



Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights: Contributions From Social Science of the Middle East

Richard Harvey Brown and Laure Bjawi-Levine

KEY WORDS Human Rights. Middle East. Relativism. Culture. Practices. Anthropology. Social science.

ABSTRACT The authors discuss cultural relativism and universal human rights as these two concepts clash in the practices of implementing international human rights accords in countries of the Middle East. They argue that anthropologists have erred on the side of relativism, thereby denying the diversity of values and cultures within particular societies and often lending legitimacy to despotisms. Sociologists and economists tend to make the opposite error. Yet, the tolerance and openness that are central to human rights require the discourse of universalism, even as that discourse itself implies a relativism in its local implementations.

Authors' Addresses: **Richard Harvey Brown**, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland College Park MD 20742-1315, U.S.A.

Email: rbrown@socy.umd.edu

Laure Bjawi-Levine, Department of Anthropology, City University of New York, Graduate Center 365 Fifth Avenue, New York 10016, U.S.A.

Email: laurebjawi@hotmail.com

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Anthropologist Special Issue No. 1: 163-174 (2002)

Anthropology: Trends and Applications
M.K. Bhasin and S.L. Malik, Guest Editors