An Interview With Kamran Matin, The University Of Sussex

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Especially the social media, but to some degree international media too, is full of photos of surrendering Daesh members in Syria. But is Daesh really over? Or, better to ask, how come that a cruel organization like Daesh came into existence in the first place?

Kamran Matin is an associate professor of international relations at the University of Sussex who mainly works on the Middle Eastern modernity from the perspective of international historical sociology. I first met him in Brussels, and he kindly agreed to do this interview for DEMOS, on his recent article where he gives a historical sociological account of the rise of Islamic State in Iraq, even before it turned to be one of the most overtly violent organisations that the world has ever known. Kamran, unlike many other researchers and commentators, related the rise of IS in Iraq back to the historically coercive, top-down nation-state formation in Iraq and the (geo-)political and social dynamics underpinned this process in the history of the modern Iraq. Kamran's article first revisits the relationship between capitalism and nation-formation; then follows its particular pattern of development in the Middle East and how its socio-political and economic contradictions created the basic context within which IS came into existence. Such way of argumentation has an explanatory power for the rest of the region to a considerable degree and it is therefore profoundly related to the possibilities of peace in the region. As a relatively new perspective unknown to readership in Turkey, Kamran's approach on these dynamics at the origin of conflicts in the broader region shall open new windows for a better understanding of the current conjuncture and political*

possibilities for the future.

YS: I will first start with your approach to International relations (IR) because you are not a mainstream IR scholar. So how do you approach IR theoretically?

KM: My research is located within historical sociology sub-field of IR. In that sense my research is concerned with large scale social and historical change. IR comes into this research agenda, in terms of the ways in which relations between societies enters into their internal development individually and how that developmental dynamic itself reflects back on relations among societies. Instead of repeating the long phrase 'relations between societies', the strand of scholarship I am part of uses the term 'the international' by which we mean a particular dimension of social reality arising from the fact that there are always more than one society in the world. So, in that sense my research generally tries to provide new understanding of specificities of late development, specifically Middle Eastern experiences of modernity, in terms of the ways in which these specificities can be understood theoretically by theoretically incorporating the international dimension of their historical constitution. So, in that sense, I constantly try to challenge but also provide alternative to, exceptionalist, orientalist or essentialist accounts of Middle Eastern modernities. The 1979 Iranian revolution's Islamic character, ISIS, even beyond Middle East, phenomena like Russian and Chinese revolutions, have all traditionally been difficult to theorize as part of a general social theory such as Historical Materialism (HM) to which I critically subscribe. So, theoretically my research also seeks to show that a revised version of HM which takes into account the causal significance of the international can theoretically comprehend seemingly exceptional phenomena, such as those mentioned above, without falling into the traps of Eurocentrism or (cultural) essentialism.

YS: Thanks, so I know that you are deploying a particular reinterpretation of Trotsky's "uneven and combined development" (UCD) as your theoretical framework. Could you briefly elaborate on the causal significance and mutually reproducing relationship between the 'internal' and 'external' in the context of UCD? This will make sense especially for the questions coming afterwards.

KM: Ok, as you say my theoretical framework to understand and investigate the international dimension of social change has been Trotsky's idea of UCD. So, the idea is rather simple but quite profound in terms of what it means when it is applied. It begins from the notion of 'unevenness' which basically suggests that at any given point in history one will always find different, multiple social formations. They are different in size, in their internal constitution, ecological endowments, geographical features and so on. So, unevenness captures difference but also inequality between multiple societies etc. From this, the second part results: combination. 'Combination' reflects the fact that any individual social formation be it a clan, a tribe or at whatever other scale, always coexists with other differentially developed and differentially constituted formations. This means whatever dynamics that is at work inside any of these units has the impact or influence on other formations' developmental dynamics. So strictly speaking, in this framework, there is actually no foundational separation between what we call internal and external. These are mostly analytical terms. So, for example what is internal to a particular country is a result of the combination of some phenomena from within and some phenomena from without. So, in a way internal is already partially external and external is already partially internal. However, when we look at a particular period in history at the level and scope of that chunk, those phenomena are solid enough to be considered analytically distinct for the purpose of analysis.

YS: And what about 'development'?

KM: So, 'development', which is the third term of the idea, results from this coexistence and interaction between multiple differentiated societies and therefore is always 'uneven and combined' and never linear or singular. And this basic premise has quite revolutionary intellectual results, especially in the field of Middle East studies. Because the field arguably still struggles against semi-orientalist / neo-orientalist notions where cultural essentialism, which is a form of 'internalism', is often seen as the key to understanding any specificity of the region's political or social history. Similarly, many critical or Marxist approaches focus solely at capitalist dynamics often with a focus on domestic class structures and relations. But UCD allows a genuinely interactive conception of social change that does not reduce developmental specificity to either internal or external dynamics but their specific forms of interaction and hybrid products this interaction entails. This is why UCD has significance far beyond non-European world and the Middle East in particular. In fact, UCD has been used to produce new accounts of phenomena such as the rise of capitalism, the First World War,

fascism, Brexit, and Trump.

YS: You are talking about the work of Kerem (Nisancioglu) and Alexander (Anievas)…

KM: Yes, and the pioneering work of Justin Rosenberg in particular. Many reference points of modern social and political thought have been deconstructed and reconstructed through this idea.

YS: We will now be talking about your recent publication on *Daesh*, on the rise of Islamic State in Iraq. You wrote about the particular interactions between Shi'a and Sunni Arabs and then the Kurds in the North in the Iraqi state formation. Of course, this is just one layer that you are elaborating on. Yes, it was astonishing to read a different account on the rise of *Daesh* which we often miss. Unfortunately, the current state of Middle East studies as well as IR studies do not allow us to see the structures within which this kind of organisations emerge. And they are not coming into existence just all of a sudden. There is an accumulation and some certain forms of interactions behind that. And in that sense, your article was one of the most exploratory ones that I read. I just want you to explain the corner stones of your publication. What anyone but particularly the readership in Turkey should know about your diagnoses on the rise of ISIS? What is the core?

KM: Like you, I didn't think ISIS or something like ISIS, could just come from nowhere. So, when I was doing my literature review, basically I came across two kinds of accounts. One was very specific, typical security studies and/or orientalist accounts which implicitly or explicitly suggest that Islam –being allegedly intrinsically 'anti-modern'– generates a reaction among at least some Muslims to Iraq's reconstruction as a modern polity etc. Other works in this genre deal narrowly with specific features of ISIS: how it operates, its strategic use of televised violence, its resources, how it taxes and how it recruits and so on. This kind of arguments is very narrow and particularistic. It never actually provides historical and/or sociological explanations for how such a phenomenon is actually possible. The second kind of account I encountered was broadly Marxist which typically resolves ISIS to capitalist contradictions. These accounts are so general that you can't really disagree with its basic claims. But we need more concrete and more historical explanations. I was basically facing polarised accounts between over-specific and overgeneralised.

YS: Given the literature, what has been your approach in particular?

I approached ISIS in terms of the contradiction of modern nation-state formation as part of a wider process of uneven and combined development as I briefly described before. Because the fact that ISIS basically represented a ‘sectarian’ conflict already suggested that the project of nation-state building in Iraq had failed. Because if there actually was an Iraqi ‘nation’ then you would expect the political loyalty of all sections of Iraqi society to be to the Iraqi nation-state rather than to their particular sub-national or supra-national community leading to inter-communal conflict and sectarian war. I tried to look at the nature of the nation-state formation in Iraq. And this required a prior conception of the nation and that is, I think, in a way the key point even though it is not fully dealt with in this particular paper. I am currently writing a paper where the argument is presented properly. The basic problem is that the dominant theories of the nation are modernist but there is no adequate account of the relation between capitalist modernity, nation-formation and nationalism. This is especially important since historically speaking powerful nationalist movements have emerged in societies with little or no capitalist development. So, we almost intuitively know that nations in the sense of peoples’ loyalty to, and membership of, abstract or imagined communities did not exist before modern times. But we don’t have a compelling account of how exactly this came about or what is the sociological content of the nation, as a key feature of capitalist modernity.

YS: In that sense, I suppose, your engagement with the theories of nationalism rests upon the nexus of capitalist development and its global expansion.

KM: To address these fundamental questions I engage with Benedict Anderson, who is arguably the most influential thinker on nations and nationalism. In this paper I very briefly argue that basically Anderson accepts that the rise of nations was possible when the old order essentially dissolved. The nation emerges from the intersection of three main processes: the collapse of personalised, dynastic rule, decline of religious ideas, and the rise of print capitalism which brought vernacular languages to mass circulation breaking the epistemic monopoly of sacred languages. All of these are related to, if not produced by, capitalism but Anderson never theoretically or substantively connects them. Thus in Anderson’s work the relation of the nation to capitalism as a totality, as a specific mode of social organisation and reproduction remains under-theorised. His argument is something like

this: There are contextual conditions: end of absolutist and dynastic rule, the decline of religious beliefs and the rise of print capitalism as a technology. And once nation or nationalism emerged in one place (Latin America for him) then it travels and expands. The nation is a ‘modular’ form. It is transplanted onto other countries or formations. So that’s how he explains the rise and spread of the nation as a form. There is not a substantive and systematic relation between nation-formation and capitalism.

My argument is that Anderson faced the same problem that most theorists of the nation and nationalism have encountered. He knew capitalism was central to these phenomena. But he also saw that nationalism emerged in contexts where there was little or no capitalist development. Because he did not conceive of a mediation, i.e. through the inter-societal, he stuck to an internalist method, which forced him to dilute the role of capitalism sociologically.

YS: If this is the case, how do you differentiate your approach from his?

In the framework I use, there is no such a problem. Because capitalism emerges in one place, but it immediately affects everywhere else, because it is such a qualitatively different kind of social organisation. But this effect is always mediated through geopolitical dynamics. So for example when England becomes capitalist, France, the closest country has to deal with the fact that actually England is more powerful in a radically new wayand there is no way she can beat it in war because England relies on a very different kind of mode of production. So, what they need in short term is to compress and mobilise their non-capitalist resources to resist this modern form. And that’s where actually the principles of citizen-army and government open to talent emerge, phenomena that requires the abolition of old feudal privileges and the institution of formal equality of the members of the community, i.e. the formation of the nation. The claim that sovereignty resides in the nation was first programmatically declared during the French revolution. So, in a way, French nationalism or French nation which is the first, I would say, case of nationalism, emerges as a response to capitalist development external to it, relying on pre-capitalist sources and resources in order to survive as it is. The key point is that capitalism here is external to France as a polity. It is causal and constitutive of nation-formation and nationalism in France, but it is not concretely dominant or even present in France. It is external to France but through uneven and combined development reshapes French society in a novel way.

This framework leads to a very different kind of conception of the state. But at some point, all of such responses culminate in some sort of industrialisation or capitalist development. The interesting point is that after the rise of English capitalism (which itself is a fundamentally interactive process), almost everywhere else nationalism comes first and capitalism comes second. And this has massive implications for what form capitalist development takes on or what it involves. This is so because in these cases it is the state which develops both the nation and capitalism.

YS: So, what does this long story of capitalist development regarding nationalism tell us? I mean what is the novelty here?

By this long story I mean to say that for me the nation and nationalism are specifically capitalist phenomena. The problem in terms of analysis is how to substantively relate them to each other. Everybody, I think, knows that they are somehow connected but nobody has been able to show the exact causality. In Anderson there is a second really important point which I discuss in the paper. He says well every community is imagined. If a community is bigger than a family, members of it do not know all other members in a face-to-face manner. So, in a sense every community is imagined. So, being 'imagined' is not just a feature of 'the nation' but all communities larger than a village. He then goes on and says if that's the case what is so different about the nation? His answer is that the nation imagines itself a 'sovereign'. So, a nation can only be self-conscious when it is free and it is only free when it is sovereign and that's how the nation is distinct from other forms of collective identity.

But the problem is that sovereignty is both a generic and specific concept. It means independent existence in general which can also be found in pre-capitalist period. But it also means the specifically modern form of rule intrinsically bound up with capitalism: impersonal state based on the distinction between the public and the private, and between 'the political' and 'the economic'. These distinctions are specifically rooted in capitalism. That is why I try to link modern state to the idea of the nation. The modernity of this sovereignty is ultimately about capitalism because capitalist development by definition involves 'primitive accumulation', which means the separation of direct producers from the land as well as all communitarian connections to their concretely organised communities such as tribe, clan and even family. In Marx's word concrete persons entangled in relations of personal dependency are recast as 'abstract individuals'. It is only when this happens that individuals are able to, in

fact forced to, imagine a community which is larger but far less concrete than what went before. It is in that sense that the nation is an abstract community. When Anderson says the nation is an imagined community, what he means is that it is (also) an abstract community. Once these abstract individuals are in place they experience existential crisis because they cannot make sense of their individual life, because they are no longer part of a concrete community. And in that sense, the nation or nationalism addresses the sense of existential disorientation experienced by the abstract individuals of capitalism.

Now, what happens, and this is the key, is that because of the way in which capitalism expands to other societies through geopolitical dynamics, in almost every case in modern history political and/or intellectual elites begin to construct the nation before capitalism. So, they have an ideology, for which there is no social basis. So how can they actually put these people together. They must rely on cultural resources especially language and when language is not available, religion or a combination of these and concurrently constructing narratives of common origins etc. all of which are imposed on populations through systematic violence and coercion. This is so because concrete persons are still entangled in communitarian pre-national relations. And that leads me to discuss state-nations *i.e.* nations which are created by the state, rather than the states which represent a pre-existing nation.

YS: Now I see clearly your line of argumentation about how the geopolitically mediated capitalist development enforces nation formation in territories where there is hardly any homogeneity. After these challenging but inspiring theoretical reflection, I think it is the moment to talk about the case of Iraq now. So, the question is simple: why and how this theoretical understanding of nation formation is related to Iraq and the emergence of ISIS?

In the case of Iraq, I show how this situation of a modern state without a nation concretely emerged and was reproduced. The process began when ‘Iraq’ fell under the ‘mandate’ of the British empire. Rather than undertaking primitive accumulation, *i.e.* to make Iraq capitalist or industrial hence modern as the terms of mandate stipulated, Britain actually reinforced pre-existing non-capitalist relations. It did so because that was how it could exercise ‘indirect rule’ over the population through pre-existing local authorities, e.g. tribal sheikhs, big landlords etc., and therefore avoiding massive financial and human investment. So, the British engaged tribal leaders, local sheikhs and religious leaders in different regions reinforcing and recasting their traditional authority. This naturally reinforced non-national

forms of collective identities of the population under the influence of these local magnets. But at the same time, the British also created a state which was modern organisationally. It had a parliamentary system, it had a separate judicial system before which people were supposed to be ‘citizens’ rather than ‘subjects’. But it should be noted that they also initially created a separate judiciary for rural- tribal populations, which reinforced sub-national identities. The result was a situation in which a modern state was transplanted onto a pre-modern social structure which is assumed to be a nation. The result was immediate. All the different communities were reacting to this forceful and violent incorporation, though the incorporation of the Ottoman-era Arab-Sunni elite into the new state, who secured its dominant status within the emerging Iraqi state.

And then, after the British departure, the situation was that, there was already an Arab-Sunni political elite created by the British. And while this political elite had an interest in a certain political arrangement that had already emerged, they also wanted to modernize the society, i.e. create the abstract individual which is the sociological basis of the nation. But this was also quite problematic because it came rather late when the balance of power between the local, communitarian power-holders generally outweighed that of the government in Baghdad, a situation that more or less continued until the 1958 revolution.

The second complicating factor on the way of laying the sociological ground for the nation-formation was oil. The growing oil revenues generated a rentier state that had no unavoidable need to radically expropriate the existing propertied classes. And this meant that primitive accumulation in the sense Marx describes in *Das Kapital* never fully took place. There was never a radical agrarian reform in order to create wage labour in the way for example Iran’s White Revolution of the 1960s did. So, the nationalist discourse had to rely on cultural identity. So long as it was based on the Arabic language, it could somehow unite Sunni and Shi’a Arabs, but it was never able to fully incorporate the Kurds. The Shias and Sunni had of course sectarian differences, but this was managed by the formally secular character of the state and through the integrative and co-optive function of the oil-based welfare state. The Kurds could not be strategically included in this political-ideological formula, hence, the Kurdish struggle has been a more or less constant feature of modern Iraq since 1900. The intra-Arab (Shi’a-Sunni) conflict was much more recent, emerging mostly from early 1990s.

The summary of the argument is then that you have a situation of sectarian ‘difference’ which is ancient and part of the wider unevenness of the region. This difference under specific circumstances generated by Iraq’s interactive, and hence ‘combined’, development turned into sectarian ‘tension’. And this, I dated to the aftermath of the 1991 Kuwait War when Iraq was subject to comprehensive sanctions as you know. And the sanctions meant that the very limited material resources that existed were distributed on the basis of loyalties to the Ba’ath state. And this loyalty too an increasingly tribal mediation and sectarian mediation. Tribal because in its genesis the Ba’ath party was largely dominated by an elite rooted in Tikriti tribes, Saddam Hussein’s own power base. And sectarian because of the Shi’a uprising after the war and war with Iran prior to that. And these further alienated the Ba’ath state from the Shi’a population.

YS: I suppose this plays a key role in consolidation of sectarian and tribal affiliations?

Yes, people increasingly had to activate all the sectarian and tribal affiliations in order to have access to whatever resources was available. And this geo-politicised these affiliations and connections. Over ten years period, this meant that people’s sectarian and tribal identity grow in political significance. At the same time this also meant by definition, the exclusion of the Shi’as because the state was dominated, if not largely populated, by a Sunni elite. So, by 2003 we already had a quite explosive situation of politicised and geo-politicised Shi’a and Sunni sectarian identities. 2003 therefore was not the beginning of the process, but, if you like, a last push. Because when the Ba’ath state was removed, suddenly these pre-existing tensions turned into conflict because the new regime was dominated by the Shi’as. But also, because of certain decisions, such as the abolishment of the Ba’ath party, de-Ba’athification of the state institutions and the dismantling of the army etc. all of which disproportionality affected Sunni Arabs.

So, the Sunni elite which were in power for so long, and their identity was, as already mentioned, already politicised and geo-politicised, suddenly was facing an occupying army supported directly by the other sect, i.e. the Shi’as. So, it was not very difficult to see why this would turn into a conflict. And once the conflict was in place you also had the other actors intervening: Iran supporting the insurgency against Americans because they were afraid of being US’s next target. Saudis were supporting Sunnis because they didn’t want to

have an Iran-aligned Shi'a state next door, etc.

YS: Under the light of this explanation, what was the impact of wider international context?

Another key aspect of the wider international context at this point is the US invasion of Afghanistan and the outbreak of 'the Arab spring'. The former led to the expulsion of Al-Qaeda and other jihadi groups from Afghanistan. Many of these relocated to Iraq – often with logistical help from Iran – to pursue their fights against the US. This very quickly radicalised the emerging Sunni reaction to the US invasion and the restructuring of the Iraqi state on a Shi'a majoritarian basis. Revising the non-territorial strategy of the Al-Qaeda and indirectly backed by a host of reginal actors who wanted to see US bogged down in Iraq, e.g. Iran, Syria, motivated these ex Al-Qaeda groups to pursue a territorial but transnational project, rooted in early Wahabi movement in (Saudi) Arabia, through an asymmetric war to which attacking civilians and televised violence were key instruments. The former would overstretch the central state forces rendering them more vulnerable to guerrilla tactics. It would also create political chaos which the emerging ISIS forces would then quell and through that gain legitimacy and popularity among the local populations. These methods are explicitly articulated in a famous internal publication by al-Qaeda in Iraq entitled 'The Management of Savagery'. The televised, extreme violence was also principally aimed at demoralising an adversary that outpower it overwhelmingly.

The effect of the Arab spring was more indirect. The Arab Spring generated a counter-revolutionary reaction form the region's authoritarian states that involved the organisational destruction of civil society forces and non-violent avenues for expressing political discontent. The most extreme case here was Syria. This situation left extreme jihadi groups such as those that merged to form ISIS as the only remaining effective vehicles for opposition to authoritarian governments which in their struggle to survive were now committing huge violence against their populations. This logic was pressed upon Iraq's Sunni Arabs during the second term of Nuri al-Maliki when his security forces suppressed peaceful demonstrations in several parts of central and norther Iraq. This pushed a considerable section of the population in these regions towards ISIS, which shortly thereafter captures Mosul.

However, sociologically speaking the fundamental, contextual basis for the formation of a phenomenon like ISIS was the fact that the nation state building in Iraq was intrinsically

contradictory unable to create a unified ‘national’ identity as I explained above. The fertile historical ground in which ISIS grew was that in a geographical space called Iraq, people did not feel that their political and collective loyalty was first and foremost to something called ‘Iraqi nation’. They didn’t have this kind of loyalty or sensibility in that historical juncture. Their loyalty was either sub-national (e.g. tribal) or supra- or trans-national (e.g. religious-sectarian). So, nation state building was completely contradictory hence the subtitle of my paper: ‘nation state (de-)formation’. At its root ISIS was therefore the product of the contradictions of the nation-state formation in Iraq.

YS: I was reading different people, like Thomas Jeffery Miley, who conceived nation as a hegemonic project. But he was rather focusing on the European context. Since then, I am trying to use what he is saying. I believe this is what you empirically showed, that how the nation is an elite-led project especially in non-Western world.

KM: Well, I am saying that was the case in Europe too. So, in France for example you have the Jacobins, in Germany Nazism, the most destructive form of nationalism. The elitist, top-down character of nation-state formation is not exclusive to the Middle East. The nation-state is always created through violence. But in those countries where capitalist development was more or less parallel or very closely following modern state formation the nation-formation was more successful in terms of its own stated goals because abstract individuals of capitalist social relations emerged concurrently or relatively shortly after nation-state formation. Whereas if you think about Iraq or Iran or even Turkey, no matter what Arab, Persian or Turkish elite said, it was very difficult for them to forge a nation because capitalist development was extremely limited and hence no masses of abstract individuals as the strategic subjects of imagining the nation. The only way the Kurds could be incorporated into an ‘Arab’ state was through force.

On a different but related issue: why is it that it is intellectuals who often lead nationalism or nationalist projects? This is a very interesting question. And I think it is related to the centrality of the notion of abstraction to nation formation and nationalism. Intellectual elites are by definition engaged with texts and text has often an extra-local character. So, the intellectual elite of any population tend to have a more heightened consciousness of the extra-local, of the ‘other’, of the ‘difference’. They are therefore the first to sense and react to the subjugation or the subordination of their ‘people’ by a ‘foreign’ force. Of course, they

do everything to prevent this. Initially, the most effective weapon for this purpose is to unite the ‘people’ to unify their material energy. But unite the people around what? It is here that common language and ancestors, myth of common origin etc. emerge, often manufactured from disparate material. So, the myth of nation therefore is also constructed obviously by intellectual elite. This can be particularly effective, if it takes place in the context of a collective existential confrontation with a foreign force which in its indiscriminate violence creates a common, and hence binding, experience among its target communities. This is particularly valid in relation to Kurds.

YS: As you know, DEMOS is a research centre that deals particularly with the possibilities of peace. Based on your approach to the region, my biggest question to you would be how do you conceive the possibilities of peace in the Middle East.

KM: Because of the belated nature of capitalist development in the region and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the populations and because of the hierarchical and hence often conflicting forms of collective consciousness that hundred years of reactive nation-state building has created, there is no way that you can create stable, homogeneous, unitary nations. So, as soon as you want to organize hierarchy, the subordinate elements would respond in one way or another. So, the only way, I think, you can geo-politically diffuse this is through a conception of political community that begins from the basic fact of ‘diversity’. One should not begin from assumption of the ‘sameness’ as nation-states in Middle East do. But that is still not enough. The collective constitutive elements of this condition of diversity must be invested with equal rights and duties in a constitutionally – legally and politically – binding manner. The basic law, the constitution, or ‘social contract’ must recognise that the population is internally differentiated at the level of collective identities and these differences are formally recognised and politically and legally equalised. None of them alone should define the overall identity of the state or polity.

So, for example, when you say ‘Turkey’, it is explicitly a state that has a Turkish identity, the manufactured nature of that identity notwithstanding. But we of course know that there are other peoples in this country: Kurds, Arabs, Chechens, Alevis, Armenians etc. The same goes for Iran. So, the definition of the state has to be based on something other than any of these collective identities in particular. So, in that sense, Kurds can have a similar problem. If you have non-Kurds and a polity called ‘Kurdistan’ then the Kurdish identity is somehow

privileged in the formal definition of that polity. And unless this formal privilege is not radically diluted in substantive political terms it is bound to generate centrifugal reaction from non-Kurdish populations.

So, the short answer is that *unitary* nation-state is not generative of peace in our region. It is actually the historical source of conflict. Cultural and linguistic diversity in the region has to be the fundamental basis on which any pluralist political order rests.

YS: Thanks! But from here emerges thousands of questions.

KM: Yes, how to do it…

YS: Actually yes, but how to do it might be the last question. We have many issues even before getting there. Take, for instance, the constant imperialist intervention in the region and all those differentiated and stratified power relations that are embedded in societal and political dynamics in different countries of the region, which simply confines you into a mind-set that you cannot talk about them, let alone attempting to think of any kind of solution. I know that these are not the questions that can easily be answered.

KM: But I can provide more questions than answers. You should not necessarily expect answers to all these.

YS: Yes, not necessarily. We are in a discussion and this discussion opens some new windows to me and I believe that this will be the case for those who will be reading this too. That is why, not necessarily providing answers but necessarily putting questions is the goal. Thank you, Kamran!

* *'Lineages of the Islamic State: An International Historical Sociology of State (De-)Formation in Iraq', Journal of Historical Sociology, 2018, 31:6–24 (to access free download click here)*