

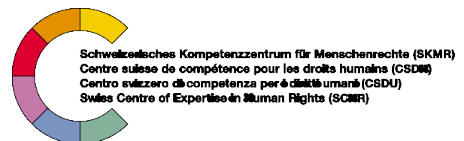
# Complex Relations: Mobility, Human Rights and the Arab Spring



**November 14-17, 2013**

Franklin Switzerland – LAC Conference Room

Hosted by the Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies Program



## About the Workshop

Since the end of World War II and the subsequent articulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, scholars and practitioners of human rights worldwide have struggled to determine what counts as human rights, who may claim them and who is excluded, and how to implement them. A number of post-Cold War human rights debates have set the stage for today's challenges to the human rights community. The first such debate concerned globalization itself, heralded by the one side as an opening for human rights progress, while the opposing camp saw it as a cause for the deepening global poverty (Sen 1999). The second debate was sparked by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 and essentially split the human rights community into two different camps that were enforced by the media. Should the USA, with its war on terror, be seen as the world's human rights guardians or as a neo-imperial power bent on ideological and economic world dominion (Ishay 2008, Hobsbawm 2003)? A third, ongoing, debate changed the fault lines of the second debate because for many it answered the question over the USA role as purveyors of global human rights. Pointing to the USA's moral failure in Iraq, as exemplified by Abu Ghraib, and other instances of incompetence by the Bush administration, many participants in the global human rights discussion concluded that the USA was no longer in a position to determine the global human rights stakes (Ishay, 2008). As Micheline Ishay argues, a “clash of fundamentalisms” has ensued, pitting the so-called free market fundamentalists, who are seen by many as having abandoned the world's poor, against various religious fundamentalist groups from the Taliban to Al Qaida, who target these same disenfranchised peoples (Ishay, 2008).

In very broad strokes, these debates in the human rights community have set the stage for the ongoing tensions in what we refer to as the Arab Spring and has left a number of ideological chasms regarding how best to apply universal principles of human rights to individual cultural settings: non-western nations understandably criticize hegemonic western interpretations of these universal principles while western nations chafe at practices perceived as blatant human rights violations. Against the backdrop of global migration, the workshop *Complex Relations: Mobility and Human Rights Regimes* will trace how the Arab Spring is influencing current human rights debates and will examine tensions between supranational and national conceptions and applications of human rights. The workshop will examine how these tensions play out in the Post-Arab Spring, with a focus on France, Germany and Switzerland.

The ongoing crisis in Syria and the ramifications of the Arab Spring coupled with human-rights infringements related to emerging migration patterns in Europe, and in particular to Switzerland, France and Germany, make this topic especially urgent. This is perhaps even more noteworthy in Switzerland where, in recent years, an increasing number of anti-immigration practices have been adopted that target rejected asylum seekers and criminal offenders. Indeed, the subject of human rights against the backdrop of migration in Switzerland could not be more pressing, as evidenced by the Universal Periodic Review on Switzerland. The establishment of the very promising pilot project, the Swiss Center of Expertise in Human Rights (2011-2015), is an indication of how important it is to promote and facilitate the implementation of international human rights obligations at all levels of the Swiss political system, and to advance the debate on this issue.

The problems presented by the Arab Spring and the ensuing negotiations over the Human Rights regimes require the collaboration of a number of disciplines. Particularly in Switzerland, the convergence and simultaneous antagonism between concepts of human rights on one hand, including the expression of political liberalism, conflict with the ruling concepts of democracy and majority rule, on the other. Switzerland, the birthplace of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and direct democracy, becomes the perfect laboratory setting for studying

complex relations between democracy and human rights in such cultural arenas as the media, and the law. In the past ten years in Switzerland, a host of popular initiatives have attacked values of the liberal state, in particular the fundamental rights that it accords: the initiative on the ban of Minarets and the most recent ban on burkas in the canton of Ticino are the most prominent ones in a series of attempts to limit liberties in recent years (See Gisler et al., 2012). Democracies all over Europe must ask themselves whose word is sovereign: the judiciary with its alignment with the rule of law and a supranational human rights regime, or democratic processes that address the will of the people, or the cultural narratives spun out in the media that help us to understand the issues at hand. Perhaps the answer lies in a combination thereof. It is the goal of this workshop to find answers that that can respond to the challenge of complex diversities in an age of mobility within the international framework of human rights.

To this end, we recognize that the theoretical discourse about international human rights does not always translate to the realities of practitioners in the field. For this reason, we have invited theorists from diverse disciplines, including political science, media studies, history, legal studies, literature and cultural studies, and the arts together with practitioners in migration, communications (including the Internet and journalism), and the law together to discuss the ways in which human rights regimes, both as a paradigm and as lived practices, are currently evolving in the wake of the upheavals of the Arab Spring. The aim of this exploratory workshop is to bring together theoreticians from a number of different disciplines, including the media, the arts (literature, film and conceptual arts), politics, religion, legal studies, and economics, with practitioners from the field of human rights to explore the following questions: how are dominant human rights regimes being reshaped in the aftermath of the Arab Spring? How does migration in the wake of the Arab Spring affect current ideas, instruments and practices of human rights in the receiving and sending countries? How is migration gendered? How are both the theories and practices of human rights changing under the pressure of, and in reaction to, the Arab Spring? What is the impact of social media technologies on the ability of different actors to engage in shaping Human Rights discourses? How does migration influence the ways in which we negotiate the tensions between the national and supranational usages of human rights? Where are ideas about migration and human rights conceptualized and represented? What do practitioners need from theoreticians and vice versa?

Addressing the issue of visually questioning and re-presenting human rights, the exhibition “*Syria: Facing the Revolution*” is an integral part of the workshop. It features select photographs by UK born photographer Russell Chapman who travelled to the Middle East in the spring of 2013, documenting the revolution and its impact on human life in Syria and in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. For Chapman, “Photography does not mean to freeze what you just saw but more what you just felt. When we venture into our past, our memories are not like a continuous film that runs on in our head but more like images, in which we recognize forms that touch all of our senses.” His art touches all spheres, including experimentation with abstract and HDR photography and has been featured in exhibitions and articles. Chapman also served in the UK military in both Afghanistan and Iraq and his images documenting daily life in the war zones in Syria are informed by his own war experience. The exhibition is curated by Johanna Fassl, faculty member at Franklin College Switzerland and director of Columbia University in Venice, who is engaged in a comprehensive research project investigating the art of veterans and soldiers from the recent conflicts in the Middle East.

**Workshop Program**  
November 14-17, 2013  
Franklin Switzerland – LAC Conference Room

**Thursday, November 14, 2013**

19.00 Welcome Dinner

**Friday, November 15, 2013**

8.45-9.15 Coffee and Croissants

9.15-9.45 Setting the Agenda  
Gianni D'Amato, Sara Steinert Borella, Caroline Wiedmer and Eva Wyss Kontar

9.45-12.30 Topic I: Democracy, Mobility and Human Rights  
Chair: Gianni D'Amato

11.15-11.30 Coffee Break

11.30-12.30 Plenary Session

12.30-14.00 Lunch

14.00-16.45 Topic II: Narratives, Human Rights and Law  
Chair: Caroline Wiedmer

15.30-15.45 Coffee Break

15.45-16.45 Plenary Session

17.00-18.00 *Secularism, Minority Religions, and Religious Expression in Public Places*  
Video Presentation and Discussion with David Oppenheimer  
School of Law, UC Berkeley

18.00 *Syria: Facing the Revolution.* Exhibition of photography by Russell Chapman  
Opening Remarks: Johanna Fassel and Russell Chapman

Reception North Campus Villa

**Saturday, November 16, 2013**

- 9.00-9.30 Coffee and Croissants
- 9.30-12.15 Topic III: Sexuality, Gender and Human Rights  
Chair: Sara Steinert Borella
- 10.50-11.15 Coffee Break
- 11.15-12.15 Plenary
- 12.15-14.00 Lunch
- 14.00-16.45 Topic IV: Media Discourses, Migration and Human Rights  
Chair: Eva Wyss Kontar
- 15.20-15.45 Coffee Break
- 15.45-16.45 Plenary
- 17.00-18.00 *Technology, Human Rights and the Arab Spring*  
Video Presentation by Franklin Alumna Esra'a Al Shafei '08, founder and director of Mideast Youth, Bahrain  
Erik Nielsen Auditorium
- Round Table Discussion with Esra'a Al Shafei, Majeda Dakkak, Rima Kalush, Ziad Majed, Elham Manea, Eva Wyss Kontar
- Reception co-hosted by the Franklin Arab Club and the Franklin Honor's Society.  
All are welcome.
- 18.30-21.00 Farewell Dinner for Conference Participants

## Participants

Laura Affolter, Anthropology Department, University of Bern; Esra'a Al Shafei, Founder and Executive Director of Mid-East Youth, Bahrain; Dawn Chatty, Professor of Anthropology and Forced Migration, Director of the Refugee Studies Center, University of Oxford; Majeda Dakkak, Franklin College Switzerland; Johanna Fassl, Associate Professor of Art History, Franklin College Switzerland; David Jacobson, Founding Director of Citizenship Initiative and Professor of Sociology, University of South Florida; Rima Kalush, Programme Coordinator, Migrant Rights Research Centre, Bahrain; Layla Kamil Abdulsalam, Media Studies, University of Koblenz-Landau; Ziad Majed, Assistant Professor of International and Comparative Politics, American University of Paris; Elham Manea, Associate Professor, Institute for Political Science, University of Zurich; Simone Marti, Anthropology Department, University of Bern; David Oppenheimer, Professor of Clinical Law, University of Berkeley; Brigitte Schnegg, Professor of History and Director of Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies, University of Bern; Sidonie Smith, Martha Guernsey Colby Collegiate Professor of English and Women's Studies, University of Michigan; Robert Tobin, Henry J. Leir Chair and Professor in Foreign Languages and Cultures, Clark University; Nicole Wichmann, Scientific Collaborator, Swiss Center of Expertise on Human Rights, Project Manager, SFM, Neuchâtel.

## Organizers

Gianni D'Amato, Professor of Migration and Citizenship Studies, Director of the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies, University of Neuchâtel; Sara Steinert Borella, Dean and Professor of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, Franklin College Switzerland; Caroline Wiedmer, Professor of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, Franklin College Switzerland; Eva Wyss Kontar, Professor of Media Studies, University of Koblenz-Landau.