

adequate about to whom this book appeals. The students of the field are, to a large extent, familiar with the information presented in the book. That is to say, the book does not present something new except two points. The first one is testimonies of Qutb's living disciples. These testimonies are important in that

they cast a new light upon the inner worlds of Qutb and his surroundings. The second point I will highlight is that reading the whole conflictual history of the Middle East from the angle of the clash of charismas of Nasser and Qutb may contribute a fresh interpretation of events happening since the 1950s.

## Islam Beyond Borders: The *Umma* in World Politics

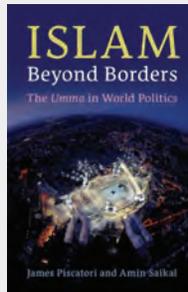
By James Piscatori and Amin Saikal

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Reviewed by Ravza Altuntaş-Çakır, İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

There are very few religious concepts that have enjoyed such a prominent place in modern political discourses as the *umma*, the global community of Muslim believers. With different meanings attached and without an overarching formal institution, the *umma* has nevertheless maintained strong symbolic, normative and political appeal in the world of nation states. However, as James Piscatori and Amin Saikal observe, with the structural fragmentation after the abolishment of the Sunni Caliphate and the absence of Shia Imamate, new forms of interconnectedness that embody “Muslim communalism today” are replacing old forms and bringing new theological and practical quandaries (p. 7).

In *Islam Beyond Borders: The Umma in World Politics*, Piscatori and Saikal “explore the dynamics by which the concept of the *umma* affects, and is affected by, Muslim politics” (p. vii). Based on an examination of Sunni and Shi'i political doctrines and case studies of actors such as Iran, ISIS and Saudi Arabia, they



present a comprehensive account of the *umma*'s relevance in the modern period. The main recurring theme of the book is that the concept of the *umma* has been constructed and reconstructed ideologically, politically, socially, strategically and theologically in different times and contexts. Piscatori and Saikal make

novel observations about these processes in their analysis. While the main focus of the book is on “intellectual and political elites,” the authors study these articulations in the context of real-world politics (p. 161). The book successfully combines modern articulations with discussions coming from medieval scholars such as Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi, Ibn Qiba al-Razi, Taqī al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya and Shahid al-Thani, as well as political developments such as the Küçük Kaynarca treaty, the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation [OIC].

In a generic sense, the *umma* “denotes a cluster of believers bounded by their faith and re-

ligious and moral responsibilities, in a single borderless community” (p. 50). Regardless of the shared understanding of a transnational sense of belonging, contested theological and political meanings have been applied to the *umma*. Controversy has emerged about some general themes such as (i) membership/comprehensiveness (the issue of inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness), (ii) legitimate leadership authority (symbolic/spiritual vs. political), (iii) form of unity (religious vs. concrete/institutional) and (iv) political articulation (identity vs. instrumentality). The authors adopt a nuanced approach in addressing these issues. In dealing with these matters, both Sunnis and Shi’is propose different normative and institutional frameworks. The book also demonstrates that when it comes to the praxis of these themes, not only are sectarian differences prevalent, but internal disagreements within the same sect are also striking.

Following the introduction, in chapter two, Piscatori and Saikal explore the meaning of the *umma* in Sunni thought. Prominent Sunni scholars manifest a plurality of understanding on the issues surrounding the concept of *umma*, such as (i) legitimate authority (ideological Islamic state [Sayyid Qutb and Abu A’la Mawdudi] and Islamic democracy [Rashid al-Ghannushi]); (ii) nature of unity (spiritual [‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq], pan-Islamic [Jamal al-Din al-Afghani] and the transnational institutionalization of separate Muslim majority states [Hasan al-Banna and ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri]); and (iii) membership (exclusivist [Qutb], inclusive of Abrahamic [Ghannushi] or universalist [‘Ali Juma’a] beliefs). Conversely, chapter three examines the conceptualization of the *umma* in Shi’i Islam, using Iran as a case study to demonstrate theoretical and political contexts empirically. Different theories of *wilayat al-faqih* (the rule of the supreme jurist) that developed as part

of the doctrine of *al-na’ib al-‘amm* (“general deputy to the Imam during the Occultation”) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century onward are evaluated (p. 57). Piscatori and Saikal illustrate how the Imamate Doctrine (the idea of the spiritual authority of the Imams) evolved after the Iranian Revolution, in which the Iranian state appealed to pan-Islamist and cross-sectarian religious and political sentiments. Chapter four moves to focus on the religious and political discourses on the *umma* within the Saudi context. The chapter explains how the Wahhabi-Saudi establishment has utilized the self-imposed mission of the guardianship of the (Sunni) *umma* and protector of the holy sites for religious legitimacy and political interests within and outside the borders of the Kingdom. Finally, chapter five evaluates the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The authors investigate the utilization of the ideal of the *umma* in Islamist religious radicalization in the age of globalization and the internet.

Piscatori and Saikal emphasize that defining the concept of the *umma* is not only a matter of theological dispute, but is also often based on political expediency. On particular occasions, such as the Sudanese national movement, the *umma* became a rallying call for resistance against colonialism, reinforcing communal identity. The *umma* has also been a by-product of the instrumentalization and repudiation of the Islamic ideal at the hands of political actors in order to validate internal and external legitimacy and advance their national interest. The Iranian case highlights the political manipulation of the *umma* for domestic and international, as well as ideological and geographical survival. The authors, however, suggest that this top-down approach has caused more hostility, sectarian division and demoralization than any meaningful promotion of unity. In the Saudi case, the leadership

claims of the *umma* received ample petrodollar funding, which has promoted the soft power of the Saudi patrons through a whole range of organizations. These have included, but are not limited to, internal (University of Medina) and external institutions (the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America [IIASA]) as well as international ones (the OIC, the Muslim World League). When it comes to non-Wahhabi bonds, Saudi Arabia has manifested hostility with both Shia Muslims and non-Muslims as well as competition with other regional Sunni powers such as Turkey and Egypt.

The notion of the *umma* has gone beyond providing symbolic and aspirational meaning in constituting Muslim identities and has been turned into an explicit ideology by local and global actors. Pan-Islamism was the most prominent global ideology with its mass popular appeal and still remains a strong foundation for an overarching identity in public consciousness among Muslims. Although mostly peaceful, occasionally pan-Islamist expressions of the *umma* have turned violent, ISIS being an extreme example. Piscatori and Saikal define ISIS's *umma* as Salafist, romanticized and purified on the one hand and ideological and politicized on the other. ISIS's exclusionary, combative, expansionist and radical reading of the *umma* derives from its textualist and narrow understanding of Islam.

In general, the authors suggest that the political relevance of pan-Islamism may have been overestimated. In contrast, the *umma*'s innate sense of belonging has been more powerfully represented in the everydayness of Muslim life, fostering Muslim transnational networks of various forms. The authors define this phenomenon as the "*umma* sentiment" encompassing "cyber-Islam," "virtual Islam," pilgrimage, humanitarian organizations, Sufi

orders and global political causes such as the Palestinian struggle (p. 161; p. 5).

At the end of their detailed analysis of the *umma*'s role in the context of politics, the authors conclude that, in the absence of an ideal Islamic unity, notions of the *umma* have been created from the interaction between the bottom-up Islamic sentiment of ordinary Muslims and the top-down instrumentalization by political and religious elites. Similarly, in practice, as opposed to the ideal goal of a transcending unity, the reality of the *umma* displays "external intervention" and "internal division" (p. 164).

It is an undoubtedly ambitious undertaking to encapsulate a wide-ranging reflection on the *umma* into a single monograph. Thus, certain underemphasized areas are to be expected. There appears to be an inclination toward covering the Middle East at the expense of the worthwhile inclusion of countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan. Central, South and South East Asian regions, which constitute nearly two-thirds of the world's current Muslim population, are touched upon when necessary (for example in Mawdudi's political experience in the sub-continent, Wahhabi propaganda in Malaysia and Indonesia and ISIS's Khorosan branch) mostly to indicate the importance of local and global interactions for the increasingly globalized world in which we live. When it comes to the *umma*, however, an expanded focus on case studies could have gone beyond the Middle East, and maybe even beyond the boundaries of the 'Muslim world,' as there are increasing Muslim populations in North America and Western Europe that are changing the traditional dynamics of the *umma*.

Overall, James Piscatori's established scholarship on the *umma* can be seen in his re-

cent collaboration with Amin Saikal in *Islam Beyond Borders: The Umma in World Politics*, which brings together two of the leading experts in the field. Piscatori and Saikal fill a lacuna among existing publications in their book's blending of the profound insights of political theory with a novel analysis of political practices among contemporary Mus-

lims. They cover almost all of the normative and practical debates regarding the concept of the *umma* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an exacting eye for detail. This book should be the default text for fellow practitioners and anyone who wishes to understand the rapidly changing pace of events in Islam and politics today.

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## Sport, Politics and Society in the Middle East

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*Edited by Danyel Reiche and Tamir Sorek*

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*Reviewed by Mehmet Akif Koç, Social Sciences University of Ankara*

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The nexus among sports and politics has gained strength during recent decades. Because the Middle East is one of the world's most troubled regions, studies of Middle Eastern sports and the strong relation between sports and politics have become a major issue within the international community. *Sport, Politics and Society in the Middle East*, edited by Danyel Reiche and Tamir Sorek essentially aims at addressing the political, economic and sociological dimensions of the sports-politics nexus.

The editors of the book state that it is the product of two working groups held at Georgetown University of Qatar in 2017. The volume consists of ten valuable essays discussing different states and societies of the Middle East and authored by experts of various regional and non-regional origins.

The first chapter elaborates on the history of sports and the sport-society connection by focusing on the 20<sup>th</sup> century in detail. In



this respect, Murat C. Yıldız places a special emphasis on the parallelism between the political renaissance (*al-Nahda*) of the post-WWI era in the Arab states and developments in the social sphere, particularly in sports. Here, the main focus of *al-Nahda* (in both politics and sports) concentrates on Egypt (mostly Cairo and Alexandria). General developments in sports are discussed within the regional context, and the author notes the initial steps taken by British soldiers, workers and merchants in Istanbul, Tehran and Cairo as 'nodal cities' (pp. 36-38). Football, gymnastics and other team sports were the locomotive of sportive activities in the region and missionary schools also played a crucial role in introducing sports.

The second chapter, written by Dag Tuastad, utilizes sociological tools (social memories, group membership, symbolic battles, etc.) to explain the fragile set-up of Jordanian society. This riveting piece compares the ethnnonational social memorialization of Palestinian