

Tribhuvan University Journal
Vol. 39, No. 2: 218-232, December 2024
Research Directorate, Tribhuvan University (TU),
Kathmandu, Nepal
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/tuj.v39i2.73006>



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UNLEARNING LOVE: DEFYING COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE IN BELL HOOKS'S *ALL ABOUT LOVE: NEW VISIONS*

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Received date: Sept. 01, 2024 – Accepted date: Nov. 01, 2024

ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical reading of bell hooks's *All About Love: New Visions*. It explores the concept of Love, which she defines in various aspects of people's life, going beyond the established idea or definition of love. She also challenges conventional ideas of Love and the ways people practice it, giving or taking it. The traditional understanding of Love reinforces norms that restrict how people feel, express, or define Love. This research investigates the colonial roots that influence contemporary definitions of Love and specifically examines how colonial ideologies have shaped relationships, gender roles, and social expectations. Employing a qualitative approach, this study draws on theoretical frameworks, including Maldonado-Torres' concept of 'On the Coloniality of Being,' Tuck and Yang's notion of "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," and Aurora Levins Morales' concept of "the Historian as Curandera" to analyze colonial knowledge embedded within modern interpretations of Love. Hence, the research shows that redefining the concept of Love actively confronts colonial ideologies by promoting a decolonized and restorative view of Love, which encourages more inclusive and genuine relationships. In conclusion, this study suggests that unlearning colonial interpretations of Love paves the way for more inclusive and holistic approaches to Love and societal norms.

Keywords: colonial discourse, decoding, decoloniality, love, and resistance

INTRODUCTION

This research brings the concept of decolonizing the mind in the sense that we have to unlearn the knowledge that the system of patriarchy and colonization fed us. By recognizing Love as a site of resistance, we can employ its transformative potential to promote social justice and challenge oppressive systems. It further explores how colonialism shaped one's understanding of Love, perpetuating inequalities and power imbalances. By challenging these colonial concepts, people empower marginalized communities to assert their voices and experiences, unlearning the knowledge fed to us by patriarchal and colonial systems. Jennifer_C. Nash (2011) argues, "Love, of course, is not wholly unproblematic political terrain: it can be deployed to shore up heteronormativity, to re-energize dominant narratives of romance, and to advance claims to power" (p.19). Nash highlights the politics of colonial discourse on Love which is used to maintain status quo of colonial power. Overall, decolonial practices offer alternative frameworks for understanding Love, highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings and the value of nurturing relationships by being empathetic and giving equal treatment to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, and perceptions. De-coloniality is best described as a gesture that de-normalizes the normative, problematizes default positions, debunks the a-perspectival, and destabilizes the structure as a program to rehabilitate epistemic formations that continue to be repressed under coloniality (Galliens, 2020, p. 28). It challenges the societal definitions of "normal" or "standard," particularly regarding the beliefs, values, and practices that were established during the colonial era and oppress people from having alternative perspectives and way of lives.

Love is spiritual in the sense that it goes beyond physicality and is free from any biases. bell hooks (2000) defines Love "as a choice rather than a passive experience, and that we do not have to Love, but we choose to love" (p.5). Things people do in Love are and should be valued more than they just laying back and receiving/giving things as they are doing passively. She critiques the Western concept of Love and highlights its role in activism, which is the potential for collective Love to dismantle the existing system of oppression (p. 20). Nadra Nittle (2023) argues, "...she [hooks] began to be more transparent about the place of spirituality in her life to comfort her students struggling with hopelessness, loneliness, and lovelessness" (p.11). In the context of hooks' philosophy, Love transcends mere emotion; it serves as a political and liberating force that fosters a

comprehensive understanding of humanity. By incorporating spirituality into her pedagogy, she exemplifies vulnerability to inspire people to embrace love as a means of transformation as well.

Colonial assumption upholds the belief that Love exists when one individual or group dominates the other. M. J. Monahan (2011) explains hooks politics as,

hooks develops in a direction that places central emphasis on the idea that love is a practice or activity, and not simply a feeling that we experience passively. This emphasis runs directly counter to most mainstream conceptions of love and has crucial implications for her account of love's role in liberation. (p. 105)

Love and care are often devalued or dismissed as signs of weakness in patriarchal societies, particularly when expressed by those perceived as inferior or subordinate. This devaluation contributes to a culture that prioritizes aggression and control over nurturing and empathy (p. 115). To dismantle this power relation, decolonial practices of "Love," such as mutual respect, responsibilities, and accountability, should be practiced rather than relying on the uneven giving and taking of forms of Love.

Since colonialism has a long history of erasing and subjugating indigenous forms of knowledge, including those related to Love and relationships, former colonial subjects challenge colonial concepts of Love and other "norms" to reclaim authentic, culturally rooted expressions that have been marginalized, suppressed, or overlooked. They use Nelson Maldonado Torres' (2007) concept of "On the coloniality of being," in which he defines coloniality as an order of things that put people of color under the murderous and rapist sight of a vigilant ego . . . radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war (p. 248). Colonialism, where powerful nations control and use others for their benefit, has created a mindset that treats people of color poorly and sees them as less than human. It points out that this view leads to violence and oppression against these communities. The phrase "murderous and rapist sight of a vigilant ego" highlights the violent and dominating behavior that stems from colonial thinking. This unveils the colonial concept of bianarism in which they try to put people of color in the category of uncivilized, irrational, and less human. Colonizers created this discourse of bianarism and forced people of color to internalize it.

Meanwhile, "radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war" indicates that such unjust and harmful actions have become accepted and typical in society, almost like a normal part of how things operate. Torres calls us to question these assumptions, these definitions of being careful about the things we know, because all of our data has been gathered under a set of assumptions, and those assumptions may be false. Torres talks about colonialism as a system that subjects people of color to violence and oppression, viewing them as objects to be controlled and exploited. He describes it as a way of thinking that normalizes unethical behavior, particularly in the context of war. Torres also emphasizes the importance of decolonization, which is the focus of my research, which involves challenging and dismantling colonial structures and perspectives.

Torres also emphasizes the decolonial turn, in which hooks builds on the arguments to show what it means to decolonize and what it does to our knowledge process. She further argues that "Patriarchy has taught him that his masculinity has to be proved by the willingness to conquer fear through aggression; that it would be womanly to ask questions before taking action" (Maldonado, 2007, p.195). Patriarchy has been instilling these perceptions in people that there are certain attributes that men and women are supposed to follow. A man is supposed to be rational, decisive, and independent. In contrast, a woman is supposed to be dependent upon a man, be it her father, her brother, or her husband, and she is indecisive and emotional. If she tries to take a stand herself, making major life decisions, the society says she is cocky. On the other hand, if a man shows his emotions, if he is very loving, if he helps his wife in the kitchen if he gets emotional, he is called feminine, which is against conventional social standards. (what is the research gap that you wish to fill up?)

ANALYSIS: DECODING COLONIAL CONCEPT OF LOVE

hooks dismantles colonial attributes by introducing Love as a mutual effort between both genders. She advocates that, "To heal the gender war rooted in struggles for power, women and men choose to make mutuality the basis of their bond, ensuring that each person's growth matters and is nurtured" (164). To break away from the binary oppositions, men and women should give and take equal Love, trust, responsibilities, and efforts. Women, unlike in the past, should not hold their opinions back to suffer in silence; rather, they should speak up for themselves and to make men understand what they want to communication better, understand better, help

each other build a healthy relationship. Supporting the concept of Love by hooks, Dixon and McPhail (2003) propose several aspects of radical Love:

First, we have to love our uniqueness in order to love others. Second, fostering individual self-love suggests that we love ourselves in the service of others; therefore, the process of self-love is not one of individualized self-actualization. This involves embracing dialogue and engagement. (p. 127)

One can find traces of non-Western elements, such as spirituality, as a counter to the Western beliefs that dominantly rely on science. hooks talks about spirituality, and her belief in other natural entities itself is decolonial (Dixon and McPhail, 80), as Western philosophy of life depends on rationalization. Still, non-Western philosophy depends upon God and other natural entities that cannot be justified by Western rationality. Referencing her thoughts about spirituality from Jack Kornfield, hooks emphasizes, "... in pursuing a spiritual life, it is crucial to keep it simple and heart-centered, advising that when starting on this spiritual journey, we should focus closely on what is immediately before us, ensuring that our spiritual path aligns closely with what we deeply care about" (p. 80). This is significant in a decolonial context as it encourages individuals to reclaim and center their own "local," "individual" values and beliefs, which may have been overshadowed or suppressed by dominant cultural or colonial norms.

Also, in the context of decoloniality, which focuses on native cultural elements like spirituality, God, and communality, this approach can be seen as a form of resistance against external definitions and impositions of identity or worth, promoting a return to what is genuinely significant and cherished by the individual. Lawrence Chua, (1994) after interviewing bell hooks, writes that in "many public presentations, hooks has hit raw nerves, delving into the possibilities of culture as a place of resistance to white supremacy, capitalism" (p. 25). Essentially, it is about uncovering the layers of colonial influence on our perceptions and practices to reconnect with what is truly meaningful to us. This reconnection can be a powerful act of Love and a step towards personal and communal liberation. The idea of going beyond personal liberation and well-being in Love also connects to Florence (2022) who claims, "hooks speaks to our cultural enclaves and reminds us of the greater call to our common humanity, beyond family, beyond community and country to the entire planet" (p. 359). This suggests

that hooks envisions Love as something radical, something uncommon, that connects people regardless of their race, class, or nation, uniting them on the basis of humanity who are committed to care for each other, who respect and love each other.

Beyond the problematic concepts and practices of gender, there are some even terrible "norms" embedded in race. In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks also emphasizes the role of media in (mis)representing people of color (195). She argues:

Viewers are encouraged to feel sympathy for the white male homeowner who made a mistake. The fact that this mistake led to the violent death of an innocent young man does not register; the narrative is worded in a manner that encourages viewers to identify with the one who made a mistake by doing what we are led to feel we might all do to protect our property at all costs from any sense of perceived threat. (p. 195)

This idea clearly depicts that the focus is on making the white male homeowner sympathetic, even though his mistake caused the death of an innocent young man. The narrative does not pay enough attention to the victim's death. Instead, it tries to make viewers identify with the homeowner by implying that anyone might react the same way to protect their property, even if it means harming the "othered" group, i.e., the people of color in this context. This interpretation highlights how racism might play a role in framing a situation, as it prioritizes the perspective and actions of the white homeowner over the harm done to the innocent victim, who might belong to a marginalized group.

Kristi Dotson, (2013) suggests that by combining Love, belief, and hard work, one can challenge the unfair treatment of Black women in philosophy. She argues, "making love and belief inseparable from hard work," I will use this notion to turn down the norm of false objectivity that the West, especially the U.S., appeals to in turning black women as insignificant in the professional philosophy" (p.41). Showing care and belief in their abilities while working hard to recognize their important role in the field. It is about acknowledging and valuing their contributions with kindness and dedication rather than sticking to biased views of objectivity. It also critiques how Western societies, particularly the United States, often dismiss and undervalue the contributions of Black women in the field of professional philosophy. The U.S. claims to be fair but usually overlooks or

undervalues the work and ideas of Black women, which happens because they promote a standard of 'false objectivity,' which means they pretend to be neutral but actually are not.

Decolonial approaches have come into play to destabilize the colonial system. Tuck and Yang in "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" primarily define the concept of decolonization and what it wants. It explores the internal as well as external structure of the categorization of land and people, focusing more on the material effects of land and borders on its people. While human and civil rights-based approaches to justice focus primarily on legal and institutional reforms, decolonization offers a broader and more holistic framework that challenges the underlying structures of power and oppression. Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a metaphor" aligns with the concept of Love and social justice by recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals (p. 36).

Tuck and Yang discuss the significant and ongoing impact of settler colonialism, particularly emphasizing the importance of land in colonial contexts. It explains that in places where settlers have established control, the main issue is the possession and management of land, along with other natural resources like water, air, and minerals (p. 4). "Deconolization is Not a Metaphor" also highlights that the consequences of settlers using indigenous lands are twofold. Firstly, settlers benefit economically by using this land for housing and generating income. Secondly, and more profoundly, the occupation of land disrupts the indigenous people's fundamental connections to their environment. This disruption is not just about losing physical space. Still, it is responsible for deeply affecting the indigenous people's entire way of understanding the world, including their cultural, spiritual, and intellectual traditions. The harm caused by this disruption continues every day as long as the occupation persists, emphasizing that the problem is ongoing, not just historical.

As Tuck and Yang mention about colonial history that do not consider the specific issue of settler colonialism will not fully address how to decolonize areas where settlers have taken over property. To give justice to the indigenous or oppressed people, one needs first to understand who settlers are or what it means to be a settler and what they do. Tuck and Yang define settlers as being diverse beyond immigrants; they are not limited to white or European descent; they can also be people of color (p. 7).

Settlers, directly and indirectly, benefit from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous people, and even the scholars in the field justify their inactions towards the issue by situating themselves in the position of "unrelatedness."

The settlers often displace or marginalize the Indigenous population, and this process is characterized by the imposition of a new social, economic, and political order (p. 3). By positioning themselves as a different group of people and lacking the embodied experience of being misused and mistreated, they repress their feelings of guilt and responsibility as global scholars who should be addressing these issues without biases (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Adding to the incommensurability of decolonialism as a possible "solution" to compensate for the losses to some extent, Tuck and Yang assert:

Breaking the settler colonial triad, in direct terms, means repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolishing slavery in its contemporary forms, and dismantling of the imperial metropole. Decolonization "here" is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere. However, decolonial struggles here/there are not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved - particularly not for settlers. Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable. (p. 31)

The process of decolonization is distinct from other anti-colonial movements because it specifically addresses the unique conditions and impacts of settler colonialism. It does not necessarily provide a clean or comfortable resolution for everyone involved, particularly for settlers who have benefited from the status quo. Instead, decolonization requires a deep commitment to justice and equity, recognizing that healing and reparations for Indigenous people stem from a place of Love and profound respect for their rights and well-being, which involves a radical rethinking and reshaping of relationships, power structures, and ownership of land, guided by principles of care and respect for those who have been marginalized.

In indigenous or cultural communities, it is important to talk about past hurts and struggles, like Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2013) does in her book *Islands of Decolonial Love*. When people share their painful stories, it helps them feel less alone and creates empathy between different groups. It is also helpful for society as a whole to understand where these hurts come from so one can avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

By facing these tough truths together, one can work towards a fairer and more peaceful world. As Simpson shares as:

Your mom turns around from the driver's seat and yells, 'roll up in a ball if the car tips over,' which at this point had not occurred to any of you in the back seat, but your mom soldiers on trying to pull her knees around the steering wheel and towards her chest to demonstrate. (p.18)

It is a moment where she is trying to keep everyone safe and preparing the kids to tackle the unforeseen if she is not around. This idea centers around the concept of the unconventional Love of a mother toward her children. Along with that, Simpson discusses colonialism's non-lasting impact on people, mentioning ancestral connections (p. 67), talking about dead people making connections, and embracing destruction to heal from its impacts. She conveys what colonialism does and how we can overcome its effects.

North American people use the word "Zhaganashi" to refer to non-Natives, often specifically white people, which, in this context, carrying the weight of the zhaganashi's house represents the labor, suffering, and cultural displacement imposed by colonial settlers, which continues to affect Indigenous people. Simpson talks about embracing destruction as a means to heal, she writes, "enjoy your visit. but like my elder says / please don't stay too long" (pp. 69-70). This quote reflects a tension between hospitality and the necessity of boundaries. It suggests that while there may be a temporary space for interaction (the "visit"), the prolonged presence of non-Indigenous people (or colonial influences) is harmful or unwelcome. Love has the potential to change people and society. By actively practicing Love in all its forms (self-love, familial love, romantic love, and love for humanity), individuals can contribute to a more compassionate and just world (p.138).

Mako Fitts synthesizes hooks's ideas: "hooks advocates for self-love that is rooted "at the intersection of self and community," whereby one accepts the uniqueness of their personhood as part of the building of community" (p.127). How does it connect with the new concept of Love, then? Is it enough to sympathize with the marginalized, colonized people? What would "Love" look like in this case? Well, connecting these decolonial ideas to Love underscores a holistic approach to addressing the wrongs of colonialism. It is about caring deeply enough to make substantial changes

in how Indigenous peoples are treated and seen in society, promoting healing, respect, and justice as foundational expressions of Love. It requires understanding Love in its broader, more collective, and transformative sense.

From a decolonial perspective, Love entails advocating for and participating in the restoration of rights, land, and autonomy to Indigenous communities. This means supporting their sovereignty and self-determination, which Simpson says are the key aspects of the Indigenous healing process. This form of Love recognizes the need for space where Indigenous peoples can govern themselves and heal on their terms. It understands that true support sometimes means stepping back to allow others the autonomy to lead their recovery and define their futures by challenging the ongoing effects of colonialism not out of pity or obligation but from a genuine desire to see Indigenous peoples flourish on their terms. Aurora Levins Morales in "The Historian as Curandera" serves the purpose of demolishing the conventional understanding of history that was Eurocentric and attempts to establish the contemporary approach to revisit history in order to right the wrongs done in the past. The article highlights the importance of understanding history to make our actions more effective. It explains how knowing about the past helps us see how current events are connected to earlier ones and how they affect people today. History is not just about facts; it is about the stories we tell to understand why things are the way they are now and to imagine what the future could be. "The Historian As Curandera" discusses how Morales sees the role of an activist historian, someone who tells these stories honestly and without bias to help create positive change in the world.

Morales (2007) argues, "Storytelling is not neutral. Curandera historians make this explicit, openly naming our partisanship, our intent to influence how people think" (1). One need to be careful in doing historical research about oppressed communities to see that the active ingredients get back to the people whose ancestors generated our work. These statements emphasize the importance of ensuring that the benefits of historical research about oppressed communities are returned to those communities, suggesting that the knowledge and insights gained from studying the history of marginalized groups should be shared and utilized in ways like writing that benefit the descendants of oppressed communities (Morales, 2007, p.8). It is our responsibility to acknowledge and honor the contributions

of the ancestors of oppressed communities, ensuring that their voices and experiences are respected and uplifted in the research process, as well as for the Love, understanding, and inclusivity to bloom at large.

Aurora Levins Morales in "The Historian as Curandera," purposes the connection between Love and decolonialism which is nuanced and profound, intertwined with the responsibilities of the historian in the process of healing historical wounds. Morales emphasizes that the historian's role includes a loving acknowledgment of the sources of their knowledge — specifically, the lives and experiences of oppressed communities (p. 8). This form of Love is respectful; it honors the ancestors and their contributions, ensuring their stories are told with dignity. This is crucial in a decolonial context, as it challenges and seeks to dismantle the Eurocentric narratives that have historically marginalized these voices. The idea that historical research should benefit the communities from which it is drawn reflects a commitment to restorative justice. The expression of love through action is not just about feeling empathy for oppressed communities but also about actively working to return the value derived from their histories back to them. Morales argues for a decolonial practice of history that repairs part of the damage done by centuries of exploitation and misrepresentation.

By advocating for the historian as a "curandera" — a healer — Morales suggests that historians must not remain neutral. Instead, they should Love actively, engaging with history in a way that supports and promotes the well-being of those historically harmed by colonial narratives. This approach involves a clear bias towards justice and truth, actively choosing to side with those marginalized by conventional historical narratives (p. 6). It is about making sure that the descendants of these communities are not only aware of their historical narratives but are also empowered by them. Empowerment of this kind can foster a greater sense of identity, belonging, Love, and strength, contributing to the healing and decolonization process.

Morales views history not only as a recount of past events but as a tool to reshape the future. This vision for the future is grounded in Love and aspiration to create a world where all communities are recognized for their contributions, where their stories are integral to the global narrative, and where they have the power to define their destinies. This transformative aspect of Love in historical work is central to decolonialism, as it seeks not just to correct past injustices but to pave the way for a more just and equitable

world (Morales, 2007). It is important to handle these conversations with care, humility, and an openness to learning from Indigenous perspectives without changing or misinterpreting them. We can begin to improve the situation by engaging in dialogue with Indigenous communities, supporting their rights, and raising awareness about past injustices.

In "Understanding History from Decolonial/ Women's Perspective," Patricia A. Schechter (2017) also contends, "The decolonial offers an important perspective for historians of women as it can name resistance to coloniality in female-centered practices unevenly connected to or even in avoidance of a state, where arguably most women in history have functioned and live" (649). Schetor highlights how women were excluded in history; they were avoided and treated as inferior. So, decoloniality is not only about political north and south, but it also concerns social dynamics such as gender and race in particular.

Love, according to the traditional understanding, used to be limited to the ability to show affection, feelings, and efforts to the people we are related to or with the bond closer to us. Unlike this, the decolonial perspective on Love suggests that it goes beyond that, creating a greater community of respect, solidarity, understanding, and care, and questioning the "standards" set by society, by the Western world, as Laura E. Perez in her article argues,

As part of a decolonial project, these studies (feminism, ethnic) contribute as well to the transformation of our understanding of what gets to count as knowledge and the appreciation of its value to humanity outside the prejudices of the Eurocentrism particularly those of its gender-privileged ruling classes, are most worthy of study (Perez, 2010, p.142).

Perez emphasizes on studying transformative knowledge that should be beyond Eurocentric tendency and must serve the interest of wider population.

Likewise, Brown (1997) states that "Changing how we see images' is for hooks, 'clearly one way to change the world'" (p. 122), suggesting that if people want to change the world, we have to start from ourselves. Instead of expecting the initiation from other people or blaming people for being insensitive or indifferent, we have to change our perception and try

to understand their behavior from a different viewpoint, dismantling our mindsets as well.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, decoloniality involves questioning and dismantling systems and structures of power that have been established through colonialism and that continue to perpetuate inequalities. By valuing feminist and ethnic studies, academia can begin to undo the Eurocentric and patriarchal norms that prioritize certain kinds of knowledge over others. This shift helps to decolonize knowledge by rejecting the idea that Western methods and perspectives are universally superior. Instead, it recognizes the worth and validity of diverse intellectual traditions and insights, treating them as crucial to understanding the human experience comprehensively, the ultimate goal of which is to embrace an understanding of Love that nurtures all individuals and respects their intrinsic value, creating a society that transcends the historical confines of colonialism in families, institutions, and nations at large. In this framework, Love transcends simple individual or romantic connections, fostering broad relational practices rooted in respect, care, and social justice.

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