

bell hooks

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Born on September 25 1952, bell hooks¹ is an American author, feminist, and social activist. Her work addresses a range of themes including race, class, gender, pedagogy, art, history, sexuality, mass media and feminism. Of particular relevance is the way she critiques the interconnectivity of race, gender and capitalism, and what she describes as their ability to produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and domination. However, she doesn't stop there. Her work inspires the transformation of this oppression and domination into engaging practices and pedagogies that bring the possibilities of hope, love and freedom. In other words, she is an engaging author who calls you to action!

Many of hooks' ideas can provide useful pathways for CIAN delegates to follow when reflecting on the creative processes and pedagogies at play in intercultural arts practices. Whether it be thinking about the ways in which our work can create sites of hope and radical possibilities (hooks, 1994), or the ways in which we can build a sense of life-sustaining and mind-expanding "community" in the partnerships we develop (hooks, 2003). The list of insights that come from her work could go on for pages, but when thinking about the politics, practices, theories and methods we engage in when doing and documenting intercultural arts, her work on a love ethic might strike a chord (hooks, 2003).



"To live our lives based on the principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous. Learning how to face our fears is one way we embrace love. Those of us who have already chosen to embrace a love ethic, allowing it to govern and inform how we think and act, knowing that when we let our light shine, we draw to us and are drawn to other bearers of light. We are not alone" (hooks, 2000, p. 101).

hooks' work shows us how intercultural relationships can potentially free us from the fears perpetuated by cultural domination. "Fear," writes bell hooks, "is the primary force upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat" (hooks, 2000, p. 93). Intercultural relationships can allow us to move against these fears – against such cultural alienation and separation. Following hooks, this movement towards cultural connection rather than separation is guided by an ethic of *love*. As hooks explains: "The choice to love is a choice to connect – to find ourselves in the other" (p. 93). In the intercultural relationships we foster, this can involve embracing the dimensions of love in all that we do – "care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge" (p. 94). When we do this, an ethic of love can act as a compass for how we engage and connect with people, places, arts practices and pedagogies. It becomes much more difficult for fear and cultural domination to exist when a love ethic prevails (p. 98).

References

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¹ Gloria Jean Watkins is known by her pen name Bell Hooks (stylized bell hooks).