Islam as a Special World-System*

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Islam is identified as a religion, a civilization, a way of life, and many other things. Some of this is simply a result of the confusion created by using the same term for different phenomena. As Marshall Hodgson noted twenty years ago, the terms *Islam* and *Islamic* are used "casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion."[1] Confusion is also created by attributing to Islam the characteristics of terms that are thought to be generic but in fact have distinctive cultural or historical referents. This is sometimes clear in discussions that speak of Islam as a "religion" and may also be the case when we speak of "Islamic civilization." It may be useful to ask whether the complex of social relations that is often called Islamic civilization can be most effectively conceptualized for purposes of world historical analysis as a civilization or whether there are more useful identifying terms.

The current transformation of major social formations on a global scale provides the opportunity to reexamine 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

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

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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.

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. Recent 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.[2]

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 way to formulate a world-system analysis.

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

[2] Samir Amin, "The Ancient World-Systems versus the Modern Capitalist World-System," *Review* 14 (1991): 349–85; 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): 287–93. Frank has also discussed these issues in "A Plea for World System History," *Journal of World History* 1 (1991): 1–28; and in "The Thirteenth-Century World System: A Review Essay," *Journal of World History* 1 (1990): 249–56.

> 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.[3]

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 politico-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 B.C.E. and stretched through the Hellenistic state system created by the conquests of Alexander the Great to the later Parthian-Sasanid and Roman-Byzantine empires.[4]

The standard account notes the disintegration of the Islamic imperial system under the Abbasid rulers of the tenth and eleventh centuries C.E. 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."[5] In the scholarly terms of his influential book,

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[3] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. to date (San Diego: Academic Press, 1974–), 1:348.

[4] A clear summary description of this long tradition of cultural and sometimes imperial unity is presented in Amin, "The Ancient World-Systems versus the Modern Capitalist World-System," pp. 357–59.

[5] Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam* (New York: New American Library, 1982), p. 78.

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."[6]

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 C.E.], 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.*[7]

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

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[6] Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History,* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 174.

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

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, southeastern 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 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 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 an intercivilizational 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.

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.[8] It is tempting to think of this Islamic world as a premodern world-system. 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."[9]

The real foundation of this world-system 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. Recent 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."[10] It is noteworthy that the trade 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.

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[8] See, for example, the classic collection of essays by Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); and the thought-provoking review article by Andrew C. Hess, "Consensus or Conflict: The Dilemma of Islamic Historians," *American Historical Review* 81 (1976): 788–99.

[9] Wallerstein, *Modern World System,* 1:347.

[10] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, "Restructuring the Premodern World System," *Review* 13 (1990): 275–76. For her full presentation, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

However, it was not trade or economic exchange that gave this Islamic entity its identity or basic cohesion.

In a recent article, 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."[11] 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 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.[12]

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 Dar al-Islam or Abode of Islam."[13] This Dar al-Islam 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."[14] This pattern of communication in the Islamic world is not primarily based upon 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 Dar al-Islam.

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

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[11] Wallerstein, "World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase," p. 291.

[12] Discussions at the plenary session of the New England Historical Association, 19 October 1991.

[13] Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 6.

[14] 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.

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."[15] This pattern of communication or discourse provides the basis for identifying Dar al-Islam 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 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

[15] Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 16.

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 systemwide 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 upon 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."[16] I suggest that a similar statement can be made about the Islamic world-system since 1000 C.E.: 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 five hundred 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

[16] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System,* 1:348.

take shape.[17] In the context of the political disintegration of the Muslim world, the *tariqah*s assumed increasing importance as the vehicle for social cohesion and interregional unity. The "sufi movement was based on its popular appeal, and its new structure of religious unity was built on popular foundations. . . . While many *tariqah*s 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."[18]

This great network of teachers and students provided one of the most important vehicles for the expansion of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. The *tariqah*s 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 studied with Naqshbandi *shaykh*s 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 *tariqah*s also provided physical support for travel throughout the Islamic world. After the development of the major widespread *tariqah*s, 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.[19]

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[17] A helpful account of the emergence of the orders is J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[18] Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "An Interpretation of Islamic History," in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), pp. 29–30.

[19] A discussion of the development of these institutions can be found in Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam,* chap. 6.

Wandering scholars provide a similar vehicle for systemwide interactions. Muhammad is reported to have said, "Seek knowledge, even unto China," and Muslim scholars were great travelers. These were not simple sightseeing adventurers. Their goal was to gain greater knowledge within the framework 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.[20] The great 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 thirteenth centuries, a standard set of works defined the major schools of law and the accepted collections of traditions of the Prophet, and these provided a common "canonical syllabus of learning" for scholars anywhere within the postimperial Islamic world-system.[21]

The changing organization of travel in search of knowledge reflects the postimperial 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 *masjid*s with accompanying structures specifically for lodging out-of-town students and travelers (usually called *khans*). These were followed by formal institutions of Islamic learning, called *madrasah*s, 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 *madrasah*s that the "canonical syllabus" was presented to scholars traveling in search of knowledge.[22]

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 sepa-

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[20] 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), p. 55 and passim.

[21] Ibid.

[22] This discussion of the institutional evolution is based on the important works of George Makdisi, especially *The Rise of Colleges, Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981) and his revision of J. Pedersen, "Madrasa," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 5:1122–34.

rated, with *rihla* applying to pilgrimage and the other terms keeping the basic meaning.[23] "This change may reflect the institutionalisation of the *madrasa* system in place of the formerly more individualized, orally-oriented relationships which prevailed between students and teachers in the early medieval centuries of Islamic history. Thus, Ibn Battuta [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."[24]

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.[25] In some cases, different branches of great families combined with *tariqah*s 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 south Yemen had established a far-flung network of trade contacts, *tariqah*s, 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*.[26]

Clearly, people who traveled in the Islamic world of the post-imperial 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. Many were in the same situation that Sam Gellens notes for Ibn Battuta: "Ibn Battuta may not have known the local languages of the places he visited, but he did know the cultural language of Muslims and hence felt at home."[27] They were moving within the

[23] Gellens, "The Search for Knowledge," p. 53.

[24] Ibid.

[25] See, for example, the very important study of the evolution of the Funj state in the central Nile valley: Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnar* (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985).

[26] The information on this family is drawn from my unpublished research.

[27] Gellens, "The Search for Knowledge," p. 51.

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 traveled 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.[28]

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.[29]

This double level of world-system operation, even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, suggests the need for a broader conceptualization of *world-system*. World-systems may compete and also may operate in different dimensions of a social system in ways that force a changing definition of *hegemonic*. Wallerstein has suggested that the world-system perspective needs to be

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[28] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), chap. 17.

[29] Donald B. Cruise O'Brien, "Islam and Power in Black Africa," in *Islam and Power,* ed. Alexander S. Cudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 160–61.

"unidisciplinary" and not just "interdisciplinary" or "multidisciplinary" in method and approach, but he recognizes the difficulty of this task.[30]

The issues raised by considering the Islamic world-system may help in developing a broader approach. I suggest that the modern capitalist world-system was not the first long-lasting world-system without a world-empire. The Islamic community had already developed such a world-system in the centuries following the collapse of the Abbasid state by the tenth century C.E. This nonimperial world-system was not based on a world-economy. Instead it was a discourse-based world-system tied together by interactions based on a broad community of discourse rather than by exchange of goods. The capitalist world-system strongly influenced this Islamic world-system, but it did not destroy it. The interpretation of the capitalist and Islamic world-systems represents a subject of study that tests even the most talented unidisciplinary scholars of modern history.

[30] Wallerstein, "World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase," pp. 292–93.