

# From Salaam to So Long

The Journey of a Word, the Contribution of a Nation: Dimensions of a Stereotype

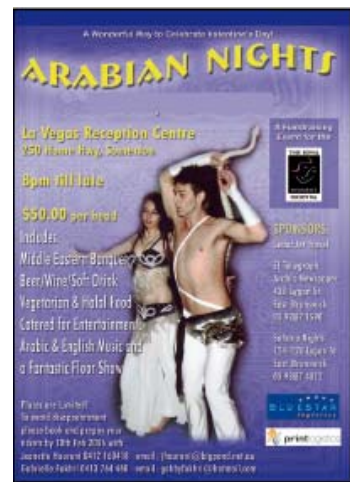
By Ali Darwish ©1994-2001<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of the Arabs to modern civilization is usually glossed over, if not totally ignored in the West. The Arabs are frequently portrayed as bloodthirsty, sword-wielding, desert dwellers obsessed with women and camels. On the one hand, images from the Arabian Nights, or *One Thousand and One Nights*, are engraved in the subconscious of almost everyone in the West. Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Sinbad, the Flying Carpet, the All-seeing Eye, the harem, belly dancers, and a god that is misunderstood — Allah Akbar!



On the other, sinister pictures of terrorism and fundamentalist extremism, of crowds of black-breaded youths bashing their blooded heads with razor-sharp swords while marching down the streets of Beirut send shudders down the spines of television viewers and fill them with disgust. At the far end of the picture, white-robed sheikhs dealing and wheeling with petro-dollars in the middle of the desert to a backdrop of camels and sheep, and black-robed women getting out of chauffeur-driven limousines outside shopping centres in New York or Bentleys outside Harrods in London make people turn green with envy.

Hollywood and the media have played a major role in propagating and reinforcing these stereotype portrayures, sometimes intelligently blending romanticism and fantasy with barbarism, backwardness and lunacy, and often blatantly attacking the Arabs in a fragmentation of reality and out-of-context treatments. Even to this day, futuristic science fiction movies such as *Star Trek* (*The Perfect Mate* episode) deal with themes of female bondage and harem indoctrination, and children's programs such as Bugs Bunny's *1001 Rabbit Tales* reinforce similar images in impressionable minds. These stereotypes are so much ingrained in the psychological makeup of almost everyone to the extent that even some Arabs gladly participate in propagating them. It takes only an international or domestic event related to the Arabs to rake up these deep-seated stereotypes and bring them out in the open in the most vicious and venomous fashion. During the first gulf war, images of navy officers wearing white bath towels on their heads and mocking Islamic prayers on board warships en route to the Arabian Gulf were broadcast live into the homes of millions of viewers across the world. Suddenly, political correctness disappeared from the hearts and minds of those perpetrating such racist acts and those justifying them as aberration confined to ignorant "few bad apples". Other prejudices take more subtle forms.



<sup>1</sup> Based on a paper by the author presented at Deakin University in 1994. Revised in 2001.

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*“Stick with me baby, and I’ll have you fartin’ in silk” — A mock-up of a coffee mug made in USA paraded by a senior employee in an Australian IT company in the aftermath of September 11, 2001*

In his famous work *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) confirms this all-encompassing stereotype, “An Arab Oriental is that impossible creature whose libidinal energy drives him to paroxysms of overstimulation—and yet, he is as a puppet in the eyes of the world, staring vacantly out at a modern landscape he can neither understand nor cope with”(312) — so much so that the Arab contribution to civilization and humanity is completely overlooked and replaced with pictures of barbarism, savagery and violence. Even specialist historians such as Bernard Lewis, perhaps with the best of intentions, deny the Arabs their genius by attributing the Islamic civilization to the collaboration of many peoples using Arabic as the medium of expression.

DURING the period of greatness of the Arab and Islamic Empires in the Near and Middle East a flourishing civilisation grew up that is usually known as Arabic. It was not brought ready-made by the Arab invaders from the desert, but was created after the conquests by the collaboration of many peoples, Arabs, Persians, Egyptians and other. Nor was it even purely Muslim, for many Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians were among its creators. But its chief medium of expression was Arabic, and it was dominated by Islam and its outlook on life. It was these two things, their language and their faith, which were the great contribution of the Arab invaders to the new and original civilisation which developed under their aegis (Lewis, 1970:131).

The Arabs’ role is invariably reduced to that of preserver, translator (allegedly not doing a good job of that either) and transporter of the Graeco-roman civilization. Their contribution to Western civilization does not go beyond preserving the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans *in Arabic*.

The contribution of the Arabic Islamic world to Western civilization through its *preservation* [emphasis added] of the Graeco-Roman heritage during the Dark Ages is usually underestimated. Kenneth Clark in his famous television series on *Civilization* ignored it entirely. It was left to the author/scientist Jacob Bronowski to make amends in his own series entitled *The Ascent of Man*. (Mansfield, 1978: 495).

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Falling into the same psychological Orientalist trap as his compatriots, in his book *The Arabs*, Peter Mansfield, a historian and journalist, bases his historical analysis of *The Great Arab Explosion* on the folktales of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of 264 fictional stories that were written during the decline of Arab civilization a few centuries later.

Something of the spirit of the Abbasid Empire is reflected in the glittering tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which is by far the best known work of secular Arabic literature in the West and has added Aladdin, Ali Baba and Sinbad the Sailor to our folklore. Like the empire, the tales are cosmopolitan. They come from India, Persia, Turkey and possibly Greece as well as Iraq and Egypt.

Haroun al-Rashid and Abu Nawas both frequently appear in the tales, although the main protagonists, such as King Shahryar and his prime minister's daughter Shahrazad ('Scheherezade'), who tells him stories, have Persian names. Stories about Abu Nawas are found anywhere that Arab culture has spread, from Morocco to India, and most of them are scandalous. The anecdotes may be apocryphal but his reputation was undoubtedly based on fact. Much of the Arab's reputation for sensuality may be traced to him...

According to *The Thousand and One Nights*, even Haroun al-Rashid was sometimes so shocked by his behaviour that he would consider putting him to death. But he found the poet too amusing to carry out his threat... (Mansfield, 1978: 492)

In the concluding chapters however, Mansfield (1978) reluctantly acknowledges the false ideas and stereotyped portrayals of the Arabs in the West. He admits that any writer who embarks on an attempt to describe and interpret the contemporary Arab world to Western readers is confronted by a set of formidable difficulties relating to the superficial, stereotypical vision of the Arabs, and of the Islamic religion, which is closely associated with them in the Western mind. At a more complex level, Mansfield arguably confirms that the average educated Westerner is unaware that he suffers from prejudice towards the Arabs.

Even those Neo-Orientalists who try to set the record straight and redress the balance fall prey to the same stereotypical, rash generalizations that their fellow denizens make. Mansfield again:

"Like *many Arabs*, Abu Nawas was *bisexual*. However, unlike most Arabs he seems to have preferred girls who looked as much like boys as possible." [emphasis added]

How Mansfield managed to reach this conclusion, which can only be described as rash generalization and unscientific, just by reading *The One Thousand and One Nights*, calls the validity of his entire analysis into question.

In his book *A Concise History of Mathematics*, Dirk J. Struik (1987) seems to skim over the achievements of the Arabs in this field and paints an *Arabic* world revolving around a Greek civilization.

The political hegemony of the Greeks over the Near East disappeared almost entirely with the sudden growth of Islam. After 622, the year of the Hegira, the Arabs conquered large sections of Western Asia in an amazing sweep and in less than a century had occupied parts of the West Roman empire as far as Sicily, North Africa, and Spain. Wherever they went they tried to replace Greco-Roman civilization with Islamic. The official language became

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Arabic, instead of Greek or Latin; but the fact that a new language was used for scientific documents tends to obscure the truth that under Arabic rule a considerable continuity of culture remained. The ancient native civilizations had even a better chance to survive under this rule than under the alien rule of the Greeks. Persia, for instance, remained very much the ancient country of the Sassanians, despite the Arabic administration. However, the contest between the different traditions continued, only now in a new form. *Throughout the whole period of Islamic rule there existed a definite Greek tradition holding its own against the different native cultures* (Struik, 1987: 64-69).

Not surprisingly, like other Western writers, Struik resorts to the book of *The Thousand and One Nights* to establish historical facts about the mathematics of the time.

...Mesopotamia, which under the Hellenic and Roman rule had become an outpost of the Roman Empire, reconquered its central position along the trade routes under the Sassanians, who reigned as native Persian kings over Persia in the tradition of Cyrus and Xerxes. Little is known about many aspects of this period in Persian history, especially about its science, but the history — as reflected in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Omar Khayyam, Firdawsi — confirms the meager historical record that the Sassanian period was an era of cultural splendor... Babylon had disappeared but was replaced by Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which was in turn replaced by Bagdad after the Arabic conquest of 641. This conquest left much of ancient Persia unaffected, though Arabic replaced Pehlvi as the official language. Even Islam was only accepted in a modified form (Shi'ism); Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians continued to contribute to the cultural life of the Bagdad caliphate...<sup>2</sup>

Not only does Struik demonstrate a clear bias against the Arabs by referring to them as Arabic, but he also shows ignorance of the reasons for Shi'ism, which has its roots in the heart of Arabia, and has nothing to do with the implied claim that the Persia resisted Islam. He totally overlooks the fact that Islam allowed various cultures and religions to come together under one administration to live in harmony and peace with one another — although he indirectly acknowledges that later. In this regard, William Chester Jordan (2001) observes:

Islam itself afforded the greatest single cultural challenge. It offered an alternative religion to those of the Christian faith and to Jews as well. Adoption of it was made attractive partly because it gave access to the best jobs and to social respectability in regions dominated by Muslim rulers. Islam's doctrinal simplicity, compared to doctrinal intricacies of Trinitarian Christianity, plus its incorporation of respect for Jesus and Mary, also persuaded a few irresolute Christians that conversion was not the sin the priests told them it was. (Jordan, 2001:23)

It seems quite astonishing however, that Struik, like many Western scholars and historians, is unable to understand that a new nation was born whose language was Arabic and whose culture was Islamic. Yet they readily accept a composite nation such as the American or the British and so on, and the notion of the melting pot. However, when the matter concerns the Arabs, he and many others do not hesitate to cast doubts over the *Arabness* of the Arab nation and readily stress the point that those Arabic scholars and scientists were not of Arab origin although they were born and bred, to use a cliché, in an Arab environment generation after generation. Those scholars and scientists were brought up in an Arabic-speaking environment.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p 69.

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Their names were Arabic, their outlook on life was Arab-Islamic, their intellectual, social, economic and political affiliation was Arab and their affinities were Arab, probably in a similar way Italian Americans, Irish Americans, or Polish Americans are American and the Scottish, English, Welsh and Irish are British. Struik again:

Islamic activities in the exact sciences, which began with Al-Fazari's translation of the siddhantas, reached its first height with a native from Khiva, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, who flourished about 825. Muhammad wrote several books on mathematics and astronomy. His arithmetic explained the Hindu system of numeration. Although this book is lost in the original Arabic, a Latin translation of the twelfth century is extant. It was one of the means by which Western Europe became acquainted with the decimal position. The title of the translation, *Algorithmi de numero Indorum*, added the term *algorithmus* — a Latinization of the author's name — to our mathematical language. Something similar happened to Muhammad's algebra, which had the title *Hisab al-jabr wal-muqabala* (literally, 'science of reduction and confrontation,' probably meaning "science of equations". This algebra, of which the Arabic text is extant, also became known in the West through Latin translations, and they made the word *al-jabr* synonymous with the whole science of "algebra", which indeed, until the middle of the nineteenth century was nothing but the science of equations (Struik, 1987:69).

Al-Khwarizmi, or rather al-Khuwarizmi (died 849), lived in the Abbasid period (750 - 1258), that is 128 years after Islam was born and about a century after the province of *Khuwarism*, (*al-Khuwarizmi's country*) came under Islamic rule. It certainly took less than this length of time, for instance, for the American people to evolve and for the American national identity to be established. Nonetheless, Western historians find it extremely difficult to understand that an Arab scholar or scientist could be of Persian or other descent and remain Arab in his outlook on life, cognitive processes and affiliation.

In *A History of Mathematics*, Carle B. Boyer (1968), out of step with the titles of the other chapters in the book, dedicates chapter thirteen to the Arabic Hegemony. He writes "During the first century of the Arabic conquests there had been political and intellectual confusion, and possibly this accounts for the difficulty in localizing the origin of the modern system of numeration. The Arabs were at first without intellectual interest, and they had little culture, beyond a language to impose on the peoples they conquered" (226). Here again we see a reductive representation of the Arabs, erroneously or intentionally called Arabic. Contrastively, in *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas (1991) gives an account of the glorious achievements of the West from the days of the Greeks to The Transformation of the Modern Era, without describing the early Europeans as being at first without intellectual interest. Instead, Tarnas writes: "Despite the decline of Europe into cultural isolation and inactivity during the following centuries (especially as compared with the flourishing Byzantine and Islamic empires), the restless enterprising vigor of the Germanic peoples combined with the civilizing influence of the Roman Catholic Church to forge a culture that was, in another thousand years, to give birth to the modern West. These "Middle" Ages between the classical era and the Renaissance were thus a gestation period of considerable consequence" (90).

Today, negative stereotypes of the Arabs permeate the media and society, and no one seems to be immune to these deeply entrenched caricatures and falsehoods — not even the most enlightened minds, especially where academia and politics intersect. It is ironic, though not surprising, to find derogatory expressions describing the Arabs as dirty and unmannered

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alongside words derived from Arabic in European dictionaries. The following is an example from the Cassell's Spanish Dictionary.

“**alárabe, alarabe**, *a., n.m.f.* Arabian. — *n.m. (fig)* unmannerly person; *portarse como un alarabe*, to behave badly.

**alarade**, *n.m.* review, parade (soldiers); show, display, ostentation; *hacer alarade de*, to make a show of, boast of.”

The word *alarade* is the Spanish version of the Arabic word *al-'ard* that means the same, derived from the verb 'arada (paraded or displayed).

Here is another example from the Concise Oxford French Dictionary, French-English/English-French.

**arabe** [arab] *adj., s.m.f.* Arabian, Arab; (fam.) *téléphone ~*, bush-telegraph; ~ *s.m.* (lang.) Arabic.

The Encyclopedic World Dictionary defines *téléphone arabe* or bush-telegraph as follows:

**bush telegraph**, **1.** a system of communication over wide distances among primitive peoples, by drumsbeats or other means. **2.** *Austral., N.Z.* a bushranger's confederate who supplies information about police movements, etc. **3.** *Colloq.* a channel along which rumours spread.

In the age of *political correctness*, respectable language authorities such as the American Heritage Dictionary still define the Arabs as:

**Arab** *n.* **1.** A native or inhabitant of Arabia. **2.** Any of a Semitic people originally from Arabia but later widely scattered throughout the Near East, North Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula. **3.** Any nomadic people living in North African and Near Eastern desert regions. **4.** Any of a breed of swift, intelligent, graceful horses native to Arabia. **5.** A street Arab; waif — *adj.* Arabian [fr. *Arabe* <Lat. *Arabs* <Gk. *Araps* <Ar. 'Arab.]

Definitions 2, 3, and 5 are of particular interest because they exhibit a stereotype of what constitutes the Arab nation and what constitutes an Arab. If the Arabs are *scattered* throughout the region, who in heaven's name are the 200 million plus people who live there? Furthermore, this definition bestows “intelligence” on the native horse of Arabia and immediately follows up with the definition of “street Arab”.

In its online version, the American Heritage Dictionary revises its definition of “Arab” as follows:

**Arab** **1.** A member of a Semitic people inhabiting Arabia, whose language and Islamic religion spread widely throughout the Middle East and northern Africa from the seventh century. **2.** A member of an Arabic-speaking people. **3.** An Arabian horse. **4.** Offensive Slang A waif.

The word “scattered” is replaced with the word “spread”, the “Near East” becomes “the Middle East” and the definition “waif” is qualified as offensive slang. That is a good start.

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Guillaume<sup>3</sup> (1981) briefly describes the influence of the Arabs on Europe and especially on Spain as follows:

The Muslim entry into Europe began with sporadic raids on outlying islands such as Cyprus and Rhodes. These became more and more serious until in the ninth century the Arabs gained possession of Sicily. From these outposts they raided the mainland and threatened Rome itself. The history of Sicily under the Normans, who led the island from the end of the eleventh to the end of the twelfth century, shows an extraordinary intermingling of Muslim and Christian culture. Spain was conquered, save for the extreme north, and held by the Muslims from the eighth to the fifteenth century, by which time their territory had been reduced to a mere fragment of the country. They have left an indelible mark on the language and literature of the Peninsula. Here as in the old Byzantine Empire, the Arabs were at first welcomed as deliverers from the intolerable yoke of Church and State, and thousands of the inhabitants accepted Islam. Such a hold Arab civilization gained that it was found necessary to translate the Bible and Liturgy into Arabic for the use of the Christian community. Scholars from the West visited Spain to learn philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. The oldest European universities owe an enormous debt to those scholars who returned from Spain bringing with them the knowledge they had gained at the Arab universities of the country. (95)

The portrayal of the Arabs as backward and uncivilized is not restricted to so-called scholarly work on science, history, and culture. It permeates almost all aspects of discussion of the Arabs, and self-styled scholars spare no occasion to strike with venom at the creativity and genius of the Arabs. In the introduction to his book *Arabic*, Dr A.S. Tritton, Professor Emeritus of Arabic, School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, does not waste time to tell us that:

Formerly, the Arab sat on the floor, ate with his fingers and at meal or bed times his food or bed was brought to him. The result is that many words, indispensable in English, scarcely occur in account of native life. For 'table' Syria uses an Italian, Egypt a Greek, and Mesopotamia a Persian word (Tritton, 1980).

It is interesting that a *Teach Yourself* language book about Arabic accounts for the absence of certain words by referring to old aspects of social life. Such an absurd justification never occurs in books of teaching English, French, Italian, or Spanish. It would be rather odd to find instances in English language books for example, where because the English formerly did not have running water in their homes, they nowadays wash their dishes in the sink and therefore the expression *dishwater* has come about. Equally absurd would be to say the English are gamblers and drunks and that is why English has expressions such as *wheel of fortune*, *drunk as a skunk*, *to drink as a fish*, or *to drive someone to drink* (to annoy).

Moreover, Dr Tritton does not seem to know that the same words or concepts, which are indispensable in English, and which he claims are nonexistent in Arabic, are arguably of Arabic origin. For instance, the English word 'table' and its French predecessor 'table' (as well as the word *tableau*) have their origin in the Arabic word 'tab(e)l' (or its inflected form *tablu*), which means 'drum'—the flat surface of the drum has been figuratively extended to the concept of table. Ironically, the word has found its way back into Arabic via Italian as 'tawila' (*tabella* = *tavella* = *tawella* = *tawila*) to mean table, Arabicized in the same manner as

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<sup>3</sup>Alfred Guillaume, *Islam*, Pelican Books Ltd, 1981, p 85.

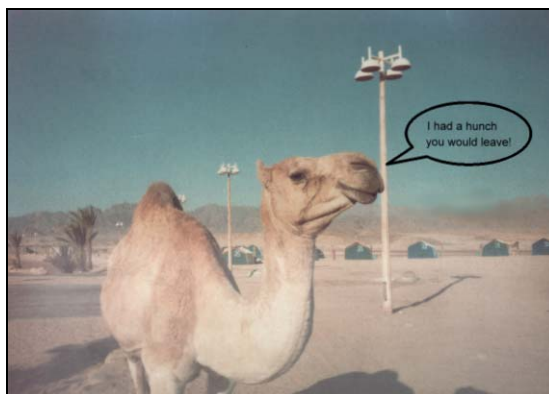
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the French *table* was Anglicized. As for the concept of food-laden table, Arabic does have a genuine word for it. In fact, the word *ma'idah* is the title of one of the chapters of the Koran revealed some 1400 years ago. However, centuries of foreign domination have left their mark on the Arabic language and dialects.

In an article titled *Arabic: Unifying Factor of the Islamic World*, published in *Language Monthly* in 1985 (issue No 25), Diana Darke writes:

The image most westerners have of Arabic is of a language that looks like an incomprehensible series of squiggles and dots resembling those of shorthand and that sounds like an equally incomprehensible series of gutturals and hisses of a camel. Few and far in between are those people who regard it as a subtle and expressive language, beautiful in the same way that French is popularly regarded (16).

How many Westerners have seen, heard or encountered a camel firsthand is anybody's guess. My first encounter as a Lebanese Arab with that noble creature was when I visited the United Arab Emirates in 1980. His "gutturals" did not sound anywhere like Arabic to me! So how can most Westerners be more acquainted with the camel unless negative stereotypes have been drilled into them through the media and other means of communication and indoctrination?



*"I had a hunch you would leave"—a hand-made farewell card. London 1983.*

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell (1937) touches upon an important aspect of stereotyping, which the anti-Arab machine has employed very successfully in portraying the Arabs as dirty barbarians, who smell like goats or camels. The physical repulsion of people who habitually stink overrides any other feelings of hatred.

...And here, obviously, you are at an impassable barrier. For no feeling of like or dislike is quite so fundamental as a *physical* feeling. Race hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot. You can have an affection for a murderer or a sodomite, but you cannot have an affection for a man whose breath stinks—habitually stinks, I mean. However well you may wish him, however much you may admire his mind and character, if his breath stinks he is horrible and in your heart of hearts you will hate him. (119)

In *Ten Tall Men*, Hollywood succeeds in bringing this kind of physical repulsion to the screen and in perpetuating this feeling to the present day. Burt Lancaster, a French Legionnaire officer, is in a French army prison cell somewhere in Algeria. In an adjacent cell stands a



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filthy Arab tribesman watching him drinking water from a canteen. He kindly offers the Arab a drink. The Arab snatches the canteen, sticks the spout in his slobbery mouth and discourteously swigs down the water.

These stereotypical representations remain dormant and subtle until the occasion arises. For example, as mentioned earlier, during the first Gulf war, images of navy officers clothed in white towels and mimicking Islamic prayer were broadcast to the world. This dismissive attitude towards the Arabs, their creed and culture shows the depth of ignorance and strength of stereotypes. However, little did these young men know that the Islamic prayer is the foundation of callisthenics, the basis of virtually all sports and physical activities, and most certainly their daily military regimen! Edward Said (1990) observes: “Certainly representation, or more particularly the act of representing (and hence reducing) others, always involves a violence of some sort to the subject of representation, as well as a contrast between violence of the act of representing something and the calm exterior of the representation itself” (Said, 1990: 94). Invariably, the first instinctive reaction to difference is hostility.

### THE JOURNEY OF A WORD

Words travel across languages and cultures. Nations borrow and re-borrow words from each other. It is a fact! Strong nations borrow, adapt, crush, crunch and mould foreign words and make them their own and word origins are committed to oblivion. Borrowed words tell only a little bit of the story. They are the tip of the iceberg. Words are only a vehicle for information and thought. Borrowing words is only a by-product of borrowing information and by extension knowledge. The extent of borrowing shows how much information the borrower has received and how much knowledge has been transferred in the process. It is undeniable, though dictionary compilers, terminologists and lexicographers hardly admit it, that thousands of words have entered the English language and other European languages from Arabic. A modest estimate puts this at 10,000 words for English only (Abu Goush, 1977). For such a thing to happen, it means that at some stage of their development, those languages were receptors of new information from Arabic. Surely, a nation with little to contribute would not be exporting but rather importing words. Was this the case with the Arabs?

In *A History of Mathematics*, Carl B. Boyer (1991) sheds some light on this:

One cannot absorb the wisdom of one’s neighbors if one cannot understand their language. The Moslems had broken the language barrier to Greek culture in the ninth century, and the Latin Europeans overcame the language barrier to Arabic learning in the twelfth century. At the beginning of the twelfth century no European could expect to be a mathematician, in any real sense, without a good knowledge of Arabic (1991:251).

Putting aside the influence of Islam and the terminology it has introduced to the nations that have embraced it, the contribution of the Arabs in science and technology is worthy of note. At its peak, the Arab Empire extended from the Atlantic Ocean across North Africa and the Middle East to central Asia. By all accounts, a great Arab civilization emerged in which education, literature, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and science flourished. In Europe, the Arab conquests were particularly important in Sicily, from the ninth to late eleventh century, and in Spain. As it is the case with English today pervading every facet of human activity from McDonalds to the Internet, Arabic was the lingua franca of the times and the language of upward mobility. However, in the clash of civilizations and struggle for supremacy, a reductive strategic approach is taken to diminish the other. In this regard, Montgomery Watt (1972) observes, “The Europeans’ hostile confrontation with Islam led to their degrading of the influence of Muslims on their civilization and their exaggeration of the

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influences of Greek and Roman heritage. Therefore, the most important duty for us West Europeans, and for the world to become one, is to correct these misconceptions and completely acknowledge the debt we owe to the Arab and Muslim world” (watt, 1972:114).

In his book *On Language*, first published in 1836, German philosopher Wilham von Humboldt (1999) confidently confirms this condescending European view of the Arabs and their contribution to Western civilization:

In the history of nations, the question may well have been raised as to what would have happened in the world if Carthage had defeated Rome and conquered the European West. One might equally well ask what the present state of our culture would be if the Arabs remained, as they were for a time, the sole possessors of scientific knowledge, and had spread throughout the Western world. A less favourable outcome seems to me, in both cases, beyond doubt. It is to the same causes which produced the world-dominance of Rome, namely the Roman spirit and character, rather than to external and more accidental circumstances that we owe the powerful influence of this world-dominion upon our civil institutions, laws, language and culture. Through the turn toward this culture, and through inner kinship, we became genuinely receptive to the Greek mind and language, Where the Arabs only adhered, for the most part, to the scientific results of Greek inquiry. Even on the basis of the same antique heritage, they would not have been capable of erecting the edifice of science and art which we may justly boast today. (Humboldt, 1999:182).

Raising doubt about the intellectual ability of the Arabs has undoubtedly been a recurrent theme in so many publications by so-called scholars and misguided, ignorant and prejudiced laypersons.

### CONCLUSION

Never in the entire human history has a race or a people been subjected to such racist portrayals in such a nasty fashion as the Arabs except perhaps briefly their cousins. Doubts about their glorious past, intellectual achievements and national aspirations have filled volumes upon volumes of both fact and fiction. Yet the influence of the Arabs is all pervasive, as many words across languages would tell the story. Take the simple, daily American expression “so long”. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Historical Slang*, Eric Partridge tells us that “so long” is a corruption of salaam, “though Ware’s suggested derivation ex Hebrew *selah* (God be with you) is not to be wholly ignored” (Partridge, 1937: 878). Hence the journey of a word—the contribution of a nation, a past forgotten and a present distorted. So long! Salaam!

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