Black Schoolgirls in Space

STORIES OF BLACK GIRLHOODS GATHERED ON EDUCATIONAL TERRAIN

— Edited by —

ESTHER O. OHITO AND LUCÍA MOCK MUÑOZ DE LUNA

TRANSNATIONAL GIRLHOODS

— Volume 7 —

Black Schoolgirls in Space

Transnational Girlhoods

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Girlhood Studies has emerged over the last decade as a strong area of interdisciplinary research and activism, encompassing studies of feminism, women and gender, and childhood and youth and extending into such areas as sociology, anthropology, development studies, children's literature, and cultural studies. As the first book series to focus specifically on this exciting field, *Transnational Girlhoods* will help to advance the research and activism agenda by publishing full-length monographs and edited collections that reflect a robust interdisciplinary and global perspective. International in scope, the series will draw on a vibrant network of girlhood scholars already active across North America, Europe, Russia, Oceania, and Africa, while forging connections with new activist and scholarly communities.

BLACK SCHOOLGIRLS IN SPACE
Stories of Black Girlhoods
Gathered on Educational Terrain

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berghahn
NEW YORK • OXFORD
www.berghahnbooks.com

A portrait of three girlfriends—Karen, Lilian, and Florence, Esther Ohito's mother—standing shoulder to shoulder circa 1969 on the grounds of Mawego Girls Secondary School, an all-girls boarding school founded by the Catholic Church in the Nyanza Province of Western Kenya. Author photo.

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[*]This chapter is not available in the open access edition due to rights restrictions. It is accessible in the print and retail e-book editions, spanning pages 27–49.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are a terribly constraining form, given that there are innumerable sources of personal and professional inspiration and support that underlie the process of a book of this nature coming to life. The text below is incomplete, but we are thankful to everyone listed and all others who have helped us bring this volume to fruition.

We are grateful to our most intimate relations, for everything.

We are grateful to the authors of the chapters included in this volume for trusting us and our emergent, iterative method for editorial curation.

We are grateful to the series editors, Claudia Mitchell and Ann Smith, for helping us sculpt a vision for the book, allowing us the freedom to pivot and adjust as we felt necessary, and giving this project a welcoming home.

We are grateful to our colleagues and thought partners, particularly Sherry L. Deckman and August G. Smith of the Black Girlhoods in Education Research Collective, as well as for generous organizational and institutional support from the American Educational Research Association, Rutgers University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

We are grateful to our supremely skilled copyeditor, Susanne Viscarra, whose attention to detail is unparalleled.

We are especially grateful to you, reader, for your curiosity about and interest in the stories contained in this volume.

Ever with love,
Esther and Lucía

Storying Black Girlhoods on Educational Terrain

Esther O. Ohito with Lucía Mock Muñoz de Luna

flesh memory (flesh mem′ e re) 1. a text, a language, a mythology, a truth, a reality, an invented as well as literal translation of everything that we've ever experienced or known, whether we know it directly or through some type of genetic memory, osmosis, or environment. 2. the body's truths and realities. 3. the multiplicity of languages and realities that the flesh holds. 4. the language activated in the body's memory.

—Akilah Oliver, *The* She Said *Dialogues: Flesh Memory*

There were no books about me, I didn't exist in all the literature I had read . . . this person, this female, this black did not exist center-self.

—Toni Morrison, quoted in Jill Matus, *Toni Morrison*

We must situate race, not only in a historical context, but also in a historical-geographical context. We must expose the skeletons of places and plant the flesh of black experiences on those bones as well.

—Bobby M. Wilson, "Critically Understanding Race-Connected Practices: A Reading of W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright"

Black Schoolgirl Becoming

My Christian name is Esther (see Figure 0.1). Where I am from, I answer to other names, including Nyar Ugenya, Nyandere, and Nyamalanga. Within the walls of my childhood home, I was taught that girls are to be seen and silent. But in the privacy of my shared bedroom, gossiping with my older sister into the morning's wee hours and plotting revenge against our woes, I learned that I am naturally a storyteller and story gatherer (Kearney 2007). It was a lesson affirmed at school, where I blossomed by listening intently and purposefully to the worlds around me.

I begin with a story of how I became who I am at my core. By story, "I mean an event in which I try to hold some of the complex shimmer-

Figure 0.1. Esther O. Ohito (Nyar Ugenya), approximately age ten. Author photo.

ing strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them with you. When I say 'story,' I mean 'theory'" (Powell 2012: 384).

A long time ago, when I was eight years old, I found myself sitting beside my father during parent–teacher conferences at St. Nicholas Primary School off Ngong Road, not far from Books & Things, my favorite shop in Nairobi's Adams Arcade. My teacher, a heavy-tongued Kikuyu woman named Mrs. Mwangi, said to my father, "Your daughter's a writer." My father, a journalist with *The Standard* newspaper (if my memory does not fail me), broke into a wide, toothy smile. I stared at him adoringly. I nodded to signal understanding. I was lying. I knew neither what Mrs. Mwangi meant nor what being a writer had to do with the bliss sweeping over me. I just felt happy that I had made my father happy.

I remember being interpellated as a storyteller—a writer—by the kind of elementary and secondary school reading and writing teacher I aspired to be when I began my teaching career in Chicago, Illinois. Many years later and thousands of miles away from Kenya, I realized my why. I became a teacher because I realized the power of being visible to Mrs. Mwangi even before I was visible to myself as a self, which was long before I found language with which to articulate my knowledge. But even then, I had intuition. Even my preteen self intuitively felt called to collect, care for, and (re)tell stories. Care is cultivated by love. Even at age eight, I knew, within, that I loved words as much as I loved my father, and what greater love could there be?

I remember being a child who was most joyful, free, when playing with words. I read the dictionary for fun, which was much more fun than it sounds, sounding words out and committing meanings to memory. This meant I often penned pieces with obnoxious terms. Take *pertinacious*, for example. My absurd use of vocabulary—or use of absurd vocabulary—was fueled by the fact that at that age, I was reading both young adult literature, in the vein of Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and the Sweet Valley High series, and—courtesy of my older sister—literature with what some may deem "adult themes" from writers the ilk of Danielle Steel, Sidney Sheldon, and Agatha Christie. I was being (mis)educated about whiteness as (much as) romance and mystery. Yet, I was also gearing up for battle by building an arsenal of words, toys with which to playfully imagine my way out of the misery that lurked at the corners of my world. I knew, even then, that "as a culture worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible" (Bambara, quoted in Bonetti 2012: 35). This made for some humorous moments. Once, I raised my hand in

class and asked my stern male teacher how to use the word *ejaculate* in a sentence. Guess who laughed?

A girl child's heart is always on the line, pressed against some margin, imperiled, sometimes destabilized, and other times brimming with joy accessible only from that lived perspective and posture. I have a vivid memory and imagination, the meld of which becomes an endless source of colorful vignettes I use to illustrate that I was a creative, curious, playful child. I navigated the landscape of my childhood driven by an exhausting insatiable desire to please an audience (in order to be liked and loved) that falsely projected my interiority as easily accessible. However, within my internal self, I harbored wonder about my place in the world in which I lived, others' worlds, and otherworldly worlds.

My story is that of a *girl* child born not far from the shores of Lake Victoria, known locally in Kenya as Nam Lolwe. This place—Luoland, home to the traditionally pastoralist and fishing community of Luo people, JoLuo—is where I came to know myself as a particular type of girl. This is where my knowledge of girlhood and Blackness is situated. This is my epistemological place of origin.

Mapping Black Girl Ontoepistemologies on the Educational Landscape

Katherine McKittrick (2011: 947) explained that Black geographies are "shaped by histories of colonialism, transatlantic slavery, contemporary practices of racism, and resistances to white supremacy." Black girls' and women's geographies are spun from our knowledges, desires, needs, and lived experiences, which are entangled with our negotiations of these processes of domination as they materialize *in place*. Black girl ontoepistemologies—interdependent ways of being and knowing—are also grounded in place. This is because "the earth is also skin and . . . a young girl can legitimately take possession of a street, or an entire city, albeit on different terms than we may be familiar with" (McKittrick 2006: ix). A girl's claim to place is inextricably enmeshed with the knowledges, needs, and lived experiences she embodies. Literature by Black women authors (e.g., H. A. Jacobs 1861; Webster 2020) published as early as the mid-1800s illustrates this assertion. Lucille Clifton's "what the mirror said" exemplifies such literature. It is a poem that says,

you got a geography
of your own. ([1980] 2012: 199)

Literature fosters a mindset of multiplicity and openness. The literature I encountered as a girl growing up in Kenya, books such as Grace Ogot's ([1966] 2000) *The Promised Land* and Margaret A. Ogola's (1994) *The River and the Source*, taught me to know myself as somebody from somewhere who was worth knowing: a Luo girl of the Ndere clan from Ugenya—Nyar Ugenya, both an individual and collective name literally meaning the daughter of a place called Ugenya. I knew who I was because in Luo culture and society, girls and women (learn to) belong to a people—a clan or community—affixed to a place based on our association to our father's and our husband's land (Ogola 1994). Blood and land—blood sucked by the soil of the land—are how my people lay claim to place.

In Dholuo, the language of Luos, my middle name, Oganda, means community. But as a displaced immigrant in the United States, a daughter who often felt isolated, set adrift in the Black diaspora, I could not find myself anywhere, least of all in the literature. Did I cease to exist? I wonder. Édouard Glissant noted,

> One of the most dramatic consequences of interdependence concerns the hazards of emigration. When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging. ([1997] 2010: 143)

Identity is tethered to and untethered by place. In other words, place does not just change people; people change in place. The self—and the sense of belonging to one's self—is shaped by "multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion" (McDowell 1999: 4). For a time, after immigrating to the United States, my sense of self was lost in space. The truth is, before a chance encounter with Toni Morrison's ([1970] 2000) *The Bluest Eye* as a teenager, I did not know that I could exist as myself, a *Black subject*, in the worlds found in the books most accessible to me through official school curricula, including the books that lined the shelves of the library at the public school I attended. When I finally read *The Bluest Eye*, the narrator mirrored back to me a complex self, making the textures of the self whose existence I was beginning to recognize and know anew visible to me. Thumbing through the book's pages, I was no longer simply one of those "never taken seri-

ously by anybody—all those peripheral little girls" (Morrison, quoted in Duvall 2000: 31). Using that text as a compass, I found that I was no longer a nobody to myself.

Curiosity can be formalized and fashioned into a researcher's compass (Hurston [1942] 2006). This volume presents research that takes Black girls seriously as particularly creative, curious, and desiring somebodies with particular bodies of knowledge cultivated and cultivable in the capaciousness of Black girlhood. Here, *Black*—a racial code and shorthand for Afrodiasporic subjectivities—and *girl* are fluid, sociocultural constructions with meanings that shift in place. In the United States, this dynamism is evident in the discursive practices of Black girls and women. As we spin among categories and identities, such as age and gender, we frequently acknowledge each other by saying, "Hey, girl!" To greet each other this way is to offer linguistic recognition that the other has the capacity to be and become both girl and friend (Canaan 1990; Scott 2000).

Girl, listen. *Girlhood* is a hood: an infinitely expansive universe that is home to the embodiment of galaxies, a site of knowledge generation, an ontoepistemological standpoint, and a place into which people and polarities can disappear. Girlhood is a *black* hole, a space where the complexities and contradictions of ideologies and politics, as well as (inter)personal and social relations on multiple scales, offer pathways to possibilities for liberation (Bey 2022). Indeed, what could be more educational for Black girls than a space that provides endless possibilities for genesis, again and again?

Using illustrative stories about, with, for, and on Black girls (even those who live within the self), authors included in this volume map a Black girl ontoepistemological terrain fastened to relationality (Shange 2019). On this land, creativity is queen mother to curiosity, and sibling to desire. Across the chapters in this book, Black girls are interpellated, made into not just knowers but knowers of what nobody else knows. How powerful might it be to know (you know) what no other body except your own knows? In this book, Black girls become known as keepers of epistemological secrets, creative farmers of earth fertile enough to bring forth precious knowledge.

Where My Girls @?

I remember the first time I saw a girl resembling me in a book. I was standing at the checkout desk at Roseville County Library in a suburb of

St. Paul, Minnesota. A colorful cover caught my attention from the corner of my eye. Responding to the visual stimulus, I tiptoed to the librarian's desk, magnetized by the allure of the color purple. Then, I picked up an audiocassette case (yes, I am dating myself) containing Morrison's ([1970] 2000) masterpiece, *The Bluest Eye*. Later that evening, I listened to the author reading her own words, entranced as much by the content as by the storyteller's embodied craft. Morrison created a world in which girls like me existed *and* made sense, made meaning, made knowledge, made theory.

Susmita Roye surmised that by speaking of and to girls like me, Morrison

> sheds light on a painful paradox: while they experience their girlhoods mired in physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, these girls, more often than not, are robbed of their girlhoods in a struggle for survival. The disturbed girlhoods of Toni Morrison's disrupted girls most powerfully register her angry protest against a gender system that designates a woman a secondary rank and against a social system that effortlessly overlooks what befalls a poor (black) female child. (Roye 2012: 212–13)

Whereas I disagree with the interpretation of anyone's girlhood as robbed—and, instead, invite thinking about girlhood as a spacious genre containing *different* illustrative types—I appreciate Roye's invocation of Morrison as a model for the type of critical spatial analysis of Black girlhoods that the current volume attempts and invites. Morrison, then, a foundational Black girl cartographer (Butler 2018, reprinted as Chapter 1 in this volume), becomes central to this book illustrating Black girl ontoepistemologies as processual creative praxis and emplaced, embodied geographies.

This is a timely volume, curated during the global COVID-19 pandemic and amid calamity after calamity caused by climate change and various catastrophes. It is a collection of stories about all types of knowledges, desires, needs, and experiences that Black girls find in this wild world called Black girlhood. The book's pages contain stories for Black schoolgirls and school-age girls, and those who love them; girls seeking solidarity, stimulation, and God knows what else while traversing educational spaces, endeavoring to make sense of experiences that vary in relation to where intersecting lines of social difference, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, dis/ability, immigrant status, religion, and ethnicity, fall on their bodies and along the perimeters of their lives. Authors illuminate and inquire into Black girls' geographies in response to scholarly

calls for analyses of girlhoods that account for the *structures* and *strictures* of colonialism, imperialism, and racism in tandem with other -isms, such as capitalism and neocolonialism, and patriarchy (Vanner 2019). These constraints facilitate the ongoing (re)production of inequitable urban, rural, diasporic, local, and transnational educational spaces. This book foregrounds Black girls' complex negotiations of these spaces vis-à-vis the sociospatial aspects of teaching and learning that shape Black girls' being and becoming.

By (re)positioning Black girls as agents and actors in specific educational spaces, authors make visible the emplaced and embodied plurality of Black girlhood not as a singular object of research but rather as multiple sites of inquiry wherein knowledge that challenges hegemonic, whitewashed understandings of *Black* and *girl* as subjectivities can be found. Ultimately, the book invites both a recognition and a reimagining of possibilities for a world where the many somebodies Black girls can be and become (sometimes all at once) in and through education exist freely in every place, space, and body.

Textual Tracings of Black Girlhoods

Black Girlhoods in Scholarly Literature

The womanist (Walker 1983) notion that Black girls are innately creative somebodies has appeared in several Black girlhood studies texts essential to the field (e.g., Sankofa Waters, Evans-Winters, and Love 2019; Toliver 2022b). Undergirding this notion are the womanist ethoi of care and love, as ascertainable in Ruth Nicole Brown's (2013) *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*. Brown's book details an exploration undertaken collaboratively with the community-based, performance arts–oriented youth collective Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths. Framing the project, Brown wrote,

> Black girlhood is freedom, and Black girls are free. As an organizing construct, Black girlhood makes possible the affirmation of Black girls' lives and, if necessary, their liberation. *Black girlhood as a spatial intervention is useful for making our daily lives better and therefore changing the world as we currently know it* [emphasis added]. Love guides our actions and permeates our beings. For those who do not know love, we create spaces to practice Black girlhood and sense love, to name it, claim it, and share it. What we know, what we say, our process, and what we make is of value. The space is specific enough that Black girls recognize

it as theirs. The making of the space is collective and creative; uncertainty and complexity motivate, and revolutionary action is the goal. (2013: 1)

Brown's book is considered a canonical text in Black girlhood studies, and Brown a progenitor of the field. As others have remarked,

Black girlhood studies actualized as an important, necessary, and rich field of inquiry because Ruth Nicole Brown dared to believe not only that Black girls were worthy of our intellectual, artistic, and political labor, but also that they had something in turn to teach us—that they could, *if we listened* [emphasis added], change the world. (Owens et al. 2017: 117)

Listening to Black girls, then, is an instrumental method in the burgeoning field of Black girlhood studies, which is broadly concerned with righting the materially consequential and downright wrongful erasure of Black girls' ontoepistemologies from the knowledge canon (Halliday 2019).

Since 2013, the year Brown's (2013) *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* was published, several studies have illuminated that in the social imaginary, Black girls exist on the periphery of hegemonic ideas of the ideal girlhood: a fiction moored to discourses that mold Black girlhood in the shape of a singular white, Western, Judeo-Christian, heterosexist, middle-class model (Nyachae and Ohito 2023; Webster 2020). The history of Black girls constitutes a relatively robust line of inquiry in Black girlhood studies. Much of that literature corpus situates Black girlhoods, real and imagined, in the historical-geographical context of the United States (Chatelain 2015; Hartman 2019; Simmons 2015; Webster 2021; Wright 2016). Some studies have brought to view the history and experience of Black girlhood in Germany (Donaldson 2019) and the knowledges, needs, and experiences of Black girls on the African continent, such as in Senegal and on the Gold Coast (Duke Bryant 2019; Hern 2021). However, to date, the United States remains the primary geographic site of Black girlhood studies.

The publication of *The Global History of Black Girlhood*, a volume edited by Corinne T. Field and LaKisha Michelle Simmons (2022), signaled a shift away from the field's narrow Western focus. The text underscores the importance of making global meaning of Black girls' place-bound histories. The book's authors also responded to calls for an interdisciplinary approach to Black girlhood studies by featuring scholars, artists, and activists theorizing and storying the storied pasts of Black girls in the diaspora, and exploring the imbrication of identity,

imagination, time, and place in the space of Black girlhood (Owens et al. 2017).

Black Girlhoods in Education Literature

Research on Black girls' educational experiences in schools and school-adjacent spaces has continued to increase (e.g., Cabral et al. 2022; Coker and González 2022; Crenshaw 2015; Farinde-Wu, Butler, and Allen-Handy 2022; Morris 2016, 2022). Thus far, much of this research has focused on the criminalization and adultification of Black girls, thereby explaining why schools and classrooms can be considered "hostile geographies" (Rogers 2022: 34)—warlike terrain—for Black girls (e.g., Burnett et al. 2022). This scholarship has brought much needed attention to damaging school policies and practices employed to police and control Black girls' bodies through exclusionary disciplinary measures such as discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. These detrimental policies and practices push Black girls out of classrooms and schools. Black girls are cast as deserving of this mistreatment through the continuous discursive construction of an ideal (white) girlhood that always already excludes them. Researchers have surfaced the miseducation received by this group and the harms Black girls endure by being (mis)perceived as "the epitome of exactly what whiteness (as maleness) and femininity (as whiteness) is not: dark, sinister, raunchy, belligerent, burly, and licentious" (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010: 18).

Contemporary scholarship on Black girls' educational experiences has brought visibility to the specificity of Black girls' suffering in classrooms and schools (Butler-Barnes et al. 2021; Dumas 2014). Within the published research, however, Black girlhood itself rarely has been theorized and/or articulated as contested beyond topical references to fixed notions of race and gender. Consequently, Black girlhood and Black girls have been (re)presented through frames that privilege one type of middle-class, heterosexual, and cisgender Black girl. These frames have spotlighted "only a few kinds of Blackness in Black girls, thus (re)producing the fiction that Black girls can be but one thing and that one thing must be abject" (Franklin-Phipps 2017: 385). Obscured or erased from view have been the nuanced educational needs, rich and plural knowledge, and textured lived experiences of Black girls who may, indeed, be raunchy, belligerent, burly, licentious, and wayward. Those who exist on the edges of the specific strand of Black girl deemed most worthy of educational interventions have been largely ignored and/or

forgotten in educational research. Specifically, the "good" Black girl has been configured according to middle-class norms and ideals of purity, propriety, and respectability (Nyachae and Ohito 2023). The resulting good/bad binary has marginalized the "bad" Black girl, whose possibly tenuous relationship to Black girlhood may be moored to her situatedness in a specific geographical, environmental, sociohistorical, and cultural place, and/or her expansiveness and expressiveness with regard to gender and sexuality.

In short, the narrow (re)presentations of Black girls that have abounded in educational research have contributed to a construction of Black girlhood that does little to challenge categorizations that are based in, and uphold, (neo)liberal humanist structures of what it means to be freely human. Ergo, because Black girlhood has been commonly conceptualized as monolithic rather than heterogeneous, suggested educational interventions and innovations have tended to be shaped from a one-size-fits-all mold that excludes queer Black girls marginalized in relation to their different (from the norm) geographies, genders, and sexualities.

Summarily, educational scholarship on Black girl geographies published between 2013 and 2022 has contributed to the larger field of girlhood studies along three germane lines. First, this body of research has situated the history and experiences of Black girls in specific school and community sites (e.g., Chatelain 2015; Nyachae and Ohito 2023). Second, the researchers have illuminated the conditions faced by Black girls in schools and classrooms, with an emphasis on interrupting the criminalization of Black girls as enacted through mechanisms such as the school-to-prison pipeline (e.g., Morris 2022). A third line of inquiry has interrogated Black girls' pedagogic needs, which span the academic, across a range of content areas and subjects, and the socioemotional (e.g., Apugo, Mawhinney, and Mbilishaka 2021; Cotton, Davis, and Collins 2022; Davis 2022; Delano-Oriaran et al. 2021; C. E. Jacobs 2019).

On the whole, extant research has made visible the specificity of Black girls' educational lived experiences, where education is a relational process of teaching and learning that happens everywhere all the time: at home, in communities and schools, in virtual and online spheres, and through media. Yet, revolutionary action requires more fuel than visibility; "we need to challenge the tropes of both Blackness and woman/girlhood and add to the analysis on Black girls in informal and formal educational spaces" (Rogers 2022: 36). This is where the assemblage of stories contained in the present volume enters the field.

Black Girlhoods in Theory and Method

As I wrote this introduction, I was awaiting a forthcoming volume on Black girls, love, and educational spaces, inspired by bell hooks and edited by Autumn A. Griffin and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2024). I was also reading a special issue of the journal *Girlhood Studies* on African girlhoods (Jaksch, Fourshey, and Moletsane 2023). These works seek to address gaps in the literature on Black girls in educational spaces, which can be organized into three main themes.

In my review of literature, I found, first, theoretical imprecision with regard to terminology (see, e.g., D. Smith, Caruthers, and Fowler 2019). *Black girl* has been taken as a foregone conclusion, an already known entity, but really, who is a Black girl? Specific to education, how might this girl be known and be knowin' vis-à-vis place and/or space? Moreover, what are the dimensions of Black girlhood as an educational place and/or space? There, what new possibilities may be opened for who and what a Black girl could possibly be and become? What makes this particular girl's particular girlhood quintessentially (or not) Black? How might these questions be asked and answered across and with/in people, places, spaces, and times? I presume that pursuit of these queries may produce deeper knowledge of Black girls' place-based knowledge-making practices, knowledge potentially useful for creating worlds capacious enough for the complexities of Black girls—worlds in which Black girlhood is a viable, vibrant hood, within and outside of the limits of imagination.

The second aperture in the literature gestures to the need for the actualization of disciplinary and methodological border crossing. Despite calls in that vein, I found that illustrations of theoretical and methodological trans- and interdisciplinarity are limited in the literature (Griffin 2022; Owens et al. 2017). Also, there has been limited engagement with Black girl ontoepistemologies situated in educational spaces both outside of the United States (see, e.g., Stanger 2018) and beyond the Global North (see, e.g., Bhana and Mayeza 2019; Florence 2021).

The third gap in the literature corpus concerns knowledge of the interior lives of Black girls and the interiority of Black girlhoods, the inner human essence, within and across markers of social difference, as emplaced and embodied in educational spaces across time and place. S. R. Toliver (2022a) and other Black girlhood studies scholars have asked for a (re)turn to the imagination, in both theory and method. I wonder, where and how

in education literature can the transgressive knowledge suggested by such calls be located?

Location denotes area, and geography points toward spatial analysis, a lens that allows for zooming in and out while exploring different scales, from the intimate (Moss and Donovan 2017; Valentine 2008) to the intergalactic, and beyond.

> Geographical analysis necessarily includes critical social analysis: race, class, and gender are not fixed identities but ongoing social productions; the multi-scalar spaces in which such social production takes place are vitally important to understanding how our societies work and, most importantly, how we might improve our social processes, especially for the most marginalized in our society. (McCreary, Basu, and Godlewska 2013: 255)

A geographical analysis brings attention to the spatiotemporal dimensions of human life. A Black feminist geographical lens allows for knowledges, desires, needs, and lived experiences to be located in "the weeping, living, hurting, body" (Bakare-Yusuf 1997: 172), recognizing this enfleshed body as essential to the intimate, complex work of *doing* human, of learning to live relationally in a place at a particular point in time.

Humans are storied into being. We become what we come to know through stories. Our stories, our theory(ies), can spark and facilitate sustaining intimate relation(ship)s across both the transatlantic and the space-time continuum, thereby producing political and potent—and perhaps potentially pleasurable—reverberations. As Black girl cartographers coediting this volume with a commitment to care and love, Lucía and I turned to the embodied art of gathering stories as a method for bringing to view the diverse landscapes of the Black girlhoods mapped in each chapter, bearing in mind that stories are cartographies of creativity, curiosity, and play, at once local and global, intimate and intergalactic, and/or everything in between.

Storytellers and story gatherers make meaning relationally. The writer of a story is in relation to the story content and characters, real or fictional. The writer is also in relation to the reader, although the reader may have a desire for the writing that the writer cannot or does not wish to fulfill. Stories can be refusals of the binary thinking characteristic of whiteness as epistemology and practice. Stories can resist dichotomization and invite plural interpretations. Stories can allow for experimentation and improvisation with voice, form, and word. Stories are also primed for revision, which Kiese Laymon posited

as a dynamic practice of revisitation, premised on ethically reimagining the in-gredients, scope, and primary audience of one's initial vision. Revision required witnessing and testifying. Witnessing and testifying required rigorous attempts at remembering and imagining. If revision was not God, revision was everything every God ever asked of believers. (2021: para. 16)

For the Black girl cartographer, possibilities abound in the words strung together to create stories. Words make people possible and make it possible for people to be. When story is approached as methodology (Mucina 2011), revision becomes the possibility of reinvention and rebirth.

True Story: Black Girls Be Knowin'

Storytelling, as a practice and process, allows for the creative "mapping of the body's inner surface, the surface of sensations, intensities, and affects, the 'subjective experience' of bodily excitations and sensations" (Grosz 1994: 37). Drawing from geographic engagement with Black feminist praxis, the stories constellating in this volume position Black girls *not* as objects of study but rather as actors, creators, composers, and interpreters of, and in, educational spaces. These stories challenge and expand under-standings of Black girls and/in educational spaces by paying attention to the particular embodied and emplaced ways Black girls practice curiosity, play, desire, and/or relationality.

The attendant practices of storytelling and story gathering can be powerful, potentially leading to "the breaking of conceptual ethnic and cultural borders" (A. Smith 2019: 11). Contained in this collection are

stories and forms of storytelling that address the ways that individuals and communities reconcile themselves with the weight of history while imagining and seizing opportunities to make themselves anew, . . . important reminders of the existence of alternative genres of the human. (Clarke and Mullings 2023: 170)

This collection of stories owes much to Tamara T. Butler's (2018) "Black Girl Cartography: Black Girlhood and Place-Making in Education Re-search." Originally published as a journal article in 2018, the chapter ap-plies intersectionality as a lens of analysis to include a consideration of space—particularly in thinking through schools as geopolitical spaces—and Black girls as navigators and mappers of those spaces, creating and en-acting liberatory practices rooted in Black girl ontoepistemology. Butler's interdisciplinary methodological offering to Black girlhood studies opens