

BOOK REVIEW/ULASAN BUKU

BOOK REVIEW *ISLAM BEYOND BORDERS: THE UMMA IN WORLD POLITICS* BY JAMES PISCATORI AND AMIN SAIKAL, CAMBRIDGE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019, 361 pp, ISBN: 1108740553^{©Σ}

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The umma holds a central place in Islamic religious and political thought, but its significance is a matter of contention. It serves as a rallying cry for some Muslim activists and politicians while being viewed as a threat by some in the West. This concept provides a valuable perspective for studying Muslim spirituality, history, and politics. Historians, scholars of Islamic Studies, and political scientists continue to discuss it with diverse perspectives (see also Esposito and Shahin 2013).

Zafer (2020), a historian specializing in early Islam, explains that the term "umma" refers to a community that acknowledges the authority of the Prophet as a mediator. This recognition promotes inclusivity and allows for integrating existing social differences based on class, clan, and custom without erasing the identities of these diverse groups. In contrast, Aydin (2017) views "umma" primarily as a religious concept in the 19th and 20th centuries, with the term "Muslim world" emerging as its political counterpart.

Sheikh (2016), an International Studies scholar, explains that the concept of umma can serve as an alternative to the modern nation-state and can be viewed in two ways: a thin version of an interstate society, similar to the European Union's supranational structure or a thick version of universal claims about Muslims and their relationships. Additionally, influential members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) promote their visions of the umma, with Saudi Arabia emphasizing the religious aspect, Iran focusing on the political aspect, Pakistan prioritizing security, and Turkey emphasizing an economic community (see also Manabilang Adiong 2013; Manabilang Adiong *et al.* 2018; Reiter 2011).

Discover new perspectives on Muslim politics in *Islam Beyond Borders: The Umma in World Politics* by James Piscatori and Amin Saikal (2019). The authors delve into the concept of the umma, which holds significant symbolic appeal, shaping Muslim

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identity and politics. Through case studies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Islamic State, the book reveals how pan-Islam appeals are often used for political gain and sectarian affiliations. Piscatori and Saikal (2019) analyse theological interpretations and political agendas to provide a nuanced understanding of today's world's complex dynamics surrounding the umma.

Piscatori and Saikal (2019) studied how the umma influences modern Muslim identities and motivates social and political movements. They suggest that the umma helps connect Muslims, especially when supporting those who face harm or injustice. This is seen in daily life and global networks, where people rally behind causes like the Palestinians or Rohingyas. Unfortunately, some Muslim countries may prioritize their interests over supporting fellow Muslims, despite claiming solidarity (see also Abdelkader *et al.* 2016).

This book's authors discuss how Muslim elites, rulers, and states use institutions, conferences, publications, and rhetoric to cultivate a sense of umma and establish themselves as leaders in the global Islamic community (Piscatori and Saikal 2019, 8). They refer to this as "push factors." This manipulation of the umma concept allows these leaders to legitimize their authority, especially when facing legitimacy deficits. The book takes a unique approach by exploring the significance of appeals to Islamic solidarity and brotherhood. It recognizes that countervailing forces, such as sectarianism and alternative identities, coexist with the umma's influence. The interpretation of the umma concept varies and is subject to theological and political debate, making it context-dependent and open to diverse perspectives and self-interested political motivations.

The authors present case studies exploring the umma's historical evolution and its relevance to contemporary Muslim politics worldwide. Their discussion begins with the Sunni interpretation of the umma, stressing its significant role in shaping Muslim ideology. The concept is based on the principle of oneness (tawhid), emphasizing the unity of Muslims under a shared faith. This unity strengthens the spiritual bond between believers and forms the basis for their collective identity. The umma is closely linked to the idea of leadership, as the belief in the necessity of a guiding authority for the community's cohesiveness is encapsulated in the saying "no umma without leadership." Sunni intellectuals have traditionally regarded the Caliphate as the central point of this leadership, with the Caliph serving as a vital figure who upholds righteousness and guides the Muslim community. As a result, loyalty to a just ruler becomes a unifying factor within the umma.

In modern Sunni thought, the concept of umma now encompasses politics. Piscatori and Saikal (2019), in line with Aydin's discussion of pan-Islamism and the Muslim world, focus on Muslim elites and rulers (Aydin 2017). They examine how elites recognized the political implications of the umma in response to challenges faced by the Muslim world in the late 19th century. The umma is now seen as a religious community and a collective entity with political aspirations and responsibilities. Modern Sunni intellectuals explore the potential of the umma to shape and influence political

dynamics, leading to further discussions and explorations on this topic.

The authors analyse two present-day Sunni examples: Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's government comes from leading the umma and modernizing functionally with Islam. However, the Wahhabi ideological narrative limits broader acceptance and goes against societal pan-Islamism. Geopolitical factors, such as challenges from Turkey and a divided Organization of Islamic Cooperation, weaken Saudi Arabia's claim to ulama pre-eminence. Also, relying on external powers like the United States weakens the kingdom's leadership of the umma (see also Esposito and Shahin 2013).

In contrast, ISIS embraces a rigid and exclusive interpretation of the umma within Islam (Reiter 2011, 23). These radical groups reject the separation of religion and politics, presenting themselves as a political Islamist vanguard. Their vision of the umma is belligerent, perceiving a global war against non-believers and justifying violence and terrorism. ISIS views the umma as expansionist, believing all Muslims must resist non-believers and actively strive to expand the Islamic world through combative means. Their concept of the umma is closely tied to the territorial Caliphate as they seek to restore its political and territorial dominance (see Abdelkader *et al.* 2016).

Piscatori and Saikal (2019) also delve into the Shia construction of the umma, highlighting significant differences from Sunni Islam. In Shia Islam, the Imams are considered divinely designated and possess immense religious and political authority, surpassing that of the Caliph in Sunni Islam. In the absence of the Imams, their successors claim to speak on their behalf and inherit substantial power. While apoliticism was traditionally prevalent, the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of clear ideas about governance. Ayatollah Khomeini presented a compelling vision that advocated for the clergy to provide guidance and hold ruling authority. He aimed to restore pan-Islamic unity and believed in Muslims uniting under God's sovereignty, opposing blasphemy and anti-Islamic stances adopted by Western powers. According to this perspective, Iran, as the vanguard of the umma, carries a special responsibility to promote Islam globally and, consequently, requires protection (see also Kayaoglu 2015).

The topic of unity in Islam has been viewed differently by various groups. Western imperialists have seen it as a potential threat, while devout Muslims consider it a natural expression of their belief in oneness. However, Piscatori and Saikal's analysis provides a balanced perspective. Most Muslims view Islam as a way of life that encompasses all aspects (2019, 37). The concept of the umma, or the Muslim community, as a unified entity affects both internal cohesion and external perceptions (see Kayaoglu 2015). Muslims have mixed feelings about solidarity, with some political aspirations advocating for pan-Islam, while others, particularly at the elite level, embrace the concept of the nation-state. Nonetheless, the umma remains a significant factor in Muslim politics, influencing identity and authority (2019, 67).

Nonetheless, this book has raised more questions than answered, just like any good

book. It inspires us to investigate how Muslim elites, grassroots Muslim organizations, and ordinary Muslims work together to shape the symbolic politics of the umma. Furthermore, it makes us wonder how non-Muslim states exert their influence on the umma's discourse. They may do this by co-opting Muslims, forming alliances, or demonizing them to advance their domestic and international agendas (see also Kayaoglu 2015).

There are several questions to consider regarding the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which represents the Muslim community. Despite being around for over 50 years, why is the OIC still divided and needing more strength? Muslim minorities must navigate how to show support for the umma without being accused of disloyalty to their country. Additionally, countries like Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia, with unique characteristics such as economic diversity, nuclear power, and large Muslim populations, must decide how to engage with the concept of the umma.

However, these questions encourage a more thorough examination of the intricacies of the umma and its different interactions in Muslim and non-Muslim environments.

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