Religion and Nation Building : Turkey and Pakistan

Today Pakistan and Turkey are considered to be polar opposite examples in the Muslim world in terms of state religion relations. However, a more nuanced analysis would show that the commonalities with regard to the role religion plays in the national identity of these two cases are much more than assumed. The simplistic dichotomy of religious and secular nationalism is insufficient to address the nuanced role religion plays in public life. Although both states were constructed as safe havens for the Muslims living in a disintegrating empire, certain historical factors created different trajectories in the nation building process in these two countries. The aim of this paper is to develop an alternative pattern which reflects the complexity and the dynamic nature of the relationship between religion and nationalism, through a comparative analysis of Turkey and Pakistan.

Considering the creation of both Turkey and Pakistan as transitions to a modern nation-state from an imperial historical background, this paper argues that homogenization is a key process in this transition and the role religion plays can best be evaluated with respect to the role it plays in homogenization. Other certain factors such as language and state capability will also be addressed in order to explain the different trajectories of these two Muslim nation-states.