

Answer to Question

The Word 'Ummah' according to Linguists

(Translated)

Question:

In *The Draft Constitution*, Article 21, we have said: “And the word group here is the name of a genus, in other words, the word group is used and what is intended by it is the genus ...”

I have two questions:

1. Is it not better to say: "And the word 'Ummah' (أُمَّة) here is the name of a genus" instead of "and the word group..." because it is related to the denotation of expression of a verse so it must be used as it is?

2. It is mentioned in many linguistic sources that the word 'Ummah' (like the words 'jama'ah' (group), 'qawm' (people), 'rah't' (family) and 'ta'ifa' (faction)...) is a collective noun and not the name of a genus. Why did we consider the words 'Ummah' and 'group' (Jama'ah) the names of a genus and not collective nouns?

Answer:

• For the first question, the answer is as follows:

1- The word 'Ummah' (أُمَّة) is a common expression; it has several meanings, including:

a. A group: ﴿تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ﴾ “That is a nation which has passed on” [Al-Baqara: 134] Meaning a group. ﴿أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ﴾ “A nation (a band of people) inviting to [all that is] good” [Al-i-Imran: 104] Meaning a group calling for goodness.

b. Meaning one band either in Iman or in misguidance, ﴿كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً﴾ “Mankind was [of] one faith” [Al-Baqara: 213], i.e. one band on one way of misguidance. ﴿وَمَا كَانَ النَّاسُ إِلَّا أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً﴾ “Mankind were once a community of one faith” [Yunus: 19] i.e. one band affirmers of the Oneness.

c. To mean a religion or law “Shariah” ﴿وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً﴾ “And indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so fear Me.” [Al-Mu'minun: 52] i.e. your religion and your Shariah.

d. To mean time or duration ﴿وَاذْكُرْ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ﴾ “and remembered after a time” [Yusuf: 45] i.e. after a period of time.

e. To mean an individual who acts as a group in goodness ﴿إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً﴾ “Indeed, Abraham was a [comprehensive] leader” [An-Nahl: 120] That is, an imam or role model, who acts as a congregation in the worship of Allah.

2. Thus, 'Ummah' is a common expression, so, when explaining the verse its meaning in the verse is used, which is a 'group', and therefore we used the meaning in the explanation, which is clearer than the use of the word Ummah, because this word has several meanings, **and as long as we explain the verse, then it is more clear to use the meaning**, and so we said: (the word group here is the name of a genus) because if we say (the word Ummah here is the name of a genus), there would have been confusion in its meanings; is it the Ummah in the sense of the individual Imam or role model, or the Ummah in the sense of the group, or the Ummah in the sense of time, or the Islamic nation ... Thus, to use the expression "group" is clearer because it is the intended meaning in the verse ﴿وَلَتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ﴾ “Let there be [arising] from you a nation (a band of people)”. [Al-i-Imran: 104]

• As for the second question, the answer is as follows:

It seems that you have read in some language books the division of the noun (al Ism) to generic noun and plural noun... And that the expression that indicates a plural and no singular form of its expression is called a plural noun such as *qawm* and *rah't* ... As if you understand that this division is the only one of the nouns. And that the definition of the plural noun is indisputable, and therefore

wondered why we said Ummah and group to be generic nouns, although they indicate a plural and no singular form of its expression...?

My brother, the question of the generic and plural nouns has extensive research ... and disagreements about the divisions ... rather there are disagreements when applying the rules defining the generic noun and the plural noun according to the method of linguists in the division of the noun, including:

First: There some who divide the noun (al lsm) to generic noun and collective noun...

1. The collective noun is divided into:

- a. What implies the meaning of the plural, but there is no singular form of its expression, but its singularity is in its meaning, such as: qawm (people), rah't (family), jaish (army) ...
- b. What is contrary to the forms of the plural, which is to have a single form of its expression, but contrary to the known forms of the broken plural, such as: rakkab is a plural of rakeb (a passenger).
- c. What might be attributed to it, which is to have a single form of its expression and agrees to the formulas of broken plural, but equal to the single form in attributing to it, such as: rikaab on the form of (Fi'aal) of the broken plural formulas, and has a single form of its expression "rukuba" but is attributed to it as a single "rikaabi", thus it is a plural noun.

2. The generic noun is divided into:

- a. Collective generic noun is what implies plurality in meaning referring to a genus and has a singular form that is distinct from it in two signs:
 - *Taa marbuta* "ah" such as: Nah'l (bees): Nah'lah, Kalem (words): Kalemah, Tufah (apples): Tufaha, Shajar (trees): Shajarah, and Tamr (dates): Tamrah.
 - Possessive *Yaa* "i", such as: Arab: Arabi, and Turk: Turki, and Zinj: Zinji.
- b. Individual generic nouns, which denotes a genus valid for little and many, such as: water, milk, thus it is an individual generic noun.
- c. Singular generic noun such as a lion, a wolf, a man.

3. As I mentioned to you at the outset, there is some disagreement in the application of the above rules in determining the collective noun and the generic noun, for example:

- a. It came in (al-Bahr al-muhit fi usul al-fiqh) 4/115: (Third: The generic noun which is differentiated from its singular expression by the letter *Taa*, it is not a source and not derived from it, such as Tamr (dates) and Shajar (trees), this is the famous; I mean being a **generic noun**. Al-Ghazali calls it a **plural**, and Ibn Malik calls it a **collective noun**, for he has considered it in the collective nouns, but in Sharh al Kafiya he has called it a generic noun...). **As you can see in the division above, the plural of Tamr (dates) and Shajar (trees) is Tamrah and Shajara respectively, that is they are collective generic nouns, but here there is a difference between the famous (generic noun), al-Gazali (Plural) and Ibn Malik (collective noun).**

- b. It came in Al-Sharh al-Kabir li-Mukhtasar al-Usul (p. 155): [(Sheikh mentioned here that Al-kalemah (the word) is the singular of Al-kalem. And what is famous with most of the grammar scholars is that al-kalem is the plural for al-kalemah not al-kalaam... The scholars differed in the "Al-kalem" is it a **(collective generic noun)** or a **(generic noun)**: al-Suyuti said in "Ham' al-hawami" (1/55): (In explaining at-tasheel by Nadhir al-jaish grammar scholars differed in the word (al-kalem), a group of them including al-Jurjani argued that it is (plural) for al-kalemah whereas, al-Farsi and other investigators argued it as a **(generic noun)** for it.) **As we said in (a) we say it here as well, the issue is related to the plural of (kalem) which is distinguished from its singular (kalemah) by the Taa "ah" and yet there is disagreement; according to the the division above it is a (collective generic noun), but according to al-Jurjani it is the (plural) for the word (al kalemah) and it is a (generic noun) in accordance to al-Farsi.**

As you can see, there is a difference among linguists depending on their approach to the first division of the noun.

Second: There are those who divide the noun into generic and derived:

- 1- In the book (Almahsool) by its author Abu Abdullah al-Taymi Razi nicknamed Fakhr al-Din al-Razi Khatib Al-Ray (deceased: 606 AH)

(... As for the noun it **is either proper (alam) or derived (mushtaq) or generic noun**, but the proper noun is not a metaphor (majaaz) because the condition for a metaphor is to be transformed for a relation between the origin and the branch, which is not present in the proper nouns. However, the derived noun, unless the metaphor addresses the word derived from it, it does not address the derived which has no meaning, but it is something happened to the derived from it, thus metaphor does not essentially address except the generic noun, and Allah Knows Best).

2- In al-Bahr al-Muhit fi Usul al-Fiqh by Abu Abdullah Badr al-Din Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Bahadur Zarkashi (deceased: 794 AH):

[Second remark] [The general is divided with regard to its expression into a derived and others]

“with regard to its expression because **it either denotes the essence that has a quality, then in this case it is the derived noun**, like “black”, this is called quality “Sifah” in grammarians’ terminology. Or it does not indicate that, then in this case if it is **denoted by the same essence only than it is the generic noun...** Al Isfahani said: **the denotative for genus is divided into generic noun like Asad (a lion), and proper generic noun like Usama (a lion)**, but they are not mutaraadif expressions (synonymous), because the generic noun is set for the general essence, and the proper generic noun is set for that essence as it manifest in the mind ...

3- It came in al-Muhadhab fi Ilm Usool al-Fiqh al-Muqaarin by: Abdul Kareem bin Ali bin Mohammed al-Namlah (contemporary)

The general is also divided into: “generic noun” and “derived noun”:

- The generic noun is: the noun that denotes a specified thing, like the “horse” and the “human”.
- The derivative is: the noun that denotes a certain quality, without the specificity of the essence such as: "the horseman", and "the scholar", this indicates a thing characterized by horsemanship and knowledge.

The partial noun is divided into "independent" and "non-independent". The independent partial noun is: a proper noun (*ism alam*) like "Zaid", which does not need to be implicit... The non-independent partial noun is: the pronoun (*dhameer*) like "I", "You" and "He".

Third: In the book of the Islamic Personality, Volume III, section "The Expressions of the Language and their Divisions- The Noun (al Ism)", we divided the noun in this way, and stated:

(... The noun is either general or partial, because its concept can be either shared by many (things) or not shared, if it is of the first kind, then it is the general, and if it is of the second kind; it is the partial...

The general noun is two kinds: generic noun and derived noun, because

- **if it denotes a specified thing, like the horse, the human, and others which indicate a certain essence, then it is the generic noun,**
- **And if the general noun denotes something that has a specific quality, then it is the derived (al mushtaq), like the black, the horseman, and the likes.**
- **As for the partial noun, it is two kinds: a proper noun (ism alam) and a pronoun (dhameer), and that is,**
- **if the expression denotes independently, not needing anything to explain it, then it is the proper noun, like Zaid and Abd Allah...**
- **And if the partial noun is dependent, i.e. it needs something to explain it, so it is the implicit (the pronouns), like: he and she ...) End**

Accordingly, the expression that carries the collective meaning that is the general is two parts:

If it denotes a non-specified thing, but indicate a certain essence like horse, human and darkness, then it is the generic noun... And if the general noun denotes something that has a specific quality, then it is the derived, like black, horseman and scholar, thus, black is characterized by darkness and horseman is characterized by horsemanship and the scholar by knowledge ...

Accordingly, the expressions (Ummah and group in this sense) denote non-specific things, any Ummah, and any group... neither of them have a certain quality ... they are therefore generic nouns and not derivative nouns according to the definition already mentioned ... This is what

we adopted with regard to the division of the noun, and then we said that group and Ummah are generic nouns (the name of a genus) as stated in the explanation of Article 21 of the Draft Constitution:

[Its evidence is the words of Allah (swt) ﴿وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾ “And let there be [arising] from you a nation (a band of people) inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.” [Al-i-Imran: 104]. The angle of using this verse as an evidence for the establishment of political parties is that Allah (swt) ordered the Muslims to have a group which carries out the Da’wah to Islam amongst them, and likewise carries out enjoining the Ma’ruf and forbidding the Munkar, so His (swt) saying ﴿وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ﴾ “Let there be [arising] from you a nation (a band of people).” is an order to create a structured group which has the characteristic of the group from amongst the groups of Muslims, since He (swt) said “from you”, and the intention of His (swt) words (وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ) “Let there arise from you” is to let a group from the Muslims rise and not that the Muslims be a group; in other words, let their arise from the Muslims an Ummah, and the meaning is not that the Muslims should be an Ummah.

This is because the word “from” (*min*) in the verse is for partitioning (*tab’id*) and not for clarifying the genus, and the way to check is that the word “some” (*ba’d*) should be able to replace it, so it can be said “Let there be [arising] from you a nation (a band of people).”, whereas the word ‘Min’ cannot be replaced with “some” in the verse ﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ﴾ “Allah has promised those who have believed among you” [An-Noor: 55] since it cannot be said that “Allah promised some of those who believed from you” and so in this case it is for clarifying the genus; in other words, the promise is not restricted to the generation of the companions (may Allah (swt) be pleased with them) but it is for all those who believed and did good actions.

It cannot be argued that this verse says “Ummah”, in other words, a single party, and that this means the absence of multiple parties. This cannot be argued because the verse did not say “One Ummah”, so it did not mention one group but rather it said “Ummah” in the unknown form and without any description. That means to establish a group is obligatory. If a single group was established then the obligation has been met, but it does not prohibit the establishment of multiple groups or multiple blocs. The carrying out of the obligation of sufficiency by one in which one is enough to carry it out, does not prohibit other than that one to carry out this obligation. **And the word group here is the name of a genus, in other words, the word group is used and what is intended by it is the genus and not the single unit; Allah (swt) said ﴿كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ﴾ “You are the best nation” [Al-i-Imran: 110] . and what is intended is the genus.** And comparable to that are the words of the Messenger (saw) «مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ» “Whoever from you sees an evil (munkar), let him change it” (reported by Muslim through Abu Sa’id Al-Khudri), so the intention is not a single Munkar rather the genus of Munkar, and there are many similar examples. So it holds true upon the single unit from the genus and also upon multiple units from that genus. Accordingly, it is not permitted to prevent the establishment of multiple political parties. This only applies to those political parties that are established upon what the verse mentioned; that is the call to the good, the enjoining of the Ma’ruf and the prohibiting of the Munkar which encompasses the rulers and accounting the rulers.] End.

For information, there are linguists who have stated that the word (Ummah) is a generic noun (the name of a genus), and hence the word group (Jama’ah) a generic noun:

It says in "Al Muharrer al-Wajeez fi Tafseer al-Kitab Al Aziz 1/488 m" by Ibn Atteyh Al-Andalusi (deceased 542 A.H): "and interpreters differed in the meaning of His (swt) saying: ﴿كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ﴾ “You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind.” [Al-i-Imran: 110]. Al Hassan bin Abi Hassan and a group of scholars said: the meaning of the verse, is a speech to the Ummah that they are the best nation brought out to people, **thus, the expression Ummah (nation), based on this interpretation is a generic noun as if they were told you were the best of the nations,** and this interpretation is supported by them being witnesses to humankind ... **Qadi Abu Muhammad: Ummah (nation) based on this interpretation is a generic noun...** End.

I hope the matter is clear now, and Allah Knows Best and He is All-Wise.

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