


ARTICLE

# Finding Homeplace within Indigenous Literatures: Honoring the Genealogical Legacies of bell hooks and Lee Maracle

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## Abstract

This article maps out a pedagogical juncture of bell hooks's feminist theory of homeplace (hooks 2007) and Indigenous maternal pedagogies as liberatory praxis through a journey with Indigenous women's literatures. I position this work as a response to the call to transform feminist theorizing through Indigenous philosophies as articulated in a recent *Hypatia* special issue (Bardwell-Jones and McLaren 2020, 2). The article documents hooks's theory of homeplace as a space of resistance and renewal and shares insights into Indigenous experiences of homeplace within historical and contemporary contexts of genocide, and the ongoing racialized and sexualized violence on Turtle Island. I discuss finding homeplace in Indigenous literatures by sharing a genealogy of Indigenous women's literatures as theorizing tools for engaging social change within academic spaces. To bring this work full circle, I offer Indigenous perspectives of homeplace, and the lessons gleaned from Indigenous women's literatures, as intentional work toward imagining Indigenous futurities. Indeed, connecting this work with liberatory pedagogical praxis imagines a site to establish homeplace in academic settings and empower students to engage in the kind of work that fosters and calls for safer homes, schools, and communities.

I'm home again.  
My pathway here is strewn with sharp stones  
singing confusing songs of yearning.  
My bones,  
my personal stones,  
sing back songs of yearning—Tsuniquid's  
yearning.  
I watch myself highstep my way to this language  
This pen  
This paper  
this place. (Maracle 2013, 18)

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Home is for us the origin, the shell of nurturance, our first fire and the harbinger of our relationship to the world. (Maracle and Laronde 2000, i)

In the preface to *My Home as I Remember*, Sto:lo author Lee Maracle offers a glimpse into the complexities and memories of home for Indigenous women who have been forcibly removed from their communities. As she explained, for Indigenous women, it is these very communities that breathe life into us and shape our futures. Many “began their lives in communities from which they are removed but far from alienated” (Maracle and Laronde 2000, 1). The complexities associated with the memories and disruptions of home are shaped by colonial interferences and embedded throughout the stories found within Indigenous women’s literatures. This is evident in this excerpt from Maria Campbell’s memoir *Halfbreed*:

Going home after so long a time, I thought that I might find again the happiness and beauty I had known as a child. But as I walked down the rough dirt road, poked through the broken old buildings and thought back over the years, I realized that I could never find that here. Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. (Campbell 1973/2019, 2)

As Campbell’s words express, searching for home extends the physical structure or geographical site and brings one to spiritual and intellectual spaces; I contend that these spaces can be found within the connections among Indigenous women’s writings that provide spiritual and intellectual homeplaces. Complexities of home—expressed in Indigenous literatures—are particularly significant as a lens through which to enact homeplace as liberatory praxis. Foregrounded in the work of critical race and feminist scholar bell hooks, who defined homeplace as a space of resistance and renewal within the context of racism and sexism (hooks 2007), I theorize homeplace as a critical juncture of Indigenous maternal pedagogies by extending Indigenous literatures as liberatory praxis for antiracist education. Moreover, I situate this work within the call to transform feminist theorizing through Indigenous philosophies as articulated in a recent *Hypatia* special issue (Bardwell-Jones and McLaren 2020, 2).

My entry point into this collective and ongoing conversation stems from my positionality as a Haudenosaunee woman and mother-scholar who teaches courses on Indigenous literatures through the lens of homeplace as liberatory praxis. My work is situated on Turtle Island, the land colonially known as North America, and it is from this place that I theorize about home and engage with Indigenous literatures that both yearn for and reimagine the home as articulated in Lee Maracle’s “I’m Home Again” (in Maracle 2013). My intention in this article is to write about Indigenous understandings of homeplace and the associated lessons within Indigenous literatures. I write about the implications and intricacies of teaching through the lens of homeplace elsewhere (Brant 2017). The lessons offered here provide a glimpse into the value of Indigenous women’s writings for liberatory praxis to “introduce new ideological frameworks, imagine new directions, and navigate toward better and more vibrant Indigenous futurities within feminist philosophy” (Bardwell-Jones and McLaren 2020, 15). Indigenous women’s literatures tell us about home—the memories, the beauty, the disruption, and the despair—and illuminate the spiritual strength and resilience of homeplace that hooks theorizes. Homeplace transcends the physical structures of what we call home and exists within the intellectual and spiritual realms

of community activism, literature, and liberatory spaces. Indeed, homeplace exists on land, and on defined territory, but it also exists in our psyches, our hearts, and our spirits. Eloquently written into our stories, homeplace serves as an intellectual site for liberatory practices. The critical junctures of the domain of home are presented in powerful narratives, memoirs, and scholarly material included in Black and Indigenous literatures; indeed, both communities share a deeply rooted history of genocide, settler colonialism, and racism across Turtle Island.

hooks describes homeplace as a safe place for renewal and self-recovery within the context of racism and sexism, and an outside world characterized by white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. She begins her powerful piece “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance”, by recalling her own memories of homeplace:

When I was a young girl the journey across town to my grandmother’s house was one of the most intriguing experiences. . . . I remember this journey not just because of the stories I would hear. It was a movement away from the segregated blackness of our community into a poor white neighborhood. I remember the fear, being scared . . . because we would have to pass that terrifying whiteness—those white faces on the porches staring us down with hate. . . . Oh! that feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming when we finally reached the edges of her yard. . . . Such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming, this sweetness and the bitterness of that journey, that constant reminder of white power and control. (hooks 2007, 266)

hooks’s work is particularly timely during the heightened call for police accountability in response to police brutality that is currently under the microscope following the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the United States, and of Chantel Moore and Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Canada. The senseless deaths of Floyd, Taylor, Moore, Korchinski-Paquet, and countless others at the hands of police are not isolated incidents; their deaths inspired a powerful international movement that draws attention to ongoing issues of police brutality and state violence, along with calls for defunding and police abolition. These calls are not new but gained more support and international attention throughout 2020. This movement walks alongside calls from Indigenous communities in response to the ongoing travesty of racialized and sexualized violence. Collectively, these calls ask us to reimagine community safety (Maynard 2017) and arguably reawaken us to a time when, as Maracle shared in *Daughters are Forever*, “Turtle Island women had no reason to fear other humans” (Maracle 2002, 14). Indeed, violence against Black and Indigenous peoples is rooted in a troubling history of colonization and manifests in contemporary acts of white supremacy, racism, and sexism. It is steady and ongoing, built into our institutions and social structures, and represented in the establishments, buildings, and parks that surround the neighborhoods we call home. The hegemonic conception of home is implicated in this violence as highlighted by Maracle’s description of Turtle Island women’s homes in *Daughters are Forever*. Maracle intricately weaves a story that expresses the reverberating and intergenerational effects of colonial violence on the home, making it clear why it is necessary to reconceptualize home as homeplace.

hooks describes homeplace as a safe place of refuge—behind closed doors—amid a harsh world outside the home characterized by white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. Homeplace is also described as a place for envisioning a future of liberation. Although hooks described homeplace as both a physical and transitional site, it can also be theorized as an intellectual and spiritual site within Black and Indigenous

literatures. hooks's work is not only timeless but also particularly timely within the current political climate and ongoing efforts to confront and dismantle anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. I extend hooks's work on finding homeplace within Black communities to Indigenous literatures that also theorize and trouble the colonial interferences and genocidal attacks on the home. These narratives write not only of the trauma inflicted on the home by violent histories and contemporary realities, but also of the creative acts of resistance that map out revolutionary ways of being by reimagining home and community, as evident in Beth Brant's "A Long Story" and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Islands of Decolonial Love* (in Brant 1988; Simpson 2015). Moreover, both works extend ideas for revolutionary mothering as articulated in Simpson's earlier work that positions birth as decolonized pathway through the revitalization of Indigenous midwifery and Alexis Pauline Gumbs's work that presents a feminist genealogy of radical mothering (Simpson 2006; Gumbs 2016).

### Mapping Out a Liberatory Praxis of Homeplace and Indigenous Literatures

To map out a pedagogical juncture of bell hooks's feminist theory of homeplace and Indigenous maternal pedagogies, I begin by describing hooks's theory of homeplace as a space of resistance and renewal. I then share an overview of Indigenous experiences of homeplace within the context of the ongoing history of genocide on Turtle Island and persistent colonial violence. This is followed by sharing the "grandmother's place" as an example of community organizing that fosters intellectual spaces of resistance and renewal. I then discuss finding homeplace in Indigenous literatures by sharing a genealogy of Indigenous women's literature for feminist praxis. This extends into a conversation about Indigenous literatures as theorizing tools for engaging social change, and I offer examples of how I engage homeplace as liberatory praxis for teaching Indigenous women's literatures. To bring this work full circle, I offer this Indigenous perspective of homeplace as intentional work toward imagining Indigenous futurities. My commitment to enacting liberatory pedagogical praxis rests in fostering a homeplace in academic settings by extending the lessons gleaned from Indigenous literatures. Indeed, theorizing about and enacting homeplace provides the basis for liberatory practice in the classroom, specifically through critical engagement with Indigenous literatures. This involves bringing hooks's work on homeplace into conversation with Indigenous literatures—specifically those that share and interrogate ideas of home (Campbell 1973/2019; Brant 1997; Maracle and Laronde 2000)—to highlight Indigenous experiences of homeplace and showcase the ways in which Indigenous women have also created safe spaces for renewal and self-recovery amid racialized, sexualized and gender-based violence.

Aligning with my praxis of Indigenous maternal pedagogies, this article is presented in a style that moves away from traditional academic writing aesthetics (Graveline 1998). Following Indigenous literary aesthetics and Indigenous pedagogical approaches to academic writing (Justice 2018) is common within Indigenous women's literatures as we journey and mark our "home" in academia by charting new, albeit familiar, pathways for theorizing violence and oppression. This work, then, follows a tradition of presenting narrative and creative artifacts to imagine change and call for safer "homes" behind closed doors, and within the communities that have become our homes. I thread snapshots describing memories of homeplace throughout this article to give a deeper sense of the sacredness of the homeplace and glimpses into the meaning of home that exists in the hearts of those who long for home, who are removed from home,

and who are seeking to reconcile the notion of home. Finally, connecting this work with liberatory pedagogical praxis fosters a site to establish homeplace and empower students to engage in the kind of work that recreates the home and advocates for safer homes, schools, and communities.

### Homeplace: A Space of Resistance, Renewal, and Self-recovery

hooks presents a theory of homeplace by drawing on the experiences of Black women within the context of racial oppression and sexist domination. Homeplace is defined as a safe place for renewal and self-recovery, but it is primarily described as a site of resistance:

Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world. (hooks 2007, 267)

As hooks expressed, love and respect for self could not be learned in the culture of white supremacy, thus homeplace took place behind closed doors where there was an opportunity for nurturing and a place “where we can heal our wounds and become whole” (277). Indeed, this notion of homeplace has deep historical roots connected to a troubling past of slavery, segregation, and colonial violence.

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. (267)

Thus, homeplace existed as more than a safe place of refuge; homeplace was also about envisioning a future of liberation.

hooks shares her work on homeplace by presenting snapshots of particular moments by looking into the histories that have characterized the construction of a safe gathering space for healing, wellness, love, and nurturing. As an example, hooks recalls the stories told of Black women who nurtured and cared for white families, longing to have energy for their own families. By drawing on some of these stories, hooks reminds us that for some families, the act of creating homeplace became a connection between mother and child to the extent to which mothers were in the home. In some cases, the homeplace connection was only possible in the wee hours of the night when Black women were home for short periods of rest before returning to their roles as homemakers in the homes of white women. It was during these few hours of rest that they could hold their children as they slept. Establishing homeplace was not easy within the context of slavery and the years that followed. It is arguably challenging for many Black families today given the social, political, and economic climates that continue to benefit a society that hooks refers to as a “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 1984, 51).

Within the lens of these historical and contemporary realities, hooks’s work takes on deeper meaning as she writes about the longing for the energy to establish homeplace and the efforts involved in reserving, or finding within, that energy to offer their own children:

I want to remember these Black women today. The act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring their struggle, their effort to keep something for their own. I want us to respect and understand that this effort has been and continues to be a radically subversive and political gesture. For those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity, our humanness that we have nothing left, no “homeplace” where we can recover ourselves. . . . I want us to honor them, not because they suffer but because they continue to struggle in the midst of suffering, because they continue to resist. I want to speak about the importance of homeplace in the midst of oppression and domination, of homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle. (hooks 2007, 267–68)

Historically, the mobilizing and gathering of individuals who resist oppression and domination and call for freedom face ongoing attacks. It was not only strategic, then, but also necessary that homeplace took place behind closed doors and has become threaded into revolutionary mothering practices (Mogadime 2000; Simpson 2006; Gumbs 2016; Brant 2019).

To bring hooks’s work full circle, it is important to consider ongoing attacks on homeplace since it serves to threaten the status quo. Indeed, many who now call these lands home are beneficiaries of the sexist and racist domination of families and communities displaced by settler colonialism. Thus, as hooks articulated:

It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance. (hooks 2007, 271)

As hooks articulated, “domestic space has been a crucial site for organizing, for forming political solidarity” (271). Homeplace is thus more than a physical space but also an intellectual and spiritual site for holistic well-being (Brant 2017). As a site for radical mothering, homeplace is also intergenerational (Gumbs 2016). Thus, this work extends Haudenosaunee teachings of looking forward to the next seven generations and creating healthy homes and communities for the coming faces.

### **An Indigenous Perspective of Homeplace**

Indigenous women have also had to create safe spaces of resistance intended to nurture and bring wholeness to their families and communities in response to ongoing genocidal attacks. The Indian Act of Canada, a policy that inspired racial apartheid in South Africa (Talaga 2017), advanced strict policies of assimilation that controlled the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples, and interfered with family and social structures. This involved forced relocation to reserve lands, removal of children who were placed in residential schools and subject to multiple forms of abuse, and ongoing interference through family and children’s services. The Indian Act and its associated legislated policies continue to interfere and separate Indigenous families today (Blackstock 2003). From health care to education and human services, this act still governs the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada who are still legally defined as “Indians.” Although recent amendments to the act have addressed sex-based discrimination, the act still exists as a racist piece of legislation and arguably a contemporary form of segregation.

It is important to consider that when children were removed from communities and placed in residential schools, foster care, and detention facilities, opportunities to create physical homeplaces were not always available. Indigenous women had to find other ways of providing sources for renewal and self-recovery. Cultural practices were legally prohibited as a way to control and assimilate, but they were carried in the hearts of mothers and grandmothers and creatively passed on to younger generations for the survival of Indigenous nations. It is important to understand homeplace as an intentional orientation for resisting violence and calling for liberation rather than a physical structure. hooks reminds us that homeplace is a transitional site; I extend this into spiritual and intellectual realms. Attending to the transitional nature of homeplace, cultural traditions were practiced secretly and in some cases out in the bush and on the land. Indigenous women, aunties, and grandmothers held onto traditions such as “coming of age” and “rites of passage” ceremonies despite the harsh colonial realities that continually attacked Indigenous families (Brant 2014). Because of the fierce and radical love of Indigenous grandmothers, aunties, and mothers, our traditions have survived years of genocidal and colonial attacks. These women persisted as cultural carriers to ensure that our most sacred traditions could be revived today. This is not a seamless process, but I raise the idea here as an intergenerational survivor of the aforementioned colonial attacks on my Indigenous relations. The continued work toward marking out pathways of resistance and renewal aligns with this vision as a journey toward homeplace.

The silent place where Indigenous maternal traditions were held and nurtured has also served as a site of resistance. The continuity of these traditions demonstrates the deep love the women expressed for future generations. Today many young Indigenous families are unconnected to these traditions; they are trying to mark their own journeys back home. This work also honors these Indigenous women, aunties, and grandmothers who went to great lengths to plant seeds of renewal and make space for remembrance. Indeed, as hooks wrote, “The act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring their struggle, their effort to keep something for their own” (hooks 2007, 267).

As Indigenous communities continue to face racialized and sexualized violence, especially at the hands of authorities, resistance fuels solidarity work and mobilizing efforts. Ongoing genocidal attacks have been largely on women—through practices that remove their right to choose mothering by physically birthing or raising up younger generations of Indigenous peoples. In Canada, we continue to see these attacks, with recent cases of coerced sterilization, birth evacuation, and the troubling practice of birth alerts.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Indigenous home and family unit is still under attack by genocidal practices. When we consider these attacks on Indigenous women, the meaning of the Cheyenne proverb “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground” becomes strikingly clear (Lavell-Harvard and Corbiere Lavell 2006). Yet we are still here; our survival is rooted in the creative acts of resistance of Indigenous mothers, aunties, and grandmothers who physically, politically, and spiritually continue to birth the nation. These creative acts of survival and resistance give life to the community (Anderson 2007) despite forced sterilization, ongoing racism and sexism, and continual interference in the homes and lives of Indigenous families. Thus, Indigenous women enact intellectual and spiritual homeplaces through creative acts of resistance and renewal expressed in our writing. As Beth Brant articulated, “these fruits feed our communities. These flowers give us survival tools” (Brant 1994, 9). Indeed, Indigenous women’s literature “does become the Good Medicine that is necessary to our continuation into wholeness” (13).

### Finding Homeplace at “The Grandmother’s Place”

The efforts to find homeplace are ongoing in Indigenous community work and writings. This is evident in the lifelong work of Maria Campbell, author of *Halfbreed*, a beautifully written and powerful memoir that carries with it the gift of homeplace. *Halfbreed* was first published in 1973 and is well known as one of the first Indigenous-authored books that inspired an Indigenous literary movement. The connections of Campbell’s lifelong work to a spiritual and physical homeplace are eloquently reflected in *Halfbreed*. Campbell’s literary legacy itself offers homeplace for generations of Indigenous folx whose experiences are reflected in the memoir. Campbell has also established a homeplace that community auntie and mentor Kim Anderson describes as “the grandmother’s place”; a physical and spiritual gathering place for resistance and renewal (Anderson 2019). The intellectual and community work imagined at “the grandmother’s place” extend Campbell’s legacy: her writing, her role as a muse, a leader, and a community grandmother. Indeed, this work will continue to have reverberating effects on generations to come.

To offer a vivid picture of “the grandmother’s place,” I turn to Anderson’s words:

You can still see the tracks of the Red River carts on the hills as they snake down toward the river, familiar signs for those of us who have spent days sitting on the bank of the other side. This is where Maria sends people out to fast, and today we feel the power of those tireless tracks as we have just completed our week-long fasting camp. We are exhilarated and exhausted from all the labour involved in ceremony and are ready to settle into the storytelling that follows. Maria is finally sitting down at the kitchen table next to the big brown teapot that never goes empty. (Anderson 2019, viii)

In this excerpt from the preface to Campbell’s updated edition of *Halfbreed*, Anderson reflects on “the grandmother’s place,” describing it as a place where Maria holds ceremony and prompts a younger generation of Indigenous women to carry on the many responsibilities of Maria’s lifelong work into the future. The second edition of *Halfbreed* comes more than forty-five years after the first. Since then, Maria has touched the lives of many, and her work has indeed had a rippling effect, transferring well-being throughout Indigenous families and communities.

Campbell wrote *Halfbreed* to share what it’s like to be defined as a halfbreed woman in Canada, “the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams” (Campbell 1973/2019, 2). Maria’s story marks the resilience of Indigenous womanhood, of overcoming racism, sexism, and colonial violence, and the power of reconnecting to cultural identity. Powerful lessons associated with the launch of the second edition of *Halfbreed* expose the sexual violence Campbell experienced at the hands of RCMP officers. This scene was removed from the first edition without Campbell’s consent and directly highlights the ongoing issues of complicity and silence around racialized and sexualized violence against Indigenous women at the hands of police (Goodyear 2018). Moreover, Campbell’s lifelong work is rooted in spirit, thus offering a spiritual homeplace in her writing that transcends the physical site of the grandmother’s place. Both are sites that offer a gathering space through mind, body, and spirit to resist the racist and sexist domination of Indigenous bodies and to advance healing and wellness as we come to understand how to be active agents of social change and advocate against racialized and sexualized violence and other genocidal attacks on



Indigenous families. Like homeplace, “the grandmother’s place” advances the kind of community work that characterizes a labor of love that merges into academic spaces (Anderson 2020).

### Finding Homeplace within Indigenous Literatures

I pick up the volumes of books cradling the text of this language.  
I feel the sandpapering this language once was and re-watch as my body  
smoothes the rough edges as the words journey through me. (Maracle 2013, 19)

When I read Maracle’s words, I am reminded of two powerful anthologies: *A Gathering of Spirit* (Brant 1988), and *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America* (Harjo and Bird 1998). Indeed, as Brant articulated, “writing done with a community consciousness” (Brant 1988, 19) has led to an Indigenous literary movement that extends Indigenous philosophies with contemporary realities to transform feminist theorizing. The idea for *A Gathering of Spirit* was born in 1982 in the living room of Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich. During a visit to their Massachusetts home, Beth Brant asked the editors of *Sinister Wisdom* if they had ever considered an anthology dedicated to the writings of Indigenous women. In a similar fashion, the plans for *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* were solidified by a gathering of women at Lee Maracle’s kitchen table in 1993. Harjo and Bird “wished the collection to be as solid as a kitchen table and imagined creating that kind of space within the pages of a book, a place where we could speak across the world intimately to each other” (Harjo and Bird 1998, 21). The anthology was imagined as a collective voice of Indigenous women. As Harjo and Bird explained: “To understand the direction of a society one must look toward the women who are birthing and intimately raising the next generations. We wanted to see how well we had survived the onslaught of destruction” (21). These anthologies published nearly a decade apart both serve as seminal documents of Indigenous women’s writings and share the commonalities and differences among Indigenous nations, their homes, and communities. As Brant articulated:

Because of our long history of oral tradition, and our short history of literacy (in the European time frame) the [number] of books and [amount of] written material by Native people is relatively small. Yet, to us, these are precious treasures carefully nurtured by our communities. And the number of Native women who are writing and publishing is growing. Like all growing things, there is a need and desire to ensure the flowering of this growth. (Brant 1994, 9)

My own liberatory pedagogical praxis is grounded in Indigenous literary traditions and continues to be informed by the work of those who contributed to the aforementioned anthologies: critical race and critical feminist scholars, particularly those who bring emancipatory literatures into their classrooms (Martin 2009; Nixon 2014; Hardwick 2015; Hanson 2017). As Brant eloquently expressed, these literatures give us survival tools, and in so doing, move us to community organizing and action; thus they are important tools for application in educational settings as well. The following words by Angelique Nixon, who specializes in Caribbean and African diaspora literatures, speaks to the power of literature that can be applied within educational settings to “move” learners to action and inspire empowered participation:

My feminist praxis and pedagogy is loaded with anger transformed into language and action as I use and remix the brilliance of Audre Lorde. I make my space—my classroom, my courses, my community activism and grassroots work, and my poetry—sites of resistance. I dance in the magic and fury of Audre Lorde, laughing with her and walking with spirit. Giving thanks. I am here. I have survived. Blessed with the guidance of ancestors. Creating, Teaching, Writing, Speaking, Doing. (Nixon 2014, para. 12)

Nixon describes the value of literature as an educational tool that inspires students to think about processes of oppression and the intersections of oppression that are deeply embedded throughout social and political structures. Thus, her application of literature in the classroom promotes critical dialogue that can move students spiritually and invoke transformative emotional learning. Lorde's poetry moved her to find her voice. In the following excerpt she describes a deep connection with Lorde's poem "A Woman Speaks" (in Lorde 1997):

The words in this poem have been my guiding force for many years as Audre Lorde's poetry helped me to make sense of my life in profound ways. Her collection *The Black Unicorn* remains my torch and inspiration to be and become more. Yes, my voice matters, my survival matters, and I have a right to define and redefine myself. Audre Lorde has been my spirit/poet/intellectual guide and through studying her work, I have carved a place for myself in spaces never meant for me. (Nixon 2014, para. 1)

The sentiment evident in this statement resonates with my experience when I first came across the work of the late Patricia Monture-Angus, whose *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* was my first taste of Indigenous women's writing (Monture-Angus 1995). Although her book is a collection of her own academic essays, it opened my eyes to the world of Indigenous women's literature where I have in many ways found myself, my intellectual homeplace, and inspiration for my liberatory pedagogical praxis of Indigenous maternal pedagogy. This praxis is further documented in my dissertation, which showcases the reverberating effects of Indigenous literatures on Indigenous students who also found homeplace in Indigenous literatures. Alicia Elliot has also recently expressed this experience of finding herself in the literature in her debut memoir, *A Mind Spread out on the Ground*, where she shares her experience of reading Simpson's work:

I came across *Island of Decolonial Love*. Everything changed. . . . Here—in these pages—was what I'd been searching for my whole life. Finally, after twenty-five years, I felt there was space for me to breathe inside the claustrophobic world of Canadian Literature. Reading Simpson's stories ultimately gave me permission to write my own. (Elliot 2019, 25–26)

Nixon's and Elliot's words also resonate with those of Sabrina, one of the participants in my doctoral research. Sabrina was in my Indigenous Literatures course where I shared Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Feminism and Sociology* (Maracle 1996). Sabrina described this as a powerful moment that ignited a flame within her. After connecting with Maracle's work, she immediately purchased her own copy and has expressed a similar experience of finding herself, her voice, and the strength to

use her voice in the call for community well-being. Sabrina described this as a starting point that fueled her into community work, advocacy, and activism. Two other participants in my doctoral study, Jess and Sherry, articulated this sentiment of finding their voices. Moreover, their own work toward empowered participation (Yosso 2005) is exemplified in their application of classroom lessons to community organizing and publishing. As published authors in an anthology about racialized and sexualized violence against Indigenous women and girls, their contributions are helping other Indigenous women become empowered participants. Fostering homeplace in academic settings by extending Indigenous literatures as liberatory praxis “ensure[s] the flowering of this growth” (Brant 1994, 9). Like Elliot, all three of these women articulated the feeling of finding permission to write their own stories after delving into Indigenous women’s writings and used their experiences to foster this growth in other Indigenous women.

Another connection between Indigenous, Caribbean, and African diaspora literatures that is relevant to the act of finding homeplace is that of ancestral or spiritual guidance. For example, Nixon refers to Lorde as an ancestral guide and connects with her writing in a similar way to how I—and many other Indigenous women—have connected to the work of Tekahionwake Emily Pauline Johnson (Johnson 1892; 1997; see also Nixon 2014) and the many others whose writings now fill our bookshelves. As Beth Brant expressed, these writers have become our muses, and we carry their words with us as we engage on our own liberatory paths:

Pauline Johnson’s physical body died in 1913, but her spirit still communicates to us who are Native women writers. She walked the path clearing the brush for us to follow. And the road gets wider and clearer each time a Native woman picks up her pen and puts her mark on paper. (Brant 1994, 7-8)

In her own writings, Brant described Pauline Johnson as a “spiritual grandmother” and ancestral guide for Indigenous women writers. Brant explained this further by noting the process of the spirits calling her to write:

This desire to peel back the husk of memory, the hungry need to find the food that is waiting inside. There are times when I feel as if *I* am the seed, being watered and sunned by the keys I press to make words. The words are the shoot, wandering across the screen, stopping then starting, coming from my mouth, my fingers. I speak aloud as I write — the words being borne from mouth to hand. Somewhere in that activity is the nucleus of writing, of truth. I no longer feel that the words come directly from me. There are spirits at work who move my lips, my fingers. Who call me, who take over my clumsy attempts to put one word after the other to make some kind of sense. An automatic writing of sorts. I used to fight the spirits. Now I accept them. (112)

This process also helps articulate the responsibilities of honoring the depths of Indigenous literatures. The writing process Brant defined is not a solitary process, rather it is a collective one. Like homeplace, writing, then, becomes a site for fostering community consciousness that is both fed by ancestral memories and spirits to feed new generations through resistance, renewal, and self-recovery (hooks 2007).

I am moved by the connection between the work of scholars who merge Caribbean and African diasporic literature into their feminist praxis in a way similar to how I merge Indigenous women’s literature into my feminist praxis. Indeed, these

connections mark the meeting spaces of liberatory work and showcase how the spiritual and intellectual elements of homeplace come to fruition to plant seeds of renewal within our homes, gathering spaces, and communities. The defining features of homeplace as “a site of resistance” and a safe space for “renewal and self-recovery” (hooks 2007, 272) live within these literary works that bring life into our spirits and awaken our critical consciousness. Bringing these writings into praxis through a particular pedagogical process (Hanson 2017) is intentionally political; for our daily lives and our spiritual, cultural, and physical existence. As Anh Hua eloquently expressed, writing is thus the intellectual weapon that promotes the possibilities for social change:

[L]anguage and the narrative world are used as a political tool to generate agency for the subjugated. . . . Black diaspora women writers deploy storytelling, critical theorizing, and remembrance practices to comprehend, resist, transform, and heal from patriarchy, racism, colonization, and the history of slavery, to explore uncharted journeys. Writing, language, and the spoken words are creative, political, and intellectual weapons that Black diaspora women use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness, and voicelessness. I argue that far from silent, Black diaspora women have spoken in tongue, drum, and chant to create a reality that has yet to exist—a world of egalitarian possibilities. (Hua 2013, 30)

This sentiment echoes the work of Indigenous women authors such as Laguna Sioux writer Paula Gunn Allen, who said, “I came to understand that the pen is mightier than the law books, and that the image is where the action is begotten” (Allen 1998, 151). This is evident in the work of Brant, Maracle, and Monture-Angus along with the many others who fill my reference list and whose work I feature in this article (Brant 1988; 1994; Monture-Angus 1995; Maracle 1996; Brant 1997). Indigenous literatures are creating new forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) that resist ongoing genocidal attacks and extend powerful visions of holistic well-being that redefine homeplace on Turtle Island.

### Theorizing Tools for Articulating Social Change

Beth Brant’s work positions Indigenous women’s literature as a place of “self-recovery” where we can imagine together our liberation and transformation (Brant 1988; 1994; 1997). This is evident in her very process of putting together *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*. Intending to ensure that the voices of Indigenous women who were most silenced would be heard, Brant requested contributions from everywhere she “thought there was a story to tell” (Brant 1988, 9). She recruited entries from Indigenous women from all over Turtle Island by sending requests for submissions to Indigenous newspapers, journals, and associations, to prisons across Canada and the United States, to Indigenous women’s health organizations, and to the antipsychiatry network. As Brant wrote, the intention of this far-reaching collection was to gather voices from those who could attend to complicated realities of a wide Indigenous readership. For Brant, who described herself as an uneducated, economically poor, feminist lesbian, the act of gathering spirit for the collection was both personal and political, and indeed a labor of love. Because generations of Indigenous homes, families, and kinship relations have been disrupted for generations, a vision of homeplace must include gathering the many and varied voices of Indigenous

women. If we are to truly imagine liberation, we must delve into the spaces of those who have been most displaced and center their lived experiences in our work to bring wholeness back to our communities.

Beth Brant's description of Indigenous women's writing as "recovery writing" against repeated attempts of "cultural annihilation" at the hands of the "State" (Brant 1994, 18) highlights Indigenous women's literature as a "survival tool" that serves as a weapon against colonial violence. Indigenous women's literature, then, becomes a source of homeplace itself as a powerful source of protection and spiritual medicine against the collective threat of violence. Bringing these stories into the classroom as part of an intentional liberatory praxis offers a theorizing space for articulating change.

By reading the memoirs noted throughout this article as curricular material, students whose family realities are reflected in the stories may find comforting familiarity as they come to terms with their own experiences in relation to others'. As students collectively make sense of their worlds, Indigenous women's literature fosters a pedagogical homeplace as it deepens a critical consciousness for students to understand the root of social inequities and begin to realize that education is a vehicle for social change. A developing critical consciousness involves naming the forces of oppression that have attempted "cultural annihilation" (Brant 1994, 18). Janice Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe's work helps students to name and identify the ideological and colonial forces of systemic racism (Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe [1995] 2016), and the memoirs help students connect these systems to the daily lived experiences of social injustices. Tara Yosso expressed how naming these forces can lead to empowered participation:

When the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can often find their voice. Those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make arguments to defend themselves. (Yosso 2005, 75)

Enacting homeplace as a liberatory praxis provides a space for students to gather medicines that empower their participation while protecting them from the need to hide their identities. I have established a safe educational homeplace where Indigenous students can follow a path toward community well-being, and non-Indigenous students can also participate by walking along this path of liberation. Homeplace is a space for all learners to express their whole selves and work to advance sociopolitical justice within the communities we call home.

### Teaching Indigenous Literatures through the Lens of Homeplace

My own praxis of Indigenous maternal pedagogy fosters a pedagogical homeplace through the use of Indigenous literatures so learners can understand the colonial interferences in generations of Indigenous homes (Brant 2017). By centering Indigenous voices through a variety of literatures and making intentional connections with contemporary realities, students are exposed to particular knowledges that will indeed fill the gaps that have arguably been left out of the predominantly colonial education of many students. As Sheila Cote-Meek articulated in *Colonized Classrooms: Racism, Trauma and Resistance in Post-Secondary Education*, if we "justify silence as a preferred

ethical and pedagogical response,” we continue to be complicit in the colonial violence that manifests in classrooms (Cote-Meek 2014, 34). This work then contributes to the scholarship on antiracist and decolonial praxis across education. The historical, socio-political, and contemporary contexts of ongoing injustices as they relate to the home and community call attention to the need for homeplace as a safe space within academic settings and communities. Such a safe space is required as classrooms themselves can be violent spaces, and educators must employ particular pedagogical strategies to move students through “difficult knowledge.” This vision of homeplace as liberatory praxis imagines and fosters spaces in classrooms for curriculum and pedagogy to attend to the difficult work our current political moment calls for. I position homeplace as a liberatory praxis that aligns with the work of educational scholars who have theorized about resistance to antiracism education (Schick and St. Denis 2005; Cote-Meek 2014), and offer this as one pedagogical approach to teaching antiracism and social justice (Brant 2017).

By working intentionally with Indigenous women’s literatures, students learn not only about the disruption and the despair, but also about the collective memories that highlight the beauty and illuminate the spiritual strength of homeplace. The power in these stories in relation to homeplace is in their shared connections that reflect *memories of home, longing for home, disruptions of home, and visions for recreating the home*. Collectively, bringing the synergies of these works to those of hooks offers an Indigenous theory of homeplace that prompts us to reimagine home and community. Teaching homeplace through Indigenous literature is fitting because the literature itself can become a homeplace, as noted above. Beyond this, approaching the literature through the lens of homeplace presents a safe curricular and mourning space (Tarc 2011) to understand historical and contemporary injustices. For some, this becomes a process of feeling safe within ourselves, and this can involve ceremony or other elements that bring self-renewal into the classroom. Ultimately, teaching Indigenous literatures through a shared vision of homeplace can offer theorizing tools to articulate social change.

In my courses I begin teaching homeplace as a theoretical framework by sharing hooks’s work, walking students through Indigenous realities of homeplace, and prompting students to reflect on their own understandings of homeplace. Students are asked to consider external factors that have shaped their experiences of home, and connections are made from the personal to the communal. One of the first books students read is *Iskwewak Kah’Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws* (Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe [1995] 2016). This text documents Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe’s research into the stereotypical images of Indigenous women within mainstream literature. Through an analysis of white-Euro-Canadian-Christian-patriarchy institutions, Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe documents how literature, dominant ideologies, and policies have targeted Indigenous women and justified acts of genocide, racism, and sexism. Her work is situated alongside hooks’s notion of white capitalist supremacist patriarchy to consider state disruptions of and interference with home. Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe connects her work to the ongoing acts of racism and sexism that have been ignored until very recently when Canada launched the national public inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This book sets a pedagogical platform to move into memoirs such as Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Helen Knott’s *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience* (Campbell 1973/2019; Knott 2019). Both memoirs powerfully name the forces of oppression and the cycles of despair as the authors unapologetically speak

their truths and invite readers to bear witness to the ongoing racism and sexism in our own backyards.

I then encourage students to consider Indigenous experience of homeplace with attention to these themes: memories of home, longing for home, disruptions of home, and visions for recreating the home. Below, I offer a brief sense of what each of these themes might entail. For a fuller discussion, see Brant 2017.

### *Memories of Home*

A prominent theme of Indigenous literature is the sharing of memories of home, often a childhood home as shared in Campbell's memoir: "Going home after so long a time, I thought that I might find again the happiness and beauty I had known as a child" (Campbell 1973/2019, 2). For many, these memories of the childhood home are complicated by the history of genocidal attacks on Indigenous homes. Thus, my intention is not to romanticize the idea of the childhood home but rather to share the complicated memories associated with home. For as Morningstar Mercredi recounts: "The violence, abandonment and insanity of complete instability took its toll. I can place some things in order of my age, but for the most part my mind is a jigsaw puzzle of pictures, pitfalls or traumatic traps" (Mercredi 2006, 42). Indigenous literatures also document accounts of becoming reconnected and sharing stories of "homecoming" (Brant 1997). Often this notion of "homecoming" is expressed as a spiritual and cultural place and involves connecting to land, ceremony, and finding Indigenous community away from home as documented in Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Mercredi's *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit*. As an example, Mercredi describes this process of homecoming in her connections with land "in the bush and near the lake, I felt embraced by the familiarity of the land" (Mercredi 2006, 57). The spiritual and cultural elements of homecoming are also evident in this excerpt from the First Edition (1995) of *Iskwewak Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*:

A couple of winters ago, on a journey that took me halfway around the world, the vibrant, tenacious spirits of two wonderful old Koochums (Grandmothers) came to me in a dream and directed me back to my home communities and, most importantly, my sense of self. Throughout most of my life, I've felt those very distinctly maternal energies although consciously I paid little attention to them. This time, I responded to those energies, whose spiritual directives prompted my journey home. When at last my feet touched the earth from which I came, I felt the spirits of Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak (all my relations) welcome me home. (Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe 1995, 17)

### *Longing for home*

Longing for home is another theme expressed in Indigenous literatures and poetry that is intertwined with memories of home. For example, in the preface to *My Home as I Remember*, Maracle wrote:

Some of the remembrances of home find us still searching, still struggling to affirm our origins, to reclaim those original processes which signify our cultural selves. For some, our memory sharpens images of home. For others the loneliness, the emptiness of home is a tangible thing. For all of us, the memory of home is more than physical, geographical, emotional or even spiritual. (Maracle and Laronde 2000, i)

This sentiment of longing for home is eloquently woven into Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe's *Iskwewak Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak* and Campbell's *Halfbreed*. Campbell, who recounts years of displacement, racism, violence, and abuse, eventually found a sense of home in community; particularly in the Indigenous movement in the 1960s. "The years of searching, loneliness, and pain are over for me. . . I have brothers and sisters, all over the country" (Campbell 1973/2019, 189). Longing for home must also be understood in the colonial interferences that uprooted and displaced generations of Indigenous children. As Campbell shares, finding home becomes intertwined with the renewed connections found in community.

### *Disruptions of Home*

Disruptions of home is a core theme expressed in different ways to name the multiple interferences into Indigenous families and communities. Campbell's *Halfbreed*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (Culleton 1983), and Mercredi's *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit* present the many ways "home" has been disrupted for generations of Indigenous women and families through legislated policies, residential schools, and interventions from social services. Not only do these stories dig up memories of home and express a childhood yearning to return home, they also mark the commonality of forced relocation for Indigenous families. These disruptions are also articulated in ways that help us to understand how Indigenous worldviews, cultural values, and family relations have been attacked by heteropatriarchal models.

Generational disruptions of home are documented in Beth Brant's "A Long Story" (in Brant 1988). This powerful story takes the reader through a journey of two different time periods in which children are physically removed from the home as a result of residential schools and children's aid policies. In the second time period, the removal of a daughter from a lesbian couple showcases how Western practices of the time pushed heteronormative values onto Indigenous families. These stories offer us visions to recreate the home by returning to Indigenous worldviews that are both matriarchal and not divided by gender binaries.

### *Visions for Recreating the Home*

Visions for recreating the home call on us to consider, imagine, and redefine Indigenous homeplaces. In *A Mind Spread out on the Ground*, Elliot wrote about her experiences in Tkaronto, otherwise known as Toronto, Ontario:

No trace of Indigenous history is etched into these sidewalks, illuminated by these streetlights, cemented between these bricks—not when I lived here years ago, and not today. That past is still packed up, forgotten. Descendants of this land's original caretakers are still here, though. We're laughing with our friends outside the movie theatre, or trying to get by selling dreamcatchers at Bloor and Spadina, or dancing in our regalia at the tiny but perfect powwow at Dufferin Grove Park, or reading on the subway on the way to school. We're here, in diaspora on our own lands. (Elliot 2019, 50)

Although her excerpt describes Indigenous displacement on their own lands, it also speaks to the ways in which Indigenous peoples reassert their presence and imagine liberatory Indigenous futures by recreating our homeplaces. Today we are seeing striking examples of this as a result of mobilization efforts and activism from



Black and Indigenous communities. Mobilization efforts extend classroom conversations to symposiums and teach-ins, to marches and demonstrations. Activism and creative acts of resistance include the name changes of buildings and streets, the removal across the country of statues that mark colonization, and the redefining of the markers of place that literally rebirth and renew our spirits as we reassert our roles as caretakers of the land and nurturers of our families and communities. Indigenous literatures are both rooted in and give life to these powerful assertions of homeplace.

### Theorizing Homeplace to Imagine Indigenous Futurities

This article documents homeplace as an essential element of my own liberatory pedagogical praxis that centers Indigenous worldviews, antiracist curricula, and cultural identities to promote agency, activism, and advocacy. Within the teaching and learning context, I extend hooks's work as a lens through which to teach Indigenous literatures and position the classroom as a site of resistance, renewal, and self-recovery within the context of ongoing white supremacy, racism, and colonial and epistemic violence. I offer this article on an Indigenous perspective of homeplace in honor of bell hooks's work, as an expression of solidarity with the many communities facing ongoing injustices, and as a commitment to enacting liberatory praxis that moves students to action. In the current sociopolitical climate, this work is critical in the teacher education courses I teach and offers an ethical space to articulate Black and Indigenous solidarity work that holds our institutions accountable. It is within academia that the tools for societal change can not only be imagined and articulated but actualized through a rippling effect that transcends classroom spaces outward into our social institutions, homes, and communities.

I present Indigenous women's literature as a powerful force that lends protection, perhaps spiritual medicines, against violence as it empowers women to return to their cultural identities. Indigenous women are still here! Our hearts are not on the ground! And our writings continue to plant seeds of rebirth and renewal. In this way, if we are to consider Anderson's work on life stages (Anderson 2011), Indigenous literature itself can be the starting point for a reader's own rite of passage to understanding an Indigenous perspective of homeplace. Thus, these are spaces that nurture Indigenous cultural identities and offer spiritual medicines as weapons against colonial violence (Brant 1994; Hua 2013). It is no coincidence that two of the authors, Maria Campbell and Morningstar Mercredi, whose memoirs I feature in my Indigenous literature courses were also keynote speakers at the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Conference held in Regina, Saskatchewan (Anderson, Kubik, and Hampton 2008). Indeed, the realities that Indigenous women write about connect Indigenous women across Turtle Island and prompt empowered dialogue that engages women in drawing from and forming renewed relations that bring us to imagine safer homes, families, and communities.

As I wrote in the introduction, homeplace exists beyond the physical structures and geographical spaces we call home and is found within the intellectual and spiritual realms of community activism, emancipatory literature, and liberatory spaces. Indeed, it is a place that exists on land and in territory, but it also exists in our psyches, in our hearts, and in our spirits. Theorizing homeplace to imagine Indigenous futurities, then, extends Indigenous women's literatures as the "fruits [that] feed our communities . . . [and the] flowers [that] give us survival tools" (Brant 1994, 9) to imagine,

dream, articulate, and create safer homes and communities. To bring this article full circle, I return to the words of Lee Maracle:

I am home again.  
Squamish voices are everywhere here.  
I am so totally old and so completely new here.  
I pull fragments from old file cabinets,  
Splinters of memory,  
Bind them together to re-shape my world.  
I weave this imagined dream world onto old  
Squamish blankets,  
history-hole-punched and worn—  
to re-craft today,  
to re-member future in this new language  
And I sing I am home again. (Maracle 2013, 20)

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to dedicate this article to the memory of bell hooks and Lee Maracle who both journeyed to the spirit world after this paper was written. Their work has deeply influenced my scholarly orientations and ways of being in the world. I hope this paper will inspire others to continue extending the powerful legacies of hooks and Maracle. As literary matriarchs they continue to offer ancestral guidance as we rekindle ancient wisdoms, map out contemporary pathways for liberation, and re-imagine community safety.

## Note

1 Birth alerts or hospital alerts have become the subject of a recent policy discussion in Canada following the release of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report titled *Reclaiming Power and Place* in June 2019. The final report called for an immediate end to the practice of targeting and apprehending infants from Indigenous mothers right after they give birth. For more information, see:

<https://indiginews.com/investigation/birth-alerts>

<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/family-life/birth-alerts-canada-discriminatory-need-to-stop/>

<https://theconversation.com/british-columbias-ban-on-birth-alerts-a-guiding-light-on-the-road-to-reconciliation-123896>

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