

# Sarah Willen (Anthropology)

**UConn Humanities Institute Fellows' Public Talk**  
**February 13, 2014 -- 4:00-5:30 PM**  
**AUSTIN 301**

## **“Outlaw Motherhood on a Moral Frontier: Migrant ‘Illegality’ and the Pursuit of Dignity on Israel’s Margins”**



This talk asks what we can learn about unauthorized transnational migration and migrant “illegality” by peering into the tumultuous lifeworld of Marlene, a Filipina woman and unauthorized migrant to Israel who is also a single mother, an abandoned lover, a victim of harassment, and an outlaw denied the possibility of police protection. Viewed in ethnographic context, Marlene’s experience illuminates three dimensions of this contemporary mode of abjection. Illegality is not only a form of juridical status, but also a sociopolitical condition and a mode of being-in-the-world. The talk considers three questions. First, how is migrant illegality configured – especially in Israel, a country whose citizens bear their own complicated histories of marginalization, othering, and exclusion? Second, how does illegalization impinge upon migrants’ existential and moral realities? Finally, how do migrants like Marlene actively pursue groundedness, meaning, and dignity within fraught and rapidly changing sociopolitical contexts?

**Sarah S. Willen** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, where she also directs the Research Program on Global Health and Human Rights at the Human Rights Institute. A medical and sociocultural anthropologist, her primary research interests include the illegalization and criminalization of irregular migrants; immigration and health; embodiment and experience; and anthropological approaches to morality, dignity, and deservingness. She has authored over 25 articles and book chapters and edited or co-edited seven volumes, among them *Transnational Migration to Israel in Global Comparative Context* (2007) and special issues of *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* (2013), *Social Science & Medicine* (2012), *Ethos* (2012), and *International Migration* (2007). She is also co-founder of the blog “AccessDenied: A Conversation on Unauthorized Im/migration and Health.” A former NIMH (National Institutes of Mental Health) Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Willen has been awarded the Rudolf Virchow Prize from the Society for Medical Anthropology’s Critical Anthropology of Global Health group (2004, 2012), a David R. Blumenthal Award in Jewish Studies and the Humanities (2004), a Marjorie Shostak Prize for Excellence and Humanity in Ethnographic Writing (2003), and two Certificates of Distinction in Teaching from the Derek Bok Center at Harvard College (2008, 2009). She has taught at Emory, Harvard, Southern Methodist University, and UConn.