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***Why has Islam not been able to serve as a unifying force
within the states of South Asia?***

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I. Introduction

On 16 December 1971, East Bengal seceded from Pakistan and constituted the newborn state of Bangladesh. Not only was it the first successful secession after decolonization in the Third World, but also displayed it to be the final evidence that Mohammad Ali Jinnah's 'Two-Nation Theory' was no longer sustainable, because a third nation had been born on the Indian subcontinent. Islam could not prevent that East Bengal seceded and hence was *latest* from now onwards no longer a unifying force within South Asia.

This paper argues that 'religious nationalism' could not solve Pakistan's problems after independence. It was an effective force in the short-term view to justify the creation of Pakistan, but at the same time could not solve the long-term needs of the newborn state. Islam could not contribute to create a uniform Pakistani identity and thus was not sufficient to unite Pakistan's diverse people. The principle of 'unity in diversity', which guided the colonial struggle, can not be applied on Pakistan, because the partition of the Indian Subcontinent in accordance with religious symbols concealed ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences among others. Islam was indeed not strong enough to define a long-term nationhood for Pakistan.

Regional identities play an important role in this question, because they can either act supplementary or against national identities, dependent on how the interests of the communities are represented at the national level. West Pakistan itself faced problems in accommodating demands from various regional groups, but the most apparent division within Pakistan existed between the Western and the Eastern wing. The central government with its quarters in West Pakistan pursued rather discriminating policies towards the 'Muslim Brothers in the East'. The representation of Bengal in state politics, in the Army and the Public Administrative service was disproportional.

Bengal has a strong cultural tradition, which acts unifying on its people. Indeed, some voices even suggested that the creation of an independent United Bengal should have been

considered at the time of partition, because Bengalis are very aware and proud of their cultural heritage. Throughout it can be identified that Bengali Nationalism was a strong force. Its revival in 'a linguistic form' and the evolution into a mass movement displays this train of thought and broaches the question whether the creation of Bangladesh can be described as finalizing 'the unfinished partition'.

The last part examines the claim whether Islam per se is able to unify people. At the example of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan during the last two decades, it is attempted to display that Islam cannot claim to be a universal religion, because in particular Shias and Sunnis clashed violently, constructing a severe threat for Pakistan's national integrity.

II. Religious Nationalism for Pakistan – only a short term solution?

The struggle against the British Raj was mainly driven on Indian Nationalism. It was rendered possible by the Indian identity, which was formed during the colonial discourse. This Indian identity especially accentuated the need to fight against the colonial powers. An Indian identity is not absolute at all. Quite the contrary, it does not prevent that other identities, influenced by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and other aspects, exist within the society. Indeed, Indian Nationalism took advantage of the existing variety of different identities, making the 'unity in diversity' one of its main principles. The common goal of all identities was an independent India, free of foreign rule. Hence, many more distinguished identities ran parallel with the existence of Indian Nationalism.

But the fear that India could turn into a Hindu-dominated state after independence existed among some Muslims in India. Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the 'founder of Pakistan', was in the beginning "a devoted Indian nationalist who fought for Muslim minority rights"¹. Jinnah, belonging to the minorities of Muslims in India and doubtlessly a person with

¹ Ludden (2002), p. 225.

‘Muslim identity’², identified himself at the same time as an Indian. But very latest in 1940, at the Lahore session of the Muslim League, it became clear that Jinnah’s Muslim identity prevailed over his Indian identity, which was declining the closer India’s independence approached. He articulated his concerns about the Muslims’ status and, according to Jaffrelot, asked for a separate state for the Muslims in South Asia.³ This reveals the existence of a second form of nationalism within the anti-colonial discourse, which became stronger as the ‘Muslim question’ became more imperative. Jinnah’s Two-Nation theory predicated that South Asia was composed of two nations, namely a Hindu-dominated and a Muslim State. The creation of “Pakistan became for Jinnah the ultimate manifestation and evidence of the Two-Nation theory”⁴. This ‘Pakistani Nationalism’ is described to be the “counter-hegemonic discourse” against Indian Nationalism.⁵

Contrasting these two main forms of nationalism, it can be seen that the Pakistani Nationalism is mainly based on the assumption that religion is the central factor for nationhood in South Asia. It was believed that Muslims need their own state in order to create their own nation, which cannot exist within a Hindu-dominated state. Pakistani Nationalism suggests that Islam unifies the people and thus serves as a valid criterion for nationhood.

This religious nationalism was effective in the short-term view to justify the creation of Pakistan, but at the same time could not solve the long-term needs of the newborn state.⁶ In particular, there was the need to accommodate the interests of many different groups of people, and it is questionable whether this “uni-dimensional nationalism, based on religion alone”⁷, can serve for this purpose. Pakistan’s culture, albeit unified through the same religion, is strongly distinguished. Generally spoken, different sets of beliefs within Islam and

² Although Jinnah is described of having a rather secular, westernized character (see Robinson (1986), p. 612), his lucid representation for India’s Muslims is evidence that he considered himself at first as Muslim.

³ See Jaffrelot (2002b), p. 12.

⁴ Mathur (1994), p. 39.

⁵ See Samad (1999), p. 379.

⁶ See Samad (1999), p. 375.

⁷ Qureshi (1972-73), p. 557.

many different ethnic, regional and linguistic groups exist, which produce uncountable interests and demands within the Pakistani society. Can belief in Islam really be so strong and ‘antagonize’ all these needs?

The many interests existing in the Pakistani state seem to make the nation’s unity weak. The question is why Pakistani Nationalism could not compensate for the state’s vulnerability.⁸ In the following section, regional groups within West Pakistan will be discussed, before turning to the ‘Bengali question’.

III. Regional identities in West Pakistan

“Created on the strength of Muslim solidarity, Pakistan almost immediately gave birth to its own minorities”⁹

As said, Pakistan was created with the ambition to be a homeland for all Muslims in South Asia, because among them many were afraid that Hinduism could dominate the national identity of post-colonial India and thus endanger their own status. In context of the Two-Nation theory, Pakistan was supposed to be the homeland of all Muslims, thus with ‘something like a dominant Islamic culture’.¹⁰ Islam was supposed to act unifying.

Jinnah’s ambition for Pakistan was to have one nation, one culture and one language.¹¹ But as Hasan’s statement above suggests, the problems of Pakistan’s national integrity began with independence. Although it had the ambition of being a state for the Muslim minority of British India, it became apparent that aggregating all Pakistanis simply under the Muslim identity was impossible, because strong ethnic distinctiveness existed. Ethnic nationalism in Pakistan is so strong that it almost constitutes distinct nationalities¹² and makes it de facto a

⁸ See also Jaffrelot (2002b), p. 14.

⁹ Hasan (2001), p. 311.

¹⁰ Although Art. 2 of the Constitution of Pakistan says that “Islam shall be the State religion of Pakistan”, Pakistan is still described in the literature as being secular. Jinnah wanted to create a model, in which the majority of Muslims could live along with the minorities. See Ziring (1984), p. 934. He described Pakistan’s concept as “secular nationalism”. This suits to the statement that “unlike Turkey, Pakistan has not successfully separated religion from politics” (Hussain (1976), p. 925).

¹¹ See Jaffrelot (2002b), p. 8.

¹² See Jaffrelot (2002b), p. 7.

multicultural state. Nasir Islam criticizes that “multiple identity in a multiethnic state is often ignored” and that Pakistan always relied on the strength of its uniform nationalism.¹³ The failure to accommodate the existing identities and ethnicities resulting of multiethnic nationalism has remained a threat for Pakistan.

Rahman offers an innovative approach to study identity and ethnicity. He asserts that identity creation in the modern context of decolonization is especially caused inter alia by language. At the same time, language is used to define group identity. Political leaders mobilize people in the name of “language-based ethnicity”. This, as he says, “is a modern phenomenon that is used to pursue political power”.¹⁴ In other words, identity in the modern context is in particular determined by language, and language is an important cultural symbol for ethnic groups. Since this transformation of identity has occurred in the modern context and has dramatically changed the notion of ethnicity, which hitherto has only to a small extent been influenced by language,¹⁵ the idea that identification of groups is enlarged to many distinct determinants, is also referred to as “new ethnicity”.¹⁶ And as one can see, “each of these [ethnic] groups [in Pakistan] is loosely defined by an admixture of linguistic and territorial attributes”¹⁷. In other words, the ethnic groups are mainly gathered in their provinces, although especially in recent years domestic migration has changed this. But this is not of importance for this paper.

To bring in one comparative perspective: Diverse India was mainly reorganized according to linguistic entities and was never threatened as strong as Pakistan in its national integrity. This supports the assumption that linguistic nationalism is an important phenomenon of modernity.

¹³ See Islam (1981), p. 58.

¹⁴ See Rahman (1997), p. 835. Similar is Samad (1999), p. 380.

¹⁵ See Rahman (1997), p. 834.

¹⁶ See Samad (1999), pp. 377-8.

¹⁷ Kennedy (1993), p. 126.

Urdu was declared as the only official language of Pakistan after independence. This project was doomed to failure, although “Urdu is an ‘Islamic’ language *par excellence*”¹⁸. The proportion of Urdu speakers in Pakistan, even in 1981, is said to be 7.6 % only.¹⁹ The decision to induct Urdu as official language especially benefited muhajirs²⁰ and the existing ruling elite and devalued ethnic identities, although Urdu is widely spoken, even among lower classes.²¹ The non-recognition of regional languages, and the fact that knowledge in Urdu (and English) is a precondition for receiving governmental jobs discriminated ethnic groups, who were strongly attached to their language identity.

Apart from Urdu, the five other major languages spoken in Pakistan are Punjabi, Bengali Pushtu, Sindhi and Baluchi, all with their own rich history and influence on the ethnicity of the people.²² Whereas Punjabis, along with muhajirs²³, were well off on terms of representation in the Pakistani governmental institutions and the military, the groups belonging to the latter four languages were rather underrepresented. Hussain summarizes that Pakistan failed to perform an “inter-ethnic recruitment” into their political system.²⁴

Talbot says that the preference for Punjabis in terms of recruitment has prevented the national integration of Pakistan, which therefore is often called “Punjabistan”.²⁵ Basically, all

¹⁸ Rahman (2002), p. 251 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ 1981 Census in Pakistan, extract in Rahman (2002), p. 250. This figure has to be seen skeptically, because the question was about the language ‘normally spoken at home’, and not about native speakers or capability to speak a second or even more languages. Additionally, Rahman (2002), p. 250-1, criticizes that the census did not even ask about English. Still, this considerable small number is remarkable.

²⁰ See Fn. 23 for a detailed description of this term.

²¹ See Rahman (2002), p. 251.

²² See Islam (1990), p. 7.

²³ See Hussain (1976), p. 926. Muhajir is an Urdu word and means literally refugee, whereas all persons who migrated from Indian Territory to Pakistan are referred to as. Muhajirs do not have any ethnic identity entrenched on the territory of Pakistan, because they migrated from various parts in India. Thus, while their identity pre-partition was influenced along religious and linguistic (Urdu) criteria, they had to redefine their identity along ethnicity thereafter, which makes its creation more complex (see Samad (1999), pp. 376, 381). This helps to explain the “Punjabi-mohajir axis”, which evolved by the early 1950s (see Samad (1999), p. 383), because they were able to seize power with their loyalty towards Punjabis.

²⁴ See Hussain (1976), p. 925.

²⁵ See Talbot (2002), pp. 52-3.

of the ethnic conflicts can be seen as being against the Punjabi domination at the center. Punjab is indeed described to be the “only refuge for Pakistani nationalism”²⁶.

It is wrong to say that the Punjabi domination only began with the secession of Bangladesh. In fact, the 1951 census counted Punjabis to be 25 % of the total population, but they occupied 80 % of the army and 55 % of the administrative posts.²⁷ The conflicts between the center and the ethnicities deteriorated with the induction of the one-unit scheme in 1956. West Pakistan was united into one administrative province in order to “counterbalance East Bengal”, which composed about 55 % of Pakistan’s total population.²⁸ This meant that West Pakistan technically only consisted of one province. The one-unit scheme also aimed to introduce *absolute* equality between the West and the East.

This move towards centralization means to be a rejection of the fact that West Pakistan has a multi-cultural design. Administering this heterogeneous region as one province is definitely a move attempted towards national integration, but caused just the opposite, since it fortifies the power struggle between different ethnic communities and the center. Linguistic (and ethnic) groups felt discriminated, because they had to surrender a big amount of power to the center. Additionally, Bengalis, about 2000 Km away from West Pakistan, were everything but amazed by this move, because it meant at the same time the rejection of the Bengali’s quest for provincial autonomy.²⁹ As said, the one-unit scheme was propagated to be a move towards equality between the two resulting provinces. But in fact, it is correctly argued that it rather discriminated Bengalis, since they constitute the majority of citizens of Pakistan.³⁰ A proportional representation would have been juster, but would have meant that East Bengal had the power to dominate Pakistani politics, provided that they spoke with one voice. But the leadership at the center could not take that risk.

²⁶ Qureshi (1972-73), p. 569.

²⁷ See Jaffrelot (2002a), p. 18.

²⁸ See Jaffrelot (2002a), pp. 20-1.

²⁹ See Samad (1995), p. 177.

³⁰ See Samad (1999), p. 190.

The cohesion of Pakistan remains a problem. It is interesting to note that virtually every of its provinces experienced an independence movement, based on different reasons. This shows the low degree of national integration. For example, the Baluchi movements for self-determination (1958, 1962-66, 1973-76) had to be suppressed three times violently by army intervention.³¹ Indeed, Baluchi nationalist see Pakistan consisting of more than one nationality due to the ethnic differences and asked for linguistic reorganization.³² Linguistic reorganization of states as quasi-federal move was a successful strategy used by India in order to secure the integrity of its union. Even in Sindh, the call for an independent “Sindhu Desh” arose. Interesting is also the point that apart from Sindhis, many mohajirs are also settled there and see themselves as an own ethnic community. This leads to the question of hegemony within Sindh and thus also to a basis of possible civil war between these two groups³³ in Sindh and consequently threatening national integrity, because muhajirs have, as said, considerable power at the center.

The given examples of ethnic conflict – or center-province conflicts – show that Islam was not sufficient to spread a uniform identity on the Pakistani people. Ethnic nationalism was more influential than religious nationalism. However, the most interesting example in this regard is the failure of West Pakistan to eschew the secession of Bangladesh in 1971. It is the ‘official’ proof that the Two-Nation theory and religious nationalism in South were ineffective and hence Islam too weak to keep the Muslims of South Asia under the ‘banner’ of Pakistan.³⁴ The force of Bengali – or Bangladeshi – nationalism created new facts.

³¹ See Rahman (1997), p. 833.

³² See Islam (1981), pp. 65-6. Paradoxically, Baluchistan is a multi-linguistic province. See Rahman (1997), p. 837.

³³ See Rahman (1997), p. 836-7.

³⁴ Apart from this, it has to be mentioned that even today, approximately 120 Millions of Muslims live in India.

IV. The secession of East Bengal

“The creation of Bangladesh was attributed to a variety of causes such as foreign intervention, economic disparity, geographical distance and Bengali intrigues. These issues, however, were all ensconced in the real problem precipitating the internal crisis: *that of Pakistan’s national identity*.”³⁵

Not even a quarter of a century after the British Empire lost its colony in South Asia, the Indian Subcontinent was the scene of the first successful secession after decolonization. In 1971, the events came in a rush. The leading party in East Bengal, the Awami League, had issued its six points demands to the center earlier in 1966. In brief, the central demand of the Awami League was a strongly decentralized model of Pakistan, with the center merely having the competence for core areas like Foreign Affairs and Defense. In other words, they asked for a strongly federalized system, or a confederation. After negotiations between the Awami League in East Bengal and the central government about the future status of Pakistan political system and its eastern wing failed, “Pakistan’s first war of 1971 began on the night of 25 March.”³⁶ After heavy fights, and finally after the Indian military intervened and captured the East Bengali capital Dhaka, the Pakistani Army had to surrender. East Bengal finally possessed the necessary the criteria of statehood on 16 December 1971. A new state named Bangladesh was born. The affiliation of East Bengal to Pakistan was history from then on.

Hussain’s citation at the beginning of this section brings it to the point. He alleges that Pakistani Nationalism was not strong enough to prevent the secession of its former province East Bengal. Referring to the point of Chapter II, that a comprehensive national identity does not prevent other identities to exist, the reason for the failure of Pakistani Nationalism seems obvious. Bengali Nationalism was the counterforce leading to independence. How could Bengali Nationalism prevail over Pakistani Nationalism, although Bengal was divided at the partition of India and Pakistan, with the consequence that the ‘divide and rule strategy’ should

³⁵ Hussain (1976), p. 924 (emphasis added).

³⁶ Sisson and Rose (1990), p. 133.

have tallied? A short excursion in the creation of Bengali Nationalism is necessary. It is an example how a regional identity can revive, redefine and persist, although it had to face severe extraneous influence.

Chatterjee sees the first partition of Bengal in 1905 as a crucial event for Bengali Nationalism to be practiced by masses. The British Raj wanted to divide Bengal, as it is said, for merely administrative purposes. But “on the ground that the people of Bengal were culturally one and indivisible”, “perhaps the first mass nationalist agitation in India” began.³⁷ Finally, in 1911, the British reversed their decision, inevitably due to the public pressure, which evolved from the feeling of being one culture and one nation. Indeed, Chatterjee sees entire Bengal being an “imagined nation” from this time onwards.³⁸ It is worth noting that Muslims as well as Hindus believed in this Bengali Nationalism, which is evidence that it was made up, if at all, only in a small extent of religious elements. It is mainly composed of their awareness of having a special culture with an own language and their own tradition of literature and so on.³⁹

Social scientists, studying rural villages in Bengal, have concluded that it does not matter of which descent the people are. Community life in Bengal in the past was determined by sociability. They even pointed out that religious holidays were often celebrated together.⁴⁰ The ‘harmony’ Bengalis lived together in, regardless of their religious affinity, raises the question why Bengal was divided at all at religious lines, as happened later. Was there no alternative?

Indeed, the idea for a United Bengal scheme was expressed from the Bengali Premier H.S. Suhrawardy. Not only was it considered that entire Bengal should go to Pakistan (because the majority of 54 % of the population were Muslims), but also a proposal for an

³⁷ See Chatterjee (1997), p. 27.

³⁸ See Chatterjee (1997), p. 30.

³⁹ See Park (1975), p. 456. Tagore is often cited as one symbol for Bengali culture and literature.

⁴⁰ See Park (1975), p. 457.

independent Bengal – a third state on British Indian soil – existed.⁴¹ This shows how strong Bengali Nationalism was, since it wanted to avoid to be divided in accordance with the Two-Nation theory.

However, the support for a United Bengal was by far not strong enough. The incidents in the wake of the forthcoming partition also captured West Bengal. The mass riots and killings in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946 are seen as an important factor why Bengal was finally divided despite Bengali Nationalist feelings.⁴² The Hindu feared that a United Bengal could be a “virtual Pakistan” due to the Muslim majority and rejected this scheme.⁴³ And last, but not least, it has to be mentioned that an opinion poll in April 1947 showed only 0.6 % of Bengalis in favor of a United Bengal, whereas 98 % preferred partition.⁴⁴ This actually deemed Bengali Nationalism to perish, because from now on an international border divided this culture, separating two hostile states. But already in 1952, a new form of Bengali Nationalism, containing ‘old’ elements, revived among Bengali’s in East Bengal, albeit on a smaller scale (because West Bengal was excluded). Furiously, Abul Hashim, spokesperson of the Bengali Premier Suhrawardy and thus supporter of the United Bengal scheme, already anticipated in 1947 what would happen.⁴⁵

The Bengali language movement began literally with the independence of Pakistan, because Jinnah and his successors wanted to introduce Urdu as the sole state language. On 21 February 1952, police used violence to combat activists in Dhaka, who opposed this move, and killed some of them. “This date became a symbol of resistance against Punjabi-dominated West Pakistani ruling elite”⁴⁶. In other words, this was a renaissance of Bengali nationalism.⁴⁷

⁴¹ See Chakrabarty (2003), p. 195.

⁴² See Chatterjee (1997), p. 37.

⁴³ See Chakrabarty (2003), p. 207.

⁴⁴ See Chakrabarty (2003), p. 209.

⁴⁵ See Chakrabarty (2003), p. 198.

⁴⁶ Rahman (1997), p. 836. See also Islam (1981), p. 60, who sees this development as the beginning for the Bengali demand for regional autonomy.

⁴⁷ See Islam (1981), p. 64.

In the chapters before, the importance of language as a factor for ethnicity has been underlined. Analyzing the starting point of Bengali resistance against the West Pakistani – or Punjabi – domination, one can see that it was the question of Pakistan’s state language, which set the ball rolling. The Bengali language movement mobilized the ethnically different Bengalis to fight against the supremacists of the West in the following decade.

It was too late in 1956 that Bengali was recognized to be an official language with the implementation of Pakistan’s first Constitution. On the one hand, it was only pretended to be equal with Urdu, because the center attempted to “Islamize the language by changing its script or eliminating certain letters”⁴⁸. Additionally, the envoys, who were sent from the Western wing to administer the East rather tended to use English or Urdu.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the dynamics of Bengali nationalism, albeit without popular mass support yet, were already too far progressed. The sharp increase of Bengali Nationalism and the resulting tensions between West and East Pakistan only a few years after independence can be explained by contrasting the ethnicity. West Pakistan is said to be culturally heterogeneous, while East Pakistan is characterized as being almost homogenous.⁵⁰ Hence, the common goal of requesting Bengali to be equal to Urdu and the end of discrimination of Bengalis in terms of representation was easy to formulate. Bengalis could speak in one voice against the domination from the West.

After General Ayub’s military coup in 1958, representation of Bengalis even declined. Indeed, the “military-bureaucracy-industrial complex” in the West subdued Bengalis even more.⁵¹ The aforementioned six-point demands and the quest for regional autonomy were expressed during Ayub’s era.

⁴⁸ Islam (1981), p. 63.

⁴⁹ See Islam (1981), p. 63.

⁵⁰ See Islam (1981), p. 58, and Islam (1990), p. 7. The current data of the CIA World Factbook 2003 confirms this. For Bangladesh’s ethnic groups, 98 % Bengalis is quoted, while the data for Pakistan does not even provide numbers but the listing of groups in accordance to the state structure. Tribes are not at all mentioned, which has to be criticized in regard of Pakistan’s strong tribal population, especially in Baluchistan and the NWFP.

⁵¹ See Islam (1981), p. 61.

Even immediately before the crucial civil war began in 1971, Shaikh Mujibur Rahman, the ‘father of Bangladesh’, did not demand an independent Bengal but greater autonomy in a completely decentralized Pakistan. Qureshi points out that Bangladesh was founded with the help of “militant Bengali nationalism”. Mujibur, after being released from prison, found given facts, namely independent Bangladesh instead of a strengthened Pakistani province of East Bengal.⁵² Islam was latest at this time no more a unifying force, because the Two-Nation theory turned into a “Three-Nation Reality”.⁵³

Nationalism is not static but dynamic and consequently has to be adapted to the changes in reality. One could consider the creation of Bangladesh as ‘the unfinished business of partition’, because Pakistan had failed to define a new national identity after independence, which could have been applied on all of its citizens. Bengali Nationalism finally turned out to be dominant over Pakistani Nationalism in the Eastern wing and defeated the latter, with Bangladesh as result. Or as Hussain puts it:

“In 1947 the Bengalis chose to be Pakistanis first and Bengalis second; in 1971 they chose to reverse the order through the force of ethnic nationalism and created Bangladesh. Ethnic nationalism had developed strong enough dimensions to defy national identity and destroy the state.”⁵⁴

Even after the birth of Bangladesh, Islam has not remained a unifying force in South Asia. Too many paradigms within Islam exist, which reprobate the claim that Islam is universal. The experience with sectarian conflicts in Pakistan shows how Islam itself can be disintegrating and will be briefly discussed in the next section.

⁵² See Qureshi (1972-73), p. 571.

⁵³ See also Mathur (1994), pp. 55-6.

⁵⁴ Hussain (1976), p. 924.

V. Is Islam itself unified? Sectarian violence in Pakistan

“Lately, sectarian conflicts between Shias and Sunnis have further challenged the notion that Islam provided Pakistan with a common platform.”⁵⁵

Although it is widely believed that the secession of Bangladesh will make Pakistan’s national integrity rather stronger,⁵⁶ doubts have to be expressed whether ‘solving the Bengali question’ has restored the Pakistani nationalism. Ethnic conflicts remain accurate even today. Additionally, the increase of sectarian violence between opposing groups within Islam is threatening the ‘internal peace of Pakistan’.

Sectarian violence in Pakistan has not only occurred against other religions like Christianity and Hinduism, but also in particular between two main communities of Islam, the Shias and Sunnis. Jaffrelot’s above citation underlines the challenge for Islam in this regard to be a unifying force. Indeed, it is said that the “national ethos of Pakistan” is endangered through this conflict.⁵⁷ Why has sectarian violence in Pakistan grown to such a high extent up to today and remains one of the main problems of national integrity?

Pakistan’s population consists in a large extent of Sunnis, who Nasr estimates to be between 75 – 85 % of the entire population.⁵⁸ Although sectarian violence in Pakistan existed already since the early 1950s,⁵⁹ it only became a severe problem after the Iranian revolution,⁶⁰ the first successful revolution by Shias. The conflict between Sunnis and Shiis transformed into a regional dimension, with crucial influence on Pakistan. Saudi Arabia and Iraq, both Sunni dominated, wanted to avoid that Iran gains too much influence in, or even transfers their revolution to Pakistan. Hence they supported Sunni forces in Pakistan. This is seen as one main factor why Sunnis in Pakistan used violent means against Shias.⁶¹ Additionally, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan brought Pakistan closer to the United States, one of the main

⁵⁵ Jaffrelot (2002b), p. 8.

⁵⁶ See Hussain (1976), p. 929.

⁵⁷ See Nasr (2000), p. 171.

⁵⁸ See Nasr (2000), p. 171.

⁵⁹ See Zaman (1998), p. 714, referring to Juergensmeyer.

⁶⁰ See Nasr (2000), p. 174.

⁶¹ See Zaman (1998), p. 704.

enemies of Iran after the Islamic revolution.⁶² Hence Pakistan has moved further away from Iran.

Now, it can be seen that Pakistan is a place, where Sunni and Shia Muslims clash. This conflict was not only driven from abroad. After seizing power, Pakistan's Military leader General Zia-ul-Haq wanted to create an Islamic state while augmenting the role of Islam in the governmental institutions and the Pakistani society. The induction of shariat law was a part of the program. This policy of Zia is also called Islamization.

Thinking about Islamization suggests that Islam was earmarked be a unifying force again, although it has failed to be so in the past, as the given examples have shown. But it happened that the Islamization conducted by Zia was in accordance with the Sunni belief.⁶³ Thus, this Islamization is also referred to as "Sunnification"⁶⁴, which means that the Sunni interpretation of Islam was seen as the real Islam by Zia. Many Sunnis indeed deny Shiism to be an integral part of Islam.⁶⁵ And since the Shia identity was severely threatened by Zia's Islamization, Shias began to agitate, as Zamman says, in 1979.⁶⁶ The conflict between Sunnis and Shias has caused many victims in the past and is still causing victims today.

The enmity between Shias and Sunis is also one of the main reasons why Islam will probably never be a unifying force in Pakistan. Zia's attempt to strengthen Pakistan's national identity by islamizing the state could not solve the sectarian violence. Hence, the Islamization effort, and the corresponding refusal to accept minority interpretations of Islam, rather looked like a failed attempt to revitalize religious nationalism and the common identity, on which principle Pakistan was founded. Today, President Musharraf seems to have understood the problem of Pakistan's national ideology and is trying to crackdown militant Islamists. The future will show whether this strategy will have success.

⁶² See Nasr (2002), p. 87.

⁶³ See Nasr (2000), p. 175.

⁶⁴ Nasr (2000), p. 176.

⁶⁵ See Zaman (1998), p. 693 and Nasr (2000), p. 176.

⁶⁶ See Zaman (1998), p. 693.

VI. Conclusion

Pakistan was founded in order to be a home for South Asia's Muslims. But Pakistani Nationalism with its basis on religion, defining Pakistan as nation for the "Muslims living in the subcontinent"⁶⁷, was only sufficient to justify its creation and could not integrate its diverse ethnicity. The religious ideology of Pakistan made it to be an "ideological state [which] was relying on a fragile basis"⁶⁸ at its birth. The Two-Nation theory was a useful mean to mobilize masses to fight for Pakistan, but could only be used for that purpose. After Pakistan was created, the Two-Nation theory was outdated, and the inability of the leadership to define a new concept of nationhood finally disintegrated Pakistan. Regional identities in the Western wing were acting against their own national identity and building movements against the Punjabi dominance of the center in accordance with their ethnic identity, because "which of these identities affects a person's action will depend on the situation in which the person finds himself"⁶⁹. In some cases, these movements even turned into secessionist movements. The center has not been able to accommodate the demands of all these groups and rather favored Punjabis and mohajirs. The use of extreme methods to integrate the country, like the one-unit plan, failed. It only boosted regional identities, which consequently did not act supplementary but against Pakistani Nationalism.

The creation of Bangladesh finally was official evidence that the Two-Nation theory was not sustainable. It rather suggested a Three-Nation reality. The center's discriminatory policies towards East Bengal in terms of representation and language issues, and centralizing moves like the one-unit plan were the platform on which Bengali Nationalism, strong in its historical origin and inevitably one of the driving forces of decolonization, revived. In the course of time, it developed a dynamic, which prevailed over their Muslim identity. Since Ayub's regime was not able to find a solution with greater autonomy and self-governance for

⁶⁷ Islam (1981), p. 56.

⁶⁸ Jaffrelot (2002a), p. 4.

⁶⁹ Bill and Freeman, as cited in Islam (1981), p. 58.

East Bengal, as Shaikh Mujibur Rahman of the Awami League asked for, the original Bengali movement for autonomy resulted in the secession of East Bengal, with the help of the Indian Army.

Finally, since Islam cannot prove to be universal in its practice, recent experiences with sectarian conflicts further questions the claim that Islam is universal. Sectarian violence and ethnic conflicts are devastating for the integrity of Pakistan, especially if the leaders are able to combine them. This would definitely enhance their dynamics.

India was more successful in terms of their national integration. The linguistic reorganization of states gave the regional identities more power, although India itself was quite centralistic, too. But using this strategy, regional identities have proved to be effective in supporting the national Indian identity. Pakistan was more centered than India, which according to Samad gave it less maneuver to manage ethnic conflicts.⁷⁰ The tactics used rather repressed the ethnic identities and caused them to explode.

Pakistan could have been more successful if they had – at least partly – decentralized their political system to accommodate more interests. The redefinition of the state’s ideology and the reorganization of provinces in a more federalized structure could have enhanced regional identities and finally “grassroots nationalism” to evolve and support a new Pakistani nationalism.⁷¹ It is not too late yet to start these reforms. The independence of Bangladesh should be seen as a warning shot. If the center continues to suppress its regional identities, Bangladesh could constitute a precedent.

⁷⁰ See Samad (1999), p. 385.

⁷¹ See Qureshi (1972-73), p. 569.

VII. References

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