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Why Love Matters for Human Rights

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

Why Love Matters for Human Rights

Presented by:

Lena Khor, *Lawrence University*

Session: Reimagining and Decolonizing Human Rights

Abstract:

Human rights are typically thought of as a matter of justice, but I argue that at its core, human rights are a matter of love. To develop this argument, I analyze select literary representations of human rights at work including Dave Eggers' *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, a Novel* (2006) and Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World* (2003). My concept of love builds on the vision of "open love" proposed by French philosopher Henri Bergson in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932) and sketched out more fully by political theorist Alexandre Lefebvre in *Human Rights as a Way of Life: On Bergson's Political Philosophy* (2013). My analysis reveals the critical and complex role love plays in promoting, protecting, and defending human rights as well as the challenges and limits of its role. Studying the role of love in human rights is important because it asks and answers vital questions about the social practice of human rights: What is at stake in human rights work? What motivates and sustains human rights work? What are the challenges of human rights work?

Presenter information:

Lena Khor is an Associate Professor of English at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. She is the author of *Human Rights Discourse in a Global Network* (Ashgate 2013). She teaches and publishes on postcolonial literatures, human rights, and globalization.