

Models of Positive Historical Islamic-Western Cultural Interaction: The Challenges of Practice in the Contemporary Context

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Abstract

This article delves into the history of Islamic-Western cultural interaction and the challenges undermining such interaction in the contemporary context. The research reveals that history stands as a witness for a positive empirical legacy of interactions between the Islamic and Western cultures through translation, mutual scholarships and linguistic exchange, providing a unique model of cultural engagement. However, bias and the absence of a fair perspective remain major obstacles to Islamic-Western cultural interaction, hindering an objective understanding of reality. Similarly, the influence of the “ethnic civilisation” theory and the disregard for diverse spatio-temporal contexts present another challenge to a meaningful cultural exchange. The article emphasizes the significance of considering successful historical positive models of Islamic-Western cultural interaction that have embraced diverse cultural environments, fostering a meaningful strategy for addressing the contemporary challenges of cultural exchange.

Keywords: Islamic Culture, Western Culture, Cultural Interaction, Cultural exchange, Challenges, Contemporary Context

Introduction

The notion that the relationship between Islamic and Western cultures is purely conflict-driven, with their positive interaction being merely theoretical rather than practical, highlights a significant aspect of methodological shortcomings. The premises of such an assumption are not based on inductive or deductive arguments. Rather, they are shaped by personal biases and a fragmented view of reality, giving a focus to the supposed negative aspects of the relationship between the two cultures. The conflict-driven narrative between Islamic and Western cultures often relies on selective historical factors, privileging episodes of military confrontation and imperialistic pursuits. The Crusades (11th-13th centuries) marked a critical era of conflict, contributing to long-standing tensions and encounters between the two cultures.¹ Even the era of cultural coexistence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was often weakened by later imperialistic ambitions. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a shift in attitudes towards the West because of the expansion of Western hegemony and dominance into Islamic regions.² Furthermore, stereotypes and misconception about Islamic culture, because of 9/11 terrorist attacks, entrenched the divide and shaped a skewed perception of Islamic culture in the West.³ These historical factors have significantly contributed in marginalizing long periods of coexistence, cooperation, mutual

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¹ Leli Al-Farisi, “Islam-West Relations: Clash or Cooperation?” *SocioHumania: Journal of Social Humanities Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 18–32.

² Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2004): 1–20.

³ Sanaa R. Alrefai, “History of Western Image of Islam and Muslims,” *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2015): 135-142.

influence and intellectual exchange, viewing civilizational interactions through a polarized lens rather than acknowledging their historical depth and strength.⁴ Therefore, it is essential to adopt a more comprehensive analytical methodology in studying Islamic-Western cultural interaction, suggesting a more nuanced relationship than the prevailing view of a clash of civilizations.

There have been significant historical instances that challenge the conflict-driven narrative between Islamic and Western cultures, emphasizing that religious, social and economic differences fostered cultural interaction rather than barriers to engagement. The translation movement during the Abbasid period stands as an outstanding paradigm, where Jewish, Christian and Muslim translators collaborated to translate Greek philosophical texts into Arabic—an endeavour that ultimately fuelled the European intellectual revival.⁵ Likewise, the era of Al-Andalus or medieval Spain witnessed intellectual cross-pollination among Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars, highlighting how religious and cultural differences did not preclude mutual understanding; rather, they foster mutual benefit, meaningful scientific exchange, and intercultural dialogue.⁶ Muslim philosophical works, like those of Al-Ghazali, had a profound influence on western thought, promoting a shared intellectual heritage.⁷ Even in the contemporary context, Muslims in Western societies contribute significantly to cultural diversity and actively contribute to the well-being of their environments, demonstrating continued efforts to achieve effective integration and cooperative relations.⁸

This research aims to present positive and successful historical models of Islamic-Western cultural interaction, offering a contextual analysis of these models while exploring the challenges that undermine the full realization of their positive impact. Surprisingly, the relationship between Islamic and Western cultures continues to face significant challenges, influenced by the diverse religious, social, cultural, and economic approaches, shaping the overall perception of this relationship. The inductive and analytical methodologies have been employed in this study to analyse the historical models of positive Islamic-Western interaction, offering solutions to the challenges undermining the contemporary cultural exchange.

The Concept of Cultural Interaction

Within the realm of cultural terminologies, “cultural interaction” holds a pivotal place. Like other cultural concepts, it is subject to diverse interpretations and perspectives. Cultural Interaction may be broadly defined as the forms of interaction and exchange between two distinct communities.⁹ Specifically, it refers to a dialectical relationship between a community-specific cultural model, as a distinct unit, and other cultural models. This interplay between the internal and external factors of a cultural structure reinforces a specific culture and identity while also enabling the adoption of new elements and contributing to the construction of novel cultural expressions.¹⁰

⁴ Edi Kurniawan, “Relationship between Islam and the West: From Historical Review to Clash or Cooperation?” *Journal of Islamic Civilization* 5, no. 1 (2023): 66–76.

⁵ H. Hanafi, *Cultures in Conflicts or Dialogue? Alternative Models* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 237–244.

⁶ R. Tottoli, *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (Taylor and Francis, 2014), 1–478.

⁷ Nur Kirabaev, “Knowledge and Action: Al-Ghazali and Arab Muslim Philosophical Tradition in Context of Interrelationships with Philosophical Culture of Byzantium,” *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2023): 201–215.

⁸ Anfal M. Hijeat, “Integration Theory in Measuring Cultural Diversity in the Western Urban Context: The Case of Islamic Religious Buildings in the Western Urban Context,” *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning* 19, no. 9 (2024): 3351–3362.

⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, “Interaction of Cultures,” *Egyptian General Book Authority* 12, no. 2 (1993): 217–229.

¹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, “Interaction of Cultures,” 217–229.

Cultural exchange is a concept which is very close in meaning to cultural interaction. It is defined as a complex and necessary phenomenon that refers to certain types of human communication, in the sense that it adapts to the mechanism used for its elaboration and successive themes.”¹¹ Acculturation is also another close concept, which can be defined as the processes and changes caused by direct and consistent interactions and communications between different ethnic groups. They have multiple forms, including sharing, borrowing, ostracizing, imitating, adapting, compromising and re-interpretation.¹²

Encounters between Islamic and Western Cultures

The encounters between Islamic and Western cultures have been of several patterns and have lasted centuries. In fact, there was a mutual cultural exchange, with both cultures giving, taking, influencing, and being influenced by each other. The first Islamic-Western cultural encounter occurred within a unique historical context: the West, represented by Greek culture, was experiencing a post-prosperity phase, while Islamic culture was in its formative and developmental stages.¹³ The Islamic-Greek cultural interaction in this context was essential to the emergence of Islamic culture.

As a significant part of human history, Greek culture naturally became a point of encounter, dialogue, and interaction for Muslims during their cultural formation and innovation, manifesting its impact on intellectual trends that emerged within the Islamic culture.¹⁴ The convergence of these cultures led to the translation of Greek philosophical texts into Arabic, which were later translated into Latin, significantly influencing the European Renaissance.¹⁵ This interaction between the Islamic and Greek cultures persisted for a considerable period. However, the modern European Renaissance marked a significant turning point in Islamic-Western relations, with the influence shifting from Islamic culture to the West. The beginning of the modern era marks another shift in Islamic-Western cultural relations, as the Islamic world is confronted by the significant gap between the empirical scientific advancements of the West and its own. This sparks a new chapter in Islamic-Western cultural interaction. These were the key stages that shaped the trajectory of Islamic-Western cultural interaction.

At first glance, these stages of interaction may appear to require only a historical narrative. However, given the complexities involved in interpreting these stages, an accurate analytical approach is essential for understanding them. What follows is an exploration of several models of Islamic-Western cultural interaction.

Model of Translation

Translation is a fundamental aspect of human civilization, enabling communication with and understanding of the “other.” It has been an essential tool for cultural dialogue and interaction, as it transforms the unknown into the known. In fact, it has served as the gateway to understanding

¹¹ A. Al-Dashimi and M. Haddiya, *Youth and Problems of Integration* (Rabat: College of Arts and Humanities Publications, 1995), 21. See also S. Bin Labbad, “Language of Cultural Communication,” *Journal el-Hikma, Kounouz el Hikma* 32 (2014): 112-118.

¹² Gilles Ferball, *Dictionary of Sociology Terms*, translated by Ansam M. Al-Asaad (Beirut: Dār Al-Ḥilāl, 2001), 24.

¹³ Mohamed Al-Wakidi, *Cultures: Influence, Clash, Dialogue and Interaction, Forum on Towards a Charter of Coexistence and Mutual Respect Among Modern Cultures* (Kairouan Islamic Studies Center, 2006), 101.

¹⁴ Mohamed Al-Wakidi, *Cultures: Influence, Clash, Dialogue and Interaction*, 101.

¹⁵ H. Hanafi, *Cultures in Conflicts or Dialogue? Alternative Models* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 237–244.

others.¹⁶ Le Grand Robert assumes that the term “translation” means transferring the speech from one language to another, while maintaining the semantic equivalence of the text, along with its interpretive meaning.¹⁷ In this sense, translation carries both cultural and civilizational dimension. It is not simply an act of rendering one word or idea into another language; rather, it is a dynamic cultural process capable of transforming human resources into a driving force for innovation. It has the power to shape culture into a civilizational achievement and generate the momentum needed to transform society.¹⁸ Moreover, translation is a pivotal mechanism for the exchange of knowledge between nations, enabling the dissemination of human understanding across geographical boundaries. In examining the course of human intellectual development, it would not have occurred without this mechanism, which expanded human participation in the evolution of ideas.

Translation of Western Culture during the Rise of Islamic Civilization

Although the early Abbasid Dynasty witnessed significant cultural interactions through translation, this does not mean that Muslims had no previous cultural exchanges with other civilizations. In fact, a closer look at the Diwan of Letters during the Prophet’s era reveals that Arabic writing underwent a transformative shift, with over forty scribes and translators among the companions of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) who learned Syriac, Greek, Ethiopian, and Hebrew.¹⁹

With the rise of the Umayyad Dynasty, Prince Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Mu’awiya was the first to focus on translating medical and chemistry books into Arabic. Under the reign of Hisham Ibn Abdul-Malik, books of management were translated.²⁰ The Abbasid Dynasty represents the golden age for embracing the scientific mechanism of translation. The history of translation during this period can generally be divided into three distinct generations of translators, as follows:

- i. First Generation (753-813 A.D.): Their efforts were central to the translation of works on astronomy and engineering. Moreover, their translations flourished during the era of the Abbasid Caliphates of Al-Mansour and Al-Rashid who ordered the translation of Greek medical texts into Arabic.²¹
- ii. Second Generation: This period falls under the Caliphate of Al-Ma’mun, during which Hunayn ibn Ishaq and his school emerged, including notable figures such as Yahya Al-Batriq and Al-Hajjaj Ibn Matar.
- iii. Third generation: This period extends from 912 A.D. to the end of the tenth century, during which prominent figures such as Matta ibn Yunus, Sinan ibn Thabit, and Yahya ibn ‘Adi can be recalled.²²

The Abbasids established *Bait Al-Hikmah* (the House of Wisdom), which was the first Islamic institution concerned with translation and translators. The establishment of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad was a key institution where scholars from various cultures and religions worked

¹⁶ M. Boushafra, “Translation and Cultural Interaction,” *Arab Organization for Translation Journal* 7, no. 25 (2016): 60.

¹⁷ N. E. Saddar, “The Role of Translation and Arabization in Cultural and Civilizational Interaction,” *Arab Organization for Translation Journal* 5, no. 13 (2013): 51.

¹⁸ N. E. Saddar, “The Role of Translation and Arabization in Cultural and Civilizational Interaction,” 51.

¹⁹ N. E. Saddar, “The Role of Translation and Arabization in Cultural and Civilizational Interaction,” 12.

²⁰ N. E. Saddar, “The Role of Translation and Arabization in Cultural and Civilizational Interaction,” 14.

²¹ I. Fernini and H. M. K. Al-Naimiy, “The Living Contribution of Islamic Science to Space Exploration,” *Proceedings of the International Astronautical Congress (IAC)*, International Astronautical Federation (2022): 190266.

²² M. S. Kar, *Translation in the Abbasid Dynasty*, translated by N. Ghazzawi (Publication of the Syrian Ministry of Culture, 1998), 14.

together, translating and creating knowledge that would later influence Western thought.²³ However, Al-Ma'mun was not satisfied with the mere translation of scientific books into Arabic. Rather, he provided direct instructions for putting these translations into empirical application. As a result, observatories, hospitals, and schools were established, where he specifically ordered the translated texts to be studied and applied.²⁴ These efforts in the field of translation included any available works by Galen, Hippocrates, and their associates on medicine. They additionally included the translated Dioscorides' writings on botany and the composition of medicinal drugs, as well as the works of Euclid, Archimedes, Ptolemy, and others on mathematics, astronomy, mechanics, and geography.²⁵

The Abbasid Caliphs' robust support of translation and dissemination of knowledge significantly consolidated their political legitimacy and power within the Islamic world. The substantial financial incentives for translators—such as al-Ma'mūn's practice of paying the weight of books in gold—positioned the caliphate as a hub of intellectual and cultural exchange.²⁶ The Caliphs' efforts to foster an environment of intellectual growth reinforced Baghdad's political stability and economic prosperity. During that era, the translation movement efficiently served the administrative and medical sectors, equipping the empire with essential tools for effective governance.²⁷ Recognizing these underlying dynamics solidifies the status of Caliphs as enlightened rulers, underscoring the interplay between power, policy and intellectual development. The analysis of Islamic-Western cultural interaction through the model of translation unveils three key points:

- i. First, natural sciences were the primary focus of these translation efforts, highlighting their crucial role in the rise of civilizations. Moreover, this reflects the absence of any conflict between Islam and the natural sciences. Muslims did not resist these sciences in any way, whether independently or by drawing from other cultures.
- ii. Second, cultural interaction mechanisms are shaped by broader societal dynamics rather than being limited to individual experiences.
- iii. Third, this pattern of interaction flourished alongside the thriving of Islamic civilization, demonstrating that its positive impact sustained this progress. Mariam Salama Kar highlighted that this period played a pivotal role in laying the foundations of scientific translation by directly shaping translation practices.²⁸

Translation during the Western Renaissance

As a mechanism of cultural interaction, translation was not limited to Islamic contexts. The Western civilization, in turn, utilized translation as a key tool to render vast volumes of Muslim scientific heritage. Arabic-Latino translation, which coincided with translation from Latin into Greek, led to a transformation affecting all the philosophical fields of the Latin arena in medieval

²³ R. Tottoli, *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (Taylor and Francis, 2014), 1–478.

²⁴ N. E. Sadder, "The Role of Translation and Arabization in Cultural and Civilizational Interaction," *Arab Organization for Translation Journal* 5, no. 13 (2013): 14.

²⁵ C. Kahn, *History of the Arabs and Islamic Peoples*, translated by B. A. Al-Qasim (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥaḡīqah, 1973), 156.

²⁶ C. Hidayat, T. Hidayat, and S. Y. Permana, "Sains dan Sastra Pada Zaman Dinasti Abbasiyah," *Tanjak* 4, no. 3 (2024): 247–253.

²⁷ S. Mdallel, "Financial Power and the Thirst for Knowledge: The First Arabic Translation Movement (8th to 10th Centuries)," *Translation Matters* 4, no. 2 (2022): 23–36.

²⁸ M. S. Kar, *Translation in the Abbasid Dynasty*, translated by N. Ghazzawi (Publication of the Syrian Ministry of Culture, 1998), 8.

centuries.²⁹ This process began in Toledo in the 12th century, when Archbishop Drummond established the first-ever school for translation, operating from 1130 to 1150 A.D. He then appointed Archduke Dominic Baker to oversee the verification of the translated Latin vocabularies. John of Seville was the most famous translator of that school, where many books of Avicenna and some works of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi and Al-Kindi were translated. Long before that school, some translators, such as Constantine the African, Gerbert and Plato of Tivoli, transferred the Arabic books on mathematics, medicine and astronomy.³⁰ Moreover, Frederick II (591-648 AH, 1194-1250 AD), King of Sicily, was concerned with translating Arabic books. He was of the habit of getting himself surrounded with a large entourage of Muslim scholars. He established the University of Naples in 621 AH: 1224 AD. He translated the works of Aristotle and Averroes into Latin and sent copies thereof to Paris and Bologna.³¹

Based on the above, it can be deduced that translations of Muslim scholars' works were not a random Western practice; rather, they were organized and institutionalized efforts. These translations were not only limited to Greek works translated by Arab scholars, but they also included Arab commentaries, explanations, and their own scientific innovations. Moreover, these translations occurred not only during periods of peace between the West and the Islamic East, but also during times of war and conflict. As a cultural mechanism, translation thus has the potential to reduce the intensity of global conflicts.

Model of Scientific Missions

Some people are driven by a passion to travel and explore new cultural places. When this passion is directed through cultural exchange between nations and cultures, it becomes a key mechanism of human cultural interaction. Considering the positive Islamic-Western cultural interaction, it is evident that academic scholarships played a significant role in this mechanism, demonstrated by the following examples:

- i. First, the continuous missions to Andalusia were among the earliest scientific missions sent from European countries such as Italy, France, Germany, and England to the Islamic world. By the reign of Caliph Al-Nasir, the number of students had grown to approximately 700 by 312 AH/924 AD.³²
- ii. Second, Byzantine embassies were sent to Andalusia, with the first occurring in 326 AH/947 AD, where the ambassadors were warmly received by Al-Nasir. The second embassy took place in 338 AH/949 AD, and it too was met with great hospitality.³³
- iii. Third, Western scientific missions continued to arrive in Andalusia, including one led by Princess Doubant, daughter of the governor of Wales, Prince George. Another notable mission was the French scientific delegation headed by Princess Elizabeth, a cousin of King Louis VI.

Additionally, a Spanish mission of about 700 students visited the region. King George II of England also sent a mission to Seville, consisting of 18 daughters of nobles, led by his niece, Princess Doubant. With this delegation, he addressed a letter to the Umayyad Caliph Hisham III.³⁴ Consequently, the key role of scholars in cultural interaction becomes evident. While books are

²⁹ D. N. Hasse, "Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, translated by M. S. Al-Rashawi, *Hikmah Journal* 1 (2018): 151–198.

³⁰ M. S. Rafii, *History of Arab Literature*, vol. 3 (Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2012), 218.

³¹ M. Khofagi, "Arab Civilization and Its Influence in Europe," *Al-Hilāl Journal* (1979).

³² K. Al-Samarra'i, *History of the Arabs and Their Civilization in Andalusia* (Dar Al-Madar Al-Islami, 2004), 477. See also: H. bint A. Al-Omar, *Gulf Journal of History and Archaeology* (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, 2016).

³³ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyun Al Nab* (Beirut: Dar Maktbat Al-Hayat, n.d.), 59.

³⁴ M. Khofagi, "Arab Civilization and Its Influence in Europe," *Al-Hilāl Journal* (1979).

essential tools for cultural transmission, the human element remains crucial to ensuring such interaction, particularly when this human factor possesses knowledge neutrality. The era of Al-Andalus, or medieval Spain, witnessed a significant cultural symbiosis among Islamic, Jewish, and Christian cultures. This period was marked by significant contributions in literature, science, and philosophy, fostering a synthesis between Arabic and European cultures.³⁵ Although some fanatical perspectives view Andalusia through a negative lens, it remains an undeniable example of the structure of Islamic-Western cultural interaction.

With the advent of the modern era, scientific missions resumed between the Islamic and Western worlds, driven by the decline of Islamic civilization and the pressing need to access Western sciences and knowledge in an effort to bridge the gaps between the two worlds. Muhammad Ali initiated the first scientific mission of the modern era by swiftly working to improve his country. He brought in numerous Western scholars and sent as many students as possible from Egypt to these countries for further education and knowledge exchange.³⁶ Muhammad Ali continued to send students to various European countries to master different industries, sciences, and arts. However, he showed a particular preference for France and sought someone to oversee the scientific missions there. Fortunately, he came across Monsieur Jomard, who was appointed to lead the Egyptian missions to France and other countries.³⁷

In Tunisia, scientific missions to the West continued to build on its scientific progress. On 27th Dhil-Qa'dah 1297 AH, Al-Arabi Zarrouk, director of Collège Sadiki, requested Prime Minister Mustafa ibn Ismail to send students to Paris for advanced scientific studies. In the autumn of 1881, a second mission was dispatched to Saint-Louis Institute in Paris.³⁸

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Algeria has sent student missions mainly to neighbouring regions, including Ez-Zitouna University in Tunisia and Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco. More missions have also been sent to Eastern and Western countries such France.³⁹ Jordan has sent its own scientific missions, including delegations to the USA, Netherlands and Germany between 1961 and 1962.⁴⁰

Model of Linguistic Intersection

While translation plays a significant role in cultural interaction within academic contexts, linguistic exchange facilitates such interaction in social settings. In business transactions, nations often share expressions and terms, bridging the gap between cultures. Cultural interaction inherently involves linguistic exchange, as language and culture are closely interconnected. Language is a fundamental pillar of culture, while culture, in turn, preserves and nurtures language. Moreover, language is reflected in everyday behaviors and actions, shaping how individuals express their cultural identity.⁴¹

³⁵ M. M. Bahjat, T. Ramdane, and A. S. Preece, "Muslim Andalusia: New Insights into Linguistic and Literary Exchanges Between the East and the West," *Asiatic* 12, no. 1 (2018): 166–179.

³⁶ R. At-Tahtawi, *The Extrication of Gold in Summarizing Paris* (Hindawi Organization, 2012), 17.

³⁷ O. Tūsūn, *Al-Ba'thāt Al-'Ilmiyah Fī 'Ahd Muḥammad 'Alī Thumma Fī 'Ahdī 'Abbās al-Awwal wa Sa'īd* (Cairo: Maktabat Ṣalāh ad-Dīn, n.d.), 14.

³⁸ A. Ben Youssef, "Tunisian Scientific Missions to Europe During the 19th Century," *Rāwafid Journal* 12 (2007): 11-41.

³⁹ A. Atallaoui, "Algerian Missions to Ez-Zitouna University," in *Events of the Ninth International Conference* (Jil Research Center, 2015), 38.

⁴⁰ R. K. Ibrahim, *Scientific Mission in Jordan from 1926–1962*, doctoral dissertation (Jordan University, Post-graduate Studies College, 2015), 51.

⁴¹ R. Morsli, "Cultural Linguistic Interaction," *Majallat 'Alāmāt* 37 (2012): 59-66.

Omar Farroukh has given several ancient and modern models of such cultural linguistic intersection, stating: “When we, the Arabs, imported the Frankish telephone device, we also imported its name along with it. Later, we began calling the device “*hatif*” in Arabic; though “telephone” is still commonly used. After World War I, we imported the car, and initially everyone referred to it as “automobile.” Eventually, however, the term “car” became more widely used, and “automobile” faded from common usage.” Similarly, when Europeans adopted scientific knowledge and various tools from the Arabs, they also took their names with them. This remains clear evidence that human civilization is built upon mutual indebtedness and fulfillment, reciprocal sharing between nations.⁴² For a culture to advance, in fact, its capacity to give must be greater than what it receives.⁴³ Moreover, this age has witnessed the use of Greek vocabulary, particularly in fields such as philosophy, medicine, and terminologies related to names of measurements, scales, diseases, and medications.⁴⁴ These vocabularies contributed to creating the conceptual frameworks and philosophical lexicons of European scholastic thought. Terms such as “essence,” “substance,” and “intellect” enabled scholars across cultures to address significant topics about reason, metaphysics and science through the translation of such terms into Arabic and re-entry into Western discourse.⁴⁵ Therefore, the cross-pollination of philosophical concepts significantly contributed to the development of intellectual discourse across various cultures. Furthermore, mutual syntactic influences not only allow the transmission of knowledge but also the transformation of thought frameworks across civilization, fostering cultural mutual understanding.⁴⁶

Considering the above discussion on the aspects of linguistic intersection, it can be deduced that:

- i. First, human life is not a one-way street. Throughout history, wars and conflicts have never entirely halted cultural communication between nations. Instead, people adapted to these circumstances, creating innovative mechanisms that allowed human interaction to persist as the norm, with conflict remaining a temporary disruption.
- ii. Second, linguistic intersection, across past, present, and future, dispels the notion of linguistic superiority. History demonstrates that any language can be a participant in linguistic exchange, regardless of its status or origin.
- iii. Third: Linguistic exchange was not limited to scientific terms; it encompassed all areas of life.

Challenges of Islamic-Western Cultural Interaction in the Contemporary Context Bias in Cultural Perception

In fact, cognitive failures in certain cultures were often driven by unfair discrimination and prevalent biases, which distorted their perception of reality. Montaigne highlighted such bias as the root of the absolute condemnation of various cultures by other civilizations. Montaigne added: “Each custom carries its own wisdom. However, our tendency to condemn or praise a custom stem from a narrow perspective shaped by racial centrality. People often label anything outside their own race as barbaric.”⁴⁷

⁴² M. Shamsaei and A. Mahmoudi, “The Role of Islamic Civilization in Medical Sciences Advancement,” *Journal of Advanced Pharmacy Education and Research* 7, no. 4 (2017): 503–514.

⁴³ O. Farroukh, *Human Civilization and the Arab’s Share in It, Al-‘Irfān Magazine* (1979): 271-281.

⁴⁴ K. M. Al-Jarad, “Cultural Interaction During the Abbasid Dynasty,” *Arab Writers Union* 20, no. 80 (2000): 133.

⁴⁵ M. Al-Shawi, “Culture’s Echo: The Bi-Directional Influence of Language and Cultural Dynamics,” *Communication and Linguistics Studies* 10, no. 3 (2024): 63–74.

⁴⁶ T. Madigan, *Cultural Syntax and the Rules of Meaning-Making: A New Paradigm for the Interpretation of Culture* (Policy Press, 2023): 118–139.

⁴⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, “Interaction of Cultures,” *Egyptian General Book Authority* 12, no. 2 (1993): 217-229.

While the interaction between Eastern Islamic and Western cultures was a historical reality, the unfair perspectives held by each side have hindered further dialogue.⁴⁸ Dr. Sarton emphasized this cognitive issue, specifically the biased view of cultures like that of the Arabs.⁴⁹ Charles Singer, a modern historian of science, exemplifies this biased perspective by asserting that the period from 200 to 1200 AD was a “dark age” for science. He claims that after figures like Galen, Dioscorides, and Herophilus, there were no significant scientific advancements.⁵⁰ Such a generalization by a historian of science disregards the numerous intellectual achievements across various fields produced by Islamic civilization during that period. Additionally, such unfair view towards Islamic civilization is found in Western historians’ disregard for the contributions of al-Khazin, al-Idrisi, and Bani Musa on gravity and mechanics (Mechanical Engineering). Western historians of science often attribute sole credit for these discoveries to Newton, ignoring the earlier insights from Islamic scholars. They also praise Harvey as the sole discoverer of the circulatory system, overlooking Ibn al-Nafis, the renowned Arab physician. Similarly, they celebrate the journeys of Vasco da Gama and Marco Polo while disregarding the remarkable travels of Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, and other great Arab explorers who undertook significant journeys.⁵¹

In addition to this unfair perspective, Western scholars of linguistics dismiss the science of the Arabic language, justifying their stance by claiming that Arab culture produced a linguistic science focused solely on the Arabic language itself.⁵² However, this does not imply the complete absence of a fair Western view of the Islamic world. On the contrary, certain facts have proven strong enough to break through the accumulated racist barriers. Claude Kahn, for instance, offers a model of fairness by recognizing the value of Arabic and highlighting the crucial role of Arabs in giving the language global significance.⁵³

On the other hand, unfair perspectives developed by cultural, political and religious contexts contributed to shaping the Islamic perception of the West. Historical narratives, particularly during the colonial and crusade periods, contributed to reciprocal stereotypes and cultural distance, triggering biased views towards the West by reducing the Western civilization to materialism, moral decay and spiritual emptiness.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, numerous Islamic scholars maintained a balanced view and the Islamic history is rich with examples of fairness toward other cultures, such as the narrative of Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi. He recounts: “I asked Abu Sulayman, ‘Is there any eloquence better than that of the Arabs?’ He replied, ‘The only way to determine this is to master all languages, then compare them one by one until we have covered them all. Only then can we offer a partial and objective judgment.’ Yet, he acknowledged that this is an unattainable task.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Ya‘qub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi made a clear statement: “We must not criticise those who have benefited us, even if only slightly. And what of those who have benefited us greatly? We should not hesitate to approve and adopt the truth, regardless of its source, whether distant or from different nations. Indeed, truth is sought for its own sake. Therefore, we should neither belittle the truth nor its source.”⁵⁶ In his book

⁴⁸ A. S. Nurullah, “Globalisation as a Challenge to Islamic Cultural Identity,” *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 3, no. 6 (2008): 45–52.

⁴⁹ Q. Tūqān, “On Arabic Culture,” *Risalah Journal* 216 (1937):1-8.

⁵⁰ A. H. Muntaşir, *Islamic Scientific Civilization Withstands the Malicious' Slander*, *Al-Risālah Journal* (1965): 14.

⁵¹ A. H. Muntaşir, *Islamic Scientific Civilization Withstands The Malicious' Slander*, 15.

⁵² R. Morsli, “Cultural Linguistic Interaction,” *Majallat ‘Alāmāt* 37 (2012): 59-66.

⁵³ . Kahn, *History of the Arabs and Islamic Peoples*, translated by B. A. Al-Qasim (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥaḡīqah, 1973), 15.

⁵⁴ H. J. Nicholson, *Muslim Reactions to the Crusades* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 269–288.

⁵⁵ A. H. Al-Tawhidi, *Al-Muqabāsāt*, edited by H. Sanduby, 2nd ed. (Dār Su‘ād al-Şabāh, 1992), 293.

⁵⁶ K. M. Al-Jarad, “Cultural Interaction During the Abbasid Dynasty,” *Arab Writers Union* 20, no. 80 (2000): 133.

Muqaddimah, the great historian Ibn Khaldun discussed the rise and fall of civilizations irrespective of religious or geographical origins, establishing a universal framework for understanding the dynamics of human growth.⁵⁷

Such fair views should dominate cultural discourse, as they enrich our understanding of shared knowledge and the positive historical exchanges between cultures. They also highlight that cultural intolerance is a destructive mindset. In fact, cultural fairness values knowledge as a shared human foundation. This, in turn, opens vast opportunities for communities to reflect on and recognize their potential cognitive contributions to humanity.

The Prevalence of Racial Theory in Culture

Cultural racial theory has been a significant barrier to cultural interaction, highlighting the need for an equal and unbiased perception of nations and peoples. This theory assumes that only one nation can create civilization based on its exclusive heritage, which is absent in other nations and passed down through its ancestors. It thus argues that creativity is a biological trait.⁵⁸ Proponents of this view argue that human races do not share a common origin, but instead stem from separate origins, each with its own distinct genetic makeup. For them, this belief provides an acceptable explanation for the perceived physical or psychological differences between societies.⁵⁹ By linking civilization to heredity, this theory limits the capacity to create civilization to a single race, the Aryan race—believing it possesses the necessary genetic material to produce civilization.⁶⁰

Human intellect was shaped by racial theory in various ways, including fostering a fragile and limited understanding of humanity. In this regard, Claude Lévi-Strauss states: “We know, in fact, that the concept of humanity as covering all forms of the human species, irrespective of race or civilization, came into being very late in history and is by no means widespread. Even where it seems strongest, there is no certainty—as recent history proves—that it is safe from the dangers of misunderstanding or retrogression.”⁶¹ Despite the significant progress made by humanity, it has “served less to dismantle this illusion and replace it with a more accurate understanding, and more to make us accept it or adapt to it.”⁶² To counter the impacts of such racial civilizational theory, one’s view of the human communities needs to be broadened. Goethe stressed: “In every special, historical, mythical, wise or random characteristic, universality shines increasingly through the national and individual character.

On the other hand, we should not merely accommodate foreign culture. Instead, we should view it as a diverse expression of universality and focus on integrating it. He emphasized that we must learn to recognize the unique characteristics of each nation to honor them. This understanding enables us to engage in meaningful exchange with these nations, as language and currency are key aspects of a nation's identity.⁶³ The persistence of racial theory in cultural discourse has significantly influenced intercultural understanding in contemporary contexts. Contemporary

⁵⁷ M. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Rosenthal, ed. & abridged by N. J. Dawood (Princeton University Press, 2005), 65.

⁵⁸ N. Meciad, “Critique of the Racial Interpretation of Civilization,” *Guelma University for Social and Human Sciences* 16, no. 1 (2022): 27.

⁵⁹ N. Meciad, “Critique of the Racial Interpretation of Civilization,” 20.

⁶⁰ N. Meciad, “Critique of the Racial Interpretation of Civilization,” 27.

⁶¹ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*, translated by S. Haddad (Al-Mu’assasah Al-Jāmi’ah li Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzī’, n.d.), 14.

⁶² C. Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*, 13.

⁶³ Tzvetan Todorov, “Interaction of Cultures,” *Egyptian General Book Authority* 12, no. 2 (1993): 226.

examples include immigration policies shaped by implicit cultural superiority narratives, which fuel xenophobia, where Muslim or Arab immigrants are commonly portrayed in terms of national security risks or pressured assimilation narratives, reproducing historical patterns of racial categorization and exclusion.⁶⁴ Similarly, mainstream global narratives in education often marginalize non-Western epistemological traditions within global academic frameworks. For instance, favoring Western development models of science, philosophy and medicine over Islamic and non-Western traditions.⁶⁵ The enduring influence of historical racial ideologies on contemporary practices manifests the necessity to confront them to foster balanced, inclusive and constructive cultural interaction.

Disregarding the Diverse Cultural Contexts

Understanding the contexts in which Islamic-Western contacts occurred is crucial for ensuring their successful interaction in the future for the following reasons:

- i. First, focusing on isolated incidents without exploring the deeper causes behind them leads to a fragmented view of both cultures, making it challenging to move beyond these misconceptions and enter a phase of genuine, fruitful interaction.
- ii. Second, judging past events through the lens of modern values reflects a misunderstanding of how human life has evolved. Instead of using these values to interpret the present and shape the future, they are often used solely to revisit the past, shaping intellectual perceptions of culture in a limited way. In exploring the relationship between the East and the West, some early historians have focused primarily on wars, neglecting the reality that life was not a continuous cycle of conflict and battle between two nations that were, in fact, deeply interconnected.⁶⁶ Thus, while examining historical heritage is important, understanding its context is equally crucial for a proper interpretation.

The modern cross-cultural engagement is significantly influenced by disregard for historical contexts. For instance, the banning of *Hijab* (headscarf) in public schools in France has sparked rage and denial in Muslim counties, considering this policy a violation of religious freedom. Despite this policy might align with the French historical and cultural secular context, it is perceived very differently by Muslims, disrupting cross-cultural understanding.⁶⁷ Therefore, the recognition of cultural contexts and the integration of cultural peculiarities can serve as pivotal foundations for fostering effective and sustainable Islamic-Western cultural interaction.

Imposing Conditions on Cultural Interaction

Setting conditions for cultural interaction presents a significant challenge that can lead to the loss of cultural identity. This framework forces cultures into a difficult choice: either engage in interaction at the cost of compromising their identity, or retreat into cultural isolation. For example, Pipes presents westernization as a prerequisite for modernization, arguing that one cannot be modernized without abandoning one's own principles, identity, and cultural values. According to this view, to reap the benefits of modernization, one must first adopt Western practices.

⁶⁴ L. Fekete, *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe* (Pluto Press, 2009), 93–96.

⁶⁵ G. Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (MIT Press, 2007), 12–15.

⁶⁶ Rajab M. Abdelhalim, *Relations Between Islamic Andalusia and Christian Spain in the Era of the Umayyads and the Taifa Kings* (Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī al-Lubnānī, 1983), 7.

⁶⁷ Bruno Pedrosa, *Liberté, Egalité et Laïcité: The Use of Hijab in Public Schools as a Threat to the French Republican Ontology (1989–2004)*, *janus.net* 13, no. 1 (2019): 51–62.

In a desperate attempt to defend this fragile argument, he points to supposed economic contradictions between Islam and modernization, such as issues related to interest, fasting, inheritance, and the role of women in the workforce.⁶⁸

The Absence of a Proper Philosophy of Dialogue

Like any form of interaction, cultural exchange has its inherent resilience. A significant challenge arises when a fixed pattern of dialogue, whether in form or substance—is imposed. This stereotypical approach to dialogue stifles opportunities for true cultural convergence. According to various studies in anthropology and linguistics, misunderstandings between two parties from different cultures can arise due to their distinct cultural backgrounds. Communication styles can vary significantly from one culture to another.⁶⁹

When the German researcher Hans Jürgen Heringer compared African “high-life music” to the sun, the listeners remained silent, troubled by the comparison. Eventually, one of them asked, “Why do you like our music to the sun, which burns and destroys our life? Our music is different!” The issue was not the translation or semantic duality, but rather the cultural background, which shapes the correct interpretation and usage of semantic knowledge.⁷⁰

Disregarding the Intercultural Positive Models

Although Islamic-Western cultural interaction offers numerous positive models, there is a tendency to overlook or dismiss them. For thirteen centuries, Islamic and Western histories have been intertwined, in both conflict and collaboration. Both cultures have shared common roots. While they have evolved and diverged over time, a balanced understanding of both will enable the development of a more nuanced perspective.

There are numerous models of Islamic-Western cultural interaction, some of which were highlighted earlier in this study. These models are not confined to distant history; in fact, in the modern era, several figures have sought dialogue with Western culture. Notable among them are Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Taha Hussein, Lutfi al-Sayyid, and others, who explored the relationship with the West and how to benefit from its scientific and intellectual advancements, without succumbing to notions of superiority or inferiority.

Regarding Western culture, orientalist studies have conducted studies on Islamic cultural texts, drawing attention to the significance of Islamic cultural heritage. Their work has emphasized the profound questions raised by this heritage and its relevance to humanity.⁷¹ The experiences of these intellectuals are not subject to evaluation within the scope of this study. However, the key point is that such cultural interaction has been the subject of several attempts throughout history.

Applying Generalized Terms on Cultures without a Clear Methodology

The use of generalized terms without a clear methodology presents another significant challenge, undermining effective cultural interaction. Territorial classifications like “the East,” “the West,”

⁶⁸ K. Samizay & B. Kazimee, “*Life in Between Residential Walls in Islamic Cities*,” *Housing: Design, Research, Education*, vol. 9 (2024), 221–238.

⁶⁹ R. Morsli, “Cultural Linguistic Interaction,” *Majallat ‘Alāmāt* 37 (2012): 59-66.

⁷⁰ R. Morsli, “Cultural Linguistic Interaction,” 59-66.

⁷¹ M. Al-Wakidi, *Cultures: Influence, Clash, Dialogue and Interaction, Forum on Towards a Charter of Coexistence and Mutual Respect Among Modern Cultures* (Qayrawān Islamic Studies Center, 2006), 108.

“the First World,” “the Second World,” and “the Third World” are relatively recent constructs. These labels have been shaped by modern standards and criteria across different human domains. Yet the inherent human characteristics that unite people in both the East and West are reinforced and shaped by diverse, advanced media. An event in the far East often sparks commentary and analysis in the far West, and vice versa. As a result, numerous issues have spread globally, influenced by the involvement of multiple parties.⁷²

Conclusion

The article underscores the existence of a positive legacy found in the Islamic-Western cultural interaction through translation. The translation movements, particularly during the Abbasid and Andalusian periods, were pivotal in the transmission of knowledge and culture. Scientific missions have shaped another aspect of positive Islamic-Western cultural interaction. Throughout history, there has been a reciprocal influence where both Islamic and Western cultures have benefited from each other's advancements in various fields. Given that language is the vessel of culture, linguistic exchange has shaped a unique model of interaction between Islamic and Western cultures, evident in its various manifestations. However, unfair views coupled with bias pose a key challenge to Islamic-Western cultural interaction, which impedes discerning facts. The influence of racial civilizational theory presents another challenge to cultural interaction by narrowing the capacity to create civilization to just one race, deemed uniquely suited for civilizational act. Another challenge to cultural interaction is the failure to consider the varying spatio-temporal contexts, even though changes in these contexts are a natural and inherent part of human life.

The study highlights that revisiting historical positive Islamic-Western interaction models is a crucial means of overcoming these challenges and addressing any negative aspects that may affect diverse cultural environments. Moreover, fostering Islamic-Western interaction necessitates developing modern interaction models, using technological advancements to foster cultural exchange, and availing the benefits of the cognitive values of both cultures. Effectively, there should be consolidated efforts to apply practical strategies that can strengthen future Islamic-Western cultural interaction, such as joint interdisciplinary research initiatives, academic exchange programs, institutional scientific partnerships and cross-cultural conferences and symposiums that incorporate insights from both Islamic and Western traditions. Furthermore, the utilization of AI-driven digital technology can offer unprecedented opportunities for fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange. Launching virtual reality exhibitions of Islamic and Western arts and AI-powered translation platforms can enrich cultural interaction and enable more inclusive participation at a global scale. Such initiatives have the potentials to be visionary roadmaps for revitalizing and transforming the positive historical models of Islamic-Western Cultural interaction into a tangible and sustainable reality.

The historical interaction between Islam and Western culture is marked by periods of important intellectual, cultural and scientific change. These interactions not only enriched the civilizations of both but also laid the foundation for many modern developments. Understanding these processes of positive communication provides valuable insights for promoting contemporary intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

⁷² M. Al-Wakidi, *Cultures: Influence, Clash, Dialogue and Interaction*, 289.

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