible political and violent action because it has to fall within the sectarian discourse to be legitimated within its parameters.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the difference that violence makes in identity formation through its ability to construct and maintain borders. When that difference being enforced and maintained is related to religious discourse, it becomes qualitatively different to the other possible differences that an identity group can occupy. Being connected to the divine, with divine and unquestionable truths, those differences can be more salient and rigid, possibly reinforcing exclusivist identity discourse in a different manner to other identity differences. It was highlighted that both the concept of identity formation through borders and violence and identity differences related to religious discourse do not lend themselves to essentialism or essentialist understandings of identities or religion.

The interplay of space, religion, and violence is evident in the location of sectarian violence mostly discussed in the literature: sacred spaces. Now religion and religious identities are contested in their established spaces,

making sacred spaces the prominent spaces to negotiate and challenge those identities related to religious discourse. Sacred spaces—such as processions—are part of asserting communal identities in a shared public space. Claiming that space temporarily is a part of the spatialised politics of identity. Processions and other religious rituals highlight the *temporal* element of sacred space. The convergence of temporal sacred spaces and the *dramatic time* of violence create a powerful mode to enforce and display exclusivist sectarian discourse.

In addition to sacred spaces, the literature highlights individuals, Sunnis and Shias, as targets of sectarian violence. These targets have been chosen for their importance for the *other* community, both as community leaders and as having symbolic value. Furthermore, they also carry significance as being instrumental in maintaining and reproducing the identity group they belong to and their identity discourse. The location, or spaces of violence, can then be thought to include these important individuals as instantiations of the *other* identity.

These are not thought to be the only locations of violence, though, and the next challenge with analysing the data is to locate sectarian violence: where is violence trying to enforce the borders, where are they spatially located, and what do the locations tell us? By analysing the location, time, and form of violence and by looking at the spatialities and temporalities of sectarian violence, we are able to construct a new type of geography of sectarian

violence, which informs us where and how the borders of exclusivist sectarian discourse exist.

Chapter 6

Locating Sectarian Violence in Pakistan 1996–2005

Introduction

In this chapter, we turn to the data collected to locate sectarian violence in Pakistan. By categorising and analysing the locations of violence, we will examine the spaces where the processes of exclusion are being enforced and what the spaces where sectarian discourse is reproduced.

The chapter starts by making general observations on the data, first outlining what this analysis is able to say about violence based on the data collected and then uncovering how the data—and the analysis—is conditioned by the media's representation of sectarian violence. Next, the chapter further specifies what is meant by violence and a violent incident and what were the types of violent incidents included in and excluded from the analysis.

The chapter then moves to analyse all the main categories of locations of violence—target killings, processions and religious gatherings, and mosques and imambargahs—and how these locations were present in the data, as well as their significance as spaces of sectarian violence. We also get an understanding—albeit a limited one—of the agency behind the violent incidents and the patterns and methods used in sectarian violence. Most

importantly, we will gain understanding of the spatialised politics of religious identities and the contestation of spaces where those politics are played out. Finally, the chapter concludes with highlighting some of the stories related to sectarian violence that fell out of the scope of the focus of the analysis.

Observations on the Data

Before beginning with the data analysis, it is important to emphasise that what this analysis finds, or does not find, about sectarian violence is accurate within these data collected and within this framework of analysis. The analysis, or the thesis itself, does not—and cannot—claim absolute truths about sectarian violence. The analysis does not provide numerical truths about the violent sectarian incidents that have been perpetrated in Pakistan, as mentioned in chapter 4. The number of certain types of incidents and the locations of violence are presented as comparisons within the data collected and as compared with the other incidents in this data set, not as absolute figures of violent sectarian incidents in Pakistan during that period.

By presenting the locations of violence found in the collected data, comparing, and analysing the relationships of these locations, this analysis provides one method of analysing sectarian violence. Again, this method is not claimed better or more accurate than other methods of analysing violence, but it will provide an alternative approach to understanding these violent incidents by placing them at the centre of analysis.

Does Media Make Sectarian Violence?

One significant inherent limitation of the data collected for this research is that a violent sectarian incident exists (in the data set) if it has been reported by the media. The availability of data inevitably follows the logic and laws of reporting violence and violent incidents in the Pakistani media, presenting the question of what is left out or not known merely because it has not been reported. For example, is the Punjab-centricity of the Pakistani media also reflected in its reporting, or is sectarianism and sectarian violence genuinely concentrated to the province to the extent reflected in the data? Or do sectarian incidents that occur in small and far-away places from the news desks also find their way to the newspapers—if they take place? This concern is also voiced by Khaled Ahmed (2011, 168) when he said, “[t]he media covered sectarian deaths in the big cities but violence taking place in the small cities went unnoticed although the number of dead was much higher and the incidents more frequent”.

The role of media has to be highlighted in relation to analysing sectarian violence for two specific reasons. First, the news sources are used and referred to often in academic analyses. Media sources are also used in several databases that collect data to produce statistics on sectarian violence, such as the South Asia Terrorism Portal. This bias in media reporting—if it exists—is subsequently reflected in the academic understanding of sectarian violence. Second, media report not only the violent incidents but also the

explanations of violence, both on the part of the agency and whether the attack or incident was sectarian or not. The agency—which was behind the sectarian incidents—can be conveyed in the news items through the people interviewed, the actors declaring to have perpetrated the attack, or the news reporters themselves, for example. The real motivations behind the different violent incidents and attacks are impossible to assess without an in-depth investigation on each particular incident. The media's portrayal about these incidents and their explanations on whether the incident was sectarian or something else entirely affect how these incidents are perceived—despite their 'real' motivation.

On 22 March 2002, *The News* reported that '2 unknown gunmen on a motorcycle' in Karachi killed a Shia shopkeeper and wounded two bystanders. The victim, video shop owner Kazim Jafri, was killed as he was in his shop, where witnesses quoted by *The News* claimed Jafri had played videos of Shia speeches. These witness statements link the incident firmly to the sectarian discourse, although there have been several attacks on video shops for possessing 'objectionable material' without any connection to sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. Media can also work towards downplaying a potential sectarian connection by highlighting and emphasising other possible motivations and explanations for the incident in question, for example, personal disputes. As said, verifying the motivations of all the attacks and incidents is impossible, but it is important to highlight that the media's explanation and portrayal play a significant role in how these incidents are perceived.

This framing of violent incidents by the media and the potential risks the sometimes simplistic framing carries in relation to the understanding of sectarianism and sectarian conflicts are summed up by Ali A (2010), as follows:

To frame these attacks as 'sectarian' in the news misleads an uninitiated viewer into believing that this is a fight between the Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan. That is not true. For one, consider the background of people killed in the Ashura blast: according to one report, 15 of the 50 killed were Sunnis, two were Bohra Shias, and one was Christian. Anyone familiar with the ground reality in Pakistan knows that Muharram processions are widely attended by Muslims from diverse sectarian background, and at some places, even non-Muslims also participate. Thus, the processions are not an exclusive tradition of Shias, contrary to how it is framed in the international news media. They are for all those who want to commemorate the noble sacrifice of the grandson of the Holy Prophet, Imam Hussain (peace be upon him). However, the reductive representation in the international news media further distorts the image of Sunni-Shia differences in the mind of general viewers: an attack on Muharram procession is automatically seen as an attack on "Shias by Sunnis" ' in the news and analysis. Perhaps that was also the intention of the perpetrators of

these attacks: to provoke sectarian differences and to distance the Sunnis from the Shias and Muharram processions.

This 'reductive representation' is a valid concern not only for how media—both the international and the Pakistani media—represents violence but also for the analysis of this thesis. The categorisations used in the analysis are necessarily simplistic in the sense that they do not fully reflect the rich plurality of Pakistan—for some, the term 'Shia', for example, would be too simplistic in the Pakistani context, as discussed in chapter 2—but to deny the use of these categorisations would render any analysis meaningless and indeed impossible. Whether other people than Shia participate in the Ashura processions, for example, does not take away the fact that it is a religious practice at the core of the Shia belief, signifying Shia Islam in a particular and powerful way, as discussed in chapter 5. Targeting these processions is targeting the Shia as well as the practice of Shia beliefs in public spaces in Pakistan. Having noted all this about the possible media bias in reporting violent incidents and their representation and framing, the media are still the most accessible (and sometimes the only) source of those incidents, despite the limitations.

Violence and Violent Incidents

Sectarian violence exists always within a specific context, and it is often interwoven with other types of violence, as discussed in chapter 3. The fact that it is now separated from its context as a separate category is recognised, and the limitations it places to the analysis are acknowledged.

Violent incident is now defined as an event or occurrence where force is used with the intention to cause physical harm. The violent incidents placed at the centre of the analysis are moments or instances in space and time, but in practice, violent attacks entail a great deal that have preceded them. For example, this can refer to the meticulous planning and selection of the target and the method(s) of violence. Or, alternatively, sometimes the previous violent incidents, either recent or older, are the impetus for violence. There are also cases where there have been tensions and animosities building up for a long period, which then erupt eventually as violence.

These histories, or cycles of violence, are not evident in the data presented in this form, nor are they represented in the analysis of the locations of violence. Revenge and retaliations—whether imagined or real—are important elements in explaining sectarian violence and giving its rationale, as seen in chapter 3. They are however present in the data as a subtext where the timing and the

target are occasionally, but not always, explained as a part of cycles of revenge and getting even. The data point out to how the alleged payback is not always perpetrated in the same locality or even province, implying the existence of those supralocal networks that act upon and promote violent sectarian discourse, as conceptualised by Qasim Zaman and discussed in chapter 5. Violence that is being retaliated is also not always returned in kind: target killing can be followed by a retaliation attack in a mosque, for example. The retaliation violence, according to the data, is also not always a response to violence but has been used to get back on other issues such as arrests, perceived mistreatment of religious figures, and unwanted government policies.

There is also a presence of another type of retaliatory violence in the data analysed. This refers to violence that often follows a violent sectarian incident. The immediate retaliation or reactionary violence can take different forms, such as demonstrations or killing sprees, and it is often coupled with damaging properties, such as burning shops or vehicles. Sometimes reactionary violence is directed towards another sect, but occasionally, it is directed to the surrounding locality of the incident in question. This immediate retaliatory violence is not included in the analysis unless it results in further killings. It is important to note, however, that this type of violence does take place, and it sometimes adds to the casualty figure of the violent incident in question. The mobilising effect of these violent incidents, and the form this reactionary violence takes, would warrant a separate research.

Focus of Analysis

The news items excluded in the first stage of data analysis were presented in chapter 4, but with a further analysis of the data on sectarian violence, a more precise focus was developed, and the following additional categories were excluded from the analysis:

- Deaths in prison or police custody. The data included incidents where members of sectarian groups or religious figures died while in prison. It was frequently speculated in the media whether the deaths were natural or the deceased were murdered on sectarian grounds. The circumstances were often unclear, and these deaths were often mentioned in passing in the news items. There were also news items about deaths in police custody that are not included in the analysis for similar reasons.
- Violence with the police. The incidents where Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) members were shot in incidents known as ‘police encounters’—where the victims were claimed to have either attacked the police or tried to escape from the police—started to appear in the data in 1998 and peaked in 1999. Also, other violent incidents with the police are not included if the violence was between the police and another party. However, if police intervened in a tense or violent situation and were involved in the reactionary violence, these incidents are included in the analysis.

- Intra-Sunni violence. To focus the analysis, the violence between the different Sunni sects was attempted to be excluded from the analysis. However, it was difficult to gauge when violence fell into this category. The difficulty of separating intra-Sunni violence as a distinct category is explored further below.
- Violence against Sufis. The data included cases where people from the Sufi branch of Islam were attacked, but these incidents were not included in the analysis.
- Violence in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). During the researched period (1996–2005), there were three periods of intensive violence in FATA (or bordering FATA): in 1996 in Parachinar and the nearby villages, in 1998 in Hangu, and in 2001 in Orakzai Agency. The way these periods of violence were reported in the Pakistani media made it impossible to locate the violence using the method of this research. Violence in these cases was presented as having multiple simultaneous locations, without specifying those locations in detail. It was referred to as ‘clashes’ in specific villages or cities, and occasionally the news items only referred to casualty figures when talking about the incidents and violence involved. Because of the lack of adequate details on violence and its locations, and the methods used, those intensive periods of violence were not included in the analysis. It is recognised, however, that these are locations of serious sectarian conflicts, and the reason why they are not analysed here in detail are purely methodological.

- Finally, the violent incidents included in the analysis are all incidents of active and purposeful violence. For example, victims of self-flagellation or casualties from stampedes are not included in the analysis.

The news items varied considerably in how much detail they provided on the incidents they reported. Some had very little detailed information, and some items consisted of barely anything other than the headline. There were news items that were printed in the 'briefs' section of the newspapers, without even the headline. This analysis did not want to value some attacks or incidents over others, and all those news items that had any information that could be analysed within this framework were included in the data set.

Quantity and Location of Incidents Analysed

There were a total of 520 violent incidents analysed.¹⁰³ Table 2 shows how they were distributed during the researched period. Figure 1 presents the spatial distribution of those incidents by province.

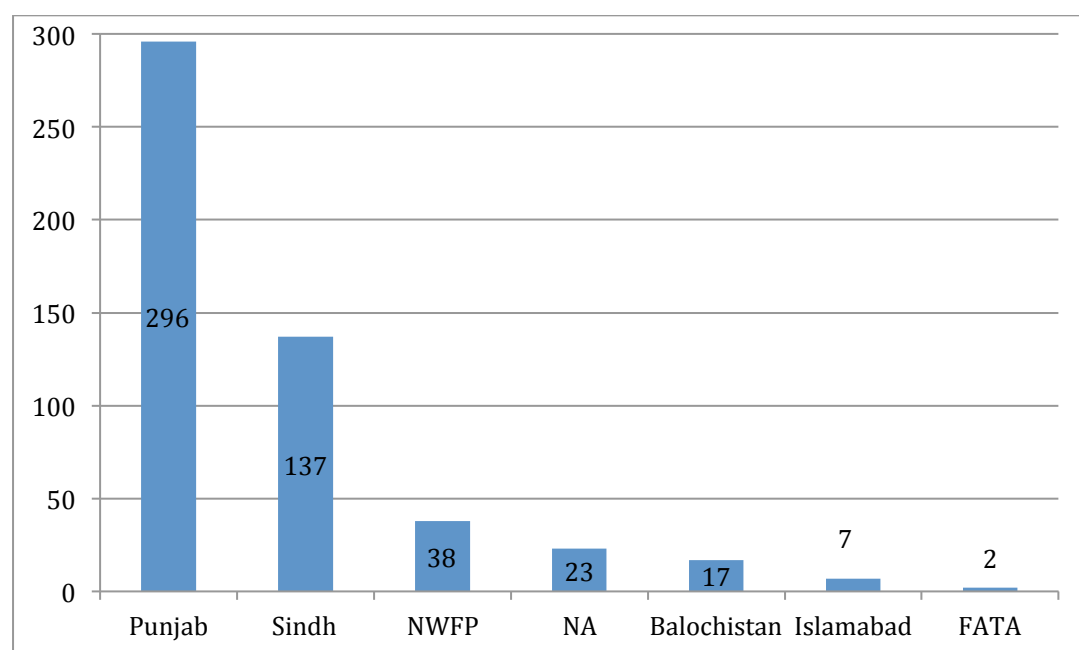
¹⁰³ To compare these figures to other available statistics on sectarian violent incidents compiled from the English language press, the South Asian Terrorism Portal (2012) reports the following figures for the period researched: 1996, 80 incidents; 1997, 103 incidents; 1998, 188 incidents; 1999, 103 incidents; 2000, 109 incidents; 2001, 154 incidents; 2002, 63 incidents; 2003, 22 incidents; 2004, 19 incidents; and 2005, 62 incidents. It is important to note, however, that the figures in Table 2 are the incidents analysed. The overall figures of incidents is higher before the process of excluding some categories of violent incidents from the analysis.

Table 2. Number of violent incidents analysed per year.

1996	24
1997	103
1998	70
1999	51
2000	50
2001	66
2002	40
2003	33
2004	28
2005	55
Total	520

Source: Data analysis

Figure 1. Spatial distribution of sectarian violent incidents analysed in provinces.



Source: Data analysis

The data are Punjab dominated, with 296 of the 520 incidents being located in the province. Towards the end of the period included in the research, the other provinces have a more significant role as locations of violence. Although Karachi is present in the data from the first year analysed, it features more prominently from 1999 onwards. Nearly all incidents of sectarian violence in Sindh occurred in Karachi. Similarly, most of the violent incidents reported in Balochistan were located in Quetta. The province appears as a location of sectarian violence the first time in 2000. Northern Areas were present in the data only during the last two years analysed (2004 and 2005).

During the process of data analysis, four main categories of spaces of sectarian violence emerged from the data:

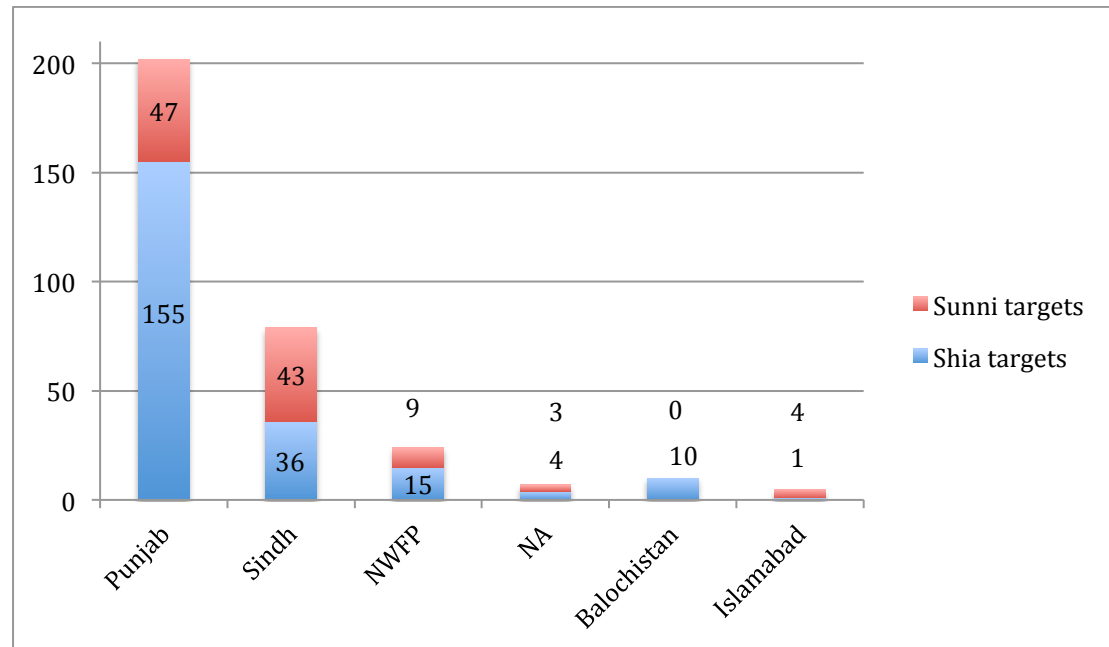
- Individuals of both sects killed in target killings
- Processions and religious gatherings
- Mosques and imambargahs
- Others

All these categories as locations of violence are explored in detail in the following sections. The analysis starts with the numerically largest category (in terms of the number of incidents rather than the number of people killed), namely, target killings.

Target Killings

As anticipated by the literature on sectarian violence in Pakistan, violence targeting individuals of both sects is featured prominently in the data. If measured by the number of incidents, this is the largest category of violent incidents in the data set. There are target killings every year of the period analysed, although the number of incidents declines towards the end of the period, increasing again in 2005. Most of these incidents occurred in Punjab, as with the other types of incidents included in the data set. Other locations, particularly Karachi, start to be featured more prominently during the last six years of the period included in this study (2000–2005). It is noteworthy that target killings occurred in all the Pakistani provinces during the researched period, although significantly less in Punjab. There are target killings in Northern Areas only during the last year (2005) in this category of violent incidents. There is also a significant imbalance in the number of Shias attacked as compared with Sunnis, confirming the asymmetry of violence discussed in chapter 3.

Figure 2. Quantity and spatial distribution of sectarian target killings in provinces.



Source: Data analysis

When the incidents of target killings were categorised by the different types of identity categories the victims were reported to have, the following categories as presented by Tables 3 and 4 emerged as the main identity categories targeted in this type of sectarian violence. These categories are discussed—and problematised—in the following sections.

Table 3. The main categories of Shias killed in target killings.

Leaders of TJP, SMP or ISO
Religious leaders and figures
Shia leaders or activists
Government officials and bureaucrats
Academics and teachers
Doctors
Policemen
Others

Source: Data analysis

Table 4. The main categories of Sunnis killed in target killings.

SSP leaders and activists
Religious leaders
Lawyers
Others

Source: Data analysis

Members of Sectarian Organisations and Religious Leaders

People related to sectarian organisations, both Sunnis and Shias, formed the largest category of victims of target killings. In the Shia category, these included people affiliated with the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), the Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), and the Imamia Student Organisation (ISO). Similarly, in the Sunni category, those with affiliation to SSP were the largest group targeted. According to the data, the victims included people with vastly different types of affiliation and rank in these organisations. For example,

those victims affiliated with the TJP included TJP activists, members, workers, leaders, presidents, central leaders, and senior leaders. In fact, it is often difficult to gauge the exact type of affiliation the victims had with these organisations: by labelling someone an ‘SSP man’ does not provide a full picture of the victim’s role in the organisation or indeed their level of affiliation and activation. Also, sometimes the affiliation to sectarian groups is not clear, or it is disputed.¹⁰⁴ It is then important to problematise these labels and ask what labelling victims as a ‘Shia leader’ or a ‘Sunni activist’ exactly means as a precarious use of these terms by the media can significantly affect how the news items—and the violent incident itself—are perceived.

In addition to the above-mentioned groups, members of groups such as the Tehrik-e-Khatam-e-Nabuwat (TKN),¹⁰⁵ an anti-Ahmadi movement discussed in chapter 2, and Sunni Tehreek (ST),¹⁰⁶ a Sunni Brelvi organisation, appear as victims of target killings, albeit significantly less in numbers. Also, there are cases when family members of people affiliated to these organisations have been targeted. The absence of LJ from the data analysed, other than being the organisation claiming to be behind the attacks, is noticeable. In the data collected, LJ activists are present as being killed in police encounters or in police custody. More research would be needed to find out reasons for the lack of LJ members being targeted, but it could stem from the LJ being a more

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *Dawn* (2000d) and *The News* (2000e).

¹⁰⁵ The most famous TKN leader killed during this period was Maulana Mohammad Yusuf Ludhianvi, who was killed with his driver in a drive-by shooting in May 2000 in Karachi. (*Dawn*, 2000c).

¹⁰⁶ Sunni Tehreek was founded in Pakistan in 1990. Its members were the victims of target killings since late 2004 in the data set. This can signal the increasing level of intra-Sunni violence in Pakistan.

amorphous organisation as compared with SSP and not as active and present in the grassroots and community levels in Pakistan.

What is evident from the data is that being a known member of these organisations, whether a local activist or a community leader, or a more prominent figure has been grounds for selecting them as targets. It is not surprising that the members, activists, and leaders of organisations specifically formed as Shia and Sunni organisations with sectarian agendas are targeted as a part of sectarian violence. Targeting these individuals is at the same time targeting these organisations in question and what they represent.

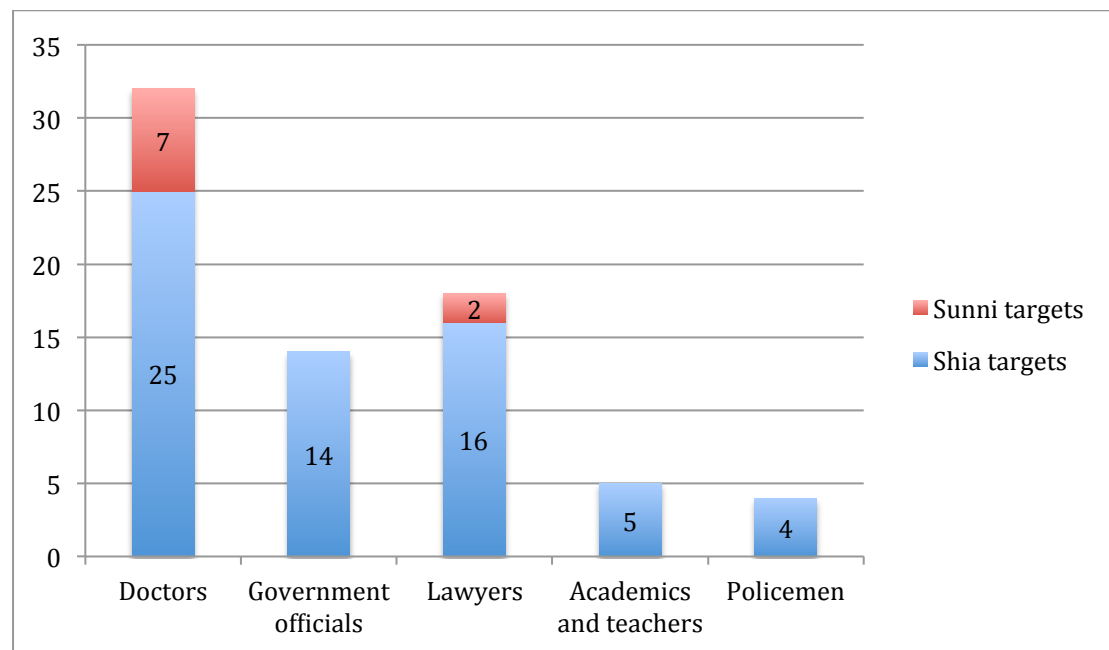
The category of people affiliated with these organisations is closely linked to—and significantly overlapping with—the second largest category of the target killings, namely, religious leaders or religious actors. These include, for example, prayer leaders, imams, clerics, seminary principals, and religious scholars—all terms that are not clearly defined or specified in the media use or how they are used overall in Pakistan. Some members of sectarian organisations are of course also religious leaders, such as Maulana Mohammad Abdullah, who was killed on 18 October 1998. He was the chairman of Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, a known religious scholar, and a *khateeb* (orator, person who preachers the Friday sermon at a mosque) of Lal Masjid (*The News*, 1998d). The same is true for many Shia leaders and

activists. Religious actors, as defined by Appleby, mean ‘people who have been formed by a religious community and who are acting with the intent to uphold, extend, or defend its values and precepts’ (Appleby, 2000: 9). As suggested by the definition, this is a broad category and can include different types of actors related to both sectarian and religious organisations and the sectarian discourse itself. The fact that there are religious leaders with different status included in the victims of target killings mean that religious leaders at both community and national levels are targeted, indicating the ongoing and mutually reinforcing local, supralocal, and national sectarian conflicts. As instantiations of the ‘other’ identity—and the sectarian discourse itself—both religious leaders and leaders and members of sectarian organisations are not merely symbolically relevant targets, and attacking them carry a different significance to merely targeting ‘Shias’ or ‘Sunnis’.

Occupation as an Identity Category

There are five main categories related to occupation that emerged from the data as categories of individuals being targeted: doctors, government officials and bureaucrats, lawyers, policemen, and academics and teachers. As discussed further, often these victims would also possess other identity categories that have been identified as relevant as categories of individuals targeted. For example, a doctor could also be a Shia leader or a religious leader, implying that the occupation might not always act as the only impetus for sectarian killing.

Figure 3. Distribution of sectarian target killings based on occupation.



Source: Data analysis

Doctors. Both Sunni and Shia doctors were killed, although the asymmetry of sectarian violence is applied in this category too. Until 2002, majority of the attacks against doctors occurred in Punjab, after which the focal location of killing doctors was Karachi.

Government officials and bureaucrats, academics and teachers, and policemen. Only Shia government officials or bureaucrats, policemen, and academics and teachers were targeted according to the data collected. Although the number of those incidents is relatively small, it seems that all those targeted have had a visible and prominent role in their communities, and thus, their deaths were widely publicised. One Sunni official (*Dawn*, 2005)

and one ex-policeman (*The News*, 2005) who were targeted were exceptions to the rule. These target killings were not as Punjab-centric as other incidents, but Karachi and Quetta were featured prominently as locations where these identity categories were targeted.

Lawyers. Almost only Shia lawyers were killed. There were only two Sunni lawyers killed in 1997, one with close affiliation to the SSP leader Azam Tariq and the second identified also as an SSP supporter and an activist of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI, Samiul Haq group) (*Dawn*, 1997d; *Dawn*, 1997e). It is noteworthy that those Shia lawyers who were victims of sectarian violence also possessed several relevant identity categories. Of the 16 cases included in the researched period, 11 (69%) possessed other identity categories, many of them having a TJP or other Shia leadership roles. Some lawyers killed in these target killings were linked to specific court cases related to sectarian groups.

Others. Finally, there is the ‘others’ category—incidents that do not fit with any of the identity categories mentioned earlier. This category is much more substantial with Shias than Sunnis, including, for example, Shia shopkeepers or businessmen, eyewitnesses of court cases related to sectarian groups, and family members of TJP leaders or members and other Shia leaders. Family members were also sometimes victims in the incidents, although not necessarily the intended main targets. Sometimes these ‘identity categories’ not only are religious or political (as in a membership of a Pakistani political

party) but also can signal a specific status in the social hierarchy. This 'others' category also included cases where the victim killed belonged to a landlord family or was a member of a 'prominent Shia family'. In this category, any connection that the victims might have had to sectarian groups is hard to establish, often because there is not a lot of information available.

Target Killings as a Space of Sectarian Violence

Target killings—as shown by the data—are methodologically targeting particular individuals. In most of the killings, the method of killing is shooting from a moving vehicle, usually a motorcycle or a car, either on route following the daily routine of the victim or close to their residence or work. This shows familiarity with the victim's identity and routine, and the method of killing is efficient in ensuring a quick escape from the scene.

The observation from the data that these identity categories are often interlinked and overlap brings us to the important notion that often the victims of target killings had multiple identities that were relevant as categories in target killings. It is impossible to say whether a local prominent Shia leader who is also a lawyer was killed because he was an active and visible member of his community, he was a lawyer, or both. A closer examination of these 'identity categories' might reveal if possessing more of these categories increase the likelihood of being targeted, or whether those incidents where

people with multiple identity categories are circumstantial.¹⁰⁷ The data presented here is not adequate to answer that question, nor is that the focus of the analysis. However, it highlights how these categories presented in the data and used by the media and eventually by the research done on sectarian violence are more nuanced and subject to oversimplification. As an example, by reporting on the numbers of Shia (or Sunni) doctors attacked, a study could discard the fact that doctors can also play a role in their religious communities or be affiliated with a sectarian organisation, oversimplifying why doctors are attacked and perhaps also which doctors are attacked.

This notion of victims possessing different identity categories also demonstrate how difficult it is at times to remove sectarian violence from the terrain of political and ethnic violence ongoing in Pakistan. For example, Qari Abdul Raziq, who was killed in a target killing on 12 September 2005 in Karachi, was a Pesh Imam (prayer leader) of a Jannat Town mosque as well as a local leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) (*Daily Times*, 2005b; *Dawn*, 2005c). This entanglement of different identity categories, and the impossibility to know from the data which—if it indeed has been one of those categories that has taken precedence—has been the reason for them being selected as targets. This is clear especially in the cases of target killings located in Karachi that was predictably featured as the location with the most target killings outside Punjab in the data set.

¹⁰⁷ For example, of the 25 target killings against Shia doctors in the data set, 8 (32%) possessed also other relevant identity categories and had for example an affiliation with TJP and SMP or a religious leadership role. Of the seven Sunni doctors killed during the researched period, two (approximately 28%) possessed other identity categories.

It is also clear that some cases are not evidently 'sectarian', but the data are infused with personal conflicts (*The News*, 2000), family quarrels and feuds (as shown in the next paragraph), robberies, and monetary disputes (*Dawn*, 1999c; *The News*, 1999). Violence is also entangled with the criminal activities of some sectarian groups, especially LJ. This theme is present in the data from 1999 onwards. In addition, the method of violence in these cases does not often concur with the typical method of targeted killings, but the victims are stabbed, beaten, clubbed, or strangled rather than shot from a moving vehicle.

It is also possible that sometimes a murder is presented as sectarian. After first reporting on the murder of Zulfikar Jandran, a TJP activist who was shot on 26 February 1998, *The News* stated that Zulfikar was apparently killed by Zakir Ali because the victim had tortured and kicked his family out of their house and kidnapped his sister. It was the religious leaders of TJP who had initially termed the incident as sectarian and exploited it 'to their own ends'. Not all killings of religious leaders are sectarian, concluded *The News* (1998b). A murder can be also framed to look like a sectarian killing. Both *Daily Times* and *Dawn* reported of an incident where six members of a Shia family, including two women and an infant, were shot dead at their home in Mughalpura, Punjab, in 2004. According to the police quoted in the news items, the words 'Shias are infidels' were written on the walls of the family's house, pointing towards a sectarian motivation for the killing. The police also noted that the writing could be an attempt to mislead the investigation as the

family had an ongoing marriage dispute, and there were also signs of a robbery in the house (*Daily Times*, 2004b; *Dawn*, 2004e).

Whether or not these incidents are sectarian is not the most crucial thing to find out in this research. What is noteworthy, however, is that the incidents can be interpreted as sectarian by the family members of the victim, the police, the media, or the 'religious leaders', as mentioned earlier. The fact that violent incidents that fulfil certain characteristics can be interpreted as sectarian shows the impact of the protracted violence and the patterns established by that violence in Pakistan. Thus, these incidents, whether or not 'really' sectarian, become a part of the sectarian discourse, reinforcing that discourse and presenting another type of 'utility' that the discourse can have for both those related to the victims of violence and its perpetrators.

As also observed by the literature, the violence in this category is targeting men, with very rarely women being attacked other than as family members present when the main target was attacked.¹⁰⁸ The above-mentioned incident in Mughalpura was the only one where a whole family was attacked. One incident stands out from the data as being different in method and in scale from the other target killings: the bomb attack in January 1997 outside Sessions Court in Lahore. The attack killed the SSP leader Maulana Ziaur Rehman Farooqi. Azam Tariq was also injured in the incident. The purpose of the attack was most likely to attack the higher tier of the SSP leadership. This was the first bomb attack in the data set, and according to the media, it was

¹⁰⁸ A female doctor was killed in Dera Ghazi Khan in 2004 (*The News*, 2004b). Victims also rarely include children. An incident where a 13-year-old son of a TJP supporter was killed in a target killing was a rarity (*The News*, 1999b).

the most powerful bomb ever used in Punjab, killing more than 20 people and injuring more than 90 people (*Nation*, 1997; *The News*, 1997; *Dawn*, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, those perpetrating target killings have been meticulous in selecting their targets and executing the violence. When six Shias were singled out from all the 35 people sleeping in the *adda* (bus stand) in a predawn attack in Mondja village close to Multan in 1997, the killers knew who they were targeting, and no Sunnis were hurt in the attack, according to *The News* (1997d). There are also occasions when the victim's sect or identity is confirmed before the actual attack.¹⁰⁹

The data also include cases of mistaken identity or where having a 'Shia name' has led into a target killing. The *Newsline* magazine quoted the Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP) Sindh president Allama Hasan Turabi, who thinks that Sunni doctors were targeted 'because they bore names that are common among the Shia community' (Syed Ali, 2001). In the article, Turabi cited one name also present in the analysed data, Dr. Ishrat Hussain, a Sunni doctor, as an example of a case of mistaken identity. 'Allama Turabi adds that some days before his death, Dr. Ishrat Hussain received a phone call directing him to drop "Hussain" from his name. He refused to comply'. Despite knowing that Dr. Hussain was not a Shia, the refusal to eliminate the name usually associated with Shias was enough grounds for his killing (Syed Ali, 2001; *Dawn*, 2001f).

¹⁰⁹ For cases where identity has been confirmed before attack, see *The News* (2000d) and *Dawn* (2001).

It also seems that target killings are mainly the domain of the sectarian groups because of the method most of them are conducted (shooting from a moving vehicle), confirming the view widely present in the literature. The agency of sectarian groups would also account for the theme of revenge being so strongly present in the explanations of violence. To quote *Dawn* from 30 July 2001 to explain why Shia government officials were targeted,

The Lashkar-i-Jhangvi has claimed responsibility for the murder of PSO managing director Shaukat Mirza and the defence ministry official, Syed Zafar Hussain. In a joint press statement on Monday, chief of Lashkar-i-Jhangvi Riaz Basra and Lashkar's divisional chief, Lal Mohammed have claimed responsibility for both the killings.

They also warned that any government functionary resorting to abuse of power would face the same fate. 'We had urged the President, General Pervez Musharraf, not to implement the death sentence awarded to Sheikh Haq Nawaz as it could prove harmful for the integrity of the country but the government went ahead with its plan to appease a neighbouring country', said the statement. They said they would not shun their struggle, come what may, added the statement. (*Dawn*, 2001g)

Killing officials, according to LJ, was a retaliation for an unwanted foreign policy and a warning not to 'abuse the power' anymore. Shia public figures and community leaders now paid the price for those government policies, as the perpetrators used them as sites of violence to try to urge the Pakistani

government to refrain from any policies that relate it to all things Shia—as Iran is understood to be the ‘neighbouring country’ mentioned in the news item.

In addition to the high-level targets of senior leaders of the sectarian groups and notable religious leaders, who are active in maintaining and spreading the sectarians discourse of those organisations and movements, there is an organised effort to target public and active figures, particularly Shias, also at the community level. This is an important function of the target killings, based on the premises of this thesis. With this method of violence, the attacks can be seen as an attempt to control public space by showing that it is dangerous, and potentially lethal, to be a public and active figure in one’s community and that the visible activism, particularly if carried out in various roles, is not tolerated and can lead to violence.

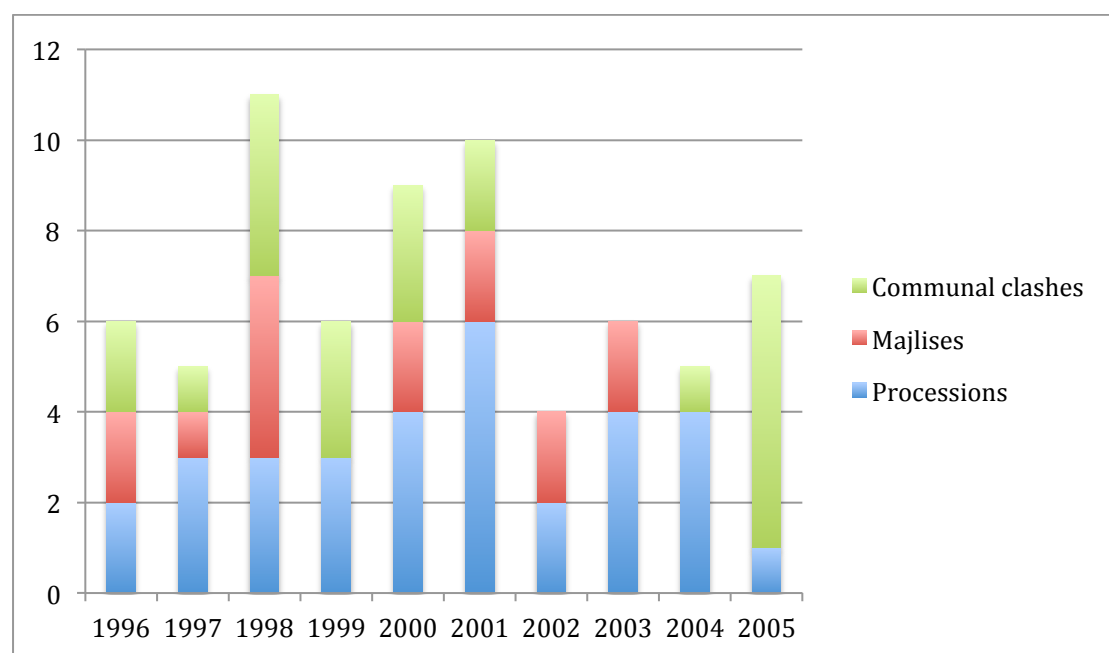
Sacred Space and Sacred Time

The locations of violence related to sacred space and time consisted of three main categories: religious processions, religious gatherings (particularly *majlises*), and mosques and *imambargahs* (Shia place of worship). These locations are discussed in more details in the following sections.

Processions

Incidents of violence related to processions carried on throughout the period studied in the analysis. These incidents were also not as Punjab-centric as other locations of violence, but other provinces were featured as locations from the beginning of the researched period.

Figure 4. Distribution of sectarian incidents related to processions, majlises, and communal clashes.



Source: Data analysis

One of the most important findings from the data revealed that the method used in violence related to processions was often low-level violence: there was a lack of sophisticated weapons and organisation, and the violence was perpetrated not only by firing but also with sticks and pelting of stones, or even fists. Often the casualty figures in these incidents were very low. Also, these incidents occurred often in smaller, rural locations and were not confined to urban localities, as the target killings mostly were. Thus, the presence of this location of violence in the data was not surprising, but the form it took was not expected—or discussed—by the literature. The existence of communal clashes is highlighted in Figure 4, where cases that were defined as clashes are separated as a distinct category, although they often related to processions and religious gatherings.

The processions that featured as locations of sectarian violence reflected the plurality of processions held in Pakistan: *Alam* (flag, banner) processions, *Zuljinnah* (horse used by Hussain in the battle of Karbala) processions, Eid Milad-un-Nabi (birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad) and Nauroz (Persian New Year) processions, or processions organised by sectarian groups for variety of purposes were among those attacked. Processions were also locations of intragroup violence, both between different Shia groups and Sunni groups, although this intragroup violence played a minor role in the overall incidents related to procession. The Shia groups conflicted mostly over procession routes or procession order,¹¹⁰ whereas the intra-Sunni clashes highlighted the differences in Sunni beliefs, for example, during the Eid Milad-

¹¹⁰ See, for example, *Dawn* (1997c, 2000b).

un-Nabi procession (*The News*, 2003b; *Dawn*, 2003). Eid Milad-un-Nabi or the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad is accepted by some Sunni sects and thought as *bidah*, or innovation in Islam, and thus not celebrated by others (Esposito, 2003: 138).

Processions were also sites of clashes, instead of only being attacked by sophisticated weaponry in organised attacks. Often these clashes revolved around the issue of the procession route, causing tension and violence. There were incidents where two processions (of different sects) were in the same route, resulting in violence during Ashura; there were conflicts resulting in changes in the route and resistance to those changes.¹¹¹ There were also incidents where the attempt to take out a procession in a location where it had not been done before was met with resistance and violence.¹¹² It is clear that in some of these incidents, especially with the negotiation of routes, there are long-term tensions that come to their peak during the procession times. Tension and violence were not only caused by the negotiations of the procession routes but also arose when the processions passed certain locations such as ‘Sunni strongholds’ or specific madrasas.¹¹³ Sometimes it is these locations that are passed that are also targeted from the procession.¹¹⁴

In accordance with the literature, the data show that religious processions and their routes are a matter of serious negotiations, both with the other sects and the relevant officials. The data point to the fact that there are certain locations

¹¹¹ See, for example, *Dawn* (1998b, 2001b, 2004c).

¹¹² See, for example, *Dawn* (2001d, 2002).

¹¹³ See, for example, *Dawn* (2000).

¹¹⁴ See, for example, *Dawn* (1998d) and *Muslim* (1998).

that are particularly sensitive¹¹⁵ when it comes to negotiating those routes as well as along those routes that the processions take. This signals the existence of a type of 'local geographies' that different communities are aware of, where certain areas and landmarks carry specific meanings in relation to the sectarian discourse. Navigating these 'local geographies', for example, in the form of religious processions, has the potential to trigger violence. At the same time, these processions are part of the negotiations of those 'local geographies' and the ownership of space.

Although the great majority of the violence related to processions was low-level¹¹⁶ rather than big, striking acts of violence, there was one occasion of high-intensity violence where 45 people were killed and more than 160 injured. The main Ashura procession in Quetta in March 2004 was attacked with both hand grenades and indiscriminate firing and later on with bombs that were attached to the attackers (*Dawn*, 2004b; *The News*, 2004). This was an outlier in the data when looking at violence related to the location of processions both in the method of violence and the number of casualties that resulted.

Majlises

Another location of sectarian violence related to sacred space and time is *majlises*. The term 'majlis' refers to 'a gathering of a select group of people in the presence of a leading notable, religious dignitary, or well-known poet'

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *Dawn* (1999b).

¹¹⁶ Of 74 cases, 47 (64%) included low-level violence.

(Esposito, 2003: 187). In the Pakistani context, majlises are usually held by Shias, and the term refers to a religious gathering that has been organised, for example, to mourn Imam Hussain during Muharram. Surprisingly, according to the data, attacks against majlises resulted in higher casualty figures as compared with attacks on processions, and high-intensity rather than low-level violence was used more often.¹¹⁷

For example, the shooting on Majlis-e-Aza participants in Vehari, Punjab, in 1996 killed 18 and injured 50 people (*Dawn*, 1996). Also, 22 people were killed and more than 50 people were injured when three gunmen fired at Majlis-e-Aza in a Shia graveyard in the heart of Lahore in 1998 (*Dawn*, 1998; *The News*, 1998). The method favoured in the target killings was used to attack the majlis in Kot Addu, Punjab, when four gunmen with two motorbikes opened indiscriminate fire, killing four people.¹¹⁸ Although majlis as a form of religious gathering features in the data analysed, it is not usually separated in the literature as a space of sectarian violence.

The contestations of space are also strongly present in the case of majlises. When the Majlis-e-Aza during the month of Muharram was about to start at the residence of Nazar Hussain Shah in Wah, Rawalpindi District in Punjab, it was found that the house was too small for all the participants to fit in. The majlis then occupied a part of the street next to the house, which ‘annoyed Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman’ and other SSP members, resulting in a clash with pelting of stones (*The News*, 1998c). Moving the religious gathering from

¹¹⁷ Of the 15 cases related directly to majlises, 10 (67%) included the use of sophisticated weaponry and organized violence.

¹¹⁸ See also *Nation* (2000, 2002) and *Dawn* (2002b).

private to public space and occupying that public space showing religious identity were the trigger for violence, according to the data. In 1996 in Lahore, a majlis was organised at the same time with *Naat Khawani* (religious poetry recital) in a nearby mosque. Both gatherings wanted to outdo each other, gradually increasing the volumes of their loudspeakers. Eventually, the tension resulted in fist fighting and pelting of stones, and the clash was stopped after police intervention (*Muslim*, 1996).

With the big, striking acts targeting majlises, there are also incidents with low-level violence. Similar to processions, holding a majlis can trigger clashes with people not participating in the religious gathering, that is, the outside observers of the ritual. The triggers for these clashes cited in the data are also similar, such as 'objectionable remarks', referring to the practice of *tabarra*, for example, as discussed in chapter 5. There are several cases of this low-level Sunni-Shia violence in different provinces and in both rural and urban settings.

Processions and Religious Gatherings as Spaces of Sectarian Violence

The extent of the incidents related to sacred time and space that involved the use of low-level violence, conducted by shooting but also with chains, stones, clubs, and fists, was a surprising find, as low-level violence is not usually discussed in the literature on sectarian violence. Some of these incidents could be defined as small-scale localised communal violence (as opposed to

large-scale communal violence).¹¹⁹ These incidents are not premeditated, but they are triggered during sacred time and space, possibly after a long history of communal tensions in the locality. The plurality of these locations as sites of violence is also noteworthy. For example, the locations of processions are attacked from outside, but different processions can clash and individuals from a procession can also be the aggressors against outsiders.

The clashing parties were described with slight variation in the data. Mostly, the clashes were described as being between the SSP and the Shias, between the SSP and the TJP, or between the Sunnis and the Shias. This is important if we want to look at the claim that sectarian violence is only the domain of sectarian groups and does not exist in the grassroots level in Pakistan. Further research would be needed to look at the membership of these organisations and the meaning of being affiliated with them to further analyse this question, as also observed in relation to target killings. However, when assigning all the participants in these low-level violent incidents or clashes as members of sectarian organisations, it is also a way to externalise and confine the problem of sectarian violence to something that does not exist outside those groups, thus being external to the mainstream Pakistani society. What we can confidently say based on the data is that these violent incidents are not confined to the specifically violent sectarian groups such as LJ and SMP.

¹¹⁹ The term 'communal conflicts' originated in colonial analyses of religious conflicts in the Indian subcontinent (Human Rights Watch, 1995). For further definition and types of communal violence, see, for example, Van Klinken (2007) and Tambiah (1996).

Another important observation from the data is how the sectarian violence related to the sacred space and time is clearly linked to the concept of spatialised identity politics in Pakistan. The control of public space, for example, by controlling the procession routes, particularly through the inability to alter the established procession routes or to bring out new processions in localities where processions have not occurred before, was a recurrent theme in the data. The visible forms of practicing religion in shared public space are enough to trigger tension and violent clashes. Processions moving through 'sensitive locations', that is, spaces associated with the other sect and their identity signifiers, are potentially violent equations. Sometimes violence occurs as a result of a competition between sacred spaces or the simultaneous occupation of a space by different sects.

From the data collected and analysed, the role of police in these violent incidents is important, both in securing the sacred space and time and in intervening and mediating in conflicts and violent clashes. Policemen are also often among the casualties of these violent incidents, particularly because of their presences in these occasions and also because of their role as intervening when clashes or other forms of violence occur. Securing all the religious processions and gatherings during Muharram, and particularly during Ashura, is the largest police operation every year. Although protecting or securing sacred space is not the focus of the analysis conducted in this thesis, it is important to point out the strong link the concept has to the exclusivist sectarian discourse. The processes of protection are also

processes of exclusion: protecting sacred space limits, delineating the expressions of religious identities, excluding the communities needing protection, and taking the religious to the political domain. As explained by Hassner (2006: 150–151),

Even though actions taken by a religious community to defend a sacred site from desecration or destruction are driven by religious precepts, they are essentially political because they involve monitoring access to the site and policing behavior within it. Sacred places thus translate abstract religious ideas into concrete political action and even violence.

Although processions are now acted out in public spaces, they are increasingly controlled and monitored by the practices of protection because of the ever-present danger of sectarian violence. The need to protect those sacred spaces and communal religious expressions transforms those spaces and sites of reproducing the religious identities. The presence of police, armed guards, and elaborate security measures militarises the space and creates further processes of exclusion and inclusion.¹²⁰ This relates directly to the transformative power of violence, as discussed in chapter 3, and how that power can manifest itself also through other processes than eliminating the ‘other’.

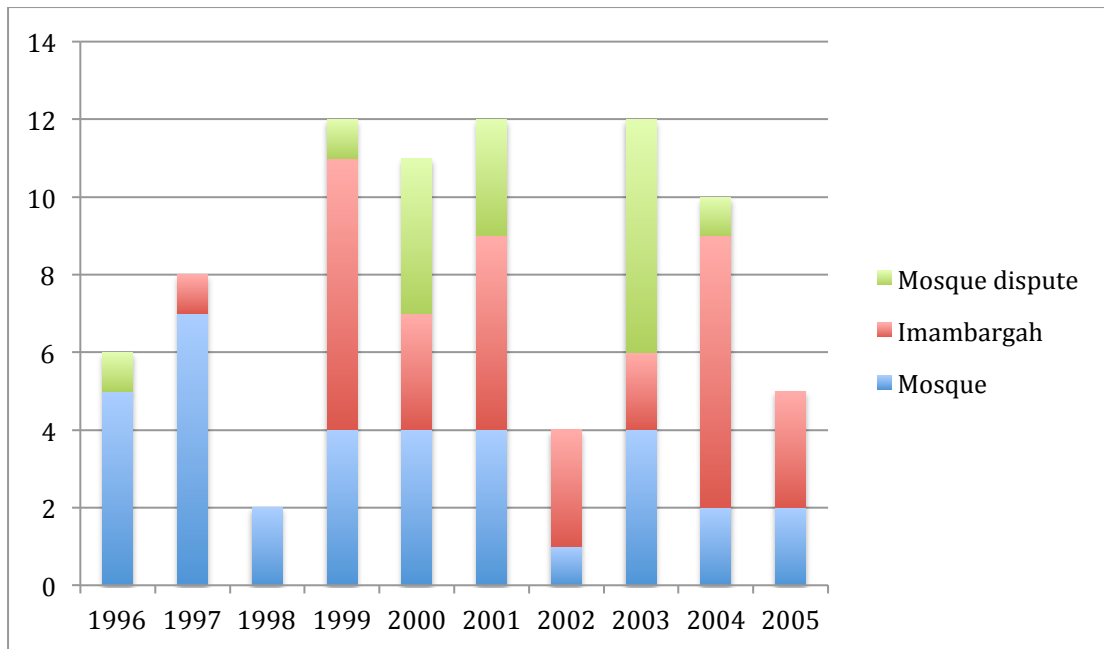
¹²⁰ Furthermore, according to Abbas, official permissions and licenses for more processions have become rare after the district-level administrators and law enforcement discourage processions to avoid the security measures and police manpower necessary to secure such events (Abbas 2010, 22). The violence, therefore, had contributed to creating a state practice negative towards religious processions, further affecting the use of public space in Pakistan.

Mosques, Imambargahs, and Mosque Disputes

The third main location that emerged from the data is related to mosques and imambargahs. This category for location of sectarian violence is not explored in the literature in detail, and the volume of the violent incidents related to these locations was thus surprising, as well as the type of violence used in those incidents.

As with the other locations of violence, majority of the attacks related to mosques, imambargahs, and mosque disputes before the year 2000 are located in Punjab or Karachi. This time, the incidents in these locations are close to equal in numbers with both sects (approximately 31 incidents against Shia imambargahs or mosques and 36 against Sunni mosques), with the asymmetry of sectarian violence being reversed.

Figure 5. Distribution of sectarian incidents related to imambargahs and mosques and mosque disputes.



Source: Data analysis

One of the typical methods to attack a mosque or an imambargah was by shooting or by a grenade attack. Often there was indiscriminate firing either inside or outside the mosque or imambargah. These incidents, however, did not always result in casualties or a high number of casualties. In addition, mosques and imambargahs were targeted by some of the most striking acts of violence, in terms of the method of violence used and the number of casualties that resulted. There are several shooting incidents that resulted in a significant number of people getting killed and injured. For example, in 1996, four attackers fired on the *namazis* (people praying) starting their morning prayers at the Jamia Masjid Al-Khair in Multan, killing 21 and injuring 50 people in what was suspected as retaliation of the killing of 12 Shias in a religious ceremony over a month before (*Dawn*, 1996b; *The News*, 1996).

Another method resulting in high casualty figures present in the data is suicide attacks. This form of violence is present only during the last three years of the period researched (2003–2005). Suicide attacks are used more against mosques and imambargahs than against any other locations present in the data. The first suicide attack, in any location, occurred in 2003 when the mosque-imambargah Kalan Asna-e-Ashriya was targeted during the Friday prayers in Quetta (*The News*, 2003c). Mosques and imambargahs were attacked with high casualty figures by suicide bombers also in Karachi,¹²¹ Rawalpindi,¹²² Sialkot,¹²³ and Lahore¹²⁴ during 2004–2005.

When looking at the details of the incidents related to mosques and imambargahs, it becomes apparent that a mosque, as a space for and of violence, is used in different ways. As discussed earlier, there are cases of indiscriminate use of violence targeting everyone in the mosque, imambargah, or shrine. Usually, the method of these incidents is either shooting or bombing. There are also cases where low-level violence is used and where shooting is done outside the mosque or imambargah, with—what it seems—the intention to intimidate as well as, or instead of, to cause casualties. There are also cases where it seems like a mosque is used as a space for target killings to target religious leaders. Whether they are indeed targeted or the mosque itself is often unclear.¹²⁵ This does imply that occasionally mosques are also spaces for personal revenge, highlighting how these three categories

¹²¹ For more information, see, *Daily Times* (2004, 2005) and *Dawn* (2004d, 2004f, 2005b).

¹²² For more information, see, *Dawn* (2004).

¹²³ For more information, see, *Dawn* (2004g), *Nation* (2004), and *The News* (2004c).

¹²⁴ For more information, see, *Dawn* (2004i).

¹²⁵ See, for example, *Nation* (1997c) and *The News* (1997d).

of locations for sectarian violence are interlinked and often difficult to separate as distinct categories for analysis.

It would also take further research to uncover the different affiliations of each of the mosques and imambargahs attacked to get a more nuanced picture of who was targeted when a specific mosque or imambargah was attacked. Now we have to settle with the undoubtedly simplistic terms 'Shia' and 'Sunni'. It is also safe to assume that although the data do not offer many details on the perpetrators of these attacks, there are also intra-Sunni violence among the incidents (and even potentially intra-Shia violence). The data also raise the question of a mosque as space. It is clear that mosques are places of worship, open for all Muslims in theory but affiliated with specific schools of thought in practice, thus becoming visible and important signifiers of particular religious identities.

This clearly is not an exhaustive explanation or description of mosque or imambargah as space of violence. The data point towards mosques being spaces where sectarian groups' offices are located¹²⁶ or arms are stored, for example. As discussed in relation to madrasa institution in chapter 3, mosques can have multiple uses offering alternative explanations for attacking them other than being related to a sect's religious identity. Then also attacking a mosque can have a different relevance to sectarian violence than attacking a sect's religious space.

¹²⁶ See, for example, *Nation* (1996).

Mosques and imambargahs, as spatial signifiers of one's religious identity, also become the locations of spatialised politics of identity. There are several cases in the data (16) where a mosque or imambargah has been at the heart of a violent dispute. There are violent incidents over the control of a mosque or imambargah¹²⁷ and attempts to violently occupy a mosque.¹²⁸ Some incidents relate to the construction of a mosque or an imambargah, such as the one reported in December 1999 by *Dawn* and *Frontier Post*. An ongoing dispute over the construction of an imambargah in the graveyard in Haripur had escalated to firing. Salamat Shah had built a *kachcha* house (mud house) in the graveyard and wanted to convert that into an imambargah, but SSP, also using the graveyard, objected to the attempt, and the tensions eventually resulted in firing in the graveyard after the last rites of a local SSP leader (*Dawn*, 1999d; *Frontier Post*, 1999).¹²⁹

The connection with mosques and imambargahs and the disputes related to the land are also present in the data in further cases. Hakeemi Shah, an activist of a religious organisation, occupied a piece of land in the premises of Hafizabad Railway station where he set up an office for his organisation. Later on, his wish to get more land for the mosque started a rivalry with another sect, resulting in a clash (*The News*, 2001). Either seizing more land or constructing a mosque or imambargah on space associated with another sect is a recurring theme in the data. This research questions the notion of these disputes being 'just about land': labelling them as land disputes ignores the contestations of spatialised identity politics clearly at play in these conflicts

¹²⁷ See, for example, *Dawn* (1996c), *Nation* (2003), *The News* (2003), and *Daily Times* (2003).

¹²⁸ See, for example, *Dawn* (2001e).

¹²⁹ For other incidents, see *Nation* (2000b) and *The News* (2000b).

and local disputes. Further research would be needed to fully understand what holding a possession of a mosque or imambargah would mean in those localities, but it is evident that mosques and imambargahs, in all their usages, are strong, and visible signifiers of one's identity and the location in and around that mosque or imambargah then become 'associated with' that sect. This idea of spaces and localities being associated with a particular sect runs throughout the data and is especially evident in the data relating to sacred spaces, mosques, and imambargahs. It again points towards the social geographies that denote public space, with localities being divided and associated with particular sects, as briefly discussed earlier. With these specific social geographies comes the notion of possessing and controlling space, through processes of inclusion and exclusion. These social geographies are also creating localised minorities and majorities, 'Shia areas' or 'Deobandi areas', for example, and a part of the contestations of the location of the borders of those localised majority and minority areas.

These localised majority and minority roles then further channel the acceptable social behaviour in those areas. In 1999, in Dera Ghazi Khan, the Shia family of Barkat Ali built a small mosque 'for saying prayers according to their religious beliefs'. Other people, Sunni by sect, asked the family to stop calling for prayers through loudspeakers as they were the only Shia in the village who would turn up for prayers (*Nation*, 1999; *Dawn*, 1999). To pronounce Shia faith in the majority Sunni village was not acceptable and resulted in the death of Barkat Ali.

Category 'Others'

As often happens with data analysis, there are data that do not fit into any of the main categories identified. During the analysis process, several violent incidents were difficult to categorise because of the nature of the incident or the information available on those incidents. For example, there were a series of 'Iranian targets'—targets that somehow related to Iran, such as attacks against Iranian cultural centres,¹³⁰ or the killing of seven Iranian Air Force cadets that were targeted in their van in Rawalpindi also in 2001.¹³¹ These attacks were anticipated and explained by the literature, as deliberated in chapter 2, highlighting the regional context of sectarian violence and the relocated proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran that acted as an important impetus for the organised sectarian violence in Pakistan.

The 'others' category also included cases where a series of violent incidents happened in the same spatial location, with very little information on the details of the separate incidents that could be analysed by using the variables and method of analysis.¹³² Those cases with very little details to analyse or where the sect of the victim(s) was not clear were also included in this category.

This category also includes cases of the micropolitics of sectarian violence, resulting in humiliation and intimidation rather than physical violence or casualties. Religious scholar Maulvi Iftikhar Ahmad Awaisi was kidnapped and

¹³⁰ See *Frontier Post* (1997), *Nation* (1997b), and *Dawn* (1998e).

¹³¹ See *Nation* (2001) and *The News* (2001b).

¹³² See, for example, *Nation* (1997d).

tortured by the members of the rival school of thought in Dhani village, in Punjab. The accused shaved Maulana's beard and moustaches, blackened his face, and made him parade in the village for writing a book against their sect (*Dawn*, 1998c). This incident can also be called sectarian violence, albeit being the type that rarely finds its way in to the national media or the academic literature on violent sectarianism. Nevertheless, it is important in illustrating the type of violent practices encountered by some Pakistanis in the localised negotiations of the sectarian difference.

Spatial Politics of Identity—Final Reflections

After identifying and discussing the main categories identified as locations of sectarian violence in the data, we turn to the final reflections on the findings and what those findings tell us about sectarian violence in Pakistan and the spaces where the boundaries between sects are being reinforced and maintained.

The three main spaces for sectarian violence (individuals killed in targeted killings, religious processions and gatherings, and mosques and imambargahs) concur with the literature on sectarian violence by all having been mentioned in the academic analyses to some extent. The theme of revenge and revenge murders, tit-for-tat killings, come through in the data collected, as highlighted in the literature. There are also signs of changing patterns of sectarian violence with the introduction of new methods and modes of violence. It was also evident from the data that the incidents, which

in the beginning of the period studied were mostly occurring in Punjab, spread to other provinces, eventually occurring in all the Pakistani provinces.

Time to Kill

In the previous chapter, we discussed the importance and significance of time in creating sacred space. The importance of those sacred spaces and times are featured in the data, although it is clear that the sectarian violent incidents are not confined to those sacred spaces. The data also suggest that sectarian violence creates its own specific times with significance by constructing temporal and spatial places where the dead are celebrated and mourned. Death anniversaries are times for revenge, times when those killed before are remembered with more violence. The spaces of remembrance manifest as gatherings and religious congregations, which then in turn are potential targets of sectarian violence. The death anniversary of Allama Arif Hussain al-Hussain was commemorated in Majlis-e-Aza near Parachinar in 2002. The gathering was attacked by mortars, wounding five people (*The News*, 2002b). Those participants who had gathered to commemorate the first death anniversary of Azam Tariq in 2004 in Multan were targeted by a powerful car bomb, killing approximately 40 people and injuring more than 100 people. The mourning of a leader who died a violent death now attracted more violence and contributed to the cycle of violence (*Daily Times*, 2004c; *Dawn*, 2004h).

Shooting by Two Motorcyclists or a Bomb Blast: Does the Method Make a Difference?

Although the main focus of this research was not to study the methods used in the sectarian violent incidents, they have provided important information on those violent incidents analysed here. First, sometimes the method of violence is specific to a certain location. For example, heavy weapons such as mortars were only used in FATA and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). What is important for this study, however, is that the method of violence points towards the agency behind the attacks and whether or not the violent act has been premeditated. Target killings and suicide or car bombings, for example, require planning and specific expertise, implying an organised entity behind those incidents.

However, these are not the only type of methods used in sectarian violence according to the data. There are clashes that are carried out by clubs and chains. Stones are thrown, and occasionally conflicts are acted out with fists. The low-level violence does not often feature in analyses on sectarianism and sectarian violence, although it clearly is a considerable part of what is defined as 'sectarian violence' in Pakistan based on the data analysed. The low-level violence often takes the analysis to smaller localities and introduces it to local, long-term sectarian disputes. These violent incidents are not the domain of the extremist sectarian groups but go beyond the Jaishs, Sipahs, and Lashkars. For us to analyse and understand the extent of sectarian violence

and the sectarianism as a phenomenon in Pakistan, these types of violent incidents need to be recognised and included in the analyses of sectarian violence.

Spatial Politics of Identity

But the tendency to romanticise public space as an emptiness which enables free and equal speech does not take on board the need to theorise space and place as the product of social relations which are most likely conflicting and unequal. (Massey, 2005: 152)

A significant theme present in all the spaces of violence, when looking at the data of violent incidents more closely with their context of method and location, was that of spatialised politics of identity. Simply reducing these incidents to statistics and tables or figures obscure the spatial contestations of identities played out in all those locations of violence.

Public space now, as observed by Doreen Massey, is removed from the idea of 'emptiness', or of a space of free and equal use. Instead, public space is conditioned by the contestations of conflicting and unequal social relations, and the attempts to limit the use of that space are powerful practices of exclusivist discourse. Confining the expressions of religious identities indoors, away from the public space, or restricting the public space allowed to that

expression to the traditional spaces it has occupied in the past (such as traditional procession routes), and refusing the negotiations about allowing new spaces for that expression are about the control of public space as well as the processes of exclusion of the plurality of religious identities from that space.

Furthermore, targeting and systematically killing leaders, activists, and prominent figures not only of sectarian groups but also of local communities violence is a means of removing the public figures from the public space and from that leadership or community role they possess. By targeting the instantiations of one's as well as the other's identity discourse, the violence is also sending a message how dangerous it is to be a visible part of that community. Acquiring a mosque or an imambargah or more land to them is not only about obtaining a valuable property but also about possessing a visible, highly symbolic signifier of one's identity. Thus, the space of that mosque becomes 'associated with that sect' being a powerful statement and showing power in that locality as well as a mechanism by which localised majorities and minorities are created.

As observed by Kaur (2005: 36–37), 'The destruction of mosques, temples and other sacred spaces symbolises the change of spatial usage and therefore the change in community hierarchy'. This thesis argues that the change in social hierarchies can also happen through other forms of spatialised identity politics and identity contestations than the dramatic forms of destruction of sacred spaces. Through the use of sectarian violence,

locations and localities become associated in a certain way, creating localised social geographies and specific areas of minorities and majorities, affecting in turn the way those spaces are used and perceived by different sects. Those 'associated spaces' then can channel and condition behaviour and social interactions.

Exclusion, if not in the form of annihilating the other but excluding the presence of another religious community or expressions of other religious identities from public space or from the space associated to one's own sect, is a significant part of sectarian violence in Pakistan during the researched period. This also explains why marking spaces with the signifiers of one's identity is an important part of sectarian identity politics and also can act as a trigger for violence. The spatialised sectarian identity politics is acted out also with the symbolic signifiers of one's identity, marking the 'associated spaces'. In Peshawar in 2001, right before Ashura, it was acted out by using wall writings by including and excluding words with specific meaning. The local SSP workers had written 'Ya Allah Maddad' on a wall of a mosque. However, one night before Ashura, the word 'Maddad' was erased, causing resentment among the SSP. Officials who intervened in the situation suggested replacing the slogan with *Kalma Tayyaba* (declaration of Muslim faith), which was agreed upon. However, since then, SSP has tried to write a fresh slogan on the same spot on that wall, continuing the spatial contestation (*Dawn*, 2001c).

We will further explore why these social geographies, the localised divisions of spaces associated with a particular sect, and the control of public space matter in the Conclusions section of this thesis.

Epilogue—The Untold Stories

Although the data revealed a lot about sectarian violence in Pakistan, there were many questions left unanswered. For example, why was Haji Asha Abbas, the owner of Karachi's oldest juice shop, killed in 2002 (*Dawn*, 2002c)?

Going through the data brought the human behind the violence to the fore and gave names to those killed in sectarian violence, occasionally offering glimpses at their personal stories. Through the news items, it was also possible to learn about the perpetrators or those guilty of sectarian violence. According to *The News* (1997b), Mehram Ali, first the accused and later the convicted youth behind the Sessions Court bomb blast, declared how he was 'born to kill those who ridicule my sect' and showed no remorse for what he had done. *Dawn* later reported that Ali was tortured after his earlier arrest in 1990, after which he was declared mentally unstable. One cure proposed to Ali according to *Dawn* was—as one would suspect—marriage (*Dawn*, 1997b).

Through the data, it was also possible to learn about the heroes, myths, and martyrs of sectarian violence. The media were particularly fascinated by the

mythical character of LJ's founder, Riaz Basra, and how he fooled the police and authorities with several body doubles who mimicked his limp to perfection to allow his escape from the police several times. From the data, it was also evident that this feared character, said to have masterminded many gruesome acts of violence, was also admired and idolised in the Pakistani media.

When analysing the data, it was also possible to encounter the accidental and absurd sectarianism. Bibi Hava, a Sunni woman, was convicted by Peshawar High Court 'for precautionary measures under the FCR' (Frontier Crimes Regulations) after she married a Shia, as recently approximately 200 people had been killed in Kurram (*Frontier Post*, 1996). The media also instructed the reader in how to recognise a sectarian hit man: they carry hit lists in their pockets.

There were also hints at how the sectarian discourse affects the lives of ordinary Pakistanis and how Islam is lived in the polyphony of multiple interpretations of the creed. A prayer leader in a village Chak no. 235 near Faisalabad decreed to dissolve the *nikah* (marriage) of some villagers who had attended the funeral prayers of a person belonging to a rival sect. Luckily, the son of the deceased reported this, and the police acted against the cleric for spreading sectarian hatred. Later, he renewed the *nikah* after the magistrate's intervention (*Muslim*, 2000). This act was termed as 'illiterate and mischievous' by the Ulema (*The News*, 2000c). A similar *fatwa* from the *mullas* in Kalabagh took a more sinister turn and caused a threat of violence

in the city. It resulted in more than six people giving written statements that they did not belong to the accused sect, and the local police called people belonging to the sect to provide them protection and to help them to show their dissociation with the sect. These examples about the significance of sectarian difference and identification offer views of how that difference manifests itself in social interactions and how it is dealt with in the Pakistani society. These stories, all related to sectarian violence in Pakistan, have provided a valuable insight to the sectarian phenomenon not available anywhere else.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, this chapter is going to sum up the main findings of the research. Therefore, this concluding section will discuss the theoretical, methodological, and analytic outcomes revisiting the research hypothesis and the subsequent questions that presented the key aims for this research and structured the approach for this thesis. This section also outlines the limitations of this research placed by the analytic framework, the chosen methodology, and the scope of the study. The significance of the findings is also discussed, as well as the contributions of this research to the body of knowledge on sectarianism in peace and conflict studies. It concludes by pointing towards future research areas stemming from the research process and the findings of this study as well as the questions not answered by this thesis. However, the rationale of investigating violence—the focus of this research—is explored first.

Rationale of Investigating Violence

In peace and conflict studies, violence can be researched in many different ways. The method with which violence is analysed in the academic inquiries reveals the role violence is assigned in relation to the conflicts or contexts it exists in. Often violence is treated as a derivative symptom, indicative of

larger societal processes lying behind the violence. Different explanations are offered as to the cause of violence, but often authors endorse similar processual models of violence, emphasising violence as a tool or utility. These instrumentalist explanations see violence as a surface expression of 'deeper' socioeconomic and/or ideological contexts. Violence, in these explanations, is seen to transform socioeconomic inequities or ideological contexts, but the transformative role of violence itself, in particular, protracted violence, is not adequately recognised.

Within the Pakistani context, sectarian violence is mostly researched as a part of the 'dizzily diverse universe of Pakistani Islamic militancy' (Roul, 2005). It is seen and treated as a by-product of the function of the militant sectarian groups and an addition to the ubiquitous world of terrorism and terrorist violence. Therefore, in most academic works discussing sectarian violence, it is featured as big striking acts of organized violence with significant body count and brazen tactics.

This thesis wanted a departure from that understanding of violence and the role it has been assigned in academic analyses. Instead, the research here treats the acts of violence themselves as significant, independent of what they accomplish or fail to accomplish in strategic terms (Mahmood, 1999: 79). Violent acts are more than military tactics or related to the function of militant sectarian organizations perpetrated with the intention to eliminate the enemy and show military power.

Sectarian violence, as suggested by this thesis, is part of regularized conduct of sectarian politics and the production and maintenance of exclusivist sectarian discourse. Violence is not merely a frustrated political expression but a creator of (sectarian) a different, dichotomizing tool. The hypothesis at the core of the research postulated that 'sectarian violence in Pakistan is conducted to reproduce and reinforce exclusivist sectarian discourse'.

By placing violence and violent incidents at the centre of the analysis and by contextualising violence rather than looking at them merely as statistics and figures or as a derivative symptom, this research not only has a different focus to the majority of academic analyses on sectarian violence but also promotes a different understanding of that violence. The transformative role of violence is highlighted in the hypothesis: it assumes that violence is able to reproduce and reinforce the exclusivist discourse, therefore being an important former of that discourse.

Theoretical Conclusions

Theoretically, the thesis had two main challenges: to develop an analytic framework to successfully explore the validity of the hypothesis and to develop a conceptual understanding on the term sectarian both as a general term and as it applies in the context of Pakistan.

By choosing identity politics as an analytic approach, it allowed the research to draw from the vast literature examining identities and how they are formed and transformed in violent conflicts. The analytic framework subsequently highlighted the tripartite relationship between identity, violence, and space and encouraged the analysis to examine the discursive practices on constructing space and identity as identities are mutually formed in an inherently spatial social interaction. The spatialised forms of identities and their interaction in conflict were then operationalized by using the concept of border that illustrated the mechanisms at work in spatialised identity politics.

Through the analytic framework, the research was interested in the communicative dimension of sectarian conflicts instead of the social and political dimensions, which are often the focus of academic writers. This focus highlighted how violence, as it is understood in the thesis, is tied to the exclusivist identity discourse and that violent acts are often more expressive than instrumental in nature. The aim of the research now was not to quantify the communication but to look at the contextualised processes of communication, in particular, the temporal 'when' and spatial 'where'.

The task for the research then was to look at the spatial uses of violence and locate the sectarian violence. What are the locations of violence? Where are the identity borders drawn, enforced, and maintained? Through what spaces does the violence communicate that discourse?

This analytic approach is encouraging not only a different understanding of violence but also a stand against the essentialised understandings of identities: constructed identities are constructed here and now, in their sociopolitical context, 'not archeologically salvaged from the disappearing past' (Massey 1993, 158). This is particularly important when discussing identities related to religious discourse, a context in which the essentialised identity perceptions have been particularly persistent. This theme was explored in chapter 5, which examined how the meaning and consequences of sectarian differences change in relation to other differences related to identities. In particular, the role of violence in the processes of producing and resignifying that difference as a part of protracted violent conflicts was analysed.

The second specific aim of this thesis that is related to theoretical understanding of sectarianism and sectarian violence was to gain conceptual clarity on the term *sectarianism*, especially in the context of Pakistan. This was seen as particularly important because this analysis is almost lacking the peace and conflict studies literature, and when the study was performed, the analytic examination has been conducted in a very different context as compared with Pakistan, as shown in chapter 2.

The thesis distinguishes between sectarianism as a term and sectarianism as a phenomenon in Pakistan. Sectarianism as a generic term refers to a particular relational group attitude, is tied to a religious discourse, and can be

understood as a destructive way of dealing with difference. It is different to what a 'sect' or a denomination is in Islam; it is not a group attitude inherently related to those different religious groups. Thus, belonging to a sect (or denomination) does not equal having a sectarian group identity. When placed in the Pakistani context, the terms *sectarian* and *sectarianism* usually refer to the Sunni-Shia conflict. However, the broad categories of Sunni and Shia in chapter 2 were found to be simplifications unable to fully convey the dynamics of sectarian conflicts. Thus, it was important to emphasise that to see sectarianism in Pakistan only as a Shia-Sunni problem is too simplistic, as it is to assume that there is only one sectarian conflict.

The construction of identities is conditioned by several simultaneous political, social, and ideological processes. These processes also form the context of sectarianism in Pakistan. Chapter 2 investigated the processes that have contributed to the sectarian phenomenon and to the birth and development of exclusivist sectarian discourse in particular. These processes are not confined within the borders of Pakistan, but sectarianism in Pakistan is a complex mix of the local, supralocal, national, and regional. There is no undifferentiated sectarianism: the plurality and complexity of the elements reinforcing sectarian conflicts converge in the sectarian phenomenon that defies easy definitions and simple categorisations.

The important role state practices play in the development of the exclusivist discourse in Pakistan was highlighted in chapter 2. How that discourse and its proponents have found institutionalised representations within the Pakistani

polity highlighted the scope and variety of representations of sectarian exclusivist discourse. This showed how the discourse is not limited to organized sectarian groups or how only a fraction of those contributing and maintaining the exclusivist sectarian discourse carry and use a gun.

The thesis also wanted to clarify the complex relationship between sectarianism and sectarian violence as the literature often conflates sectarianism, sectarian conflicts, and sectarian violence. Chapter 2 focused on sectarianism, whereas chapter 3 explored the elements that sustain sectarian violence and contribute to the permissive environment and operational spaces for it to exist. It was examined how the current literature on sectarian violence also conflate sectarian violence with the organised sectarian groups and what this means to the understanding of that violence. This view neglects the systemic forms of sectarian violence and the violence of the word, for example, as important parts of sectarian violence. Also, its protracted nature is often left unaddressed as well as the intricate and complex interplay of local dynamics with national sectarian discourse.

With a functioning analytic definition, this thesis contributes to the academic understanding of sectarianism by providing a better understanding of what is exactly meant when we talk about sectarianism, both as a more general state of conflict or tension and especially as a type of violence used (sectarian violence). This will hopefully enable the term to be better operationalized in academic studies in the future.

Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the scope of violence committed in the name of sectarianism not only in Pakistan but also in other parts of the world requires peace and conflict studies to build a theoretical body of knowledge of the phenomenon to be able to address the issue. This research has linked the peace and conflict studies literature with sociology's understanding on sectarianism in Pakistan, in particular, on identities related to religious discourse. For its theoretical understanding, this thesis draws from human geography and its understanding of the concept of space. This study then resides at the intersection of different disciplines, contributing to the understanding of sectarianism by bringing together these different disciplines within this analytic framework and forming a unique synthesis when analysing sectarian violence. In addition, by developing the concept of violence as the former and enforcer of borders between identities and as a way to communicate and maintain exclusivist identify discourses, this research has contributed also to the theoretical understanding of sectarian violence.

Methodological Conclusions

Chapter 4 discussed the methodological possibilities for conducting research on violence in a place where security concerns are real and the security situation is continuously changing. By selecting a method of analysis that allowed an archived-based research, some of the concerns related to the feasibility of the research were attempted to be minimized. It also allowed a

framing of sectarian violence to be present in the analysis that was not imposed by the outside researcher.

Despite the benefits of this approach, there were also significant limitations on the research—and analysis—process. As it became clear during the process of gathering and analysing data, the sphere of sectarian violence is inevitably much broader than that presented or analysed in this thesis. The enterprise of violent sectarianism in Pakistan is multifaceted and complex, as discussed in chapter 3. It is also impossible to fully remove sectarian violence as an independent and a separate category from the other forms of violence present in Pakistan.

However, as the violence related to sectarianism includes such varied forms of violence and combinations of different actors, it would be impossible to study ‘all sectarian violence’ or all the violence related to the phenomenon of sectarianism in Pakistan. The process of exclusion of certain types of violent incidents done according to the analytic framework gave an insight into the enterprise of violence and its extent. Although the process of exclusion and the focus it brought was valid within the analytic approach chosen (and necessary to be able to carry out a focused research), it is recognised that the approach inevitably offers a limited understanding of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

During the data analysis process, further limitations of using this methodological approach became evident. With this method of analysing data

and the data available, it was clear that intense periods of violent sectarian conflict (e.g., the periods in FATA) did not fit the chosen method and had to be left out of the analysis. This was due to the way both the intense periods of violence were reported in the Pakistani media and the method the data were categorised for this analysis. To include those intense violent periods (inevitably an important part of what sectarian violence is in Pakistan) in future analysis, the method of analysis should be refined. In addition, more detailed information on the different violent incidents and the methods of violence used, most likely from other sources than the Pakistani newspaper reports, would be needed.

It also became obvious that this method of analysing sectarian violence functions much better when the violence studied is focused on, or even limited to, the violence against the sect that is 'to be excluded', that is, the Shia sect in this case. The asymmetry of violence—Shias are targeted and killed significantly more than Sunnis—indicates that besides targeting the members and leaders of those sectarian organisations that have a part in producing, spreading, and maintaining exclusivist sectarian discourse, Shias are not in a majority Sunni country able to, or indeed hope to, exclude Sunnis as a whole from the public space or from the realm of what is being a 'Muslim' in Pakistan. Sects subscribing to the majority Sunni schools of thought are in a different position in producing and maintaining sectarian exclusivist discourse. Having said this, it was clear that there are some locations in Pakistan where the national majority and minority roles are reversed. These can be entire villages or pockets within cities, towns, and villages. In these cases, the use of

violence could fit with the analysis model, encouraging a more geographically limited focus for those studies.

More research is also needed if this method would be suitable for studying intra-Sunni violence, although the understanding after this research process is that this method of analysis could at least be used as the starting point to see where the contested spaces for that aspect of sectarian conflict in Pakistan are located.

Spaces of Violence

This thesis looked at the categories spaces for expressing identities, which were also the locations for expressing competing identity claims and spaces for violence as the extreme way to communicate and enforce those competing identity claims. The main category of location for sectarian violence that emerged from the research was individuals killed by target killings, such as community and religious leaders and Shia and Sunni activists, including activists and members of sectarian groups. The second category of location was sacred spaces, such as religious gatherings and rallies. Finally, the third prominent category of location is mosques and imambargahs. Of the data analysed, these were the three categories that included a vast majority of all the violent incidents perpetrated in Pakistan during 1996–2005.

By targeting spaces for reproducing religion and the visible symbolic signifiers of 'the other', sectarian violence targets the fundamental values, the sense of security, and also the self-definition of the communities in question. Sectarian violence is then located in the context of broader contestations of Islam in Pakistan and tied to the ongoing debate of what is it to be a (true) 'Muslim' in Pakistan. That violence also plays an important role in how those contestations are played out in public shared space.

As formulated in one of the research questions, the analysis wanted to find out whether only the militant sectarian groups perpetrated sectarian violence, as suggested by many analysts and as implied by the role violence is assigned in the academic analyses. As discussed in chapter 6, the incidents of low-level violence and communal clashes in particular are difficult to explain purely by being confined to the militant sectarian groups, suggesting that there are at least some local cases of violence that are not initiated or perpetrated by militant sectarian groups. This is a significant find that challenges the common assumptions on sectarian violence in Pakistan.

It was noted in the previous chapter that there could be a tendency both in the media and in the literature on sectarianism to use broad definitions of belonging to a 'sectarian group'. By using these broad definitions, it is possible to externalise the phenomenon of sectarian violence from the Pakistani society and brand it as only existing with and through the violent sectarian groups. Although this study recognises that more research is needed to understand exactly the extent of sectarian violence not perpetrated

by those groups, it strongly suggests that this violence exists and should be part of analyses on the violence going forward.

What is the value in knowing that sectarian violence does exist beyond the violent sectarian groups, that the spaces of sectarian violence correspond with the spaces where religious identities are reproduced, or that, indeed, sectarian violence can be thought as reinforcing and communicating exclusivist sectarian discourse? As mentioned previously, on the basis of the findings of this thesis, it is important to expand the understanding on sectarianism and sectarian violence to include considerations on wider fault lines than merely those associated with or imposed by the sectarian groups. The existence of 'associated spaces' that 'belong' to a certain sect is the first step in making the identity borders more rigid and tangible, thus affecting and limiting the shared public space. In other words, the local sectarian geographies limit the interactions between the sects and the possibilities for those interactions. Also, in conflicts, these borders are easy to deploy as barriers, impenetrable objects affecting the social life of communities even more and, most important, reducing shared space and spaces for interaction and cooperation.

Because of this mechanism of associating space with a particular sect, there are incentives for different communities to move closer together, to form localised majorities and thus gain local power and ability to claim the ownership of their space. The transformative role of violence vis-à-vis the spatial arrangement of different identity groups was discussed in chapter 3.

Spaces of violence as well as the transformative power of violence contribute to the understanding of the configuration of religious relations in space and the changing spatial patterns of those relations. These spatial patterns are exclusionary, forming localised majorities and minorities, with the possibility of further transformation through privatised securitization of those spaces, as was seen in chapter 3.

In this context, the contestations on mosques, imambargahs, and shrines and the 'land disputes' often associated with them can be seen in a different light and not being 'only about land'. Thus, the politics of religious identities and the relational politics of space as well as the contestations of spaces through the use of violence offer significant insights to the function of sectarian exclusivist discourse and the multiple forms of exclusion in Pakistan.

Areas for Future Research

During the process of this research, there are several areas that have emerged as either being underdeveloped in peace and conflict studies discipline and its body of literature or being new, previously unaddressed by the researchers working towards developing an academic understanding on sectarianism and sectarian violence.

As the theme of contestations of space and disputed spaces emerged so strongly in the analysis, developing an understanding on public space and its

contestations in Pakistan is needed. An understanding of those social forces that compete for space and control space and the different ways that control is enforced need to be addressed in the future. In particular, control over public space, spaces where different religious, ethnic, and linguistic identities meet and play out their sometimes unequal social relations, should be researched further. It would be important to gain an understanding of the current state of the (public) space in Pakistan where Islam exists in pluralistic forms and the different ways in which the pluralistic existence is being limited or excluded from the public shared space. There needs to be a deeper understanding on the discursive practices on constructing space and identity in public spaces in Pakistan and mapping those disjunctures of space where mutual existence is being contested.

There are three areas for further research suggested by the outcomes of this thesis. First, as one of the locations of sectarian violence, mosques and imambargahs stood out as not being fully understood as significant spaces for the production and maintenance of sectarian exclusivist discourse. It was also evident after the research that the understanding of mosque as a space is not adequate to assess what exactly is being contested and targeted in sectarian violence. Further studies focusing on mosque and imambargah disputes and exploring them as space and as spatial signifiers of religious identities would greatly enhance the understanding of sectarianism in Pakistan.

Second, the data analysis alluded to the idea of 'social geographies', spatial understandings of one's own locality with spaces associated to one's own

sect and those belonging to other sects. This idea should be tested with further research to gain an understanding of the extent of this in Pakistan and how these social geographies channel social interaction and the use of public space in Pakistan. Part of this line of research could be to look at the symbolic signifiers associated with particular identity groups and how they are used to demarcate and own space, how they mark the delineations of the associated spaces, and how those symbols or identity signifiers are used to declare a sect's space and its control over that space. Mapping these local sectarian geographies would then give us tools to understand whether the borders between these 'associated spaces' are ever turned into impenetrable barriers affecting the use of social space in both urban and rural localities and to know the process or events that led to that transformation.

Finally, a recurring theme encountered during both fieldwork and data analysis was the role of police in securing sacred spaces and in intervening and mediating in the disputes and violent conflicts between the different identity groups. The process and the extent of securitization of sacred spaces and religious entities (e.g., religious leaders, buildings and other sites, and events) and the role of different actors in that process are not discussed in the literature, but it would greatly contribute to the understanding of both sectarianism and the different Islamic discourses in Pakistan. The effects of that securitization on both public and shared space as well as limitations this places on the expression of different religious identities should also be researched in the future.

Overall, this research is an opening towards new ways of approaching and analysing sectarianism in general and sectarian violence in particular. It is hoped that there will be further academic research that is inspired by, and drawn from, both the analytic approach and the findings of this research. In particular, the future studies on sectarianism in Pakistan should have the courage to look at security as a broader concept than being merely related to extremism, violent groups, and big striking acts of violence. This thesis strongly argues that the security-related research and analysis should recognise that the studies done outside the usual focuses of security analyses are crucial for understanding and assessing also security-related issues in Pakistan.

It is undeniable that it is not possible to comprehend sectarian violence without analysing sectarian groups. However, as shown in this thesis, there is a need for further studies that look at sectarianism and sectarian violence as a broader phenomenon than merely belonging to the domain of those sectarian groups or 'Islamist extremisms'. Thus, further research also needs to go beyond the *Sipahs*, *Jaishs*, and *Lashkars*.

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Dawn. (2001d). Rehmanpura tense over Zuljinnah issue. 26 April.

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