

The Construction of the Umma: From Global Consciousness to an Aspirational Global Society

Ganjar Widhiyoga

Department of International Relations, Slamet Riyadi University

The articulation of Islamic solidarity has been prevalent throughout Muslim history. This sense of solidarity was founded upon the belief that all Muslims are brothers, that all Muslims are the members of a comprehensive Islamic society. Watt describes the Muslims' view on the *umma* as a form of 'charismatic community'.¹ In this sense, Muslims see the *umma* not simply as a social phenomenon. But whether and how it has been transformed into social practices ingrained in Muslim societies today can perhaps be understood by using social science perspectives.

The Construction of Social Reality

Society, according to Berger and Luckmann, is the product of humans' consciousness. In order for an idea to be able to affect society, it has to go through the three stages of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation. The first stage, externalisation, is done when humans are expressing their subjective ideas to other humans. The second stage, objectivation, happens whenever humans put their ideas into signs or material objects available to them, allowing other humans to perceive their idea and agreeing to it. This forms an intersubjectivity that then affects their perception of the society. When this particular idea has gained enough followers to be the dominant idea, the society transforms itself, adjusting itself to the new dominant idea. What had been a subjective idea now becomes "objective" and the third process, internalisation, begins when the society teaches the idea as the objective reality to the next generation.²

It is important to note that despite an idea's dominance in a society, the idea will always require certain forms of legitimation in order to maintain its position. There are levels of legitimation that help legitimate an idea. The most fundamental is the transmission of language whose vocabulary defines and supports the idea, providing tools for conversation on the idea. The next levels are the development of theoretical propositions and the articulations of theories to explain and justify the idea further. The highest form of legitimation is the establishment of a *symbolic universe*, which is the amalgamation of bodies of theoretical traditions that support the idea. It

¹ M. Watt, "The Conception of the Charismatic Community in Islam", *Numen*, 7 (1960), 77–90: 79.

² P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden city, N. Y: Doubleday, 1966), 33–42.

encompasses all socially objectivated meanings. The history of the society and biographies of its members are seen as events taking place within the symbolic universe. It creates a whole world and by accessing this knowledge, humans are affirmed of their position in the world.³

Berger and Luckmann's description of the translation of an idea into societal reality mirrors contemporary researches on international norms and their life cycle. The work of Finnemore and Sikkink tells us that there are stages that a particular norm needs to go through in order to establish its dominance and be adopted by the general populace.⁴ At its first stage, *norm emergence*, a new norm requires support and campaigns so that the masses notice and adopt it. Adopting foreign norms is not a trivial matter, as constructivists tell us. They are the foundation from which actors derive their identity, in turn defining their interests. Norms influence the international context by providing intersubjectivity among actors, and determine what behaviour is appropriate.⁵

Since actors are often reluctant to adopt a new norm, the devout initiators and advocates of such a norm, called *norm entrepreneurs*, have to mount a campaign for the norm and try to diffuse it as broadly as they can. In this early stage, norm entrepreneurs persuade other actors to embrace the new norm. It is possible that, at this stage, norm entrepreneurs have to make a bargain with the other parties, providing necessary incentives for them to embrace the norm. Since humans have the tendency to maximise their gains, it is possible that the other parties will adjust their behaviour in accordance with the norm but without believing in it.⁶

If enough masses adopt this new norm, it will pass a critical tipping point. It is essential for a norm to pass this tipping point because if it fails to do so, it will be neglected and, eventually, forgotten. However, if norm entrepreneurs manage to gather enough support, the norm will enter its second stage, *norm cascade*. At this stage, norm entrepreneurs seek to recruit more supporters for their championed norm through socialisation of the norm.⁷ Norm entrepreneurs then engage with other parties using argumentative discourse in order to challenge the established narrative, seeking to usurp it with the championed norm and to change the identity of the other parties to conform to the new norm.⁸ During this process, it is possible that the other parties will still maintain their pragmatic interests but, at the same time, will become more deeply entangled with the moral discourse brought by the norm entrepreneurs.⁹

³ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 112–115.

⁴ M. Finnemore & K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization*, 52 (1998), 887–917: 895–896.

⁵ M. Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations. The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–4.

⁶ T. Risse-Kappen & K. Sikkink, "The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction" in *The Power of Human Rights*, T. Risse-Kappen, S. C. Ropp & K. Sikkink (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–38: 12.

⁷ M. Finnemore & K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 902.

⁸ M. Finnemore & K. Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", 13.

⁹ T. Risse-Kappen & K. Sikkink, "The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction", 15–16.

The diffusion process continues, until the norm starts its final phase, internalisation. By becoming internalised, the norm acquires a taken-for-granted status and no longer becomes the topic of debate.¹⁰ At this mature stage, actors act in conformity with the norm because “it is the normal thing to do”.¹¹ This mature stage is mirroring the habitualisation process in Berger and Luckmann’s work. According to them, an idea becomes habitualised when it becomes an accepted pattern in the society. The conforming pattern then frees the individuals from “the burden of ‘all those decisions’” and provides them with psychological relief. A further step will institutionalise the idea within a society and lead to it being perceived as “objective” reality.¹²

The Prophetic *Umma*

The centrality of the concept of the *umma* can be traced from its position in Muslim sacred texts. In Qur’anic terminology, the *umma* refers to a body of people who are objects of the divine plan of salvation.¹³ At first, the Qur’an uses this term to refer to various people of faith, not only Muslims, such as implied in the term *ummatan waḥida* (Qur’an 21:92¹⁴), which implies a concept of human unity which is bound collectively in a special, religious way.¹⁵ The Qur’an then subtly shifts the meaning of *umma* into a Muslim-specific community, such as in the term *ummatan muslima* (Qur’an 2:128¹⁶) and *ummatan waṣaṭan* (Qur’an 2:143¹⁷).¹⁸ Then, in one of the Qur’anic

¹⁰ M. Finnemore & K. Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change”, 895–896.

¹¹ T. Risse-Kappen & K. Sikkink, “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction”, 17.

¹² P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 70–72.

¹³ F. M. Denny, “The Meaning of ‘Ummah’ in the Qur’an”, *History of Religions*, 15 (1975), p 34-70: 34.

¹⁴ The full verse of the Qur’an, sura 21:92, is: *Inna ḥādhibi ummatukum ummatan waḥidatan wa ana rabbukum fa ‘abudūni* (Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me).

¹⁵ F. M. Denny, “The Meaning of ‘Ummah’ in the Qur’an”, 48.

¹⁶ This verse of the Qur’an should be put into the larger context: it refers to a prayer from Abraham to God, which is described in the Qur’an, sura 2:127-129, as follows: *Wa idh yarfa‘u Ibrāhīmu al-qawā‘ida min al-bayti wa Ismā‘īlu rabbanā taqabbal minnā. Innaka anta al-samī‘ al-‘alīmu. [127]* (And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and (with him) Ishmael, (saying), “Our Lord, accept (this) from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing.) *Rabbanā wa aḥlānā muslimayni laka wa min dhurriyyatinā ummatan muslimatan laka wa arīnā manāsikanā wa tub ‘alaynā. Innaka anta al-tawwābu al-rahīmu. [128]* (Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation (in submission) to You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.) *Rabbanā wa abūth fīhim rasūlan minhum yatlu ‘alayhim āyātika wa yu‘allimuhumu al-ḥikmata wa yuzakkīhim. Innaka anta al-‘azīzu al-ḥakīmu. [129]* (Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise.)

¹⁷ Sura 2, verse 143 should be put into the context of moving the *qibla*, or direction of prayer, from Jerusalem to Mecca; thus it addressed the Muslims specifically: *Sayaqūlu al-sufahāu min al-nāsi mā wallāhum ‘an qiblatibimu al-lati kānu ‘alayhā. Qul lillabi al-mashriqū wa al-maghribū. Yabdi man yashāu ila širaṭin mustaqīmin. [142]* (The foolish among the people will say, “What has turned them away from their qibla, which they used to face?” Say, “To Allah belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.”) *Wa kadhalika ja‘alnāhum ummatan waṣaṭan li-takūnu shuhadā‘u ‘alā al-nāsi wa yakūna al-rasūlu ‘alaykum shahīdan. ... [143...]* (And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you ...).

¹⁸ F. M. Denny, “The Meaning of ‘Ummah’ in the Qur’an”, 69.

verses, *sura* 3:110, *kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijat li-nasi*, the Qur'an specifically addresses the Muslim *umma* and puts the Muslims in a global context. The Muslim *umma* is one of the many communities in the world and it can be the best through its faith and good deeds.¹⁹

Given these Qur'anic roots, the word *umma* has acquired a special resonance among Muslims. The Prophetic period looms large as formative. The *umma* was becoming an overarching term that connected various institutions and social practices in the society and, to some extent, was taken for granted by the Muslims as the natural condition of a society. In the conceptual framework based on Berger and Luckmann, discussed above, the *umma* had become a symbolic universe living in the Muslims' minds.

In order to make the ideal *umma* into social reality, the Prophet took great steps. At first, Muḥammad had seemingly tried to establish the *umma* within the existing context of Arab tribalism in Mecca. Yet, it was soon apparent that the established societal structure in Mecca resisted these attempts.²⁰ Frustrated by the constant rejection, Muḥammad then aspired to build a new society outside the existing establishment of Mecca. He sent the believers to other tribes and to far countries such as Abyssinia.²¹ When the people of Yathrib received his envoy warmly and pledged to support him, Muḥammad was determined to build the new Islamic society there. He then inspired the believers to take the religious journey of *hijra*, emigrating from Mecca to Yathrib, before finally doing so himself.²² As soon as Muḥammad had arrived in Yathrib, which was then renamed 'al-Medina' ('The City'), he established a society of the believers, which all Muslim agree was the initial form of the Islamic *umma*.²³

The establishment of the *umma* in Medina was quite revolutionary because, unlike other societies in Arabia at that time, it was not based on blood or kinship but on religious values. To perform the *hijra* was not simply changing one's location from Mecca to Medina; it required the person to completely discard his/her allegiance, attachment and deference from the tribe and to change it to the *umma*.²⁴ It was a total societal change and it allowed the *umma* to mobilise its members, even against their former tribes and kin. *Hijra* and the establishment of the Muslim *umma* in Medina were the beginning of what Donner calls "Islam's long life as a political force".²⁵ To further emphasise the importance of faith as their source of unity, instead of blood, Muslim traditions record how Muḥammad then established the bond of brotherhood between the Emigrants (Muhājirūn), who followed him from Mecca, and the Helpers (al-Anṣār) who

¹⁹ F. M. Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur'an", *Numen*, 24 (1977), 26–59: 37.

²⁰ M. Watt & M. V. McDonald, *The History of al-Tabari (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk)*. Vol 6: *Muḥammad at Mecca*. Translated and annotated (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988).

²¹ S. A. A. Abu-Shahlieh, "The Islamic Conception of Migration", *The International Migration Review*, 30 (1996), 37–57: 37.

²² F. M. Donner, "Muhammad and the Caliphate" in *The Oxford History of Islam*, J. L. Esposito (ed.) (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–62: 9.

²³ C. F. Robinson, "The Rise of Islam, 600–705" in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, M. Cook & C. F. Robinson (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 173–225: 187.

²⁴ M. Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 242.

²⁵ F. M. Donner, "Muhammad and the Caliphate", 9.

welcomed him in Medina. People who had been strangers from the perspective of tribalism, suddenly became ‘brothers’ to one another bound by their faith.²⁶

Another trait of the *umma* which distinguished it from Arab society at that time was its trans-locality. While it was natural for tribes to have their own territorial basis, the members of the *umma* did not recognise such a basis for the *umma*. It is true that the *umma* was based on Medina and its core members were Muslims living in the city, but the *umma* was also thought of as vaguely translocal. This lack of territorial basis became more pronounced with the inclusion of various tribes outside of Medina after their conversion to Islam.²⁷

The *umma* in Medina put Muslims on an equal standing vis-à-vis the Quraysh of Mecca. Muḥammad then used his position to forge unity among the Arab tribes. According to Watt, the notion of unity among the Arabs before Islam was rudimentary.²⁸ It was Islam that strengthened this sense of unity by implicitly alluding to the Arabs as an independent cultural unit. Muḥammad then took this into practice by building what Hodgson calls an “Arab commonwealth”.²⁹ Soon, Muḥammad contested the influence of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires over the region. Hamidullah³⁰ describes in great detail how Muḥammad conducted activities such as correspondence and sending and receiving envoys to various regional powers – practices which can be perceived, in our modern language, as international relations activities. The scholar al-Mubārakpūrī (1943-2006) also dedicates parts of his *Sīra* to discuss these translocal interactions and networks that Muḥammad tried to establish.³¹

If the Qur’an had instilled a sense of global consciousness among the believers through its religious narrative, Muḥammad then became the first one to embrace the idea. It was through him and his teachings that the idea of an ideal society embedded in the Qur’anic verses was introduced to the believers and then, considering how eager the believers were to emulate the Prophet, it spread among the Muslims. Through Muḥammad, Islam introduced the notion that human society is characterised by faith, instead of by blood, and unbound by traditional notions of border and locality. In the time and location where tribalism was the prevalent societal system, it was a radical new idea.

The actions of Muḥammad and his interaction with his Companions could be considered as an act of externalisation, how a person communicates his/her consciousness and ideas to others around him/her and then constructs a socially accepted intersubjectivity.³² Language, the choice of words, may become the sign bearing a certain meaning in the objectivation process.³³ When establishing a bond between the Emigrants and the Helpers, Muḥammad expressed the idea of

²⁶ For such record on brotherhood between the Emigrants and the Helpers, see Bukhari, “Sahih”, vol. 5/book 058/no. 124.

²⁷ M. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 241–242.

²⁸ M. Watt, “The Conception of the Charismatic Community in Islam”, 142–143.

²⁹ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 187.

³⁰ M. Hamidullah, *Muslim Conduct of State* (Lahore: Khasmiri Bazar, 1945)

³¹ S. al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (India: Maktaba Darus Salam, 1996).

³² P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 34.

³³ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 50–51.

universal brotherhood in a series of signs and symbols. Then, he put the idea into social practice, objectivating it, by bonding two strangers in “the brotherhood of Islam”. Other than the immediate societal effect, this narrative also serves as an instrument for internalising the idea of the *umma* to younger generations, with teachers routinely citing this *hadith* as an example of the universal brotherhood among Muslims. The power of this narrative is strong among Muslims, even in the present period, as seen in the case of the Rohingya refugees and their Indonesian “helpers”.³⁴

The transformation of the *umma* from a religious terminology into a symbolic universe during the time of Muḥammad occurred because religious activities were able to induce the motivation and shape the moods of believers. As detailed by Geertz, religious activities motivate the believers by providing them with the underlying cause they strive for. In the case of the *umma*, it is possible that the social activities done by Muslims are within the framework of the Islamic *umma* when the Muslims perceived their actions as required steps to achieve the Qur’anic virtue of *kbayra ummatin* described in the Qur’an 3:110 above. Geertz also explains that religious activities can influence the moods of the believers by conditioning the believers to do or avoid certain actions.³⁵ This behavioural-shaping ability is mainly achieved through the practice of religious rituals. By attending religious rituals, believers shape their worldview in accordance with that of the religion. They then may conform their actions to the values embedded in the worldview.

The Historical *Umma*

During the time of the Prophet, Muḥammad himself became the source of authority with the capacity to interpret God’s Will. As the Prophet of God, his policies were divinely sanctioned, thus requiring no further explanation or legitimation. During this era, it was as if God was the titular head of state and Muḥammad was the head of government.³⁶ Thus, the processes to establish the *umma* relied on the Prophet’s actions or examples. After Muḥammad’s death, however, the community lost its authoritative figure. This was a grave matter for Muslims since without an authoritative figure, how could the *umma* work to attain the success that God had decreed? It was thus essential for the *umma* to develop institutions as the embodiment of the concept of authority.

The Muslim society at Medina managed to get through this ordeal by appointing Abū Bakr as the successor of the Prophet. While the decision was not without controversy, it was considered as a sound decision in a time of turbulence. Unlike Muḥammad with his sacred authority,

³⁴ After receiving the news of hundreds of Rohingya refugees stranded on the ocean in early May 2015, Indonesian Muslims mobilised themselves to provide assistance to the refugees. While at first the Indonesian navy tried to turn the refugees back, the local fishermen saved them, despite warnings from the authorities. As soon as this news hit social media, the huge interest from Indonesian Muslim activists forced the government to change its policy. After that, Islamic charities and organisations flocked to provide assistance to the refugees: F. Shadiq, “Berbondong-bondong, Relawan Muslim Bantu Ribuan Pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh (In waves, Muslim volunteers helped thousands of Rohingya refugees in Aceh)”, *Kiblat* (27 Mei 2015).

³⁵ C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, C. Geertz (ed.) (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 96–98.

³⁶ M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1955), 10.

Abū Bakr declared that he was merely administrator of the Muslims' affairs and enforcer of the divine law. Islamic historical accounts provide an account of Abū Bakr's sermon after his appointment, in which he stressed his nature as a common man, just like the rest of the *umma*. In the sermon, Abū Bakr also emphasised that he would only follow Muḥammad's path in guiding the *umma*. He also asked for advice from the Muslims and even encouraged them to reprimand him when they perceived him at faults.³⁷ Abū Bakr's sermon managed to win the loyalty of most Muslims.³⁸

Thus, the caliphate was established. Etymologically, the word *khilāfa* means "succeeding to someone." The term was then adapted in the political context and came to refer to the office of the person who succeeds Muḥammad as the leader of the *umma* but not as the Prophet of God.^{39,40} Abū Bakr's appointment and his sermon signified fundamental characteristics of a caliph: he essentially was only an elected executive of the state, with no power over divine legislation and with the limited judiciary function of interpreting the sacred law.

Abū Bakr and his earlier successors, the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* (Rightly Guided Caliphs), provided the foundation for the emergence of an integrated *umma*. Each of the caliphs, perhaps inadvertently, contributed to the establishment of commonality among the Muslims, which then developed into a sense of community. Abū Bakr (r. 632-634 C.E.) managed to defend the orthodox interpretation of the faith from various "divergent" others, embodied in the false prophets and prophetesses. He also managed to maintain the political unity of the fledging caliphate and secured Hijaz as the base of the caliphate. Without Abū Bakr's insistence during the Wars of Ridda (*Ḥarḓb al-Ridda*, 632-633), the government in Medina would not have enjoyed its unchallenged authority and there would have been no foundation for the coming Muslim expansion.⁴¹

Umar (r. 634-644) expanded on what Abū Bakr had secured. He added to the caliphate various territories that were under the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires. But not only

³⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nibayah. Biographies of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs* (Jakarta: Darul Haq, 2004), 71-72.

³⁸ The figure of Abū Bakr as the first caliph of the Muslim world has become a powerful political symbol in Muslim history. Abū Bakr and his sermon signify the establishment of a political institution that plays a crucial role in safeguarding the *umma*, both as an idealised concept and as a social truth. In our modern age, where there is no political institution as the agent of the *umma*, some political actors seek to establish their authority over the *umma* by associating themselves with Abū Bakr and quoting his sermon, linking symbolically their rule to the first caliphate. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the so-called caliph of the Islamic State, quoted the first Caliph during his inaugural sermon on 5 July 2014. Several months after that, Afghan president Ashraf Ghani also quoted the same line during his inaugural speech in September 2014. Abū Bakr's famous line that was quoted by both is: "If you see me [Abū Bakr] doing the right-hood, help me, and if you see me on falsehood, advise me and lead me to the right path." For the video and transcript of Abu Bakr al-Baghdādī's speech: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/webtv/reports/2014/07/07/ISIS-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdidi-first-Friday-sermon-as-so-called-Caliph-.html> For the relevant part of Ashraf Ghani's speech: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/30/international-home/ashraf-ghani-sworn-in-as-afghan-president.html> _ (both accessed on 22 August 2018).

³⁹ M. Ahmed, "The Classical Muslim State", *Islamic Studies*, 1 (1962), 83-104: 93.

⁴⁰ F. M. Donner, "Muhammad and the Caliphate", 10-11.

⁴¹ H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates. the Islamic Near East from the 6th to the 11th Century* (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2004), 52-57.

expanding the territories, 'Umar also played an important part in the integration of these territories into the *umma*. First, 'Umar provided amnesty to the tribes that had rebelled during the Wars of Ridda and incorporated them into the *umma*. These tribes then gained their popularity by contributing to various expeditions in the Fertile Crescent.⁴² Second, 'Umar made Islamic values and rituals the fundamental characteristic of the *umma*. He was well known for sending teachers to various towns to teach the people the Qur'an. Being a strict disciplinarian, he also expected his governors and soldiers to act in a disciplined manner, such as demanding that every soldier perform the minimum prayer ritual. He also adopted the *hijri* calendar based on the year when Muḥammad performed his *hijra*, providing the *umma* with a common chronological framework.⁴³

'Uthmān's reign (644-656) is often identified as the beginning of tribulations that plagued the *umma*. It is often argued that 'Uthmān favoured the Quraysh aristocracy above others, a contrasting policy to 'Umar's, which distributed favour according to a person's closeness to Muḥammad.⁴⁴ It is important to note, however, that the first half of 'Uthmān's reign was deemed successful. He oversaw expeditions to Nubia and North Africa. He also expanded the Muslims' naval presence in the Mediterranean under the control of the governors of Egypt and Syria. He also completed the subjugation of the Sassanid empire.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, according to Muslim sources, the most important legacy of 'Uthmān to the integration process of the *umma* was not territorial conquest. It was the codification and standardisation of the Qur'an. Despite controversies,⁴⁶ 'Uthman's decision to standardise the Qur'an provided the Muslim society with an important symbol of unity,⁴⁷ earning the praise of Sunni scholars. Ibn Kathīr even considered the efforts as 'Uthman's greatest service to the *umma*,⁴⁸ providing the Muslim society with an important symbol of unity.

During 'Alī's rule (656-661), even the appearance of the political unity of the *umma*⁴⁹ was shattered. The Battle of Camel, the Battle of Šiffīn and the emergence of the Khawārij were the most important events that are considered as the first great *fitna* or revolt in the history of Muslims. These events, however, did not undermine the social integration of the *umma*. It was under 'Alī's patronage that the study of Arabic grammar was initiated. One of the leading Arabic grammarians, Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī (603-688/9), was 'Alī's disciple. This helped the integration of non-Arabs into the *umma*, both new Muslims learning the Arabic language, and converts

⁴² J. P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam. Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

⁴³ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 210–211.

⁴⁴ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 212.; I. M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46.

⁴⁵ H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 69–72.

⁴⁶ For accounts describing the controversies, see M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 213.; Also, F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers. At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 153–155.

⁴⁷ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 213.

⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, 349–352.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that three out of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs were assassinated, including the two immediate predecessors of 'Alī.

learning the Qur'an.⁵⁰ 'Alī also moved the capital from Medina to Kūfa, a step which unwittingly provided the inspiration for various caliphs to move their centre of power to the best location. This increased the dynamics of Muslim politics and the fluidity of the caliphate also encouraged mobility among Muslims.⁵¹

Khadduri asserts the traditional Sunni view that the election of Abū Bakr took into account "popular opinion" from the Muslims. In this view, it put the caliphate in accord with the social contract theory of state, whereby the Caliph established a contract with the Muslim society to lead them within the boundaries of the divine law.⁵² It follows, accordingly, that a caliph should be responsible to the people as long as the people deem him faithful in enforcing the divine law. However, the later concept of the caliphate developed by Muslim scholars deviated from these characteristics and, instead, put the caliph into the exalted position of being unreservedly obeyed.⁵³ Rosenthal shares the same opinion with Khadduri that the nature of the caliphate was transformed during the later period. The reign of Mu'āwīya and his dynasty changed the caliphate into an absolute monarchy.⁵⁴ During the 'Abbasid period, Rosenthal further suspects that the Muslim scholars had deliberately developed a distinct theory of statecraft in order to validate the divine purpose of the caliphate and, at the same time, to support the regime against insurgents.⁵⁵

Despite this deviation, the later caliphates were important in both the expansion of the *umma* and its internal integration. For the example, Mu'āwīya, while surrounded by controversies,⁵⁶ established a greater sense of communal integration and he ruled with general common interests as his priority.⁵⁷ He also developed the caliphate into a mature political institution, with features resembling a state such as standing army, solid bureaucracy and network of tax collectors.⁵⁸

Later Umayyad caliphs further this integration process. 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685-705) made bold reforms by adopting Arabic as the official language of the caliphate⁵⁹ and minting coins with Arabic engravings, making the caliphate relatively independent from Byzantine coins.⁶⁰ 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (r. 717-720) was well-known for his many reforms, including a

⁵⁰ M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam. The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 25.

⁵¹ F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 191.

⁵² M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, 9–11.

⁵³ M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, 13.

⁵⁴ E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam. An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26.

⁵⁵ E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 27.

⁵⁶ See P. Crone, *Slaves on horses: the evolution of the Islamic polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30. Cf. H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates* and R. S. Humphreys, *Mu'awiya Ibn Abi Sufyan. From Arabia to empire* (Oxford, England: Oneworld, 2006) for a more sympathetic view on Mu'āwīya.

⁵⁷ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 217–218.

⁵⁸ F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 171–172.

⁵⁹ G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam. The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 63.

⁶⁰ G. Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), 50–51.

new tax policy and making unpaid labour illegal.⁶¹ These reforms helped the Umayyads to establish an effective administrative body to support their rule. In return, the uniform governmental apparatus, regulations and practices provided a framework for the establishment of a general sense of identity among Muslims. They were speaking the same Arabic language, using the same coins and were administered by the same bureaucracy.

The ‘Abbasids managed to attain great stability during its Golden Age, which brought many benefits to the society. It opened various travel routes for mercantile purposes, religious pilgrimages or military conquests. Arabic had become the *lingua franca* of the caliphate, making social and economic interactions easy. These developments made possible the establishment of strong trade routes, which connected various trading centres into what Abu Lughod calls “one integral world-system”.⁶² The territories that the ‘Abbasids held during their zenith were vital to the trade routes that connected China in the east to the Byzantines in the west and various merchant cities in the Mediterranean region. Baghdad was positioned in the most lucrative trade route, making the city pivotal to economic activities and becoming one of the most important cities in the world.⁶³ The ‘Abbasids also controlled important ports and from there established their rule over the Indian Ocean, which connected the Indian sub-continent to the cities in the Persian Gulf and Africa. Even though the ‘Abbasid caliphs’ power waned during the later centuries, this caliphate still played a vital part in the world-system. Only after the Mongols’ invasion did the ‘Abbasids’ trading influence begin to crumble.⁶⁴

The wealth that many had accumulated was then channelled into the development of science and knowledge. Those with a religious inclination funded the development of Qur’anic studies, Prophetic studies or religious law and theology. During the ‘Abbasid period, there were religious movements to collect and validate the *hadith*. Two prominent scholars in this movement were al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875); both left their compilations of *hadith* as an invaluable legacy towards the development of Islamic scholarship in subsequent periods.⁶⁵ The availability of knowledge and learning centres and the ease of travelling in the ‘Abbasid period made it possible for Muslims from all over the then-known world to perform *rihla*, travelling to seek knowledge from famous scholars, which in turn established translocal networks between Muslims scholars.

After the destruction of Baghdad and the re-establishment of the ‘Abbasid caliphate in Egypt under the protection of the Mamluks, the caliphate was no more than a shadow of its former self. The new age of the caliphate began with the Ottomans with whom it remained until the abolition of the caliphate in 1024. They managed to expel the Safavids from south-eastern

⁶¹ Gibb, H. A. R., “The Fiscal Rescript of ‘Umar II”, *Arabica*, 2 (1955), p 1-16;; G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*.

⁶² J. L. Abu-Lughod, “The Shape of the World System in the Thirteenth Century”, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 22 (1987), 3–25: 10–11.

⁶³ J. L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony. The World System A. D. 1250-1350* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 190.

⁶⁴ J. L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 193–197.

⁶⁵ A. K. Bension, *The Great Caliphs. The Golden Age of the ‘Abbasid Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 168.

and eastern Anatolia, controlling the western Mediterranean through Tunis and Algiers and conquering all territories of the Mamluks under the leadership of Selim I (r. 1512-1520). The stage was set for Suleyman I (r. 1520-1566) to take the title in 1540. During the Ottoman period, the Caliph possessed great political power and made the caliphate a strong institution. Controlling the three holy cities of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, the Ottomans gained high prestige and were considered as the most powerful Muslim dynasty of their time.

To establish their reputation in the minds of the Muslim population, the Ottomans were keen to protect and provide for Muslims doing the *hajj*. Ottoman sultans, and then caliphs, took great care in assuring the safety of the pilgrims by building forts and strengthening garrisons between Damascus and the Holy Cities. They also asserted physical presence in the Holy Cities using inscriptions of their names in the holy places, reminding the pilgrims of their role as the caliph and guardian of the two holy lands. They even tried to monopolise the provisioning for the local population in Mecca in order to gain their loyalty. This was important considering that the Ottomans were never able to directly conquer Arabia.⁶⁶ Along with the adoption of Islamic symbols in their political rituals to enhance their legitimation in the eyes of the wider Muslim populations, the Ottomans also regulated taxes, established codes of law and a judicial system. These reinforced the subjects' sense of belonging to the same universe.⁶⁷

Developments in technology and infrastructure under the Ottoman rule further helped the integration of the *umma*. Under the sailing technologies employed by Ottoman ships, the journey from Istanbul to Venice could take fifteen days. From Alexandria to Venice, the journey would be longer, between seventeen to eighty days, depending on the winds. This allowed faster and easier mobility between various places, helping Muslim traders, pilgrims and other travellers.⁶⁸ While they did not directly control the whole Muslim world, the Ottomans took their leadership seriously. In their rivalry against European powers, the Ottomans expanded their diplomatic missions and trade envoys to all corners of the then-known Muslim lands. They also formed military alliances with various Muslim sultanates such as Gujarat in India and Aceh in Indonesia to halt the Portuguese expansion in these territories.⁶⁹ Suleyman Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, was said to sign a military pact with Sultan Alauddin of Aceh and Turkish soldiers were observed helping the Acehnese during their battle against the Portuguese in Malacca in 1547.⁷⁰

After Muḥammad, under the leadership of the caliphs, Muslim society gradually expanded. With each victory, the Muslims both spread the message of Islam to other people and put more territories under their rule. The vision of a global society named the *umma* became more vivid with each passing day; the idea became imaginable. Yet, at the same time, there was a problem of internalisation of the idea to both younger generations of Muslims and foreign people later

⁶⁶ D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95.

⁶⁷ D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, 32.

⁶⁸ D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, 117-118.

⁶⁹ M. Cizakca, "The Ottoman Government and Economic Life: Taxation, Public Finance and Trade Control" in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, S. Faroqhi & K. Fleet (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 241-275: 243-244.

⁷⁰ A. Reid, "Sixteenth Century Turkish Influence in Western Indonesia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10 (1969), 395: 401-402.

integrated in the society. In order to survive, a symbolic universe needs to develop supporting bodies of knowledge.⁷¹

The territorial expansion of the Muslim world and institutional development were in fact followed by the development of various bodies of knowledge to support the idea of an integrated *umma*. These included the science of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* and the adoption of Arabic as the official language of the society. Later, Muslim scholars such as al-Māwardī (972-1058), Nizām al-Mulk (1018-1092) and others also attempted to formulate a more coherent theory on Islamic governance to further support the idea of a global *umma* and the presence of a centralised authority over it, which took form as the caliphate. Al-Māwardī's major work, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, was published both as an argument to defend the caliphate and as a theoretical foundation for its past and future practices.⁷² Indeed, the lack of such theoretical explanations of the caliphate in the previous era made this treatise one of the most authoritative texts on Islamic statecraft. Later scholarly works built upon or proposed different ideas than al-Māwardī's, reflecting the nature of the caliphate as a socially constructed concept, not a divine one.

After the destruction of the 'Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in the thirteenth century, scholarly works on Islamic authority shifted again to reflect the changed condition of the *umma*. While the caliphate had long lost its actual political power before the fall of Baghdad, it had been a powerful symbol that embodied the concept of the *umma*. Its destruction necessitated the development of new perspectives on Islamic authority. Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406), with his theory of '*asabiyya*, managed to de-sacralise the caliphate and presented its dynamic as a sociological phenomenon.⁷³ While Ibn Khaldūn's conceptual work seems to legitimate fragmentation in the Muslim world, it actually promotes the idea that authority over the *umma* is universal⁷⁴; whoever manages to gather and command '*asabiyya* will rule over Muslims. This concept eventually provided strong legitimation to the Ottomans during their campaigns to establish their authority over the Muslim world.⁷⁵ Despite their non-Arab origin and lacking a direct link to the Prophet and his family, the Ottomans' rule was deemed to be valid on the grounds that they possessed the strongest '*asabiyya* in the Muslim world.⁷⁶

The development of theoretical knowledge on the caliphate and its general authority over the *umma* and the practical implementation of such authority are both important since they each support the maintenance of the imagined *umma*. The development of knowledge provides the *umma* with rational and normative justifications.⁷⁷ During the Prophetic era, the development of theoretical knowledge was mainly Scriptural. The *umma* was what the Qur'an and the Prophet

⁷¹ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 112–114.

⁷² I. Mattson, "Al-Ahkām Al-Sulṭāniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance", *Journal of Law and Religion*, 15 (2000), 399–403: 401.

⁷³ F. Rosenthal, *An Introduction to History. The Muqaddimah*. Translated (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967); M. M. Rabi', *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 91.

⁷⁴ M. M. Rabi', *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun*, 59–61.; K. Bland, "An Islamic Theory of Jewish History" in *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology*, B. B. Lawrence (ed.) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 37–45: 37–39.

⁷⁵ C. Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism and "Ibn Khaldunism" in Sixteenth Century Ottoman Letters" in *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology*, B. B. Lawrence (ed.) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 46–68: 47–48.

⁷⁶ N. Ardiç, "Genealogy or Asabiyya?", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 71 (2012), 315–324: 321–323.

⁷⁷ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 127.

outlined it to be. In the framework of Berger and Luckmann, this equates with the development of ‘mythical’ knowledge to support a symbolic universe.⁷⁸ During the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the Umayyads, the theoretical knowledge was expanded to theological knowledge, evident with the development of *fiqh* to further refine Islamic knowledge to support the idea of the *umma*. In the ‘Abbasid period and later, the development of knowledge advanced further into the realm of philosophy, if not also entering the domain of science.

In order to protect its existence as social reality or to defeat offending narratives, a symbolic universe also requires social groups to perform practical measures against the advocates of the opposing narrative. It is through these social groups that the symbolic universe becomes embodied and established as the “natural” condition to be embraced by all. While scholars debate how to defend their interpretation of a symbolic universe against the opposing narrative, the social groups put the theory into practice and battle to eliminate the practices of the opposing theory.⁷⁹

The presence of opposing theories within Muslim society, notably the schism between Sunni and Shi’a, provides further evidence that the concept of *umma* is central to the Muslims’ worldview to the point that even contending ideas and conflicting political groups are still contesting over the authority over the *umma*. Regardless of their position on the debate over the caliphate, either Sunni or Shi’a, supporting or disregarding the Umayyads, the ‘Abbasids or the Ottomans, the different norm entrepreneurs used what they regarded as an ‘Islamic’ framework as the foundation of their works. The presence of different interpretations over a symbolic universe, “the deviants”, is inevitable, and the interpretation that can gather the most support will become the next “official” one.⁸⁰

In this perspective, the Sunnis and Shi’a are two social groups bearing different interpretations of the idea of the *umma*. Each consider themselves as the embodiment of the “official” narrative of the *umma* and consider the other as a “heretical” group for espousing a “deviant” narrative. Both, however, claim authority over the whole *umma* and seek legitimacy for their claim by providing different interpretations of Muslim historical accounts. Although the accounts differ as to the meaning of particular events, they relate to a cultural and social field understood as ‘Muslim’. In a backhanded sort of way, their competition for the leadership over the *umma* and invocation of a common, though disputed, history, is evidence of the trans-sectarian importance of the *umma* idea.

The “Global” *Umma*?

Before Islam, Arab tribes had not developed any form of political institution advanced enough to unite all Arabia.⁸¹ Instead of relying on political institutions to govern their affairs, the Arabs had relied on their tribal structure to provide them with basic needs and protection.

⁷⁸ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 112.

⁷⁹ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 136–138.

⁸⁰ P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 124–138.

⁸¹ G. E. von Grunebaum, “The Nature of Arab Unity before Islam”, *Arabica*, 10 (1963), p 5-23: 6.; M. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 238–239.

Without a tribe, a person would not be able to survive in the harsh environment of the desert.⁸² The few Arab states in the northern part of Arabia had been acting as dependencies to larger political institutions, the Byzantines and the Sassanids, as can be seen in the case of the Ghassanid kingdom that owed fealty to the Byzantine empire or the Lakhmid kingdom, which was the vassal of the Sassanid empire.⁸³ These kingdoms' existence had been influenced by the whims of the great empires, evident in how Khusrau II abolished the Lakhmid kingdom of Hira in 602 and replaced the Lakhmid king with a Persian governor.⁸⁴

Unlike the Ghassanids and Lakhmids who maintained close relationships with the great powers, the Quraysh tribe that inhabited Mecca sought relative independence from them.⁸⁵ The only intense interaction between the Quraysh and the outsiders was Abraha's assault on Mecca (ca. 570). The assault, according to Peters, was part of a series of efforts by the Byzantine empire and its vassals intended to secure their interests in the area and to hamper the Sassanid's influence.⁸⁶ Islamic sources confirm this event and remember it as the War of the Elephant.⁸⁷ This event was described in detail by the classical Muslim historian, Ibn Ishāq (704-768), in his *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*.⁸⁸

This attitude of cautious neutrality was in contrast with the intense expansion done by the newly Muslim Quraysh. After embracing Islam, the Quraysh endeavoured to establish the vision of a global, unified *umma* instilled by the Qur'an and various Islamic teachings. This change of consciousness, from fixated to local or traditional boundaries to having a vision of uniting the world under one banner, is in line with what Robertson and English define as the emergence of global consciousness: a consciousness of the world as a whole, interconnected and interdependent.⁸⁹

Early Islamic society developed global consciousness through reflecting the spiritual teaching of Islam and through several networks -- namely, intellectual, political and legal-institutional and mystical networks. That the teaching of Islam had changed the societal practice in the Arabian Peninsula is supported by various accounts, from both classical Muslim tradition and modern scholars. The ease of the first generation Muslims in embracing the societal nature of the *umma* was based on their understanding of the Islamic teaching that God is One and that men are created to live together.⁹⁰

⁸² M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 148–149.; R. G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs. from Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 113–117.

⁸³ G. E. von Grunebaum, "The Nature of Arab Unity before Islam", 6–7.

⁸⁴ H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of Caliphates*, 11.

⁸⁵ M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 147.

⁸⁶ F. E. Peters, "Introduction" in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, F. E. Peters (ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999) xlvii.

⁸⁷ S. al- Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet*, 20.

⁸⁸ A. Guillaume, *Ibn Ishāq's The Life of Muhammad*. Translated (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 20–24.

⁸⁹ R. Robertson & D. English, "The Global Animus" in *Globalization and Global History (Rethinking Globalizations)*, B. K. Gills & W. R. Thompson (eds.) (Routledge, 2006), 30–43: 30.

⁹⁰ M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, 3.

This emphasis on unity is caused by the foremost doctrine in Islam, which is *tawhid* or the Oneness of God. There are also verses in the Qur'an which emphasise the unity of mankind according to Islam, such as Qur'an 49:13, which, according to al-Suyūṭī (1445-1505), was delivered to admonish the racial behaviour of early Muslims.⁹¹ The teaching of the Qur'an sets the moods for Muslims to maintain unity in their society. Furthermore, the Prophet had also established a unified society in Medina, which then developed into what Arjomand describes as the *Pax Islamica* movement.⁹²

The presence of the caliphate and the integration processes that unfolded under various rulers established the *umma* as a social reality and that it had the characteristics of translocal society. Yet, while this translocal society has global aspiration, it had not truly achieved *global* in the sense that, quoting Shaw,⁹³ it had "the quality involved in the worldwide stretching of social relations".

Consequently, the realisation of a truly global *umma* that connected and encompassed the whole world in networks of social relations was, and is, questionable. The Umayyad caliphate never ruled the entire world. Even during their peak, the 'Abbasids and the Ottomans had to share their authority with contending caliphates or other political actors. The networks of scholars in the Muslim intellectual world or the Sufi brotherhoods were expansive and extended well beyond the caliphate's political influence, especially in the later years, but there were still parts of the world which were not included in the network because of various reasons. The exclusion of non-Muslim societies from these networks is obvious but more subtle questions such as "should the non-Muslim intellectuals in the Muslim world be considered as part of the Muslim intellectual network" or "should the presence of an independent Sufi order be considered as part of a global Sufi movement" posit challenges to the idea that the *umma* was a truly *global* society.

This article then arrives at its conclusion that the "global *umma*" resided at the conceptual level of belief, calling Muslims to venture towards it. The Qur'an taught it. Islamic rituals provided the mood and motivations to actualise it. It perpetuated and permeated Islam and Islamic teaching and Muslims inevitably internalised the concept with their religious experience. The experience of pilgrimage is instructive. A Muslim might have considered performing the ritual of *hajj* as his or her religious duty. In so doing, interacting in the charged multicultural environment of Mecca, pilgrims from various geographical areas were likely to envision the Muslim *umma* in global terms. Once home, the perceived global society would have formed an integrated part of their religious narrative – in this sense, an integral part of their religious experience. Yet the global society as an established fact – a concrete, regularised and institutionalised existence – was and remains an aspiration. In a word, therefore: global consciousness has inspired the idea of a global society but the reality is of a translocal, rather than truly global, society.

⁹¹ H. S. Jarret, *Jalaludīn al-Suyūṭī's History of the Caliphs*. Translated (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1881), 530.

⁹² S. A. Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41 (2009), 555–575: 571.

⁹³ M. Shaw, *Theory of the Global State. Globality as Unfinished Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.