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EUROCENTRISM AND THE RE-IMAGINATION OF GLOBAL HISTORY THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARSHALL G. S. HODGSON

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the critical contributions of Islamicist and world historian Marshall G. S. Hodgson's study of Islamic civilization in Western academia and civilization studies in general. It surveys the emergence of global history as a field of inquiry and critiques of Eurocentrism in historical theory and method, tackling issues such as the 'invention of Europe', 'Euro-exclusivity', and 'the Orient' as an analytical unit. While the logic of Eurocentrism necessarily ends in Otherization and 'us and them' dichotomies, global history offers a viable alternative that considers the complex interrelatedness of societies. Hodgson's global historical approach 'decenters' Europe from world history and offers a sophisticated alternative beyond the unidimensional historical study of nations as isolated units. By doing so, Hodgson offers a viable and much needed alternative to the so-called 'clash of civilizations' thesis of Islam as the civilizational Other by stressing the fundamental interconnectedness of the world's civilizations. Examining the possibilities of re-imagining Islamic civilization through a global historical lens, or what some scholars call a 'Hodgsonian revival', might prove a helpful remedy to Otherization in an age of growing xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Keywords: Marshall Hodgson, civilization studies, Islamic civilization, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, global history, Otherization, xenophobia, Islamophobia

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Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, one could not imagine studying the Islamic world without taking into account the authentic effects of Eurocentrism on the academic scholarship on the history of Islamic civilization and Muslim societies.¹ Inspired by the ideas of the French post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (d. 1984), Said argued that Orientalist scholarship, as it took shape in the Western academic study of Islam, was a "Western-style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient".² Although he was critical of the term, Said is often seen as the intellectual father to a whole essential strand of scholarship collectively called "postcolonialism".³ After the publication of *Orientalism*, a wave of polemics started throughout the 1980s and 1990s in departments of middle eastern studies and area studies (or other university departments that dealt with the academic study of Islam, either directly or peripherally), until the work reached a considerable stature and came to be seen as the "Mimesis of its time".⁴

However, while Said was pushed to the forefront of the academic study of Islam as somewhat of a literary celebrity, another great contributor to the debate on Eurocentrism in Islamic studies, Marshall G. S. Hodgson (d. 1968), is often forgotten. Hodgson, a University of Chicago world historian and specialist in the history of Islamic civilization, published his magnum opus *The Venture of Islam* (3 vols.) around the same time as Said, in 1974.⁵ His *Venture of Islam* and his posthumously published collection of essays *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History* are hailed by specialists as having had a significant impact on re-envisioning the study of Islamic civilization in Euro-American universities.⁶ Bruce Lawrence argues that at least one of the reasons Said impeded Hodgson's contribution is that

he was unable to finish his most significant works before his unexpected early death in 1968.⁷ Hodgson died at the relatively young age of 46 and did not publish much during his life, except for one monograph on a Shi'ite sect named *The Secret Order of Assassins*.⁸ All of his other works were published posthumously. However, despite Hodgson's relative obscurity, several scholars broadly work within the intellectual framework of the so-called "Hodgsonian" approach to the study of Islamic civilization and Muslim societies or are at least indebted to him, such as Vernon O. Egger, Anouar Majid and to a lesser extent, Ira M. Lapidus.⁹

Hodgson's work, mainly his *Venture of Islam*, stands apart from other similar works in many important ways, especially from those scholarly works that were contemporary to his time. For example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr mentions Hodgson's three-volume magnum opus that, where other works only partially deal with Islamic civilization (leaving out this period or that geography), the *Venture of Islam* "covers the whole of the Islamic world in time as well as geography".¹⁰ This uniquely world-historical approach to Islamic civilization, which treats civilizations not as separate entities but as an inter-related complex, lays at the foundation of Hodgson's attempt to "globalize" Islamic history.¹¹ Hodgson developed a very sophisticated version of civilization theory, supported in his historical analysis by some of his famous neologisms, such as "Islamdom" and "Islamicate civilization".¹² In that sense, Hodgson has been compared to other great world historians, such as Arnold Toynbee, Fernand Braudel and William H. McNeil.¹³ He has also been likened to the great eighteenth-century English

7 See Bruce Lawrence, "Genius Denied and Reclaimed: A 40-Year Retrospect on Marshall G. S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam*", in *Marginalia: Los Angeles Review of Books* (November 11, 2004).

8 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâ'îlis Against the Islamic World* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, originally published in 1955).

9 See Vernon O. Egger, *A History of the Muslim World to 1405: The Making of a Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000); and Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, second edition).

10 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Origins and Development of Islamic Studies in the U.S.: A Historical Overview of Trends and Institutions", in *Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, ed. Mumtaz Ahmad et al. (London and Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 18.

11 We will further delve into Hodgson's methodology for studying civilizations in the course of this paper.

12 Johann P. Arnason, "Marshall Hodgson's Civilizational Analysis of Islam: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives", in *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam: Islam in Process – Historical and Civilizational Perspectives*, eds. George Stauth and Armando Salvatore (New Brunswick, USA: Transcript Verlag and Transaction Publishers, 2006), 23.

13 Steve Tamari, "The Venture of Marshall Hodgson: Visionary Historian of the Islam and the World", in *New Global Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2015), 73. In comparison to Hodgson's world historical approach, see Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, abridged by D. C. Somervell (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003, originally published in 1978).

2 Ibid, 3.

3 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 25. Also see, Bill Ashcroft et al. (eds), *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 204-209. Said does use the term "decolonization" in his later work *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), which may be considered as a sequel to his influential work *Orientalism*, see xii.

4 Ziad Elmarsafy and Anna Bernard, "Orientalism: Legacies of Performance", in *Debating Orientalism*, ed. Ziad Elmarsafy et al. (Hampshire, England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4. "Mimesis" here of course refers to the German philologist Erich Auerbach's famous work called *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, originally published in 1946). For more on Said's impact on Western academia, see Peter Gran, "Orientalism's Contribution to World History and Middle Eastern History 35 Years Later", in Elmarsafy, op. cit., 18-37.

5 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

6 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

historian of Roman civilization Edward Gibbon (d. 1794).¹⁴

Thus, arguably, a more extensive treatment of Marshall G. S. Hodgson's works on Islamic civilization and world history are called for. In the remainder of this paper, I first deal with the emergence of the field of academic inquiry called "global history". Hodgson's work, in many ways, could be seen as a precursor in terms of scholarly concerns. This field of knowledge approaches history from a global perspective, instead of from the limited view of one particular civilization in isolation that supposedly sits at the "center of history", thus critiquing overly Eurocentric approaches to world history. Secondly, I focus on Hodgson's specific critique of Eurocentrism and what he himself calls the "Great Western Transmutation". Here Hodgson aims the "de-centralize" Europe in historical inquiries and proposes his own ideas on rethinking world history as a discipline. Lastly, I discuss and analyze Hodgson's approach to studying civilizations in the context of global history.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF GLOBAL HISTORY: CRITIQUES OF EUROCENTRISM IN HISTORICAL THEORY AND METHOD

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his now seminal work *Provincializing Europe*, argues that while history has already provincialized (or decentered) Europe, Western academia is still haunted by habits of thought that are deeply embedded in "certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even the theological traditions of Europe".¹⁵ Hodgson was very much aware of this "centering" of historical inquiry upon the European (or rather Euro-American) experience, even in other civilizations, such as Islamic civilization. This way of looking at history from the intellectual precepts of European thought and an almost exclusive focus on Europe as the "central hub", as it were, of global history, is also called "Eurocentrism". Eurocentrism as an analytical concept is defined as: "The conscious or

unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the normal, the natural or the universal."¹⁶

In critiques of Eurocentrism in the study of world history, some of which were also pointed out by Hodgson, we can observe several common biases. Some of these are:

- 1) The tendency of "Euro-heroism", which entails the disproportionate (and often triumphalist) attention to European and Western cultural and intellectual achievements;
- 2) The bias of "Euro-mitigation", which points to the tendency to underplay crimes perpetrated during Western colonialism and imperialism;
- 3) And the bias of "Euro-exclusivity" alludes to the disproportionate space given to the European and Western experience in world history.¹⁷

Hodgson seems to have been predominantly, but certainly not exclusively, concerned with the bias of Euro-exclusivity, as we will see in the course of this paper.¹⁸ Other biases pertain to various ways in which Eurocentrism has limited, marginalized, obstructed and discredited the cultural and intellectual achievements of non-Western civilizations.¹⁹ These latter biases have been met by increasing thorough critiques and responses from scholars from the so-called "non-West".²⁰

Imbedded in the assumption of Eurocentrism is also the idea of the "invention of Europe", which points to the construction of the self-identity of the West.²¹ More often than not, the self-image of Europe is presented as a distinct expression of Western civilization that is an anathema to an imagined "Eastern civilization". The non-Western civilization here serves as the civilizational Other. The so-called "Orient", a role preoccupied with any non-Western

16 Ashcroft, 107. Eurocentrism is to be found beyond the confined of the field of historical inquiry. For an example from the field of literary studies, for instance, see Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

17 Ali A. Mazrui, "The Seven Biases of Eurocentrism: A Diagnostic Introduction", in *The Challenge of Eurocentrism: Global Perspectives, Policy, and Prospects*, ed. Rajani Kannepalli Kanth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xi-xiii.

18 This is especially apparent in Marshall G. S. Hodgson's brilliant essay on the topic called "In the center of the map: Nations see themselves as the hub of history", in *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29-34.

19 Mazrui, xiii-xiv.

20 See, for example, the excellent volume by Lutfi Sunar (ed.), *Eurocentrism at the Margins: Encounters, Critics and Going Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

21 Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. 1. In this regard also see Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

1946); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995, first published 1949); and William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

14 See Robert J. Mankin, "From Gibbon to Hodgson and Back", in *Islam and World History: The Ventures of Marshall Hodgson*, ed. Edmund Burke III and Robert J. Mankin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 25-37.

15 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

civilization (but predominantly Islamic civilization), functions as a mirror for the European self-image through which European identity takes shape and develops.²² The self-identity thus constructed by the West is not always based on realistic, or even factual, self-interpretation. Sometimes it is even informed by mythological conceptions of Europe that go back to Ancient Antiquity.²³

It is not at all unexpected, when we follow the logical reasoning of this “us versus them” argument, that Eurocentrism, on this reading can be seen as directly related to the so-called “clash of civilizations thesis”, popularized by the controversial political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in his work with the same title.²⁴ In many ways, Eurocentrism lays at the very foundation of the idea that civilizations are in a political (and ideological) struggle for global power and influence.²⁵ In his equally controversial book *The End of History and the Last Man*, direct students of Huntington continue to perpetuate this conflictive civilizational narrative, such as the Stanford political scientist Francis Fukuyama.²⁶

Concurrent with the emergence of critiques of Eurocentrism, which is also central to Hodgson’s approach to history, the field of global history emerged.²⁷ Partly set up to counter the effects of Eurocentrism in historical scholarship, global history looks at history, not from the level of specific and isolated nations, but instead looks at history as an interconnected and complex whole that goes beyond mere national or communal boundaries. Global history moves away from the past as a “partial view of reality” and incorporates a thoroughly global historical perspective.²⁸ Included in this approach is not only a severe critique of Eurocentrism but, indeed, of any “centrism” that displays a tendency to put one particular, often local, historical perspective over others.²⁹

22 Delanty, 84. Delanty mentions in this regard that “[i]n order to define itself, Europe needed an Other against whom it could construct an identity of its own, see p. 86. This also ties into the complex history of Orientalism as a way for the West to relate to the non-West, as discussed above.

23 Heikki, pp. 3-16. In this regard, also see Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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

25 Arun Bala, “Eurocentric Roots of the Clash of Civilizations: A Perspective from the History of Science”, in *The Challenge of Eurocentrism: Global Perspectives, Policy, and Prospects*, ed. Rajani Kannepalli Kanth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9-23.

26 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

27 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 14.

28 Conrad, 15.

29 Alessandro Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 15.

Global history is also increasingly used within the framework of academic Islamic studies. This is, for example, seen in the excellent scholarly contributions of Cemil Aydin.³⁰ In his work *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History*, Aydin argues against the oversimplified binaries of the clash of civilizations thesis (“us” versus “them”) and instead aims to “decolonize” and “deconstruct” typical Western categories and conceptions about religion, civilization and world order.³¹ In his scholarly precision, ambition and intellectual nuance, Marshall G. S. Hodgson certainly follows in similar lines in his approach to studying Islamic civilization and world history in general. In many ways, he anticipated the central concerns that are pertinent to the field of global history. It is to his approach to world history and civilizational studies we now turn.

II. THE GREAT WESTERN TRANSMUTATION: HODGSON’S CRITIQUE OF EUROCENTRISM AND ITS REMEDIES

In his typical provocative style, Hodgson states in his essay on “The role of Islam in world history” that:

In the sixteenth century of our era, a visitor from Mars might have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim. He would have based his judgment partly on the strategic and political advantages of the Muslims, but partly also on the vitality of their general culture.³²

Placing Islam in the center of world history, as Hodgson does in this passage, does not only fly in the face of Eurocentric characterization of the West as the central hub of world history and the unique site of the emergence of modernity. It is also telling of Hodgson’s world-historical project. In another, related, essay, Hodgson asked the question of why it is

30 Cemil Aydin, “Globalizing the Intellectual History of the Idea of the “Muslim World”, in *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 159-186. Also see his “The Ottoman Empire and the Global Muslim Identity in the Formation of Eurocentric World Order, 1815-1919”, in *Civilizations and World Order: Geopolitics and Cultural Difference*, eds. Fred Dallmayr et al. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 117-144.

31 Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017), 237.

32 Hodgson (1993), 97.

that modernity, as we know it today, arose in Western civilization and not in some other civilization, such as in Chinese, African or Middle Eastern civilizations.³³ Is there something unique about Western civilization? Or are we dealing with a combination of other, rather coincidental, factors? Hodgson already admitted to the fact that Western Europe only covers very small geography in relation to the global scale, and yet all history has been made to focus exactly here.³⁴ In fact, according to his observations, Western Europe only played a very “peripheral”, and even “backward” role (these are Hodgson’s characterizations) in the vast historical complex of the Middle Ages.³⁵

In what Hodgson calls the “Great Western Transmutation” he points out that the emergence of the West as a hegemonic cultural and civilizational power did not happen in a vacuum.³⁶ In fact, he argues, “without the cumulative history of the whole Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene, of which the Occident (i.e. the West) had been an integral part, the Western Transmutation would be almost unthinkable”.³⁷ Hodgson does go on to cite some of the specific advantages Westerners had, such as the relative virginity and extensiveness of the soil, the cultural and intellectual flowering of the European Renaissance, the “technicalization” that came with the Industrial Revolution, and other economic, intellectual and social developments.³⁸ But these advantages, Hodgson argues, are not per se inherent in the evolution of Western civilization itself, but part of the larger scheme of the course of development of the Afro-Eurasian historical life as a whole.³⁹ And a very significant reason for this is the inter-connectedness of these smaller regions to the larger global complex of societies and culture in which borrowing, mutual influences and extensive cross-pollination played a very major role.⁴⁰ Hodgson therefore concludes that:

33 Ibid, 66.

34 Ibid, 4.

35 Ibid, 26.

36 In this context, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

37 Hodgson (1993), 68.

38 Ibid, 62-71.

39 Ibid, 28.

40 For examples of this process of intensive cross-pollination between Islamic and Western civilizations, see Cristina D’Ancona, “Greek to Arabic: Neoplatonism in translation” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-31; and Charles Burnett, “Arabic into Latin: the reception of Arabic philosophy into Western Europe”, in the same edited volume, 370-404.

When we look at human historical life as a whole, it will not do simply to give more attention to “Eastern” societies – either for their own interest or as influencing or contributing to Europe. We must learn to recognize the Occident as one of a number of societies involved in wider historical processes to some degree transcending or even independent of any given society.⁴¹

In other words, rather than the Eurocentric triumphalism of an imagined and uniquely *Western* civilizational achievement – as an instance of the “Euro-Heroism” explained above⁴² – the emergence of modernity should be seen as the fruit of the efforts of an interrelated complex of civilizations that operate on a global level. The Afro-Eurasian historical complex, of which Europe has always been part, functioned as a “framework for mutual borrowings and influences among organically independent civilizations”.⁴³ Civilizations thus do not develop in isolation of one another but rather develop concurrently while mutually influencing each other in all domains, be they cultural, artistic, intellectual, scientific and more.

Another dimension of Hodgson’s critique of Eurocentrism is more methodological in nature. In a small, but insightful, essay called “In the center of the map: Nations see themselves as the hub of history”, Hodgson points to the interesting fact that in map-making different civilizations have the tendency to put their own nation in the center of the map.⁴⁴ In medieval European maps Europe took center stage, while for example China was delegated to the right-hand edge of the map. On Chinese maps, however, China was centered in the middle as they thought of themselves as the “Middle Kingdom”.⁴⁵ On a similar note, Muslims often came to believe that the birthplace of the prophet of Islam, Mecca, was the center of the world.⁴⁶ Many other examples from different civilizations (such as Hindu or Graeco-Roman civilization) could be found. From this human curiosity Hodgson concludes that the “temptation not only to put one’s own land in the center of the map, but one’s own people in the center of history, seems to be universal”.⁴⁷ Hence, in line with this reasoning we can understand that in current

41 Hodgson (1993), 28.

42 Mazrui, xi-xiii.

43 Hodgson (1993), 25-26.

44 Ibid, 29-34.

45 Ibid, 29.

46 Ibid, 31.

47 Ibid, 29. Edmund Burke III, Hodgson’s editor, mentions in the preface that Hodgson made a major conceptual breakthrough with this essay, which enabled him to combine both Islamic and Western civilization in the context of world history, see xvi.

European so-called “world histories” and “world atlases” European histories and geographies take center stage, while non-Western countries and cultures are relegated to the periphery as less central, or even less important.⁴⁸ This Eurocentric historical and geographical narrative has become ubiquitous in modern times with the emergence of the West as the hegemonic civilization of the world.

In what is perhaps his most famous essay (aside from his monumental *The Venture of Islam*) named “The interrelations of societies in history”, Hodgson further criticizes what he calls the modern Westerner’s “ethnocentric medieval image of the world”.⁴⁹ This image, Hodson argues, is still prevalent in our contemporary times, albeit that it is cast in modern scholarly and scientific language.⁵⁰ In what would today very well have counted for a direct critique of Huntington’s clash of civilizations narrative discussed above (and this is well before Huntington published his book), Hodgson puts very bluntly that the aim of *any* ethnocentric world image is to “divide the world into moieties, ourselves and the others, ourselves forming the most important of the two”.⁵¹ Hence, Hodgson tries to overcome this parochial outlook on world history by developing an approach for the study of civilizations that is more global and interconnected. It is to this approach that we now turn in our final analytical section of this paper.

III. CIVILIZATIONS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT: HODGSON’S APPROACH TO CIVILIZATION STUDIES AND WORLD HISTORY

In Hodgson’s active time as an academic scholar and historian (in the early 1960s), the study of Islamic civilization was deeply bound to the dominant Eurocentric narrative, which tended to perceive modernity as “quintessentially Western” and the history of other civilizations, including Islamic, as belonging to the realm of past glory.⁵² Hodgson fervently

48 Ibid, 33.

49 Ibid, 3. Hodgson wrote in a time when the term “Eurocentrism” was not yet widely utilized in academic scholarship. Hence, he uses “ethnocentrism”, which has very similar meanings. It does, however, have slight differences in nuance. For more on ethnocentricity, see Werner Sollors, “Who is Ethnic?”, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 191-193.

50 Hodgson (1993), 3.

51 Ibid.

52 Edmund Burke III and Robert J. Mankin (eds.), *Islam and World History: The Ventures of Marshall Hodgson*

argues against this very Eurocentric approach, as we have discussed above, in similar lines as we have seen in contemporary global history scholarship, as described above. Hodgson strongly argues that “it is of the utmost importance that our historians and social scientists, in general, build a “global,” world outlook”.⁵³ What this global historical outlook could look like makeup much of the reflections and ruminations in the bulk of his posthumously published collections of essays called *Rethinking World History*.

Let us first turn to Hodgson’s definition of civilization. In his *Venture of Islam* Hodgson devoted an entire section to “On defining civilizations” (which is reproduced in his collection of essays).⁵⁴ Civilization as an analytical concept is defined in many ways and can mean different things in different contexts, but for Hodgson, it is mostly related to the study of the great cultural heritages of, especially, pre-modern citted ages.⁵⁵ In his *Venture of Islam* Hodgson mentions the following about studying civilizations:

In this work, we shall speak more of masterpieces of art and dynastic policies, of religious geniuses, and scientific discoveries, than of everyday life on the farm and in the kitchen. Hence we will include in our scope those peoples among whom a few privileged men shared such masterpieces and discoveries, however much those peoples differed among themselves, in a framework or in homemaking. This may seem like an arbitrary preference for the spectacular. I believe it answers to a legitimate human need to understand ourselves. In any case, we must be clear as to what we are doing, and its consequences.⁵⁶

Hence Hodgson seems to be primarily interested in the so-called “high culture” of the intellectual, artistic, cultural, social, legal and political achievements of the world’s great cultures.⁵⁷ Hodgson does not attribute some kind of “biological law” to civilizations, that as an organism they must flourish and then decay.⁵⁸ This is contrary to other civilizational theorists,

(Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 5.

53 Hodgson (1993), 38.

54 Ibid, 81-85.

55 Ibid, 81.

56 Hodgson (1974, Vol. I), 90-91.

57 Hodgson sometimes uses “culture” and “civilization” interchangeably. Ultimately it seems, however, that he views culture as the smaller analytical unit. A civilization, on this reading, then, is a complex of interrelated cultures. Hodgson defines culture as “a complex of interdependent traditions”. Tradition here refers to the cultural and intellectual traditions of citted and lettered human life. See Hodgson (1974), 79-87.

58 Hodgson (1993), 125.

such as Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee or Ibn Khaldun, who do adhere to a more cyclical theory of civilization.⁵⁹ He simply points to those human societies that have reached such a level of complexity that every subsection in a population (often urban) can be said to have a degree of cultural self-sufficiency.⁶⁰

The purpose of history as a scholarly discipline, according to Hodgson, lies in helping us understand civilization today and to put contemporary civilization in its historical habitat.⁶¹ On this reading, which seems to make a lot of sense, it is questionable to have some kind of self-understanding as a civilization when studied in isolation and without studying a civilization within its setting in the world as a whole.⁶² Studying the history of the world, Hodgson argues, would give us an understanding that European history in the main, at least until relatively recently, has been a “dependent part of the general development of civilization”, an understanding which might give us a completely different view on both Europa *and* the human race as a whole.⁶³ The concern for studying civilizations as situated within the network of world history (as opposed to studying it in isolation) also extends to non-Western civilization. Hodgson thus argues that, as is necessitated for European history, Islamic civilization should similarly not merely be studied in those regions where it flourished, but as “a major element in forming the destiny of *all mankind*”.⁶⁴ Hodgson was, after all, aside from a world historian, primarily a historian of Islamic civilization. This means that a lot of his scholarship deals with bringing Islamic civilization into the purview of world history.⁶⁵ In Hodgson’s concern for the human race *as a whole* we can see the deep moral commitments Hodgson has as a historian of human history. It is to these commitments we turn as a final part of our analysis of the Hodgsonian approach to world history.

59 See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1927); Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, abridged by D. C. Somervell (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946); and Abū Zayd Abd al-Ra mān b. Mu ammad b. Khaldūn al- a ramī, *Muqaddima ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- Ilmiyya: 2009).

60 Hodgson (1993), 81.

61 Ibid, 36.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid, 37.

64 Ibid, 172. (Emphasis added by me.)

65 While extremely important, the study of Hodgson’s contributions to the history of Islamic civilization as such lies beyond the proper scope of this paper. Hence, I have neglected, for the most part, those essays in his *Rethinking World History* that deal specifically with Islamic history (these essays are mostly contained in part II of the book). This topic is deserving of a separate treatment in a different paper. For an overview of Hodgson’s radical revisionism in the study of the history of Islamic civilization, see Tamari, 78-83. Also see Arnason, 32-46.

In a rather brave act of self-reflexivity, Hodgson argues that any historian that takes himself (or herself) seriously should be willing to justify his (or her) point of view.⁶⁶ As the viewpoint from which a historian (or any scholar) works guides the research at hand, a reflection of the role of the scholar is justified, yes, even of great necessary.⁶⁷ Hodgson rightly argues that because in historical studies human loyalties and commitments play such a vital role, the personal commitments of scholars play an even greater role in historical studies than in other studies.⁶⁸ Even in the highest ranks of the most serious scholarship “historical judgments cannot be entirely disengaged from the basic precommitments of inquirers”.⁶⁹ This very human character trait also does not *have* to be a problem as some of the most profound scholarship often only arises once we are “humanly deeply engaged”.⁷⁰ Hodgson’s final advice on the topic of scholarly precommitments is certainly valuable enough to cite here in full:

Inquiries by pure specialists, seeking only to straighten out this or that detail brought up by some greater scholar who *was* humanly engaged and had discussed the great issues, may bring useful clarifications but often miss the main points. Precommitment can lead the unwary – and often even the most cautious scholar – too biased judgment. Bias comes especially in the questions he poses and in the type of category he uses, where, indeed bias is especially hard to track down because it is hard to suspect the very terms one uses, which seem so innocently neutral. Nevertheless, the bias produced by precommitment can be guarded against, the answer to it cannot finally be to divest ourselves of all commitments, but to learn to profit by the concern and insight they permit while avoiding their pitfalls”.⁷¹

66 Hodgson himself was a pronounced Quaker, which might also have played into his scholarly positions, see Tamari, 75.

67 Hodgson (1993), 72.

68 Ibid, 77.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

HODGSON'S SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF REVOLUTIONARY COSMOPOLITANISM AND MORAL COMMITMENT

In this brief study, we have addressed Hodgson's approach to the study of civilization within the framework of world history and his critique on Eurocentrism in historical scholarship. Said's *Orientalism* – while undoubtedly a classic in Islamic studies and an important corrective on Eurocentrism in its own right – has received an unprecedented amount of attention in the decades after its publication in the late 1970s, Hodgson's works have remained a somewhat underappreciated contribution to the field. This is due, at least in part, to his premature death and the fact that some of his main works remained unfinished and were only published posthumously.

Called a “counter Orientalist” by some, Hodgson used the tools of Orientalist scholarship to radically re-imagine both the study of the history of Islamic civilization, as well as world history in general.⁷² In doing so, he anticipated the emergence of the field of global history as we know it today. Hodgson was also an early, and fervent, critic of what we today call Eurocentrism (and we he, in his time, would call “ethnocentrism”), that is, the effort to de-center the Euro-American experience and Western habits of thought from historical inquiries, in favor of an approach that acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness of the world's civilizations. In doing so, Hodgson confronted Western historical scholarship with a reflective mirror in which Europe has been able to re-examine its artificially constructed self-image as the “antithesis” of the cultural and civilization “Other”. In an age where Huntington's thesis of the so-called “clash of civilizations” is still in full swing and in which Islamic civilization is often projected as being the civilizational Other, Hodgson's world-historical approach is still very relevant, and perhaps now more so than ever.

As a matter of fact, very recently, there have been increased calls from scholars (both world historians and Islamicists) for a Hodgsonian revival.⁷³ Whether this is truly desirable remains to be seen, but I do think a renewed interest in Hodgson's work is not only justified but,

indeed, imperative. In an age of growing xenophobia and Islamophobia⁷⁴ – and what seems to be a growing general misunderstanding between peoples of different cultures and civilizations – Hodgson's world-historical and civilizational approach, which is deeply informed by his revolutionary cosmopolitanism and moral commitment⁷⁵, are a welcome counter-narrative to the *zeitgeist* of the modern secular age.

72 Christopher A. Bayly, “Hodgson, Islam, and World History in the Modern Age”, in *Islam and World History: The Ventures of Marshall Hodgson*, eds. Edmund Burke III and Robert J. Mankin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 38.

73 Edmund Burke III and Robert J. Mankin, *Islam and World History: The Ventures of Marshall Hodgson* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 2.

74 See Nazanin Massoumi et al. (eds.), *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

75 Burke and Mankin, pp. 2 and 5.