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Two sides of the same coin? The Muslim *umma* and the European Union

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the normative aspirations of the umma in International Relations. It is not the intention of this article to provide the blue print of a 'Muslim EU', rather, in comparing the articulation of the EU and the umma in International Relations (IR), the article shows the way in which the EU represents a (limited) 'European umma', and charts the difficulties faced by both assemblies in being analysed in IR, by virtue of their shared transnational character. However, the Muslim umma assembly is shown to face more problems than its erstwhile EU counterpart due to the religious nature of the umma.

The article charts the use of constructivism in IR to explain the creation of norms and identity in the international system, accounting for the EU's supranational presence in international politics. The application of constructivism to the umma, however, is shown to be more problematic due to the secular bias in International Relations¹ and, perhaps more importantly, the Islamic resurgence being insufficiently concerned with the constitutive elements within it.²

¹ Elizabeth Hurd: *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 1.

² Abdul-Karim Soroush: 'The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge', in Charles Kurzman, (ed.): *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 250.

This paper explores how the global Muslim community, or *umma*, might resemble the EU as a transnational construction. The implication of such a comparison is two fold. The first argument offered is to emphasise that one construction (the EU) is successfully articulated in international politics, while the second (the *umma*) is less successful. To say the *umma* is not a successful political entity when compared to the EU is not to deny the fact that many people *do* identify with the *umma*. It might even be true that more Muslims consider themselves part of the *umma* that EU citizens consider themselves ‘European’. The nature of the EU’s success, for the purposes of this paper, lies in the way in which the EU possesses an overtly political function in IR, while the *umma* is prescribed a socio-religious function. The paper refers to an externally affirmed function, legitimised and recognised in the international system. In this respect, the function the assembly holds confers to it some level of identity. Such an identity is externally affirmed, and contrasted with an internally affirmed identity, such as an ethnic identity in Fredrick Barth’s schema.³ Put differently an individual may be classed as a ‘European citizen’ by international organisations (what it means to be European in this understanding would be wholly based on the function of the organisation – the EU – within which an individual finds themselves), while not internally affirming that aspect of citizenship over and above that same individual’s sense of nationalism, for example.

The second implication of comparing the EU and the *umma* is to chart the normative terrain the EU developed for itself in the creation of its transnational organisation. When compared to the *umma*, the paper will argue that the same tools, namely constructivism and cosmopolitanism, cannot be used to explain the common norms of the *umma*. This problem will be argued to be an impetus for Muslims to concern themselves with issues beyond personal piety, to deal with the heterogeneity of Muslim peoples verses the unity of religious

³ Fredrick Barth (ed.): *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc, 1998), p. 6. I am very grateful to Samantha May for pointing out the importance of this distinction, and for many other helpful comments on this paper.

affirmation in the *umma*. Despite the considerable differences between the EU and the *umma*, there is cause for comparison. Take, for example, Barak Mendelsohn's summary of religious challenge to the state based politics of the Westphalian system: 'Religion circumvents the territorial divide by seeking to unite people around a set of rules applied on a non-territorial basis'.⁴ While the EU does not seek to establish a set of rules applied on a non-territorial basis, it *does* circumvent traditional (national) territorial divides. The *umma*, in comparison, falls squarely in Mendelsohn's description as a non-territorial assembly. While the ends are different, both the EU and the *umma* challenge traditional territorial divides, and so can be compared.

The extent of the *umma*'s transnational character is not clear, as it is traditionally conceived as a community of Muslim individuals. As such, the national may not even be a factor, making the *umma* more 'transIslamic' rather than transnational. This distinction will be discussed further, later in the paper, but for now the term 'transnational' will continue to be used despite its deficiency in describing the *umma* concept, as facilitates, however imperfectly, comparison with the EU. More problematically, the *umma* might not be a *political* assembly at all; Muslims who feel part of a broader 'pan-Islamic' identity fall under three broad categories in the literature on political Islam: 1) Muslims might take political action based upon their perceived membership to the *umma*;⁵ 2) Muslims might eschew politics all together based upon membership to that same *umma*, seeing Islam as separate from social functions or lacking authority in such matters;⁶ 3) Muslims might recognise that

⁴ Barak Mendelsohn: 'God vs. Westphalia: Radical Islamist Movements and the Battle for Organising the World', (*Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2012), p. 596

⁵ Mona Kawal Sheikh: 'How does religion matter? Pathways to religion in International Relations', *ibid.*, Vol., No. 2, p. 378-379

⁶ Sami Zubaida: *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 3

political action falls beyond the remit of their membership to the *umma*, but do so anyway, as ‘religionising’ political issues is seen as an effective way to achieve their goals.⁷

This article takes the view, in keeping with the theme of the special issue, that separation between religion and politics is at best arbitrary, and at worst neglects key ways in which religion influences contemporary lives. The assumption is, therefore, that the *umma* is political in so far as its members want it to be, *regardless* of how theologically sound such a position might be. As James Piscatori notes, in the aftermath of the abolition of the Ottoman Empire, ‘[t]o the question, ‘How should the umma be constructed now?’ little agreement emerged, with, however, the significant exception: the spiritual unity of the *umma* required political expression’.⁸ Turkish theologian Hayrettin Karaman, one of the principal scholars shaping contemporary Turkish Islamist rhetoric sees the *umma* as ‘not a purely religious entity, but it is an Islamic entity that has religious, social, economic, legal, and political implications. [It is] [i]nherently political’.⁹ Moreover, Karaman argues for the creation of an international organisation to realise unity in a world of nation-states, and explicitly compares such an organisation to the EU.¹⁰ The debate about how political the *umma* is, is related to the final theme of this paper which will be returned to in the conclusion, about what the constitutive elements of the Islamic resurgence actually are.

In pursuing the comparison between the EU and the *umma*, the paper is by no means attempting to outline the practical intricacies and policies necessary for a union of Muslim states along the lines of the EU; the difficulties of such an endeavour range from the expansive geography of Muslim majority territory, to the difficulties of working out

⁷ Bassam Tibi: *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change*, (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 5

⁸ James Piscatori: ‘Imagining Pan-Islam: Religious Activism and Political Utopias’, (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 131, 2005), p. 427

⁹ Ravza Altunas-Cakir: ‘Umma: A Modern Turkish Approach,’ School of Government and International Affairs (Unpublished conference paper: University of Durham, 2014), p. 15

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

economic integration across a heterogeneous mix of economic state systems, to defining the in-group/out-group distinction of the very term 'Muslim'. Rather, the paper attempts to explore the existence of group identity within the *umma* and group identity within the EU, which can be explained as distinct, if related, to practical integration. Indeed, if there is any comparison to be made between the two formations, it must be based on the normative environment of the EU and *umma*, as comparison in different spheres only highlight the difference experiences of the two assemblies; the European Community (EC)/EU coalesced after significant external pressure, which is not present for the *umma*. A small justification is offered here for why an abstract '*umma*' is chosen to contrast with the EU, rather than another international organisation, specifically, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The OIC, the second largest international organisation in the world behind the United Nations, is a group bound by both multistate functionalism (like the EU), but also carrying with it 'ideational subscription to a unification, or integration, of Muslim peoples',¹¹ like the *umma*. The OIC straddles state based politics and Muslim solidarity, and so seems well placed to serve as comparison for the EU. While scholarly attention on the OIC is limited, one of the few comprehensive works on the OIC in world politics offered by Naveed Sheikh, is fairly critical of the organisation's 'Islamic credentials'. Sheikh points out that '[w]hile the very theorem for the establishment of the OIC was the transnational body of believers, the OIC remains, in fairness, a secularized association of states rather than an international society'.¹² The OIC presents one particular articulation of *umma*, but so do transnational charitable organisations, diaspora and educational organisations. Rather than proceed by narrowing the discussion to one particular form of *umma*, the paper will remain slightly

¹¹ Naveed Sheikh: *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 16

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 42

abstract so not to pre-empt what *umma might* look like, and the challenges it *might* face, when contrasted to the EU.

The paper begins by taking a more in depth appraisal of the way in which the term identity is utilised in the paper, before moving onto to examine the challenges the EU poses for traditional understandings of what constitutes the units of international politics. This challenge is one that is shared by both transnational formations, but the *umma* is assumed to diverge with IR both because of its transnational character *and* its religious nature; the latter divergence is not a problem shared by the EU. While the argument offered by Erin Wilson previously in this special issue examines how European religious influence is downplayed and normalised to the point at which it is no longer seen in European states, this paper will not seek to challenge the EU's claims to secularism, but rather show how being perceived as secular is an important factor when it comes to being analysed by the discipline.

In exploring the creation of the EU's transnational character, the paper examines the importance of shared norms amongst different peoples as a requisite component of that transnational assembly. Two alternatives are put forward in explaining EU identity formation. The first, cosmopolitanism, relies on pre-political consensus over norms, implying a universalism or ethnocentrism that undermines the very notion of transnational allegiance. The second, constructivism, emphasises the construction of geographically and temporally bounded norms. The latter part of the paper applies both cosmopolitanism and constructivism to Muslim conceptions of the *umma* in an attempt to give agency to that concept of transnational religious solidarity.

The paper concludes that the EU's experience has shown that IR is capable of accounting for norms and identity through the medium of constructivism, and in this sense the EU is attributed a certain identity by the discipline. The applicability of constructivism to the *umma* however, is contingent on two factors; Constructivism as applied to the *umma* must

firstly overcome the secular resistance to overt religious expression in the discipline of IR, and secondly is reliant on the nature of Muslim religious resurgence becoming concerned with extra-religious factors, rather than an attempt to ‘purify’ existing practise by looking back at utopian histories.

Speaking about a transnational European/Muslim ‘character’ or ‘identity’ obscures the conceptual differences between these terms and leads to the trap of holism, where by these transnational assemblies are given ‘life’ separate from the individuals who constitute them. To prevent such essentialism, the paper will continue by discussing what is meant by identity in more depth.

INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, AND DISCIPLINARY IDENTITY

Identity is a fairly inclusive term, further complicated, as discussed briefly, when talking about ‘group’ identity;

[Identity] can legitimately be employed in a number of ways. It may, for example, mean no more than that a person or group is known by a certain name, but it may also be used in reference to the distinguishing characteristics marking whatever is known by that name or to the ensemble of cultural features that collectively constitutes the larger reality with which a person or group is identified through a certain name¹³

In this paper, identity is used to distinguish one group from another, and group identity is used as a term distinct from an individual identity, though the two are related. Where as individual identity answers ‘who am I’, the group identity answers ‘who are we’. It is not enough to say one is a social construct (group) and the other is not (individual), as *both* are socially constructed; Individual level identity is commonly referred to as dependant on ‘role

¹³ Philip Gleason: ‘Identifying Identity: A Semantic History’, (*The Journal of American History*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1983), p.930

performance’¹⁴ or ‘symbolic interactionism’.¹⁵ Role performance attributes one’s role or identity as contingent on the ‘complex weighted sum of various sources of reward’¹⁶ for the performance of a particular role/identity, while symbolic interactionism is contingent on communication between one’s self and the society they are embedded in. Both explanations are ‘social’ insofar as the external environment plays a prominent role in the creation of one’s identity.

Group identity, in contrast, ‘describes the set of common characters to which we allude when saying ‘we the members of this political community’.¹⁷ This group is given form only through the many individual identities that construct it; ‘collective-level we’s are derived from cognitive processes of group social comparison, group categorization, and group evaluation’.¹⁸ So to talk of a European identity is to talk of something that serves some purpose, is constituted by particular individuals and excludes others. It is not a reified entity that can be studied independently of the people who constitute it. The same is true of the *umma*. Regardless of the way in which the *umma* is defined theologically, in practise it only takes the form that its advocates create. In this way, the paper does not engage with debates over what the ‘proper’ form of the *umma* might be, but uses the *umma* as an example of religious transnationalism to contrast with the secular transnationalism of the EU. All that being the case, then what is the sense in referring to ‘identity’ at all? The paper is not strictly dealing with identity, but with units of analysis in IR. How these units of analysis are recognised and dealt with however, is related to identity. How do IR scholars identify an international actor? How do they identify a political actor? What behaviours must the *umma*

¹⁴ For more on role performance see: Peter Burke and Donald Reitzes: ‘The Link Between Identity and Role Performance’, (*Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1981)

¹⁵ For more on symbolic interactionism see: Peggy Thoits and Lauren Virshup: ‘Me’s and We’s: Forms and Functions of Social Identities’, in Richard Ashmore and Lee Jussim, (eds.): *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 108-113

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.110

¹⁷ Barbara Henry: ‘Identities of the West: Reason, Myths, Limits of Tolerance’, in Heidrun Friese, (ed.): *Identities: Time, Difference and Boundaries*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), p.86

¹⁸ P. Thoits and L. Virshup, ‘Me’s and We’s: Forms and Functions of Social Identities’, p.122

or the EU display to be considered a unit of analysis in IR? These questions of identity *do* relate to group identity, but in a very bounded way; it is not the purpose of this paper to answer ‘who are we’, in relation to the EU or the *umma*, but to explore the extent to which these assemblies are *recognised* by established actors in IR (states). This recognition being one of the many criteria for analysing the ‘actorness’ of an entity in IR.¹⁹

In summary, the group identities of Muslim *umma* and EU are invoked to facilitate comparison of how they are analysed in IR. This specific focus should not be confused with, for example, charting the individual-level identities which lead to group-level identities, or answering the questions about the inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics of such group identities. In this way, the paper is not claiming there is anything ‘essential’ about either the EU or the *umma* which separates the constructs, for as their character is wholly dependant on the individuals who constitute them and there is no ‘inherent’ meaning to either grouping; EU citizens might well be members of the *umma*, and will balance their obligations to both groups much as EU citizens balance membership to their nation and the EU simultaneously. Rather, the paper is drawing attention to the way in which IR prescribes identity upon different transnational groupings which influences their analysis. This identity problem is identified by Joseph Jupille, James Caporaso, and Jeffrey Checkel when they comment that ‘its [the EU’s] identity as a political system [is] problematic, and its location within traditional academic subfields ambiguous’.²⁰ Such an identity, while related to both group-level identity and ‘actorness’, as outlined above, is distinct from both, and will be referred to as ‘disciplinary identity’. The importance of discussing such non-traditional themes in IR is

¹⁹ Joseph Jupille and James Caporaso: ‘States, Agency, and Rules: The European Union in Global Environmental Politics’, in Carolyn Rhodes, (ed.): *The European Union in the World Community*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 215-221

²⁰ Joseph Jupille, James Caporaso, and Jeffrey Checkel: ‘Integrating Institutions: Rationalism, Constructivism, and the Study of the European Union’, (*Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 7, 2003), p. 8

growing; '[s]ymbols, utopias, feeling, faith: these are no the normal concepts of international relations. But they have an undeniable marked presence today'.²¹

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S CHALLENGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dominant theories in IR use states as their primary unit of analysis. Even beyond realist theory, the question is almost always 'why/how should we account for this non-state actor' as an exception to the norm, rather than 'why/how should we account for state actors'. This presumption betrays the underlying assumption that states are the real 'movers and shakers' in the international sphere. Joining the 'international community' is almost exclusively tantamount to achieving statehood as characterised by the Treaty of Westphalia, now granted through membership to the United Nations.²² The ethnocentricity or historical veracity of this conception of the international community, and the discipline which studies it, is not in question in this paper (though allusions are made towards these problems). Rather, taking a concept of state centred IR as given; the focus of this section of the paper is on challenging this conceptualisation of the international system to acknowledge the presence and power of EU. In essence we are building on David Chandler's assessment that '[t]here is a growing consensus that expressing political community in territorially bounded terms is inherently problematic because of its narrow, self interested and divisive framework'.²³ The need to reassess the viability of territorially bounded community (states) is more than a normative assessment but also a reflection of the changing empirical world, in which such super-state organisations as the EU have come to exist.

Ian Manners contests that many of the problems in analyses of the EU can be traced back to the analyst's incorrect appraisal of *what* the EU is. Going by the earlier appraisal of

²¹ J. Piscatori: 'Imagining Pan-Islam', p. 441

²² Turan Kayaoglu: 'Westphalian Eurocentrism in International Relations Theory', (*International Studies Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2010), p. 193.

²³ David Chandler: 'Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism? The Limits of the Biopolitical Approach', (*International Political Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2009), p. 53.

the units constituting the international system, for the EU to exist in the international sphere it must behave like a state. Herein is Manners' problem with EU studies, which broadens out to IR more generally; the EU as a super-state entity is shaped by norms which lead to 'a willingness to disregard Westphalian conventions'.²⁴ The EU is able to disregard these conventions as, unlike a state, the EU is not constituted by the Westphalian example. We return to Manners for a concise summary of the EU's challenge to more traditional IR:

The creative efforts of the European integration process have changes what passes for "normal" in world politics. Simply by existing as different in a world of states and the relations between them, the European Union changes the normality of "international relations". In this respect the EU is a normative power: it changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from the bounded expectations of state-centricity.²⁵

Manners is not arguing that statism is undermined, but rather *changed*. It is evident that the EU is reliant upon the states that constitute it, but the relationship between states and the super-national institution that is born out of them can be related to the constructivist notion of 'co-constitution', as will be explored in the next section.

NORMS AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The norms that for Manners constitute the difference between the EU and state actors need to be defined. In general norms characterise an 'oughtness'; they encompass a 'shared moral assessment, norms prompt justifications for action'.²⁶ Manners identifies 5 norms that guide the EU and help constitute its international identity: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law

²⁴ Ian Manners: 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', (*Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002), p. 239.

²⁵ Ian Manners: 'The Normative Ethics of the European Union', (*International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1, 2008), p. 65.

²⁶ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink: 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', (*International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998), p. 891-892.

and human rights.²⁷ The ‘oughtness’ of these norms is a central problem to their inclusion in IR, as it is a discipline traditionally dominated with description or explanation.²⁸ Irrespective of the commitments of European elites to the norms identified by Manners, norms surely cannot influence the trajectory of the EU more than socioeconomic conditions or geopolitical power balancing? But the debate does not cut so cleanly. Norms as related to the EU represent more than an ‘oughtness’, they have in fact constituted a ‘European’ identity. However weak (with regards to individual level ‘who am I’ questions) or strong (with regards to ‘actorness’ and recognition from others) such an identity may be, it exists.²⁹ The ‘construction’ of European norms and shared cultural values has helped lead to this new political community, providing a positive and distinct group identity, as social psychologist Henri Tajfel forwards to be a key aspect of group identities.³⁰ Moreover, the legitimacy of this community is now vested, at least partly, in those norms and values. At this point we engage with social constructivist theory to better explain the nature of the EU’s presence in IR.

Social Constructivism (hereafter constructivism) represents an ontological departure from more systemic IR theorising in that it views reality as partly constructed by individuals, not separate to them as objective phenomena. In both instances individuals interact with their worlds, but for constructivists the world is not passively waiting to be discovered and interacted with – it is partly constituted by those individuals.³¹ The implication of constructivism is that it does not purport to discover some ‘truth’, but to show how truths are created; ‘The point is not to deny the existence of material reality, as critics sometimes

²⁷ I. Manners: ‘Normative Power Europe’, p. 242.

²⁸ Mervyn Frost: *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

²⁹ Richard Bellamy and Alex Warleigh point opinion poll data to show the pervasiveness of a hybrid national-European identity amongst German participants, for example. See: Richard Bellamy and Alex Warleigh: ‘From an Ethics of Integration to an Ethics of Participation - Citizenship and the Future of the European Union’, (*Millennium: A Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1998), p. 462.

³⁰ P. Thoits and L. Virshup, ‘Me’s and We’s: Forms and Functions of Social Identities’, p. 115

³¹ Jeffery Checkel: ‘The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory’, (*World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1998), p. 236.

suggest, but to focus on the consequentiality of representations of that reality'.³² With regards to IR and the centrality of states, the power of constructivism is made clear by Nicholas Onuf. For Onuf, if we presume IR to begin with states as the 'who' and war as the 'how', then it is not unreasonable to believe in the anarchic system; the point being that this may not be the case, if we construct the conditions of our reality differently.³³ In other words, the world is anarchical, in part, because we conceive of it so, and therefore we behave in anarchic ways; 'the role of shared ideas [is] an ideational structure constraining and shaping behaviour'.³⁴

Jeffrey Checkel summarises the constructivist perspective as relates to the behaviour of EU:

Societal pressure constrains the behaviour and choices of decision-makers – a process captured by rationalists' emphasis on instrumental action and the means-ends calculations of agents. In contrast, elite learning occurs when individuals are taught, in the absence of obvious material incentives, new values and interests from norms – a process best explained by the constructivist focus on logics of appropriateness and the mutual constitution of agents and social structures.³⁵

Here we see the co-constitutive nature of norms in the construction of EU identity; while norms and values may begin as 'outside influences', constraining the behaviour of actors, they are then internalised and form the basis of shared understanding between peoples, who exert this understanding upon others in a cyclical manner. Likewise, we could begin our understanding from the internalisation of values by an actor, who in promoting these values constrains the behaviour of a second actor, who later internalises that same value as the basis of shared understanding with the first actor, and so on.

³² Nik Hynek and Andrea Teti: 'Saving identity from postmodernism? The normalization of constructivism in International Relations', (*Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2010), p. 175

³³ Nicholas Onuf: *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 231-232.

³⁴ Dale Copeland: 'The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay', (*International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2000), p. 189.

³⁵ Jeffery Checkel: 'International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide', (*European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1997), p. 487-488.

Beyond constructivism there are a host of other theories to explain the cohesiveness of the EU, primary of which is neofunctionalism.³⁶ What constructivism accounts for is not the formation or functioning of the Union, but the construction of its group-level identity. Another theory to consider in this regard is liberal cosmopolitanism, which distinct from the shared norms and values of constructivism, see super-state political community as bound in rights and duties of (global/European) citizens.³⁷ This paper has focused on constructivism as a theory of European identity as cosmopolitanism implies a certain universality which is ahistorical, taking away the social aspect of individual and group level identity formation. In claiming the values of liberalism are ‘universal’ obscures the fact they were conceived in a historical and geographical context. According to Turan Kayaoglu, in IR this equates to ‘treating the West as a perennial source of political and religious tolerance in the international society... Perpetual progress of the Western normative order will continue to sustain a normative hierarchy in which the non-Western tortoise will never catch the European hare’.³⁸ While Kayaoglu essentialises the ‘West’ (which at times is tantamount to Europe), he points out that removing the geographical and historical specificity of certain norms and values leads to, in the case of cosmopolitanism and the EU, Eurocentrism. Constructivism achieves specificity and links value creation not with pre-political consensus, but with the co-constitutive relationship between actors and their environments, articulated through political process.

Having related a story of European norm construction and group level identity based upon those norms (and recognising that such an identity is not the *only* way to be

³⁶ See: Ernst B. Haas: ‘The Uniting of Europe and the Uniting of Latin America’, (*Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1967) and William Wallace and Julie Smith: ‘Democracy or Technocracy? European Integration and the Problem of Popular Consent’, (*West European Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1995).

³⁷ D. Chandler: ‘Critiquing Liberal Cosmopolitanism?’, p. 62.

³⁸ T. Kayaoglu: ‘Westphalian Eurocentrism’, p. 196.

European, but the one with the most saliency in IR literature), the paper will now shift focus to the Muslim *umma* and a similar quest for a super-state or transnational formation, highlighting at once the ways in which the challenges facing both identities are similar on account to the transnational nature of the *umma*, and different on account of its explicitly religious nature, as opposed to the EU.

THE UMMA'S CHALLENGE TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

‘Today, the Islamic civilization is no longer a world of Islam, or an Islamicate for itself. Under the conditions of globalization it is incorporated – against its will – into a combination of an international society and an international system’.³⁹ Bassam Tibi here highlights the predicament facing Islamic politics: an imposition of political models which, in the words of Sami Zubaida, ‘has raised different sorts of questions regarding the compatibility of “imported” models of the nation state with histories, cultures and societies in the region’.⁴⁰ Put differently, this predicament is framed as a crisis of identity.⁴¹ If the international system, the world of nation states, is the ‘imposition’, then what is the culturally ‘authentic’ model of Islamic politics? Here is a problem similar to European identity: Islam (or Europe) is not a culture but an amalgamation of cultures that draw on Islamic (or European) symbols in a variety of ways. The use of religious symbolism is something that Samantha May discusses at length in her paper, showing how past ideas of geographic understandings are used by Muslims to find alternatives to the state model. This paper makes no claims to an ‘authentically’ Islamic (or indeed European) method of politics, indeed, as noted earlier group-level identities involve an in-group/out-group aspect that make it difficult to talk of genuine, or even a singular, European or Islamic character. Rather, the creation of these

³⁹ B. Tibi: *Islam's Predicament with Modernity*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Sami Zubaida: *Islam, the People & the State*, 2nd ed. (London: IB Tauris, 1989), p. 121.

⁴¹ Khaled Abou El Fadl: ‘Islam and the Theology of Power’, (*Middle East Report*, Vol., No. 221, 2001), p. 28.

identities highlight the possibilities a post-communist world holds for alternative modes of politics; a space has been opened up for alternatives, like political Islam, to develop.⁴² This alternative, the paper proposes, can be represented by the *umma*.

The *umma* is described by Nazih Ayubi as an Islamic equivalent to the state, only with a larger, transnational scope.⁴³ In fact it is an alternative to the state, as alluded to by verse 143, chapter 2, of the Qur'an, which states: 'Thus have we made you an umma justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves'.⁴⁴ Here the reference to *umma* and nations, *nas*, in the same verse highlight their different meanings. The *umma* is a rule over people rather than rule over territory, which is commonly tied to notions of state sovereignty. The word *umma* is not exclusively Islamic, the Arabic word means community, and so Muslim *ummas* exist alongside Christian and Jewish *ummas*, for example. The extent of the union within the (Muslim) *umma* is less clearly established. Is it a community of *all* Muslims or all Sunni Muslims, as distinct to a Shi'a *umma*? The delineations between different groups of Muslims may very well play out in any conception of the *umma*, but that does not deny an urge to unite, it only questions the extent of such a union.⁴⁵

The use of the *umma* in Islamic conceptualisations of the international sphere is problematic for IR, which struggles, as seen with scholarship on the EU, to accommodate such transnational organisations. Peter Mandaville describes the problem with IR's relation to the *umma*: 'By locating "the political" within the state, conventional IR theory reproduces a set of political structures unsuited to circumstances in which political identities and processes

⁴² Bryan Turner: *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

⁴³ Nazih Ayubi: *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1-10.

⁴⁴ *Qur'an*, 2:143.

⁴⁵ James Piscatori: *Islam in a World of Nation States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 45-46.

configure themselves across and between forms of political community'.⁴⁶ Mandaville's assessment rings true for any number of transnational movements, the EU included. However the EU still locates politics within states, which constitute its very being, as discussed earlier. Mandaville's description of the problems with what he labels 'conventional IR theory' has further implications for the *umma*.

As pointed out earlier, the *umma* does not *necessitate* any concept of the national at all, though it often includes it. Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries, for example, would still need to feel part of any institutionalised conception of the *umma*. In this example, emphasis on territory (and the nation) is exchanged for emphasis on the individual. Majid Khadduri highlights the specific predicament for Muslims. In prophetic tradition, Muhammed's agreement with the tribes of Medina (623AD) inferred that all other loyalties were superseded by those of Muslim solidarity.⁴⁷ At the same time, the need for authority or even the state 'is regarded as absolutely necessary' to ensure the existence of community.⁴⁸ The current state system then, in dividing the loyalty of Muslims away from faith based solidarity, poses a problem that the *umma* presents itself as the solution to, in facilitating transnational allegiance. Even in this brief summary, a spectrum of arguments is revealed as to the vitality of the *umma*. In Mandaville's appraisal the *umma* is a challenge to the way politics is conceived in IR, but Khadduri advocates the necessity of a delineated, Muslim polity. Alternatively, Sami Zubaida argues that the politics of community may not be wholly congruous with the politics of states, representing the contemporary world's only legitimate international polity. However Zubaida does not believe, as Mandaville does, that the politics

⁴⁶ Peter Mandaville: *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 5.

⁴⁷ Majid Khadduri: *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1955), p. 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5-7.

of community *challenge* the status quo, rather ‘they only pose practical problems to it’.⁴⁹ Acknowledging that the conception of the *umma* forwarded here is but one of many articulations of the concept, the paper will focus on something like Sohail Hashmi’s ‘thin’ conception of *umma*, which see it as an internationalist enterprise, perhaps an interstate society. This is contrasted to a ‘thick’ conception of the *umma* which might be represented by *dar-al-Islam* or individuals linked through transnational organisations; ‘According to this [‘thick’] vision, the *umma* has a life apart from the state or states’.⁵⁰

As the EU is based upon the states that comprise it, so too will the theoretical *umma* be based upon Muslim states, that is, states that recognise Islam as an official state religion. Doing so allows the paper to work with the term transnationalism, aids the comparison with the EU, and adds a practical dimension to the paper. The disadvantages of conceptualising a state based *umma* is significant, as such a structure would not be representative of the whole *umma* as it would not include the substantial numbers of Muslims living as minority populations in non-Muslim states, as well as Muslim leaders not affiliated to the state, NGOs, and charities. In addition, developing criteria for what constitutes a ‘Muslim’ state is not easy, as was discussed earlier in this section. These are very acute problems with a state based conception of the *umma*, for sure, but the discussion continues, as it has so far, not looking to solve the operative problems associated with the *umma*, but looking to explore the problems with religious based identity in IR, specifically, the problems with a thin conception of the *umma*. As will be argued, even considering a conception of the *umma* that ‘plays the game’, so to speak, with the dominant international relations traditions, it still runs into considerable problems around its religious identity. That a thin conception of the *umma* is considered here

⁴⁹ Sami Zubaida: ‘Islam and the Politics of Community and Citizenship’, (*Middle East Report*, Vol., No. 221, 2001), p. 22.

⁵⁰ Sohail Hashmi: ‘Islam, the Middle East and the Pan-Islamic Movement’, in Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, (eds.): *International Society and the Middle East*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 170.

(aiding comparison with the EU, but not representing the dominant understanding of the *umma* amongst believers) does not mean that there are no other conceptions available for study. For now, and to maintain the discussion on transnationalism in IR rather than Islamic group-level identity, the paper proceeds by placing the *umma*, however arbitrarily, in the vessel of states.

Having briefly reviewed the notion of *umma*, the next section will deal explicitly with similarities and differences between the *umma* and the EU, asking to what extent the EU can be considered a European *umma*, and whether the approaches of constructivism and cosmopolitanism can give the Muslim *umma* a sense of disciplinary identity in the same way they have tentatively answered ‘what is the EU’, for the discipline of IR.

A ‘EUROPEAN UMMA’, OR A ‘MUSLIM EU’?

The ways in which the EU has engendered a European identity is perhaps an approach that could similarly be adopted by Muslim states to engender some form of Islamic solidarity which is currently missing from the international relations of these states⁵¹. Instead, the Islamic credentials of these rulers, verses the challengers for state control, represent a source of illegitimacy vis-a-vis their domestic populations.⁵² It has been observed that the plans that Islamists visualise ‘have not been tested by the realities of power, nor have they themselves had to organize and staff ministries, meet budgets, or implement policies’.⁵³ Beyond these tests of power, it is also true and perhaps more troublesome for Islamists, that they lack the theoretical framework for such religious transnationalism in the secular world of nation-states; the transnationalism represented by the EU is not so easily replicated in the *umma* as there is considerable resistance to the notion of Islamic, religious solidarity in the IR discipline.

⁵¹ N. Ayubi: *Political Islam*, p. 122-123.

⁵² For a detailed discussion on the power of Islamic discourse and symbolism in Muslim politics, see: Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori: *Muslim politics*, (Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵³ Richard Bulliet: ‘Twenty Years of Islamic Politics’, (*Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1999), p. 196.

Juxtaposed to forms of liberal-democratic governance, Islam is popularly conceived as ‘repellent and strange... The notion commonly associated with it is the Sharia... which would seem to be incompatible with the rules of enlightened reason’.⁵⁴

Thomas Risse-Kappen warns that ‘there is no reason to assume that transnational relations regularly promote “good” causes’.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the supporting example of a ‘bad’ cause for Risse-Kappen is an ill-defined Islamic fundamentalism.⁵⁶ In fact, much of the resistance to religion in IR stems not from some essential and irrational nature of religion, but from a secular bias in IR scholarship.⁵⁷ This section continues by subverting ‘the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist separation between religion and politics’⁵⁸ and discusses the ways in which theories that seek to explain the formation of an EU identity might work in relation to the *umma*.

Recalling the universalist aspirations and rights based approach to community inherent in cosmopolitanism, verses the geographical and historical specificity of community afforded by constructivist theory, the lack of clarity with regards to the extent and nature of unity amongst Muslims resonates with this cosmopolitan/constructivist division. On the one hand, a popular and in some senses ‘classical’ understanding of Islamic IR, *siyar*, bears much resemblance to the universality of cosmopolitanism. Ahmed Bsoul Labeeb tries to emphasise exactly this when he states that, ‘Islam is a universal message and its rulings cover and refer to all people without distinction and without favouring one group or race over another. Islamic law aims to establish one society under one system.’⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Josef Van Ess: *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Thomas Risse-Kappen: ‘Bringing transnational relations back in: introduction’, in Thomas Risse-Kappen, (ed.): *Bringing transnational relations back in: Non-state actors, domestic structures and international institutions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁵⁶ This paper does not engage with cataloguing the numerous and divergent Islamist trends. For a concise taxonomy of these groups, see: N. Ayubi: *Political Islam*, p. 67-69.

⁵⁷ E. Hurd: *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ Ahmed Bsoul Labeeb: ‘Theory of International Relations in Islam’, (*Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2007), p. 72.

The quintessential Islamic reformer, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, also alludes to this universality, but betrays a naivety in the power he affords religion in this instance. For al-Afghani, Islamic solidarity is at least comparable to nationalism and he believed that by being loyal to their faith, Muslims can put sectarian considerations aside in the creation of their *umma*.⁶⁰ Much as European cosmopolitanism is imbued with Eurocentric allusions, so too is al-Afghani's reference to broad Islamic universalism laden with essentialism. This is a position criticised at length by Aziz al-Azmeh, who notes that Islamists, 'claim to speak for a univocal body of legislation which is not grounded in the vast historical experience of Muslims';⁶¹ Indeed it is worth considering, has there ever been a singular *umma* for all Muslims? After the death of the Prophet Muhammed, it is hard to answer in the affirmative. That does not mean that the *umma* is fantasy, only that its meaning can be more than the idealised *singular* community commonly invoked. Al-Azmeh argues that generalisations made about social groups in terms of religion incorrectly overwrite socio-economic factors, when in fact 'religious difference underwrites and does not overdetermine social exclusivism'.⁶² In moving away from the idea that some pre-political consensus exists amongst Muslims, perhaps al-Azmeh goes too far, denying the constructivist, co-constitutive relationship of religious ideas on the behaviour of actors, instead arguing that behaviour is already determined by socio-economic factors and subsequently given legitimacy through religious discourse. How can constructivism better relate the religious experience of Muslims to the urge for some kind of solidarity, represented through the *umma*?

Two constructivist analyses of the Middle East posited by, Michael Barnett and Shibly Telhami offer the potential for a more nuanced understanding of Islamic community, in the same way that Checkel's work applies constructivism to explain the formation of EU

⁶⁰ Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani: 'An Islamic Response to Imperialism', in John Donohue and John Esposito, (eds.): *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 21-23.

⁶¹ Aziz Al-Azmeh: *Islam and Modernities*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1996), p. 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

identity. Both studies focus on the role of social processes in constructing Middle East politics, in particular the processes that constitute identity. Indeed, '[n]o student of Middle Eastern International politics can begin to understand the region without taking into account the ebb and flow of identity politics'.⁶³ The focus here on the Middle East, and Islamic identities derived from that location, is not an attempt to essentialise the Islamic faith, but rather an example of constructivist discourse on religion and identity.

So far, so good. Unfortunately neither study gives enough time to separating out religion, culture and identity. Islam is tied to culture in both analyses; it is only mentioned as a reactionary force by Telhami and Barnett⁶⁴ and appears 3 times in the index of *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.⁶⁵ While the constructivist method opens space for the study of religious identity, the secular biases inherent in IR, identified in Elizabeth Hurd's work,⁶⁶ ensures that such identity is under-theorised. Abdul Latif Tibawi pre-empted some of the conclusions of Hurd's study when he wrote in 1964 that without understanding Islam as it is understood and experienced by a believer, scholarly work is ensured to be disconnected from the realities of Muslim people.⁶⁷ As Peter Mandaville asserts, '[e]ven if Muslim identities remain primarily nationalized, this does not mean that it is not possible for them to make common cause with co-religionists elsewhere, or to sympathise with "Muslim" issues'.⁶⁸

Despite the problems with current constructivist study (or omission) of Islam's relation to identity, constructivism in the mould of EU integration studies still holds much potential for theorising the *umma*. The often heard slogan of *din-wa-dawla*, the inseparability

⁶³ Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett: 'Introduction: Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East', in Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, (eds.): *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.1-10.

⁶⁵ Michael Barnett: *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁶⁶ E. Hurd: *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*.

⁶⁷ Abdul Latif Tibawi: 'English-Speaking Orientalists', in Alexander Lyon Macfie, (ed.): *Orientalism: A Reader*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

⁶⁸ Peter Mandaville: *Global Political Islam*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 341.

of religion and politics, is again not representative of the realities of Muslims, nor an appreciation of Islamic texts.⁶⁹ In fact, there is little about the faith of Islam that predisposes its believers to a specific political order, the religious source texts offer very little by way of detail regarding the proper forms and conduct of politics – except to state that these activities should occur in accordance with the moral system of Islam.⁷⁰ This being so, the scope for developing a framework for common identity is huge.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the 5 core norms identified by Manners, around which European identity is constructed: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights,⁷¹ comparable norms can be found in, for example, ‘Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman’s study into the content of an Islamic IR. For Abu Sulyman, self-determination, justice, peace, self-exertion, and a respect for and fulfilment of commitments represent the normative basis of Islamic IR,⁷² which could be adapted to form the basis of Muslim transnational identity. *Which* norms constitute Muslim identity is not clearly defined; even Abu Sulayman’s norms are ambiguously tied to Islamic texts. But European identity is not derived from some essential European character; there are no ‘European source texts’ that bind Europeans through time and space. Rather, the identity is constructed in the here and now, in a geographically and temporally specific instance and socially dependent on the hierarchical roles or symbolic interactionism.⁷³ So too can Muslim identity be formed and relevant to Muslims *now* rather than all Muslims throughout time, as is so often the urge for Muslim thinkers. Of course in this conception the *umma* would have to be geographically limited by the states that constitute it, much as the EU

⁶⁹ D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori: *Muslim politics* p. 56.

⁷⁰ P. Mandaville: *Global Political Islam*, p. 12.

⁷¹ I. Manners: ‘Normative Power Europe’, p. 242.

⁷² Perry Gledd: ‘Book Review: The Islamic Theory of Interntional Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought’, (*American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1992), p. 124-125.

⁷³ P. Thoits and L. Virshup, ‘Me’s and We’s: Forms and Functions of Social Identities’, p. 108-113

is, and therefore compromise much of what makes the *umma* unique and desirable for Muslims, namely, a sense of solidarity with *individual* Muslims, regardless of the territory they live. As an example of religious based identity in IR, the state conception of the *umma* serves.

Cosmopolitanism denies the conversations needed to establish what it means to be Muslim in the international sphere, and presupposes the answer to that question based on interpretation of religious source texts. Constructivism is far better placed to give agency that is meaningful and relevant to the realities of Muslims from different ethnic/national, cultural and denominational backgrounds. In this way, the example of the EU's identity construction is exemplary for the *umma*, as it too encompasses a heterogeneous mix of cultures, religions, and ethnicities/nationalities. The ability for Muslim thinkers to conceive of 'Muslim' in this way is contingent on the way in which religious revivalism is articulated in Islam.

Abdul Karim Soroush talks of religious revivalism as coming in both positivist and negativist forms. 'Negative revivalism comes in purging and purifying current religious understanding of alien elements and doing justice to the more neglected dimensions thereof'.⁷⁴ Negativist revivalism, reminiscent of *din-wa-dawla* Islamists, is tied to EU cosmopolitanism by the ahistorical and universal nature of both their discourses. Positivist revivalism concerns itself with 'extra religious factors and foundations required for and relevant to the time bound comprehension of the [religious source] text'.⁷⁵ It is positivist revivalism that needs to be harnessed by Muslim thinkers and, through the constructivist methods that have yielded results for the EU, used to develop an Islamic *umma*. As the *umma* vested in states is inadequate for Muslim unity, so too is the notion of a 'European *umma*' problematic. The limitations that the state system brings to transnational imaginaries need not

⁷⁴ A.-K. Soroush, 'The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge', p. 250.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

be a legacy of the *umma*, as it is for the EU, in the search for religious transnational solidarity.

As IR has struggled to account for the EU it has expanded its conceptual boundaries;

the EU represents a living laboratory within which to study a variety of economic, social, political, and institutional developments, none of which is unique to it. EU studies, rather than standing separate from the subfields and from broader developments in the discipline, may instead stand astride them, at once drawing from and influencing them.⁷⁶

The same can be said in the study of *umma* in IR, adding two important variables: the study of religion, and the study of community.

⁷⁶ J. Jupille, J. Caporaso, and J. Checkel: 'Integrating Institutions: Rationalism, Constructivism , and the Study of the European Union', p.108