

INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Desecularization

In May 2010, members of the Punjab wing of *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, an extremist religious organization that was outlawed by the Pakistani state in 2008, attacked two mosques in Lahore. These mosques belonged to the Ahmadiyya community, a self-identifying sect of Islam that was constitutionally declared a non-Muslim minority by the Pakistani state in 1974.¹ Newspapers across the country reported this news as an attack on Ahmadiyya “places of worship.” The word “mosque” was avoided because a law promulgated by the state in 1984 made it a criminal offense for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslim, to their religion as Islam, or to publicly practice Islam.² Although Ahmadis consider their places of worship mosques and themselves Muslims, these designations are consciously avoided in the public sphere in deference to these laws.

The issue runs deeper than religious categorization. When the former Prime Minister of Pakistan and then member of the National Assembly Nawaz Sharif condemned the attacks and stated that “Ahmadi brothers and sisters are an asset” and citizens of Pakistan, his statements immediately drew criticisms from various religious parties and groups. For example, the leadership of *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam*, a prominent Islamist party, called Sharif’s statement a “violation of the Constitution” and demanded that he “seek forgiveness from Muslims all over the world.” Some *ulema*³

¹ Constitution (Second Amendment) Act of 1974.

² *Anti-Islamic Activities of the Qadiani Group, Lahori Group and Ahmadis (Prohibition and Punishment) Ordinance of 1984.*

³ The term “*ulema*” (singular: “*alim*”) refers to traditional Muslim religious scholars.

threatened to launch a campaign against his party if Sharif did not retract his statements.⁴

Nawaz Sharif is one of Pakistan's most popular political leaders. Politically, he is a religious conservative. During his tenure as Prime Minister in 1998, Sharif had attempted to pass a constitutional bill that would have made *sharia* the main source of law in Pakistan.⁵ In the aftermath of the 2010 attacks, he chose to express solidarity with a vulnerable religious community that had just witnessed horrific acts of violence.⁶ In response, conservative religious groups publicly rebuked Sharif for sympathizing with a religious community that they deem heretical. By pitting Sharif against "Muslims all over the world," these groups sought to link Sharif with religious deviance while establishing themselves, the Pakistani *ulema*, as the legitimate purveyors of fundamental religious truths supposedly held by a monolithic Muslim *ummah*.⁷

From Sharif's perspective, the existence of laws rendering Ahmadis non-Muslim did not strip Ahmadis of their right to practice their religion without the threat of physical harm from an outlawed religious group. For the vocal *ulema*, the symbolic import of Sharif's statements trumped the gravity of the attacks. Expressing solidarity with Ahmadis and referring to them as citizens was, in their view, tantamount to violation of the law of the land that had already relegated Ahmadis to an inferior non-Muslim status. Notwithstanding the religious controversy that his comments generated, Sharif steadfastly stood by his statements.⁸

Since gaining independence, the Pakistani state has moved from accommodating Ahmadis as full citizens of the state to forcibly declaring them non-Muslim and eventually criminalizing them for adhering to nonconventional interpretations of Islamic religious tenets. An examination of

⁴ "PML-N Defends Nawaz's Remarks about Ahmadis," *Dawn* (Karachi), June 10, 2010.

⁵ Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act of 1998. Sharif's proposed measure would have introduced fundamental structural changes by making executive state authorities the sole legislators, above and beyond elected representatives and the courts, of an authoritarian and arbitrary "Islamic" system. Although the bill was intensely opposed, Sharif was ultimately able to push it through the National Assembly with some minor changes. However, it was not presented before the Upper House because Sharif did not enjoy a majority there. The ouster of Sharif from power via a military coup in 1999 cast the bill aside (H. Khan 2005: 483–4; Zaman 2002: 91–3). Sharif has not expressed a similar initiative in his current tenure as Prime Minister (June 2013–present).

⁶ Militants armed with guns, grenades, and suicide bombs entered the mosques and indiscriminately attacked Ahmadi worshippers.

⁷ The Arabic word "*ummah*" is deployed to refer to a transcendental Muslim community tied together by a religious bond.

⁸ "PML-N Defends Nawaz's Remarks about Ahmadis," *Dawn* (Karachi), June 10, 2010.

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why the Ahmadiyya community provokes unique anxieties for political and religious actors in Pakistan, which is the subject of this book, is akin to inquiring about the Pakistani state's checkered history with Islam. The two are different sides of the same coin, and an inquiry into one inevitably leads to the other.

The emergence of Pakistan as a central player in US foreign policy goals during the Cold War and the War on Terror tends to obscure that Pakistan is the only Muslim state that has been self-consciously founded on the basis of religion.⁹ Unlike Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose Islamic systems were put into place by specific political regimes, the very *raison d'être* of Pakistan foundationally rests on its Muslim identity. The country came into existence in 1947 following a nationalist movement that advocated the “two-nation theory,” which represented the idea that Muslims and Hindus of the Indian subcontinent constitute two separate nations. The newly carved state of Pakistan was to serve as a separate “homeland” for Muslims living under British colonial rule.

However, there was no consensus at the time of independence about how the idea of a territorially based Muslim nation-state would translate into state formation. The Preamble of the Pakistani Constitution, termed the “Objectives Resolution,” adopted in 1949, explicitly vests sovereignty in Allah and privileges a Muslim national identity for Pakistan.¹⁰ Yet debates and contestations over how this identity ought to inform state policies continue to be a defining feature of public life. The “religion question,” that is, the question of the relationship between religion and state, in Pakistan is striking because of this political vibrancy, animating citizens across the ideological spectrum and bringing high-level officials into conversation with ordinary citizens.¹¹

While our scholarly understandings of modern public religion have made significant strides as a result of critically questioning traditional secularization theories that posited a decline in the influence of religion with increasing modernization, they are unable to explain the nature and direction of religious change in Pakistan. The primary reason is that this

⁹ The only other modern state that has been similarly founded on the basis of religion is Israel.

¹⁰ The resolution begins with “Sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan, through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust.” See Appendix A for the text of the Objectives Resolution.

¹¹ The religion question in Pakistan is thus conceptually distinct from its counterpart in, say, twentieth-century China, where it has been subjected to stringent top-down regulation and management by an authoritarian state (Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

scholarship is disproportionately focused on national cases in which states have been reasonably successful in arriving at relatively stable official ideologies about religion.¹² For example, Joel S. Fetzer and Christopher Soper explain variations in state accommodation of Muslim religious practices in Britain, France, and Germany through “the *inherited* relationship between church and state in each nation.”¹³ Similarly, Ahmet T. Kuru explains variations among France, Turkey, and United States in a number of religious policy arenas through variations in secularist state ideologies¹⁴. These studies exemplify cases in which relatively stable state ideologies guide policy conflicts and outcomes. Within such lines of inquiry, national cases that cannot boast core state ideologies (typically secularist ones) are unwittingly cast away as messy and deviant cases unable to contribute to our theoretical understandings of modern religious change.¹⁵

This book demonstrates that by examining the hitherto neglected case of Pakistan, we can yield novel insights about *unsettled desecularization* as one among multiple trajectories of modern religious change that characterize our contemporary world. I make two broad arguments. The first relates to desecularization as post-secularization. While there is much debate among scholars with respect to what defines secularization and the different forms this process has taken in different historical contexts, there is an emerging consensus that its defining feature is the institutional differentiation of society into distinct social spheres such as religion, politics, economy, law, education, and so on.¹⁶ Secularization entails the emergence of “religion” as one differentiated and shrunken social sphere among many others at the same time as these other spheres are rendered autonomous from religious authorities.¹⁷

Yet it is precisely this differentiation, typically deemed essential for secularization *qua* modernization, that continues to be challenged in

¹² I discuss these interventions in more detail below.

¹³ Fetzer and Soper (2005: 16, emphasis mine). This approach is reminiscent of Rogers Brubaker’s classical study on variations in immigration policies in France and Germany, which are explained through “idioms of nationhood” (Brubaker 1992; for a critique, see Joppke and Rosenhek 2002).

¹⁴ Kuru (2009).

¹⁵ An exception is the case of Egypt, which is being deployed by an increasing number of anthropologists of Islam to critically interrogate the categories of religion, secular, and secularism. See, for example, Asad (2003: chap. 7), Mahmood (2005, 2015), and Agrama (2012).

¹⁶ Casanova (1994); Gorski (2000a). For Max Weber’s classical account of these different “value spheres,” see Weber (1958).

¹⁷ Chaves (2004).

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myriad ways by different people across the globe. It is now clear that secularization is neither a ubiquitous feature of modern political life nor does it constitute the end of the political history of religion. A theorization of desecularization allows us to gain a better understanding of the ways in which people engage in sacralizing their worlds within the structural confines of the modern nation-state form. The Pakistani case points to a particular historical modality of this quest, centered on aligning political institutions and practices of governance such as democracy, elections, and constitutional law with religious norms and sensibilities. I argue that in the ensuing process of desecularization, imperatives associated with public religion, politics, and state formation are redefined and reconstituted.

My second argument is that this process may be deeply contentious. I posit that modern polities can be distinguished by whether they have settled or unsettled state–religion relations. I deploy the notion of unsettled state–religion relations to refer to those cases in which the normative relationship between religion and state formation is a deeply contentious issue and keeps arising across different time periods and in different guises. In contrast, polities in which state–religion relations are relatively settled do not grapple with *this* kind of contentious politics, having arrived at basic norms that are relatively stable and enjoy wide social consensus.

In general, contemporary societies may be undergoing secularization or desecularization processes, and both may be shaped by societal contexts that are either relatively settled or unsettled with respect to the religion question. An examination of state–religion relations in Pakistan allows us to analyze a distinct trajectory of modern religious change defined by unsettled desecularization. Furthermore, it enables us to dissect a key historical dynamic of modern public Islam – its contested and unsettled relationship with the nation-state form.

THE AHMADI QUESTION

The conceptual site of state management of religious difference is particularly significant for examining modern trajectories of religious change. For one, debates about state–religion relations are typically carried out with reference to questions about religious pluralism and difference.¹⁸

¹⁸ Zybrzycki (2006). The question of religious pluralism has also animated much discussion on possible roles of public religion in Western liberal states (e.g. Audi and Wolterstroff 1997; Connolly 2000; Habermas 2006).

The stakes of these debates are thus highest for religious minorities. Second, it is widely believed that Islamic tradition marginalizes religious minorities, thus explaining contemporary discrimination against religious groups such as the Ahmadiyya community. A political approach to desecularization dispels this notion by showing that exclusion of religious minorities emerges from the imperative of creating homogeneous nation-states and not from the authority of *sharia*.¹⁹ The Ahmadi question thus throws light on the tensions that inhere in the creation of a national and unified body politic in Muslim-majority societies.

The Ahmadi question is a controversial issue whose history is longer than that of Pakistan itself. The Ahmadiyya movement was formed toward the end of the nineteenth century under British colonial rule in India. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), founder of the movement, held that he had received divine revelations from Allah and deemed himself a Prophet. Even though he upheld the supremacy of Prophet Mohammad, Ghulam Ahmad's claims were received with hostility and suspicion from the very start because they contravene the traditional Muslim belief that Prophet Mohammad is unequivocally the last prophet to be sent to earth by Allah. There are thus distinctly theological roots to the Ahmadi question.

The religious controversy began in 1891 when a group of Indian *ulema* issued a joint *fatwa* condemning Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.²⁰ The poet Muhammad Iqbal famously raised the issue of the religious status of Ahmadis in 1935 and deemed Ahmadis separate from the rest of the Indian Muslim community.²¹ The impulse toward forcibly creating a minority within the Indian Muslim community, incidentally itself a minority, was thus present prior to the independence of Pakistan. However, the colonial state's policy of religious equality ensured that hostilities directed toward Ahmadis were confined to public arenas because colonial courts unequivocally deemed Ahmadis a Muslim sect.²²

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1947, the Ahmadi question resurfaced in postcolonial Pakistan. Here, it immediately became linked with the political question of the nascent state's national and religious identity. The first explicit policy of accommodation of Ahmadis

¹⁹ See also Mahmood (2015).

²⁰ Issuance of a *fatwa* refers to the rendering of nonbinding advisory opinions by leading *muftis* (jurisconsults) or *ulema* by invoking *sharia* (Masud, Messick, and Powers 1996: 3–4). On the *fatwa* issued against Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, see Lavan (1974: 51, 60).

²¹ Iqbal (1976: 59).

²² Fyzee (1964: 59–60).

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was laid down by the state in 1954 in response to an organized religious movement that demanded that the state officially declare the Ahmadiyya community a non-Muslim minority.²³ This policy was radically reconfigured in 1974 in face of another such religious movement. While initially resistant, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto eventually placed the issue of the determination of the religious status of Ahmadis before Pakistan's first democratically elected National Assembly. The efforts of Islamists and *ulema* to turn the Ahmadi/non-Ahmadi religious distinction into a non-Muslim/Muslim political distinction bore fruition in 1974 when Ahmadis were constitutionally declared a non-Muslim minority.²⁴ Subsequently, in 1984, military General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq promulgated an ordinance that made it a criminal offense for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslims, to their religion as Islam, and to publicly practice Islam.²⁵ As noted earlier, this ordinance also did not bring an end to the vexing question of the place of Ahmadis within the Pakistani nation.

Statistically speaking, Ahmadis appear quite insignificant in Pakistan's demographic landscape. The last official census conducted in 1998 reported that around 96 percent of the Pakistani population was Muslim, and only 0.22 percent belonged to the Ahmadiyya community.²⁶ Second, Ahmadis are a politically quiescent community and are mainly oriented inward toward their own community life. Ahmadis are scattered all over Pakistan and form a majority only in the city of Rabwah (officially renamed Chenab Nagar), where the central educational, community, and religious organizations of the Ahmadiyya movement are located. The primary import of the Ahmadi question is therefore symbolic, pertaining to issues about citizenship rights, national identity, and state–religion relations in a Muslim-majority country.

Analytically, the Ahmadi question is both reminiscent of and divergent from another pivotal minority question of our modern age that has received much scholarly attention, the “Jewish question.”²⁷ For example, drawing on the experience of Jews in interwar Europe, Hannah Arendt drew attention to a fundamental paradox that lies at the heart of the

²³ Lahore High Court (1954). This policy of accommodation is discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁴ Article 260, Constitution of Pakistan. See Chapter 3 for a discussion.

²⁵ See Appendix B for the full text of this ordinance and Chapter 4 for a discussion.

²⁶ See www.census.gov.pk/Religion.htm for official statistics on population breakdown by religion (accessed on December 17, 2013). Ahmadis maintain that their numbers are significantly underrepresented in the census.

²⁷ See, in particular, Mufti (2007), who draws explicit parallels between the “minoritization” of Muslims in India and Jews in Europe.

modern nation-state. On the one hand, she argued, the rise of the nation-state in France coincided with the establishment of a constitutional government that was meant to protect people from “arbitrary administration and despotism.”²⁸ The ideal of legal equality of all citizens enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was designed to replace the system of privileges that characterized the preceding feudal order. It was premised on the notion of natural rights of “man” – those inalienable human rights that were to accrue to the “abstract” individual human being.²⁹ On the other hand, those rights were to be ensured by the state that would exert sovereignty in the name of the people of the nation, that is, in the name of a *particular* historical collectivity. There was thus a core contradiction at the very heart of the modern nation-state manifest in two opposing ideals – one extolling the prepolitical natural universal human rights that supposedly belong to all human beings and the other affirming the rights of the people of the nation-state, that is, of a delimited political community supposedly characterized by “homogeneity of population and rootedness in soil.”³⁰

Arendt argues that the contradiction did not immediately manifest itself, and the first impulse of the nation-state was to ensure legal equality among different groups. Thus France (in 1791) and Prussia (in 1812) enacted legislations formalizing the emancipation of Jews. However, this legal equality constantly collided with nationalist sentiments infested with anti-Semitism, as evidenced in France by the Dreyfus Affair and in Germany by the rollback of Jewish emancipation. Arendt analyzes the subsequent fate of Western Jewry through a set of interconnected histories, factors, and events: disintegration of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, the emergence and paucity of League of Nation’s minority treaties, German imperialism in the interwar years, scientific race theories, and the “tribal nationalisms” that exploded across Europe. In Germany, this was followed by the stripping away of formal citizenship rights of Jews, their statelessness and expulsion, their forced return, and finally, their movement to concentration camps. Arendt demonstrates that the condition of being stateless was absolutely crucial for the subsequent pogroms aimed at the extermination of European Jewry. Ultimately, it was only because Jews were rendered external to the German body politic or when, in Arendt’s words “the transformation

²⁸ Arendt (1968: 275).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation had been completed” that Hitler could proceed with his pogroms.³¹

Now consider the core issue that lies at the heart of the Ahmadi question, pertaining to whether Ahmadis belong to the Pakistani nation or not. On the one hand, this question can today be answered in the affirmative by virtue of Ahmadis being formal citizens of the state. It can be argued that this entitles them to citizenship rights that are a core element of Pakistan’s frequently changing constitutions.³² From this perspective, anti-Ahmadi laws are not aimed at stripping Ahmadis of basic civic, political, or social rights but merely at “protecting” prevalent Muslim susceptibilities that balk at the suggestion that Ahmadis are Muslim. It is often argued that this represents a basic commitment that any Muslim state ought to have to its majority of Muslim citizens. On the other hand, this question can also be answered in the negative by invoking the discriminatory laws that I mentioned earlier. It can be suggested that if Ahmadis were indeed full citizens, Pakistani law would not mark them out through special laws and policies. By thus marking out a specific group within the polity, furthermore, the Pakistani state potentially facilitates the conditions for its future expulsion and extermination.

The coexistence of these two realities – formal *de jure* citizenship and lawful exclusion – means that Ahmadis are suspended in a state of limbo, perched between citizenship and statelessness.³³ Conceptually, it is this in-between-ness that differentiates Ahmadis from the condition of being stateless that Arendt theorized. The Jewish question is suggestive of the perils that beset minorities in a *system* of nation-states, that is, in a system in which everyone is required to substantively belong to a political community in order to be a rights-bearing person or, as Arendt famously put it, in order to have “the right to have rights.”³⁴ The Ahmadi question, however, is suggestive of the impulse to create a homogeneous nation-state that is nonetheless checked by the notion that “minorities” are an

³¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

³² These rights have frequently been “temporarily” suspended by different regimes.

³³ Margaret R. Somers draws on Arendt’s notion of statelessness to analyze the economically marginalized people of the contemporary United States. Somers argues that while these “socially excluded people” hold formal *de jure* citizenship, they do not have *de facto* citizenship because they exist in “a condition of pure market exposure no longer mediated by the now absent government” (Somers 2008: 134). While I find Somers’ distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* citizenship helpful for thinking about the Ahmadi question, I am reluctant to characterize Ahmadis as stateless and find it more useful to situate them in a precarious in-between location between full citizenship and complete statelessness.

³⁴ Arendt (1968: chap. 9).

integral part of any nation-state. This impulse, too, is a modern product of the establishment of a system of nation-states.³⁵

By virtue of being formal *de jure* citizens of a state, Ahmadis have a legal status and consequently do possess a right to have rights, which they have exercised, among other ways, by their frequent mobilization of courts.³⁶ However, they do not have the right to *all* the rights that full Pakistani nationals belonging to mainstream Islam do. Specifically, Ahmadis have been excluded from enjoying religious rights that other Pakistanis take for granted. The most fundamental among these is one that is considered so basic that it is implied and not explicitly articulated in formal statements about religious rights: the right to publicly declare one's religious identity.³⁷

Empirically, this book analyzes the processes through which Ahmadis came to be situated in this precarious position.³⁸ It demonstrates that the Ahmadi question has animated competing claims about the Pakistani state's ideological commitments, Islamic norms, and national identity since the country's independence despite multiple attempts by state authorities to offer a "final solution" to the Ahmadi question.³⁹

³⁵ As Arendt argues, the League of Nation's minority treaties had the effect of creating "the minority as a permanent institution", which formalized a number of assumptions that had hitherto been "only implied in the working system of nation-states, namely, that only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions, that persons of different nationality needed some law of exception until or unless they were completely assimilated and divorced from their origin" (Arendt 1968: 275).

³⁶ See Chapter 5.

³⁷ For example, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Note that the right to "manifest" one's "religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance" is predicated on a prior right to proclaim and maintain one's religious identity in public. For only when one is allowed to publicly declare oneself, say, Buddhist, can one proceed to manifest one's Buddhism in public.

³⁸ While much emphasis has been laid on aspects of Ahmadiyya religious thought (Lavan 1974; Friedmann 1989) and marginalization of the community by the Pakistani state through both legal-constitutional and extralegal means (Gualtieri 1989; Kaushik 1996; Khan 2003), there is a dearth of studies that examine the political and cultural processes that have given rise to different state policies toward the religious and citizenship status of the Ahmadis (but see Qasmi 2014).

³⁹ During passage of the motion before the National Assembly that it consider the religious status of Ahmadis, Law Minister Abdul Hafeez Pirzada stated that his hope was to arrive at "an effective, just and final solution" to the Ahmadi question (NAPD, June 30, 1974: 1302, 1303).