

AUTUMN Working Papers Seminar Series 2013-2014

“Acts of citizenship and the production of claims in human rights activism in Israel”

Dr Alexander Koensler (ISCTSJ)

DATE: Wednesday 20th November at 4pm

VENUE: Room 24.0G.002, 24 University Square



The question of how to speak out for social justice of marginalized groups leads to the heart of a polarized debate. A widely diffused engaged understanding of political mobilization in terms of the global human rights language is opposed by a critical, constructivist realm of research. The intricate issue of indigenous Arab-Palestinian Bedouin land rights within the boundaries of the Israeli state is a particular significant case in point. By taking up Engin Isin's notion of 'acts of citizenship', this paper follows practices and discourses of less familiar types of activists in a campaign against house-demolitions in informal Bedouin settlements, analyzing how indigenous cultural rights are enacted in an increasing harsh conflict over the access to resources and land rights in the Negev/Naqab desert. The ethnographic approach emphasizes the role of a range of silent practices of protest, as well as carnivalesque and spontaneous acts of citizenship. This case shows how forms of mobilization that reproduce dominant interpretative categories of human rights create new pitfalls and often virtual second-order sites of contestation, which function as a catalyzer for different global concerns.