

Academic freedom and knowledge tradition of the Arab heritage

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to confront some of the many facets of academic freedom as a whole, including the shared concerns with Western academia, its relationship to the politics of Arab society and the relevance of these issues within local political domains. It attempts to profile the problems hindering societal progress beyond the seemingly defined truth. While this subject has many facets, this article only examines academic freedom within the scope of knowledge and inquiry derived from the revered text of the Qur'ân, including its relation to democracy and radicalism. It is an effort to refocus Arab intellectual dialogue on its ailing academia. It also argues for Arab society to reclaim its core culture of Islam as an enabler of learning aside from the Eurocentric perspective of academic freedom.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper uses an expository and persuasive format in its novel perspective. This expository form sets out the argument of academic freedom as being indigenous to Arab-Islamic heritage and pursues a persuasive statement for its resolution. This format outlines the main familiar aspects of academic freedom and lays out its components within Arab-Islamic history.*

Findings – *This paper provides insights and arguments supporting its main theory. It suggests that Arabs must judiciously consider what their education will look like and accomplish in the next 100 years, considering the sociopolitical status quo and the chances of changing it. It argues that academic freedom is indigenous to Arab-Islamic early history, academia and knowledge governance. Therefore, Arab academia must not ignore its heritage to examine what hinders education and intellectualism. It concludes with the point that reinstalling a culture of knowledge will create a relevant democracy.*

Research limitations/implications – *The implications for research, practice and society are vast. Further academic freedom research would redefine terms of processes, change the role of academic leadership, debunk locally dominated politics, introduce learning-first policies, balance inequalities in gender, abolish academic tribalism and move past colonialist ideas and predominance. For researchers, this point of view would open doors for new scholastic approaches.*

Practical implications – *This paper includes practical implications that stem from an approach that would provoke practical possibilities and call for more academic conversations. Further conversations should explore and debate the gaps in Arab-Islamic knowledge history. The Global South of the Arab World or the Middle East and Northern Africa/Southwest Asia North Africa region could consider drafting a contemporary MENA account of a Magna Charta Libertatis Academicae or a Magna Charta Universitatum that is galvanized by Arab revivable heritage. Moreover, It would be productive if Western universities that operate in the Arab World would also take an active role in denouncing undemocratic practices and not merely operate as commercial enterprises.*

Social implications – *Realizing academic freedom in Arab institutions will have a positive spillover effect on Arab society, including thriving and free media, freedom of speech and gender issues. Academic freedom is one of the main elements in structuring free political culture that*

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