

## **Communication Revolution and Academic Freedom**

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### **Abstract**

Our approach of understanding the linkages between communication revolution and academic freedom depends on a simple but important idea that communication revolution derived by information and communication technologies (ICTs) brings with it the knowledge society, which is mainly dependent on the human brain and human skills. Academics are at the heart of the knowledge society. They are entitled to innovate new ways of knowledge production, dissemination, training and learning and to play a significant social responsible role in leading their societies to rise to the challenges of the global knowledge society and to better use of communication revolution.

This paper has shown that communication revolution derived by digital communications has profoundly changed the ways that university faculty members conduct research, store data, share and publish research findings. It has also heavily affected ways of teaching and learning. Communication revolution has not only transformed the university activities-research, teaching and outreach-but as well changed how universities are organized, financed and managed. Such changes make timely the consideration of whether and how the communication revolution affects academic freedom and how universities need to change to safeguard it. The paper has also illustrated that the traditional concepts of academic freedoms are no longer fit the challenges brought about the communication revolution. An appropriate institutional policy would defend free access of Internet information, as it will help create a genuine platform of knowledge sharing, information exchange, research conducting and thus enhance the collective mind of the academics. The scope of the operative term classroom must be enlarged to encompass electronic formats for those virtual spaces and areas where the communication inherent in the teaching and learning process may occur. With regard to Arab and African Universities, it is safe to state that academic freedom lags behind the potentials of communication revolution. At the same time, one cannot predict the academic freedom to flourish where other types of freedoms are restricted or even does not exist. Arab and African universities are striving to take advantage of the communication revolution and to enjoy the benefits of the knowledge society; however, ICTs are still in the periphery of the development process in most Arab and African universities. Lack of other democratic and transparent institutions in Arab and African countries along with the prevalence of corruption, social inequality, dictatorship, poverty, health and population problems call for more radical role by the university professors to enable the people to leapfrog into the knowledge society. Finally, the paper demonstrates that Islamic culture is consistent with the spirit and requirements of the communication revolution and knowledge society, and calls for the most extent possible of freedom of expression and academic freedom.

### **Introduction:**

The communication revolution derived by digital communications has profoundly changed the ways that university faculty members conduct research, store data, share and publish research findings. It has also heavily affected ways of teaching and learning. Communication revolution has not only transformed the university activities-research, teaching and outreach-but as well changed how universities are organized, financed and managed. Such changes make timely the consideration of whether and how the communication revolution impacts academic freedom and how universities need to change to safeguard it.

Our approach of understanding the linkages between communication revolution and academic freedom depends on a simple but important idea that communication revolution derived by information and communication technologies (ICTs) brings with it the knowledge society, which is mainly dependent on the human brain and human skills. With 70 and 80 percent of economic growth now estimated to be due to new and better knowledge. The future prosperity is critically dependent on policies that foster the continuous generation of knowledge and pursuit of learning. The global influence of ICTs is transforming the university, the economy, and the society as a whole. But information technologies do not produce new ideas. All knowledge and learning ultimately depend on people and definitely on the scholars, academics, teachers and trainers of the universities and higher education institutions" (Chichilnisky, 2998, p. 40). Academics are, therefore, at the heart of the knowledge society. They are entitled to innovate new ways of knowledge production, dissemination, training and learning and to play a significant social responsible role in leading their societies to rise to the challenges of the global knowledge society and to better use of communication revolution. This paper, therefore, is organized—in addition to the introduction and conclusion- around two parts, as follows:

1. Communication Revolution, Knowledge Society and University.
2. Communication Revolution and Academic Freedom.

### **Communication Revolution, Knowledge Society and University:**

The discovery of communication revolution was relatively recent. Neither information nor communication made the list of 102 great ideas used to organize the great books of the Western World, published by Encyclopedia Britannica in 1952. It was not until the early 1960s that attempts to capture the ongoing transformation of industrial societies began to draw on the idea of communication revolution (Beniger, 1986, quoted in Ungar, 2003, p. 332). Since then it has become the master metaphor of our time, an all-embracing ubiquitous idea. Virtually everything is now reduced to information (Ungar, 2003, p. 332). At present time, we are undergoing a social and economic revolution; the knowledge revolution, which matches the impact of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. This is a knowledge revolution driven by knowledge and by the information technologies that process and communicate it. Knowledge is an intangible public good. It is privately produced, and it is replacing land and machines as the primary factor of production prevailing in the agricultural and industrial revolutions (Chichilnisky, 2998, p. 40). Contemporary knowledge possesses, among other characteristics, those of accelerated growth, greater complexity and a trend toward rapid obsolescence. (Tunnermann and Souza Chaui, 2003, p. 2).

The convergence of a number of industries has shaped the knowledge society with a number of unique characteristics which include: (1) intensive use of information by the common citizen, (2) use of information as a strategic resource by organizations, (3) development of the information sector within the economy, (4) growth of the information sectors quicker than the global economy and quicker than the growth of specific nations, (5) continuous efforts from different countries to develop their infrastructures and integration within an international common standard (Moore, 1997, quoted in Kunsch, et al, 2002, p. 2). With these characteristics, innovation in knowledge society is hailed. While it means disturbance and may produce chaos in previous societies, it directly leads to creativity and productivity in knowledge society.

The rationale for what can be described as a strong relationship between knowledge society and the university is the nature of the key activity of the university which revolves around knowledge: its production through research, transfer and integration through education and cultivation of critical judgment, diffusion through publishing and application through university outreach (Wallerstein, 2003, quoted in Michelsen, 2004, p. 3). Founded on knowledge production and its corresponding activities, the likelihood of the magnitude of changes in both activities and structures of the university is quite high. Other similar sectors that enjoy the same privilege are those producing goods which use ICTs to expand the ability of human brain to create, save, process, and retrieve information. Computers, software, telecommunications and biotechnology, entertainment and financial markets are just few examples. Because information has become the

most important product in the knowledge society, knowledge workers who are serving at universities or other similar sectors would be treated as super elite.

Given this unique relationship between knowledge society and the university, it is believed that the role of university will be substantially broadened. Erich Bloch, former Director of the U.S. National Science Foundation, stated it well when noted: "The solution of virtually all problems with which government is concerned: health, environment, energy, urban, development, international relationships, economic competitiveness, and defense and national security, all depend on creating new knowledge-and hence upon the health of our universities" (Bolk, 1998, quoted in Duderstadt, 2000, p. 3). For the university to exert this responsibility, it must have the capacity to control its own destiny, particularly during times of change. This does not only include granting the faculty traditional perquisites such as academic freedom, but allowing university more control over all aspects of its operations, including academic programs, budgets, student selection and faculty appointment and hiring (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 17).

A specific question that emerges is: how does the current communication revolution differ from previous ones? From the very beginning of the human society, we have always communicated with each other. The book, newspaper, radio and television have been termed as tools of communication revolution. But we cannot accept the idea that ICTs are just an extension of the previous tools of communication revolution. The qualities of the current tools or fuels of knowledge society are different from previous ones; furthermore, the globalizing impact of the current ICTs in nearly all aspect of life is profound, unprecedented and unpredictable. The new communication revolution have vastly increased our capacity to do things differently, it is likely to reshape in profound ways knowledge based-institutions such as the university.

#### **Qualities of the Current Communication Revolution:**

The current communication revolution has four interconnected qualities that give it a character that transcends previous communication revolutions. The first quality of the communication revolution is digitization, which permits the construction of networks. By translating every kind of information into a universal binary code, any kind of information can be handled through time and space by the same medium. Texts, drawings, pictures, sounds and speech, video and many other types of information, once they are translated into binary code, can be transmitted through digital networks (Schonberger and Hurley, 2000, p.1). Every previous medium of communication be it radio, newspaper, television was designed to transmit a specific type of information, but not others. This unique quality helped create diversity of Internet's content and made it a medium of all communication media. The second quality is the information processing that provides the power to transform ever-richer streams of information into digital code and back into human-absorbable form, to permit it to be handled and transmitted across digital networks. What makes the transmission of information possible over networks is the bandwidth-the amount of information capable of being transmitted over a network-does not just double every eighteen months, as Moore's Law predicts for information processing speed and power, but triples every twelve months. The global decentralized and standardized system of the Internet, the most successful of all digital networks represents the fourth quality of the current communication revolution (Schonberger and Hurley, 2000, p.1).

The link between communication revolution and university and thus the academic freedom is now clear. Communication revolution with its unique qualities paved the way before the knowledge society, in which the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity of humankind has become knowledge itself. As knowledge can be created, absorbed, and applied only by the educated mind, universities will play increasingly important roles as our societies enter the digital age. In a sense, knowledge is the medium of the university, through the activities of discovery, shaping, achieving, transmitting, and applying knowledge. The university services society in a myriad of ways: educating the young, preserving our cultural heritage, providing the basic and applied research, training professionals and certificating their competence, challenging the society and stimulating social change (Bolk, 1998, quoted in Duderstadt, 2000, p. 3).

Let us now investigate how communication revolution affected the modern university. The idea of modern university was shaped at the same time and closely related to the process, which made the nation-state the central unit for organizing society. Thus, the various national systems of higher education and research were colored by and configured according to the specific ways dominating elites in each nation-state defined the appropriate mechanisms to maintain social and political order (Dobbin, 1940; Musselin, 2001, quoted in Michelsen, 2004, p. 3). The education thus prepared the students for work useful for the nation-state, and very often for the public service. The nation-state context was consequently crucial for constitution of academic and student identities. ICTs are taking the university and knowledge out of its traditional territorialized premises. Conventional boundaries like those between types and levels of education. Private and public, pro-profit and non-profit education, state and country boundaries, as well as boundaries of time and space are increasingly crossed (Middlehurst, 2002, quoted in Michelsen, 2004, p. 4). In addition, ICTs undermine the boundaries between different disciplines (Trow, 2001, p. 2).

It is the complexity in the structure of the contemporary knowledge generated by ICTs that dictates interdisciplinary as appropriate response to that complexity. Morin tells us that the predominance of fragmented learning divided up into disciplines, often makes us unable to connect parts and wholes; it should be replaced by learning that can grasp subjects within their contexts, their complexities, their totality. Interdisciplinary presupposes complementary, mutual enrichment and a conjunction of disciplinary skills (Tunnermann and Souza, 2003, p. 2). ICTs also weaken the boundaries of the university and college itself. Students now may be living anywhere, and lectures may be online from anywhere. Obviously, ICTs weakened the role of the library as a major centripetal force as information comes online from anywhere (Trow, 2001, p. 2).

The potential impact of communication revolution on ways of conducting research is quite high. This is because of the basic feature of ICTs; interactivity, the desired quality of communication systems. Interactive communication behavior is expected to be more effective, more accurate and more satisfying to the participants of the communication process. As Rogers states the most distinctive single quality of ICTs is their interactivity, in interactive communication systems, the individual is active rather than passive or reactive (Roger, 1990, p. 5). Interactivity of the Internet has a number of implications on the research university. Internet encourages academicians to seek collaboration with fellow researchers at other places around the glob. A number of studies show that collaboration is increasing over the last decades and the pattern of collaboration themselves change. Rossman concludes that the primary importance of the Internet for the electronic university lies not in machines that will think for scholars but in scholars using such tools to amplify collective intelligence, brining many minds together for more effective collaborative research (Nentwich, 2001, p. 4).

A second possible impact of ICTs use on the substance of research is that Internet will increase efficiency and productivity of research. With Internet we would not only have to expect more and faster results but as well new types of results and with more productivity. It is also argued that via Internet researchers gain access to a wide variety of projects that can make use of their skills. Actually, Internet has enabled new ways of doing research. Computer-based simulations and experiments became widespread in mathematics and that digitization replaces the traditional model. It is also obvious that online surveys will revolutionize survey research (Nentwich, 2001, p. 4). Concerning information access and publication, the impact of Internet is enormous. Firstly, in many cases it has accelerated the transfer of knowledge. Online publication makes papers available to all subscribers at the same time as it eliminates postal delays. More importantly, reading patterns have changed as readers can now access the literature from their desks, rather than having to go to the library (Prosser, 2004, p. 24). We should not forget that the real change has been occurred thanks to human skills and abilities, it is the university professors and other knowledge workers who generated knowledge, rather than technology. What Davenport and Prusak (1998) have stated in this context illustrates my point: information technology increases an organization's ability to capture data, however, it is people that make the data relevant by using their insight to reflect on, synthesis, and turn data into information, then place it in context to create knowledge (quoted in Jones, 2003, p. 299).

The speed of change brought about by ICTs defeats broad comprehensive planning. Planning on any scale needs a reasonable time horizon—at least 3 to 5 years—in which the outcomes of the plans can be anticipated, and some rational links can be made between a policy and its intended outcomes. But ICTs do not give planners and policy makers that time horizon. In higher education one outcome is that many big American universities are not doing much if any institutions-wide planning for the adoption of ICTs, but giving these decisions over to departments and research units—a form of decision by trial and error which, if properly monitored, can at least be treated as small scale experiments. It is what an institution does when it does not know what to do. One example: In 2000, the U.S Congress became concerned about the impact of ICTs on the ownership of intellectual property that being distributed through it in ways that made it available to many users without payment or even acknowledgement of authors or creators of the new knowledge. The highly qualified committee that was asked to study the problem wrote a long report in which the Congress was advised to do nothing—do not write any legislation in an era so little understood (Trow, 2001, p. 2).

### **Communication Revolution and Academic Freedom**

The previous debate on communication revolution and university gives us a broad view as well as an analytical tool to investigate the academic freedom as a core academic value closely connected to the overall status of the university. For instance, the degree of university autonomy will affect the degree of the academic freedom; the more autonomy the university is, the more freedom the professors enjoy, opposite is also true. Accordingly, in the remaining part of this paper I wish to examine a relatively unexplored matter; communication revolution and academic freedom. The importance of this exploration lies in the fact that all traditional statements on academic freedom were conceived in a context prior to the age of communication revolution, where traditional media mentality was dominant. Academicians are currently heavily affected by the communication revolution where the individual can participate in horizontal, interactive, synchronous, asynchronous and decentralized communication. The past traditional media systems through which academic freedom is—at least partly exercised were designed for vertical, unilateral, centralized, mass distribution of information, not for communication; communication is interactivity. The convergence of satellite communication and computing democratize communication and free individuals from the restrictions of the state and authority. In this sense, communication revolution is, by definition, a revolution of freedom. As new political and social structures are always created around new modes of communication, as always all types of freedoms are formed around the new changes in the areas of communication, academic freedom should be reconsidered and reexamined according to the substantial changes brought about by the communication revolution, otherwise, traditional statements of academic freedom will constitute a barrier before the academicians in the knowledge society.

The major principles of academic freedom guarantee freedom of inquiry and research, freedom of teaching, and freedom of expression and publication and outreach. These freedoms enable the university to advance knowledge and to transmit it effectively to its students and to the public, both inside and beyond classroom. We believe that all types of academic freedoms are linked to the right to communicate which is a personal right that guarantees the basic right of communication, a faculty member or a student will not exercise his or her academic freedom unless he or she has the right to access information and express his or her opinion freely, publish it freely and disseminate the knowledge through the available media inside and outside the university. "The importance of freedom of expression is due to the fact that it is an essential part of human dignity. Freedom of expression also constitutes a basis of democracy. Without it there is no possibility of free and genuine elections, nor any chance to realize the right to self-determination. Without the right to freedom of expression other freedoms cannot exist: religious, academic, or those relating to media, arts or culture" (Arnaldo, and Alain, 1998, p. 30). With this in mind, I will first investigate the crucial debate about academic freedom and then will show how this concept has been affected and how it could be reformulated to cope with the challenges of the communication revolution.

Perhaps no belief has been more central to academic life than that of academic freedom. Academic freedom codified the belief about the research for truth. No less a body than the United States Supreme Court has weighed in on the importance of academic freedom by stating: "Our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned" ( Tierney, 2004, p.1).

The existing literature shows that the concept of academic freedom is open to a range of interpretations and has been used at times to support conflicting causes and positions. Despite this lack of clarity, some common themes can be found in the literature. At its most basic, academic freedom is frequently presented as a negative right of individual academics-that is the right to non-interference in their activities: the freedom of the teacher or research worker in higher institutions of learning to investigate and discuss the problems of his science and to express his conclusions, whether through publication or in the instruction of students without interference from political, or from the administrative officials of the institution in which he is employed, unless his methods are found by qualified bodies of his own profession to be clearly incompetent or contrary to professional ethics (Arthur, quoted in Kerlind and Kayrooz, 2003, p. 2). This type of definition emphasizes the concept of academic freedom as a freedom from, i.e., freedom from interference. Others see academic freedom as being more about a freedom to, i.e., a freedom to engage in appropriate academic activities. This represents a shift in the interpretation of academic freedom from being a negative right to a positive right of academics. The wider concept of academic freedom is generally assumed to include the right to participate in the government of the institution and its policy-making, freedom in what and how to teach, choice of research topics, and freedom to travel and to communicate with colleagues (Kerlind and Kayrooz, 2003, p. 7).

The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure emphasizes the side of negative freedom and, while it gives teachers freedom of research, teaching and outreach, it puts a number of restrictions that inhibit the faculty member from being able to do his job properly. The statement, as I will indicate later is not consistent with the challenges, requirements, qualities and opportunities given by the communication revolution. The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom states that:

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter, which is not related to their subject.
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations, they should be accurate, should respect for the opinion of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution (AAUP, 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom).

An extension of scope of academic freedom has been stated in the modifications added to the University of California's old regulation. The new regulation on academic freedom of 2003 gives a special emphasis to the academic freedom of students, at the same time it repeats the same rights and responsibilities of the 1940 statement. Academic freedom requires that teaching and scholarship be assessed only by reference to the professional standards that sustain the University's pursuit and achievement of knowledge. The substance and nature of these standards properly lie within the expertise and authority of the faculty as a body. Members of the faculty are entitled as University employees to the full protections of the Constitution of the United States and of the Constitution of the State of California (Trow, 2004, P. 37). Though these modifications provide more types of freedoms as students also are free to express their viewpoints, but as the reader may notice, freedom of expression for both teachers and students are restricted by the

walls of the classroom. A style of thinking that no longer fits the spirit of the communication revolution.

To clarify my point, I find it useful to differentiate between two types of freedoms: academic freedom as stated earlier and freedom of expression as a human right, a personal freedom without which, academic freedom is incomplete or may not exist. The difference lies in the reasoning behind the principles. "Academic freedom is a freedom granted by society to members of the academic community to ensure that they are able to fulfill the tasks given to them, and thus, to enable a university to fulfill its responsibilities to society and to contribute to the progress of humanity. Freedom of speech is a personal right for all people; however, the argument in favor of free speech is not only self-fulfillment but also that of strengthening democracy, truth, and culture. The core of academic freedom is the right to conduct research and to teach without any interference or pressure, from the institution itself or from the outside, be it from the political authorities or from private stakeholders or patrons. Academic freedom can thus be asserted both against the state and against the given institution" (Spiro, 2003, p. 315). Accordingly, Academic freedom is an integral part of freedom of expression.

Another fundamental condition, not less important than freedom of expression, is the autonomy of the university. "These two concepts-academic freedom and university autonomy-are often treated as one, and sometimes confused; however, they are interlinked. It is important to distinguish between them. University autonomy refers to institutional self-government, while academic freedom relates to the academic staff, but also to the institution as such" (Spiro, 2003, p. 312).

#### **Academic Freedom and the Problem of Secrecy:**

The desire for secrecy has led external sponsors of academic research to impose, as a condition of funding, contractual restrictions on the publication rights of researchers. This climate of secrecy reduces collegial interaction amongst faculty and students and places a chill on peer evaluation and presentation of new knowledge at conferences, public seminars and in journals. At its worst, the trend towards secrecy has manifested itself in attempts to suppress research that produces commercially unfavorable results. In a survey conducted to review relevant contract language and policy documents from 27 institutions in Canada, researchers found that academic staff associations at a number of institutions have negotiated language that seeks to protect the right to publish (The Freedom to Publish Report).

The above discussion on interrelationship between academic freedom and freedom of expression has a strong support from the UNESCO conference on "higher education in the twenty-first century: vision and action" that concludes: so that the university may fully assume—and carry out—the responsibilities which society lays upon it, the university as an institution of scholarship and its academic staff individually need to be granted certain conditions of work held to be necessary for such responsibilities to be optimally fulfilled. These terms are contained in the two concepts of university autonomy and academic freedom. The former relates to institutional self-government. The latter relates to individual members of the academic staff and also to the students." (UNESCO Working Document, 1998, p. 7).

At this point, it seems important to mention that academic freedom is not an absolute right. There are, however, some restrictions to the activities of research and publication which mainly seek to safeguard human rights. "American Psychological Association (APA) for example imposes specific restrictions that limit what researchers can and cannot do when conducting research. Consequently, psychologists recognize that their ethical obligations forbid certain programs of research when the research procedures produce unacceptable consequences for the participants. As Singer states the protection of fundamental human rights takes precedence over the freedom of science and over the benefits that promising scientific research projects bring. Another potential barrier to research relates to the consequence of pursuing specific programs of research is the value of knowledge. The primary concern with this type of restriction is not with

the treatment of the participants per se, but with the potential consequences of acquiring specific knowledge. (Pittenger, 2003, p.110).

The epistemological barrier to research represents a specific objection to the research question because of the topic it addresses or the extra scientific implications of the research. The argument presented here suggests that the pursuit of knowledge is not value free, because it does create consequences that affect others. (Singer, 1996, quoted in Pittenger, 2003, p. 113). This barrier is problematic because one should know beforehand the forbidden knowledge that may be produced in order to forbid a program of research. For example, one may wish to prohibit a program of research for fear of the technology such exploration may produce. Such speculation will remain an inference, without the empirical support generated by the forbidden research (Pittenger, 2003, p. 115).

### **Future Trend:**

The basic argument of this paper is that it is not only communication revolution that will result in substantial changes in the concept of academic freedom, but the overall characteristics defining the age of globalization. Among these characteristics are the trend towards deregulation and liberalization, privatization, globalization of commerce, culture and capital, the multilateral free trade system derived by competition, the lifelong educational needs of citizens in a knowledge-driven global economy and so many. Given the limitations of this contribution, the focus will be only on the communication revolution and academic freedom. Understanding both the architecture of the Internet and the responsibilities of modern university professors will help us analyze this relationship. The Internet is an unregulated cyberspace allows information to bypass state and university high officials' interventions and thus produces greater academic empowerment. It is a global communication network that allows the top-heavy, concentrated media monopolies to be displaced by a responsive multi-model of communication. More importantly, it is a democratic, participatory communication network that gives its users free, independent, pluralistic and uncensored public space. On the other hand emphasizing the real responsibilities and duties of the modern university require us to look at the academic freedom from different perspective. The responsibilities of the university professors is to transform the education system so as to maximize the benefits of the communication revolution and reduce its threats, to think about their responsibilities as agents of change, leaders of social and political movements, and freedom fighters. Asmal well notes that academic community has to deal with the deprivation and alienation, and above all the poverty of peoples. He added that academic freedom will be diminished if it is seen as just freedom from the unjust rules and regulations of the past. It must become "freedom to" fully develop the potential of our societies and above all our peoples. Academic freedom cannot flourish in a restrictive society where the wider freedoms are restricted or even do not exist (Asmal, 2002, p. 159). In Arab and African countries-for example- we need to recognize the duty of the academics to go further to meet the needs of the society and to free the people and not to confine their interests to teaching, conducting research and transmitting knowledge to society. There is an ethical obligation before the academics in Arab and African countries to go beyond their limited and special university community and to address the wider issues of the whole society if the university is to contribute to its advancement.

In his important work, *Representation of the Intellectual*, Edward Said, points out that: There is no such thing as a private intellectual, since the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered the public world. (Said, 1994, p. 12, quoted in Asmal, 2002, p. 167). In line with Edward Said, Louis Menand, a writer and literary theorist, in his essay "The Limits of Academic Freedom" argues that: We don't need universities in order to preserve a static knowledge from the forces of change. We need them to ensure that knowledge will not remain static in the services of some vested interest (Menaned, 1996, p. 13).

Needless to say, that academic freedom as suggested here comes with a corresponding social responsibility. While accountability must prevail among peers within the institutions, it also involves external accountability to society as a whole. In this regard, academics must ensure that their research is "open" and accurate, and not for private profit. Academic freedom recognizes the



important role of academics in the fulfillment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of the people and the need to engage in activities that respond to the needs of society at large (Asmal, 2002, p. 168). There should be no objection to accountability. The problem is the way in which government handles the moral expectation that accountability entails. (Stevenson, 2004, p. 1).

In its search for challenges of the communication revolution to academic freedom, The American Association for University Professors (AAUP) established a subcommittee that investigates this matter and expressed its concerns about access to information in digital format. The report states that faculty access to print format materials (e.g., in library collections) is seldom a concern; universities rarely seek to limit or restrict the availability of even the most controversial materials among the monographs or serials they hold. Access to material in digital format may, however, present quite different problems. Several universities have curtailed access, through the campus computing system, to politically explicit materials under conditions where access to comparable print material would be routine. An appropriate institutional policy would ensure that access to politically explicit and other controversial materials through university computing networks and systems would be limited to no greater degree than access to print and visual materials in library collections is limited (AAUP report, 1997, p. 6). Defending free access of Internet information is, in fact, empowering the academic freedom to a large extent as it will help create a genuine platform of knowledge sharing, information exchange, research conducting and thus enhance the collective mind of the academics. As Unger concludes, "The internet is certainly the largest and most inclusive library ever. (Ungar, 2003, p. 343).

The second area where new policy of academic freedom may be needed-as stated by AAUP report, is the posting by faculty members of materials that could evoke controversy on or off campus. In many academic disciplines, faculty members may share and distribute politically explicit and other potentially controversial material. Faculty in other fields may legitimately wish to access or transmit such materials. Such dissemination is generally accepted in the print environment; though even in recent times there have been external pressures to restrain such materials. But even if the material posted in cyberspace is controversial, so long as it is not illegal it should not be banned simply because it comes in electronic format. (AAUP report, 1997, p. 6). Information sharing through Internet enables the university elite to practice their real responsibilities towards the development of their countries and empowerment of their peoples especially in Arab and African countries.

The third issue raised by the sub-committee report is freedom of teaching. Under the conditions of communication revolution, the scope of the operative term classroom must be enlarged to encompass electronic formats for those virtual spaces and areas where the communication inherent in the teaching and learning process may occur. Web sites, home pages, bulletin boards, chat rooms, and e-mail lists that convey or share information and ideas within the context of a university class or course--as well as to the traditional physical classroom in which much teaching will continue to take place (AAUP report, 1997, p. 6). Adjusting academic freedom to the requirements and potentials of online education will better serve the effectiveness of education, online education favors self and cooperative learning in particular since students are not passive recipients in the learning process. Cooperative learning is founded upon constructive theories of learning (Glges, 2001, p. 137).

The report criticized what has been stated in the 1940 statement when it cautions that faculty members, speaking as citizens, should be accurate and "exercise appropriate restraint" as well as "respect for the opinions of others" in their external utterances. The reasonable justification behind this restriction is that this regulation was formulated before the advent of the communication revolution as we live it today and where the mentality of the physical university campus was dominant. "In cyberspace it is difficult to distinguish between what is internal from what is external. (AAUP report, 1997, p.6).

The fifth concern of AAUP report indicates that there are at least some evidences that some institutions treat computer access as a lower-order faculty benefit, which may be suspended or terminated for minor infractions, with little if any formal process. Such notions need to be rejected. Access to computing facilities and electronic communication, including Internet access, is a resource of great value and utmost importance to faculty scholarship and thus for academic freedom. Finally the report asserts the value of the privacy of electronic communication. It shows that in the relatively few cases on privacy of e-mail, courts have shown some willingness to overlook invasions that probably would not be allowed in more familiar settings. Regardless of the medium, privacy of communication is vital to the quality of an academic institution (AAUP report, 1997, p. 6). It is logical to stress the free access to information and the right to privacy and to reject any type of censorship as a decisive condition of academic freedom that rise to the challenges of communication revolution.

### **Academic Freedom in Arab and African Universities:**

Where does academic freedom in Arab and African universities stand in this debate of communication revolution? It is safe to state that academic freedom in Arab and African universities lags behind the potentials of communication revolution. At the same time, one cannot predict the academic freedom to flourish where other types of freedoms are restricted or even does not exist. Arab and African universities are striving to take advantage of the communication revolution and to enjoy the benefits of the knowledge society; however, ICTs are still in the periphery of the development process in most Arab and African universities.

A significant portion of Arab and African university professors does not have email or homepage and thus are not able to communicate with their counterparts either from their region or from outside. Arab and African countries are still following restrictive policies in different areas of freedom; freedom of information, freedom of expression, press freedom, human rights, academic freedom. Lack of democracy and freedom is always justified by the authoritarian state as prerequisites for economic development, stability, or to confront external threats. Regardless of what is explicitly said by officials or implicitly written in the constitutions, documents, policy statements, missions and visions, the real world cues testify that we still out of the privileges of the knowledge society especially in relation to academic freedom and university autonomy. It is confirmed that out of seven-world region, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s (Arab Human Development Report, 2002, p. 120).

The declaration of Arab Universities Conference held in Amman, Jordan, in December 2004 that called for the deletion of political trusteeship imposed on the academic community and assertion of Arab universities-self governance. (Deceleration of the Conference, 2004, p.2). The broad meaning of academic freedom or what is called the general theory is what we need to reshape the Arab and African universities as well as the Arab and African societies to cope with the knowledge society requirements. In Western developed countries this may not be the case because other democratic institutions are performing their responsibilities to the extent that academic community and the society as a whole may achieve progress if university professors restrict themselves to the internal affairs of the university. Lack of other democratic and transparent institutions in Arab and African countries along with the prevalence of corruption, social inequality, dictatorship, poverty, health and population problems call for more radical role by the university professor to enable the people to leapfrog into the knowledge society.

Finally, I would like to raise this important question: Given the qualities of the communication revolution one has to ask whether Islamic culture compatible with it and thus enhances a modern concept of academic freedom or it stands against this revolution. The purpose is to respond to the conservative Muslims as well as others who believe that Islamic culture lies at odds with the digital age and therefore, works against all types of freedoms, including academic freedom. I hereby stress the point that Islam presents itself as a way for the digital age. It would be useful to quote Ali Mazrui's analysis who wrote recently that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) moved from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single night in the age of travel by camel; he moved from earth to heavens during the same night ascending from

Jerusalem; and while in the heavens, the present age communicated with the ages of the past, for Prophet Muhammad was able to talk to Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and all the way back to Adam during the same night. The Prophet was back in Mecca before morning, breaking at least three barriers of cosmic experience: 1- killing distance between Mecca and Jerusalem, 2- killing the distance between the earth and the heavens, and 3- killing the distance between the past and the present. It is in this sense that Islam prepared believers for the age of the end of distance and the age of globalized digital simultaneity (Mazrui, 1998, quoted in Hamada, 2004a, p. 11).

Consequently, knowledge is the key to the human condition and the power that drives human civilization. In the 6,291 or so verses of the Qura'n, there are about 791 references to the Arabic root ilm (to know)—roughly 12.7 percent—making it fourth after Allah (God). Knowledge links humans to God: only knowledgeable persons fear God. The people not only have a general right to know, but also a specific right to read, which in Muslim cultural theory is not a mere right, but an—all important and universal duty (96:1). Note that the first word of the Qur'an urging Muslims to read. This notion is further reinforced by the fact that Qur'an specifically identifies the pen as God's chosen instrument in the process of teaching man (96:4) (Pasha, 1993, quoted in Hamada, 2001a, p. 220). Also Hamid Mowlana has concluded in his analysis of the Islamic community paradigm which is based on theory of tawhid (the unity of God, human and the universe) that Islamic community was responsible for the information and scientific revolution that characterized the middle ages. What was known as a dark age of the medieval period in Western history was a golden age in the Islamic community (Mowlana, 1993, quoted in Hamada, 2004b, p5). With regard to freedom of expression, scholars find evidence in the Qur'an to support the fact that cultural diversity and differences of opinion and disagreement are natural in social life and embedded in mankind (Kamali, 1994, p.76 quoted in Hamada, 2004c, p. 12). Note for example the following text which provides "If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one nation: but they will not cease to differ" (Hud, 11: 118). The Qur'anic vision here is clearly one of pluralism, which, in turn is premised on the freedom of expression and thought, and differences of abilities, cultures, experiences among individuals and nations (Hamada, 2004c, p. 15).

### **Conclusion:**

Communication Revolution is shaking the foundations of how universities are organized, managed and financed. The overall activities of the university-teaching research and outreach are also being transformed. The comprehensive view of academic freedom in Arab and African universities incorporates a full engagement of the academic community in the development process of the whole society to compensate lack of rule of law and good governance. Academic freedom is not an absolute right, it is not also a privilege for university professors, but a responsibility and duty with ethical and human constraints. Finally, the paper demonstrates that Islamic culture is consistent with the spirit and necessities of communication revolution and knowledge society, and calls for the most extent possible of freedom of expression and academic freedom.

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