

Portland State University

PDXScholar

International & Global Studies Faculty
Publications and Presentations

International & Global Studies

Summer 2013

Book Review of, Human Rights, Revolution, and Reform in the Muslim World

Tugrul Keskin

Portland State University, tugrulkeskin@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is_fac



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Citation Details

Keskin, T., Anthony Tirado Chase (2013) "Human Rights, Revolution, and Reform in the Muslim World" Review of the Middle East Studies, 47 (1).

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in International & Global Studies Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

ANTHONY TIRADO CHASE. *Human Rights, Revolution, and Reform in the Muslim World.* Syracuse, New York: Lynne Rienner, 2012. 225 pages. Cloth \$US52.00 ISBN: 978-1-58826-801-3.

Human rights has become one of the most important concepts in global politics. It has also been used as a political tool against developing countries since the Reagan administration, which coincided with a resurgence of Muslim politics. Although human rights is an intrinsic part of the belief system of Islam, with the emergence of the nation-state, Muslim societies have explored individual and other social rights. The emergence of the nation-state generated the idea of citizenship, based on modern conditions of political governance. Moving from religious-based identities to constitution-based identities, Muslims began to learn about obstacles to the rights of women, laborers, ethnic and religious groups, minorities and citizens.

In *Human Rights, Revolution, and Reform in the Muslim World*, Anthony Tirado Chase critically examines the role of human rights in Muslim societies from the perspective of global politics. Chase is not surprised by the events of the Arab Spring, because the post-colonial Muslim nation-states had not created a stable context for human rights. Thus, Chase perceives a relationship between human rights and the Arab Spring. Agreed, human rights is a bottom-up concept and Western-supported dictators were no longer able to ignore the rights of ordinary citizens; however, in Europe, rights were not born under colonial conditions, but rather flourished within the context of capitalist development in parallel with an internally fueled process of urbanization.

According to Chase, Muslims had focused on external enemies, instead of seeking to establish and guarantee human rights internally. He does not mention the role that European colonization played in suppressing the human rights of colonized people, which continued into the post-colonial era with its powerful militaries, Western-oriented secular elites, and troubling gaps between the rich and poor. In the last thirty years, however, citizens began to question their individual rights, democracy, social justice, the rule of law and the practical application of constitutions in their nations.

As a part of national politics, Islamic movements will not be able to undermine human rights, because in the Middle East, demands for human rights and increased democracy generated Islamic movements and empowered them within semi-authoritarian states. However, human rights has become a commodity in the negotiation process between social and political actors in the post-semi-authoritarian Middle Eastern condition where all actors redefine human rights in light of their own interests. According to Chase, international law and NGOs play an important role in this political negotiation. Law, politics,

institutions and norms are rapidly moving towards the internationalization of human rights. Local actors accept international definitions of human rights; however, the accommodation of human rights into the local cultural context is a mutually constitutive process. The Western notion of human rights is also shaped by local conditions. Chase examines three levels of this negotiation process: the domestic, international, and transnational levels. He emphasizes the importance of transnational dialogue in continuously influencing the definition and understanding of human rights and is optimistic about the evolution of this understanding at the global level.

Chase argues that the social and political debates in Muslim societies are informed by the struggle for human rights. This argument is likely applicable in every corner of the globe. Gender rights are becoming one of the most complex and controversial issues in Muslim societies. However, given the role of tradition, culture and religion in developing societies, one cannot apply the rules defined in postmodern capitalist economies. Therefore, the adoption of gender rights will be implemented organically, in parallel with the evolution of the market economy in these societies. On the other hand, gender rights in the West are arguably as controversial as in Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, etc. On this issue, similar to other Western scholars, Chase ignores the role of economic structure in the modernization process.

According to Chase, new opportunities emerged post-Arab Spring to improve freedom of speech and democracy. He furthermore argues that this reformism is not revolutionary and is not intended to overthrow the government. I would counter that successful reform would be based on economic development, which depends on certain political and economic conditions, such as less foreign political involvement and an independent economic policy.

Chase attempts to explore the complexity of human rights and the diversity of Muslim societies from a non-orientalist perspective. His work should be considered seriously within human rights policy-oriented circles as well as in academia, although the definition of human rights continues to evolve given the interaction brought about by the digital age and global market economy. Therefore, the correlation between economic development and human rights should be considered in any evaluation of free speech, democracy, and gender rights. ✨

Tugrul Keskin
Portland State University