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# Ethics and Methods of Human Rights Work: Exploring Both Theoretical and Practical Approaches

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# Going Against the Grain

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

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## Ethics and Methods of Human Rights Work: Exploring Both Theoretical and Practical Approaches

### Presented by:

**Shayna Plaut**, *Global Reporting Centre*  
**Maritza Felices Luna**, *University of Ottawa*  
**Christina Clark Kazak**, *University of Ottawa*  
**Neil Bilotta**, *McGill University*  
**Lara Rosenoff Gauvin**, *McGill University*

**Session:** Ethics and Methods of Human Rights Work

### Abstract:

This workshop will explore both theoretical and practical approaches to methodologies and ethics as it relates to human rights work.

The goal of the workshop is to create a dynamic space that encourages participants to share and learn from our own experiences navigating the messiness of human rights ethics and methods. We specifically address formal education and systems and structures so that we may all design, do and teach research and practice related to human rights in a more critical and sustainable manner. We recognize the tensions of creating research, programs and advocacy that is seen as “legitimate” to educational and funding institutions in a way that centers, and privileges, the people involved rather than procedures. Our workshop asks:

- What might this look like?
- What are some of the fuzzy and messy realities and ethical challenges and how might we work through these?
- How do you teach this?

Too often “human rights” is discussed of simply in terms of content, this workshop focuses on the *doing* of human rights work specifically the considerations, limitations and possibilities in terms of:

- Conceptualization of academic and practical projects
- Formal ethics review board
- Funding
- Pedagogy/teaching
- Data collection
- Working with interpreters/gatekeepers

- Knowledge dissemination

By “human rights work” we are referring to human rights research, practice (i.e.: law and advocacy) as well as social services/provisions. All of us involved in this workshop teach courses related to human rights in a variety Canadian universities and are also engaged in practical, artistic and advocacy work. We come from a variety of disciplines (anthropology, criminology, international relations, communications/sociology and social work) and embrace our transdisciplinarity. This, plus our, praxis-based reality affects our approach to ethics and methods of human rights work.

### **Presenter information:**

Neil Bilotta is a Ph.D. candidate in Social Work at McGill University. He holds Masters Degrees in Social Work (Smith College School for Social Work, USA, 2011) and Public Health (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School for Public Health, 2014). During his MSW, Neil spent eight months in post-conflict northern Uganda deconstructing and exploring the realities of cross-cultural social work in a post-conflict setting. Prior to commencing his PhD, Neil spent two years working as social worker with unaccompanied refugee young people, from sub-Saharan Africa, in San Jose, California.

Christina Clark-Kazak is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, and President of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration. She has previously served as Editor-in-chief of *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, and President of the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies. Prior to joining the University of Ottawa, she worked for York University (2009-2017), Saint Paul University (2007-2008) and the Canadian government (1999-2007). Her research focuses on age discrimination in migration and development policy, young people's political participation, and interdisciplinary methodologies in forced migration contexts.

Lara Rosenoff Gauvin has worked with individuals and communities in rural Northern Uganda since 2004 as documentarian, researcher, activist, and ally. She is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University, continuing work that explores the importance of indigenous knowledge and land rights to living through forced intra-community violence and mass displacement.

Maritza Felices Luna grew up in Peru during the internal armed conflict of the 1980s-2000 which brought about her interest in political violence and social justice. After conducting her studies in criminology and sociology at the University of Montreal (Canada), she was hired as a professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa (Canada) where she teaches and researches political violence and rethinks qualitative methodology and research ethics as a way of working towards social justice.

Shayna Plaut, Research Manager for the Global Reporting Centre, is interested in how people represent themselves in their own media, with a particular focus in peoples who do not fit neatly within the traditional notions of the nation-state. Her teaching and research engages on

the how of human rights advocacy with an interest in the roles of research and methods in human rights work. Shayna has designed and spearhead five large scale research projects spanning over 10 countries and has trained and academics and advocates in data collection and analysis. She currently teaches at the University of Winnipeg and conducts policy related research and outreach for a variety of non governmental organizations engaged in social justice work.