



# Cornerstone Forum

*A Conversation on Religious Freedom  
and Its Social Implications*

No. 272. May 29, 2020

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## Transcript: Nation State Formation and the Muslim-Majority World

Middle East Action Team, Islam Action Team

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*The following is a transcript from the event: Nation State Formation and the Muslim-Majority World with Professor Recep Şentürk.*

Event Details and Speaker Biographies:

<https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/rfievents/webinar-nation-state-formation-and-the-muslim-majority-world>

Video: <https://youtu.be/OFwGFzpWkzs>

\*Transcript has been auto-generated and lightly edited for clarity though errors may still be present.

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**Jeremy Barker:** Good morning I'm Jeremy Barker, the director of the Religious Freedom Institute's Middle East Action Team. We thank you for joining this webinar today. The mission of the Religious Freedom Institute is to achieve a broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right - a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society and a driver of national and international security. And we do that in a number of ways through research and education programs and one of those is a series of webinars that our Middle-East and Islam and Religious Freedom Action Team are hosting on the relationship between Islam and the state in the Muslim majority world. And so this is the second in that series and joining me in this is the director of RFI's Islam and Religious Freedom Action Team, Ismail Royer. Ismail, thanks for joining me today.

**Ismail Royer:** Thank you for having me. So yes, I'm the director of the Islam and Religious Freedom Action Team and we're really excited for this - our second series in the webinar. I've been at RFI for about two and a half, almost three years now, I think. And this webinar is part of a series in which... actually a broader series where we've been doing in-person live consultations with Islamic scholars and non Muslim scholars, focused on understanding the scope of the scope of religious freedom within Islam.

And we did our first of the series in Rome. We did another consultation at Pepperdine University in California and our next one is scheduled for Sarajevo. During this period of COVID lockdown, we decided to do this series as a webinar to lead up to the Sarajevo event. So Jeremy, why don't you introduce Osman Softic, our colleague in Sarajevo.

**Jeremy Barker:** Yeah so Osman is our colleague, an academic and journalist based in Sarajevo. Osman thanks for joining us once again.

**Osman Softic:** Thank you Jeremy. Thank you Ismail. Good to be with you again. Thank you.

**Jeremy Barker:** As Ismail mentioned, these webinars are part of this broader consultation series that's looking at the core underlying principles that make up religious freedom and how those are understood in different traditions, both historically and looking at both the principles but historical case studies as well as in their contemporary issues. And part of the reason that the consultation was scheduled to take place in Sarajevo is because the Bosnian experience really has a lot to contribute to this discussion. And so Osman we really appreciate the perspective that you're bringing to these events from both your scholarship, but also the lived experience you have there in Sarajevo.

**Osman Softic:** Thank you Jeremy. I would like to thank the RFI for actually making the decision to hold this very important consultation in Sarajevo. Obviously as the saying goes, we dream and plan and the God is the one who decides for us. So obviously, this, as you mentioned, will have to be postponed for some other time in the near future.

However I think you are right - Bosnia and Sarajevo in particular - as it is called Jerusalem of Europe or at least Jerusalem of the Balkans - I think it has a lot to offer because the people of Bosnia and this region have lived for centuries in cohesion and cooperation. Some periods of conflict and discord as well but they were minor - very short periods of conflict - so I think traditionally Bosnia although it's a small and insignificant country in terms of wealth and technological advancement and so on.

But in cultural terms and I think intellectually and particularly in a religious field as well, it can offer some perspective that could be beneficial for the rest of the world. I think irrespective of the small size and the general role that Bosnia plays in the world. And obviously also, and I already emphasized this fact, that Bosnia and Herzegovina is perhaps one of the most successful examples and I always talk about it to my friends and colleagues from overseas that where the international humanitarian intervention has really given a positive result, where we have a dividend of peace. And for the last three decades we've had this democratic society. Although very imperfect and with a lot of difficulties and challenges but still the conflict hasn't returned. The people-to-people relations are good and I think it is progressing, albeit slowly, quite positively for a brighter future.

**Ismail Royer:** Yeah there's no doubt that Bosnia is a goldmine of cultural and religious and historical achievements and - we hope to explore - we will be exploring that in much more in-depth in future webinars. Jeremy, so we are waiting now for Dr. Recep Şentürk to call in. He has indicated to us that he is going to be a little bit late. Do you want to introduce who he is and give us his biography and let the viewers know who he is?

**Jeremy Barker:** Yep so I'll give a brief introduction and then we'll have him join us. Just before that, we'll have Ismail give us a bit of background on the first webinar on some of the points that Professor Greenfeld made. But yeah, our guest today joining us from Istanbul is professor Recep Şentürk, currently the president of Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul.

Professor Şentürk has degrees in theology and sociology from Marmara University and Istanbul University and his PhD from Columbia University. He's the author of a number of publications on topics related to what we'll be discussing today. He's been the director of the Alliance of Civilizations Institute since its founding and then for the last number of years, the president of Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul. So, very excited to bring a professor Şentürk into the conversation

today. And so I'll go ahead and bring him in and then Ismail, well you can recap a few of the key points to start the conversation.

**Ismail Royer:** Okay.

**Jeremy Barker:** Professor Şentürk, welcome.

**Recep Şentürk:** My warmest greetings to all of you from Istanbul.

**Jeremy Barker:** Thank you for joining. We're glad to... to have you as a part of this conversation and know that you have a number of things to contribute to this. So thank you for - as you're coming toward the end of your day and we're starting it here in the US- thank you for joining the conversation.

**Recep Şentürk:** Thank you for the invitation. I'm very happy to be part of this dialogue and the conversation.

**Ismail Royer:** Thank you.

**Osman Softic:** Thank you.

**Jeremy Barker:** So Ismail, well, two weeks ago we had Professor Greenfeld on - discussing the emergence of the nation-states. Recap for us a few of the most salient points from that conversation.

**Ismail Royer:** Sure yeah. So first, I want to say we're very, very blessed to have Dr. Şentürk on and we were really, really grateful and it's amazing that we have on this webinar - we have Dr. Şentürk in Sarajevo- I mean, excuse me - in Istanbul. And we have Osman Softic in Sarajevo and we have Jeremy in DC and me in Pennsylvania. It's really an amazing thing.

So in our last webinar - the first one - Dr. Leah Greenfeld, who is an expert on - perhaps the greatest living expert - on the nation state, on nationalism. She explained to us that there were no actual "states" in the pre-modern world as we understand them because they are modern states or the product of national consciousness and the phenomenon of popular sovereignty, or the notion of popular sovereignty. And so she said in that sense - although we often use the term "state" to refer to pre-modern political communities - strictly speaking the term "state" really refers to the contemporary phenomenon of nation-states. So she further explained that national consciousness - today the dominant form of consciousness, that is the view that all that really matters - is concentrated in this world in the mundane to the exclusion of the significance of the transcendental spheres - so in other words, that the nation and the state is the primary source of legitimacy. And therefore the people is the primary source of legitimacy, the primary source of sovereignty, and that this is a very new type of identity, she explained that [the idea of the nation state] did not exist before nationalism was born in England in the 16th century and then spread to other parts of Europe.

So prior to that, you know, the world was... the political communities in the world tended to be either kingdoms or feudal polities or tribal. Whereas today, the nation-state order has more or less

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spread throughout the world. And she explained also that with the notion of popular sovereignty - the notion that the people are the source of legitimacy - that God loses sovereignty in that situation and God becomes much less important. And she explained that in modern times, religion has gone from being the sort of, the legitimating factor of, or the lodestone or the foundation of order. It has become a tool in the hands of the state in the pursuit of worldly [goals]. She explained that our relation to the state, in fact, has almost taken the place of God Himself and that our relationship to the state, and in general to the nation, is very similar to the pre-modern relationship between the individual and God Himself.

And what was so interesting to us about this discussion of history is, we're very interested in what the thesis of thinkers like Wael Hallaq and Talal Asad and many others who have argued that as a result of all this, an Islamic state is in fact impossible because the pre-modern Islamic polities and Islam itself can only fully, authentically be lived in a polity which is fundamentally grounded in the transcendent and other structural features that follow from that. As opposed to the contemporary state which is arranged in such a way structurally and ideologically, as Dr. Greenfeld outlined, in a way that in fact is contradictory to Islam itself. And then of course the attendant things that came along with that like the collapse of the waqf system, the co-option of the ulema by the state and so on.

So we're very blessed to have Dr. Recep Şentürk on, who is an expert in matters of statecraft and politics and history, to explain to us how this phenomenon that began in Europe, this ideological and structural phenomenon, began to spread and did in fact spread to the Muslim world. The Ottoman Empire whose seat was in Istanbul - where Dr. Şentürk is located - was you know, it was dismembered and its parts became nation-states in the Muslim majority world. So what we'd like to begin with Dr. Şentürk, is asking him - if he could - how did the nation-state spread to the Muslim majority world and crucially, what changed from the pre-modern order into the world nation-state order that we have today?

**Recep Şentürk:** Thank you. The pre-modern and the modern statecrafts in the Muslim world is very different. Most of the modern nation-states in the Muslim world are installed by colonial colonizers, you know. They are products of nation building and state building and that's why it would not be appropriate to compare the rise of nations and states in the colonized regions in the world with the rise of nation states in Europe - so there are major differences.

First of all, like what's "nation" and is it appropriate to call many of the states in the Muslim world "nations" - let's say, you know, the Gulf states, you know, tribal states and like if you consider Arabs as a nation. So how many nations, how many nation-states Arabs you know, have today? Same thing for if Turks, you know, is a "nation" then how many Turkish or Turkic states are there? So the concept of nation is a very problematic and contestable concept: What's a nation? How are you going to define it? Can we manufacture nations? Can we build nations? So there isn't an objective reality that can be objectively called "nation." It is something crafted, built and then the state is built for it. Sometimes each state is built, then a nation is created for them, yes. And sometimes, you know, a nation is created, then a state. So in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and also the spread of colonization and European expansion, many states have been established by the colonizers in the formerly Ottoman lands as well as in Africa and in Asia, in different parts. After, they shared in those regions and they built nations and then the states as well. So we have to be aware of these differences. But at the abstract level you know, if you compare the pre-colonial

states in the Muslim world - by the way Muslims always had states - it is like the medieval Islamic history is different than the medieval European history because there was no feudalism involved. So there were like these empires, like Ottoman Empire, the Iranian Empire and also in India the Mughal Empire. So they were like big empires and centralized governments in those regions. Those states - they collected the taxes you know, from a very wide area, so it was not divided similar to the European feudal system. Even the... even during the Abbasid period there were small, you know, governing bodies but they were all connected to the *kehalifa* [caliph] at the center. So the philosophy was, the finance structure, was also different.

We should always avoid essentializing “Islamic state” the concept of Islamic state and Islamic political philosophy. The term used for a state in the traditional Islamic languages is *dawlah* and also *mulk*. These are all terms that are used and there are different genres, different literary styles in Islamic history about politics. For instance, politics and state are part of the theology, Islamic theology. Because the Shi’ah has its own doctrine about how a state should be established and how it should be run; what's the source of legitimacy? And Ahl as-Sunnah has its own views and doctrines on it. So Shi’ah emphasizes the lineage from Prophet Muhammad for the political legitimacy and authority, but Ahl as-Sunnah rejects that. And in Ahl as-Sunnah there is, you know, *bay’at*, the consensus or the consensual contract or agreement between the leader or the authority and the subject. It's more... it's more like contractual, more impersonalized understanding- its part of the ilmu-kalam. And also in *fiker* is also very important. And both in *fiqh* and *‘ilm al-kalam*, it is postulated that, you know, to live under a political administration is obligatory for Muslims, otherwise they cannot fully practice their religion. For instance like a Friday prayer - today is Friday right - so I mean you cannot... Friday prayer, in order to be legitimate, requires there to be a political authority and this political authority gives permission, you know, to hold Friday prayers, and this is in *fiqh*. So *fiqh* issues that in order for Islam to practice, there must be a state, a political authority. So there is *kalam* approach to politics and there is *fiqh* approach to politics.

And also people like Ibn Khaldun, their approach to politics is more empirical. For instance, Ibn Khaldun says that *al-mulku daruriyyun shar’an wa ‘aqlan*: “state is necessary, rationally as well as religiously.” Religion tells us that “state is necessary, you cannot live without state” and also, you know, reason tells us that you cannot live without the state, you must have the state. So Muslim thinkers, historians, or people who may be called social scientists, who look at the issue not from *fiqh* or theology perspective, they also postulated that the state is necessary. I mean human beings cannot continue without the state. So Ibn Khaldun says that you know, Sharia requires people to have a state - you know, a religious thing. But at the same time security - security you know in order for people to live in security - requires to have a state. And also their economic needs - they cannot meet their economic needs, you know. So this security argument is very common in the Western political thought as well and this economic argument also - division of labor and meeting the needs - is also very common. But there is something unique to Ibn Khaldun. He uses... he says that *uns*, I mean the friendship and socialization, is another need - like peaceful socialization. Friendship among people is also a very important need that cannot be met without the existence of state. So this is more like a psychological, social-psychological need for people to live in friendship and fellowship with each other. Because you may be very safe and all your needs may be provided but if there is no, you know, friendship, if there is no socialization, you wouldn't be happy. So he also sees this as a need for the establishment of a state and he very interestingly talks about *‘asabiyyah* as a source of authority and legitimacy.

And *asabiyyah* is a very important concept because it is very similar to what you said. I mean the popular... popular yeah, popular source of authority as people, you know. So he says, if there is no *asabiyyah* - no political legitimacy, no state. You know you cannot have a state without *asabiyyah*. I mean the collective solidarity or collective consciousness. The concept of *asabiyyah* is a multidimensional concept; it has a social psychological dimension and a political dimension, cultural dimension, religious dimension. And Ibn Khaldun explains the rise of every state with the concept of *asabiyyah*. He says without *asabiyyah*, you cannot have states and *asabiyyah* is the cement that brings people together, ties them together, as a single group under one political authority and it makes people to accept the legitimacy of that authority above them. So the concept of *asabiyyah*, you know, is part of Islamic political thought as well and it was taken into consideration and there is also something very interesting from Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun drew the image of a state as a circle. You know, I make in my classes on states and politics, I ask students to draw image of state. You know, I mean, we can make it like a test here also, like ask to draw image of state.

I mean if I ask you to draw image of state, what would you draw? So sometimes, you know, students draw some very interesting things but most of them draw a pyramid. Pyramid. Right? Because this is the modern understanding of state. But Ibn Khaldun drew a circle - a circle with eight components, eight components. And he called it *da'iratu as-siyasa*, the circle of politics, circle of politics. There are eight elements in that circle: there is a you know, a head of the state and there is the subjects, there is economy, there is army, you know, there is a justice system. So eight components which make the state and yes, where is the head of state? You may think it's at the center. No, the center is empty. mean a head of the state is one of the components, among the eight components. So this is something very interesting and very shocking.

So from Ibn Khaldun's perspective if you look at the process of modernization, you know, it is a new *asabiyyah* - it is a crafted *asabiyyah*, whether it is crafted indigenously or by the intervention of the colonizers. It's an attempt to create some popular legitimacy for a new state. But at same time, more importantly, it's a transition from circular understanding of state to a pyramid understanding of the state, because the nation-state - a modern nation-state - is built on pyramidal understanding of political authority. So the subjects - the people - is at bottom and then the ruling class at the top. So they vote once in a while you know, to elect the rulers, but they are subjects. And in modern literature the state is always depicted, illustrated, as a pyramid. So this is a transition, I think, from a circular model of politics to the pyramid-like understanding of politics and the Ottomans applied Ibn Khaldun's theories, especially this circular state model and they call it *da'irah 'adliya*, means the circle of justice, the same concept but they call it circle of justice instead of circle of politics because the Ottoman political thought was result-oriented. So politics is process, justice is outcome - the result.

So the goal of this circle system is to produce justice, so that's why they call it the circle of justice, referring to the expected outcome of the system. But Ibn Khaldun called it circle of politics, referring to the process, because there is this process. So this how I see the shifts - the transition - from the pre-modern understanding of a state to the modern understanding of the state. And of course other dimensions of it we can explore it through your questions.

**Ismail Royer:** Yeah thank you so much Dr. Şentürk. You've mentioned so much there that requires a lot of fun unpacking. The first thing I want to just mention for viewers is that when you're using the terms "state," [viewers of] the previous webinar would see that Dr. Greenfeld wanted to make a

distinction between, or she wanted to specify the terms “state” as a contemporary phenomenon. And I think some of the words that you were using like *dawlah* or *mur* are not necessarily “state” in the contemporary sense but they refer more to like...

**Recep Şentürk:** I disagree with this, I disagree with this because this is essentializing the modern concept of state and universalizing it. So this is a very narrow perspective. You know, people always had states, but different types of states. So you cannot say you know, “I have this model of state and if there are other modes I don't accept them.” So “state” means political authority and governance and throughout history people always developed many different models; like a Chinese state, Indian state, Roman state, Muslims and Medieval Europe, and Europe. So we cannot say a modern nation-state is the only state model. I mean you can say “modern nation-state did not exist before modernity.”

**Ismail Royer:** Right.

**Recep Şentürk:** Of course it wouldn't exist, because it's a modern phenomenon.

**Ismail Royer:** Right.

**Recep Şentürk:** But people had other types of institutions and arrangements to serve the same goals.

**Ismail Royer:** Yes no doubt. I'm just referring to like the terminology that she was using. But yes, no question there. So... so you mentioned and I read in your paper that you know that you sent us - discussing Ibn Khaldun's circle of politics and how the Ottomans adopted that and had a sort of circle, the circle of justice - and contrasting that with contemporary, the contemporary notion of the pyramid. And you critiqued modern, or contemporary like Islamist thinkers, and conceptualizing - or let's say like assuming this premise, assuming this model of of governance - and in failing to look back to to Ibn Khaldun and the Ottoman Empire's understanding of politics or governance as a circle, I thought that was really fascinating.

I wanted to ask you what is the, what is the - structurally - what is the difference after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, after the consolidation of these nation states across the Muslim world? And by the way you mentioned - it was a very important point - that many of these nation states are actually not really nation states, they're more states that are trying to you know, that are not necessarily with nations, you know. But the ideology, or the aspiration is nevertheless there to sort of... to have a state - that's sort of what has become the norm. And so what is the difference in terms of say, the *waqf* which was a critical part of pre-modern societies, that those were tended to be nationalized either by the colonizing powers or by the successor governments to the Ottoman Empire. You know, you have the *waqf*, you have the co-option of the ulema which began in the late Ottoman Empire but was consolidated and carried on and by the successor states. What has been the effect of those processes? Also one other thing I'll mention - but the end of the “millet system.” The millet system where you had a sort of legal pluralism and in the contemporary modern state legal pluralism is sort of anathema, even though to some extent, you have some vestiges, some leftover resemblances of that. But so between these, for example three phenomena - collapse of the millet system, collapse of the *waqf* system, the co-option of the ulema by the state, what has been the

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effect of that on Islam, the way that Islam is understood, practiced and for that matter, for minorities - religious minorities?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes. One of the very important dimension of the transition from the pre-Islamic state craft to the nation-state in the Muslim world is elimination of civil society, completely. Those nation-states that were installed or built in the Muslim world, they they crushed civil society organizations because they wanted to control the society completely, without any potential rivals against them. So *waqf* is part of civil society in the Muslim world because *waqf* is established by an initiative from society and is financed by society - by civil society. And *waqf* decides what to do, itself, not on orders from the state. So the leaders of the nation states or the ruling class, they saw this as a threat because it was not controlled by the state. Financing was not from the state and they did not get the orders of what to do, you know, from the state. So in order to have the society as the whole under the control, they destroyed the *waqf* system. And with the fall of the *waqf* system, you know, ulema also fell because *waqf* financed ulema, because ulema was not financed by the state, historically. Ulema had their financing coming from the *waqf*, so this gave autonomy and relative independence from the state to the ulema and also the madrasa system, you know, the education system was also financed by the *waqf* system. So ulema was also part of the civil society and the same with some Sufi orders. They were also closed down, let's say in South Arabia, in Turkey you know, they were outlawed because you know a Sufi order is an independent organization.

**Ismail Royer:** Yeah.

**Recep Şentürk:** I mean the Sufi sheiks, they are not appointed by the states and they generate their own financing and their membership does not depend on state approval. So it's an independent civil society organization. So nation states, they did not not like that type of civil organization. And the same thing for the millets, the minority groups - you know, those millets, they were minority groups- and they were organized among themselves under a religious head: like a Jewish millet, Orthodox millet, Armenian millet and they followed the religious head. But the modern nation-state ruling class, they did not like this either, because they wanted to subjugate and establish total control on every group in society. So they fought the *waqf*, they fought ulema, they fought sufi orders, and they fought millet system. And in the process of modernization, Christian minorities, Jewish minorities, did not like this secularization because they were aware that in the pressure of secularization they would lose their autonomy and freedom. So that's why, for instance, there is a Christian scholar called Sabah Pasha. So he's the first one who wrote a *fiqh* book, defending *fiqh*. Can you imagine a Christian defending *fiqh*, defending Sharia? Why? Because Sabah Pasha, he knew if Ottomans abolish Sharia and the millet system will be abolished, and the Christians will lose their relative autonomy under the state. So everything revolves around eliminating civil society and civil society organizations so that nation states can establish total control over society. But this was very consequential in the progress of society and democratic participation and also social peace. Yes, thank you.

**Osman Softic:** Yeah, Professor Şentürk, great to be with you in this fascinating conversation. You mentioned Ibn Khaldun - obviously there is a lot of symbolism, you're heading the university which carries the name of this famous Muslim scholar. My question to you is, do you think that the current crisis that the Muslim world generally is going through - and it's been going through it for many decades - could be overcome by reimagining or learning from Ibn Khaldun from the beginning- to reimagine his thought? Because historians, like for instance Albert Hourani, who studied the Arab



world - a quite serious authority - he mentioned that the Arab world experimented with not only secularism, but liberalism as well in the 1930s. And then after that came the period of this national awakening through socialist thought, especially in Syria and Egypt and then pan-arabism and the Christian scholars obviously played an important part in it, like Syrian Michel Aflaq for instance, together with Salah al-Din al-Bitar. But then again the military juntas took over, and it seems to me that the Muslim world has had a really rough ride. Is it, do you think, because they haven't - the Muslim countries or Muslim peoples, particularly the Arab peoples - haven't learned from Ibn Khaldun and what he... to say prophesized, so to speak, that other scholars in the West like Edward Gibbon and in most recent times, Paul Kennedy discussed the rise and fall of civilizations and empires. Could we learn, as of now, what can Ibn Khaldun and his thoughts teach us about reform and this *asabiyyah*? And how do you think Ibn Khaldun can direct the popular will of the Arab people towards the center? And how can they overcome the injustices, illegitimacy, and this crisis that is caused by entrenched elites in the Muslim world, and the disenfranchised masses - as we've seen on the Syrian case - failed to accomplish this task of popular will and creating a more just and democratic society?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes thank you very much for this question. I am the head of International Ibn Khaldun Society since 2006 and every two-three years, we organize International Ibn Khaldun Symposium where we discuss contemporary social, political, economic and cultural questions from a Khaldunian perspective. And our motto is “applied Khaldunism.” You know, we don't want praise of Ibn Khaldun, you know. We don't want you know, reintroducing ideas of Ibn Khaldun. In these symposiums we invite scholars to implement Ibn Khaldun’s concepts and methods to analyze one current issue - be it political, economic, social, or cultural. Analyze it and demonstrate the advantages of using a Khaldunian perspective, compared to the other existing alternatives. And we are attracting many scholars from around the world who are discontent with the existing perspectives in social sciences, in politics, in economics, in history, sociology, etc. And we argue that Ibn Khaldun is not the *precursor* of modern social sciences, but it is the *alternative* of modern social sciences. And our goal is to show that he is a good alternative through applied Khaldunism. So this is the best way to demonstrate that he provides an alternative to the existing theories. So Ibn Khaldun is a good alternative to understand the world today as a whole, not just the Middle East. If you want to understand the Europe, America, Japan, Africa, you have to use Ibn Khaldun, and we have a very interesting research trying to understand American society by using Ibn Khaldun, or European society by using Ibn Khaldun.

And actually there's a very interesting anecdote. Once there was a Sikh with a big turban. He came to make a presentation in the Ibn Khaldun Symposium, and all my colleagues, they said “who's this guy? What's he doing here?” I said, “you know he's a Sikh from India.” And he said, “what's he doing here?” I said, “he's going to explain the Indian economy by using Ibn Khaldun perspective,” and they were all shocked. I told them, “if he used one European economic perspective to analyze Indian economy, you wouldn't be surprised. Why are you so surprised he's using Ibn Khaldun’s perspective to analyze the Indian economy, right?” Because you know, we all became Eurocentric in our understanding. So like Ibn Khaldun Society is promoting Ibn Khaldun as an alternative - as a global alternative - to the existing positivist social sciences, because positivist social science is very reductionist. I mean Ibn Khaldun has a more comprehensive approach. There is an empirical level in his analysis, but those who see this similarity between Ibn Khaldun’s empirical perspective and some of the empiricist social scientists in the West, they say “wow he is the precursor of that guy!” But I mean, how can you say Ibn Khaldun is a precursor for Marx? Either you don't know Ibn

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Khaldun or you don't know Marx. How can you say Ibn Khaldun is a precursor of Auguste Comte? Either you don't know Ibn Khaldun or you don't know Comte. Because Ibn Khaldun's ontology is a multiplex ontology. It accepts that there is a material world and also there is a metaphysical world, and then there is the divine world. But Auguste Comte, Marx, is a materialist. They only act in one material world of existence. So how can you say these are the same people?

And also Ibn Khaldun has multiplex epistemology. He sees empirical research as a source of knowledge, but at the same time rational thinking as a source of knowledge, and he also accepts divine revelation as a source of knowledge. This is what I call multiplex epistemology and traditionally Muslim scholars called it *muratib al-'ulum*. And also Ibn Khaldun accepts the legitimacy of multiple methods - multiplex methodology. And this is called, *muratib al-usul*, the different methods. I mean I can elaborate on these things but it would take a long time. I'm just drawing your attention. If we apply this Khaldunian multiplex perspective to modern society, be it Islamic or not Islamic, I believe that we'll be better off.

For instance now we have pandemic, you know Ibn Khaldun talks in *Muqaddimah* about pandemic. And he says that the big problem is that people during a pandemic, they try to maintain their previous habits. This is what makes them die, not the pandemic itself, okay? They ignore that there's a new condition, they want to keep going on the same way, you know. So he says this is what kills them, not the pandemic lay itself. Because it's possible to protect yourself from the pandemic, but if you think there is no pandemic and you want to keep going the same way as before... So now they are talking about "new normal" right? So Ibn Khaldun kind of reminds that when there is a pandemic, you have to change your life because of the new conditions.

So there are many things that we can learn from Ibn Khaldun, but most importantly this concept of *asabiyyah*, this popular sovereignty, and the people as a source of legitimacy, and also this circular governance. And I believe you know, nation-states suffer today from big problems, and I see that this pyramid-like structure is a big problem and we need to reform our state system everywhere in the world. Whether in America or in Europe or in the Muslim world, my proposal is that we have to shift to the circular state model, as proposed by Ibn Khaldun and as implemented many different states, including the Ottoman... and Ottoman is not the only one. The contribution of the circular understanding of state is that it is more egalitarian and it allows participation in governance. And today, the problem with the political process is that some people are excluded from the political process and they are alienated and then they react, either through terror or some other ways. So we need a more comprehensive, more egalitarian understanding of politics and the political process to allow all segments of society to involve in politics and *asabiyyah* I think, is something we need to really appreciate - especially during the process of pandemic because social solidarity is very important; not only for the political process to function very well, but at the same time when you handle the crisis. So today we have a big crisis in the world and we learn that no one is safe until everyone is safe in the world. And this reminds us that individualism is not the best way to go. We need *asabiyyah*, we need solidarity to help each other. So this is something that we can learn from Ibn Khaldun and apply today.

**Ismail Royer:** Dr. Şentürk I know Jeremy has a question, but I wanted to ask you about the concept of *asabiyyah* and the relationship between that and the contemporary notion of popular sovereignty. So as I read Ibn Khaldun, he discussed *asabiyyah* almost in terms of which - they translate in English as "group-feeling" or "group solidarity" - he seemed to be discussing it... it

seemed to me to be discussing it in terms of a pragmatic necessity. In other words for example, he talked about the way that the Prophet Muhammad (*ṣalla'Allahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*), he'd never... he was aided by the *asabiyyah* or the group feeling of the Arabs and that the group, the *asabiyyah* of the Arabs was an asset for these people. And then likewise the *asabiyyah* of the Persians and other - let's say other peoples - that played very important roles in the the governance of the Muslim societies, that these were necessary just in terms of pragmatic necessities to governance. As opposed to today with the concept of popular sovereignty as it sort of developed in...at least in the West, the idea is that the people are the source of legitimacy. In other words, not just in a pragmatic sense, but almost in a sort of you know, reality. In other words the people are the ultimate source of sovereignty, which I read it as somewhat different than just that sort of "group feeling." What's your take on that?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes so this is a very important comment. So Ibn Khaldun is not talking about what it should be.

**Ismail Royer:** Right.

**Recep Şentürk:** He's talking about what it is. So he observes, in reality, that if there is no group feeling to accept the legitimacy of a state, the state cannot survive. And he also warns against this disintegration of the *asabiyyah* due to individualism. So if you have individualism then this *asabiyyah* may disintegrate and as a result this would have negative consequences on the survival of the state. Because those people who advocated for nationalism, they always used the concept of *asabiyyah* for nation building, because they said you cannot have a nation without *asabiyyah*; I mean, like a people sharing the same common identity as a nation and also the solidarity in the nation. And so in the modern Western political thought they are talking about what it should be. So they are saying people *should* be the source of legitimacy, which I believe is a dream never realized, okay? They produced some mechanisms, some mechanisms like voting, elections, etc. And these are all debatable; whether it's enough to have an election in five years, to have people vote, and then claim that, you know, people is sovereign and they are the ones who are ruling. I mean, it's a construction. I took theory of democracy from Sartori. He is a famous political theoretician. So Ibn Khaldun's perspective is more empirical - he's talking about it is in reality - and the theories you are referring to, they are talking about actually said normative approach; how things should be. I completely agree. I mean the idea is very good; people should be sovereign. But how are you going to realize it in practice? It's a big question.

**Jeremy Barker:** Yeah well I wanted to bring in a point you made earlier but also one of the questions that we just got from one of the viewers related to, kind of the decreasing in religious plurality in many Muslim majority countries. And this touches a little bit on what are the points you made in your opening remarks of, as states were formed following the collapse of the Empire, some cases you had a state established, and then this process of creating a nation to be a part of that state. And whether we look at the Turkish experience, Egypt, Iraq or others, this question of what is the nation? And who belongs? And whether it's on ethnic divisions or religious divisions? And in this shift to more of a pyramid conception of the state, you have an administrative structure forcing a conception of identity onto the populace. And so what are some of the impacts of that, of kind of a top-down creation of a nation and the identity, and it has impacts - certainly we could look at religious minorities as one example - but even within the Muslim community of a particular type of Muslim, fits with the conception of a Turk? You could be a Turkish Muslim, but just a particular

type, and others not. So how that kind of creating, of national identity as that's kind of forced on, what are the impacts of that? And then to that question of as we look - now this kind of decrease in religious plurality - what do we do about it?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes I see that today the biggest problem in the world is *diversity management*. Diversity is increasing in the world - in particular, due to fast developing transportation and communication. So today we don't have homogeneous societies. Maybe a century ago, Europe was completely Christian. Today - you know - in Europe there are Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus - you know - many different religions and the same thing in America - it's no longer only a purely Christian country.

So you have Muslims everywhere but Christians in the Muslim world and Buddhists everywhere and other religions in Buddhist countries. So diversity is very much increasing and I call this new condition as *open civilization*. So today civilizations have no borders; have no gates; have no windows - you know - all civilizations, they are intermingled with each other and in this conjecture, diversity management becomes the most important problem in the whole world today.

I mean like we are now watching in the news that a black man was killed in America and there's a big problem. So this problem is a diversity management problem like you have black and you have whites. I mean you need to manage them - you have to fairly administer them and the same thing like the problem of Islamophobia is another problem. And in the Muslim world, under the nation states, they did not know how to handle...manage the minorities. But traditionally Islamic civilization was very successful in diversity management.

I mean what's New York, California, or Berlin, or London today was like Baghdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Bukhara, Istanbul - you know these cities, they were very cosmopolitan cities - you know - Christian, Buddhist, Hindu minorities. They all lived in these places in particular - you know - like people are very familiar with the Andalusian diversity management: Christian, Jewish, Muslims living together or Bosnian or Ottoman. But people are less familiar with Indian practice because in India, Buddhists and Hindus they lived under Islamic rule and they were granted the same rights Christians and Jews were granted. And so I did research about this: Why - you know - Muslims granted rights in particular field of religion to all religions? What's the - you know - philosophy or legislation or morality behind this?

I came to discover that Islamic law and politics is based on a very key concept and this concept is *adamiyya*. And *adamiyya* means you know "Adam-hood" or being a child of Adam. So in Islamic law rights are granted to *adamiyya*, so any child of Adam has rights regardless of religion. And so Hindus they are *adami*; buddhist are *adami* and Zoroastrians in Iran worshipping fire but they're also *adami* so they're all granted these basic fundamental rights. So this is a very universalistic perspective and this is one of the things that we lost during the transition to the modern nation-states because modern nation-states accepts citizenship based on very narrow perspective and it accepts only positive rights granted by a positive law to the citizens.

But traditional Islamic law Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali schools - you know with the exception of the Shafi'i school - it requires more detailed discussion, I can explain if you like. So these three schools accept that rights are granted to *adamiyya* in every human being, regardless of the race, regardless of religion, have these rights: inviolability of life, inviolability of religion, inviolability of property,

inviolability of honor and family. So these rights are granted to the *adamiyya* and I have articles on these issues as well.

So in the modern - in the process of modernization, Muslim political thought lost this universalism because Muslim political thought imitates national ideology and pyramid-like - you know - understanding of politics. So Muslims need to regain you know this universalistic understanding based on *adamiyya* and I believe this would really help in *diversity management* in the Muslim world. Also, Muslims are very well positioned in helping in Europe, America, and other parts of the world in diversity management because Islamic civilization has a very rich legacy and experience in diversity management and they built philosophy, morality of diversity management both through kalam, *fiqh* and also *tasawwuf*, the Sufi approach is also very important in respecting the other and diversity management.

So it's very unfortunate that, you know, in the process of secularization and modernization, our ruling elites it became alienated to any religion, Muslim or non-Muslim and they see a religious community as a threat to homogeneous national entity. So they try to homogenize them and subjugate them, and in the process both Muslims and non-Muslims suffer.

**Jeremy Barker:** I mean that's exactly right and it's something that not only is a need for a recovery of that concept of *addameer* in the Muslim tradition; within Christianity, the the idea of human dignity based in someone's being made in the image of God grounded from Genesis and that provides universal principle. From that flow all of these other rights and values, purely because of an anthropology of who every person is. And so that's critical to diversity management and as RFI, we often think about this.

That's one of the values that religious communities bring to bear on these questions of diversity management or social and political questions is being able to bring that grounded anthropology to bear on these questions. So we're coming to the end of the time; maybe bring in one final question from one of the viewers about: is there a future beyond the nation-state for the Muslim majority world? I know for Ismail, Osman, and I we plan to have a number of conversations on that exact question but - a question we have today - as you think through this Professor Şentürk, what are your thoughts on this question?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes. There is a very striking passage in Peter Berger, this well-known renowned sociologist of knowledge and religion. He says that we now live in a condition and we think this is forever - it will never come to an end - but he says look at history. You know people who live in those historical periods, they also thought the same way but history always keeps changing and thinking that the modern condition in which we live is forever... is rejected by a simple observation of how history changed and how many periods took place in history. So our modernity, post modernity, nation-state, these things will all come to an end but we cannot predict exactly when and how, but nothing is you know forever in this world. *Kulla maa 'alayhi fan*, you know - everything on this earth is temporary.

This is what God reminds us, *li kulli ummatin ajal*, every society, every community has an end. Nothing is forever, of course the nation-state will also come to an end and I am looking forward to it!

\*laughter\*

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**Osman Softic:** What would be the alternative to it? We tend to think - Professor Şentürk - about nation state as a given, as end of history in itself, but one of my professors in Australia, Anthony Milner, from the Australian National University, one very well-known historian once said: “How about we reimagine the empires again because there might be something to learn from this kind of political system of the past.”

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes, one of the things our modern education and the system teaches us is modern arrogance. We think all previous generations are stupid; they knew nothing and we are the smartest people to live on the face of the earth. I mean, I believe this is arrogance and I agree with your professor that there are many things for us to learn from historical experiences of different civilizations, different religions, different nations. I mean, of course, the past cannot be replicated today - it's the past.

Ottoman Empire is gone. Abbasid is gone. Andalus is gone. Roman Empire is gone. But there are things that we can learn from them - in particular, we can learn this concept of *adamiyya* to build upon it - a universalist inclusive understanding of politics, law, and morality. And is the common ground for all - Universalist ideologies and religions. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism - they are all based on this concept of *adamiyya*. Their message is very much universal so this concept of *adamiyya* I believe, is very important and I hope that what should replace a nation-state should be a more inclusive system - an open civilization. An open civilization open to all religions, cultures, and ideas based on a fair diversity management system and this diversity is very important because nation-states assumed that we can eliminate diversity and this was a false expectation.

It can never be realized because it's dictation of nature and God. God created us in a diverse way and there is no way to turn us into robots or machines, thinking the same way and feeling the same way. So we have to take as given that we are diverse and create an inclusive and fair diversity management. Otherwise diversity would be a big source of problem - clash and conflict. However if diversity is managed well - in a fair and just way - it will be a source of prosperity for the future.

**Jeremy Barker:** Yeah, I know. We're nearing the end of our time. We had one good question that comes and that touches right on this - let me bring it up - Of contrasting the idea of the millet and legal pluralism, versus the more modern idea of universal human rights. Which, in a sense, may be since perhaps 1948, the attempts to get to a more inclusive society has been largely within this universal human rights structure or paradigm. Could you give us some of your thoughts on contrasts, shortcomings or otherwise within kind of universal human rights as at least applied and getting towards the more open society that you just mentioned as the needed aim?

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes so the millet system was developed as a tool of diversity management - managing religious communities. So Muslims they were called a millet... Christian... every denomination like Orthodox millet, Armenian millet, Jewish millet and later Protestants millet and Zoroasterian millet, Hindu millet, Buddhist millet so this was a tool of diversity management. Members of these millets - they were all given the fundamental rights based on *adamiyya* so they all shared the same fundamental rights in morality of life, property, religion, mind, honor, and family. They all shared these rights and from this perspective, there is no contradiction between the philosophy or the normative system behind the universal declaration of human rights and the rights given through a dominion in Islamic law - these basic rights.

So every religious community under the millet system was given autonomy to manage its internal affairs and also implement the private law like inheritance... marriage within that community. And in the Ottoman Empire, these religious communities - they were represented in front of the state by millet pasha, the head of millet. They even collected taxes from their own communities as representatives of the states. But during the period of modernization, millet system was abolished and universal citizenship was introduced and this was also a process of secularization so religious identity was completely disregarded. Now whether you are Christian, Jew, Armenian - we don't care, you are Turkish citizen. So with the introduction of universal citizenship, millet system was abolished everywhere in the Muslim world.

So millet as a group - was a massive mediator between state and individual. In the new secularized system, there was state and individual - no mediator group between the two. I have an article on this issue, *From Dhimmi to Citizen*. Under the traditional millet system, non-Muslims they were called dhimmi but under the modern nation-states everyone was called citizen, and this process started after the Tanzimat era but as I have mentioned, even some of the members of those millet groups resisted and objected against this process. But this was a kind of irresistible universal trend everywhere - like almost all countries adopted this universal citizenship and it was accepted by Turkey and as well as other countries with Muslim majority populations.

But officially religious identity is disregarded - ignored. Like we are all Turks, we are all Syrians, we are all Arabs - religion does not matter. But religion is a reality and whether we accept it or not, it's there.

**Ismail Royer:** Actually this discussion and the question helped to lay the groundwork for a future webinar that we'll be doing specifically on this question because it's very interesting that many scholars have argued that this transition from group identity rules to individualist citizenship based rules has actually ironically had a negative impact on the rights of groups.

Although you know individuals may have rights but this disregards the rights of groups and that this actually has had, in many ways, a negative effect. So there's now a movement aside...

**Recep Şentürk:** Oh sure yeah in Muslim society also. I mean in this process in society, groups they're also eliminated.

**Ismail Royer:** Fascinating discussion... you've really - you know - what we really wanted to do this session was to lay this foundational groundwork for future webinars and we've really done that so we're so blessed and grateful that you were with us today to share your wisdom. Jeremy, do you want to close us out?

**Jeremy Barker:** Sure. Yes. Thank you so much Professor Şentürk.

**Recep Şentürk:** You're welcome.

**Jeremy Barker:** For the really fundamental principles and historical perspective that were laid and we'll be sure to include some links to some of the articles that you mentioned - some of the papers you've done on *adamiyyah* and some of these other topics.

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**Ismail Royer:** *Circle of Justice*, We'll have that as well. The article that you wrote on that.

**Jeremy Barker:** Yep so thank you very much and for joining us, Osman as well. Thank you always for your insightful questions and contributions to the discussion.

**Ismail Royer:** I hope we're all reunited in Sarajevo in October.

**Recep Şentürk:** Yes, inshallah. Inshallah. I miss Sarajevo!

**Osman Softic:** ... conference a few years ago with Professor Bakr Kalia [ph] on [unintelligible] - that was supposed to be in the same venue. Hopefully everything will work out later on. Thank you Jeremy. Thank you Ismail. Thank You professor. Great to meet you.

**Jeremy Barker:** Definitely. And continue to watch the Religious Freedom Institute website at RFI.org for more resources on these and other topics so thank you all and see you next time.

**Ismail Royer:** *Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatub.*

**Recep Şentürk:** *Wa alaikum assalam, wa alaikum assalam.* Stay safe. Stay healthy!

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