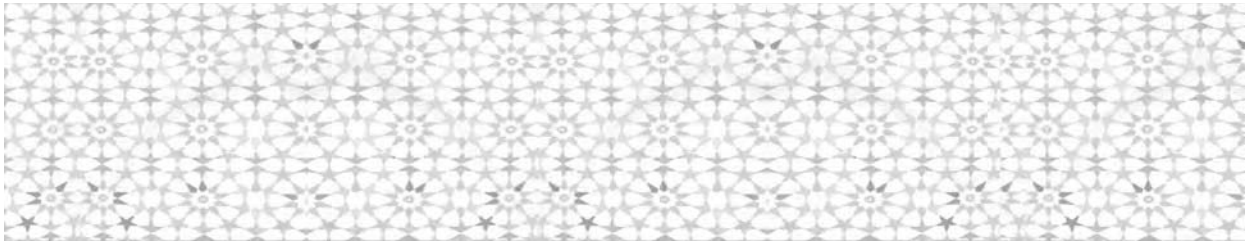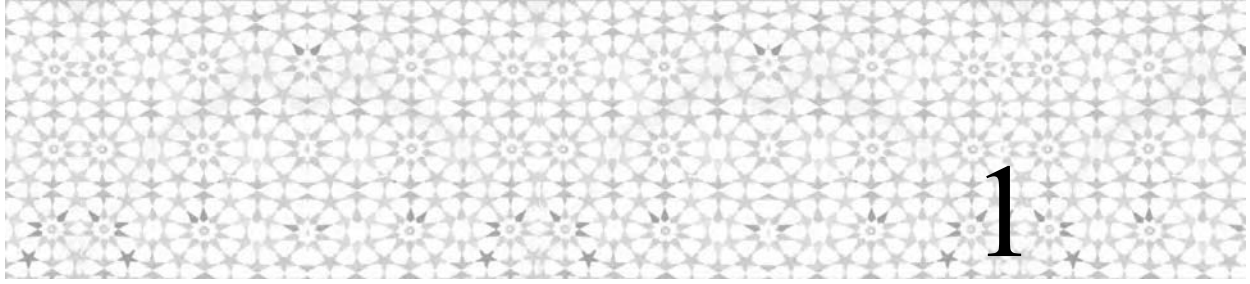# Islam and Multiculturalism

Islam as a Community of Discourse and a World-System[1]

John Obert Voll

Islam is a major monotheistic faith, but 'Islam' also is used as a term identifying a way of life, a civilization, a culture and a historic community. This variety of definitions creates confusions when people discuss Islamic history and current events. Some of this confusion is simply the result of using the same term for different phenomena. The confusion may also reflect the need for a redefinition of the basic conceptualizations involved in the study of the historic community of Muslims and their faith. Analysis of the historical experience of the believers requires different methods from those used to debate the truth of revealed religions. However, even in the discussion of historical Muslim experience, the terminology needs to be examined. In many discussions of Islamic history, 'Islam' is conceived of as an historic 'civilization', but this framework for analysis may be misleading and historically inaccurate.

The terms 'Islam' and 'Islamic' are used, as Marshall Hodgson noted more than 30 years ago, 'casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion'.[2] Confusion is created by describing Islam using general terms that are thought to be universal but may, in historical reality, be the label for a particular type of human organization. Islam is often called a 'civilization', as is the case in the famous analysis of Samuel Huntington.[3] However, that type of analysis tends to use the term 'civilization' as a generic category for any large-scale human sociocultural

unit rather than recognizing that, in world historical analysis, there are many different types of large human groupings, and that 'civilization' is simply one type of grouping with a relatively specific and clear definition, at least in scholarly analysis.[4] It is useful to ask whether the complex of social relations that is often called 'Islamic civilization' is really a 'civilization' or if there are alternative conceptualizations that can provide a more effective basis for analysis of Islamic history.

The current transformation of major social formations on a global scale provides the opportunity to re-examine our understanding of the nature of some of the basic units. In particular, it opens the way for examining the large-scale networks of relations that are the major units of contemporary global interactions. I propose to start with a well-known reconceptualization of global interactions, the world-system concepts that have been articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, and to see if this framework can help define the global Islamic entity more usefully and clearly. This analysis utilizes Wallerstein's conceptualizations as a foundation for developing a concept of the global Muslim community as a multi-civilizational and cosmopolitan community of discourse.

World-system theory is not a simple, monolithic explanation of global human history and society. Even as initially defined by Wallerstein, it was a complex cluster of approaches to understanding a wide variety of experiences. The world-system conceptualization has now become the basis for many different perspectives and interpretations, as the articles in issue after issue of the *Review* of the Fernand Braudel Center illustrate. Early articles in that journal by Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank and a thought-provoking retrospective by Wallerstein – all suggest the luxuriant productivity of this perspective, while the continuing debates into the twenty-first century between Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank reflect the longstanding importance of this conceptualization.[5]

Within this very broad field of concepts, it is difficult in a short discussion to do justice to the full relevance of world-system theory to an understanding of the Islamic historical experience. Therefore, I take one aspect of the early formulations of Wallerstein and explore its implications for the study of Islamic history. At the same time, I consider the implications of Islamic history for world-system theory, because I think that the Islamic experience represents a special case that suggests a different conceptualization of global networks of human relations based more on discourse and exchange of ideas than on the economic relations central to Wallerstein's approach.

In his early presentation of the world-system approach, Wallerstein argued that:

> … thus far there have only existed two varieties of such world-systems: world-empires, in which there is a single political system over most of the area … and those systems in which such a single system does not exist over all, or virtually all, of the space. For convenience and for want of a better term, we are using the term 'world-economy' to describe the latter. … Prior to the modern era, world-economies were highly unstable structures which tended either to be converted into empires or to disintegrate. It is the peculiarity of the

modern world-system that a world-economy has survived for 500 years and yet has not come to be transformed into a world-empire. … This peculiarity is the political side of the form of economic organization called capitalism.[6]

This broad picture of the dynamics of the evolution of the great regional civilizations fits well within the generally accepted grand narrative of premodern world history. The rise and fall of empires and of civilizations is a central theme in the visions of many world historians from Edward Gibbon to Arnold Toynbee and more recent global historians. World-systems scholars deal specifically with this issue,[7] and the popularity of the best-selling books by Jared Diamond on 'the fates of human societies' and 'how societies choose to fail or succeed' reflects the continuing interest in these subjects.[8] This general presentation of the differences between modern and premodern world-systems is appealing both for its clarity and for what we know about the history of the major world civilizations. The alternations between grand imperial unifications and political–economic disintegration in China, India, the Middle East, and Western Europe are important parts of the world historical narrative.

The pattern described by Wallerstein of incipient world-economies that result either in imperial unifications or disintegrations seems to fit the history of the Middle East in the Islamic era. There is the period of the great imperial unification begun by the Arab–Muslim conquests in the seventh century and continued by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. This imperial unification is part of the long line of great world-empires that brought the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean world-economy (or world-economies) under the control of one or two major imperial systems. This series began as early as the Phoenician–Greek–Persian network of the seventh century BCE, and stretched through the Hellenistic state system created by the conquests of Alexander the Great to the later Parthian–Sasanid and Roman–Byzantine empires.[9]

The standard historical narrative notes the disintegration of the Islamic imperial system under the Abbasid rulers of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE and its replacement by a decentralized network of smaller states ruled by military commanders, or sultans, who replaced the imperial caliphs as the effective rulers of Muslim areas by the twelfth century. The final act in this process of disintegration was the destruction of Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, by Mongol forces in 1258. Journalistic accounts speak of the era of 'backwardness and stagnation that afflicted the Moslem world between the fall of Baghdad … and the renaissance of the twentieth century'.[10] In the scholarly terms of his influential book *The Arabs in History*, Bernard Lewis notes that at this time took place the 'transformation of the Islamic Near East from a commercial, monetary economy to one which, despite an extensive and important foreign and transit trade, was internally a quasi-feudal economy, based on subsistence agriculture'.[11]

This gloomy picture is correct in some very specific and limited ways. The imperial political unity of the Islamic world was irretrievably destroyed by the middle of the thirteenth century, and in many areas, the effectiveness of the

urban-based commercial monetary economy was significantly reduced. In the terms of Wallerstein, in the absence of an effective world-empire, the old world-economy of the Middle East seems to have disintegrated. At this point, one might simply state that the history of the premodern Islamic world-system appears to bear out Wallerstein's formulation.

However, the standard gloomy picture of the Islamic world following the Mongol conquest of Baghdad is not the only possible picture, as the works of scholars like William H. McNeill, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, Ira Lapidus and others show. The gloomy picture does not prepare the observer for the actual world situation at the beginning of the sixteenth century. As McNeill has noted:

> We are so accustomed to regard history from a European vantage point that the extraordinary scope and force of this Islamic expansion [in the period 1000–1500 CE], which prefigured and overlapped the later expansion of Western Europe, often escapes attention. *Yet an intelligent and informed observer of the fifteenth century could hardly have avoided the conclusion that Islam, rather than the remote and still comparatively crude society of the European Far West, was destined to dominate the world in the following centuries.*[12]

In this so-called era of stagnation, the size of the Islamic world virtually doubled from what it had been in the days of the glories of the Abbasid caliphs. By the middle of the sixteenth century, major Muslim imperial states had been established in the Mediterranean world, Iran, South Asia, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The power and glory of the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, Uzbek and Songhai empires more than matched the emerging Iberian empires of the day and outshone the smaller dynastic states of Western Europe. In addition, Islam was actively winning converts beyond the boundaries of these empires in Southeast Asia, Southeast Europe and elsewhere.

The world of Islam was, in fact, dynamic and expanding, not static and stagnating, or disintegrating. As a global unit, however, it is difficult to define in the standard terms of world-systems theory. It stretched from the inner Asian territories of the Manchu (Qing) empire in China and the small sultanate of Manila in the Philippines to the Muslim communities growing in Bosnia and sub-Saharan Africa. Whatever the unit was, it was not a world-empire and had no prospect of becoming one. At the same time, it was not disintegrating and collapsing. Neither of the alternatives posed by Wallerstein for premodern world-systems seems to be applicable to the Islamic entity in world history in the period just before modern times.

Part of the problem may lie in the way we look at this Islamic entity as it emerged in the centuries following the collapse of effective Abbasid imperial power in the tenth century. The term most frequently used is 'civilization', as in 'classical (or medieval) Islamic civilization'. This is an awkward term, because it implies a civilizational coherence similar to other historic regional civilizations. As long as the Muslim community was primarily or exclusively Middle Eastern, it could be thought of as the most recent phase of the long-standing tradition of civilization in the Middle East. In the half-millennium after the Abbasid

collapse, however, Islam became an important component in many societies outside the Middle East. Some, like India, themselves represented significant traditions of civilization, and this civilizational identity was not eliminated by the introduction of Islam. As a result, by the sixteenth century, the Islamic entity was a multi-civilizational entity, not an autonomous 'civilization'. Further, this expanding Islamic entity now included areas where the complex urban structures characteristic of traditions of civilization were not the dominant modes of social organization. The Islamic entity included both urban-based and pastoral nomadic communities, that is, it included both civilized-cited societies and non-citied/non-civilizational societies.

This Islamic entity was a vast network of interacting peoples and groups, with considerable diversity and yet some sufficiently common elements so that it is possible to speak of these diverse communities as being part of 'the Islamic world'. I hasten to add that the problem of understanding the 'unity and diversity' found within the Islamic world is a major and continuing one for scholars of Islam.[13] It is tempting to think of this Islamic world as a premodern network or system of peoples. In terms of Wallerstein's early definition, it is possible to see this vast network of interacting peoples and groups as 'a social system … that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence'.[14]

The real foundation of this world-system, however, does not appear to be a world-economy in the precise sense of the term as used in the analyses of Wallerstein and others. The primary sense of a self-contained identity and the meaning of the boundaries and legitimations do not lie predominantly in the world of trade, production and exchange. In the current debates over the nature of world-systems and such issues as whether or not there is one world-system extending over 5,000 years, as Frank argues, most people engaging in the discourse of world-systems theory are speaking about the material world and economic forces.

Perhaps a foundation of economic ties does bind the Muslim communities of West Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, there has been little examination of the trade patterns within the Muslim world in the centuries following the Abbasid collapse. Research by Janet L. Abu-Lughod shows how important such studies can be. She presents a picture of 'a long-standing, globally-integrated "world-system", to which Europe had finally attached itself'. She notes that this world-system of the thirteenth century had three or four core areas and states that 'no single cultural, economic or imperial system was hegemonic. Indeed, a wide variety of cultural systems coexisted and cooperated, most of them organized very differently from the West'.[15] It is note-worthy that the trade of each of the three major 'core' zones in Abu-Lughod's analysis (the Middle East, Central Asia and China, and the Indian Ocean basin) tended to be dominated by Muslim-controlled groups or Muslim communities. However, it was not trade or economic exchange that gave this Islamic entity its identity or basic cohesion.

Wallerstein noted that scholars dealing with world-systems analysis face the challenge of 'elaboration of world-systems other than that of the capitalist

world-economy'.[16] I suggest that to understand the premodern entity of the Islamic world as a world-system, it is necessary to define world-systems in ways that are not as closely confined to the economic and material dimensions of history as in the conceptualizations of almost all world-systems scholars. (For example, Wallerstein insists that the networks and boundaries that define a world-system must be related to material exchanges and the economic dimensions of social systems.[17])

The Islamic world had a dimension of social legitimation and boundary definition that made it possible for someone like the great Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta to journey in the fourteenth century from North Africa to China and yet remain largely within 'the cultural boundaries of what Muslims called the Dār al-Islām or Abode of Islam'.[18] This Dār al-Islām can be seen as a special example of a large-scale human 'group', using the definition of William H. McNeill: 'What is common to all groups, surely, is a pattern of communication among members, sufficiently frequent and sufficiently standardized as to minimize surprises and maximize congruence between expectation and experience so far as encounters within the group itself are concerned'.[19] This pattern of communication in the Islamic world is not primarily based on exchange of goods, coordination of means of production or a large network of economic activities. Instead, it is built on the shared sources of the Islamic experience, which provide the basis for mutually intelligible discourse among all who identify themselves as Muslims within the Dār al-Islām.

One can view the world of Islam as a large, special type of 'community of discourse', in the sense in which that term is used by Robert Wuthnow: 'Discourse subsumes the written as well as the verbal, the formal as well as the informal, the gestural or ritual as well as the conceptual. It occurs, however, within communities in the broadest sense of the word: communities of competing producers, of interpreters and critics, of audiences and consumers, and of patrons and other significant actors who become the subjects of discourse itself. It is only in these concrete living and breathing communities that discourse becomes meaningful'.[20] This pattern of communication or discourse provides the basis for identifying Dār al-Islām as a social system or human group possessing boundaries, structures, coherence and rules of legitimation.

The Islamic discourse was able to cross the boundaries between urban-based and pastoral agrarian societies and those between the different major traditions of civilization in the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Networks of personal and organizational interaction created at least a minimal sense of corporate, communal identity in the vast emerging network of discourse or world-system. The modern world-system described by Wallerstein is the 'capitalist world-system', identified by a distinctive structure of production and exchange. Similarly, the Muslims might be said to have created the 'Islamic world-system', identified by a distinctive set of sociomoral symbols for the definition of proper human relationships. I am *not* saying that the capitalist world-system is an 'economic' system and the Islamic world-system is a 'religious' one. Rather, I am suggesting that both are

relatively comprehensive social systems that can qualify as world-systems, even though the primary identifying characteristics are drawn from different dimensions of the social system as a whole.

The emerging Islamic world-system of ca. 1000–1800 presents some interesting problems of definition, which may be helpful in the effort to elaborate world-systems other than that of modern capitalism. I suggest that the early Islamic community – the imperial community of the Umayyads and the Abbasids from the seventh to the mid-tenth century – followed the standard pattern of world-system development. The classical Muslim caliphate was an important successor state to the 'universal empires' of the tradition established by the Persians and Alexander the Great. As the world-empire system disintegrated, the collapse of the Middle Eastern world-economy seemed to be following suit.

If the premodern world-systems model held true, one would expect to see the disintegration of factors providing a system-wide sense of cohesion or shared identity. In political terms, this was clearly the case, as a variety of dynasties claimed the title of caliph, and even the fiction of loyalty to a single 'successor to the Prophet' disappeared. However, although the sense of community connectedness changed its form and organizational expression, it did not disappear. New-style organizations of legitimation and identity emerged, which were not directly dependent on the political structure or state system. These were elaborations in concrete social forms of Islamic concepts and symbols providing a sociomoral foundation for transregional communal identity.

This transformation of the Islamic world-system can be described by paraphrasing Wallerstein's words concerning the distinctiveness of the modern world-system. He noted: 'It is the peculiarity of the modern world-system that a world-economy has survived for 500 years and yet has not come to be transformed into a world-empire – a peculiarity that is the secret of its strength'.[21] I suggest that a similar statement be made about the Islamic world-system since 1000 CE: 'It is the peculiarity of the Islamic world-system that a world-society survived for almost 1000 years and yet has not become transformed into either a world-empire or a world-economy – a peculiarity that is the secret of its strength and ability to survive'.

The new Islamic world-system of the post-1000 era had distinctive organizational characteristics that contrast with the traditional Islamic world-empire. In the world-empire state, personal piety took many forms but tended not to become institutionalized. Respected figures led exemplary lives and established what is now called Sufism. For the first 500 years of Islamic history, Sufism was a mood of pious and often ascetic devotion reflecting the lives and teachings of highly respected individuals. Not until the effective collapse of imperial unity, however, did this devotional tradition come to be manifested in the great social organizations called the *tariqahs*, which are the brotherhoods of every Muslim society.

In the twelfth century, the great *tariqah* organizations began to take shape.[22] In the context of the political disintegration of the Muslim world, the *tariqahs*

assumed increasing importance as the vehicle for social cohesion and interre-
gional unity. The 'Sufi movement was based on its popular appeal, and its new
structure of religious unity was built on popular foundations. … While many
tariqahs had only local significance, the greatest orders … spread over the whole
or a large part of Islamic territory. Thus they contributed … to maintain the ideal
unity of all Muslims. … Teachers and disciples journeyed from end to end of the
Muslim world, bearing the seeds of interchange and cross-fertilization within the
Sufi framework'.[23]

This great network of teachers and students provided one of the most impor-
tant vehicles for the expansion of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast
Asia. The *tariqahs* gave people an identity that could be recognized throughout
the Islamic world. Thus, a member of the Naqshbandiyyah Tariqah from
Northwest China could find brothers all along the road to Mecca. For example,
in the eighteenth century this was the path followed by Ma Ming Xin, who stud-
ied with Naqshbandi *shaykhs* in Central Asia, India, Yemen and the Holy Cities.
On his return to China, his new approach led him into revivalist revolution that
had ties with *tariqah-related* holy wars in many other parts of the Islamic world
of the time. These *tariqah* networks provided an important foundational bond for
the postimperial Islamic world-system.

In addition to shared teachings and identity, the *tariqahs* also provided physi-
cal support for travel throughout the Islamic world. After the development of the
major widespread *tariqahs*, the wandering Sufi could turn to fellow members of
the *tariqah* for spiritual support and also for shelter in the buildings of the order.
Most *tariqah* centers had facilities for long-term students and more temporary
travelers as well as areas for the practice of pious ritual. The visitors' facilities
were known by various names throughout the Islamic world, such as *zawiyah*,
khanqah, and the like, but they all performed comparable functions in making
pious travel possible.[24]

Wandering scholars provide a similar vehicle for system-wide interactions and
discourse. Muhammad is reported to have said, 'Seek knowledge, even unto
China', and Muslim scholars were great travelers. These were not simply sight-
seeing adventurers. Their goal was to gain greater knowledge within the frame-
work of Islamic understanding. Travel for the sake of religious scholarship
became a normative feature of medieval Muslim education and an important part
of the definition of scholarship.[25] The different traditions of legal opinion became
the great 'schools of law', with standardized texts to be taught and passed on.
Study of the texts of law and traditions (*hadith*) of the Prophet and the other
major disciplines provided the program for the travelers. By the twelfth and thir-
teenth centuries, a standard set of works defined the major schools of law and the
accepted collections of traditions of the Prophet,[26] and these provided a common
'canonical syllabus of learning' for scholars anywhere within the postimperial
Islamic world-system.[27]

The changing organization of travel in search of knowledge reflects the post-
imperial institutions of the Islamic world. The development of instructional

centers went from individualized instruction, especially in particular mosques (*masjids*) that were not mosques for the Friday congregational prayers, to *masjids* with accompanying structures (usually called *khan*s) specifically for lodging out-of-town students and travelers. These were followed by formal institutions of Islamic learning, called *madrasahs*, which emerged by the eleventh century in Southwest Asia, especially in the Seljuk domains, but rapidly spread throughout the Islamic world. It was in these *madrasahs* that the 'canonical syllabus' was presented to scholars travelling in search of knowledge.[28]

The vocabulary underwent a parallel evolution. The Arab terms for 'travel' (*rihla*) and 'seeking knowledge' were used almost interchangeably in early writings. Later, they were separated, with *rihla* applying to pilgrimage and the other terms keeping the basic meaning.[29] 'This change may reflect the institutionalisation of the *madrasa* system in place of the formerly more individualised, orally-oriented relationships which prevailed between students and teachers in the early medieval centuries of Islamic history. Thus, Ibn Battuta (who lived in the fourteenth century) usually looks for buildings – i.e., colleges of Islamic law and Sufi convents – rather than the solitary but renowned scholar here and there on his itinerary'.[30]

How the networks of Sufi teachers and itinerant scholars were related to the flows of economic goods is not clear. These people followed the same paths as wandering merchants, and Muslim merchants and Sufi teachers are frequently mentioned together as important elements in the nonmilitary expansion of Islam in many regions. It is clear, for example, that the two worked together in the Islamization of what is now the Northern Sudan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[31] In some cases, different branches of great families combined with *tariqahs* to provide a basis for networks of exchange of knowledge, political influence, and trade goods. For example, by the sixteenth century, the Aydarus family of the Hadramaut in South Yemen had established a far-flung network of trade contacts, *tariqahs*, and scholarly centers throughout the Indian Ocean basin. Notables in this family held high positions in the courts of Indian princes and also acted as *tariqah* leaders and scholars of *hadith*.[32]

Clearly, people who travelled in the Islamic world of the postimperial era – whether they were Sufi disciples, students of law or merchants – were moving within a comprehensible unit that transcended the boundaries of regional traditions of civilization. Richard Eaton describes Ibn Battuta in terms that fit these different itinerant people: 'Ibn Battuta, in his intercontinental wanderings, moved through a single cultural universe in which he was utterly at home. … Everywhere he went he found the civilized company of merchants, scholars, Sufis, or princes; and with them he could converse, in Arabic, on topics ranging from mysticism to jurisprudence. … Overall, his book conveys a self-assured tone in which the cultural unity of *Dār al-Islām*, from Spain to China, was not even an issue; it was taken for granted'.[33] Muslims like Ibn Battuta were moving within the framework of a hemispheric community of discourse or discourse-based world-system.

This sense of community is symbolized and emphasized in the belief system through the general requirement of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every year, a large

gathering of believers from throughout the Islamic world assembles in the central sanctuaries of Islam on the holiday of the pilgrimage. This requirement to travel and come together has had enormous significance in giving professing Muslims a sense of belonging to an entity that transcends particular civilizations or societies. It provides a way of communicating across boundaries that might exist within the community of Muslims. In Mecca, during the pilgrimage, it is possible to have a sense of a shared discourse that affirms the authenticity of the Islamic message, much like what Ibn Battuta experienced as he travelled in the various parts of the Islamic world. In contemporary times, the account of the pilgrimage by Malcolm X shows the continuing vitality of this experience of a special community of discourse.[34]

The strength of this Islamic world-system is reflected in the fact that even at the peak of the hegemonic power of the modern capitalist world-system, Sufi teachers, merchants and scholars continued to be successful in winning converts to Islam in Africa and Southeast Asia. Dutch commercial and imperial interests may have controlled the islands of Southeast Asia for centuries, but this control did not prevent the steady advance of Islam in those same islands. A similar situation can be seen in both West and East Africa, where the modern colonial state established an institutional framework that provided 'new possibilities of expansion' for Sufi orders and Muslim teachers and traders.[35]

The dynamism of this complex community of discourse, even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggests the need for a broader conceptualization of *world-system* and possibly even going beyond the terminology of 'system' to concepts that emphasize the multidimensional nature of the large sociocultural networks operating in the world Muslim community throughout its history. In this trans-regional community, there were local and particularist identities, but the discourse community transcended these local identities. In this way, it is useful to think of this broader network of relationships as being best described as 'cosmopolitan'. A basic dictionary definition of 'cosmopolitan' fits well with the nature of Dār al-Islām: 'With features of different countries, composed of or containing people from different countries'.[36]

The term has a long history in the West, going back to classical Greece, and Kwame Appiah provides a useful summary of its original meanings: 'Cosmopolitanism dates at least to the Cynics of the fourth century BC, who first coined the expression cosmopolitan, "citizen of the cosmos". The formulation was meant to be paradoxical. … A citizen – a *politēs* – belonged to a particular *polis*, a city to which he or she owed loyalty. The cosmos referred to the world, not in the sense of the earth, but in the sense of the universe. Talk of cosmopolitanism originally signalled, then, a rejection of the conventional view that every civilized person belonged to a community among communities'.[37]

Conditions at the end of the twentieth century inspired people like Appiah to consider the nature of being cosmopolitan. The 'nature of late-twentieth-century nationalism, multiculturalism, and the globalization of late liberalism has created a historical context for reconsidering concepts of cosmopolitanism'.[38]

This reconsideration leads some scholars to redefine cosmopolitanism itself. In its classical meaning and most current usage, 'cosmopolitan' implies a break from local and particular identities. However, analysis of current 'transnational' activist movements has led some scholars to note the importance of a foundational identity that can transcend original particularist perspectives but does not lose a sense of being grounded by those roots. Cosmopolitanism is more than simply a broad, homogenous universalism in which no particularism is recognized. Instead, some scholars speak of 'rooted cosmopolitans' who operate in the contemporary world as transnational activists.[39]

While most attention is given to contemporary developments, these scholars note that 'cosmopolitanism is not new and has been associated with trade, exile and humanitarianism in the past'.[40] In both present and historic cosmopolitanism, there is a complex relationship to local–original identities that provides 'roots' for the cosmopolitans. The 'encounter between local socialization and a newer, different reality is interactive: it does not merely substitute the new reality for the old one, but transcends locality and, in some cases, produces a creative leap'.[41]

The creative agents of this cosmopolitanism are mobile communicating people and discussions of the 'new transnational activists' are remarkably similar to the Sufis and scholars of the premodern Muslim world. Sidney Tarrow's description of contemporary cosmopolitans sounds familiar to those who know Ibn Battuta and the wandering Naqshbandi Sufis: 'The fundamental change that has increased transnational activism is the growth of a stratum of individuals who travel regularly, read foreign books and journals, and become involved in networks of transactions abroad … Underlying these activities are a number of mechanisms that link individuals into webs of interest, values, and technology. Through the use of both domestic and international resources and opportunities, domestic-based activists – citizens and others – move outward to form a spectrum of 'rooted cosmopolitans' who engage in regular transnational practices'.[42]

The broad Islamic world of the Sufis, scholars and merchants has this connecting stratum of 'rooted cosmopolitans' who give this world historical entity a distinctive identity. These people maintain and develop a shared discourse, creating a vast multicultural and trans-civilizational network of communicating groups. The scholar–saintly families of Tarim in the Hadramaut were part of the rooted cosmopolitans articulating an 'ecumenical Islam' in the Indian Ocean basin. 'Ultimately stretching from Cape Town on the southern tip of Africa to Timor at the limit of the Malay Archipelago, this new world of an enlarged Islamic ecumene became a transcultural space that numerous Muslims, among them Hadramis from Arabia, traversed and settled in with relative ease and great profit, participating in the creation of new ports, polities, and even peoples'.[43] Similarly, the awareness of West African Muslims, like those living in Niumi in the Senegambia region, reflected the nature of the complex network of discourse that was and is the Islamic world. 'West African Muslims of several centuries ago believed themselves a part of a vast community, an *intellectual* world-system

stretching across the desert they knew and into lands they could barely imagine, held together by scholars and saints and mystics and jurists and common folk all praying toward the same central shrine and living by the same law, parts of which they memorized in the same language. For this world-system, economic unity was a factor, but not the major one. Perhaps it was spiritual unity as much as anything that tied together peoples of the Muslim realm across the Afro-Eurasian landmass'.[44]

In these historical contexts, it is misleading and inaccurate to describe this vast multicultural grouping as a 'civilization'. The conceptualization of Islam as a special 'world-system' is a useful way of going beyond the conceptual distortions of the term 'civilization'. However, if 'world-system' must only be used to describe world economic networks or large political–imperial world-systems, it is important to go beyond those limitations as well.

The Muslim world contains many different and distinctive regions and peoples. However, they are tied together by a cosmopolitanism that is rooted in the shared message of the Islamic revelation. The primary instruments of this rooted cosmopolitanism are networks of scholars, Sufis, and commercial people who interact across the vast territorial reaches of the Islamic world, operating in a nonterritorial realm of shared discourse. Historic Islam (as opposed to theological Islam) is a global community of discourse that is based on an Islamically rooted cosmopolitanism. The necessary complexity of the terminology reflects the grand unified complexity of the historical reality. Historic Islam is not a 'civilization'; it is not an economic or political world-system. It is a cosmopolitan community of discourse.

NOTES

1. This paper is a revision and gentle reconceptualization of John Obert Voll, 'Islam as a Special World-System', *Journal of World History*, 5, No. 2 (1994): 213–226.

2. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:57.

3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 45.

4. See, for example, the analysis in John Obert Voll, 'The End of Civilization is Not So Bad', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 28, No. 1 (July 1994): 1–8.

5. Samir Amin, 'The Ancient World-Systems versus the Modern Capitalist World-System', *Review*, 14 (1991): 349–385; Andre Gunder Frank, 'A Theoretical Introduction to 5,000 Years of World System History', *Review*, 13 (1990): 155–248; and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase', *Review*, 13 (1990): 287–293. Frank has also discussed these issues in 'A Plea for World-System History', *Journal of World History*, 2 (1991): 1–28; and in 'The Thirteenth-Century World System: A Review Essay', *Journal of World History*, 1 (1990): 249–256. For the continuing debates, see Boris Stremlin, 'Bounding Historical Systems: The Wallerstein–Frank Debate and the Role of Knowledge in World History', *Review*, 24, No. 4 (2001): 515–531; and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Remembering Andre Gunder Frank', *Review*, 28, No. 3 (2005): iii–iv.

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7. See, for example, Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

8. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1999) and Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005).

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10. Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam* (New York: New American Library, 1982), 78.

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12. William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 485 (emphasis added).

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15. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, 'Restructuring the Premodern World System', *Review*, 13 (1990): 275–276. For her full presentation, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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19. William H. McNeill, 'Organizing Concepts for World History', *Review*, 10 (1986): 215. For his discussions of the problems of defining appropriate basic units for world historical analysis, see also McNeill, 'The Rise of the West after Twenty-five Years', *Journal of World History*, 1 (1990): 1–21.

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25. Sam I. Gellens, 'The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach', in *Muslim Travellers*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 3.

26. See, for example, the important analysis of this process of canonization of the major collections of hadith, Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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30. Gellens, 'The Search for Knowledge', 53.

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