STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE LIVES OF PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS: A COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS

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The article uses the lens of structural violence to examine the lives of Pakistani Christians. Thirty-five Christians living in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi participated in a study that elicited life history narratives and dialogical interviews. These narratives yielded participants' experiences of structural violence and their analyses of societal level processes that enabled these experiences. The collaborative analysis is discussed under three headings: the impact of the Blasphemy Laws, the ascription of impurity, and unequal citizenship. These findings have important implications for practice and future research. The results of the study, that is the accounts of structural violence generated by the participants, need to be made available to policy-makers, educators and other justice-oriented members of the dominant group so they can work towards attaining equity for Christians. In terms of further research the study points to the imperative of investigating in depth the various domains of structural violence such as education, sexual harassment, job experiences, and religious expression.

Keywords: *Pakistani Christians, structural violence, life histories*

1. Introduction

This paper utilizes the lens of structural violence to investigate the lives of Pakistani Christians. I deliberately use the identity marker Pakistani Christians rather than Christians in Pakistan: the focus here is on Christians that trace their genealogy within the Indian sub-continent and have Punjabi as their mother tongue. I was approached[1] by a group of Pakistani pastors who wanted me to conduct a study on Pakistani Christians residing in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan constructed in the 1960s, and its twin city Rawalpindi, a city that was a British cantonment and now, the seat of the Pakistani military headquarters. I shared a copy of Lykes (2013) and McIntyre (2008) with the pastors, who approved of the methodologies and lauded the perspectives in these publications, but still insisted that I take on the role of researcher and the Christians be relegated to interviewees rather than co-researchers. The pastors needed Christian voices and analyses of their oppressive conditions for advocacy purposes, but if a Muslim collected the data, especially a Muslim Pakistani who taught in a US university, it would be regarded as more legitimate. In any case, the anonymity of Christians participating in the

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[1] Some of the pastors attended a talk I gave on my work in the Swat Valley with respect to structural violence, and thought I would be an appropriate person to lead such a research project with Pakistani Christians.

study would guarantee their safety. The pastors feared that retaliatory measures would be taken against the Christians who would be known to have participated in the study, especially as co-researchers. Structural violence then determined the terms of the research under discussion in this article, even as it motivated the request for the research.

My understanding of structural violence as a concept chiefly derives from its usage by anthropologists (e.g., Farmer, 2003; Scheper-Hughes, 1993), although Galtung's (1969; 1990) writing, underpins my investigation as well. As Uvin (1998, p. 105) writes, "The concept of structural violence draws our attention to unequal life chances, usually caused by great inequality, injustice, discrimination, and exclusion and needlessly limiting peoples' physical, social, and psychological well-being". For Farmer (2003, p. 8) the term is a broad rubric that includes "a host of offences against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality, and the more spectacular forms of violence that are uncontestedly human rights abuses, some of them punishment for efforts to escape structural violence".

Structural violence, according to Anglin (1998, p. 145) is "normalized and accepted as part of the 'status quo,' but … is experienced as brutality at particular intersections of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, and age". In the case of Pakistani Christians I would add "religion" to this list of axes of differentiation.

Scholars such as Uvin (1998) and Scheper-Hughes (1996) have also examined the relationship between structural violence and acute forms of direct, physical violence. Uvin (1998) stated that the experience of everyday structural violence reduces the barriers to episodes of direct violence. Scheper-Hughes (1996, p. 889) actually refers to structural violence as "invisible genocides". These so-called invisible genocides, which are visible to the discerning eye, and are experienced as social suffering by certain populations during normative practices in everyday institutional and personal spaces, then pave the way for more visible large-scale genocides: a tolerance for structural violence in a society becomes indicative of the capacity for acute violence.

For the past several years, according to Amnesty International reports, Pakistan has been charged with human rights violations against its religious minorities, especially its Christian citizens. Christians make up a small minority in Pakistan, around 2.5 million, slightly more than 2% of the population (Fahlbusch, 2005). Many originate from Hindu families of lower castes and untouchables who converted to Christianity under British rule (Asimi, 2010; Stock & Stock, 1975). They are disproportionately restricted to janitorial labor with little chance of social advancement (World Bank, 2002). Kamran and Purewal (2016) describe over the years how the status of Christians as minorities has shifted to a more stigmatized and thereby vulnerable position. Blasphemy Laws under which approximately 1,274 people have been charged (Siddiqi, 2013) have made Christians insecure and unequal (Gabriel, 2007). Pakistani Christians have had to bear the brunt of sporadic mob violence (Tavernise, 2009). More recently, the Christian community in Pakistan has been targeted by the Taliban through bomb blasts (Boone, 2013).

Jones (2012) has charted the connections between structures and the agency of human beings. Structures and institutions are not only created and perpetuated by the collective actions and agency of human beings, they also serve as background features that influence individual actions both consciously and unconsciously. From such a perspective, all violence, including structural violence, is the consequence of multiple levels of human agency.

The Pakistani Christian participants of my study as well as the pastors who requested it were interested in how structural violence gets embodied in the survivors and perpetrators, but they

were also committed to tracing the power relations which make human agency the conduit of violence generated by structures. Motivated by feminist and other methodologies that offer spaces for grappling with oppression and its antidote (e.g., Lather, 1991; Lykes & Coquillon, 2007; Lykes & Mallona, 2007), the sub-title to the paper "A collaborative analysis" refers to this exercise of each research participant analyzing his or her life conditions in this complex manner. The participants were therefore involved in delineating what Watson-Gegeo (1992) has called "thick explanation" (p. 51), the contextualization of micro-level processes in larger macro-level forces. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to represent the complexity of the process we went through, my intent is to share a textured and nuanced insight into this process, enlivening my portrayal through the voices of my research participants as well as the interweaving of relevant historical and background information.

While earlier writings on Pakistani Christians (e.g., Asimi, 2010; Gabriel, 2007) have focused on the scrutiny of legislature and legislation that negatively impact Pakistani Christians, and done so in terms of a general discussion on Christians, the present paper is unique in its privileging of Christian voices from different walks of life. What is even more unique about the study is the highlighting of intersectionality; the fact that the reality of being a Pakistani Christian is mediated by class, gender, and educational background, to name the most salient axes of differentiation that emerged during the study. This accent on intersectionality derives its impetus from feminist theories, especially from those emanating from Third World and women of color in the West quarters (see Hancock, 2007, for discussion). Such an orientation also remains influenced by conceptions of intersectionality put forward by critical race theorists (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Both feminists and critical theorists emphasize the working together of different identity markers to produce the lived realities of people.

2. Research Design

In the summer of 2014 I had a meeting with the pastors who had approached me and 20 other people aged 21-60 who had volunteered to participate in the study in response to the pastors' word of mouth request (Three people later did not join the study). The pastors and I made sure that this group of people was drawn from different class backgrounds, and half of them were women. At this meeting we also discussed the research design that I outline in section 2.2. The study thus sought to adhere to the norms of collaborative research (McIntyre, 2008), departing from the norms of mainstream research because the research participants had input into how data was to be collected. The research took place in the winter of 2014-2015 and the summer of 2015.

2.1 Participants

In the end a total of 35 Pakistani Christians, aged 21 to 65, residing in Islamabad and Rawalpindi participated in the study. The recruitment took place through word of mouth, especially through the efforts of the pastors: all participants chose to be in the study after hearing about it from other Christians. As mentioned earlier, given the emphasis on intersectionality, care was taken that Christians from different class and educational backgrounds were included.

Eighteen of the research participants were women. All research participants said Punjabi was their mother tongue, although in many cases, their dominant language was now Urdu, the national language. The group consisted of three upper class Christians, 15 middle class Christians, and 17 lower class Christians. The assignment to class positionality was made based on research participants' own categorization, data collected on household income and expenditure plus assets, and assessment of the localities in which the participants resided. Of the three upper class Christians, one woman headed a non-government organization (NGO), one woman held a high post in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and one man was an army general. The middle class segment contained pastors, Christians who had their own businesses, nurses, school teachers, people who worked in largely Christian NGOs, one young man who had recently left his job, and a man who had retired from his government job at age 60. Fourteen of the lower class Christians were sanitation workers: 12 of them worked in peoples' homes and two in educational institutions. One lower class Christian was unemployed and two were tailors.

2.2 Data Collection

During the 2014 meeting the research participants opted for a life history methodology similar to the methodology employed by Lykes(1993), which was grounded in the storytelling and dialogical rhetoric they employed in their own lives. I discussed with them the various ways data was collected and represented in participatory action research, such as performance ethnography and the use of art and poetry (see e.g., Reason & Bradbury, 2007), but they chose a life history mode (see e.g., Larson, 2006; Shopes, 2011) for the study because they thought it would be taken more seriously during advocacy campaigns for equal rights for Christians which were to be led by the pastors. The majority of the people present also saw the data collection process as an opportunity for self-reflection, for them to gain insight into their oppression and discrimination, and perhaps arrive at better coping mechanisms against the system at individual and collective levels. For this reason it was decided that after a research participant finished narrating his or her life history (during which I was only allowed to ask clarifying questions or questions to move the story along), I would then ask a series of questions directly addressing discrimination, Christian identity, and citizenship, to fill in gaps in information that might not be covered by the life stories. Each research participant was provided with copies of the notes from their interview, although they were also invited to look at the data in its entirety.

I worked with 10 research participants during December 2014-January 2015 and 25 participants during June-August 2015. Each two-part interview lasted around three hours. The participants chose to complete the conversation in one sitting because they preferred not to explain the continued presence of the research team to any inquisitive neighbors, Muslim or Christian. The conversations took place mainly in Urdu, although sometimes the research participants would switch to Punjabi or English. The research team consisted of two note-takers and myself. One research assistant took notes in Urdu and the other in English. The participants differed in the degree to which they needed questions to proceed with their life stories and then analyzed oppression and discrimination. Some generated quite seamless life history narratives; other stories were choppy punctuated by pauses and more probing questions. Most participants moved from speaking of themselves to speaking of Christians as a collectivity and back to

themselves again. Still, each narrative and interview provided material to understand the structural violence in the lives of Pakistani Christians.

The life history narratives allowed for the emergence of themes in an organic fashion, rooted in the context of participants' lives and circumstances, generating counter-narratives that provided glimpses into societal workings through the eyes of marginalized people (see Sonn, Stevens, & Duncan, 2013 for the significance of such counter-stories). The dialogical interviews enabled the anchoring of micro level everyday experiences and interactions within larger macro societal processes, following Lykes and Mallona's (2007) prescription for participatory research.

2.3 Data Analysis

Only three of the research participants, one upper class and two middle class, looked at my coding, and gave me suggestions with respect to the data analysis. They were mostly concerned with the Blasphemy Laws and its significance in delineating the structural violence against Pakistani Christians.

The analysis presented in this paper was derived from a thematic analysis (Guest, 2012). The data were selectively coded and compared for the following themes based on the emergent codes: experiences of discrimination and oppression; analyses of experiences of discrimination and oppression; and responses to experiences of discrimination and oppression. The research assistants helped me and we came up with a grid for inter-coder reliability (Cho, 2008), which basically compared and contrasted our thematic analysis. This process helped to validate the coding: ninety per cent of our analysis was exactly the same.

3. Contours of Structural Violence in the Lives of Pakistani Christians in Islamabad and Rawalpindi

The stereotype of a Punjabi Christian in Pakistan is that they are dark-skinned, not tall, and thin (Khurshid, 2005, unpublished work), but my research participants varied in skin color, height, and weight. Punjabi Christians are distinguished primarily through their names from other Punjabis. Most lower class and even a few middle class Christians have the generic "Maseeh" as their last time. Most educated Christians, though, now have surnames. At times Christians have first names and last names that are no different from Muslim first or last names, but other Christians have names that are clearly seen as Christian. Most job applications and applications for admission to educational institutions ask for the applicant's religion, so even if you have names that could be Muslim it is difficult for Christians to "pass". Additionally, most Christians go to church and participate in celebrations for Christmas and other Christian holidays. In other words, Christians are a visible minority, which makes them susceptible to structural violence in their everyday lives.

Structural violence targeting Christians penetrates all walks of their life in institutional, community, and personal contexts. I present my research participants' descriptions and analyses of the structural violence they encountered under three sub-headings. These sub-headings were carefully crafted based on the data as well as subsequent correspondence with some of my research participants and the pastors who had requested the study. The impact of the Blasphemy

Laws, the ascription of impurity, and the fact of unequal citizenship were domains identified as of the highest priority during the interviews as well as recent e-mail exchanges.

3.1. Implications of the Blasphemy Laws – "The sword hanging on our heads"

All the Pakistani Christians I interviewed[2] unequivocally stated that they lived in fear of the abuse of the addendum to the Blasphemy Laws that is commonly known as *tauheen-i-rasaalat*, the disrespect of the prophethood. If we agree with Galtung (1969; 1990) that the fear of violence is violence itself, then all my research participants' lives unfolded in the midst of violence. Even the two upper class women who said that they had never personally encountered discrimination as Christians had to concede from such a perspective they did actually live with the fact of violence in their everyday lives.

Just a month before I started the interviews, in the November of 2014, a Christian couple was beaten to death and their bodies burnt in a brick kiln by a mob as the police stood by and took no action. The couple had been accused of desecrating the Holy Quran ("Christian couple killed for desecrating Holy Quran", 2014). The community was still reeling from this shock as I interviewed them. Most participants also talked about the Rimsha Masih case, whereby an 11 year old who was mentally unwell was incarcerated under the Blasphemy Laws in 2012. She was eventually released in 2013 after it was proved that the local imam had set her up, but still she and her family had to escape to Canada after months of hiding because a segment of the population did not believe in Rimsha's innocence ("Rimsah, accused of blasphemy, finds refuge in Canada", 2013). "Even our children are not safe," said one research participant with tears in her eyes.

There are no exact figures available for how many Christians have been charged with the Blasphemy Law, but it has been documented that the majority of people accused of blasphemy in Pakistan have been Christians (Gabriel, 2007; Rahman, 2012). The Blasphemy Laws are Sections 295-298 of the Pakistan penal code (Rahman, 2012.) They are a residue of the British colonial rule and were created with the expressed intention of protecting different religious groups from harming each other's places of worship and making pictorial and verbal insults against religious figures (Gabriel, 2007). The penalty was a fine or imprisonment for up to ten years (Asimi, 2010). Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator who ruled Pakistan from 1977-1988, and who co-opted the Islamic sentiments of a burgeoning middle-class to consolidate his own rule added Section 295 B in 1982 and Section 295 A to the Pakistan penal code in 1986 which are as follows:

> Section 295 B
> Whoever willfully defiles, damages, or desecrates a copy of the holy Koran or an extract there-from or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punished with imprisonment for life.
>
> Section 295 C

[2] All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

> Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life, and shall be liable to fine.

What distinguished these additions to the Blasphemy Law from its earlier version were the severity of the punishments and the privileging of Islam as the religion that had to be guarded (Asimi, 2010; Gabriel, 2007; Rahman, 2012). As one of the research participants pointed out, "The 1980s Blasphemy Laws suddenly changed the status of Christians as fellow people of the book (Muslims recognize the Bible as one of their holy books) to being marked as those who could be liable of disrespect to the Quran or Prophet Mohammed". Zia-ul-Haq's rewriting of the Blasphemy Laws not just made made it possible for people to misuse and manipulate these laws to punish others (Rahman, 2012), but it caused a huge shift in which Christians were positioned vis-a-vis Muslims in Pakistani society turning them into more pronounced others (Kamran & Purewal, 2016). While members of the middle classes and the elite have not been safe from allegations of blasphemy, most people punished under the laws have come from the lower classes (Rahman, 2012). The rancor against Christians, while visible in all strata of society, seems to be more prevalent among the lower classes.

The research participants pointed out how allegations of blasphemy are made due to personal grievances and for the purposes of revenge, echoing what Gabriel (2007) and Asimi (2010) have written. "There was a beautiful girl whose parents refused to marry her to a Muslim, and they made up charges of blasphemy", one research participant told me. Another one said, "One has to take care not to offend Muslims because they can bring allegations of blasphemy against you". For some research participants blasphemy charges were not even a matter of any grievance, revenge, or offence, just the fact of having a Christian amidst themselves is what some Muslims could not stand.

Three of the research participants in their life histories shared their experiences of what they perceived as close brushes with plots against them involving the Blasphemy Laws. One of them a middle class young man, Saleem, who is an engineer, was forced to leave his job.

> I worked for a private firm. It happened for a week or so. I got pulled into discussions about religion during lunch breaks. I would be relentlessly questioned about the crucifixion, the Trinity, and the accuracy of the Bible. We never talked about Islam. Yet one day as I was leaving work one of my colleagues, a Muslim, walked me to my motorbike and whispered to me that I was not safe. Some people in the office were talking about bringing charges of blasphemy against me. I never went back. I suppose I should be grateful they did not follow me home. They did have my residential address.

Another family from a lower class background fled from their home overnight because they sensed hostility in their neighborhood. "It was just in the way they looked at us. We all realized something was afoot". For another young man from a lower class background the danger arose when there was a fresh addition to the group of mixed religion friends he spent time with every night. He and his other Christian friends noticed that every time they joined their group people would become quiet and some of them would look at each other uncomfortably. It took a few days to sink in but the Christian young men separated themselves from that group and started to meet in another place.

Fifty per cent of my research participants, most of them from the lower classes, said they stayed away from friendship with Muslims, with the majority of them citing the dangers arising from the Blasphemy Laws as the reason. The other 50%, most of them from the middle class, said they had close friends who were Muslim, but they avoided discussions about religion. Silence seemed to be the main strategy in the face of the implications of the Blasphemy Laws. Donald, a man in his forties who works for an NGO, said:

> It is a big contradiction in our upbringing of our children. On the one hand we teach them to tell the truth, but when it comes to religion we drum into their heads the need to change the subject when other children or adults bring it up. I think we mess them up psychologically by telling them to have pride in their religion but at the same telling them we can't talk about it publicly.

Twenty four of my research participants, as they recounted their life stories and afterwards in the question and answer part of the interview, grappled with whether the presence of the law influenced peoples' behavior or whether the law allowed the people to express their existing hatred of the Christians. For many it was a bit of both. However, the 60-year old man, Rasheed, who had just retired from government service, felt the law and the Islamization processes within which it was embedded had drastically changed things for Christians:

> When I was growing up it was not like this. I actually went to the mosque because I wanted to learn about Islam. I learned to recite the Holy Quran and I read it with its meaning. My teacher, a well-respected individual in the neighborhood, was so proud of me. Now even if a Christian touches the Quran he is likely to be charged with blasphemy.

I also discussed with research participants the possibility of eradicating or reforming the law. Most of them were very pessimistic about its eradication or reform. They reminded me how Salman Taseer, a Muslim, the Governor of Punjab, and Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, the Federal Minister for Minority Affairs had both been assassinated in 2011 for speaking out against the Blasphemy Laws: the majority was in favor of upholding the laws. One man, Youhana, who worked for a Christian organization and was involved in a project with Christian and Muslim clerics who dialogued about the Blasphemy Laws, was more hopeful:

> It will take some years but a change has to take place within the thinking of the Muslim public about how rash people are in the application of these laws. Over time and through patient dialogue people will come to realize that some checks and balances need to be woven into how these laws are framed. The Muslim clerics will have to take the lead in implementing such a change in public opinion.

The Blasphemy Laws are the most obvious form of structural violence against Christians in Pakistan. Allegations mostly lead to mob violence, and in those cases where the allegations make it to court, the result is punishment rather than acquittal (Gabriel, 2007; Rahman, 2012). The repercussions of these laws cut across class and gender boundaries, although the lower classes remain more vulnerable to their impact. The Blasphemy Laws and its societal dynamics remain an exemplar of structural violence that is state sanctioned, involves the complicity of state apparatus such as the police and courts, and is supported by the greater public (reminiscent

of analysis provided by Scheper-Hughes, 1996). Furthermore, it exemplifies, just as Uvin's (1998) account demonstrates, how structural violence can lead to acute direct violence when all these elements work together.

3.2. Ascription of Impurity – "They think we are inferior"

Like most of the Punjabi Christians in the Islamabad-Rawalpindi area (Khurshid, 2005), the majority of my research participants migrated from smaller towns or villages in Punjab as adults, youth, or small children. The entirety of my lower class research participants, and some of the middle class ones as well, told me they were trying to escape lives where they had lived on the periphery of villages or towns as outcasts in small badly built houses cut off from the center reduced to performing duties and jobs that Muslims would find demeaning. They were called *chuhras*, a derogatory term over the centuries used for untouchables but now for Christians (Khurshid, 2005; Stock & Stock, 1975). With the exception of one research participant and her family who found lodging she could afford in Rawalpindi, all of the lower class participants found themselves in slums in Islamabad that have been allowed to thrive precisely to house sanitation workers for the upper middle and upper class neighborhoods within which they are sandwiched. Even in Islamabad these Christians were socially isolated, reduced to janitorial work, and living in unhygienic conditions in slums euphemistically called "colonies". Some of the migrants did live in integrated and middle class localities, mostly in Rawalpindi, but they were the few who had an education and found work that afforded them that lifestyle.

The fact that Punjabi Christians converted from Hinduism to Christianity so that they were no longer untouchables adds another layer to the structural violence they face. The conversion to Christianity started around 1873 (Stock & Stock, 1975) and continued well into the 1960s and 1970s in areas that are in Pakistan (Kamran & Purewal, 2016). One research participant, Rasheed, summed up the situation in Islamabad as follows:

> They see us as *paleet* (impure) and don't want to live near us. We might be Christian now but we are not given any other work to do except cleaning. Other servants are housed in servant quarters but we can only get places to live in these colonies that have stolen electricity, no water pipes, and no adequate sewage disposal. Every few months we get eviction notices that our houses will be demolished. We protest and a couple of elite Christians help us to get stay orders. But not only do we live in miserable conditions, we live in a state of great uncertainty.

Another research participant, Mary, said something that many of the research participants also talked about:

> They keep our dishes separate from the other servants. We cannot touch anything except cleaning gear and the floor. Some people are so afraid that our impurity will rub off on them that they even move their furniture away from us.

The young man Saleem who was an engineer and worked at a private firm was also told to bring his own dishes, and there was uproar in the office when he dried his hands with the same towel that everyone else in the office used. Therefore this state of mind is not just directed

towards lower class Christians. One of the research participants, Arif, who works for a Christian NGO explained the phenomenon in these words:

> Islam does not believe in the Hindu caste system, but Muslims did live with Hindus for centuries and have been influenced by their ideas of defilement. Now the untouchables are Christians, but centuries of regarding them as impure has become part of society's norm.

This state of affairs is ironic, because the Punjabi Christian community in the Indian sub-continent chose to join Pakistan rather than India in 1947 because they thought this would allow them to elude the effects of the Indian caste system (Anjum & Tariq, 2012). Another research participant, Joseph, had the following explanation for the behavior of Muslims:

> It's a circular argument. Christians are *chuhras* because they clean houses and streets, but then *chuhras* are meant to do that work. If they won't, who will? There are advertisements in newspapers for cleaning jobs that clearly say that Muslims need not apply for these jobs.

Christians were very upset about this ascription of impurity towards them, especially its intergenerational transmission. As one research participant said:

> We are very poor. We can't keep up with the rising cost of food. We don't have three meals in a day. We can only afford two, and for that we only sometimes have chapatti with red pepper. We never buy clothes. We just wear hand me downs. But I can live with this. There are Muslims who are poor too. What I can't live with is the stigma of my children and I being dirty, being impure.

For others the stigma did not matter but the structural violence of extreme poverty did:

> I don't care if they treat me like I am not clean ever. I just want to be able to get out of my living conditions. I want my children to be able to go to better schools so they can get better jobs. That was what I think all day. How to escape my life of hunger? At times we go to bed without the evening meal. My children cry themselves to sleep. Yet no matter how many houses I clean I can't make enough money after the death of my husband. He didn't make much when he alive either, but at least it was two incomes. It breaks my heart to think my children will live in the same way.

Most research participants, however, saw how the ascription of impurity and relative poverty worked together to create the scenario of dehumanizing and abject circumstances:

> My children have to sit separately in school. They don't get the same attention from the Muslim teachers in government schools. In fact, they are picked upon. One of my sons dropped out because of the teacher's treatment. My other son who is very smart actually got his bachelors but he did not get a job befitting his qualification. In the end he joined the sanitation workers. They see us as inferior and unclean and this closes opportunities for our children.

Another young man living in an Islamabad slum spoke from his experience:

> I have a college education. But every time I go somewhere in relation to a job opening, they tell the position of office boy is available. They just want me to do menial labor. Right now I am doing nothing. How can I ever move out of this dirty colony if I don't find a worthwhile job? That's why so many Christians are stuck in poverty. We are just not given jobs even if we have the qualifications.

This being seen as "impure" makes Christian women especially susceptible to sexual harassment. Gender worked with class and religious background to generate the shards of structural violence. The nurses spoke indignantly about unwelcome advances, but perhaps the most vulnerable group were the women who cleaned other peoples' houses. These women from the lower classes had little recourse to any justice if they were molested by the men in whose houses they worked. They could be dismissed from their jobs if they lodged a complaint to the women of the households, and their likelihood of getting another job were very little since they would acquire the reputation of being a trouble-maker. One woman, Hameeda, put it sarcastically:

> If we are so impure, why touch us? They keep away from us but not when it comes to their pleasures. We don't like to talk about it. It makes us look bad. Even if a woman says anything, she gets the blame, not the man. Even our own men treat us differently if we mention being harassed.

The chasm between the lower classes and middle and upper classes is quite immense. As mentioned earlier, the middle and upper classes also face discrimination born out of this ascription of impurity – many of them had overheard Muslims calling them *chuhras* behind their backs and Christians in supervisory positions routinely face insubordination from Muslims, but they have managed to create lifestyles that are quite self-contained, and in many cases they live quite harmonious lives, albeit disconnected ones, in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods. A few of them were quite self-critical:

> The Christian middle class and I include myself are very selfish. My husband has his own business and we are connected to people in Dubai. We hardly have anything to do with the majority in Pakistan, so we can avoid the discrimination. We pay for our children to go to the best missionary schools. Our lives are good, why should we worry about those living in the colonies? I am ashamed of us.

Another middle class man said:

> In years past there was more access to quality education for poor Christians. Now even the missionary schools are expensive. I provide scholarships for two poor Christian children. If we all did a little bit for the uplift of Christians in general, things might be different. But we don't. Even the churches promote the schism between lower and upper classes. There are churches for the poor and churches for the richer. We are all not quite

accepted by the Muslims, but it matters if your stomach is full and you are rejected, or if you have an empty stomach and called *chuhra* to your face.

The general in the Pakistan army whom I interviewed claimed that there was no Punjabi Christian in Pakistan who could honestly say that they had not faced discrimination. Punjabi Christians then live the reality of not just being Christians in a Muslim state, but they also live with the stigma of their ancestors being untouchables. The latter should not matter, as one research participant said, if "people diligently followed Islam and its principles of inequality", but the historical actuality of Muslims living side by side with Hindus for centuries does generate this lens of impurity through which Christians are viewed. Structural violence, then, as it pertains to Pakistani Christians is multi-layered, and the research participants assiduously unraveled these layers during the research process. As Jones (2012) puts it, these layers of structural violence impact the agency of both the survivors and perpetrators.

3.3. Unequal Citizenship – "They don't see us as true Pakistanis"

All the research participants categorically declared that they did not enjoy equal citizenship in Pakistan, although the two upper class women said they had not personally experienced discrimination as Christians. Joseph asked, "How can we be anything but second-class citizens? The country is named the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Islam is the state religion, and only a Muslim can be the President or the Prime Minister".

Joseph had his facts right. Although the founding leader of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah conceptualized Pakistan as a secular state where people of any religion would have the freedom to practice their customs, rituals, and traditions, the first constitution of Pakistan in 1956 named the country as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Gabriel, 2007). Islam became the state religion in 1973 (Gabriel, 2007). This Islamization process intensified, as mentioned earlier, in the reign of Zia-ul-Haq, and over the years, with Pakistan's geopolitical importance in the War on Terror and the workings of terror itself, Pakistan's identity as being a place for Muslims has become more entrenched (Asimi 2010; Gabriel, 2007; Rahman, 2012).

"After September 11, 2001, when the US bombed Afghanistan and then Iraq, physical violence against Christians escalated as if we were connected to the West", said Rashida. Other research participants also spoke of the post 9/11 retaliatory violence against Christians: Muslims were being killed in Afghanistan and Iraq so the Christians in Pakistan were targeted. "More recently the violence, such as the bombing of churches, has come from militant groups. At that time even people we knew were involved", said one participant from the Islamabad colonies, who were the ones who suffered the most during that period. "The police ostensibly guarded us, but they looked away when the attacks happened". All research participants spoke of the complicity of the state: the government was not committed to ensuring the security of Christians.

People brought up other instances of physical violence when the police had chosen not to intervene. Pastor Zahid spoke of one time in 2005 when a mob had broken down the doors of the houses of all Christians living in this one neighborhood in Rawalpindi. They threatened to come back again and burn the houses. The Christians filed a report and requested police protection, which was denied. Fortunately, the matter was resolved through negotiations between the local Muslim cleric and the pastor, and further violence was averted.

Some of the middle class participants cited the Pakistan Constitution as well as the United Nations International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, according to which religious minorities had the right to profess and practice their own religion. They expressed that in their experiences it was difficult to do so in Pakistan. Members of the lower classes did not cite any documents, but they also said they did not feel free to live as Christians.

"Every Christmas we make our *chirnis* (i.e., Christmas decorations, generally a nativity scene) and our neighbors claim to accidentally destroy it. We make it again, and then they destroy it again", said Saleem. Others spoke of vandalism in churches. What disturbed people most was the harassment of children from other children, which cut across classes. "My children go to a missionary school, but even there Muslim children constantly belittle Christian customs and prayers, and tell my children off", said Donald. "Muslim children tell our children to stay away from them, and make false complaints to the teachers about them. Even the teachers listen to the Muslims", said one working class mother. "The text-books used even in private schools don't say anything positive about religious minorities. Children have read about Islam in social studies and in Urdu text-books, but not about any other religion", another parent pointed out. According to Galtung (1990), these "small wars" (Scheper Hughes, 1996, p. 889) can be regarded as attempts to violently curb the ideological and cultural dimensions and expressions of Christian lives and identities.

According to the research participants, religious intolerance was woven into the fabric of society, and the state did nothing to promote equality of citizenship regardless of religion. Eighty per cent of my research participants said they felt pressured by Muslims to convert to Islam. "My best friend turned to me one day and said why don't I make life easier for myself by converting?", shared Javed, a middle-class participant. Others, especially lower class research participants, had received threats of physical violence if they did not convert. Some of them had to shift residences because of such threats.

My research participants also shared with me how petitions for political asylum have increased in recent years, since many Christians want to escape this unequal citizenship. However, with the exception of Saleem, the young engineer who had to leave his job because it was not safe for him, all of my research participants declared they do not want to leave Pakistan. Rasheed, the retired 60-year old man said:

> I want to kiss the soil of this country every time I come back from abroad. Culturally I am such a Pakistani. I go to England and have a good time but my sister says I have to call before I come visit. And when I go see her she politely asks me to leave after an hour because she has other plans. We would never do that to each other in Pakistan. We are such a warm and hospitable people, and I want to die here.

When asked what gave them the strength to stay back despite dire conditions, some participants said the process for applying and getting political asylum was just too dehumanizing, "You have to live in a third country in a camp for many years, and your family has to finance you". Others simply said that they were too settled in Pakistan to move, "Jesus warned his followers that they would suffer wherever they go. We are ready for that sacrifice".

Many middle and lower class women complained that their lives in Pakistan were "doubly unequal". According to them, women in Pakistan do not have the same status as men (see e.g., Shaheed 2010, about status of women in Pakistan), and if on top of that you were a Christian you became "third class citizens". One middle class woman Rukhsana said, "I know many sanitation

workers who have sexually molested or raped, but there is no recourse for them but to be quiet. How can they find four Muslim men to testify for them, as the law requires?". Again, this is an example of how gender works with religious identity to intensify the experience of structural violence as Christians.

Only nine research participants, one upper class, three middle class, and five lower class, had been part of any kind of collective action. Of these nine, two had attended a rally only once. I engaged with each of my research participants over the issue of fighting for their rights as Christians. Most of them said they feared for their lives if they got involved in any such movement. "If you go to a rally, you can get photographed. They can then trace you. Who'll look after my children if something happened to me?" responded one working class woman. A few people, especially the middle class participants, thought such collective action would accomplish nothing and would be a waste of time. They needed to work hard and create role models for their children to follow, so gradually the Christian community can become equal to the majority in status and position.

Still, the research participants insisted that the first steps towards equality would have to come from the state. "In each government organization and department there is a 5% religious minority quota for employment. If the government made sure this was implemented, that would be a big step in helping the Christian community to move forward". Another research participant said, "If we are indeed citizens of this country our places of worship need to be protected. They should hunt down those who bomb our churches, and punish them". Finally, the participants stressed the need for them to elect their representatives to the National and Provincial Assemblies. In the present, parties who obtain a certain percentage of seats in the Assemblies, get to select their minority representatives, who in their turn feel no accountability to the masses since they did not vote them in.

The state's inability to foster equality and freedom for Christians can be regarded as cultural genocide, which according to Scheper-Hughes (1996, p. 889) would be an example of an invisible form of violence, an apparently "small war". State laws and societal norms work in tandem to create structural violence for Christians whereby they feel harassed in their everyday lives, even as they have to face acute violence at certain points. Galtung (1990) writes of how cultural violence, the highlighting of differences that are seemingly intolerable, is used to justify structural violence. The intent of such violence is to forcefully assimilate the population deemed as deviant into the mainstream thus violently eradicating their distinctive way of life. As my research participants emphasized their survival at multiple levels – physical, cultural, psychological, was at stake even though they were citizens of Pakistan.

4. Conclusion

This paper has represented the salient themes that emerged from life history narratives and dialogical interviews with 35 Pakistani Christians living in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The point was to highlight the experiences of multi-layered violence emanating from structures that negatively impact the participants physically, socially, and psychologically. The study's emphasis on intersectionality provided an understanding of how religion worked with gender and class to create specific realities for various Christians in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

For Pakistani Christians structural violence is a consequence of the intersection of deeply ingrained societal norms and discourses with state level laws, institutions, and discourses. Both historical and contemporary relations of domination and subjugation frame the repression, oppression, and suppression of Christians. As Pakistani Christians spoke of their lives they highlighted the manifestations of structural violence, delineating the agency of those who perpetrated acts that can be read as such as well as the constriction of their own agency as Pakistani Christians due to these acts. Structures can both enable and constrain, and, in this case, laws such as the Blasphemy Laws, and societal norms such as the ascription of impurity to Christians that has been institutionalized through the job market, enable the agency of perpetrators of structural violence and constrain the agency of Christians. This paper has tried to foreground these issues through the privileging of Christian voices.

The study represented in the paper has multiple implications both at the level of practice and in terms of directions for future research. First and foremost, the research participants found the exercise useful. They had thought about the points that arose during the study but they had not been afforded the opportunity to engage with the structural violence in their lives in such a systematic manner. Christians who had not participated in the study could also findings useful: indeed the pastors shared with me that the Christian community in Islamabad and Rawalpindi at large, had found the information about Christians using silence as a coping mechanism, the schism between the classes, and the exceptional forms of structural violence faced by women especially thought-provoking. The results of the study should also be made available to policymakers, educator, and justice-oriented members of the dominant group (the pastors are already doing some of that). Perhaps framing the climate of fear and discrimination inhabited by Pakistani Christians as a form of violence will bring home the gravity of the situation in a more compelling fashion. In terms of further research the study points to the imperative of investigating in depth the various domains of structural violence such as education, sexual harassment, job experiences, and religious expression. Furthermore, there is a need to collect testimonies of Christians living in other regions of Pakistan, since the study highlighted the contextual intersectionality of religious identity with other axes of differentiation such as gender, class, and geographical location.

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