

HOMEPLACES AND SPACES: BLACK AND BROWN FEMINISTS AND GIRLHOOD
GEOGRAPHIES OF AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Gale Greenlee: Homeplaces and Spaces: Black and Brown Feminists and Girlhood
Geographies of Agency
(Under the direction of Laura Halperin and María DeGuzmán)

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, noted Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Pat Mora, as well as Black feminists like Octavia Butler and bell hooks frequently turned to children's literature or youth-centric literature as a means to confront social injustice in American society. My dissertation considers this literary investment in Black and Brown girlhoods by examining feminist-authored children's picture books, middle-grade and youth-centric literary novels featuring girl protagonists. Specifically, I examine how Black, Chicana and Mexican American feminist writers consistently render girlhood in relation to geography. Not limiting my investigation to geopolitical bodies, I pay particular attention to everyday spatial terrains such as the girls' homes, schools, community centers, and playgrounds. These seemingly ordinary spaces of girlhood merge public and private and constitute key sites for nation building. They also provide fertile ground for the development of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship: girl-centered, critical vantage points from which readers may view operations of power and privilege. Building upon work in feminist geography and adding age to theorizations of intersectionality and oppositional consciousness, I trace how this girlhood-geography alignment reframes the girls' social and political marginalization to reveal the situated, embodied knowledge and liberating worldviews produced within these spatial contexts. By attending to the landscapes of literary girlhoods, my dissertation ultimately argues that these girl-centered

narratives constitute a neglected archive of feminist thought, a creative yet compelling vehicle through which Black, Chicana and Mexican American feminist authors imagine community, resist inequity, and theorize broader social change.

To Elizabeth Greenlee Harper (a.k.a. “Aunt Lib”), the woman whose name I proudly carry and the first to tell me, “Baby, you’re going back to school.”

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school, since she trekked down the doctoral path before. I am in awe of her hustle and appreciate the model of public scholarship that she represents for me.

Lastly, what can I say about my parents, Ralph and Betty Greenlee? I don't remember how old I was when I learned to read. But memories of reading Sunday comics with Daddy and visiting the public library with Mama remain tattooed on my brain. So I credit them both with my love of language and a good story. I also don't know if Daddy ever wished he had a boy. He encouraged my girlhood vet school ambitions, attended high school games to watch me cheer, wondered why I wanted to live and study abroad, and fist-pumped the air when he heard I had successfully defended the diss. If there's one person in the world who has my back, it's him. Like Daddy, my mom is a founding member of the Gale Greenlee Fan Club, and she supports all my endeavors, even if she doesn't understand my madness or my motivation. Forever ready with encouraging words, Mama instinctively knows if the moment calls for her hallmark "Get a grip, Liz!," or if all can be resolved with a tender pot roast and her legendary mac and cheese. These two—from the North Carolina mountains and South Carolina farmland—created a home where three precocious and independent girls would be rooted in our Blackness and could develop a vision of the world as our own. Thank you will never be enough to acknowledge all my parents have sacrificed and all they've given to me. But this dissertation is, in a small way, a testament them, the homeplace they created, and the brilliant Black girl they allow me to be.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

They don't ask kids nothing. No one listens to kids.

—Delphine in Rita Williams-Garcia, *One Crazy Summer*

“Does your mama’s husband speak English?” The question threw Estrella off and she remained silent.

—Unnamed nurse in Helena María Viramontes, *One Crazy Summer*

In Rita Williams-Garcia’s award-winning middle grade novel, *One Crazy Summer* (2010), eleven-year old Delphine and her younger sisters Vonnetta and Fern eavesdrop on their mother as she meets with members of Oakland’s Black Panther Party. After the black-clad, Afro-sporting militants have left the house, the three daughters grill their mother about why the Black Panthers call her “Nzila,” rather than her given name, Cecile. Nzilla bristles at their mini-interrogation. “Who you all working for?,” she quips. “I think y’all working for the Man undercover. The FBI. The COINTELPRO....The feds hire midgets to front as kids” (Williams-Garcia 78). Delphine and her sisters engage their mother in this conversation, not fully realizing the history of state-sponsored surveillance of communities of color, and they attempt to counter her insinuation that the three girls, her own flesh and blood, can’t be trusted. Delphine, the only one of the children who even knows what the FBI is or who the Black Panthers are, quickly halts her mother’s accusation with a blunt “No one listens to kids” (79). With five simple words, the young protagonist expresses what she perceives to be an undeniable and deeper truth: that when it comes to children, adults take the old school “seen-not-heard” mentality to heart. They regard children as non-factors, as little people with nothing valuable to say, no knowledge that can be deemed important. “The Man”—Nzilla’s shorthand for the racist dominant white culture, the

FBI, and the U.S. nation-state as a whole—has zero use for children, especially little Black girls. Why would they? Black girls wield no power...at least none that adults are bound to recognize or respect.

Likewise, in Helena Maria Viramontes's 1995 novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Estrella, the young protagonist, experiences a similar kind of disregard when her family takes Alejo, a fellow migrant worker, to a clinic after he's been doused with pesticides in the fields. Though Estrella speaks on his behalf from the moment they walk through the door, the apathetic white nurse temporarily silences Estrella by asking if Perfecto (her mother's boyfriend) can speak English. The question betrays the nurse's clear adultcentrism and sexism which lead her to assume that Perfecto, as the adult male, is the head of the household and the responsible party in the group. Although the nurse has been communicating with Estrella all along, she looks past the thirteen-year-old girl, straight to Perfecto, whom she expects will explain the boy's condition even though Perfecto speaks no English. Estrella is struck silent, perhaps out of shock or disgust, and it's a telling moment. The scene shines a spotlight not only on the nurse's investment in patriarchal family dynamics, but also on her complete dismissal of the little girl who enters the clinic with a "dirty face, fingernails lined with mud, ... tennis shoes soiled, [and] brown smears like coffee stains on her dress where she had cleaned her hands" (137). The nurse cannot see Estrella, though the child literally stands before her. Her body and her position as a child migrant do not even register on the nurse's radar. Estrella is small. She's a girl, and she is Mexican American. She might as well be invisible.

For Delphine and Estrella, Black and Brown¹ girls don't matter to most adults (whether parents, teachers, or medical professionals), much less to the larger public or our nation's leaders. Unfortunately, incidents in our current world sadly affirm each character's realization of her powerlessness and invisibility. For example, following Trump's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy which led to the forced separation of nearly 2,500 immigrant children from their parents as they crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, protests erupted around the United States. Journalists demanded access to the closed-door detention facilities, and leaked photos [or "officially released" depending on the source] went viral, showing Latin American migrants—many seeking asylum—housed in cages. Public outrage was swift, and in the flurry of media images and photos released by the administration which showed boys sitting in the cages, specific concerns mounted about the girls—their physical locations in U.S. immigration

¹ While convention dictates otherwise, I follow the example scholars like critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams, who capitalizes "Black" because "Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other 'minorities' constitute a specific cultural group, and as such require denotation as a proper noun" ("Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" 1244, footnote 6). Unlike Williams, who uses "Black" interchangeably with "African American," I recognize the term does not constitute a static or self-contained community; instead, it denotes a much more expansive racialized group that includes members of various ethnic and national backgrounds throughout the African Diaspora, including Latin American and the Caribbean. I intentionally use "Brown" to signify Mexican Americans in order to underscore that despite the racial heterogeneity of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and despite past and present claims to whiteness in legal realms, Mexican Americans have nevertheless been racialized as "Brown" and regarded as a non-white racial "Other" in the U.S. cultural imaginary—even if the individual is of European/Spanish descent. I elaborate on this in this chapter. I only use "Latina" (to denote women and girls of Latin American or Hispanic descent who reside primarily within a U.S.-based context) when referencing sources that do not specify ethnic or national origin. Since the Latina authors I examine are all of Mexican descent, I use "Mexican American" or, when applicable, "Chicana" to reflect the author's stated political perspective and affiliation. Regarding gender, I personally appreciate and use "x" to eschew socially constructed gender binaries and to signal my own commitment to a politics of gender inclusivity. Given my focus on place, space and the intersectionality of girlhood, I am tempted to follow Dr. María DeGuzmán's use of "Latinx" [in this case "Chicanx"] as she theorizes the "x" as having a "locational quality" that signifies one's "here-ness or aquí-ness" ("*Latinx*: ¡*Estamos aquí!*, or being '*Latinx*' at UNC-Chapel Hill" 220). However, I've opted to use "Chicana" in my dissertation as use of the "x" had not gained currency at the time most of these works were published (with the exception of *One Crazy Summer* and *I Pledge Allegiance*). When needing the gender inclusive plural form, I employ "Chicana/os" (to underscore the feminine presence)—even though the slash invokes a binary that I do not support.

detention centers or Office of Refugee Resettlement temporary shelters, as well as their unique vulnerability to sexual violence and sex trafficking. Clearly, boys are not immune to sexual violence, as a recent investigation into the Catholic Church sex scandal reveals.² But amidst the #MeToo movement and heightened concerns about young women's susceptibility to sexual violence at the hands of powerful men in Hollywood and sports arenas, the popular discourse around sexual assault still frames the issue primarily as a women's issue, intensifying safety concerns about migrant girls. The reality of the girls' intersectional selves as Latin American migrants, likely non-English speakers, non-U.S. citizens, and *female children* (and therefore perceived to be among the most vulnerable of individuals) sparked ominous questions about their whereabouts and safety and generated a Twitter hashtag, #Wherearethegirls?

Now, flashback to 2017. Black Twitter and Instagram were fully ablaze when a social media site posted that more than a dozen Black girls in the nation's capital had "gone missing" in the span of 24 hours (Roydan "Social Media Spread the Story"). The original post—which reported that 14 Black and Latina/o children had been declared missing over a period of a few days—came directly from the Washington, D.C. police department. Media outlets from NPR and *Essence* magazine to CNN covered the hysteria and the hype sparked by social media misinformation. Despite assertions the abductions were not *that* frequent, the misinformation stoked fears nonetheless, undoubtedly resurrecting memories of the 1980's Atlanta Child Murders, particularly for African Americans who remember the nightmare that plagued Black

² On August 14, 2018, a Pennsylvania grand jury released a 1,400-page report following their investigation into sexual assault allegations against the Catholic Church. According to the *Washington Post*, the report identified more than 300 priests who had been accused of sexually abusing 1000 children, boys and girls, over a 70-year period. For more information, see: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/08/14/pennsylvania-grand-jury-report-on-sex-abuse-in-catholic-church-will-list-hundreds-of-accused-predator-priests/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ffe084618140.

communities in Atlanta for nearly two years. If Black children could “go missing” back then, in a city touted as “the Black Mecca,” it could certainly happen again in D.C., known among many Black folks as “Chocolate City.” Misinformation notwithstanding, media coverage—not of the actual disappearances but of the social media outcry—underscored the disturbing realities of how race influences law enforcement’s handling of missing children’s cases and how the media writ-large chooses to overlook the disappearances of Black and Brown kids (especially girls), unless called out by these very communities.

Whether considering Delphine’s belief in children’s invisibility, Estrella’s now-you-see-me-now-you-don’t clinic experience, or the plight of the undocumented migrant girls caught in the snares of U.S. immigration policy, or missing girls of color trapped between the anonymity of abduction and the hypervisibility of social media, all of these cases—fictional and otherwise—relate to the intersection of girls of color, space, place, power and powerlessness. These cases fuel my dissertation, which is ultimately about reversing the invisibility of Black and Brown girls not just in literary spaces, but in social, cultural, and political ones as well. These stories give us pause and comment on the social mechanisms and spatial conditions that render Black and Brown girls as non-subjects and non-citizens. Their stories urge us to pay attention to the girls’ marginalization, and they evoke empathy because of their child status. But these narratives also highlight girls’ unrecognized forms of agency. For it is in these literary spaces that these writers imagine worlds and communities where Black and Brown girls express their subjectivity, counter discourses of Black and Brown girl “badness,” and exercise creative or political agency in ways not possible or imagined in the “real” world.

In *Homeplaces and Spaces: Black and Brown Feminists, and Girlhood Geographies of Agency*, I center Black and Brown girls by examining the use and function of girlhood in select

20th and 21st texts by African American, Chicana, and Mexican American feminist writers. In particular, my project theorizes the ways in which these writers construct literary girls and girlhood in relation to geography, place, and space. I trace how this alignment reframes the marginalization of Black and Mexican American girls in order to critique systems of dominance that are central to conceptions of national identity. I turn to these fictive girlhoods and textual geographies to explore several questions: What does it mean to experience the United States as a Black or Mexican American girl? How do these girls negotiate or navigate the spaces they enter or the spaces in which they find themselves? How are their lives informed by or restricted by the social and power dynamics of particular spaces they occupy? How do race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and age converge to define their identities and shape these textual geographies? Most importantly, I argue that these girlhood texts depict Black and Mexican American girlhoods not only as socially constructed sites of oppression and marginalization but also as potential sites of power, knowledge, possibility, and freedom. Looking at the spaces these characters occupy, I argue that these stories function as literary critiques of power and inequity as well as feminist interventions that recognize girls as social and political agents, though they must navigate or exist within oppressive or even dangerous social environments.

This dissertation is intentionally comparative in order to acknowledge convergences and similarities of experiences among Black and Mexican American communities. From a pure numbers perspective, these two communities constitute the largest racial and ethnic groups in the United States. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 50.5 million individuals self-identified as Hispanic or Latino,³ constituting 16 percent of the U.S. population (Humes, Jones and Ramirez

³ The U.S. Census defines “‘Hispanic or Latino’ as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (“About Hispanic Origin”). <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html>

3), and 3.9 million people self-identified as Black or African American, making up 13 percent of the U.S. population (4). The Census Bureau reported that in 2016, the numbers had risen to 57.5 million and 46.8 million, respectively (“The Nation’s Population is Becoming More Diverse”). Antonio Flores, of The Pew Research Center, reported that in 2015, individuals of Mexican origin accounted for 63.3% of the Hispanic/Latino population (“How the U.S. Hispanic Population Is Changing”). This increase in the overall Latina/o population, but especially the Mexican-descended population has caused panic among white supremacists and political parties who see a potential threat given the declining power of the white vote and the rise of what’s been dubbed the “The Browning of America” (Segura). For a nation whose earliest immigration law restricted citizenship to free, white people, this demographic change is not just a matter of numbers or racial and ethnic shifts; it also signals a potential shift in economic and political power that many white Americans see as threatening. One only needs to remember Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric in which he said, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best....They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (qtd. in Korte and Gomez). Even worse, during a meeting about California’s sanctuary cities, Trump doubled down on his anti-Mexican rants, saying “These [undocumented Mexican migrants] aren’t people. These are animals” (qtd. in Korte and Gomez). This racist and inflammatory language reflects a level of animosity and demonization that can be likened to the rampant anti-blackness that characterizes American culture.

Aside from their sheer numbers, both Black and Mexican American communities share histories of exclusion and repression, particularly of forced and exploited labor, colonization, and general social and political abjection. While Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898 and also experienced enslavement and continues to endure U.S. colonization, Mexico’s relationship

to the United States is unique given its geographic proximity and the historic and ongoing battles over territory. From the theft of Mexican lands via the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, to the deportation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the early 20th century, to current efforts to build walls and militarize the border between the United States and Mexico, the United States has consistently wielded its legal and ideological powers to jettison Mexicans and Mexican Americans from any claim to this territory or national body.

Just as African Americans have had a fraught relationship with the United States, given the history of enslavement and legislative efforts to limit their rights of citizenship based on racial logic, Mexican Americans have also been subjected to American law imposing rights based on a fluctuating understanding of Mexican Americans and their indeterminate racial status. A series of early court cases addressed the question of Mexican Americans and race. George A. Martinez's "Mexican Americans and Whiteness" surveys this complicated history of racial classification, noting that in 1930, the U.S. Census Bureau "used the term 'Mexican' to classify Mexican Americans, placing it under the rubric of 'other races,' which also included Indians, Blacks, and Asians" (177). In *Independent School District v. Salvierra* (1930), plaintiffs contested school segregation, and the courts ultimately decided that "Mexican-Americans could not be segregated from children 'of other white races, merely or solely because they are Mexicans'" (qtd. in Martinez "Legal Construction of Race" 327-328). Less than twenty years later, Mexican Americans would be classified as white in the U.S. Census, and in the landmark case, *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954), a case dealing with Mexican American representation on juries, the courts "held that Mexican Americans are white people and therefore, fall within the classification of the white race for purposes of the Fourteenth Amendment" (328). Yet, as Martinez points out, while Mexican Americans won a legal victory that "defined Mexican

Americans as white...that law failed to provide Mexican Americans with a privileged status” (“Mexican Americans and Whiteness” 177). In *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era*, Zaragosa Vargas enumerates a litany of issues affecting Mexican American communities. From school segregation, housing and employment discrimination to police violence, Mexican Americans were treated “as non-white” (286) and increasingly moved to collaborate with African American civil rights struggles to dismantle racism and racial injustice. Citing a number of legislative wins such as the *Equal Opportunities Act* (1964) and the *Civil Rights Act* (1964), Vargas underscores the overlapping concerns about racial and social inequity that led Mexican Americans to join in solidarity with African Americans to advance racial justice work, whether through the more moderate civil rights activism or more radical nationalist movements (*Crucible of Struggle* 293). This history of cross-pollination of Black and Mexican American activism animates my work, and my hope is that this project offers additional documentation of a continued conversation between these two communities.

My work also finds inspiration from *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1981). While the groundbreaking anthology included Native women and Asian American writers and activists, I am particularly focused on Black and Chicana women. These women come from communities with distinct histories of exclusion and repression, but I see the two groups as standing on common ground. My project takes an intersectional approach to acknowledge the shared struggles of Black and Chicana women as feminist activists combating oppression on multiple fronts: racism within predominantly white, second-wave feminist movements and sexism within two of our history’s most prominent radical nationalist movements (i.e. the Black Power Movement and the Chicano Rights Movement). Though the

faces of the nationalist movements were largely male, the literary and political activism these movements produced cannot be limited to male figures. Women contributed greatly to these movements, and the writers' feminist activism or literary activism (via children's and young adult literature) can be regarded as outgrowths of these cultural moments and socio-political movements.

My focus on Black and Mexican American women in particular gestures to the shared history of activism in Black and Mexican American communities but also among Black and Brown women as women of color. It also speaks to early theorizations of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams who saw Black and Latina women as similarly positioned in relation to structures of oppression. Thinking intersectionally requires me to acknowledge that there is an obvious overlap and omission within this work, as I do not focus on Afro-Latina writers and communities. Clearly, "Latina/o" is not a racial classification. Latina/os individuals can be of African, European, Asian or Indigenous descent (or a mixture of them all), reflecting what Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs describe as the historic "gigantic mixing of races" in Latin American and the Caribbean which led to a hierarchical, yet multivalent racial classification system that puts the white-black binary in the United States to shame (Introduction, *No Longer Invisible* 3). Following Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores in the *Afro-Latin@ Reader*, I take Afro-Latina/o to signify people of all gender identities and expressions who are of African descent in Latin America, people of African descent in the United States whose heritage can be traced to Latin America (1), as well as individuals in the United States who are both of African-American and Latina/o ancestry. According to the Pew Research Center, "one-quarter of all U.S. Latinos self-identify as Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean or of African descent with roots in Latin America" (López and Gonzalez-Barrera "Afro-Latino"). While there is a long history of

Afro-Latina/o communities in the United States and of African-American-Afro-Latina/o political collaboration (think of the Puerto Rican Young Lords, the Rainbow Coalition conceived of by Black Panther Fred Hampton, or of the impact of *Mendez v. Westminster* which preceded *Brown v. Board of Education*), the work of Afro-Latina activist writers is not the focus here.⁴ Instead, my project examines Chicana, Mexican American, and Black feminist writers who intentionally write for or about children or young adults as a form of activism, protest and critique against the continued social and political marginalization of Mexican Americans and Black people in the United States. I am interested in Black and Brown feminists as reflecting an oppositional consciousness as articulated by Chicana feminist critic Chela Sandoval and Black feminist critic Patricia Hill Collins.

What follows, then, is not simply an intellectual investigation. It's my love letter to Black and Brown girls. This is an interdisciplinary project that places various intellectual traditions in conversation: critical geography, Black and Chicana feminist thought, literary childhood studies and girlhood studies. The writers I examine employ space in narratives to reveal their own epistemological standpoints and demonstrate that young girls of color should be *seen*, first and foremost, and should be acknowledged as possessors of worldviews that spring from and inform their environments and social relationships. In other words, critical geography provides a foundation upon which to analyze these girl characters as social critics in their textual worlds and to recognize girls of color as legitimate socio-political actors in the larger world outside these books. In the discussion that follows, these literary girls are not simply marginalized citizens due

⁴ There has been a recent surge in Afro-Latina authors publishing novels. We seem to be in an Afro-Latina "renaissance" with writers such as Sofia Quintero's *Show and Prove* (2015), Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* (2018), Ibi Zoboi's *American Street* (2017) and Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* (2018), to name a few. See Remezcla's recent article on Afro-Latina authors, many of whom write exclusively girl-centered narratives for YA audiences: <http://remezcla.com/lists/culture/afro-latina-authors/>.

to their racial or ethnic affiliations or due to their gendered identities as girls in a patriarchal society. Nor are they marginalized simply due to their legal status as minors. While they are all those things and experience powerlessness due to their distinct social locations, the authors render them as being so much more: namely thinking, feeling, and active social beings. If we pay attention to their stories, we can find that like their adult adults, Black and Brown girls are agents who construct meaning and initiate change in response to the unique pressures and political realities of their (and our collective) social worlds.

Why Black and Brown Girls?

Part of the need to focus on girls of color stems not only from my own personal investment as a grown-up girl of color but primarily from the relative dearth of scholarship on girls of color and their lives. Whether we're discussing childhood studies, girlhood studies, or children's literature scholarship, each field is glaringly white. In the realm of childhood studies, there's a shortlist of canonical texts, and very few pay attention to children of color. Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family* (1962), one of the most cited and contested treatises on childhood, argues that the idea of childhood, as we know it, did not exist in the 17th century. Much like Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), which draws upon print media (books and newspapers) as a critical source in molding ideologies and circulating images of nationalism, Ariès's work, widely considered a foundational text of childhood studies, turns to artistic depictions of children and childhood in portraiture and literature to draw conclusions about the ideologies of childhood. However, Ariès travels only to medieval Europe. While a digital scholar activist known as @MedievalPOC utilizes online tools such as blogs, Tumblr, and an active Twitter account to dispel the belief that "Everyone was white back then" (Perry "Yes, There Were POC in Medieval Europe"), Ariès overlooks children

of color. His omission reflects the habitual erasure of children of color in historical archives and creates a similar blind spot childhood studies.

Ariès cannot shoulder all the responsibility for the whiteness of the field. Truthfully, much of the earliest work on childhood and the figure of the child are similarly andro- and Eurocentric: John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), which famously compared children's minds to a "tabula rasa" (a blank slate), and Jean Jacque Rousseau's *Emile, Or, On Education* (1762), which advocated that children be given freedom in their education and social development, provide some of the earliest philosophical considerations of childhood. These Enlightenment era and subsequent Romantic-era notions of innocence ground the cultural depictions of childhood and even policies and political rhetoric around child rights, education, and welfare—ideologies that are on full display even in the midst of debates over the rights and treatment of undocumented minors. The residue of childhood innocence lingers in our collective psyche, constructing the frame through which we regard children, so much so that Adam Phillips called this cultural construction "our most convincing essentialism" (qtd. in Levander 1)—one in which we adults remain solidly invested. We all grow up. But our perceptions of childhood apparently remained fixed and decidedly nostalgic.

The problems stemming from our rigid investment in seeing children through the lens of a supposed inherent innocence are many. First, our romantic assumptions are often inconsistent with the historic and contemporary childhood experiences of kids who have no choice but to live out "adult" issues like poverty, sex, forced labor, or violence—like Latin American children in U.S. detention centers or Black boys and girls killed at the hands of police. Their experiences provide harsh evidence that the idea/l of childhood as "a luxury of prolonged dependence and sanctioned irresponsibility, as well as a perceived right to protection" (Honeyman 14) squares

with the reality of only a privileged few. Second, perceptions of childhood innocence often lead to a knee-jerk dismissal of children's abilities, creativity, and intellect (like Estrella's interaction with the clinic's nurse). The greater implication is that this discourse of innocence can then produce a general disregard of children as agents, subjects, and social beings. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler points out, it becomes all too easy "to dismiss children as historical actors" when we, as a culture, cling to the "very belief in children's 'specialness'—how as vulnerable, innocent, ignorant beings, they require adult protection and training—[which] thus marks childhood as culturally irrelevant" (xvi). This perception also marks children as socially irrelevant and politically insignificant.

A final issue with presumptions of childhood innocence (despite the emergence of childhood studies and girlhood studies as academic disciplines that deconstruct cultural assumptions about young people's supposed inherent dependence and adult's naturalized power) is that such ideas are often explicitly aligned with clearly marked racial and gendered identities (and bodies). In other words, if innocence is seen as an essential quality of "the child," and if the prototypical child is envisioned as being white, then children of color are automatically excluded not only from the category of childhood but also from innocence as a hallmark of the childhood experience. Debbie Olsen's work on *Black Children in Hollywood Cinema* points to the historic exclusion of Black children (regardless of gender) from the childhood club. Writing about the racial politics of childhood, she notes that "popular discourse regularly omits Black children from the dialogue about childhood...[which] ...results in the persistent visual presentation of the Black child as a non-child" (14). Works such as Wilma King's *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (2011) and Marie Jenkins Schwartz's earlier *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (2000) stand as a few of the early efforts among

historians of childhood to create a more inclusive discipline and wrestle childhood from automatic associations of whiteness. And in the realm of girlhood studies, Vera Lopez and Meda Chesney-Lind bemoan the limited available options of “gender scripts for girls of color, particularly Latina and African Americans, which emphasize their ‘badness’” (“Latina Girls Speak Out” 528) thereby excluding them from notions of innocence that frame the idea and discourse around childhood in our popular imaginations. Cinematic portrayals of Black girlhood such as Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis’s character) in *Beast of a Southern Wild* (2012), Eve Batiste (Jurnee Smollett’s character) in *Eve’s Bayou* (1997), and historical accounts such as Harriet Jacobs’s or Elizabeth Keckley’s narratives of sexual violence, or even contemporary sociological studies, suggest that Black girls, childhood, and innocence are incompatible.

I mention these girl-centered narratives because complicating our conceptions of childhood is not simply a matter of attending to issues of racial or ethnic inclusivity. It is a feminist and intersectional practice that calls us to examine the relationship between age and power or powerlessness. As Lopez and Chesney-Lind’s work attests, gender also plays a role in shaping childhood studies scholarship, and Black and Brown girls are often silenced or erased within this sociological landscape. Julie Bettie’s 2000 article “Women without Class: Chicas, Cholas, Trash and the Presence/Absence of Class Identity” speaks directly to this kind of omission. Though her concern relates to class distinctions between white and Latina girls, she references a 1993 *Oprah Winfrey Show* panel on youth and hip hop. The entire panel, Bettie notes, consisted of white and Black boys, revealing the unstated assumption that “the supposedly gender neutral term *youth* actually stands for male” and that “girls must read themselves as boys” in research and in literature in order to “envision themselves as racial/ethnic subjects” (1). As female youth, and as members of distinct racial and ethnic communities, girls of color simply fall

outside the conceptual and social parameters of childhood, not always seen or heard by adults, in the largely white spaces of popular discourse and scholarship.

Social science scholars, however, are reversing the lack of information about girls of color, especially as it relates to citizenship and social justice issues. These scholars are not just looking for girls, but they're actually listening to them. Caroline Caron's "Vocabularies of Citizenship" builds upon the idea that girls are never viewed as citizen-subjects (80). She notes that girls' voices and their particular forms of political agency are typically overlooked in conversations about citizenship and rights. Ruth Enid Zambrana's work on Latina girls and risk markers draws upon intersectionality theory and contributes to emerging scholarship that "contest[s] deficient models and reframe[s] how to think about low-income Latinas and how they negotiate structural and representational barriers" ("Girlhood to Womanhood" in *Latinos in American Society* 114). Venus E. Evans-Winters's "Flipping the Script" acknowledges the unique social and political knowledge that girls of color possess, and she bemoans the penchant, on a national level, to overlook girls of color even now in the days of Black Lives Matter (BLM)—an ironic omission since three queer Black women founded BLM ("Flipping the Script" 422). Like Caron and Zambrana, Evans-Winters addresses girls of color who are left out of participatory action research, and she pushes other scholars to embrace the unique "ways of knowing the social world by young women and women of color...specifically, the shared reality of experiencing schooling as a Black girl and/or girl of color" (415). Girlhood studies scholars fight for understanding girlhood as a distinct cultural construction and life experience, and for Black and Latina girlhood studies scholars specifically, they also advocate for recognizing the social forces and structural conditions that shape girlhood and impact the development of girls of color as historical actors and change agents. My project contributes to this growing body of

work, demonstrating how creative writers build worlds and spaces for Black and Brown girls. These works of fiction write Black and Brown girls back into normative childhood spaces and, by extension, into larger conversations about children's geographies and childhood. Most importantly, by envisioning Black and Brown girls as social critics and spatial actors, these literary works help all readers see Black and Brown girls as critical, on the individual and the collective level, to achieving social equity and justice.

Why Children's, Middle-Grade, and Youth-Centric Literature?

Unfortunately, children's literature scholarship suffers from an equally myopic vision as childhood studies scholarship. For example, much of the work devoted to children's literature and the figure of "the child"—like the history of childhood—concentrates either on the Golden Age of Children's Literature, a primarily British phenomenon, or its counterpart that occurred on U.S. shores during the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century. Scholarly treatment of canonical texts tends to regurgitate the same books. Canonical texts such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), considered the quintessential boy's book, or Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), the quintessential girl's book, or classics such as L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) or Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), dominate the scholarship and are glaring in their whiteness. Richard Locke's *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels* (2011) investigates how authors of employ children in literature, especially as "critics of their worlds" (4). While his work focuses on what he calls "ten iconic images of childhood" (8), none of these child icons—literary stars ranging from *Oliver Twist* to *Peter Pan* or even *Lolita*—are children of color. Jerry Griswold's *Audacious Kids: The Classic American Children's Story* (2014), a recent addition to discussion of children's literature and nationality, dissects twelve classic texts. Not surprisingly, none of these classic texts is written by a writer of color. Discussions that do include children of color are oftentimes

limited to debates surrounding the emergence of multicultural literatures in the late 20th century or the racial and cultural representations in children's picture books. This research typically stems from work in education or library science and focuses on the works' relevance to early childhood literacy or child development.⁵

In considering literature's relevance to living children, critic Jenny Bavidge boldly asks, "What is the use of children's literature or narratives of childhood in terms of dealing with the *actual, lived* experiences of children?" [emphasis mine] ("Stories in Space" 320). Clearly, there's no one-to-one correspondence. But whether we conceive of childhood or girlhood as a spatial condition or socio-cultural experience, childhood as we see it rendered in literature can function as a productive space for writers to explore and for readers receive information about complex social issues.

Accepting this cultural function of children's literature and analyzing the spatiality of these texts means we must come to terms with Bavidge's contention that any

useful children's geography must begin with the basic point that children's literature does not, of course, represent a child's view of the world at all. What it does represent is a privileged space in which we witness the operations of adult dialogues with children....Children's literature represents one of the most powerful manifestations of the ways in which the world is interpreted and explained to children. (322)

As educational tools, children's literature entertains while also introducing children to social and cultural mores. Books, whether introduced in school or home settings, help frame children's

⁵ Some scholars have written on the representation of ethnic communities in children's literature. See, for example, Dorothy Broderick's *Images of the Black in Children's Fiction* (1973), M.V. Lindgren's *The Multicolored Mirror: Cultural Substance in Literature for Children and Young Adults: A Selected Listing of Books 1980-1990 by and about People of Color* (1991), Beverly Lapin and Doris Seale's *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Children's Books* (1998), Donnarae MacCann's *White Supremacy in Children's Literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1830-1900* (2001), Isabel Schon's *The Best of Latino Heritage 1996-2002: A Guide to the Best Juvenile Books about Latino People and Cultures* (2003), and Dana Fox and Kathy Short's *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature* (2003). This is a growing body of literature, but this work is minuscule in comparison to the breadth of scholarship around children's literature written by white authors and featuring white characters.

understanding of themselves, their community, and the larger world. Rudine Sims Bishop's formative essay "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (1990) addresses the role of children's literature in molding children's perceptions of themselves and others who are fundamentally different. Her metaphor signifies that children's books can function as mirrors that allow kids to see themselves in a text, or they can serve as windows to other worlds and communities, and in some cases, they can function as glass doors through which a child reader can see and enter. The authors I examine present specific children's geographies and spatial worlds that allow children to witness and walk into worlds that acknowledge the presence and subjectivity of Black and Brown girls. That narrative focus is necessary and intentional.

Children's author and children's literature scholar Neal A. Lester writes that "books for children offer an exciting world that complements and interfaces with adult literature and with adult experiences. Since children typically do not write these books, it is clear that the issues and ideas in children's books are filtered through and created by adults' perspectives and views" ("For All My Children" 100-101). Children and adult lives necessarily intersect, and they do so in ways that often privilege adult subjectivity. This open secret about adult authorship of children's texts still generates countless debates in children's literary studies about the power imbalance between children and adults. I take this power imbalance as an ideological common place and therefore move from the assumption that all texts (whether for young children, YA or adult audiences) are embedded in particular ideologies held by the author and as well as those reflected in the general culture. In this way, I stand with fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes who asserts that "power relationships in literature reveal the politics of both the story and, frequently, the author. Power relationships also provide examples and models for children of social and moral behavior" (3). Without automatically thinking that these writers are *always-already* or *only*

writing autobiographically, I do see these texts as reflective of the politics and concerns of the authors in that they offer fictional interpretations how girls of color must negotiate the multifaceted terrain of racial, gender, age, and cultural politics and how they can possibly assert themselves under these circumstances.

As Bishop warns, “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part” (“Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors”). Equally disturbing is Bishop’s contention that if “Children from dominant social groups...only see reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism” (“Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors”). The relationship between texts and childhood visions of self and other, including conceptions of nation and national boundaries, then becomes a political matter. Just because children’s literature is written for young(er) audiences does not mean the work is any less vested in issues of power or that it lacks any political import.

Children’s, YA and youth-centric literatures are not just informed by the authors’ beliefs and social, cultural, historical and political contexts. They also circulate in what Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge call the “cultural domain of power” (*Intersectionality* 11), in which the narrative works to reach wide audiences and circulate ideas and ideologies among a broad population. The reach of children’s and young adult literature, especially in the days of *Harry Potter* and the *Divergent* series, proves the cultural significance of literature written for young audiences. Given their reach particularly in the realms of film, cosplay, and fandom, and with the popularity of YA fiction, these texts possess a kind of cultural and social capital, not just in an economic sense of selling magic wands and movie tickets, but in an ideological and political one as well. Therefore,

I approach children's literature just as Debbie Olsen analyzes Hollywood blockbusters: seeing these written texts as vehicles circulating within popular culture that initiate, reinforce, or even question ideologies of childhood, particularly as this concept/experience intersects with race, class, gender, and nationality, and ultimately power.

Granted, there may be little transference from literary or cinematic portrayals of childhood and lived childhood experiences. Even so, these representations do matter in the larger public culture as they can establish a baseline, create frames of reference for or provide visual and textual "evidence" of which childhoods are deemed important and which children matter. Just as researchers have used Black and white baby dolls to gauge children's attitudes about race and susceptibility to anti-black racism, so too can children's and young adult literature open the door to larger conversations about issues of social import, among children and in the public realm.

Part of my work, then, is recontextualizing girls like Delphine and Estrella as children, and children's literature, for all its omissions, as a cultural space that supports viewing some children's lives (read: white, middle class) as representative of a normative childhood. But the other critical task is looking at these texts and the relationship between geography, space, and girlhood to see how Black, Chicana, and Mexican American writers craft a different kind of theory, theories of subjectivity and national identity that are inclusive of Black and Mexican American girls. This is a creative task, but also theoretical and political work.

As mentioned earlier, Zipes moves from the assumption that children's literature is already political and embedded in a social and political space. Lest we think these contemporary works are merely the latest iteration in debates around identity politics and the culture wars, the children's literature-political connection is consistent with our nation's history. Griswold, for

example, draws a clear line between children's literature and ideas of nationalism and patriotism, acknowledging outright that "...many American children's books must be seen as nationalistic tracts" (*Audacious Kids* 29). Bruce Handy points to the fabled story of George Washington and the cherry tree, as well as Rosa Park's nonviolent resistance, to support his contention that "Educators, historians, and fanatics have long used children's books to pass along national myths and values—a hallowed if not always honorable tradition" (*Wild Thing* 183). From abolitionist children's stories' to the NAACP's *The Brownies' Books* as "literature as social action" (Bishop *Free Within Ourselves* 23), we have numerous examples of how literature has always served to introduce (or inculcate) children to the ideal of the nation and to their responsibilities as citizens.⁶

What I aim to demonstrate here is that Black, Chicana and Mexican American feminist writers create worlds for these children to exist and flourish, and they are worlds that differ from our own. With attention to space and place, these feminist writers deploy geography in order to introduce Black and Brown girls specifically (though not exclusively) to a different kind of nation, to dream new worlds and to illuminate social issues within our existing one. Sometimes their fictive worlds reveal the material conditions that circumscribe Black and Brown girls' childhoods. Sometimes they illustrate how even in these dire circumstances, there's room to develop transformative or liberatory world views. Thus, my work dances between two different epistemologies, that of the girls of color that appear in these literary texts and that of the Black and Brown feminist writers who construct literary girlhoods based on an engagement with intersectionality and the particular political standpoints of Black and Chicana feminisms. Through these make-believe worlds, we can envision new life conditions and possibilities of

⁶ Consider *Gospel of Slavery: A Primer of Freedom, an ABC book* by Unitarian minister Abel Thomas, and Paula T. Connolly's *Slavery in American Children's Literature: 1790-2010* (2013).

freedom for marginalized people, a vision that I'm calling a Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship, which I develop below.

Black and Brown Girl Spatial Citizenship

Before turning to the books, I need to explain a concept that I adapt here and introduce the theoretical framework that grounds my study. The concept is “spatial citizenship,” and the theoretical framework is based upon Black and Chicana feminist thought and theories of social space. I begin by offering a brief explanation of terminology and then move to introduce the feminist and spatial theories to which I am indebted. I end this section by returning to feminists of color to relate their particular theoretical frameworks to my conceptualization of children's geographies and new models of citizenship.

First, the term spatial citizenship comes primarily from the intersection of geography, technology, and civic education. It typically describes the practice of using technological tools (sometimes called “geomedia”) to provide an avenue for children's participation in geographic projects (Pokraka 263). I realize there's some slippage here, because the texts I examine are not juvenilia. They do not constitute the creative production of girls of color. Still, I adapt the term spatial citizenship here to suggest that Black and Chicana feminist writers utilize and create this as a particular orientation within their work. Their novels and stories pay close attention to the spatiality of young girls of color. In doing so, and in utilizing the figure of the Black or Brown girl as an embodied form of social critique, their work introduces readers to the possibility that girls of color in fact do have something important to say and knowledge that can be useful in establishing more just communities.

My project is grounded most notably in Black feminist thought but also draws upon Chicana feminist theoretical frameworks that I see as presenting complementary theories that perform similar intellectual and political work. To limn out the connections between Black and

Brown girls' socially proscribed positions and their textual geographies, I draw upon the work of contemporary Black and Chicana feminist scholar-writer-activists and feminist geographers. In particular, apply the concept of intersectionality, especially as articulated by critical race theorist and civil rights activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

Though Crenshaw is not the first Black feminist to articulate a concern about the multiple systems of oppression that mark Black women's lives, her 1991 essay, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," provided a necessary intervention into feminist and anti-racist activism by illuminating how women of color face multiple marginalizations that cannot be parsed out due to the interwoven nature of the various "dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (1242). She explores how race and gender, which are sometimes regarded as separate identity categories, situate women of color in vulnerable and disadvantaged positions in relation to structures of power and privilege and converge to shape Black women's lives, oftentimes in repressive ways. For Crenshaw, "Women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds" due to the intersectionality of race, sex, gender, class, and culture (1250).

Numerous Chicana feminists and scholar-activists have also, historically, pointed to the existence of multiple systems of oppression and what living at the intersection of these various axes of difference means in the pursuit of gender and racial justice. Sonia Saldivar-Hull, for example, describes the blind spots of white "feminist sisters and Marxist compañeros/as" who privilege gender and class issues while presuming that "race will naturally take care of itself" ("Feminism on the Border" 203). Without using the term intersectionality specifically, Saldivar-Hull presents Chicanas as women whose histories "represent unique experiences of racial and sexual and class exploitation" (203), which necessitates a more complex view not only of

“women” as a collective, but a more nuanced view and intentional consideration, especially within feminist organizing spaces, of the ways in which race/ethnicity/class and other axes of difference inform political projects and define progress. In her work on environmental justice, Emma Pérez gestures to the utility of an intersectional analysis by underscoring that “Dominated communities engaged in environmental struggles do not disaggregate their various identities and needs. ...they recognize their multiple-identities and the various lines of domination and power that need to be resisted and challenged” (*The Decolonial Imaginary* xv). Perez acknowledges the potential that intersectionality poses for coalition building. So in spite of the specificity of Black and Mexican American experiences, women from both communities may find they occupy similar social positions which can be an impetus for joint action and mobilization.

Though Crenshaw uses intersectionality metaphorically to refer to the “interaction of racism and patriarchy,” she also sees the term as referring to “the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism” (“Mapping the Margins” 1265). There are three points I want to make clear here. First, unlike some works that take “women of color” to mean exclusively Black women, Crenshaw deliberately uses “women of color,” as her work pertains to the nature of Black and Latina women’s experiences within the criminal justice system, noting a similarity in social position and material histories, which may create a promising avenue for collective mobilization or political collaboration and advocacy. Chela Sandoval also acknowledges that while feminists of color have historically been “separated by culture, race, class, sex, or gender identification,” they “became allied through their similar *positions* [emphasis mine] in relation to race, gender, sex, and culture subordinations” (“U.S. Third World Feminism” 276) She, too, acknowledges U.S. third world feminists as constituting “a subordinated citizenry compelled to live within

similar realms of marginality” (*Methodology of the Oppressed* 52.3). This common experience is critical to the production of literary geographies that posit Black and Brown girls as geographic beings.

The second point I want to address is that Crenshaw (like Sandoval) mentions subordination and marginality, two terms that I find particularly apt in thinking about childhood and girls of color. Few feminists of color actually engage age as an analytic in their political formulations. Audre Lorde, in the “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” is one of the few. She opens her statement by noting that she is responding to papers dealing with the role of “difference within the lives of American women: difference of race, sexuality, class, and age” (110). However, as she moves along, Lorde offers a roll call of those “who have been forged in the crucibles of difference,” and her comments mention “those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older” (112). Given a general cultural preference for all things young and fresh, Lorde’s focus on older adults is understandable. However, her statement reveals a gap in our thinking about age, particularly of young people, as pertinent to intersectional analyses—and by extension, progressive feminist political projects.

In drawing upon intersectionality for this work, I extend the term to articulate the distinct social location and general marginalization of Black and Mexican American girls within the larger society. The application of intersectionality to girls of color requires the addition, therefore, of another identity category: age. Corrinne T. Field and Nicolas L. Syrett’s *Age in America* (2015) investigates how the “biological reality and social construction” of age comes to be “imbued with both symbolic and legal meaning” (1). Part of this social meaning that has legal and political ramifications is that American children are legally designated minors until age eighteen. Although children who are born in the United States do carry legal rights of

citizenship, they are also limited in their ability to exercise such rights; the Kids Vote project, which teaches kids about importance of voting and mimics the voting process speaks to their limited rights. As a result, children of all genders, races, and ethnicities necessarily inhabit a marginal position in American society until age 18 when they are deemed adults who can then responsibly exercise some of those rights. Others—whether parents, guardians, or teachers—necessarily act on their behalf or presumably in their best interests in educational, political and social realms. This fact, coupled with the racial and gender oppression produced within a patriarchal society, forces girls of color to occupy a social location that we can rightly situate at “the margins.”

Popular conceptions of the margins, or “the marginalized” are often pejorative, focusing on dire material conditions or the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of communities that occupy such social spaces. However, feminist critic bell hooks usefully redefines the margin in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and later in her essay, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” (1990). She distinguishes between the marginality “imposed by oppressive structures” and the “marginality one chooses as a site of resistance” (“Choosing” 153), and she actively claims that location. While young girls do not choose to occupy a space on the periphery—actually, no one chooses to occupy any social grouping or status that’s perceived as being removed from (or *crushed* by) power—their socially proscribed positions as minors who are prevented from participating in shaping social institutions (whether family, religion, education, or government), does not eclipse all forms of agency and resistance. I look to hooks for inspiration here because just as she highlights the exclusion of the margin, she also considers this as “much more than a site of deprivation....it is also the site of *radical possibility, a space of resistance*” [emphasis mine] (149). Interestingly, hooks arrives at this empowered vision of

marginality by recounting her efforts as a young Black girl in southern Kentucky “to emerge as a critical thinker, artist, and writer, in a context of repression” (147), based on her familial, religious, and racial context. What we can gain from her essay is not simply that the margin exists in relationship to the center and across space, but also that individuals who stand on the periphery develop “a particular way of seeing reality.... an oppositional world view—a mode of seeing unknown” to the dominant society (22). Identifying or embracing an oppositional consciousness does not erase the pressing material challenges that face marginalized communities. But hooks’s essay is instructive because she links knowledge production to social space and action, which can lead to social change. She writes: “Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and untold histories. Spaces can [also] be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (23). The writers under examination in this dissertation do just that: they interrupt and transform the spaces of commonly held national narratives via the production of untold or neglected stories of Black and Brown girlhoods. These narratives present “real” and imaginary worlds that readers may witness and experience via the focalization of a girl child. Her eyes and her experiences take center stage, even though she stands at the edge, removed from but still impacted by the activities, the policies, and the discourses of the center.

Chicana feminist theories also inform my conception of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship. Chicana feminist writer-critic Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of the “borderlands” is useful in that she aligns a geographic or spatial designation with a creative and liberating potential. Like hooks, who describes the margins as a wound (“Choosing the Margin” 152), Anzaldúa similarly describes the borderlands as

una herida abierta (“an open wound”) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds

merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (*Borderlands* 25)

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa envisions not a marginal or throwaway space, but a contact zone. The borderland exists between two territories (such as the U.S.-Mexico border) and is influenced by both. In the introduction to the third edition of *Borderlands*—published three years following Anzaldúa’s death—Dominican American novelist Julia Alvarez credits Anzaldúa with being “one of the first to crystallize and celebrate the potential of a borderland state of mind,” which Alvarez goes on to describe as a “state of being betwixt and between” (Anzaldúa). While this space is one that encompasses violence and pain, for Anzaldúa, the borderland is ultimately a creative locus. Though it can be a site of transition and ambiguity, it can also be a space of openness and imaginative possibilities. This imaginative potential stems from Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of the mestiza/o not simply as the progeny (or child) of two disparate racialized, cultural, and national communities, but also as “the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” (*Borderlands* 100). I understand these “frames” to be culturally specific epistemologies, and I apply the concept of borderlands to literary girls who stand between the dominant culture and that of their specific racial or ethnic communities, who occupy spaces between distinct national territories, or who as girls “coming of age,” stand in the transitional space between girlhood and womanhood.

Another Chicana feminist writer, poet, and children’s book author, Pat Mora refers to a similar “in between” space in her collection, *Nepantla: Essays from the Middle* (1993). Like Anzaldúa, she returns to her ancestral land, Nepantla—which means “place in the middle” in the indigenous Nahuatl language—as she reflects on her life and work as “a Texican” writer (“Bienvenidos” in *Nepantla* 5). Mora also understands herself in relation to conceptualizations of

childhood and geography: “Tonight I write these words from the middle of these United States,” she reflects, “but I am a child of the border, that land corridor bordered by the two countries that have most influenced my perception of reality” (6). Mora goes on to cite one of her earlier works of poetry, “Legal Alien,” in which she highlights the experience of “sliding back and forth/between the fringes of both worlds” (qtd. in Mora, *Nepantla* 6). Mora’s essay—like hooks’s and Anzaldua’s—draws lines of descent not only between territories and national identities but also between geography, vision, and perception. For these fictional girls, the spaces of girlhood and the fictive landscapes shape their understandings of themselves and provide the foundation for their emergent worldviews.

Building upon hooks’s discussion of oppositional worldviews, I also look to Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle* (2006) which provides a deeper exploration of the intersection between Black womanhood and geography. McKittrick argues that dominant ideologies of geography obscure the ways in which Black women, throughout the African diaspora, have responded to and navigated geographic terrains and spatial relationships marked by violent and tyrannical power. Pointing to the space of the slave ship as an “oppositional geography” (xi), or a site of resistance, McKittrick reminds us that we do not live exclusively within safe spaces. She highlights Black women’s literary geographies (e.g. Harriet Jacobs’s *Slave Narrative*) and restricted spaces (such as the slave ship) to argue that Black women have been central to geographic contestations. She regards Black women as “viable contributors to an ongoing geographic struggle,” and asks, “What do black [sic] women’s geographies make possible if they are not conceptualized as simply subordinate, or buried, or lost, but rather are indicative of an unresolved story?” (xviii). McKittrick, too, considers the ways in which this marginalized social-spatial positioning leads to particular ways of knowing

and imagining the world, as well as unexpected (perhaps) forms of action. I tie McKittrick's conception of an oppositional geography to the ways in which girl characters question and navigate the sometimes-restrictive, sometimes-oppressive spaces of home and community. Just as McKittrick sees Black women as key to geographic contestations, the writers in this dissertation script Black and Brown girls as equally invested in and capable of engaging in such ideological and territorial battles.

These feminist theorists and activists each illustrate what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, would describe as a “situated standpoints” that lead to individual and collective vision and action. Collins defines standpoint theory as one which “argues that group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared challenges for individuals in those groups” which “can foster *similar angles of vision* [emphasis mine] leading to a group knowledge or standpoint that can then influence the group's political action. Stated differently, group standpoints are situated in unjust power relations, reflect those power relations, and help shape them” (“Some Group Matters” 205). Developed in the social sciences, standpoint theory originally critiqued the presumed objectivity of the sciences, arguing that all knowledge is socially constructed and dependent on our individual and collective positions within our cultural and social worlds (John 95). Elizabeth Grosz, in a nod to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories, points to the relationship between bodies and social space, reminding us that the “Body is lived and positioned as a spatio-temporal being” (*Space, Time, Perversion* 85). Space is given form and meaning by the individuals who occupy it, and those who occupy space experience it in decidedly bodily-dependent ways. In other words, if space is simultaneously a social construct and a field of social activity—the unfolding of social relations between individuals, communities, and individuals and governments—our particular social locations are not random,

but are articulated through our living bodies as we move through and in various spaces. Grosz asserts that “Corporeality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity” (103). Therefore, for girls of color who are read based on biological facets (such as phenotype, biological sex, and age), their very physical being not only informs social relations, but also shapes and reflects the material conditions of their specific subject positions and of those girls of color who are similarly situated. Girls of color certainly do not constitute a homogenous group. But their experiences within power relations, based on race/ethnicity/nationality, gender, and age, can lead them to develop a similar frame of reference or standpoint from which to understand, negotiate, and potentially *change* the world.

Thus, with these specific conceptualizations in mind—intersectionality, margins and borderlands, and oppositional geographies—I see Black and Brown literary girlhoods as sitting at an important nexus that speaks to the multiple layers of experience and positions of marginality. Each of these concepts works metaphorically. And these metaphors, particularly that of intersections, and even immediate, surface-level understanding of *standpoint* (as in marking the spot or point where you physically and politically stand), resonate with notions of geography and space. As a result, I now move to review conceptualizations of social space that are applicable to my discussion of girlhood narratives and Black and Brown girls’ spatial citizenship.

Thinking about Space

Space, as a theoretical concept or metaphor, is so nimble and applied in different disciplinary contests that its meaning can shift. As Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift assert: “Space is hot” (*Thinking Space* xi). Without going through the history of spatiality and academic debates that delineate between space and place, I acknowledge that my work builds upon critical geography and considerations of the spatial as intimately connected to the social world, a recognition that regards social relations and the spatial as constructed and mutually constitutive

and reinforcing. This conception of the social and spatial walking hand in hand is notably theorized by Ed Soja in *Postmodern Geographies*, where he distinguishes between what he calls “space per se, space as a contextual given, and socially-based spatiality, the *created* space of social organization and production” [emphasis mine] (79). While space as context may seem obvious—as in what John Brinckerhoff Jackson calls the “fact of land” (qtd. in Davis 2)—spaces are laden with the meanings that we humans assign to them over time. These meanings are based upon “various registers of human experience and interaction, whether social, political, cultural or economic” (Davis, *Southscapes* 2). Soja’s conception of space accordingly recognizes the physical and material reality (that we may refer to as place and that “may be primordially given”), but it also stresses the importance of human agency and interaction (*Postmodern Geographies* 79). Space takes shape and significance as humans define it, move through it, and shape it.

LeFebvre, with whom Soja engages, contributes to our conceptualization of space by highlighting the connection between geography and history, which is also a social construction. Notably, he identifies a particular political nuance to articulations of space and argues that “Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics. It has always been strategic and political...shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies” (qtd. in Soja 80). Among the ideologies that inhere in space are those related to identity categories, such as race, gender, class, and age.

For all of its critical rigor, Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* mentions gender only a few times, and the references are vague. Doreen Massey fills this gap with her work on the relevance of gender to ideologies of space. Her

argument holds shade of Henri Lefebvre who advances a theory of space informed by Marxism that views it as an entity dependent on economics, social reproduction, and global capitalism.

Massey argues that the social relations in space come to frame what we call “place,” defining it at a “constellation of social relations” in space (*Space, Place, and Gender* 154). She posits:

The spatial then, it is argued here, can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. It is a way of thinking in terms of the ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations, and it forces into view the real multiplicities of space-time (4).

Massey critiques Soja and proposes a theorization of space that seriously considers the impact of gender in structuring spaces and social relations.

Daphne Spain’s work also attends to gender and social relations, expanding this work to illuminate the connections between space, gender, knowledge, and inequality. She develops a theory of “spatial institutions” which correlates to gendered social institutions like “the family, education, and the labor force with their respective spatial corollaries of the dwelling, the school, and the workplace” (*Gendered Spaces* xiv). She traces how these spatial institutions enact gendered spatial practices that essentially cordon men and women in separate social and economic spaces. She sees this segregation as dangerous in that it controls access to knowledge and information (typically limiting women’s access to information) which leads to or reinforces gender inequities. Pointing to women’s relegation to domestic spaces, and men’s circulation in educational and economic spaces, particularly in the 19th century, Spain argues that “Gendered spaces separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege” (3). Her analysis points to the impact of spatial regulation and organization on knowledge production and ultimately power. I draw upon Spain’s idea of spatial institutions because it connects space to practices of exclusion and borders. It demonstrates how various

social institutions enact spatial practices can be used to exert power over others, and I cannot think of anyone subjected to the power plays of others more than children.

For Foucault, it is not just that space can exert power over others; “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (“Space, Knowledge, and Power” 252). So, it’s not just that spatial institutions and practices can “perpetuate status differences” (Spain, *Gendered Spaces* 3), they actually reproduce, in Foucault’s analysis, social hierarchies (“Space, Knowledge and Power” 255). We see this spatialization of difference in various moments in our nation’s history. For example, in “Social Geographies of Race: connecting Race and Space,” Brooke Neely and Michelle Saumra speak to the historic connection between race and space via socio-spatial processes that span vast swaths of space and time: imperialism and decolonization. The authors offer various examples of how race not only gives meaning to space but how space similarly informs and constructs our conceptions of race and racial boundaries. They cite the enslavement of people of African descent, Native removal (think The Trail of Tears, for example), Asian-American internment during World War II, Mexican and Mexican American repatriation during the early 20th century (or even deportation now in the 21st century) as examples of racial projects that depend upon spatial exclusion or expulsion. Thadious Davis’s *Southscapes* moves in this vein, showing the connection between spatial practices and power by interrogating how the “introduction of slavery in the 17th century through its abolition in the 19th century, has structured spheres of production that in turn organized social relations and created a language of spatial differentiation that depended upon race” (5). Defining, creating and monitoring space becomes, therefore, not only an ideological or discursive project (associating particular places with certain people possessing certain phenotypical markers and bodies) but also a social and political project that constricts certain subjects while liberating others.

Thinking of this constriction or control leads me children's geographies because just as geography as a discipline was resistant to recognize gender as a critical component of analysis and spatial practices, it has only recently acknowledged the intersection between childhood, children, and geography. Children's geography, as an academic discipline, is relatively new, and stems from childhood studies which attempts to complicate the presumed innocence and vulnerability that we associate with children/childhood and the maturity/rationality/rights that we assign to adults. As a discipline, children's geography recognizes that kids are equally embedded within social space as adults and that kids do shape the activities within the spaces to which they may be proscribed, even if those spaces are ultimately controlled by adults. The relationship between child and adult doesn't exist simply theoretically; these relations and divisions are also organized spatially, particularly in places where children and adults interact and meet (places like homes and schools). Like Spain's work which demonstrates spatial-based power imbalances, children's geography works to similarly demonstrate how children are defined and how their lives are positioned as marginal, dependent subjects based on spatial dictates and practices.

Our general cultural habit, as mentioned earlier, is to regard children as socially inept. They are vulnerable beings who must be cared for and surveilled within adult-centric or adult-driven spaces, whether home, school, or playground. "If one, is constituted and maintained by and within the boundaries set by a dominating authority," Houston Baker explains, "then one is not a setter of place, but a prisoner of another's desire" (qtd. in Davis 104). But is that an absolute? Such a view necessarily dismisses any room for children's agency. hooks' discussion of margins forces us to consider that exclusion or entrapment (even if it is deemed fun and natural or working in the child's best interest) does not equate to full erasure or complete subordination. Foucault, always musing about the workings of power, reminds us that "no matter

how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings” (“Space, Knowledge and Power” 245). As a discourse reified by social institutions of family, school, and religion, childhood is a pervasive social system. But if we take Foucault seriously (as well as hooks’s conception of marginality), then we can entertain the possibility that childhood, as a spatial condition, holds its own outlets and spaces for agency and active resistance.

Here, I think not only of Harriet Jacobs’s legendary “loophole of retreat” (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 114) but also of McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds* (which also discusses Jacobs), and particularly her discussion of Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved woman in Montréal, credited for (or accused of, take your pick) burning the city down. Angélique’s action offers a historic example of how beings who are regarded as non-beings, quasi-subjects, and presumably passive geographic actors, can—and oftentimes do—inform and alter space. In doing so, these individuals demonstrate how their very being or subjectivity is constitutive of the space itself. Gillian Rose’s work underscores that “Space itself—and landscape and place likewise—far from being firm foundations for disciplinary expertise and power, are insecure, precarious, and fluctuating. They are destabilized both by the internal contradictions of the geographical desire to know and by the resistance of the marginalized victims of that desire” (qtd. in Davis 7). Space itself, in other words, is always contested and precarious. Children, though distanced from traditional realms of political power, can enact such contestations.

This precarity is applicable to issues of power, particularly between adults, adult-run institutions, children, and our perceptions of what childhood is and where kids should be. Space reinforces these ideas and life experiences, situating children in particular spaces. As marginalized individuals and as “prisoners,” so to speak, of adult desire and nostalgia, children

are beings whose bodies and activities are constantly regulated (via disciplinary measures that we adults often say are “for their own good”). Children, then, are social beings situated on the receiving end of power plays. Their spatial realities are equally historically situated, informed, and politically charged. So, when I use the term “children’s geographies” (and specifically Black and Brown girlhood geographies), I do so not only to denote the everyday spaces and physical places or sites that we readily associate with children and young people (schools, nurseries, playgrounds and parks), but also to acknowledge the social-spatial hierarchical relations that unfold in those spaces. I also take heed of Soja’s warning that we must “be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology” (*Postmodern Geographies* 6). The unassuming spatiality of Black and Brown girlhoods, as depicted in children’s literature and middle grade and youth-centric literary fiction beg for consideration as spaces of restriction, repression and control, but also as spaces of possibility, agency, and liberation.

Ultimately, this project is about Black and Brown literary girlhoods and the ways in which the literature depicts geography as intersecting with other categories of difference to produce new and sometimes radical or unconsidered visions of community and national identity. This consideration of geography-as-social-space pays attention to the relationships, hierarchies and power dynamics infused in the spaces that girls of color occupy. I look, then, at Black and Mexican American girls and their particular situatedness or embodied standpoints, and I acknowledge how their material experiences as raced, gendered, classed, dependent individuals leads to unique ways of knowing and understanding the world. This knowledge base is viscerally

rooted and constitutes what Cherie Moraga calls a “theory of the flesh” (*This Bridge Called My Back* 23) or what Alice Walker regards as “a locational epistemology” (qtd. in Davis 352).

If Caron’s work on girls of color and citizenship has anything to teach us, it is that we should not discount the stories and agency of Black and Brown girls, even if they are overlooked in scholarship and in daily life. Caron purposefully broadens the definition of citizenship, wrestling it from a narrow legal or nationalist construct to acknowledge that citizenship is fundamentally a social and spatial process. The reframing is not a matter of simple semantics. It is also a critical move to recognize that girls of color, who are embedded (or in the case of literature, *emplotted*) in space, can, like Jacobs or Angélique, redefine what freedom and agency look like and what resistance entails.

There are always, even in the midst of restriction and repression, opportunities for resistance. In Davis’s analysis, “hierarchies of power” are not totalizing. Instead, “whether they exist within the family or the state,” they only wage power over marginalized communities until “the powerless transform self by accessing...the resources that might otherwise be labeled liabilities” (*Southscapes* 370). For the girls of color in these children’s, middle grade, and youth-centered novels, their “liabilities” pertain to their particular identities that sit at the intersection of multiple systems of oppressions. However, the writers, who are similar socially situated, give us girls who come to claim a sense of power based on the situated knowledge they possess. They extract wisdom from the very supposed liabilities and spaces of restriction and control. Their stories show us not a reversed geography or a simple margin-center flip, but rather, as McKittrick acknowledges, a way in which “invisible geographies, marginality indicate a struggle and ways of knowing the world” (*Demonic Grounds* 7) that can “direct us toward more humanly workable geographies” (xxx).

Literary Context and Chapter Overview

It is important to note the periodization of these narratives (1986-2014) because these literary products emerge after significant cultural moments and key social and political movements in American life. The earliest texts appear shortly after the 30th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and the 20th anniversary of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) challenged the “separate but equal” ideology that undergirded racial segregation in education, and the case ultimately led to public school desegregation. Similarly, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, arguably our nation’s most influential piece of civil rights legislation, built upon *Brown’s* gains by mandating and enforcing school desegregation. This legislation was much more far-reaching in that it outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The *Civil Rights Act* also reached into various sectors of American life (such as schools and workplaces) by requiring equal access to public places and facilities. The following year, the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, signed into law on August 6, bolstered these gains by ensuring the voting rights of all Americans. Yet, despite the progress heralded by the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, in 1965, Senator David Patrick Moynihan published *The State of Negro Family: The Case for National Action* which effectively launched an assault on Black motherhood. Moynihan’s *Report*, as it is often called, attributed the feminization of Black families and the accompanying poverty to an inherent cultural pathology, and in large part to what he regarded as the matriarchal structure of the Black family.

Black writers responded to this cultural moment, affirming Black culture and families. For example, Nikki Giovanni published her now-widely anthologized poem, “Nikki Rosa,” four years after Moynihan’s scathing report. Despite the time lapse, the poem’s speaker seems to respond directly and even defiantly to Moynihan, declaring “...I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me/because they never understand Black love is Black wealth and

they'll/probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that/all the while I was quite happy" (Giovanni *Black Feeling*). Giovanni's poem points to the limits of the white gaze while underscoring aspects of Black life and childhood that are ignored by those of the dominant white culture.

While the Civil Rights Movement is most often associated African Americans, other marginalized and disenfranchised racial and ethnic communities also organized during the 1960s and 1970s. This period saw increased political activity from various nationalist movements. Of particular interest to this project is the Chicana/o Rights Movement (El Movimiento) as well as the formation of the predominantly Puerto Rican Young Lords Organization, which emerged alongside The Black Power Movement.⁷ Many scholars point to César Chavez's founding of the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers) as a pivotal moment in the Chicana/o Rights Movement. His organization, consisting primarily of campesinos, or farmworkers, joined in solidarity with Filipino workers in a landmark labor strike that lasted over five years. The activist spirit animating these social movements also informed literary production. Cherrie Moraga documents this sentiment by asserting that much "of Chicano literature being read today sprang forth from a grassroots social and political movement of the sixties and seventies that was definitely anti-assimilationist" ("The Last Generation" 290).

Though the faces of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the Chicano Rights Movement were largely male, the literary and political activism associated with these movements cannot be limited to male-dominated activities. Women contributed greatly to these movements, and the writers and texts I treat in this dissertation respond to this particular cultural moment and these socio-political movements. Black and Chicana feminists apply a

⁷ Native Americans also organized during the Chicago Conference of 1961, and the Indian Civil Rights Act passed in 1968. Additionally, Asian American students rallied during this time as well.

critical gaze to mainstream white American culture as well as to the patriarchal Chicano and Black nationalist movements.

The latter decades of the twentieth century are also noteworthy given the widespread controversy around multiculturalism and the culture wars. Seen as a conflict between conservative values (often rooted in religious belief) and progressive values (often stemming from a belief in separation between church and state), the culture wars involve public and governmental conversations that cut to the core of our definition of American identity and the role of public policy in private life (particularly in relation to gay marriage, immigration, reproductive health, and affirmative action, to name a few issues). Cyrus R.K. Patell attributes the culture wars to the momentum from various civil rights and nationalist movements, changes in immigration reform (e.g. passage of the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*), and legal remedies for past discriminatory practices (such as affirmative action). Additionally, he cites a 1972 report, “No American: A Statement on Multicultural Education,” published by the American Association of Colleges and Teacher Education, as promoting cultural pluralism (or cultural diversity) as a defining characteristic of American society *and* a necessary tenet of the 20th century American educational system (*Emergent Literatures* 189-190). This report effectively rejected America’s romanticized image as a melting pot and contributed to a climate that promoted increased recognition of the existence and contributions of the nation’s multi-ethnic communities.

Indeed, it is not until the 1970s and 1980s that we see the emergence (though certainly not the birth) of numerous literary publications by women of color. We see these alternative perspectives not only in poems like Giovanni’s “Nikki Rosa,” but also with the publication of *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), a collection of poetry, short stories, and essays edited

by novelist Toni Cade Bambara which introduced Black female writers to the public, and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), a multi-racial and multi-ethnic collaborative project edited by Chicana feminist writer-poets Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. This literary energy characterized the 1980s, a decade popularly thought of as a “renaissance” in terms of writing specifically by Black women and by women of color, more generally. For example, noting the absence of diverse voices in the publishing world, Black feminist writers and activists Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith started Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1980, which was followed two years later by the multicultural and multiracial feminist Aunt Lute Press, home to Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking text, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

The aforementioned anthologies express a fierce commitment to social justice and exemplify an unrelenting “spirit of embrace, an embrace of the community” (Bambara, *The Black Woman*, 7). This spirit—which I read as the moral and theoretical terrain of these narratives—paved the way for Alice Walker’s signature work, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), which introduced the term “womanist” to feminist intellectual and activist circles. Walker initially defines a womanist specifically as a “black feminist or feminist of color”[5] (xi). Her extended definition describes the terms as “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually” (xi). Most importantly, for Walker and for the purposes of this project, a womanist is decidedly “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist...” (xi).

My project builds upon this womanist spirit of community, collaboration, and connection, which characterizes much of Black and Chicana feminist thought and the earlier intersections

between Black and Mexican American activism. As Michelle Wallace asserts in “Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity” (1989), Black feminist creativity is often systematically denied any political power. Yet, as Wallace explains, Black feminist production—and to this I would add Chicana—is often confined to the aesthetic realm and simply relegated to the *presumed* depoliticized spaces of entertainment and popular culture. Yet, in her estimation, “all black feminist creativity wants is to make the world a place that will be safe for women of color, their men, and their children” (53). Rita Sánchez notes a similar impetus driving Chicana literature in her essay, “Chicana Writer Breaking Out of the Silence” (1977). Identifying writing as “the tool which allows the Chicana to implement action, critical thought, change,” Sanchez argues that “all of Chicana literature crys [sic] out to make the world, to make relationships human again” (67). Therefore, this dissertation affirms the primacy of literature, specifically the ethnic girlhood narrative, as a vehicle through which Black, Chicana and Mexican American writers envision community and affect broader social change. Thus, my project maps, on one level, how these writers attempt to create new worlds characterized by freedom. Central to these constructions of alternate worlds are girls of color, who by virtue of their positions at society’s margins, possess unique visions and potentially liberating worldviews.

For the purposes of my study, I focus on texts that are written by Black and Chicana/Mexican American feminist authors explicitly for children and young adults (or widely regarded as such), and that are girl-centered and sensitive to geography (in terms of geographic territories, childhood spaces, or social spaces). Some of the authors clearly identify as feminist (such as Butler) and/or situate themselves within radical Black feminist traditions (hooks) or Chicana feminism (Mora and Viramontes, for example). Two other authors, Ryan and Williams-Garcia are not explicitly political in personally identifying as such. Their works nevertheless

demonstrate a concern with girlhood and geography and illustrate a clear feminist orientation given the political backdrop of their stories (Black Power Movement and Mexican Repatriation) and the emphasis on their girl characters' negotiation of restrictive gender expectations.

All of the works traverse multiple geographic boundaries, journeying across the United States, from New York City to Oakland, and across national borders (specifically Mexico and the United States). They also extend into the Global South as conceived by Anne Garland Mahler. Mahler's "What/Where is the Global South?" points to the concept in a "post-national sense to address the spaces and peoples negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalization." Her conceptualization gels with Soja and LeFebvre's recognition of capitalism as a pervasive economic system that structures localities across time and space and regions. Thus, while all of the texts feature "geography" in some way, the actual "real world" geography of each text is secondary to my interest in the fictional worlds and social spaces in which the girls of color are embedded. In other words, these fictional worlds—though rooted in recognizable urban centers and rural spaces spanning the United States and Mexico (with references to Asia and Europe)—are seen through the lens of child characters and their girlhood experiences. Charting the girls' emotional, intellectual, and imaginative worlds and understanding how they move through or within various social spaces as individuals in their specifically raced, classes, gendered, child bodies constitutes my central concern.

Admittedly, there is a teleological tension in this project. My discussion begins with children's picture books, moves to middle grade novels, and then to youth-centric texts that are sometimes discussed or taught as young adult novels. Part of this progression reflects the evolution of feminist-authored children's literature and children's literature depicting children of color, which begins with shorter texts, often poetry and picture books. For example, during the

Black Arts Movement, Black writers often produced texts with young children in mind, as evidenced by Nikki Giovanni's *Spin a Soft Black Song* (1971) or Eloise Greenfield's *Honey, I Love and Other Poems* (1978). The characters' age progression could lead one to misread this project as adhering to a strictly developmental approach, following a "normative" conception of young girls' life trajectory: moving from young girlhood, to tweendom, to teetering along the line of young womanhood. I refuse such a purely biological conceptualization of girlhood, preferring to underscore the social and cultural constructedness of the category and those who occupy that particular life space. Therefore, the chapters are not organized chronologically. Instead, I pair texts and authors due to converges in thematic content. Most importantly, I move amongst the spatial confines that frame girlhood, taking readers to intimate spaces and schools, to neighborhoods, cities, and countries, to spaces that emphasize the girls' explicit being-in-the-world as social actors and political agents. There's attention to the small and child-centered spaces. There's also equal, if not greater concern, for how these texts open us up to larger social worlds and convey the effect of structuring forces on girls of color, as well as how they imagine ways in which girls can take action to impact larger social and political worlds.

In Chapter Two: "When I Think of Home," I explore notions of home in feminist literary productions for children, specifically the picture books *Homemade Love* (2002) by bell hooks and *I Pledge Allegiance* (2014) a text co-authored by Chicana feminist poet Pat Mora and her daughter Libby Martinez. I place hooks and Mora in dialogue to examine Black and Chicana feminists investments in childhood and home. This analysis uses hooks's essay "Homeplace" as a starting point. I argue that Black and Chicana writers create fictional worlds via children's books that counter popular—and oftentimes derogatory—narratives of Black and Brown childhoods and reconstruct our conceptions of the United States as "home."

Chapter Three: “Moving through Nepantla” discusses girls who move through the liminal space of tweedom (between younger girlhood and their teenage years) and focuses on their growing levels of critical consciousness and political engagement. I treat two popular works of middle grade historical fiction. Williams-Garcia’s novel takes place in Oakland during the summer of 1968, and the protagonist and her sisters are embedded in a world shaped by the Black nationalist movement. Ryan’s novel, set variously in California and Mexico, in the decades following the Mexican Revolution, traces a young girl who must travel north into the United States. This movement across an arbitrary yet politically loaded line produces a shift in her political consciousness. Focusing on each girls’ in-betweenness, which is rendered in relation to geographic place and specific social, economic, and cultural spaces, I argue that their instability in the material world mirrors their emotional and political growth, casting them as literary nepantleras, to borrow from Anzaldúa.

Chapter Four: “I Dream a World” introduces two novels in which the protagonists demonstrate some capacity as change agents. I pair Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) with Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). In Butler’s novel, Lauren Oya Olamina, the daughter of a minister, comes of age amidst an apocalyptic world of social collapse and unrest. Lauren’s character, though young, articulates a decidedly womanist perspective, imagining and working for a “unifying, purposeful life here on Earth, and the hope of heaven for [all people] and their children” (Butler 261). Similarly, Viramontes’s novel, which tells the story of a young migrant worker, Estrella, presents a coming-of-age tale situated in an equally precarious context. Estrella’s story highlights the political history of the borderlands region. In this chapter, I focus on embodiedness and social location, arguing that Butler and Viramontes’s

novels illustrate the liberatory possibilities that reside at the margin or in the periphery, specifically within the bodies and minds of Black and Mexican American girls.

Granted, none of the texts can be considered canonical. With the exception of *Parable of the Sower* and *Under the Feet of Jesus*, most have received little to no scholarly attention. For some of the texts—Butler’s and Viramontes’s novels notwithstanding—this scholarly omission may be attributed to their classification (or perceived designation) as children’s or young adult literature. As Sandra L. Beckett notes in *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* (2009), “a large number of works marketed as children’s [or young adult] books are in fact intended for readers of all age” (3). Many of these narratives are crossover texts, and most have enjoyed a wide readership and have garnered critical acclaim and literary prizes. It is my contention that the popularity of these authors in the non-academic realm and their relegation to the margins of literary study can neither negate the cultural work their texts perform nor diminish their literary value. Cyrus R.K. Patell’s discussion of emergent literatures—literary products from cultural groups situated in opposition to the dominant white American literary culture—points to the shifting values that alter the perceptions of works previously regarded as subversive. He reminds us that literary canons are not static entities, writing “What was once a challenge to a literary tradition becomes the exemplar of that literary tradition. In other words, we tend to think of a classic as a text that is embedded in traditions and conventions, and we forget that many texts now considered classics were written in order to question and challenge the traditions and conventions of their times” (*Emergent U.S. Literatures: From Multiculturalism to Cosmopolitanism in the Late Twentieth Century* 7). This dissertation does not argue for the inclusion of these particular texts in the American literary canon, which is a loaded social construction itself. It does, however, urge us to look more closely at cultural productions

relegated to the broad category that we call children's literature. Barbara Christian's "Race for Theory" stresses that women of color *do* theory differently, that our theories may take different shape/forms (such as creative texts), and that they may sound differently from the high-brow and inaccessible language of the academy. Each of these texts challenge and question popular ideologies of citizenship and nationhood and in doing so create worlds and new theories of community. Invoking Christian's and Wallace's sentiments, as well as Sanchez's image of writing as tool for change, I regard these texts as creative, intellectual, and political projects. They are stories through which writers may theorize not only the social predicaments of girls (and perhaps by extension, women) of color, but also how the interlocking identity categories (and the systems which produce them) inform geographic realities that create individual and collective conceptions of self and community. Scholars neglect valuable cultural products if we ignore these child-centered texts as these narrative of Black and Brown girlhoods give us inspiration, theories, and represent an underappreciated archive of Black and Chicana feminist thought.

CHAPTER 2. WHEN I THINK OF HOME

Black feminist cultural critic bell hooks and Chicana⁸ feminist writer-poet Pat Mora are two pivotal figures in the U.S. feminist landscape who hail from distinct cultural worlds. The daughter of working class Black parents, hooks [née Gloria Jean Watkins] grew up in the segregated South. Mora, a second-generation Chicana feminist poet, spent her girlhood and much of her adult life in the Southwest border town of El Paso, Texas, with the Chihuahua desert, the Rio Grande, and the Mexican city of Juárez in her backyard. Despite their racial, cultural, and geographic differences, both entered the public stage as writers rooted in the Black and Chicana communities that defined Third World feminist activism in the late twentieth century.

hooks's first book to garner significant public attention,⁹ *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), introduced readers to her incisive critical gaze and her fearless, take-no-prisoners prose. Written while she was an undergraduate, the text is widely considered required

⁸ The question of terminology can be a confusing and potentially divisive one. In a 2003 interview facilitated by Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak and Nancy Sullivan, Sullivan, a linguist, asked Mora, "What do you like to be referred to as?" Mora responded, "I'm very comfortable if people say 'Chicana, Latina, Mexican American.' I don't have any trouble with those. Hispanic, I have a little more problem with," given its Eurocentric associations (148). She has also called herself "Texican," following Ronaldo Hinojosa Smith's lead in describing individuals "born in Texas of Mexican ancestry" ("Bienvenidos" *Nepantla* 5). As with other ethnic communities, terminology changes over time, often circling back to or revising an earlier label. Sometimes, the chosen term varies depending on the scholar's political interest or affiliations, or it can simply reflect the time period of the research. For the purposes of this project, and given Mora's early identification as a Chicana feminist poet, I utilize *Chicana* to underscore her heritage as a U.S.-born woman of Mexican descent who identifies with the more overtly "political, social and cultural movement begun in the 1960s that intersected with the civil rights movement" (Hernández *Postnationalism in Chicano/a Literature and Culture* 2). This cultural and political perspective grounds her work.

⁹ Her first published book was a volume of poetry titled *And There We Wept* (1978).

reading in women's and gender studies, as that book put mainstream white feminism on blast, bursting its exclusionary boundaries to recognize the particular social marginalization, everyday activism, and unique feminist epistemologies of Black women. hooks's perspective is pointed and political, and she is quick to call out what she terms "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* 52).

On the other hand, a cursory look at Mora's recent bibliography—populated primarily with children's picture books—seems to suggest a less explicit concern on Mora's part with unveiling privilege and dismantling systems of power and oppression. Yet, her poetry collections highlight the agency and power of women who must operate against the lingering effects of Mexico's colonial history as well as the patriarchal structures in their own families and cultural communities. In her first collection of essays, *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* (1993), Mora injects the political by illuminating the complexities of negotiating the multicultural geopolitical space of the U.S.-Mexico border. As a lyrical and personal testament to the material realities of living in a state of cultural and political in-betweenness, *Nepantla* exemplifies the borderlands concept, articulated in Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 classic Chicana feminist text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In nineteen essays, Mora pays homage to the neglected perspectives and spiritual wisdom of Chicanas; *Nepantla*'s publication and positive reception among public and academic audiences established Mora as a notable figure in Chicana letters and a voice of dissent in mainstream feminism writ large. Thus, both writers, as evidenced by their extensive publishing records, deliberately use the space of the page to foreground the experiences and standpoints of women of color, thereby challenging whitewashed notions of feminist history, politics, and community.

But Mora and hooks share more than a mutual commitment to inserting underrepresented voices in dominant feminist narratives and building an inclusive and intersectional brand of feminism. Both bring their intellectual gifts, political acuity, and creativity to bear upon the world of children's literature—particularly the genre of the picture book. Penning more than thirty-five children's books—not including her three young adult (YA) poetry titles—Mora holds sway as a heavy hitter within the children's book industry. She is an award-winning children's author, the self-professed bilingual “bookjoy” advocate, and founder of the annual bilingual children's literacy celebration, “Día de Los Niños/ Día de los Libros.”¹⁰ hooks, known first and foremost as a fierce Black feminist critic and prolific public intellectual who educates college students and adult audiences about feminism, toxic masculinity, popular culture, and love, took a more circuitous route to children's literary notoriety. Nevertheless, she made a clear mark in the children's publishing world with five picture books to her name. The fact that hooks and Mora both enjoy varied levels of commercial success and critical acclaim as children's books authors is no small feat. Of course, the children's publishing industry has witnessed—and even bemoans—the flood of pop culture celebrities crossing-over into the book world (think Madonna, Julie Andrews, Whoopi Goldberg, Kristi Yamaguchi, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, Jerry Seinfeld, and Spike Lee). But it is unusual for noted feminist thinkers, particularly feminists of color, to break into such a commercial-driven industry. Their work is critical given the ever-present need to shake up the publishing world and reconstruct the children's book industry into one that more accurately reflects U.S. ethnic, racial, and cultural demographics. We

¹⁰ Inspired by the Mexican celebration, El Día del Niño (Day of the Child), Mora partnered with REFORMA (the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latino and the Spanish-Speaking) to create Children's Day, Book Day/*El día de los niños, el día de los libros*. A bilingual initiative (typically observed on April 30), *Día* promotes literacy development among children and families of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

could say their mere presence as feminist authors of color represents a disruption in business-as-usual, but beyond diversifying the children's literature landscape, what do they bring?

The initial impetus for my project was to place hooks and Mora in conversation as two writers of color who travel in feminist, literary, and academic circles, while enjoying some fame as children's picture book authors. I focus on their picture books because these texts do not exist within a vacuum. Their turn to children's literature is not just child's play or a mere diversion from their more serious theoretical or creative projects. Just as Gary D. Schmidt argues that children's literature reflects and instills ideologies of nationalism, democracy, and citizenship (*Making Americans* xxvii), I contend that hooks's and Mora's children's books perform similar cultural and political work. These stories function as creative outlets through which these writers explore notions of justice and equity, nationhood, citizenship and belonging—but with young audiences. The narratives may be bound within the colorful pages of a picture book, but they offer children of color stories that envision them as part of this nation. Writing children of color into the nation, into our democracy, is an imaginative act that the authors undertake, but it is also a form of feminist geopolitical praxis.

Specifically, this chapter explores thematic and aesthetic convergences in their work by focusing on the connection between girlhood and geography, particularly the geographic territories as well as physical, cultural, and imaginative spaces located in the texts. My exploration centers on depictions of girl characters in two of their picture books: *Homemade Love* (2002) by hooks and *I Pledge Allegiance* (2014), co-authored by Mora and her daughter Libby Martinez. By analyzing the social, cultural, and political geographies and their relationship to girlhood in each story, I argue that Mora and hooks push readers to consider how we conceptualize home and whom we see and embrace as part of our national community. This

chapter examines how the authors render girls in relation to space and place and considers what this rendering reveals about the girls' relationships to power and home. For example, hooks's story presents an intimate Black home space, underscoring the necessity for safe spaces or affirmative and even revolutionary Black spaces to the overall project of Black liberation. Mora and Martinez's citizenship story, on the other hand, follows a young Mexican American girl as she moves among school, home, and a courthouse, positioning this young girl as a model for how the United States can embrace inclusivity as a national community. Each text, whether focused on family or communities outside the home, engages in its own kind of worldmaking: placing a young girl of color at the center of each story, connecting with young readers, and helping them picture a world without limits and boundaries.

Both authors offer kid-friendly theorizations of home by centering their stories on girlhood narratives that unfold within confines of spaces and places typically associated with children's development and womanhood/femininity: home and school. At minimum, paying attention to these literary domestic and educational spheres may seem retrograde (given women's stereotypical roles as mothers and teachers and the gender-biased associations etched into the public psyche about each space representing "the feminine"). At worst, creating storyworlds in these gender-laden narrative settings may appear counterproductive to any serious feminist political project. But as noted children's literature scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Herbert Kohl have long acknowledged, children's literature is always-already performing ideological work by educating or inculcating children on social mores and by modeling culturally sanctioned ways of thinking and modes of behavior. Therefore, though hooks's and Mora's girl-centered stories simultaneously unfold within child-centered spaces that carry gender-specific connotations and within the seemingly innocuous frame of children's picture books, they still

constitute unique theoretical and feminist meditations on race, gender, childhood, and nation by focusing on some of the most marginalized among us: young girls of color. Conceptually and pictorially, these two books envision domestic and institutional spaces that reflect an ethic of care and visualize a politics of inclusivity, thereby affirming the humanity and freedom of Black and Brown girls, and by extension, other marginalized and racialized communities in our nation.

Patrick Hamilton has cautioned literary scholars about the dangers of conflating literary representations of politics with “real world,” boots-on-the-ground political engagement and action. Instead of regarding literature, specifically Chicano/a literature, “as [a form of] resistance and [inherently] resistant,” he urges us to consider authors as simply “seek[ing] to affect how we think about such differences as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality within the U.S. nation-space” (*Of Space and Mind* 3). I fundamentally disagree with Hamilton’s dismissal of literature as a form of resistance, particularly given the history of Black and Chicana/o writers who engaged in literacy activism, affecting change and shaping public discourse around racism, sexism, civil rights, and social inequities. I see hooks’s and Mora’s children’s books as encouraging children and their adult mediators to think more expansively about these contentious issues through presentation of narratives that, due to the nature of their content, necessarily contest racist, sexist, and nationalistic discourses around difference. Placing Mora and hooks in dialogue allows me to explore but two examples of contemporary Black and Chicana feminists and their treatment of girlhood and experiments in worldmaking—how they build literary and emotional terrains, or “uniquely imagined storyworlds” to borrow Hamilton’s phrasing (1), that constitute symbolic havens offering temporary solace from the social inequities and cultural domains of power (Collins and Bilge *Intersectionality* 3) that structure American society and the systemic and even state-sanctioned violence unleashed upon communities of color. Through

these picture books, hooks and Mora privilege ordinary girlhood spaces and wage delicate attacks against racism, sexism, and xenophobia, issuing subtle challenges to America's melting pot narrative of multicultural bliss. hooks and Mora utilize geography—rendered as place and space in hooks's text as well as references to specific geographic terrains in Mora's text—to create alternative conceptualizations and visions of home, be it an intimate familial space or the space of one's native or adopted homeland. It is through the children's picture book—a genre that hinges upon the interplay between text and image¹¹—that each writer crafts the figurative homes, schools, and communities in which kids' imaginations and the girl protagonists travel, effectively re-imagining and reconstructing America as a more inclusive national home.

Contextualizing bell hooks

In her 1996 memoir *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, hooks proclaims, “Indeed, one of my favorite novels in the whole world is Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” (xii). Praising Morrison’s debut novel about the embattled life of a young Black girl who yearns for blue eyes and the happiness and freedom they ostensibly represent, hooks underscores the Nobel Prize winner’s “desire to write about ‘the people who in all literature were always peripheral—little Black girls who were props, background; those people were never center stage and those people were me’” (qtd. in hooks, *Bone Black* xii). hooks does not unpack the semantics of this directive, but Morrison’s word choice is telling and applicable to my project. Morrison’s statement that “those people were me” points to the intersubjective experience of reading in which the reader identifies to some degree with characters in the text—a concern for all readers, but particularly

¹¹ Children’s books authors, even those with established careers like Mora, have little input regarding the choice of illustrator or the content of the illustrations. Yet, hooks, as you will see shortly, was able to influence one aspect of visual representation in *Homemade Love*. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the illustrations as well as the form of the picture book as a whole, since it provides literal images that can inform or map children’s perceptions of the world.

for young readers. And the language of “peripheral,” “props,” “background,” and “center stage” highlights the historic social location (and experiences of marginalization and objectification) of Black girls in American society. This wording clarifies hooks’s glee upon discovering stories that intentionally spotlight girls who are forced to negotiate worlds marked by race, class, and gender-based disparities, girl characters whom, despite their powerless social positions, hooks heralds as “critical thinkers, [who] theoriz[e] their lives, tell the story, and by so doing mak[e] themselves subjects of history” (xii).

Morrison’s attention to Black girls as subjects and hooks’s interest in these narratives of Black girlhood represent contemporary literary engagement in what has actually been a longstanding concern of African American women writers: the relationship between Black females and space. How Black girls navigate the spaces that inform, shape, and even restrict their relationships and social options permeates the African American literary tradition and particularly Black women’s literary production, of which hooks is a part. Consider these early texts which privilege Black girlhood or young womanhood and—in some cases given their titular references to space—gesture to the spatial realities that constrict the girls’ lives: Harriet E. Wilson’s *OUR NIG; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In A Two-Story White House, North. SHOWING THAT SLAVERY’S SHADOWS FALL EVEN THERE* (1859), Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Elizabeth Keckley’s *Behind the Scenes Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868). Each text presents a searing portrayal of 19th century Black girlhood unfolding within the confines of domestic-cum-work spaces made oppressive by racist ideologies and the state-sanctioned institution of slavery. By interrogating Black girls’ social positions within the context of slavery—as young girls, enslaved or indentured and subject to sexual and physical violence and economic exploitation due to their

subjugated status—each writer underscored the relationship among Black girlhood, power, and oppressive social structures. But in so much as these authors levied harsh critiques about Black girls’ legal status as enslaved individuals or indentured servants, they also established a literary precedent of examining Black girlhood as restricted and regulated not only in a legal or social sense, but also in a fundamentally spatial one.

A more contemporary literary spatialization of Black girlhood may be seen in a litany of novels featuring young, Black female protagonists who are forced to traverse difficult landscapes. Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha* (1953), Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), and Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) immediately spring to mind. Each of these canonical coming-of-age stories charts a Black girl’s movement from childhood through adolescence to womanhood. Each novel also documents or maps a girl’s journey or everyday life, set against precarious urban environments or equally dangerous rural landscapes and intimate home spaces.

As a picture book geared towards young children and their parents, *Homemade Love* does not focus on a young girl coming-of-age in a perilous geographic or treacherous social environment. Rather, the story presents a young Black girl raised within an idyllic nuclear family and loving home. The text reproduces a hetero-normative family dynamic, including its attendant parent-child power differential, and references to purported adult matters (such as sexual violence, racial discrimination, oppressive social relations, and white supremacist capitalist patriarchy) are absent. That, in itself, is no surprise since these picture books are geared towards young children, whom adults—even authors—may want to protect from adult concerns. Even so, if we read this children’s text in conjunction with hooks’s memoir, *Bone Black*, and her theorizations of “homeplace,” “marginalization,” and “oppositional blackness,” we may

recognize that hooks utilizes the narrative space to create a storyworld that is not only intimately related to the social and material worlds that she addresses in her adult-oriented writing but also deeply influenced by her radical Black feminist ideologies of liberation. In *Homemade Love*, bell hooks creates an imagined geography that illustrates her conceptualization of a homeplace and reflects her own childhood negotiations of space within the racial apartheid of the American South. Understanding hooks's idea of homeplace and her own personal childhood geography is key to understanding the imaginative terrain she seeks to create in her picture book. This space, characterized by an ethic of love, allows for the development of an unfettered Black girlhood. By considering the textual geographies, and the ways in which hooks offers an alternative to the oppressive material realities located outside the text, I interpret hooks's children's book as an extension of her political work, and that of her predecessors.

Homemade Love

Quite simply, *Homemade Love* is a Black bedtime story. Originally envisioned as a Black picture book that would “rival [Margaret Wise Brown's 1910 children's classic] *Goodnight Moon*” (“Passionate Politics”), it's perhaps the Black bedtime book that hooks would want all Black children to read. The book features a young girl protagonist – affectionately nicknamed “Girldie” by her parents—whom hooks introduced three years earlier in her first picture book, *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999).¹² But with *Homemade Love*, Girldie returns for more than a supporting role, moving from what hooks might perceive as Morrison's metaphorical narrative background to the center stage. The story is simple: Girldie is young, spirited, energetic, and full of joy. She is part of a nuclear family, and even when she makes mistakes, her parents approach

¹² Published in 1999, *Happy to Be Nappy* offered a positive counter to an earlier book of a similar title, Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair* (1998), which was mired in controversy and met with intense public criticism after a white teacher read the book to her class of Black and Brown students. *Homemade Love* is hooks's second published children's picture book.

her with a spirit of generosity, tenderness, and forgiveness. Though some readers and critics question the book's narrative arc given the quotidian nature of the characters' activities and the lack of a dramatic action or a clearly defined plot line, *Homemade Love* visually conveys the importance of Black families and responds to the need for Black children to see images and models of a loving two-parent Black home—representations often lacking in popular culture.

In the book, geography's import can escape notice, as it does not appear to be a major concern of the text. However, hooks clearly situates Girlpie within a specific setting, and that is the site of the home. hooks constructs this domestic space—and here I'm attending to the creation of a storyworld via language, not simply via images—as an affective realm based upon an ethic of care that hooks regards as central to activating a radical love of blackness and a sense of liberation and unfettered opportunity. Placing Girlpie in *this* kind of home speaks to how hooks embeds her character in a particular affective geography that counters the race-based marginalization that circumscribes contemporary Black life.

As a children's book, *Homemade Love* book does not serve as a miniature barometer of “real-world” injustice. It does not catalogue or document the social ills afflicting Black communities. But it certainly works against longstanding discourses of Black inferiority and Black familial dysfunction. This literary space intentionally bolsters Black life, heralds Black families, and ultimately affirms Black girls' agency and subjectivity. In Girlpie, we see a young, Black, female child who is free, happy, and unrestricted. So, by charting this home that grounds and nurtures Girlpie's existence, we see how Girlpie is given the space and permission to *be*. She's afforded opportunity and room to evolve, to live freely—in mind, body, and spirit. And this vision of a free Black girlhood, which is rendered in clear but subtle geographic form, reflects hooks's own Black feminist politics, as she takes her own love of Blackness and offers

young readers with a home and a resting place. This fictional world is a site of possibility, a place devoted to supporting Black life and the nourishing the minds and spirits of Black children. Recognizing that Girlpie exists within such a spatial realm, I see *Homemade Love* not only as a challenge to anti-blackness rhetoric and pejorative images of Black family life within the larger culture, but also as a fictional extension of hooks's own theoretical work, as well as a radical re-visioning of Black girlhood, at least in the broader, public eye.

To understand how hooks charts new spatial terrains in children's literature, we have to consider that space and place operate on multiple registers in this picture book. We can attend to the spaces within the book, as rendered by Evans's vibrant artwork, and we can also consider how the book charts its own narrative geography. In other words, while the illustrations and their placement certainly create a kind of visual-spatial narrative that constitutes the setting of the story and frames the protagonist's experience, the text also brings to life a storyworld, or an imagined geography, that exemplifies hooks's conceptualization of an intimate Black homeplace. In *Homemade Love*, hooks essentially takes her conceptualization of a homeplace and grafts it onto a child's world. If we take hooks's conceptualizations of a "homeplace," "marginality," and "oppositional blackness" and join them with Morrison's project of constructing a "home," then we have the analytical or conceptual tool for reading hooks's picture books as an articulation of her political project to create an emancipatory space for Black people, particularly Black girls and women.

Before turning to her creative construction of a homeplace, I want to consider, briefly, the textual geography, which can be expressed visually or narratively. As with most children's picture books, *Homemade Love* follows the conventions of the genre by spreading the story across thirty-two pages. Since illustrations constitute the "meat" and focus of most picture books

(as opposed to the narrative content and hence the name for the genre), the textual elements can vary dramatically from one picture book to another. Here, hooks tells her story in sparse language, often utilizing simple sentences or short phrases, while vivid, semi-cartoonish, semi-realistic images dominate each page to capture the reader's eye.

It is clear from the opening words and images that Girlpie is a central figure featured prominently throughout the text, while her parents appear to be secondary characters who make brief appearances. The book downplays its adult presence from the first page, which opens with five short words: "My mama calls me GIRLPIE."¹³ In this simple declarative statement, Girlpie's mother ("My mama") functions as the grammatical subject, but Girlpie occupies the stress position, ending the sentence, giving her identity greater weight. Structurally speaking, her name comes after the first mention of her mother, but "GIRLPIE" appears completely capitalized, denoting that *this* is in fact the child character's name and that it carries the significance of a formal, given name. The accompanying image depicts a smiling-faced, milk chocolate brown girl who holds the brown hand of an adult who wears an apron; presumably, this is her mother. Their clasped hands and physical placement suggest a level of intimacy between Girlpie and an adult, maternal presence. Spatially, Girlpie assumes her position as star of the story by literally taking up the entire first page of the picture book. She may be young in age and small in size, but her face—the only one featured on the page—is privileged in the spread due to its singularity and its sheer dimensions. By honing in solely on her face, emergent

¹³ I have not cited specific page numbers since children's picture books typically lack pagination.

readers¹⁴ who are especially dependent on visual cues (and equally so on the verbal translations of their adult mediators who read the text) learn that *Girlpie* is important.

To the adult reader, this visual placement and the thematic centering it portends may seem unremarkable. But *Girlpie*'s position on the page is more complex than we might assume, especially for children in the early stages of literacy development. In "Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work,"¹⁵ children's literature scholar Perry Nodelman points out that while picture books appear easy to interpret, they are deceptively so. He reminds us of the interpretative work that images demand of readers and that young readers must make a series of sophisticated cognitive moves in order to decipher the codes represented by visuals and the written word. According to Nodelman, even the most simplistic, or seemingly representational picture (in which the image is more or less a direct representation of an object in reality), demands attention from an astute reader who is conversant in a set of pictorial conventions (128). Rather than being "innocent readers" (or consumers), children must approach the act of "reading" with a certain visual and intellectual acuity to connect language to images, even if an adult reads to them, simultaneously calling attention to the illustrations. In this regard, *Homemade Love* proves to be visually and spatially challenging for young children, preschool and early elementary age, who are just starting to learn the alphabet as well as the relationship between letters and sounds.

¹⁴ Emergent readers (pre-kindergarten through first grade) are at the beginning stages of the reading process. They generally are not able to read, but they are often familiar with concepts of print (i.e. understanding punctuation, knowing that print carries meaning, that we read from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom, that stories have a beginning, middle, and end, that letters have names, etc.), and they may have some mastery of letter recognition and letter-sound correspondence.

¹⁵ An earlier version of this essay appears under the title "Decoding the Images: Illustration and Picture Books."

In particular, Nodelman takes care to identify the “species-centricity” of the text at hand—the idea that “what matters most about the picture” (and thus, the story) “is the human being in it” (132). But again, he approaches children’s books as an experienced reader. He explains that

young children tend to scan a picture with equal attention to all parts; that the ability to pick out and focus on the human at the center is therefore a learned activity; and that reading reinforces important cultural assumptions, not just about the value of particular objects but also about the general assumption that the objects do have different values and do therefore require different degrees of attention. (132)

So reading does not simply involve learning to decipher language. It also entails decoding visual content. Nodelman’s comment reminds us that children gain this interpretative skill over time. Reading is not just calling out words on the page, but attaching meaning to those words or images. For young readers, recognizing the human character as central to the story is critical not only in learning to recognize who moves the story, but also who is of value.

Adult readers likely recognize, with little time or effort, that hooks’s *Homemade Love* clearly positions Girlpie as the most important “subject” in the picture, and hence the book. What I find most interesting about Nodelman’s idea is that if the images and text reinforce—or, in this case, *challenge*—cultural assumptions, then hooks’s young readers walk away seeing a “human at the center” who is young, Black, and female. Despite her marginalized social position as a child or minor, Girlpie, is the human who holds value. *Homemade Love* centers Girlpie’s story, and through it, children learn that this little Black girl—and Black girlhood—matters.

Moving through the story, we notice that the actual space on the page (i.e. the arrangement of images) consistently works to solidify Girlpie’s star position, placing emphasis on her as opposed to the adults in her world. Like the illustrations that include her mother, early scenes of her father curiously leave him mostly out of the page. On the third page, where the text metaphorically describes Girlpie as “Daddy’s honey bun chocolate dew drop,” we see Girlpie

joyfully clinging to the pantleg of an unidentified character. We can assume that Girlpie hugs her father's leg, given the stated reference to him on the page. But his face, as well as any other sign of his being (whether race, age, or gender), remains obscured and entirely out of the picture frame. Then, in the centerfold, all adult images vanish. Readers only see Girlpie lying down, arms spread out, her face and entire body facing readers. She sports a candy-apple red dress—readers can't miss her—adorned with little white hearts. Only two words grace the page, mirroring the title: "Homemade Love." Girlpie *is* the personification (or product) of homemade love.

These illustrations, coupled with the book's interplay between word and image, lead me to several observations. First, as already noted, the book focuses almost exclusively on Girlpie. Granted her parents are present from cover-to-cover, but they essentially make cameo appearances in the text. Second, the inner space of the storyworld (not to be confused with the space of the page as a *material* object) is primarily that of Girlpie's home. Apart from a few pictures depicting Girlpie in a limited natural landscape—denoted by flowers and blue skies—the narrative setting is rather enclosed. We see markers of interior domestic spaces (like kitchen tools, a vase, a dresser, a bed), not external images of a house, which is an important distinction to be made. As theorist Michel Foucault acknowledges in "Space, Knowledge, and Power," there's a nuance between structure (in this case of Girlpie's story, the edifice of the house) and space. For him, "architecture...is only taken as an element of support, to ensure a certain allocation of people in space...as well as a coding of their reciprocal relations" (253). In other words, Girlpie's childhood home, the exterior of which we never see, provides a frame for the social relationships and hierarchies embedded in this domestic space. That space is not an empty vessel but rather a field in which human activities occur and social relations develop and unfold.

The actual location of the house is irrelevant; there's no "real frame"—as Peter Hunt would say ("Unstable Metaphors" 31)—or real-world referent for Girlpie's home. There's no physical structure that we see, but the key factor is the emotional or affective reality that we align with the interior spaces that the text holds. Children's literature scholar Patricia Dewan has written extensively on how homes, particularly in children's literature, often represent a safety net, a place of emotional warmth and an environment characterized by a romanticized sense of affection (*House as Setting and Symbol* 4).¹⁶ However, it's only within a reading that juxtaposes the children's book with hooks's memoir that we see shades of the author's girlhood spaces in the representation of Girlpie's home. The inner space of *Homemade Love*, a profoundly nurturing and loving environment represented by smiles, hugs, and the metaphorical language of sugary desserts, mimics the intimate familial space that hooks found in her grandmother's and great-grandmother's homes. Those two homes produce an invisible yet ever-present frame, a palimpsest for the text.

To understand how hooks creates this storyworld, it is useful to revisit Carmelo Manuel's assessment of hooks's children's books. In "bell hooks's Children's Literature: Writing to Transform the World at its Roots," Manuel, a Spanish scholar and one of the few who has critically engaged hooks's picture books, describes her children's books as "blueprints for a happy life in blackness" (95). The blueprint metaphor is an apt one because it suggests that hooks's picture books constitute a conceptual and visible plan for creating a home or structuring a world that would protect and affirm the subjectivity and freedom of Black children. There's some slippage here between Manuel's use of design or engineering terminology (i.e. blueprints)

¹⁶ We know this isn't always the case given the number of texts—for adults and children—that depict physical, sexual, and emotional violence within the home.

and hooks's worldmaking project. Even so, her ideological project (to imagine a world with a particular regard for Black children) holds a real connection to the material world.

If we read *Homemade Love* in concert with *Bone Black*, it appears that hooks's blueprint for her children's book seems to be based upon her grandmother's and great-grandmother's homes, as well as hooks's experience growing up in racially segregated Kentucky. In *Homemade Love*, the specter of her childhood home, created by her parents—which hooks variously describes as “ugly” and “a site of repression”—stands in stark contrast to the feel-good nature of Girlpie's home. I should mention that in the dedication for *Homemade Love*, hooks thanks her mother for “creat[ing] a world of taste and flavors/good food, good time/sustained pleasure.” However, her memoir speaks primarily of her great grandmother's home. She describes “Big Mama” as a “short and fat” woman who “does not read or write” and who “chews tobacco and smokes a pipe” (*Bone Black* 25). She “wears aprons over the clothes with big pockets” (26)—like the mother figure in the picture book—and she cooks, particularly sweets for hooks and her siblings (26). In one instance, hooks recalls that she once wanted to bake her father a cake but at her parent's home, “we cannot make cakes. We cannot play in the kitchen. [But] at Big Mama's the kitchen is our home” (26). There is little room for carefree existence in her parents' home. But Big Mama's house offers that sense of comfort and ease.

Her grandmother Baba's house also provides a space of freedom. She describes her grandmother's house in the opening of her essay, “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional,” writing that

This is the story of a house. It has been lived in by many people. Our grandmother, Baba, made this house living space. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space...Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. (103)

Her reflection acknowledges the role of Black women in creating spaces of refuge, and she stresses the importance and symbolism of geography, place, and space. Baba's home is not simply site-specific, though in "Margins" she references its geographic position, noting its location "across town" beyond the spaces of "terrifying whiteness" (141). The most important details are not the home's physical structure or even its location, although the regulation of Black bodies and communities to the other side of town speaks to historical spatialization processes that reify race and power and demarcate boundaries of official geographies. Instead, hooks highlights Baba's home due to the unique, non-hierarchical social space it provided for her and her siblings. Baba's home constitutes a social world with more egalitarian adult-child relationships, a space where children have agency and opinions. With this inspirational backdrop, *Homemade Love* offers young Black children a similar model for "how [they can and should] belong in space." The picture book's social world is that of a profoundly nurturing and affirmative environment, and the book demonstrates through Girlpie's story that a young Black girl *can* exist freely. The picture book helps us to see that such spaces can exist even within the confines of a larger repressive, anti-black social world.

The picture book establishes, early on, that Girlpie lives in a loving home. The opening flap, albeit created by the publisher, begins: "Always loved, Girlpie is the sweet, sweet center of her parents' heart. In the paradise of childhood, all wrongs are forgiven and all the world made peace again. All children should live in such a world." This blurb, partially lifted from hooks's own language in the text, readily points to an ongoing conversation and common trope in children's literary studies: the spatialization of childhood and the glorification of this stage as an inherently innocent period of human life. Critic Susan Honeyman addresses this spatialization and its attendant power imbalance in *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern*

Fiction (2005). She asserts, “Writers often utilize childhood as a ludic space through which to criticize the adult world. In doing so, they mimic social constructions of childhood, exposing the very constructedness of such representations decentering the adult discourse that create them” and revealing Romantic-era assumptions about childhood innocence and vulnerability (5).

Homemade Love reproduces this trope of childhood innocence and conceptions of an unencumbered child space by creating a protagonist who is playful and carefree and who expresses a sense of wonder and curiosity. As Girlpie bounces from room to room of the house—and even floats in outer space among the stars—readers witness a little Black girl who knows no constraints and feels free to move, physically and imaginatively.

Granted, the text does not appear to critique the adult world, but Girlpie does represent a radical departure from popular discourse, which regards Black youth—and specifically Black girls—as un-childlike. In a 2017 *New York Times* op-ed, “Let Black Kids Just Be Kids,” Harvard University African American studies professor Robin Bernstein responds to a recent study about popular perceptions of Black children by tracing the historical development of innocence as a defining characteristic of childhood and one seen as inapplicable to Black youth. The study, published by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty, found that “a group of 325 adults viewed black [sic] girls as needing *less* nurturing, support and protection than white girls, and as knowing more about sex and other adult topics” [emphasis mine] (“Let Black Kids”). Bernstein examines historical conceptions of childhood and pays particular attention to the work of “popular writers, playwrights, actors and visual artists” in crafting images of “innocent white children” contrasted with depictions of Black children “as unconstrained imps” who were essentially “defined as non-children” (“Let Black Kids”). She notes that these “images weaponized childhood innocence, transforming [innocence] into a tool of racial domination” that

Black activists worked—and continue to work—tirelessly to counter. Arguing that “childhood innocence carries so much political force” and that these conceptions of are “part of a 200-year old history of white supremacy,” Bernstein’s commentary points to the need for art and literature that moves ideas of childhood innocence from the “whites-only club” (“Let Black Kids”). In linking Black childhood with a kind of domestic paradise, *Homemade Love* not only aligns Black childhood with idyllic notions of childhood innocence and purity, it also effectively re-spatializes Black childhood, lifting it from real-world experiences marked by racism and economic/political marginalization—the knowable narratives and acceptable spaces of blackness—to ground little Black children in spaces of peace and love—spaces imaginatively configured in *Homemade Love*.

But how free is Girlpie? And how autonomous can she be as a young child? Rather than positioning Girlpie within an urban environment beset by violence or drug activity (as might be the case if this were a young adult novel like Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* or Ibi Zoboi’s *American Street*), hooks’s sparse text and Evans’s vibrant illustrations converge to produce positive, if not outright saccharine, images of Black children and families. Although Girlpie is but a child who occupies a subordinate position in the family, *Homemade Love* conceptualizes, textually and visually, a positive and intimate Black social space. hooks crafts a story, accompanied by images of a loving Black mother and father. She insisted upon this male presence in order to combat the prevailing image of Black families as female-headed households and to disabuse readers of the notion that the nuclear family—a social institution—is largely a white enterprise (“Searching at the Source” 119-120). While her story may counter the prevailing and oftentimes derogatory narrative of Black childhood in America, hooks, like many of her literary foremothers, fashions Black girlhood in a decidedly domestic setting where Girlpie is

subject to adult guidance (or rule). For a feminist cultural critic like hooks, who is committed to dismantling systems of oppression, especially patriarchy, the emphasis on the domestic sphere seems counterintuitive. On the surface, given the focus on Girlpie's home life or her experience in the home, *Homemade Love* does not seem to be transgressive in its rendering of gender politics. Nevertheless, the book appears to be a logical extension of hooks's radical political vision which seeks to redefine and dramatically restructure the relationship between blackness, specifically Black girlhood, and everyday domestic space by linking Black home life with symbols of agency and love.

As feminist geographer Gillian Rose notes, feminist thinkers and activists "have long been aware of the importance of spatial structure in the production and reproduction of masculinist societies" (*Feminism and Geography* 18). In discussing the masculinist nature of geography studies, Rose argues for the importance of addressing "everyday spaces," and she even asserts that feminism can be considered, in large measure, "a kind of spatial politics" given the centuries-long struggle against a public-private dichotomy that largely shapes gendered relations and social roles (18). So yes, there is a political contradiction in this gendered space, and perhaps hooks does not succeed in loosening the chain-like threads between girlhood and domestic space, given her reliance on that setting—and its emotional and social resonance—to establish the familial tone and the Black cultural world. The story certainly draws upon the naturalized association between femininity and the home, but it also strips the space of potentially oppressive elements in its unapologetic embrace of blackness. The adult-child power dynamic remains firmly in place as Girlpie is but a young child (of unknown age) who is subject to parental authority and in need of her parents' care. Even so, by crafting Girlpie's domestic

world as a loving space, even in one that seems to reify heteronormative conceptions of family, hooks concretizes a site where Black subjectivity and Black girlhood can take root and blossom.

Here's where geopolitics come into play. According to geography scholar Darren Purcell, "geopolitics refers to the linkage of space, power, and political practice" ("Geopolitics," *The Encyclopedia of Geography* 3). Geopolitical theorist Klaus Dodds offers a slightly different definition that I see as particularly relevant to picture books. He explains, that "geopolitics provides ways of looking at the world," and these "geographical representations help to inform people's understandings of the world, making us all "geopolitical theorists" whose visions of the world "may differ radically and for a host of reasons—religious, ethnic, political, and so on" (4, 11). Rudine Sim Bishop's work on mirrors and windows impressed upon children's literature scholars, librarians and educators that children's books provide critical social and even global education; they help to shape children's understanding of how to interact with others and how to be in the world. By providing an example of a space in which Black girlhood can develop unencumbered by racial oppression, *Homemade Love* gives children a new vision (optical and conceptual) of how they, too, can exist in the geographic space of the U.S. nation-state, a country still wrestling with its history of enslavement, as well as a past and present marked by racial violence, and the oppression of Black people.

What, then, does hooks's *Homemade Love* tell us about space and the operation of power? The notion of power may be subtle and normalized, but it is still present in the text. Girlpie may be the protagonist and narrator, but in this fictional world, she still functions as a minor subject. For example, when Girlpie breaks a vase, she looks downtrodden as most kids would be. Her mother, still faceless, stands over her, in a reproving posture with her arms crossed. But the moment is short-lived, and her parents quickly forgive her. We see an image of

both parents—their faces visible to readers—as Girlpie reflects, “But all the time any hurt can be healed. All wrongs forgiven. And all the world made Peace again.” Her parents help her to put the pieces of the vase back together again, metaphorically healing the break that she caused. They eagerly lend their assistance and support, which they seal with a “kiss kiss.” The two-page spread shows Girlpie flanked by her mother and father, illustrating that her world is within a warm and supportive home. Furthermore, her parents’ assistance and their role in helping Girlpie see the accident for what it is and nothing more points to hooks’s conceptualization of spaces “where we begin the process of re-vision,” a process of looking at ourselves differently and *lovingly*—a process that hooks firmly lodges in the margins (“Margins” 145).

The idea of marginality is intriguing for two reasons: Girlpie’s position is that of a dependent, and children’s literature, as a discipline, is often dismissed as innocuous or frivolous within the academy despite the history of children’s literature scholarship, the presence of journals, and the growing number of academic conferences devoted to kids lit. Yet, just as hooks envisions the margin as a space of radical possibility and stresses the need to theorize our “radical cultural practice,” we can regard her children’s books as an expression of this practice—an intentional effort to utilize a popular pedagogical and entertainment tool to participate, creatively, in a conscious-raising endeavor for Black children and their families. Her essay, “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional,” acknowledges the use of art as “intrinsically serving a political function” (105).¹⁷ I look at this particular children’s book as an intrinsically political work, a creative counterspace that represents the geopolitical lessons that hooks learned in Big Mama’s and Baba’s homes.

¹⁷ In this respect, hooks’s belief is consistent with Toni Morrison’s contention that “the best art is political and that you [the artist] ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time” (“Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation” 64).

This mapping is important not only for parents, but especially for children whose worldviews are shaped by the text. Catherine Renaud—in her discussion of Claude Ponti’s children’s texts—notes that the fictional worlds in children’s picture books function not only as “settings for the reader, but also beyond the book as a kind of *carte de tendre*, a map of imaginative possibilities for children” (“The Child’s Imaginary World” 194). This “spatial cohesion,” as she terms it, bridges the world of the text with the children’s material reality, and she remarks that “spaces can take on symbolic dimensions, identifiable for instance in [the] association of trees with concepts of home and belonging” (194). *Homemade Love* teems with such associations, such as the linguistic cues in the early stages of the book; metaphors, for example, link sweetness to the emotional or psychological space of the home. Girlpie does cartwheels amidst flowers. We see idyllic images of her sleeping, “Lost in deep dreams” where she speaks of and sees “Memories of arms that hold me.” The image of her father throwing her up in the sky accompanies the text. As Girlpie’s body presses against the vibrant blue sky, arms outstretched, she wears a blue dress imprinted with planes and white clouds. She takes flight. The image suggests a sense of independence and agency as Girlpie coasts the air waves, smiling, unencumbered and alone. I want to point out Renaud’s observation that Ponti’s use of trees “mirror[s] the mental space of his characters” (211) because there’s a similar correspondence between Girlpie’s attire and her emotional state. While hooks did not illustrate the book, we can see that Evans’s illustrations effectively reflect Girlpie’s emotions as the images—hearts, planes, or flowers—change based on her encounters with her parents or as she moves through a shifting geography of gardens, kitchens, and bedrooms.

The final image is in Girlpie’s bedroom, and it is an intimate setting that merges the comfort and affection of her actual home with the larger world. The book closes with an

illustration of Girlpie, curled up under her bedcovers, fast asleep as her bed floats against a starry indigo sky. Her voice assures her real-world peers that there's "No need to fear the dark place. 'Cause everywhere is HOME." The culminating statement extends the boundaries of her home beyond the confines of her bedroom to the blue expanse, a wide, open space that appears peaceful, dreamy, and free. The illustration and Girlpie's thought exemplify Dewan's contention that in storyworlds and in the real world, "Home is a place that provides roots for stability and provides wings for growth (*House as Setting and Symbol* 275). Again, hooks does not create the images. Even so, this final illustration, which functions as paratext, depicts a young Black girl who is simultaneously rooted and secure in her home, yet who dreams of the world as an equally secure space of possibility where she can soar. *Homemade Love*, therefore, represents its own kind of homeplace, an affective, culturally rooted and liberatory space devoted to the maintenance and affirmation of Black life. This environment, which embraces blackness completely, remains elusive in a larger culture committed to the marginalization of Black people. In a country marked by virulent anti-blackness (where Black people are now questioned for engaging in routine activities in public and their *own* private spaces) and given the need to create autonomous Black spaces that can combat or mitigate the damage of U.S. anti-black racism, revisiting *Homemade Love* can provide families, teachers, and children a necessary model of how Black families can create a such an autonomous, culturally rooted, and unrestricted Black space to ground and nurture our youth. True, hooks' narrative is but one small attempt to intervene in pejorative discourses about blackness and Black people's relation to the United States as a national body. Still, the home in hooks's children's story establishes a necessary foundation that gives young readers a racial and cultural map of freedom. The story may not represent specific American towns or cities, but Girlpie's nondescript home is one that any child

can enter. And what Black children encounter when entering the world of this text is the very oppositional consciousness that hooks sees emerging in marginal spaces. This book is hooks's "echo of protest," an unexpected "radical creative space which affirms and sustains [Black] subjectivity," and "gives [Black kids] a new location from which to articulate [their] sense of the world" (145).

In the end, hooks's picture book puts forth a geopolitical vision that is subtle yet clear: there is no place or space where Black children do *not* belong. The interplay of hooks's text and Evans's illustrations help Black children envision a world where they can dream, explore, and traverse boundaries without limitations. Ultimately, the picture book visualizes Black girlhood spatiality and makes homeplace manifest. By illustrating what homeplace looks and feels like, *Homemade Love* treats Girlpie and the book's young readers as budding geopolitical actors who can construct their own mental maps of a world where, even (or *especially*) for Black children, only the sky is the limit, and "everywhere is home."

I Pledge Allegiance

If *Homemade Love* offers an theorization of homeplace and belonging rooted in family, *I Pledge Allegiance* (2014) takes the familial homeplace and connects it to the nation, picturing the United States as an inclusive national community, a homeplace for immigrants seeking refuge, better opportunities, or a new lease on life. I have chosen this picture book, co-authored by Pat Mora and her daughter Libby Martinez—as opposed to one of Mora's single-authored texts—because, like *Homemade Love*, it features a young girl as the protagonist, and the book's subject matter is relevant to contemporary debates around immigration, the presence of unaccompanied child migrants (arriving in the United States primarily from Central America), and the uncertain fate of DACA (Deferred Action for Child Arrivals) recipients, also known as "Dreamers." Through this girl's story, *I Pledge Allegiance* picks up where *Homemade Love*

leaves off. The young Mexican American protagonist teaches readers about the importance of maintaining cultural roots while introducing readers to a neglected aspect of the United States's national story. Most importantly, by sharing the history via one family's migration story, Mora and Martinez perform important pedagogical and political work: countering anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican rhetoric while expanding perceptions of borders and how we construct our own national community.

Contextualizing Mora and Martinez

Where do we draw the line between the United States and Mexico? Current political and popular discourse, with talks of border security and smart walls, seem to be consumed with the question of how the United States must hunker down and reinforce our national boundaries. Discussions of borders, crossing, transnationalism, and geopolitics are also commonplace within Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, but the tenor is decidedly different than contemporary nationalist rhetoric given the history of Spanish conquest and colonial rule in Latin America. In Mexico specifically, this imperialist history not only includes the establishment of early Spanish settlements, but also the occupation of Mexico in the 19th century, a time when “Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico ... and gradually drove tejanos (native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands” (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 28). For Anzaldúa, this move constituted nothing more than a “violent imperialist project,” in which troops representing the U.S. government “invaded and occupied Mexico, forcing her to give up almost half of her nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California” (29). The military and political campaign culminated in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which drew a hard line and solidified, in a geopolitical and ideological sense, the national and cultural boundaries between U.S. Americans and Mexicans. Shifting the border not only marked territorial limits, but it also set the stage for current iterations of the contemporary, manmade

“border fence that divides the Mexican people” (29). Speaking of this artificial break, Anzaldúa described 1848 as the point when “Mexicans became Mexican Americans, [and we] became foreigners in our own country. What we were was not valued, was treated as inferior” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 245). Raúl Homero Villa seconds her assessment. In *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, Villa speaks of this internal displacement, referring to the land grab as “the originary moment in the general subordination of *mexicanos*-cum-Mexican Americans” (1). Put differently, the imposition of that border—artificial but nevertheless legally sanctioned and internationally recognized—literally changed the citizenship status of an entire people, creating power imbalances and exacerbating social inequities between two national populations. Villa also speaks to the generational trauma associated with that break, reminding us that “geographic displacement loom[s] large in Chicano historical memory” and that the historical facts of “land loss, shifting and porous national borders, coerced and voluntary migrations, [as well as] disparate impact of urban development” necessarily inform Chicana/o cultural productions (1). Mora and Martinez’s picture book stems from this political and cultural legacy.

The mother-daughter creative duo also sits within a long established legacy of Mexican American women writing about the place of Mexican-descended peoples in U.S. society. Tey Diana Rebolledo’s *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995), for example, uncovers some early Mexican American women writers who combatted cultural erasure and worked to secure a place in U.S.-American letters. Rebolledo’s project mined Spanish-language newspapers, folktales/cuentos (stories), and oral histories from the Federal Writers Projects to discover women who are often dismissed as writing mere domestic fiction. Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), credited as the first novel to be published by a

Mexican American writer in English, depicts the struggle of elite *Californios* (individuals of Mexican or Spanish descent residing in California territory) to maintain their land rights post-1848. Cleofas M. Jaramillo's *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (1955), a work of autobiographical fiction, follows a young female coming of age while New Mexico teeters on the cusp of U.S. statehood. Another literary foremother, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, a member of New Mexico's landholding elites, documented the cultural retentions of Hispanics¹⁸ in the U.S.-American Southwest. Unfortunately, militant critics who produced "politicized Latino scholarship of the post-1960s generation" (*Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* 469) often snubbed or outright lambasted these writers who were seen as little more than mouthpieces for the bourgeois ideologies of the dominant, Euro-American culture (Rebolledo 30). Whether these women represent privileged Hispanics upholding the status quo or voices of resistance as Rebolledo has argued (33), they still constitute part of the literary ancestry of Mexican American and Chicana writers, and Latina women writers more broadly. Precursors to contemporary Mexican American literary production, these writers also paved the way for Mora and Martinez, who occupy a unique (and somewhat paradoxical) position between the cultural and economic space of their privileged Mexican American ancestry and the more radical intersectional politics of Chicana writers and cultural workers, such as Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, Norma Cantú, and Helena María Viramontes.

Contemporary literary productions such as Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Cisneros's classic *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Cantú's *Canicula* (1995), and Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), which I discuss in the last chapter, represent

¹⁸ I deliberately use "Hispanic" here as these women were of European (Spanish) descent, and they wrote of their bourgeois social worlds, and not those of the working class Mexican Americans or of mestizo communities.

progressive Chicana political perspectives and stretch our ideas of what constitutes “domestic” literature. Their novels unfold in homes and kitchens, and they touch upon relationships and romance. They invariably address the gendered expectations placed on women and girls by family members and patriarchal cultural dictates. However, their characters also struggle explicitly with the realities of being caught—socially, culturally, and sometimes legally—between two overlapping national bodies: the United States and Mexico. These Chicana feminist writers set up house in the midst of Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zone, or in the metaphysical, spiritual, sexual, cultural, and political borderlands theorized by Anzaldúa.

I want to comment specifically on Anzaldúa and Mora.¹⁹ Frankly, it only makes sense to compare Mora’s work with Anzaldúa’s because the poet-turned-children’s author also demonstrated an interest in exploring borderlands from the beginning of her writing career. Mora’s second poetry collection, *Borders* (1986), and her critically acclaimed essay collection *Nepantla* (1993) both address the significance of geography and space in public and private life, particularly the space of the U.S.-Mexico border. Mora, a self-identified “border woman” (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan, “Interview” 144), states that her interest in geography and space extends beyond the mere physical geography of the Southwestern landscape to encompass more of an “internal space,” an exploration of dream worlds as well as psychic or mental spaces. In this way, her concern approximates that of Anzaldúa, who conceptualized borderlands not only in a material and geographic sense, but also metaphorically to address experiences of

¹⁹ Although this chapter analyses a picture book that Mora co-authored with her daughter, I’m focusing on Mora due to her long publishing history and her identification (and public recognition) as a Chicana feminist writer. Her daughter, who is a children’s author and poet, also has a record of political engagement working with the Philadelphia Zoo, but does not share that same history. See her bio: <https://www.libbymartinez.com/bio/>. Mora is certainly a prolific children’s author, but I’ve selected *I Pledge Allegiance* due to its focus on a Mexican American girl, as well as the book’s timeliness and clear political implications given the Trump administration’s hostile policies and rhetoric on immigration.

sexual, psychological, cultural, and spiritual liminality. In fact, Hector Avalos Torres describes Mora's work as reflecting a "mestizo consciousness commensurate with the varieties that surfaced since Anzaldúa's proposal in *Borderlands/La Frontera*" (244).²⁰ The comparison is not farfetched given Mora's stature as a Chicana feminist poet whose work attends to women's lives, weaves in indigenous Mexican folk wisdom, and issues feminist responses to patriarchal oppression within Mexican and Chicana/o families and communities (see her 1984 volume, *Chants*).

But for some critics, Mora's borderland discourse departs significantly from Anzaldúa's. Crystal M. Kurzen, for example, points to differences between the two Chicana feminists, arguing that "While [Mora] too sees [Nepantla] as a middle space that presents possibilities for social and cultural activism, it is not characterized by the agony that Anzaldúa *Borderlands* emphasizes" (343). In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa's classic genre-bending, border-crossing text, we get a searing portrayal of the traumatic personal and collective histories embedded in the borderlands region. This historical trauma also casts a shadow over her children's picture book, *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos de Otro Lado* (1993), which may be seen as an child's accompaniment to *Borderlands*. The bilingual text presents the very real dangers of border crossing, through the story of Prietita, a Mexican American girl who provides refuge and friendship for Joaquin, "a [undocumented] Mexican boy from the other side of the river." Though written for children, Anzaldúa does not shield her readership from the painful realities faced by undocumented migrants. Joaquin suffers physically, financially, and emotionally. The boils covering his arms belie the dangerous migratory experience. His family's poverty and the lack of employment opportunities in Mexico force him to help his mother by working an

²⁰ Mora described her work as more philosophical rather than political when discussing comparisons to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*.

“occasional odd job in exchange for food and old clothes.” And a group of Mexican American children (who presumably have legal documentation) assail him with taunts, adding insult to injury. To intensify the anguish, Anzaldúa allows readers to witness Joaquin’s panic and fear when a neighbor yells, “The Border Patrol’s coming!...La migra!” The physical and emotional landscape of this borderland is dangerous and unrelenting.

I juxtapose Mora with Anzaldúa—and other Chicana writers who craft border narratives—though Mora contends that she approaches borders with an eye towards healing,²¹ which is evident in the text she co-authored with her daughter. Rather than emphasizing the generational trauma and systemic oppression stemming from land loss and displacement caused by European imperialism and U.S. occupation, *I Pledge Allegiance* creates a welcoming “imagined community” (Anderson *Imagined Communities* 6) that embraces people of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds. It is a harmonious storyworld told from the perspective of a border child whom Guillermo Gómez-Peña might regard as one of his “heirs to a new mestizaje” (qtd. in McKenna 106). The story acknowledges an unknown migration history that’s often overshadowed by extremist rhetoric about Mexicans flooding the U.S. southern border, bringing drugs, violence, and crime. By centering this story, this picture book attempts to suture the break created by imperialism (underscoring the intimate connection between Mexicans and Mexican Americans) and to unify a fractured multi-ethnic, multi-racial national community. Some might see the picture book as little more than a sentimental melting pot narrative. But what kids actually get with *I Pledge Allegiance* is the gift of a national homeplace, albeit one

²¹ Though Mora sees distinctions between her work and Anzaldúa’s, I do not. Anzaldúa demonstrates similar concern for communal and individual healing given the spiritually-inflected activism that characterizes her post-*Borderlands* writing. See *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (edited by AnaLouise Keating) or *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and work transformed our own* (edited by AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López).

characterized as a multicultural utopia. The subject of this beloved community, the social actor who bridges different cultures, is a little Mexican American girl who moves among school, home, and a court of law. By showing the protagonist operating in typical childhood spaces and by allowing her to enter a legislative (i.e. adult) space, Mora and Martinez manage to draw upon historic associations between conceptualizations of “the child” and “the nation” while skillfully disrupting images of American citizenship as prototypically white, adult, and male. Situating this girl’s story in the borderlands, along the U.S.-Mexico border, *I Pledge Allegiance* envisions the causes of migration and affirms the intimacy between U.S.-born Americans and those who reside on “el otro lado” of our southernmost border.

I Pledge Allegiance

According to Ingrid Johnston, “Books about migration written specifically for children and young adults have been published in increasing numbers over the past 20 years as countries in the west come to terms with how their sense of nation has been shifting with immigration, and new immigrants in these countries have reflected on their own experiences of migration in literature for young people” (“Migrancy: Rites of Passage and Cultural Translation in Literature for Children and Young Adults” 84-85). Mora and Martinez are U.S.-born citizens. Yet, just as the places of hooks’s girlhood provide a frame for *Homemade Love*, Mora and Martinez’s family’s history, which entails migration during the Mexican Revolution from Mexico to the Southeastern United States, informs the storyworld that they construct. On one level, *I Pledge Allegiance* is a fictional account of Mora’s aunt (Libby’s great aunt) Ygnacia Delgado, a Mexican national who came to the United States as a young girl and became naturalized in her seventies; she is affectionately known in real life and in Mora’s books as “Lobo.” The picture book focuses on Libby, a school-age girl whose great aunt, Lobo, pursues citizenship after

decades of residing in the United States.²² While Lobo's path to citizenship serves as the backdrop for the story, it is primarily Libby's voice we hear, and it is her perspective we see. Through this focalization,²³ readers witness Libby's movement among her home, her school, and the halls of a local courtroom as she and her aunt learn "The Pledge of Allegiance."²⁴ The intergenerational narrative shows Lobo practicing the pledge in anticipation of the naturalization ceremony, and Libby recites the pledge at school and at home. Seeing Libby's week unfold in these normative childhood spaces provides young readers and their adult intermediaries valuable cultural knowledge about who rightfully belongs in the national family we call America. The message is clear: since Libby goes to school and recites the same pledge that children learn, she is just like any other American child.

In this chapter, I trace how Mora and Martinez's narrative, coupled with Patrice Barton's illustrations, grounds Libby's quotidian activities in spaces generally associated with childhood. Moving between intimate and institutional spaces where children typically live, grow, and learn to be citizens, Libby embarks upon a personal journey that bridges underrepresented migration histories from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands with contemporary migration experiences. The personal and formal education obtained in these everyday childhood spaces enables Libby to step

²² The names and Mora's family tree suggest that the book's protagonist and her great aunt are, in fact, fictional versions of—or or at least inspired by—Mora's daughter, Libby, and her aunt Lobo.

²³ Angela Yannicopoulou's "Focalization in Children's Picture Books: Who Sees in Words and Pictures?" interrogates the narrative perspective in picture books. She notes, "Fixed internal focalization occurs when the presentation of events is restricted to the point of view of a single focused character" (68). She goes on to argue that the "internal focalizer is usually the smallest and the least powerful character—a young child, a personified animal, or an animated toy—in order for its own childness to be stressed and the reader's identification with her encouraged" (69).

²⁴ You will notice three different formats for the pledge. I use "The Pledge of Allegiance" (capitalized and in quotes) when referencing the official title/proper noun; the pledge (lowercase, no quotes) when referring to the oath in general terms; and *The Pledge* (italicized) when referencing the book by Jeffrey Owen Jones and Pete Meyer.

into another institutional space (a court of law). She enters this adult realm equipped with a mestizaje worldview that fuses Mexican and U.S. history to forge a conception of the United States as a nation with fluid borders, open to individuals of various ethnicities, particularly communities of Mexican descent. The knowledge that Libby acquires at home (regarding Lobo's own experience as a child migrant) and in school (regarding "The Pledge of Allegiance") produces a unique standpoint that differs from euphoric melting pot rhetoric. Instead, Libby embodies a different kind of spatial knowledge, cultivated within public and private spheres (school and home) and grounded in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Libby's perspective and her very being are at once geographically and culturally rooted yet nimble enough to allow her to be the bridge that illuminates for readers the historic connection between both national entities.

Since the picture book has a cohesive storyline, my analysis attends to spatial references within the narrative, in addition to spaces of pictorial content. I begin with the visual elements, just as a reading teacher might introduce the text to a class of emergent readers. As we open the book, the front matter includes the faint image of the American flag accompanied by the text of the pledge. The frontispiece features a more complete and colorful image of the flag secured to a silver pole, and this picture faces the title page. The title, author, and illustrator credits appear in a muted patriotic color palette: white, light pink, and pale blue. Below those credits, we see an illustration of a little girl holding a backpack and a lunch box as she walks along a path. These contextual clues tell readers that she's headed to or from school. This setting is the first stop on Libby's journey, and her activities in school directly relate to her understanding of American citizenship.

The story begins on a Monday, the first day of the school week, and readers witness Libby walking in her classroom. A Black female teacher named Mrs. Adams greets Libby. Her

classmates, a multi-hued group of nine children, surround them both. Libby excitedly shares that her great aunt Lobo passed her citizenship test, and on the second spread, readers see Libby daydreaming. Lost in her own private world, Libby thinks, “On Friday, Mom and I will go with my great-aunt to a special place. She will say ‘The Pledge of Allegiance,’ and she will become a citizen of the United States.” A bubble accompanies Libby’s reverie, allowing us to see her inner thoughts; in her mind’s eye, she imagines the “special place,” a traditional brick-like building with four white stone pillars and an American flag positioned out front. Knowing that Libby will accompany her aunt to this special place for the swearing-in ceremony, Mrs. Adams takes advantage of a teachable moment and charges Libby with leading class recitations of the pledge. The entire class will practice each day.

Though only a few pages in, the opening pages place Libby in what even the youngest of children would likely recognize as a quintessential child space: the elementary school classroom. The association between schools and children is not unusual given the number of years that young people spend in places of instruction, ranging from preschools to elementary, middle, and high schools. As Mavis Reimer notes, “the very definition of childhood is often entwined with social norms for schooling” (“Traditions of the School Story” 209), so much so that the school story—perhaps the longest running story form in children’s and young adult literature—not only takes us to the conceptual place called childhood but also to a particular social space [the school] that’s seen as its own “‘little world’ [that prepares] its students for other, larger spheres of action” (211). Geographers researching real children’s spatial lives often turn to schools, playgrounds, community centers, and homes as “institutional spaces through which adults attempt to control children and through which differences between children are re-inscribed” (Holloway and Valentine *Children’s Geographies: Playing, Living, and Learning* 14). Though

childhood studies scholars operate from the assumption that children function as social actors, this agency is confined and restricted based on parameters established and reified in adult controlled social spaces; school is one such space. Geography scholar Stuart Aiken writes that schools and their mechanisms of control serve “to socialize children with regard to their roles in life and their places in society. [Schooling] serves the larger stratified society by inculcating compliant citizens and productive workers who will be prepared to assume roles considered appropriate to the pretension [sic] of their race, class, and gender identities” (qtd. in Holloway and Valentine 14). The school in *I Pledge Allegiance* does not train children for their future lives as laborers, but it does impart lessons about nationalism and American patriotism through its incorporation of the pledge.

Though we have no sense of their typical class activities, Libby’s teacher begins the day by presenting students with a brief lesson about the pledge. She acknowledges Francis Bellamy as the author, and tells the class that he “hoped that girls and boys would promise to be good citizens.” Then, Mrs. Adams says, “Now, let’s all read the Pledge [sic] together,” and she leads her students in their first recitation, interpellating young readers in the process. This is the first of four places where we see the actual words of “The Pledge of Allegiance” on the page. It is also the first of four opportunities for young readers to join the characters in reciting the oath—a speech act that creates spatial cohesion and bridges the narrative time with the reading moment, while ushering Libby and her classmates into a one of the most common and symbolic performances of American citizenship.

Libby’s teacher condenses this history to two sentences, and the authors provide a tad more detail in their “Authors’ Note.” Even so, it is important to parse the history of the twenty-word text that stands as a bedrock of American patriotism. I find three points of particular

relevance to Mora and Martinez’s children’s story and its treatment of immigration and national identity. First, as Jeffrey Owen Jones and Peter Meyer write in *The Pledge: A History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (2010), the oath that most U.S. Americans learn in elementary school emerged in 1892, at a time when “the single most far-reaching phenomenon of the era...was immigration” (25). The authors underscore the role of immigrant labor in sustaining the U.S. economy, noting that “56 percent of the labor force in manufacturing and mechanical industries was foreign born or of foreign parentage” (25). They also acknowledge a growing nativist spirit and hostility among American-born white workers who feared that immigrants would take their jobs, deplete resources meant for “real” Americans, and cause a surge in crime. These fears remain unsurprisingly on par with anti-immigrant rhetoric more than 125 years later.

“The Pledge of Allegiance” is also uniquely connected to American childhood. The first published version of the pledge appeared in *The Youth’s Companion*, a Boston-based children’s magazine that can be thought of as the 19th century’s version of *Highlights [for Children]*. By 1892, *The Youth’s Companion*, which Paul Ringel called “the nation’s best-selling children’s magazine” (*Commercializing Childhood* 4), boasted a record-breaking 500,000 readers per week—“one of the largest [circulations] of any American magazine” at the time (Jones and Meyer *The Pledge* 36). Jones and Meyer’s account of the pledge’s inception points to the connection between childhood and the nationalist mission of the children’s magazine, as the publication mailed miniature American flags to its young subscribers and even spearheaded placing flags in public schools. Sending kid-sized flags to schools certainly constituted an innovative means of promoting patriotism among youth that draws attention to schools as “crucibles of citizenship” (38). Ringel acknowledges that in the absence of concrete subscription data, “the magazines’ formulas suggest that the editors believed their customers were

predominately white, Protestant, northern, urban, disproportionately educated and prosperous” (6), though subscribers also came from working and middle class families. Placing flags in public schools presumably allowed *The Youth’s Companion* to reach kids who were considered to be “Others.” Technically, these “Others” would include Black children (who were newly freed after the Emancipation Proclamation), Asian Americans and Asian immigrants (particularly Chinese immigrants who were targets of the race-based Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882), Native American children (many of whom were sent to military-style boarding schools), and of course Mexican children (who had not crossed the border, but whom—as the adage goes—the *border* had crossed).

Third, this kind of civic-oriented community outreach program was precisely the purpose of the original pledge, crafted not by Bellamy, but by Colonel George Balch, author of the *first* iteration. Balch, a Civil War vet, advocated using a pledge among school children, *especially* immigrant children. He saw this as a means to instill patriotic values in American youth in general, especially those who were foreign born. Balch may not have envisioned African, Asian and Latin American immigrants but rather Europeans—the “tired ...poor,...huddled masses, yearning to breathe free” (Lazarus “The Colossus”) as they stepped upon Ellis Island. But I linger here because his insistence that children profess their fidelity to the nation through repeated, daily performances of a pledge, underscores the role of public schools as an adult-controlled institutional space dedicated to nation-building. Using a pledge in schools not only allows adults to mold youth into loyal U.S. citizens, but this strategy also highlights the centrality of children as social beings and the role of “the child” in promoting a cohesive image of the United States as a national body.

It is also ironic that the current pledge was unveiled during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, as part of a celebration commemorating the 400th anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of the New World.²⁵ Columbus's travels, funded by the Spanish crown, were critical to expanding the Spanish Empire, which would begin its imperial project in Mexico within 30 years of his arrival in the New World; Spanish conquistadores would soon follow. Advocating that immigrant children recite a pledge that celebrates Columbus essentially rewrites history, as it ignores the colonial violence that eventually led to the forced annexation of Mexican territory. *I Pledge Allegiance* chips away at this erasure by gesturing to the larger social and economic forces leading to displacement and migration. The picture book bridges past with present by creating a portrait of adult Lobo sharing her experience as an undocumented Mexican girl with her great niece, a Mexican American girl and native-born U.S. citizen. Connecting the two "girls" metaphorically reverses the damage caused by the Treaty of Hidalgo, breaking down the ideological wall separating Mexico from the United States and dividing Mexican and Mexican American communities.

By positioning "The Pledge of Allegiance" early on, Mora and Martinez highlight the importance of oath, not only to the characters in the story, but also to U.S. citizens who herald the poem in terms of its symbolic value, representing the defining ethos of the nation: freedom and equity for every individual regardless of race or ethnicity. On the surface, the picture book appears to promote a kind of blind patriotism or sanitized multiculturalism. That Libby and her classmates get a streamlined version of U.S. history does not help to develop children's critical consciousness. But like the early Mexican American women writers cited by Rebolledo, the authors may have something more subversive in mind. Sharing Libby's and Lobo's story enables

²⁵ This event is also known as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Mora and Martinez to alter simplistic visions of our geopolitical landscape by exposing child readers to one family's history that reveals the long-standing, intimate, and *fluid* connections between two disparate but interconnected nations. Lobo's story, which she recounts at home, gives a glimpse into the circumstances causing some Mexicans to cross over their northern border and enter the United States. Her narrative, however, differs from a romanticized Ellis Island story. It is a domestic story that presents a compelling claim to U.S. citizenship on behalf of Mexican descendants by reconstructing their homeplace in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

In this storyworld, we have little reference to specific geographic locations. Like *Homemade Love, I Pledge Allegiance* does not identify any locale by name. But visual details help orient readers and situate the story within the borderlands. For example, when Lobo walks Libby home after school, they pass a green plant whose white dots mimic that of the prickly pear cactus, the Mexican Nopales plant. With this simple illustration—created by Texas artist Patrice Barton—readers have a subtle visual cue that marks the geographic region as the American Southwest, near the southern border. This region, which frames the story, is the place of Mora's childhood and a place that informs her work. In an interview from "Voices from the Gaps," Mora states that "the border for me, la *frontera*, is a definite place, the U.S./Mexico border, that space separated by El Rio Grande, those two tangled countries, the U.S. and Mexico rubbing against one another, the friction of languages, histories, values, economic disparity, attraction, and revulsion. That constant tension is the geographical/emotional place from which I come" (5).

As mentioned, their book eschews depictions of danger and conflict that we see in Anzaldúa's children book. *I Pledge Allegiance* only alludes to this "rubbing" in a spread that juxtaposes a generic garden scene with a domestic scene replete with pictures of tomatoes, onions, cheese, jalapenos, and a plate of tortillas—ingredients for their enchilada dinner. But this

tension, or cultural *mélange*, is understated given the emphasis on domestic activities. Here, Lobo, Libby, and Libby's mother practice the pledge at home, in a female-centered, child-friendly domain. They engage in a decidedly spatial and gendered practice (i.e. the work of food preparation in a kitchen) as they recite the pledge. The moment recalls notions of Republican motherhood, merging women's familial roles and early childhood education. As James and Dorothy Volo explain in *Family Life in 17th and 18th Century America*, the colonial family acted as the primary "agent of education," and the home—the socially-designated women's sphere—functioned as the "primary place of education" for young girls (238). In the same way that women in the early republic were regarded as teachers of young children, this moment in *I Pledge Allegiance* revises and subverts the scripts of Republican motherhood by picturing three female characters of Mexican descent united by familial ties as well as their loyalty to the United States.

This scene also places *I Pledge Allegiance* in the tradition of "girls' school stories in the English-language tradition...that firmly bracket school life with domestic spaces towards which [the girl protagonist] inevitably move[s]" (Reimer 215). Their recitation of the pledge bears traces of the historic alignment between the private sphere (i.e. home life) and the maintenance of the nation. Situating their intergenerational rehearsal within the home, then, domesticates the nation-building project while upsetting long-held conceptions of the specific immigrant communities (mostly white European) that needed to be taken into the fold of the United States. The tension, then, may be nuanced. However, as three Mexican Americans in a quintessential feminine space, their simple act of American patriotism constitutes a form of subtle resistance. Considered within the discourse of home as a site for cultivating and nurturing young citizens, their recitation is rendered natural and acceptable, even though their Mexican cultural heritage

would have excluded them from full rights of citizenship in colonial and post-Civil War America.

Some of the book's young readers may be not aware of the historical discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States. And, at this point, there are just a few cues, visual or otherwise, that point to the characters' Mexican ancestry. Early on, Libby acts as a cultural broker and explains to non-Spanish speaking readers that Lobo's name "means 'wolf' in Spanish."²⁶ But it isn't until bedtime that Libby asks Lobo why she wants to become a naturalized citizen that we get a bigger picture of Lobo's ancestry and personal story. Lobo responds: "'Mi querida, I was born in Mexico and went to school there, but the United States has been my home for many years. I am proud to be from Mexico and to speak Spanish and English. Many people are proud of the places where they were born or where they grew up.'" Lobo's didactic response frames bilingualism in a positive light and stresses the importance of cultural retentions. Her answer also teaches child readers that contrary to the assimilationist ideology that undergirds the melting pot narrative, an individual can hold emotional ties to multiple countries or homes. American patriotism is not, in Lobo's eyes, a zero-sum game.

In this regard, Lobo's story complicates facile ideas about national purity and argues for a more flexible conceptualization of American citizenship for individuals of Mexican ancestry. If we flip through a few pages, we see Lobo recount her immigration story in greater detail. She shares how she and her family arrived to the United States when she was a just young girl. The illustration invokes images of the American frontier as young Lobo, her siblings, and her father

²⁶ In an article on the Afro-Mexican presence, Ben Vinson III explains that within the Spanish colonial *casta* (caste) system, "Black racial categories accounted for at least thirty-six" of the "literally hundreds of possible racial combinations," with "lobo" (wolf) being one racial marker (denoting African and indigenous heritage) found in colonial records ("Fading from Memory" 63-64). Mora's identification as Chicana and her work to pay homage to Mexican women's traditional belief systems may be a nod to her indigenous roots; her aunt's nickname would suggest Afro-indigenous ancestry as well.

stand on a nondescript plain—with the image of a billowing American flag superimposed in the background. This moment recalls Anzaldúa’s praise for Mexican immigrants who arrive in the United States, “trembling with fear, yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation” (*Borderlands* 33). Not surprisingly, in Lobo’s rendition, she and her family do not seem to be gripped by fear. Her story does not stress the anguish or the desperation that her family may have felt as they embarked on their transnational journey. It certainly does not reflect the traumatic experiences that migrants to the United States currently face in our intensely xenophobic and anti-immigrant environment. Instead, the frontier image bleeds into an illustration on the right page, which shows us Libby’s bedroom, complete with stuffed animals and a miniature American flag positioned on a shelf above her bed. In this bedtime scene, Lobo tucks Libby in and continues her personal story: “But a long time ago, when I was a young girl, my father wanted a safer place for us to grow up, and we came to the United States.” Lobo speaks to Libby—and by extension to young readers and their adult mediators—calmly and simply, downplaying the circumstances that caused her family to flee as well as processes that facilitated or impeded their journey.

Anzaldúa remarks that “for many *mexicanos del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live” (*Borderlands* 32). Although *I Pledge Allegiance* contains much more language than *Homemade Love*, there are gaps in the narrative related to this life-or-death decision. We do not know what compelled Lobo’s family to migrate, nor do we know what happened to the young girl’s mother. Lobo simply states, “The American flag—red, white, and blue—wrapped itself around me to protect me.” So while the children’s book does not detail a harrowing journey or describe the dangers the migrants faced as they entered new territory, Lobo’s mention of “a safer place” and “protection” suggests a history marked by some level of

violence. It also reinforces the image of the United States as a nation that provides safe haven for immigrants, migrants, and refugees fleeing war or persecution.

The spread also links Lobo's past and her arrival in the United States with Libby's status as an American citizen. Seeing images of young Lobo opposite pictures of Libby creates a sense that the two girls are mirror images, just separated by a temporal space. This narrative supports such a correlation as Lobo tucks Libby in and says, "The flag made me feel like this...Safe and warm." In the spread, the bedtime scene—which is practically obligatory in books for young children—draws upon a trope in children's literature and childhood studies of home as the ultimate site of identity and security. The illustration establishes a visual argument that likens Lobo's arrival as a child migrant seeking refuge in the United States with Libby's sense of security and belonging represented by the comfort of her bedroom in her familial home. If the child focalization encourages identification among child readers, then seeing Lobo as a young girl also facilitates a kind of seamless connection between readers, the young Mexican American protagonist, and Lobo's memory of herself as a Mexican child seeking refuge in the United States.

In writing about Mora's memoir, *House of Houses*, Kurzen argues that "Mora recuperates the domestic spaces found in a family home and allows members of her extended family to interact with each other in order to reconcile their histories with hegemonic narratives of American identity that systematically exclude their own lived experiences" ("Pat Mora's Literary Nepantla" 347). This recuperation and reconciliation is what Mora and Martinez accomplish with *I Pledge Allegiance*. The picture book resurrects the "real" Lobo's migration history and presents it as representative of the many stories that remain untold in the midst of heated debates about anchor babies and chain migration.

The text, then, intervenes in such divisive narratives by using the bedtime conversation between Lobo and Libby to expand Libby's and readers' awareness of *why* one may enter the United States. In doing so, the text draws upon a longstanding discourse that conceives of the nation as one large family. In *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. Du Bois* (2006), Caroline F. Levander explores this association. She writes:

A mother country, fatherland, and “patria” as much as a child, the United States, “like a family,” confers a sense of identity and belonging among its members by recreating accustomed family relations and extending the nation's founding image of the child to transform those diverse individuals within its physical boundaries into a collective entity committed to creating and upholding a shared civic environment. (7)

Levander's scholarship specifically interrogates how the child (and notions of dependency and racial purity) effectively established the parameters of citizenship and nationhood by “racially configuring” individuals who reside within the nation's borders and by extension, the nation itself. Though Levander explores how the child demarcated racial boundaries, which were then used to reinforce legal notions of personhood and national citizenship, Mora and Martinez offer a conceptualization of nation-as-family that seeks to free itself from any particular ethnic or racial logic. We see this departure from an ethnically-defined citizenship, as aunt and niece discuss the pledge. Lobo says, “I like the words ‘liberty and justice for all... We are promising to be fair to everyone. This country is like one big family, *una familia*, that works together to take care of people who need our help. That is what America did for me.” Mora and Martinez's picture book envisions a different kind of family unit—one that is unconditionally open to and accepting of those in need. Unlike contentious debates around immigration, *I Pledge Allegiance* frames the United States as a naturally inclusive nation, a place where race and ethnicity have no bearing on attaining citizenship. There are no qualifiers based on race, ethnicity, or national origin; all those in need are welcome in the American nation and family that Mora and Martinez construct.

Despite our multiracial and multicultural heritage, American law has systematically excluded many communities of color from citizenship. The book leaps over this fact to reverse previous barriers to citizenship rights. As the story closes, Lobo, Libby, and Libby's mother walk into the special place: a courthouse. Lobo wears a new blue dress, and Libby wears what readers would likely assume to be a traditional Mexican dress—a white dress with blue stitching and colorful embroidered flowers. Libby notes that “a woman in a black robe stands in the front of the room. She looks like a judge on TV.” Though she stands in the distance, her haircut and color, and her eyes mark her as Asian American. This, too, is a subtle rhetorical move. Rather than a white male character representing this institution of the U.S. nation-state, the image is of an Asian American female judge, a detail that's even more striking given common perceptions of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and early legal proscriptions against Asian American citizenship. And on the final spread, Lobo and Libby stand with other soon-to-be-naturalized citizens as they recite the pledge. The text ends with “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.” Having moved from school to home and then the courthouse, a site that symbolizes the nation and its immigration laws, young readers travel along with Libby and participate in a 21st century revision of the original “Pledge of Allegiance” that served to indoctrinate young people as American citizens. Instead of mindlessly pledging loyalty to the United States, Libby's story and her perspective, culled in school, in a culturally rooted homeplace, and in the geographic space of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, complicates easy immigration narratives and deconstructs the idea of fixed borders between individuals and nations.

Picturing Black and Brown Girl Spatial Citizenship

Though they write from different cultural and political contexts, hooks and Mora (along with her daughter Martinez) create picture books that are culturally specific and yet politically

subversive. With *Homemade Love*, hooks manages to construct a world that is quiet yet unapologetic in its presentation of Black familial love and Black life. Mora and Martinez, meanwhile, herald Mexican ancestry among Mexican Americans. Both picture books turn to girlhood and domestic spaces in order to imagine communities that welcome and recognize the humanity of Black people and communities of Mexican descent.

Curiously, it is in the home that central lessons of both stories unfold. As Kinitra Jallow notes in her discussion of hooks's theorization, "*homeplace* is a subjective space of safety and political power created by African American women for sustained well-being" ("Homeplace" 530). And though hooks initially conceived of homeplace as a spatial product of Black women, the practice of creating such a space entails nurturing, mothering, and passing down of familial and community histories for the benefit of communal survival. So homeplace indeed "supersedes the physicality of the slave shack or woman's kitchen, though such places are the site of its creation" (530). Both of these stories exemplify a creative construction of homeplace. The girls' homes, one an autonomous Black space and the other a female-centered Mexican American household, may exist apart from the dominant culture which often denigrates both Black and Mexican American communities. But in these culturally rooted margins, Girlpie and Libby experience validation or discover their own personal histories. Grounding the girls in such spaces, *Homemade Love* and *I Pledge Allegiance* provide young readers with models of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship. The characters develop an oppositional consciousness in private and public spaces and learn to see themselves as rightfully taking up space, regardless of their social location in our national community.

The picture books in this chapter demonstrate a concern for girls of color and attempt to shape their understandings of themselves and their respective places in the world. *Homemade*

Love supports the development of a healthy sense of self-esteem and freedom for young Black girls, while *I Pledge Allegiance* presents a second-generation Mexican American girl who learns to see herself and others of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds as individuals who have a rightful claim to U.S. citizenship. Through these picture books, hooks and Mora (along with her daughter Martinez) address what critics Clare Bradford and Raffaella Baccolini call “the central concern of children’s literature:...the identity formation of young protagonist and their progress towards enhanced ways of being in the world (“Journeying Subjects: Spatiality and Identity in Children’s Texts 41). By writing Black and Mexican American girls back into the very national space that renders them invisible, these texts and their authors map new girlhood geographies and present readers with an important vision of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship. This vision stakes a claim for girls of color as legitimate members of the nation and establishes cultural inclusion as a defining characteristic of the body politic we call “America.”

CHAPTER 3. MOVING THROUGH NEPANTLA

In this chapter, I turn to two award-winning middle grade novels,²⁷ Pamela Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* (2000) and Rita Williams-Garcia's *One Crazy Summer* (2010), in order to demonstrate how the girls' sense of themselves as spatial citizens stems from the particular geographic and spatial locations in which they live. As coming-of-age stories, a genre which often entails journeys and movement, these novels adhere to this pattern by relying heavily on geography and space. Readers see this emphasis in a dual sense: in the physical terrain and distance that characters must traverse, as well as in each character's movement through psychological, emotional, and cognitive landscapes. This is no surprise, since novels of development typically chronicle a character's journey through concrete places, like cities, towns, and countries (fictional or otherwise), as well as through spaces like homes, places of employment or worship, and communities (i.e. ethnic enclaves, racially diverse, economic groups, etc.). Clare Bradford and Raffaella Baccolini speak to the importance of the spatial while underscoring the material and social forces represented in children's literature. They write that "whether located in realist [sic] or fantastic settings, narratives of maturation in children's texts are commonly plotted in relation to spatiality....Settings, motifs and tropes of space, place, and travel in children's texts thus offer critical insights into the global and local influences which shape the identities of child protagonists" (41). Since space, as Lefebvre acknowledges, "is

²⁷Maria Lamda defines middle grade (MG) novels as books geared for readers ages 8-12, that contain little violence, profanity or romance, and that focus on the character's relationship to their "immediate world." She notes the middle grade category is *not* "synonymous with middle school" and that the protagonists in these novels tend to be slightly older than the high end of the readers' age range. (<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/the-key-differences-between-middle-grade-vs-young-adult>)

constructed and has meaning assigned to it by individuals as well as by institutional stakeholders, and thus is used as a manifestation of power and control relations” (qtd. in Pokraka 263), each character’s movement within different spaces calls attention to multiple relationships with the individuals and entities she encounters as well as the gendered, racial, and ageist power dynamics that are normalized within these spaces. The social forces and institutions that structure and normalize inequity for these characters may be social institutions such as the family or formal education systems, but in these two novels, they also pertain specifically to social and political contexts such as the legacies of the Mexican Revolution and the Black Power Movement, historical phenomena of migration and Mexican repatriation, as well as the backdrop of state-sponsored racial violence and discrimination in the United States. My point is not simply that these conditions shape each girl’s life, but that these factors, expressed through geographic places or illuminated via particular spatial conditions, provide the grounds for the development of each character’s social, civic, and political consciousness. In other words, the spatial dynamics constitute the platform for each girl’s new political awareness and subjectivity. Spatiality constitutes the very conditions, social relations, and possibilities that produce each girl’s standpoint and her worldview.

My analysis, therefore, considers these texts as political coming-of-age stories. This connection between maturation and political agency is not unusual. Kristin Morrison identifies a subset of the *bildungsroman* which she terms “the political *bildungsroman*.” Though she writes about contemporary Irish literature, Morrison contends that a focus on “social and political situations” characterizes much of 20th century *bildungsroman* produced in English, which intentionally frame “the hero’s development against a backdrop of significant political turmoil and significant resultant social change” (142). She further identifies a need to move beyond

adapting the *bildung* to decolonizing it so that it works in service of communities previously locked out of the genre's tradition. Thus, there is an alignment of individual development with contemporary material situations created by the specific historical contexts that produce not only a relatively coherent adult-self, but a racialized and decidedly political self. In other words, the political *bildungsroman* focuses on coming of age within particular social, historic, cultural, and geographic spaces.

This chapter examines how Ryan and Williams-Garcia chart each girl's maturation in relation to her movement or embeddedness within particularly charged socio-political environments. I consider the inherent spatiality of girlhood in these texts and the geographic dimensions of coming-of-age stories in order to underscore the global and local influences that produce epistemological effects on the two protagonists, Esperanza and Delphine. I also pay close attention to the new vistas each girl encounters. Here, I employ "vistas" and "encounters" intentionally, as "encounters" acknowledges each character's active engagement with other human beings and new communities, including moments of conflict or confrontation, as well as the unexpected social re-positioning or racialization engendered by her travels in these geographically-rooted social spaces. In addition to acknowledging the effect of travels—her activities across space and geographic terrains—on each character's sense of self, I specifically recognize a link between each novel's geographic detail and the character's initiation to pertinent geo-political knowledge related to being Black or Brown and poor in the United States. Brenda J. Allen asserts that "Being Black and woman engenders complex ways of knowing and being" ("Black Womanhood and Feminist Standpoints" 575). By extension, being Black or Brown, *and* a girl begets a particular kind of knowledge or standpoint, and through these stories, the authors envision the possible emergence or unfolding of such knowledge. Since my project is ultimately

concerned with how literature depicts the particular situated knowledge of Black and Mexican American girls, I also use “vistas” in a dual sense. In one sense, it works on a narrative level, denoting the changing visual and physical landscapes that mark the characters’ cross-country and or cross-border travels. In another sense, the term suggests a changing, broadened, or an altogether new perspective through which the character comes to see and know herself as a girl of color, in a particular time-space continuum. In other words, there’s a connection between place, space, community belonging, and knowledge. This is ultimately a matter of epistemology, not just how the girls know what they know, but how particular spaces are conducive to producing an epistemology of agency and freedom that each girl may choose to embrace as she matures. My reading of these texts argues that the characters’ travels and movement between and within spaces does not automatically produce a liberatory or progressive political standpoint, but for these two girls, being embedded in particular social and gendered spaces activates an awareness of their relationship to power structures and their ability to assert themselves, which is one iteration of freedom, even if it is exercised within restrictive spatial environments.

In both *Esperanza Rising* and *One Crazy Summer*, the girl protagonists clearly wear their “traveling shoes.”²⁸ Esperanza moves from post-revolutionary war Mexico to the American Southwest in Ryan’s novel, and Delphine travels from Brooklyn to Oakland in Williams-Garcia’s text. Their journeys, which are forced upon them—due to parental decisions or the political and social tensions impacting their home territory—usher each girl not into womanhood but into a more mature state of being specifically characterized by an expanded sense of the political realities relative to race, class, gender, age, and citizenship. These novels map coming-of-age experiences onto particular geographic and cultural landscapes that highlight the spatial

²⁸ I borrow the term from Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1987), the fifth installment in her renowned autobiographical series.

elements and characteristics of each girl's fictionalized "real-world," lived experiences. As authors of historical fiction, Ryan and Williams-Garcia paint the landscape in such a way that grounds not only the reader but also the characters in specific, known locales and their associated socio-political histories and cultural contexts. But drawing upon critical geography does even more: this mapping constitutes a means to illustrate or concretize each girl's coming-of-age process, which is an individual, internal, and invisible process, inaccessible to others.

Writers who depict childhood, according to Susan Honeyman, tend to focus on children's physical worlds in order to surmount the challenges of mapping what is essentially an ambiguous space: childhood (*Elusive Childhood* 6). Since we cannot go or return to childhood, authors, in Honeyman's estimation, concentrate on bringing the childhood spaces and geographies to life on the page. By "focusing on the spaces [children] might inhabit," Honeyman argues, writers can avoid the difficulty of pinning down and accurately rendering the child mind (5). Importantly, I see these two middle grade novels as following a similar path in terms of spatializing girlhood. They specifically map the maturation process by likening the girls' development to liminality or to a borderland space that Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands*. Each protagonist can, then, be seen as a nepantlera in-process. Ana Louise Keating defines nepantleras as "threshold people: those who live within and among multiple worlds" ("shifting worlds, una entrada" 1-2). Specifically, these girls stand not only at the threshold of new categories of experience but also at the intersection of multiple in-between spaces, as a result of their overlapping social locations. They are girls whose ages places them between childhood and adulthood. They are "tweens" who sit between childhood and their teenage years. They are also individuals who move between home and spaces far from home. Their teen experiences represent a contact zone, characterized by crisis, psychic restlessness, and growth. The growth we see, which emerges in the context of

particular geographic places, ethnic communities, and social spaces, leads to increased clarity in terms of each girl's political awareness and her knowledge of the larger social world in which she lives. The challenge for writers, as I see it, is how to replicate or depict the characters' situatedness or standpoint when the girls exist in such a transitory state and are constantly in flux. Given this challenge, I regard the authors' use of geographic and spatial details as attempts to pin down the girls' elusive states of social, physical, and spatial liminality. In other words, emplotting Black and Brown girls in these shifting, unstable, and contested geographic spaces calls attention to the precarity of their lives while allowing writers to chart the development of the girls' critical consciousness and political standpoints.

Liminality and Girlhood

This chapter, situated between my discussion of picture books for young readers and youth-centered texts for adult readers, intentionally draws upon a long-established discourse that considers adolescence in relation to space, particularly notions of liminality or in-betweenness. As Geta LeSeur explains in her discussion of Black coming-of-age stories, most protagonists in the Black bildung are between the ages of nine and thirteen, with ten being a pivotal point—or “the age of darkness” when they experience a horrific or traumatic moment that thrusts them into adulthood (*Ten is the Age of Darkness* xi). Girl protagonists in this age range are not young children like Girlpie or Libby in the previous chapter. But they are also not women. Instead, they occupy a biological age and developmental stage that is literally wedged between two seemingly fixed and naturalized categories, which are in fact arbitrary and socially constructed concepts (read: childhood vs. adulthood, or more specifically, girlhood vs. womanhood).

British anthropologist Victor Turner²⁹ famously explored liminality in his essay, “Betwixt and Between,” in which he discusses African cultural rituals designed to usher young people from one social position (i.e. childhood) to another (i.e. adulthood). He coins the phrase “betwixt and between”—which operates as a commonplace in children’s literary studies, childhood studies and teen studies—to describe this liminality, which in turn has been used in a biological sense and a developmental sense to describe the position of teens or the adolescent life stage. Taking Turner’s concept of individuals residing in particular social *locations*, and then moving through a process to accumulate knowledge that will grant them entrée into another social realm or position, I draw a connection between these adolescent journeys, geography, and maturation, as well as feminist conceptualizations of standpoint as an epistemology. While I apply standpoint or situatedness to these girl characters, language proves limited because both terms connote fixity or stability—whether in position or perspective. Yet, it is the movement of girl characters through their specific material, cultural, and social spaces that leads to a new awareness not only of the world, but also of their unique locations as girls of color on the threshold of becoming young women. They stand, albeit unsteadily, in a shifting liminal space in which we can view the intersections not only of race, gender, ethnicity/culture, and citizenship, but also of age.

Turner points to the difficulty of mapping or pinning down the internal aspect of liminality and acknowledges that much of the language used to describe what he calls “the liminal persona...is modeled on human biological processes,” which “give an outward form to an inward conceptual process” (96). Instead of interpreting literary girls’ life transitions as strictly biological or developmental phenomena—they are characters afterall—I focus on the girls’

²⁹ Turner’s essay expands upon Arnold Van Gennep’s 1901 lecture, *Rites of Passage*, which is one of the earliest discussions of liminality.

interiority and the life transitions as sites of epistemological development. How do we depict an invisible process, one that may be cognitive, emotional? I am not pursuing a Freudian analysis here, but rather one that privileges literary representations of the spatiality of Black and Brown girls' maturation. I contend that in these two middle grade novels, Ryan and Williams-Garcia use landscape and geography as metaphors to represent this process, which is simultaneously and variously intellectual, cognitive, emotional, developmental, and also political.

This technique of highlighting the girls' spatial and material environments gives shape to their adolescence and provides a means to help us nail down (theoretically speaking, at least) the girls' existence in the liminal space of *Nepantla*. In "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric," Anzaldúa describes *Nepantla* as "unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined" (268). The girls in these novels stand in in-between spaces; they are rooted in spaces of ambiguity and contradiction. *Nepantla* is conceptually useful because just like the categories of girlhood and childhood, which are at once social constructions as well material and visceral experiences, *Nepantla* signifies a complex space that is simultaneously abstract, conceptual, and intellectual, and yet historical and physical.

For Chicana poet Pat Mora, *Nepantla*—which means "place in the middle" in the indigenous Nahuatl language—signifies a "sliding back and forth/between the fringes of both worlds" (qtd. in Mora, *Nepantla* 6). She speaks mainly of the United States and Mexico in terms of the worlds and cultures she must negotiate or float between. Anzaldúa provides a more detailed conceptualization of *Nepantla* as "indicat[ing] temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation" (qtd. in Keating "shifting worlds,

una entrada” 1), and Anzaldúa calls people who occupy such in-between states, “nepantleras”: mediators, ‘in-betweeners’ those ‘who facilitate passage between worlds’” (qtd. in Keating 1). Change involves movement of some sort. Using geography, Ryan and Williams-Garcia chart each girl protagonist’s passage through her tween years while emphasizing her different physical or social locations within a larger cultural or national community. These texts give readers a window into the world of Black and Brown girls, weaving historical events and figures into the narrative that positions these girls as historical actors. Williams-Garcia and Ryan employ geographic metaphors and tropes of travel to highlight each girl’s evolving consciousness and the development of her politicized worldview. Though this space is ever shifting (like social constructions of childhood and adolescence which morph across time and space), the landscape details or spatial metaphors locate their growth as well as the emotional turbulence and cognitive dissonance that accompanies the tween and adolescent years. In *Esperanza Rising* and *One Crazy Summer*, Ryan and Williams-Garcia offer us literary examples of how one potentially comes to be a nepantlera-in-training. I say “potentially” because in Anzaldúa’s conception, nepantleras not only have a “perspective from the cracks” (qtd. in Keating 2), but they “use their views from these cracks-between-worlds to invent holistic, relational theories...” (2). It is debatable whether the girls in these texts fully accomplish this kind of theoretical or political task. But as tweens, they may be on their way. These are young girls who are immersed in their own in-between states, undergoing transitions that are uncomfortable and unsettling. Their narratives, grounded in geographic details, show the difficulty inherent in a state of in-betweenness, a kind of restlessness that stems from being simultaneously unmoored yet bound by the intersectional social structures and historical forces that frame their lives.

Esperanza Rising

A popular work of historical fiction, and the 2002 winner of the Pura Belpré Award, Pamela Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* takes place in and between California and Mexico, in the late 1920s and early 1930s—in the midst of the U.S. Great Depression. The story centers on Esperanza Ortega, the privileged only child of a wealthy Mexican landowner. Like *I Pledge Allegiance*, which is inspired by Mora's great aunt, Ryan's narrative is inspired by her grandmother, whose life story parallels Esperanza's in that she, too, left Mexico under duress and landed in a migrant labor camp in California. In the book, political tensions between Mexican elites and indigenous communities can be traced to the Mexican-American War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which established what Anzaldúa called an "unnatural boundary" (*Borderlands* 3). This larger socio-political context eventually invades the sanctity of Esperanza's world and the intimate space of her home, as bandits kills her father. Since institutional structures such as Mexican property law and custom enact spatial restrictions that block women from land ownership, Esperanza's mother is faced with two options: marry one of her rich brother-in-laws (whom she regards as a vicious and repulsive human being) or flee the country and cross the northern border into the southwestern United States.

Ryan, who is known for crafting strong female characters—especially girls who resist restrictive social customs and gender norms—openly acknowledges the political impulse of her writing, particularly her "desire to stand up for the downtrodden, or to talk about women's issues" ("Interview"). Telling the story through the eyes of a young Mexican girl and her mother counters the image of the "pioneering male migrant," which we see in *I Pledge Allegiance* and which frames migration studies "historically in narrow neoclassical economic terms...that ignore, marginalize, or trivialize the role of gender and sexuality" (Luibhéid and Buffington "Gender, Sexuality, and Mexican Migration" 206). Instead, *Esperanza Rising*, like Mora and Martinez's

picture book, intentionally centers girlhood and gestures towards buried histories, particularly the labor and activism of women and girls, by enacting, as Emma Pérez writes, an “uncovering [of] the untold to consciously remake the narrative” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 127). If *I Pledge Allegiance* presents child readers with a gendered border story, Ryan’s middle grade novel goes a step further by specifically addressing the gendered and fluid movement of people across U.S.-Mexico national boundaries, largely due to the labor demands of U.S. agribusiness. Against the backdrop of long-standing economic and social processes which have relegated Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans to agricultural fields and labor camps, the text directly confronts anti-immigrant (primarily anti-Mexican) sentiments, and it serves as an indictment of the inhumane working conditions that characterize U.S. migrant labor practices in the work camps close to the U.S.-Mexico border. Ryan’s novel places Esperanza at the crossroads of loaded political and economic spheres, and readers get a glimpse of the history of Mexican and Mexican American repatriation and the associated labor struggles through her perspective. Centering Esperanza in a narrative set against such a historical and political backdrop offers us the chance to acknowledge Brown girls’ agency as we witness the protagonist’s growing political awareness.

Esperanza Rising affirms Dodd’s contention that the geopolitical imagination impacts worldview, as Esperanza’s migration experience quickly transforms her position from that a member of the economic and social elite to that of a laborer. This movement across an arbitrary yet politically-significant national boundary (the U.S.-Mexico border) produces a shift not only in her economic, social, and citizenship status, but also in her social and political consciousness. Esperanza undergoes a radical change of thinking, precipitated by her forced migration and the abrupt change in her social position and geographic location. I read Ryan’s spatial aesthetic—her

structuring the story in relation to geography, space, and landscape—as a tactic that reveals Esperanza’s liminality, which exists between multiple axes of difference including class, ethnicity, nation, gender, and age.

It is important to note an experience of liminality necessarily involves opposition of at least two locations. We see this contrast developed as a geographic opposition from the novel’s beginning. Esperanza’s initial grounding exists in Mexico. Ryan spends considerable effort positioning her protagonist solidly in Mexico before she begins her journey north. Esperanza’s story begins in Mexico in 1924. The novel underscores the importance of landscape and geography through the chapter title (“Aguascalientes, Mexico, 1924”) which situates the story in time and space and through the opening line spoken by the protagonist’s father. “Our land is alive, Esperanza,” he tells her (Ryan 1). This simple declarative statement positions the protagonist in relationship to the land; the land belongs to her as indicated by the possessive pronoun “our.” This initial scene depicts the protagonist as a six-year-old girl who walks with her father “through the gentle slopes of the vineyard [where] leafy green vines draped the arbors and the grapes were ready to drop” (1). In addition to providing a subtle imagery that parallels Esperanza’s growth and development (as figured by the verdant landscape that bears fruit which ripens over time), it is clear from the beginning that Esperanza’s identity is rooted in the land. The opening paragraph provides a kind of footing for the protagonist and for readers who quickly learn to associate her with her Mexican homeland. The connection between Esperanza and Aguascalientes is visceral and deep. Aguascalientes also functions as a geographic marker that frames Esperanza’s early life and sustains her lifestyle, since her family owns acres of fertile land. Mexico, therefore, signifies a specific geographic location that gives birth to her cultural

and national identity, whereas the family's ranch situates her within an economically privileged class.

The second chapter, "Las Uvas" (grapes) marks the beginning of a technique that Ryan employs for much of the rest of the novel: naming each chapter after a harvest. Ryan comments on this:

So I began to name the chapters things like, El Rancho de las Rosas, The Fire, The Escape... things like that. But as I read through my story, I began to feel a parallel between the harvest and what was happening in Esperanza's life....As I went through and began naming the chapters, the harvests began to take on the feel of metaphors. For example, the smashed figs for her smashed life and the resentment she felt. Their lives were dictated by the rhythm of the harvest seasons, so in a way, the story lent itself to this organization. ("Questions and Answers with Pamela Muñoz Ryan")

Not only does this device mimic experiences in Esperanza's life, it also provides a link between the character's growth and individual internal experiences, as well as the historical context of U.S. dependency on Mexican and Mexican descended peoples for agricultural labor. The harvest metaphorically frames Esperanza's life—as there's a harvest reference in the final chapter—and it locates her within a broader, transnational circuit of economic exchange, highlighting agricultural production and the material realities of living off the land as a worker. This chapter carries political significance since the grapes conjure the Delano grape strike that would occur in "real time" more than 40 years after the story's opening and 30 years prior to the book's publication. The novel, therefore, vacillates between the present, the past (in its evocation of the five-year strike and César Chavez and Dolores Huertas's activism with the National Farmworkers Association), and the history of early 20th century migration embedded in a storyworld that positions Esperanza as a farmworker facing the unjust working and living conditions that gave rise to migrant labor activism.

Against the backdrop of Esperanza's initially pristine and privileged Mexican girlhood, Ryan begins to illustrate the protagonist's in-betweenness, a state stemming from her

developmental stage and the traumatic experience of forced migration. Esperanza and her mother cross the border with their house servants (Hortensia, her husband Alfonso, and their son Miguel), and the spatial details underscore not only the geographic mileposts along their journey but also the in-between state that characterizes Esperanza's mindset. They leave in a wagon, specifically in a secret compartment "higher than the real one and open at the back, with barely enough room between for Mama, Esperanza, and Hortensia to lie down" (Ryan 58). Esperanza's position, wedged between her mother and Hortensia, metaphorically speaks to her own liminality. She is physically in between two countries as they travel and between two women of different economic classes, as well as different racial and ethnic communities; her mother is an elite woman of Spanish descent, and Hortensia is an indigenous female domestic worker. And, as Anzaldúa describes the border as an open wound, Ryan inserts an implicit reference to the gendered violence of the region as the narrator reminds readers that "there are too many bandits...It is not safe for women to be on the road at night" (59). Though Esperanza is not yet a woman, she occupies these precarious spaces which are influenced by intersecting spheres of race and ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship, and age. Esperanza moves along these roads, a transitional space, that I identify as *Nepantla*.

As Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez's *Radical Chicana Poetics* states, "in radical Chicana poetics, *Nepantla* designates a transitional and concurrent positioning" (81). Ryan, I should add, does not identify as Chicana. Instead, she identifies as "half-Mexican," and she describes her heritage as "an ethnic smorgasbord...Spanish, Mexican, Basque, Italian and Oklahoman" ("Interview" 5). Unlike Mora, Anzaldúa, and other Chicana feminist theorists whom I draw upon for this project, and unlike Viramontes, whom I discuss in the next chapter, Ryan seems to eschew embracing the radical political standpoint that is Chicana feminism. Yet, I intentionally

include *Esperanza Rising* because the novel focuses on a Mexican girl as a historical subject who is impacted by larger structural forces (just as adults are), and the story's spatial details mark Esperanza's in-betweenness. Pérez interprets the use of *Nepantla* among radical Chicanas as a means "to define an in-between state that is not only geopolitical, but also psychological...describ[ing] situational moments of identity crisis" (81). Therefore, regardless of the author's stated or unstated politics, I read Esperanza's position, emplotted as it is in *and between* geographic, physical, economic, domestic, and emotional spaces, as indicative of the character's *Nepantla*-like expression.

Ryan builds upon Esperanza's *Nepantla*-like characterization by emphasizing the journey motif, and the coming-of-age story is unsurprisingly characterized by different modes of transportation. Whether wagon or train, these vehicles transport Esperanza to various points and constitute metaphorical vehicles that usher her transition from one state of being (and consciousness) to another. For example, while riding the train, she is completely aghast when she comes in contact with "So many peasants" (Ryan 67), and she is certain that "She did not belong here. She was Esperanza Ortega from El Rancho de las Rosas" (68). Esperanza sees herself and her identity as still rooted in her original home place and home country. Her sense of self is bound to the family's Mexican ranch, just as she crosses national borders and just as class distinctions dissolve.

At this point in her journey, Esperanza is hardly radical in her politics, and as the daughter of a wealthy landowner, she seems disconnected from any indigenous ancestry. Not only is indigeneity not part of her cultural heritage (though emotional intimacy and close physical proximity characterize her relationships with Hortensia, Alfonso and Miguel), Esperanza distances herself as the narrator describes the family's servants, particularly noting

differences in skin color and occupation and dress. The campesinos who work the family's ranch wear straw hats and are "covered top to bottom in long-sleeved shirts, baggy pants tied at the ankles with string, and bandanas wrapped around their foreheads and necks to protect them from the sun, dust, and spiders" (4-5). Esperanza, on the other hand, wears "a light silk dress that stops above her summer boot and no hat. On top of her head a wide satin ribbon was tied in a big bow, the tails trailing in her long black hair" (5). Whereas the servants must work the land and protect themselves from the natural elements, Esperanza welcomes the harvest as each one coincides with her birthday and a lavish birthday party. These early references to the ranch, labor, and the harvest connect Esperanza to the land but simultaneously distinguish her from the indigenous communities whose labor contributes to her higher social and economic status. Still, if "Nepantla designates a transitional state that reminds us about the provisionality and contingency of our acts" (Pérez, *Radical Chicana Poetics* 82), and if as Anzaldúa posits that this state constitutes an "overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, [in which] you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labels obsolete ("now let us shift" 541), then this perspective can be mapped onto Esperanza's experience. As the protagonist migrates from Mexico to California and confronts the same threats of violence as those she deems beneath her, her social position and vantage point change dramatically. As the novel progresses, she gravitates from seeing herself strictly as a member of the elite to understanding herself as one who crosses multiple boundaries related to national identity, economic class, race and ethnicity, and age.

This process of moving, surreptitiously, simulates (or underscores) the "temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of crisis" that she experiences and "describes both identity-related issues and *epistemological* concerns" [emphasis mine] (Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa*

Reader 322). Note Ana Louise Keating's reference to knowledge, which she connects to existing in a transitory state. As a tween, Esperanza already exists in a social and developmental stage between childhood and teenage years. And as children grow and develop, they obtain knowledge based on their experiences within the material world. Ryan shows readers that Esperanza is no different. Her field of social relations, the spaces in which she navigates, shift dramatically from an elite circle and privileged childhood in an affluent family to a no man's land and transitory space—the bottom of a wagon or a train packed with peasants. Her worldview shifts accordingly.

No doubt, the transition is uncomfortable, and as Keating declares, “During *Nepantla*, our worldviews and self-identities are shattered. *Nepantla* is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic; it signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions, and changes. *Nepantla* hurts!!!!” (“From *Borderlands* and *New Mestizas*” 9). Ryan's novel lacks overt depictions of violence, but it gestures to a kind of psychic disruption via the physical journey during which wagon “jostled them” (Ryan 65). There is an unsettling jolt or “jostling” that occurs while Esperanza is hidden in the wagon, and though Esperanza resists her changing landscape and economic circumstances, she cannot control these shifts. The social forces which precipitate the travel (war, class disputes in Mexico, marital law and gender restrictions on property ownership, and Esperanza's own vulnerability as a female child who might be shipped off to boarding school) all shape her experience and alter her consciousness. These forces lead Esperanza to experience the kind of psychic crisis of which Keating writes and which Anzaldúa regards as characteristic of the contact zone. But it is this very crisis, represented partially via her movement through the changing landscape, through nations, and through different ideologies that parallels Esperanza's movement through adolescence, contributing to her social and political education.

For nepantleras to be politically effective, they must become adept at negotiating difference. This proves challenging for Esperanza as her perceptions about the rules of engagement cause confusion whenever she encounters new people and new places. When she arrives in Zacatecas, Esperanza becomes discombobulated after boarding a train “already crowded with peasants” and “reek[ing] of rotting fruit and urine” (Ryan 66). The narrator reveals that “Esperanza had never been so close to so many peasants before” (66). Occupying physical space with those who are economically disadvantaged relative to her previous elite status produces anxiety. The journey further upsets her notions of social order and propriety when a poor woman talks to Esperanza’s mother. She finds the interaction, in which the two women speak as if they are of equal social standing, to be completely disconcerting. When she questions her mother about talking to the “peasant,” her mother nonchalantly responds, “It is alright...because we are peasants, too” (77). Her mother’s matter-of-fact acknowledgement of their new economic and social position (and her quick adjustment) confuses Esperanza, and she wonders if her mother’s “rules [had changed] since they had boarded this train” (77). This is the kind of shock that Nepantla produces. In Keating’s assessment of Anzaldúa’s Nepantla theory, the term “includes both *radical* dis-identification and transformation. We dis-identify with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, we are able to transform these existing conditions (“From *Borderlands* and New Mestizas” 9). Esperanza’s mother seamlessly makes the transition and dis-identifies with her former bourgeoisie status. Her daughter, however, has difficulty rooting herself in such uncertain circumstances, and she remains tied to her identity born on the family’s ranch.

As the migrants arrive in California, Ryan depicts Esperanza’s ideological and emotional dissonance in geographic and spatial terms as the protagonist grasps for physical and

epistemological footing. Esperanza surveys the landscape and tries to connect with the land by laying on the ground as her father taught her (Ryan 91). This attempt to locate herself in time and space and stabilize her identity in relation to physical territory proves useless as the earth's sounds allude her. Here, Ryan inserts a moving passage that describes not only the landscape, but also the effect that the territorial change enacts on Esperanza's evolving consciousness and her topsy-turvy emotional state:

Seeing nothing but the vast sky in dizzying swirls of blue and white, she began to feel as if she were floating and drifting upward. She lifted higher and part of her liked the sensation but another part of her felt untethered and frightened. She tried to find the place in her heart where her life was anchored, but she couldn't, so she closed her eyes and pressed the palms of her hands against the earth, making sure it was there. She felt as if she were falling, careening through the hot air. ...Suddenly, the world went black. (92)

This passage not only paints a vivid picture of Esperanza's surroundings, but it mirrors her internal state. Mimicking the novel's title and jacket cover in which she levitates, this scene depicts Esperanza as actually *rising*, which I liken to an elevated consciousness. The movement to a new country sparks conflicting feelings: a sense of freedom but also fear. Esperanza searches for psychological grounding by holding onto the land, but the lesson her father taught her seems to fail. She does not feel connected to the land; and therefore, unlike young Lobo in Mora and Martinez's picture book, Esperanza she doesn't feel rooted or secure. Instead, Esperanza moves uncontrollably not only through psychic space, but also across national borders and space as well.

While Ryan's text reveals Esperanza's difficulty in achieving emotional grounding, it also highlights the potential challenges associated with achieving a politicized standpoint. Ryan comments on the instability of national identity and Esperanza's own fluctuating situatedness by juxtaposing her with two other tweens, Marta and Irene, girls whom she encounters in work camps and in domestic spaces. Marta is a U.S. citizen, a migrant farmworker, and the daughter of

a Mexican national “who fought against people like Esperanza’s father who owned all the land” (97). The difference in landscape and Esperanza’s first meeting with Marta introduces conflict into the narrative and also signals a milestone or opening in Esperanza’s political education. Marta, though Esperanza’s peer, speaks assertively and directly about workers uniting for better pay and housing, and she quickly tells Esperanza, “Just so you know. This isn’t Mexico. No one will be waiting on you here...Entiendes? Understand?” (99). But Esperanza struggles to come to this understanding. She experiences difficulties in adjusting to life in the United States and has a hard time shedding her expectations regarding her rights as a child of privilege. She still expects people to wait on her, and she mistakenly believes that their current situation is a temporary one; as soon as her abuelita gets money, she will come to rescue them. In essence, Esperanza is consumed by a fairy tale existence that belies her immaturity, naiveté, and her ignorance regarding the social inequities that migrant laborers must contend with in the United States. Since she doesn’t yet understand the interlocking economic, racial, and political barriers facing farmworkers, nor the racial discrimination facing Mexican-descended peoples in the United States, particularly this history of Mexican and Mexican American repatriation, she doesn’t understand Marta who fearlessly leads efforts to strike.

Esperanza also does not understand that part of her liminality relates to her sitting between different national communities. She is an undocumented Mexican immigrant in the United States. And there are others, like Marta, who though legally U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, are subjected to racial discrimination. In *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Alicia Schmidt Camacho teases out the long standing history of cross-border migration, noting that despite the fact that “the migratory circuit linking Mexico and the United States was well entrenched [in the 1920s]” (21), “the migrant presence would

indelibly mark ethnic Mexicans in opposition to the ideal citizen-subject of the U.S. nation” (7). Given Marta’s lineage, as the daughter of a Mexican activist protesting against class inequalities in Mexico, she is particularly attuned to the disparities between laborers, who are primarily Mexican nationals, Mexican-Americans, or other people of color,³⁰ and Marta is equally aware that regardless of citizenship status, Mexican-descended peoples are “shaped by the experience of laboring for the [United States] without the promise of inclusion into its community as the bearers of rights” (9). Marta’s character gestures towards the establishment of the bracero program, a federal program which allowed the American agricultural industry to bring in temporary workers Mexico. Marta, herself, is also aware of threat of deportation, a narrative detail that inserts the history of repatriation, wherein roughly “half of the estimated 400,000 Mexicans forcibly repatriated during the Great Depression were [actually] U.S. citizens” (30). The recognition that anyone of Mexican descent sits outside the U.S. nation, despite citizenship status or experiences of laboring in the fields, compels Marta to forge “new articulations of a cross-border nationalism...rooted in the culture of laboring” (25). Therefore, Marta (who’s almost a foil for Esperanza’s character) seeks to organize all workers, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, class, or age. The contrast between Marta’s characterization and Esperanza is telling. Marta’s political standpoint is clear. She, quite literally as a U.S. citizen, has a legal claim to the United States. But as a worker who has first-hand experience of the ways in which the U.S. agribusiness exploits the labor of people of Mexican descent, Marta is unwavering in her political position. Esperanza, who has yet to experience the labor camps and who is adjusting to her new country, struggles to arrive at such a standpoint.

³⁰ The text explicitly notes Esperanza’s reaction to Black laborers in the camps.

Nepantla entails two different belief systems and frames of reference, and Esperanza's education, which is not formal—in fact, she does not know English³¹—takes place in specific sites: the labor camp and private living spaces. And this education further reveals her own in-betweenness as she meets other young women in the labor camp. One afternoon, she interacts with two young women, Irene and Melina, and the narrator notes her friend's in-between state: "In some ways, [Melina] was a young girl, sometimes playing with Isabel or Silvia, or telling Esperanza gossip as if they were school friends. In other ways, she was grown-up, with a nursing baby and a husband, and preferring to crochet with the older women in the evenings" (Ryan 144). Like Melina, Esperanza, who initially lacks the knowledge and skills derived from hands-on experience working in the fields, must learn to care for children. In a comical scene—which proves to be a traumatic one for the protagonist—she must learn to change diapers and cook. She must even learn how to sweep...all from a girl much younger than herself. Esperanza is still a child, but her lack of agricultural know-how forces her to take on a caregiving role, an adult-like role for which she, as a tween, is also ill-equipped.

Like her friends, Esperanza moves between multiple states or poles. Her perception of herself and her role as one who contributes to the social reproduction of the farmworker community (via caregiving) are constantly in flux, and we see this shift marked in her body. After her mother contracts "Valley Fever" while working in the fields during a sandstorm (182), Esperanza must go to work. Due to the work she performs in the house and in the fields, her hands no longer "look like the hands of a wealthy woman from El Rancho de las Rosas. Because

³¹ Lest we forget, though Esperanza lives in a migrant labor camp with other Mexican and Mexican American workers and Spanish speakers, she is now in the United States, an English-dominant country. We, the reading audience, approach the text in English, and there are very few Spanish sections other than a few words sprinkled in the text. But one of the girls calls attention to Esperanza's lack of English proficiency. This contact (the readers' English and the inaccessibility of Esperanza's Spanish for English-only readers) also places readers and the protagonist in yet another vague, indeterminate space.

they were the hands of a poor campesina” (182). Still, despite her new status as a poor migrant worker, Miquel informs her that she still maintains some measure of privilege, particularly because of her education. “The fact remains, Esperanza,” he tells her, “that you, for instance, have a better education than most people’s children in this country. But no one is likely to recognize that or take the time to learn it. Americans see us as one big, brown group who are good only for manual labor” (187). His statement points to a racialization that takes place once she crossed into the United States territory.

In addition to this domestic and field training, Esperanza also gains knowledge of her liminality which shapes her political perspective. Her friend Irene discusses the impending strike explaining that “So many Mexicans have the revolution in their blood. I am sympathetic to those who are striking, and I am sympathetic to those of us who want to keep working. We all want the same things. To eat and feed our children” (146). Irene’s views about the strike and those who choose not to participate represent a kind of middle ground. She knows and experiences the material conditions in the camps, and those lived experiences inform her personal decision to keep working despite protests from other workers like Marta. What’s curious is how this resistant spirit is linked to Mexico as a nation-state and to Mexican nationals as a collective body. Though Marta and her mother are American-born, and though they “have never even been to Mexico,” they are still associated with the country. This is in part because her father “came from Sonora during the revolution” (129). The novel suggests that there’s a correlation between the Mexican nation-state, given its history of colonialism and conflict between indigenous communities and European-descended landowners, and revolution. Between these comments from Irene—which seem to remove her from this politicized conception of a unified Mexican community—and Marta’s unrelenting efforts to organize all people of Mexican descent who

labor in the fields, there's a blurring of national and community boundaries. Esperanza, influenced by both girls, vacillates between both perspectives.

In the final chapter, which returns to grapes, we see the closing of a cycle. There is a return to domestic tranquility in the sense that Esperanza's mother returns from the hospital after recovering from Valley Fever and pneumonia, and Abuelita finally arrives from Mexico. Yet this time, readers note how Esperanza has changed. Not only is she older and more responsible, but after being forced to work during her mother's absence, "she didn't measure time by the usual seasons. Instead, she told her story as a field worker, in spans of fruits and vegetables and by what needed to be done to the land" (Ryan 246). She now possesses an embodied sense of time and knowledge that is embedded in her physical experience of working the land as a migrant farmworker.

Theresa A. Martinez, in "Making Oppositional Culture, Making Standpoint," likens Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness to W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" which he describes as "a consciousness born of oppression" (qtd. in Martinez 560). Esperanza's perspective expands and grows, not just because she is a year older, but because she experiences a reality check, learning what it means to be part of an oppressed, laboring class. In Mexico, she reaped the economic benefits of being part of the landholding elite. But crossing the border strips Esperanza of her citizenship status and forces her to negotiate life as a farmworker who must contend with the economic exploitation of a racialized class, as well as the gendered expectations of female children. Despite her newfound knowledge of the racism that migrant workers endure, Esperanza chooses not to join Marta's protests. She may regard herself as part of the larger migrant community, but the actions she takes primarily relate to maintaining adult responsibilities during her mother's hospitalization. Esperanza's political standpoint certainly

evolves by the end of the novel, and she has a greater sense of being part of the larger Mexican American community. She even feels a sense of pride or solidarity as she eagerly awaits telling her grandmother all she has learned. Even though there's no sense of her achieving a kind of political agency that can reshape unjust power relations (Collins 205), which the mestiza consciousness theoretically leads to, readers do witness a girl child who cautiously wades through the unsettling territory of the in-between.

One Crazy Summer

One Crazy Summer—winner of the 2011 Coretta Scott King Book Award, as well as a 2011 Newbery Honor and a spot on the National Book Award shortlist—is Rita Williams-Garcia's first middle grade novel and a work of historical fiction that takes place in Oakland, California during the summer of 1968. The novel features three young Black girls (Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern Gaither) who grow up in the midst of the Black Power Movement and the Vietnam War. The sisters travel from the sanctity of their Brooklyn home, where they live with their father and paternal grandmother, to the uncertain space of Oakland, California. There, they meet the mother who abandoned them seven years earlier and who quickly introduces them to Black nationalism through her connection to the Black Panther Party. While the novel addresses difficulties in their mother-daughter relationships, that secondary narrative serves as a backdrop for the novel's primary concern: a young Black girl, Delphine, who comes of age in a period of political turmoil and social upheaval.

On the one hand, Williams-Garcia says that she was “inspired by photographs of children being served by, participating in and witnessing the movement...” (“Between Delphine and a Hard Place” 211). But as her long-time editor notes, “Rita lived through this period. Although the media mostly portrayed the Black Panthers as violent and dangerous, Rita's experience of them *as a child* [emphasis mine] was quite different: the Panthers provided shoes

and clothing, free breakfast for children, and free testing for sickle cell anemia for kids in her neighborhood” (Brosnan). Her childhood experience motivated Williams-Garcia to write the story because, in her words, “If we think of the Black Panthers at all, we rarely remember their work with and for children,” (Williams-Garcia, Interview by The Library of Congress), and more importantly, “we never think about the children when we think about these movements” (Brosnan). The novel not only contextualizes Black childhood by placing the characters in the late sixties, it also recognizes herstories, the behind-the-scenes social justice work of Black women whose political labor was overshadowed by the larger-than-life public personas of the movement’s male leaders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. All the while, Williams-Garcia foregrounds Black girlhood by choosing to tell the story from the lens of a young girl who witnesses, and in her own way, participates in the Black nationalist movement.

For Williams-Garcia, this narrative perspective is key. The author not only wanted to think and write about children living in the midst of the Black Power Movement, “but it was the subject of children within the movement that dictated *who* [emphasis mine] would tell the story” (“Between Delphine and a Hard Place” 211). Her statement suggests there is something different or unique about the child’s perspective and something valuable in what a child narrator might tell us in recounting these events. Critic Jenny Bavidge urges us to view any text’s purported “child’s perspective” with a critical eye, arguing that “a really useful literary children’s geography has to start from the basic point that children’s literature does not, of course, represent a child’s view of the world at all. What it *does* represent is a privileged space in which we witness the operations of adult dialogues with children” (“Stories in Space” 320). We can recognize that Williams-Garcia’s effort to “celebrate childhood” may, in fact, be speaking to young readers and sharing her own adult-filtered reflections on her childhood with the Black Panthers. Even so, her

insistence on telling the story from the perspective of a young girl conveys an underlying message that youthful age does not automatically eliminate children from functioning as political agents and social actors. And like Ryan's Marta, who is a Mexican American girl activist, Delphine offers readers a model of a Black girl who is also politically engaged. Though Delphine wades through multiple liminal spaces just as Esperanza, Delphine comes to represent Black girls as emerging political agents.

Therefore, Williams-Garcia hones in on the general outlook and political perspective of her protagonist, Delphine. The oldest of the three Gaither sisters, eleven-year-old Delphine is, according to the author, "...very much a tween: as innocent as she is knowledgeable" ("Between Delphine and a Hard Place" 211), and she provides the focalization for the story. Williams-Garcia's comment emphasizes the protagonist's developmental stage as a "tween" and points to Delphine's own liminality, as she sits in a developmental and social space between a youthful innocence and a state of sophisticated or adult-like maturity. Readers witness Delphine's struggles to negotiate life in this in-between state informed by her standing at the intersection of race, gender, class, and age. As Patricia Hill Collins explains in her discussion of intersectionality and epistemology, "Standpoint theory argues that group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared challenges for individuals in those group [and] these common challenges can foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint that in turn can influence the group's political action" ("Some Group Matters" 205). Esperanza's angle of vision, though similar to others in the labor camps, does not crystallize in the form of direct political action at the end of the narrative. Delphine, growing up in a Black working-class family, certainly shares experiences with and occupies a social position similar to many people she meets within the Black Panther community. But her particular position within social hierarchies

(whether in her family or the larger community) relates to her age and her status as a tween. This unique location, though it's one in flux and constantly shifting, characteristically Nepantla-like, is productive in terms of the knowledge and consciousness it engenders. As I examine *One Crazy Summer*, I interpret the author's use of geography as a means to concretize Delphine's experiences in an in-between state and render her movement through this ambiguous state legible. What we see in the novel is the development of Delphine's standpoint, a politicized worldview that emerges as she walks through her own Nepantla state of Black tweendom.

Understanding her liminality includes seeing Delphine as uniquely situated in an age category that we call "tweendom." According to educators Christy M. Howard and Caitlin L. Ryan, "Even within the larger journey from youth to adulthood, these "9- to 12-year-olds are classified as 'tweens,' indicating this transitional period between childhood and adolescence. And they assert that these years "become an important time for Black youth to construct a racial identity and view oneself as a Black person" ("Black Tween Girls with Black Girl Power" 170). In *Just Us Girls: The Contemporary African American Young Adult Novel*, Wendy Rountree writes, "It must be stated that often in young adult novels the protagonists' growing awareness of their identity and place in society coincides with their development from children into young men and women" (17). Though Delphine is not a teenager or young adult, her racial and political identities (which are related) take shape during her tween years. She already knows herself to be a "Negro"—terminology that changes as she grows—and through her travels to Oakland and her reunion with her mother, she's exposed to the Oakland community and the racial injustices that gave rise to the Black Panthers. Williams-Garcia illustrates this developing critical consciousness, through Delphine's movement in public urban spaces and in the private space of her mother's home. And we come to see that Delphine not only stands between childhood and

adulthood (or as a tween between childhood and adolescence), but that her existence in multiple spaces and places—some defined by adult control and others characterised by relative freedom—shapes her worldview immensely. Just as Williams-Garcia acknowledges Delphine’s youth and her wisdom, there is a consistent and carefully crafted Jamesian opposition³² between what Delphine knows and what she doesn’t. We can see a geographic or spatial dimension to her knowledge base as Williams-Garcia variously connects Delphine’s perspective to her experiences at home and school in Brooklyn versus what she experiences and comes to know as she moves through community spaces in Oakland, where her mother lives. The boundaries that define Delphine’s liminality may be shifting and unclear, but her movement in recognizable geographic spaces—major U.S. cities and commonplace locations like libraries, community centers, and city streets—produces a situatedness in Oakland’s Black community that shapes her worldview.

Geography frames the narrative from the first page as Williams-Garcia draws upon tropes of travel to show Delphine’s physical motion and to highlight liminality and the protagonist’s inward journey (and struggles) towards achieving a more adult-like consciousness and developing a politicized worldview. The novel opens with Delphine’s voice, a girl who, “with so many responsibilities, has a hard time simply being a child” (Williams-Garcia, Interview by The Library of Congress). In a chapter titled “Cassius Clay Clouds”—named for heavyweight champion and radical Black activist later known as Muhammad Ali—readers meet the protagonist and her two younger sisters, Vonetta and Fern, who nervously deal with turbulence during their cross-country flight. As the oldest child, Delphine “anchor[s] [herself] and [her]

³² Henry James’s novel, *What Maisie Knew* (1897) is widely considered by childhood studies scholars and children’s literature scholars as one of the most successful literary renderings not only of childhood but of the inscrutability and inaccessibility of child consciousness.

sisters best as [she] could to brace...for whatever came next” (Williams-Garcia 1). While her younger siblings shriek and hold onto their dolls for dear life, Delphine tries to hide her fear and whimpers, silently, to herself (1). She is not an adult or even a teenager. But Delphine is the one who carries responsibilities for her younger sisters. That they sit in the airplane is equally symbolic of her liminal experience, as this “locale” which drifts through space (and across geographic regions and time zones) is a space of contradiction. Being away from parental guidance and authority, Delphine and her sisters have a deceptive sense of freedom, but they are also in an enclosed space that contains them; they are literally “strapped in tight” (1). During the flight, Delphine thinks, “The last thing Pa and Big Ma [their grandmother] wanted to hear was how we made a grand Negro spectacle of ourselves thirty thousand feet up in the air around all these white people” (2). Even though the three have physically left their homeground, the social expectations that govern their behavior have not changed. There is still a negotiation of racial codes and social relations, stemming from Big Ma’s roots in racially segregated Alabama, that characterize that the transitional space of the airplane and regulate their behavior as Black children who may encounter white adults; the social norms have simply transferred from the ground in Brooklyn to the friendly skies.

The initial chapter incorporates geographic detail and connects new places to child consciousness. The sisters, Delphine tells readers, “had stayed up practically all night California dreaming about what seemed like the other side of the world” (3). California, part of the United States, not only seems like it’s situated on the “other side of the world,” it also seems to represent a different physical landscape and social world in the girls’ collective imagination. And their image is idyllic. Delphine confesses, “We saw ourselves riding wild waves on surfboards, picking oranges and apples of fruit trees, filling our autograph books with signatures from movie

stars we'd see in soda shops. Even better, we saw ourselves going to Disneyland" (3). The California of their dreams is not entirely a figment of their imaginations; some of their images stem from actual representations of the state in the media (as a key site of U.S. citrus production, home of Hollywood, and the birthplace of Disney). But by invoking Disneyland, a place that is simultaneously real and fictive, Williams-Garcia underscores Delphine's position as a tween whose own existence and cognitive state fluctuates between the realm of her childhood imagination and that of the more "realistic" adult world.

In the introduction to *The Geography of Identity*, Patricia Yaeger touches upon what she terms "themed space" (represented on one level by theme parks like Disneyland and Disney World), and she asks, "Why do people want to visit, to dwell within, a space that is extrinsically storied or narrated? What is the lure of the themed space" (18). For Yaeger, the attraction to themed spaces can be attributed to a kind of artificiality because the "enjoyment of themed space depends on... most notably, the sublimation of catastrophe" (21). I would add that this sublimation is willful in that it entails an intentional dis-association or move away from reality. For the Gaither sisters, "California dreaming" is infinitely more attractive and compelling than dealing with the potential catastrophe that awaits when they meet their mother again. On one level, they are intensely aware that they're venturing into unknown geographic and emotional territories, given their lack of a maternal connection. But they each dwell in their own stories about what California and their mother will bring.

With all the girls, but especially Delphine, we see an attempt to reconcile or accept real world knowledge versus merely follow what they imagine or envision to be true. Delphine's own thoughts illustrate how she's moving out of childhood and attaining greater knowledge of the world. She thinks to herself, "I'm not nine or seven and given to squealing or oohing like

Vonetta and Fern” (Williams-Garcia 9). But when the plane begins its descent and the pilot announces that the Golden Gate Bridge is in view, the protagonist can barely hold her excitement. She confesses:

I wanted to squeal and ooh like a seven-year-old meeting Tinker Bell. I had read about the Golden Gate Bridge in class. The California gold rush. The Chinese immigrants building the railroad connecting east to west. It wasn’t every day you saw a live picture of what you read about in your textbook. I wanted to look down from above the world and see the Golden Gate Bridge. (9)

Seeing is believing, and looking down on the bridge makes her book knowledge all the more real. As Ebony Elizabeth Thomas acknowledges in “Landscapes of City and Self,” iconic structures such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco or the Statue of Liberty in New York City, or the Gateway Arch in St. Louis “not only serve as settings and backdrops for memory, but [they] often become metaphors for the cities themselves” (13). Thomas further argues that the structures that symbolize specific urban landscapes provide young readers with “a sense of being anchored in worlds both real and fictional” (13). Aside from signaling to readers that the coming-of-age narrative unfolds in the Bay Area—which, of course *is* significant as this is the geographic, material, and cultural birthplace of the Black Panther Party—“bridging” the knowledge Delphine gained in a formal school setting with the architectural symbols that she “reads” as the plane hovers above allows Delphine to orient herself in a new place.

Her younger sisters engage in a similar act of reading the landscape below. But Fern, the baby of the family, attaches a different meaning to the bridge. Delphine shares that in Fern’s mind, “the Golden Gate Bridge sounded like Sleeping Beauty’s castle. She halfway believed in things not true and didn’t know where fairy tales ended” (Williams-Garcia 10). Delphine’s assessment of Fern’s fairy-tale beliefs places the youngest Gaither sister squarely in the childhood category; she cannot distinguish fact from fantasy. Delphine is different. Though she is young enough to get excited about seeing the tourist attraction—she cannot resist reaching

over her sister to look out the window—Delphine is old enough to know more, and her knowledge of California’s social history places her in a more sophisticated and mature category.

Still, she is not an adult, and in these early chapters, the narrative depicts Delphine as a tween who grapples with balancing her social position and different forms of knowledge. As the girls wait in the airport to meet their mother, a white woman approaches them, offering them money. Vonetta and Fern want to take the money, but Delphine refuses to do. Her decision to follow her father’s mandate that she “see after [her] sisters” (15) is interpreted by the attendant as evidence of Delphine’s “uppity behavior” (16). Delphine thinks, “What was the sense of making the stewardess stand guard over us if she refused to protect us from strangers? She thought it was all right to have the large white woman gawk at us, talk to us, and buy our attention. We might as well have stood by ourselves” (17). This moment paints Delphine as a critical, independent thinker. She recognizes their vulnerability not only as young children but as young Black children approached by an unfamiliar white person in a relatively new and foreign space. Based on the legacy of racial violence (such as Emmett Till’s murder), Delphine internalizes some of the lessons that her grandmother and the evening news teach her about her relationship to space and the individuals she may encounter, particularly if they are white.

Delphine brings a similar critical gaze when they meet their mother, whom she initially identifies as “a figure standing by the cigarette machine” (18), and she interprets these interactions spatially. After their mother coldly tells the stewardess, “I’m Cecile Johnson. These...are mine” (19), she hurries off with the children struggling to keep up. Delphine describes the physical distance, that undoubtedly signals an emotional distance as well, as a “gap between Cecile and us [that] spread wider and wider” (19). Like Esperanza who attempts to read the landscape in order to ground herself, Delphine tries to make sense of her new surroundings in

Oakland. When they arrive at Cecile's home, Delphine describes it in detail, paying attention to colors, angles, construction, and landscape:

To begin with, the house was covered in peaks of hard green frosting. Stucco, Cecile called it. She said she applied the stucco herself. The green prickly house was surrounded by a dried-out but neatly trimmed lawn. To one side of the house was a rectangular concrete slab with a roof over it. A carport, she said. Just no car. On the other side, a baby palm tree sloped toward the sun. That palm tree was as out of place as the stucco. That's how I could be sure it was Cecile's home, all right. (24-25)

Delphine surveys the property for clues about her mother, and she reads the palm tree as being "out of place" (25). We're not certain why since the trees dot the California landscape and evoke almost-automatic associations with the state. There's no indication that Delphine is even aware that all palm trees, save one species native to the California, are remnants of the Spanish colonial era.³³ But somehow this little tree's presence signals that something does not belong in this space (the three girls, perhaps?) or that something is awry with the place and with their mother.

Delphine learns something is off when she marches up to her mother, with Vonetta and Fern at her side, and announces that they are hungry. Instead of preparing dinner, Cecile—much to Delphine's surprise—sends the three girls out to pick up dinner from local Chinese take-out. She thinks, "I would have never let my long-gone daughters travel nearly three thousand miles without turning on the stove" (31). Basing her knowledge of motherhood on her experience in New York with their grandmother, who is critical of her former daughter-in-law, Delphine holds specific expectations of the roles they will play in Oakland and in their mother's home. She not only attempts to hold her mother to the gendered expectations she has come to associate with mothers and adult women, but Delphine also seems attached to conceptions of childhood

³³ See Nathan Master's "A Brief History of Palm Trees in Southern California" or Judy Richter's "Palms up! / Only one kind is native to the state, but California is defined by these trees."

associated with innocence and vulnerability. Delphine asks if Cecile will accompany them—it is after 8:00 p.m. after all—but their mother curtly gives them directions. In her refusal to accompany them in this new landscape, Delphine judges Cecile as abdicating her motherly responsibilities when she leaves her daughters to their own devices to navigate Oakland's streets. Novelist Michael Chabon associates this freedom to wander with childhood, writing that “A striking feature of literature for children is the number of stories, many of them classics of the genre, that feature the adventures of a child, more often a group of children, acting in a world where adults, particularly parents, are completely or effectively out of the picture (“Manhood for Amateurs: The Wilderness of Childhood”). Chabon’s editorial looks primarily to boyhood experiences, and the literary girls he references are all white. Nevertheless, though we may associate childhood with play and wonder, there is clearly a time and place for that. Cecile’s charge that her girls venture out in a completely foreign landscape counters Delphine’s beliefs about how, when, and under what circumstances children—especially little Black girls—can and should occupy public spaces. Just as the random white stranger in the airport could potentially be a threat, venturing out in unfamiliar territory—and not knowing the racial history of the particular place—could prove dangerous for the girls.

This scene, in which we see the three girls moving through the neighborhood, highlights notions of liminality on multiple levels. Delphine herself acknowledges that while it was only eight o’clock, “It wasn’t dark at all, but it wasn’t daylight either” (Williams-Garcia 34). So they venture out at a time that sits at the threshold between day and night. As they move during this indeterminate temporal space, Delphine also moves through another temporal space. She’s only eleven, and she does not celebrate a birthday during the narrative’s arc, as many coming-of-age protagonists do. Even so, her mother’s absence and insistence that they go out unsupervised

forces Delphine to leave her childhood caution behind and function as an adult-proxy, carrying responsibility for her younger sisters. She walks and acknowledges her lack of familiarity with this urban landscape: “One thing was for sure. These blocks might have been long like the blocks on Herkimer Street, but we were far from Brooklyn. I didn’t know where any of these streets led, but I walked down Magnolia like I knew where I was going” (34). Delphine feigns knowledge, even though she struggles, cognitively and emotionally, just like Esperanza. In Ryan’s text, Esperanza struggles to switch from her previous home as frame of reference when she enters new territories. She constantly compares her home to the new ground that she must navigate. Delphine engages in a similar process, looking for signs of familiarity and confusing the new geographic terrain.

The most pivotal experiences that shape Delphine’s tween journey stem from her introduction to the Black Panther Party, and that political education unfolds as she and her sisters participate in activities at “The People’s Center,” a community center run by the Black Panther Party. Once again, instead of feeding her children, Cecile sends them out for breakfast, telling Delphine, “You the oldest. You can read street signs” (56). Cecile instructs them to go to The People’s Center, rattling off a string of directions that ends with “Nothing but black folks in black clothes rapping revolution and a line of hungry black kids” (57). Being at the center challenges Delphine’s worldview as she sees “Puerto Ricans who didn’t look Puerto Rican but who spoke Spanish” (63) (although she later concludes they are Mexicans), and Fern is asked if she is “a white girl or a black girl” because she carries a white baby doll. Delphine learns about the possibility of building multiracial coalitions by seeing the work the Panthers do in Oakland to help various communities of color as well as poor whites, and readers witness the very collective

consciousness that Collins theorizes when she asserts that a shared social position, in relation to power and oppression, activates a similar political standpoint.

Mostly, Delphine develops a strong sense of racial solidarity by participating in activities at the center. Ever astute, Delphine quickly recognizes the socio-political education promoted to the children, and she thinks, “Vonetta didn’t seem to care that we were in some sort of Black Panther summer camp, learning to become Black Panthers” (70). Sister Mukumbu leads the children in a classroom. Bronwyn E. Wood posits that schools not only function as key sites for “young people to learn about and experience democracy, politics, and citizenship,” but that they can be seen as “hybrid political space[s] in which young people occupy an in-between or liminal status as political beings and political becomings” (“Crafted within Liminal Spaces” 337). Wood further argues that young people’s political agency is enacted “within adult-defined and school regulated notions of acceptable political action” (377). Delphine’s politicization takes place within a structured, alternative educational community in which radical Black female teachers offer the children specific ways of supporting Black liberation. In my thinking about Black and Brown girls as spatial actors, *One Crazy Summer* thus presents one model of Black girl spatial citizenship, and Delphine’s education at the hands of a Black female teacher underscores the ways in which Black women in particular have utilized traditional gender roles to further radical activism in Black communities. The space reflects traditional gender politics (women as teachers) and ageist beliefs of adults caring for and instructing young people. But even within these power-inflected spatial dynamics, possibilities emerge for children’s agency.

The narrative imparts this specific lesson about children as social actors through Sister Mukumbu’s lesson which centers on the solar system. After a short role play, in which she plays the sun and Hirohito (an Afro-Asian classmate) plays the earth, Sister Mukumbu poses one

question: “Does anyone know another word for the earth’s constant spinning?” (Williams-Garcia 70-71). One child answers, “Revolving,” to which she responds: “Revolving. Revolution. Revolutionary. Constant turning. Making things change...Today, we’re going to be like the early, spinning around and affecting many. Today, we’re going to think about our part in the revolution” (72). Expressing a kind of extra-solar geography, Sister Mukumbu connects this other-worldly phenomenon to the possibility of children affecting change on the ground, in their own communities.

Wood notes that if we utilize a concrete spatialized concept of liminal space, we can see “how spaces which are occupied by both children/young people and adults...can be examined as liminal spaces or spaces of in-betweenness which can be seen to be simultaneously sites of adult control and youthful agency” (“Crafted within Liminal Spaces” 338). Delphine’s home (and the People’s Center) are such places. Delphine’s comment that “No one listens to kids” (Williams-Garcia 79), with which I opened this dissertation, illustrates her painful awareness of her lack of power with her mother’s home. Yet, she still talks back and speaks her mind, revealing a limited kind of agency within the homespace. Her mother may not appreciate Delphine’s comment, but in insisting that Delphine be independent outside the home, Nzilla actually creates a contested space within the home, where Delphine may actually learn to challenge and subvert power structures.

The People’s Center also proves to function as an equally instructive liminal space. Reminding the students that “Yesterday we learned ‘revolution’ means ‘change’ and that we can all be revolutionaries,” Sister Mukumbu charges the students with coloring posters that read “JUSTICE FOR ALL, ALL POWER TO ALL OF THE PEOPLE, REMEMBER LI’L BOBBY [and] FREE HUEY” (88). Their posters are to be used for an upcoming rally that will take place

in a public gathering. So while Delphine does not shape the power relations in her home or at school, she is able to assert herself with her mother and participate in a larger movement for racial justice through her participation in the People's Center summer program. Later, when Sister Mukumbu asks her to count newspapers, Delphine sees a photo of Black people protesting, "carrying the same kinds of signs that we had colored in." What's more is that she thinks, "Those could have been our signs. *We* were part of the revolution" (100) [my emphasis]. The program and the Black Panthers provide a sense of belonging which translates into how she sees herself and her community in relation to the United States. Through this Black nationalist community, she learns that Hirohito's Black father is a political prisoner arrested for simply protesting racial injustice. She also learns about the murder of Bobby Hutton, the first person to join the Black Panther Party, though he was only 16 years old. Hearing about his murder enrages Delphine and also evokes feelings of her own vulnerability. She reflects, "After all, they weren't teaching us how to deal with the police for nothing. And I was tall for my age. No one would think I was just a girl going on twelve" (127-128). Though Delphine exists in multiple liminal states in this novel, her daily exposure in an adult-created Black nationalist space leads to transformation of her identity by solidifying her racial consciousness, igniting her desire for justice, and providing her with an opportunity to be politically engaged.

Literary Nepantleras

I opened this chapter stating that geographic details and spatial references operate on two levels in these texts. They serve as markers that chart or parallel the emotional and internal landscapes of each character who exists in her own liminal space, and they represent the specific territories, locales and sites that produce not only the material conditions the characters face but also the political standpoints they develop. In terms of each liminality, Delphine and Esperanza exemplify in-betweenness in various ways. They stand as tweens between childhood and their

teenage years. Both juggle child and adult roles as they must take on adult responsibilities that have been relinquished—albeit under different circumstances—by their mothers. And, both girls travel, occupying transitional spaces (like wagons and planes) and crossing geographic boundaries. The texts depict each girl's tween years, and the novels employ geographic and spatial references to illustrate the turbulence and emotional uncertainty that characterize each girl's coming-of-age experience. I liken the ambiguity and discombobulating tween state to Anzaldúa's conceptualization of *Nepantla*, and I return to Keating's view of *Nepantla* not only as a liminal and unsettling state, but also as a site of "potential transformation" where "boundaries become more permeable, and begin to break down," and where we experience a process of shedding or "loosening of previously restricted labels and beliefs...[that] can create shifts in consciousness and opportunities for change" ("shifting worlds, una entrada" 1). It is this change in the protagonist's consciousness or political standpoint that these novels represent.

Following *Esperanza* along her journey to a California migrant camp or tagging along with *Delphine* as she navigates the streets of Oakland and a new Black community is not just about physical or geographic movement. It is also about recognizing the specific material conditions and historical events that spark each girl's realization of her own situated experience and her identity as a member of a larger marginalized community. So not only are *Esperanza* and *Delphine* literary figurations of a topsy-turvy adolescent life stage, they are also examples of how Black and Brown girls come to see themselves in relation to space and how this knowledge, rooted in particular racialized and gendered spaces can produce a politicized consciousness and standpoint. How this standpoint moves each character towards possibilities to affect change in her own community is debatable as each girl acts on her epiphany and moves from her new-found standpoint in different ways.

Esperanza, who must negotiate adult responsibilities, seems to have little sense of her power as a political agent, despite her embeddedness in a laboring migrant community. Over the course of the novel, she certainly transitions to seeing herself in relationship to the spatial environments that she occupies and in relation to the other individuals who are similarly situated at the migrant labor camps. She embraces a new sense of class and race consciousness, but she eschews calls to participate in direct action or mobilization efforts. Her standpoint shifts from a psychological perspective, but by remaining committed to her domestic and caregiving responsibilities, Esperanza refuses to put her body on the line³⁴ to participate in shaping social space and her local community. Despite her clearly evolving sense of class consciousness, Ryan's protagonist turns from an active engagement in the labor struggles of her newly-realized racial and class community.

For readers who yearn to see a girl empowered to function as a socio-political actor, Delphine's character presents a more satisfying model of girl power. Like Esperanza's journey, Delphine's travels situate her within a larger racial community, one that she initially views as impoverished and socially marginalized; later, she not only recognizes the cultural wealth of Oakland's Black community, but she sees herself as part of it. In a small way, Delphine also sees herself as bearing some responsibility for advancing the community's interests and liberation. Delphine's political standpoint shifts, and her participation in the rally constitutes a form of bodily action, a protest in which she aligns herself with radical Black activists and claims space for herself and for the larger Black community. Some readers may say that Delphine merely parrots the Black Panther Party's nationalist rhetoric; even Delphine recognizes the political

³⁴ The text acknowledges that labor activism comes at great risk of personal, physical violence or "repatriation" regardless of one's citizenship status.

education that takes place at the summer camp. But at the end of her story, Delphine moves into a space of public and collective political engagement, which illustrates her youthful agency.

It is the characters' everyday struggles related to power—between the girls and their parents or adult authorities, between the girls and economic systems, between the girls and religious institutions and ideologies—that push state, institutional, and social power into view. These are young girls. We empathize with them, and we mourn their lost or fleeting girlhoods, which is why the stories are so effective in drawing readers in. In both cases, each girl's activities in various spatial realms—labor camps, kitchens, summer programs, and city streets—demonstrate that girls can contribute to the construction and maintenance (or in Delphine's case, the disruption) of spaces of power and repression. Existing within liminal spaces of tweendom does not preclude asserting themselves as individuals who shape and contest our understanding and experiences of social space. If anything, these works of historical fiction take us on journeys through each girl's personal *Nepantla*. For Anzaldúa, it is from this vantage point, this “perspective from the cracks” (qtd. in Keating “shifting worlds, una entrada” 1) that we witness the birth of a political standpoint and the possibility of Black and Brown girlhood agency in action.

CHAPTER 4. I DREAM A WORLD

When we started to organize farm workers, people would say to us, “They’re poor, they don’t speak English, they’re not citizens—how are you possibly going to organize them?” And of course, the response that we had to that is, “The power is in your body.”

—Dolores Huerta, *Dolores*

In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action.

—Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

The previous chapter examined girls whose movement across space, territories, urban centers and work sites parallels their journey through their tween years and towards a heightened political consciousness, and in this chapter, I turn to girls whose spatial placement and movement paves the way to greater political awareness and ultimately to individual action and resistance. The action each character takes arises from her own embodied experience as a girl of color. Each girl learns that the power is in herself, as Chicana labor activist Dolores Huerta asserts. Huerta issues this statement when asked about the challenges of mobilizing farmworkers for social and political action. She acknowledges the many hurdles that face migrant and resident farmworkers, ranging from limited English proficiency to the lack of U.S. citizenship status for some, systemic racism, and their historic and overall economic marginalization in U.S. society. Her statement also suggests the inherent spatiality and embodiedness of political work because taking action to improve working conditions, to change labor laws, and to agitate necessarily involves inserting oneself in arenas from which one is often systematically barred or erased, be they juridical, social, political, or economic. Huerta’s statement conveys a belief that individuals whom the dominant culture deems non-citizens, and therefore marginal and inconsequential, actually

possess power that they can tap into and activate in service of shaping larger culture, impacting public policy, and creating a more just society. Working for social justice and equity is therefore not only a political endeavor. It is also an inherently spatial and bodily one.

Though Audre Lorde's statement does not speak of the body per se, I see a similar connection between embodiment and spatiality in her assertion that individual knowledge and belief can fuel political interventions on the ground. Knowledge translates into plans and strategies, which then leads to tangible, visible action. Gloria Anzaldúa famously connected epistemology with materiality asserting that "Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" ("La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness" 109). In other words, consciousness (thoughts/awareness) fuels action, and that action or change takes place not within a void but within social space. This relationship, among embodiment, knowledge or critical consciousness, and social change forms the heart of this chapter. In particular, I use embodiment to refer not simply to our physicality as human beings but as human beings who walk through the world with particular meanings grafted onto our bodies as a result of historical and spatial processes. In other words, I'm concerned with the way in which the literature illustrates Black and Brown girls' positionality—emplotted as they are as raced, gendered, and young bodies situated in a specific place in space and time—and how this positioning can cultivate unrecognized or sometimes surprising forms of action, as well as new, egalitarian visions of community.

I explore this connection by analyzing two novels, Helena Maria Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Though written over twenty years ago, both texts resonate with today's cultural and political climate due to escalating rancor around immigration and increased organizing efforts among Black communities to

#GetFree. More importantly, Butler and Viramontes present literary models of what I call Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship by creating protagonists who exemplify the unique knowledge that we can regard as “theories in the flesh” (Moraga *This Bridge Called My Back* 23) which is linked to their embodiment as girls of color in the 20th and 21st centuries. In these two novels, we see how the authors allow their protagonists room to take up space and how, as Moraga asserts, “the [fictionalized] physical realities of [their] lives—[their] skin color, the land or concrete [they] grew up on, [their] sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). Whether the girls physically disrupt spaces of power or subvert existing power-laden narratives by creating models for egalitarian communities, we as readers see them express powers of leadership or community building largely informed by their bodily experiences. These girl-led interventions effectively reframe the girls’ own marginalization from the very worlds that ignore their presence and reconstruct a vision of the United States as a more inclusive nation in which the subjectivity and agency of girls of color are not taken for granted. For Viramontes and Butler, both avowed feminists, their narratives show us new spatial terrains that are mapped and embodied by the girls of color who ground their works. Unlike Esperanza and Delphine, in the previous chapter, who operate primarily within adult-controlled spaces like the Black Panther Party community center or the geopolitical space of the migrant workcamps, the characters in Butler’s and Viramontes’s novels operate independently by challenging adult authority (as well as racism and sexism) directly or by taking steps to conceptualize and initiate new forms of community. My interest, then, is how these girls of color embody the spaces they occupy and how they shape, alter or subvert their social positions. In other words, how do they make themselves known and visible (physically present) as social, spatial and political actors?

In her treatment of *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Paula Moya cautions against reading Chicana literature “solely in relation to works written by other Chicana/os, women of color, or women more generally” (“Reading as a Realist” 176). She argues, instead, for considering *Under the Feet of Jesus* principally as a work of “American social realism” (175), and she focuses on the reading as a trope insufficiently theorized in some of its literary counterparts. Despite her contention, I juxtapose Viramontes’s realist novel with Butler’s dystopian one for multiple reasons. Like hooks and Mora, discussed earlier in this dissertation, Viramontes and Butler readily identify as feminists, Chicana and Black feminists respectively. Both California writers came of age during critical moments of radical nationalist political movements; Viramontes grew up in the midst of the Chicana/o Rights Movement, while Butler attended community college during the Black Power Movement. Mainly, I pair the two authors’ works given their focus on young girls who learn to assert themselves despite spatial and social restrictions. Butler’s dystopian tale may push social realism to the extreme, though it now reads like an uncannily precise foretelling of Trump’s America. But it also incorporates the trope of literacy and centers a 15-year-old girl who learns to read her social world, which Moya sees as a kind of interpretative work. Butler and Viramontes imbue their characters with a critical consciousness to understand the power dynamics of their respective social landscapes. The knowledge and each girl’s subsequent role as a change agent and world builder arise from her physical embodiment as a Black or Brown girl who must navigate social worlds of chaos and oppression.

Roberta Seelinger Trites asserts that this kind of negotiation with power is essential to young adult literature. In *Disturbing the University: Power & Repression in Adolescent Literature*, she distinguishes between children’s and YA literature by arguing that children’s literature (which I take her to mean picture books and middle grade novels) are essentially about

security, whereas young adult novels thrust youthful characters into situations where they must confront issues of power. Trites explains: “During adolescence, adolescents must learn their place in the power structure. They must learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them: school, government, religion, identity politics, family, and so on. They must learn to balance their power with their parents’ power and with the power of the other authority figures in their lives. And they must learn what portion of power they wield because of and despite such biological imperatives as sex and death” (x). She transfers this thinking to the YA novel, arguing that the same challenges that young adults encounter in the material world also face young adult characters in fiction.

Here, I must touch on the issue of categorization since I apply Trite’s work to two novels generally regarded as works of literary fiction. With their young adult protagonists, *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *Parable of the Sower* share common ground with other canonical girl-centered adult novels such as Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970). While there’s a long history of adult literary fiction featuring young adult protagonists, the YA category is fluid at best. YA Scholar Michael Cart recognizes the difficulty in defining the young adult literature saying the task is “about as easy as nailing Jell-O to a wall...because the term, like the gelatin, is inherently slippery and amorphous...the amorphous part is the target audience for the literature: the young adults themselves (*Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* 3). Cart’s essay “What is Young Adult Literature?” acknowledges that the category, which originally targeted readers 12 to 18 years old, “has grown so restlessly expansive that it now seems to embrace titles for readers as young as 10 and (arguably) as old as 35” (735). Cart attributes this expansion to “market-driven phenomenon” (734), reminiscent of the book industry’s embrace of “teen” as a specialized marketing category.

Young adults may not constitute the primary or intended readership for Viramontes and Butler, but both authors have gained an audience with these readers. Janice Antczack acknowledges that while “Butler is not a ‘YA’ author...her work has found a readership among young adults, and her books are reviewed and discussed in the journals concerned with young adult literature” (“Octavia E. Butler: New Designs for a Challenging Future” 311). Viramontes’s novel has not spawned a graphic novel edition like Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*—which may create greater appeal for teens—but the author has been regarded as an important voice for young adult readers as noted by her inclusion in Judith Ortiz Cofer’s 2003 anthology, *Riding Low on the Streets of Gold: Latino Literature for Young Adults*; her short story, “Growing” appears in the collection. Many young adult readers are likely to encounter *Under the Feet of Jesus* in the classroom, as noted by pedagogy blogs and online curricula developed by Annenberg Learner—part of the Annenberg Foundation—to assist high school teachers in using the book to teach students about migrant labor in the United States. But no matter how young adult readers encounter Butler and Viramontes’s work, I am not wedged to a strict categorization of either text as a YA novel or work of literary fiction; I consider them in the tradition of youth-centric crossover texts, much like *Little Women* and *Alice in Wonderland*, which were originally written for adult audiences but are routinely deemed part of the American children’s literature canon. Regardless of categorization, Trite’s work provides a useful lens to consider power contestations in both texts. Viramontes and Butler’s coming-of-age stories depict girls who teeter along the edge of womanhood and learn to assert themselves even though adult authorities, social institutions, and larger structural forces restrict their access to power. Like Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) that identified a “loophole of retreat,” these novels envision and construct openings through which the girls can resist. In this final chapter, Viramontes and Butler advance

theories of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship by vesting the girls with power, whether physical, bodily, conscious, or spiritual. In doing so, the authors present girls who flip power dynamics and make their own lives legible, even in the very spaces that regulate their activities and render them invisible. These texts give us examples of how girls of color can not only occupy space, but actively take up space to contest discrimination and mitigate harm.

Central to my reading is the concept of spatial citizenship, which I outlined in my introduction. As a brief reminder, spatial citizenship allows for historically marginalized individuals (like children, for example) or underrepresented communities (like people of color, homeless populations, or impoverished communities) to participate in designing and shaping public spaces—similar to participatory budgeting or governing models that many municipalities employ to garner broad community input. Reflecting on the work of critical theorist Jacques Rancière, activist scholar Paul Routledge acknowledges Rancière’s observation that “the social world and the people in it are constructed in particular ways that grant participation (such as in decision-making) to some, while excluding and separating others” (*Space Invaders* 12). By virtue of their young ages, their racial or ethnic identities, their gender, and general lack of economic power, youth (like Viramontes’s and Butler’s protagonists) are routinely excluded from traditional forms of participation in shaping their specific environments and neighborhoods. Youth may have a vested interest in community life, but they are not the monied movers and shakers who possess recognizable forms of power to allocate resources or alter lives. Yet, these two novels exemplify how Viramontes and Butler use fiction to imagine girls who possess an oppositional consciousness and who can, even in the midst of constrictive circumstances, stake a claim in nation building. In both cases, the girls’ worldviews involve a creative and radical reshaping or reworking of the master’s tools (Lorde 112)—be that a literal tool such as the crow

bar, the symbolic tool of language, or ideological tools that lead them to forge new visions of how we, humans, can be in community with one another.

I begin by recognizing the unique power and knowledge that girls of color possess.

Looking to the social sciences, Aida Hurtado affirms this truth:

By the time women of color reach adulthood, we have developed informal political skills to deal with State intervention. The political skills required by women of color are neither the political skills of the White power structure that the White liberal feminists have adopted nor the free spirited experimentation followed by the radical feminists. Rather, women of color are more like *urban guerrillas* trained through everyday battle with the state apparatus [emphasis mine]. (qtd. in Sandoval 8, 9)

Her statement warrants unpacking. First, if women of color possess political skills and strategies as we cross over our specific culturally constructed thresholds into adulthood—then Hurtado is necessarily identifying skills that are initially developed, practiced, and enacted during girlhood. In the previous chapter, Esperanza’s and Delphine’s stories demonstrate through historical fiction how such political education can unfold during girlhood. The social power that children must contend with is not simply the arms of the state power (expressed via educational institutions or legal entities) but also cultural and social institutions such as family and religion. I must add a word of caution here. Though Hurtado gestures towards a conceptualization of girlhood as a training stage for future political activism, I am committed to regarding girls as agents and subjects in and of themselves, and not simply as “women in-training” or “women-becoming” (as argued in *The Girl*). Erica Burman and Jackie Stacey’s work “The Child and Childhood in Feminist Theory” warns us about the reductive penchant to conflate “women’s interests with those of children, even blurring them into the proverbial ‘womenandchildren’ as a sign of helplessness and inferior status and dependency” (228). Their concern is to liberate women from the societal norms and ideologies that infantilize women’s intellectual activities and shackle them to the little people in their lives or to the concerns of children writ-large. Their

critique addresses the uncritical manner in which women's reproductive roles bind them to children in popular discourse and in everyday life. But Burman and Stacey ultimately privilege women (i.e. female identified *adults*) and obscure girls' agency and experiences, letting widespread assumptions of children's inferiority and presumed dependency go unchecked. I stand firm in the need to recognize the critical insights and forms of bodily power (albeit unrecognized or underestimated), that these imaginary girls and their "real world" counterparts possess. In other words, I am looking at the power that lies in their young bodies as critical, not simply because they are women-becoming or future feminists but because girls' lives can be instructive and instrumental in shaping and altering power. These characters undertake varied courses of action that force readers to reflect on the ways power infuses space and impacts everyone, including children. Using fiction, Viramontes and Butler construct societies that are painfully real yet include avenues for girls to exercise their power, however limited that power may be. How these two characters utilize their bodies to disrupt space or to harness and exercise their own girl power is my focus here.

Though I work within and against a purely developmental or teleological reading of this dissertation, if we agree with Hurtado about the childhood experiences of girls of color as constituting the foundation for later activism, then this period specifically teaches girls of color what it means to live as an individual who must operate within multiple and oftentimes overlapping systems of domination. These literary girlhoods support Hurtado's claim. This can be said of boys as well. However, boys are typically expected to acquire social, economic, and political power in the public sphere. Girls, though no longer relegated exclusively to the home, remain ideologically attached to the private sphere, largely due to their anticipated reproductive role. Daphne Spain's work on "spatial institutions" highlights how gendered spatial organization

patterns can curtail “women’s access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women’s lower status relative to men’s” (*Gendered Spaces* 3). In the same way, children are often removed from forms of socially legitimized forms of knowledge as they are restricted to specific spatial arenas: home, school, and adjacent spaces of playgrounds, summer camps, and other recreational and kid-friendly venues. Children, therefore, are not only subject to the power and surveillance of adults—as discussed in the previous chapters—but their activities, concerns, and knowledge can also be easily dismissed as “child’s play.” For Viramontes’s and Butler’s characters, life is anything but whimsical and carefree. Even moments of relative leisure are fraught with threats of hunger, sexual violence, deportation, or death. Readers witness the girls’ knowledge acquisition, tied to each girl’s physical embeddedness (or standpoint) in the crosshairs of various systems of domination.

Therefore, I read girlhood as the temporal and spatial environment in which girls develop distinct ways of knowing, their own guerrilla know-how and grit. This knowledge and its attendant power may entail girls being able to size up or read a situation, interaction or social space, assess their particular role within various power systems and social relationships, and draw upon their own marginality in order to affect change. I should say that when we think of guerrilla warfare, the phrase typically evokes images of a small, informal army of people—many dispossessed or alienated from centers of power—utilizing military style tactics (like an ambush). Viramontes’s and Butler’s protagonists, as guerrilla girls and spatial citizens, come to understand and unleash the power lodged in their own bodies as workers, as community organizers, and as change agents. They develop an understanding of where they fit in the American social and historical landscape. Their “power in the body” also encompasses a visceral or conscious recognition and knowledge of the constructedness of their own identities and social

environments. Their worldviews emanate from a rootedness that comes from walking in the world as Black and Brown girls. This embodied knowledge or spatial orientation, which I'm calling Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship, enables each protagonist to rework the world and social space as she knows it by enacting her own form of guerrilla tactics in efforts to dismantle hierarchical structures and forge equitable relationships.

Like their counterparts in the previous chapter, both characters presented in these two novels travel. They move due to economic systems such as the capitalist agribusiness industry in *Under the Feet of Jesus* and global capitalism and neoliberal forces that cause widespread social upheaval, economic collapse, and environmental calamity in *Parable of the Sower*. Moya contends that in Viramontes's text, Estrella's "ability to 'read' [the social world and social landscape] is not separable from the material conditions *through which* [her] interpretive consciousness comes into being in the first place" [emphasis mine] ("Reading as Realist" 185). Her analysis necessarily links Estrella with socio-political circumstances on the ground, and it suggests that the experiential, which not only occurs cognitively or emotionally, also manifests in a physical and fleshly sense. Sonia Saldivar-Hull has similarly argued that "Chicana feminism develops from an awareness of the specific material experience of the historical moment" ("Feminism on the Border" 217). A comparable dynamic is at play in the theoretical and political work of Black feminists (and other feminists of color) whose theorizations of equity and justice stem from the everyday lived realities of communities of color that are similarly marginalized and dispossessed in the larger culture, or to borrow from Hurtado, "those bodies crushed under oppression" ("Theory in the Flesh: Toward an Endarkened Epistemology" 219). These texts offer readers a window into the lives of girls who refuse to be crushed. The novels ground each girl in a specific social, economic, and racial-cultural climate and illustrates how her experience

as a young girl of color generates a particular kind of oppositional consciousness or “endarkened epistemology” (216), born of her life experiences at the very intersection of race, class, gender, culture, and age.

Taken together, these two novels illustrate what spatial citizenship may look like for Black and Brown girls or how these girls embody power and then unleash it. The characters and their forms of political action simultaneously reflect the girls’ epistemological standpoints as well as the authors’ theoretical bents and critical praxis. For it is in the realm of literature and worldbuilding that these authors are able to create narrative worlds and social spaces that hold various iterations of girl power and possibilities for conceptualizing community, even if our material world actually limits opportunities for such girl-led interventions. Both characters represent Black and Brown girls as participating in their own social worlds, whether forcing visibility or intervening in hegemonic spaces by restructuring community. Despite the girls’ positions and no matter the form their actions take, each protagonist deploys her personal bodily power in a way that intervenes in popular discourse about girls of color, justice, and community.

Under the Feet of Jesus

It is useful to provide a brief biographical sketch regarding Viramontes because I do see her political orientation directly informing her creative work, and ultimately I regard all of these texts as giving us a window into the theoretical concerns and political perspectives of the authors. Viramontes’s literary activism and her insistence to highlight marginalized populations is not surprising given her personal history. Like Dolores Huertas, activism is in her blood. Born in East Los Angeles in 1954, as the daughter of working-class parents, Viramontes worked alongside her parents as a child farmworker, an experience she shares with her characters. Just as Rita Williams-Garcia’s personal experiences with members of the Black Panther Party which inspired her text, Viramontes was directly influenced by the Chicana/o Rights Movement and

farmworker activism, as evidenced by the novel's dedication to her parents and to legendary farmworker activist Cesar Chávez.³⁵ Of her writing, Viramontes ascribes an explicit political purpose saying that "All serious writers have the responsibility to try and disrupt patterns of thought and behavior that damage the integrity of life. That's why most writers do their best work while living on the fringes of a society. We can have a better view from there" ("Interview with Helena Maria Viramontes" (*La Bloga.com*)). She situates her work within the margins, the very site that hooks and others see as productive and liberating.

From this position as an activist-writer in the margins, Viramontes crafts a story that is close to the ground, where we can witness a young girlhood and other bodies "crushed under oppression" as they move across physical landscapes and in various social spaces carved out by capitalism. The narrative, though told from shifting perspectives of four characters, centers on Estrella (a.k.a. "Star"), a young female migrant worker and U.S. citizen of Mexican descent. The novel shares some ground with Ryan's *Esperanza Rising*. Like Esperanza, Estrella is in her pre-adolescent years, on the cusp of womanhood; in fact, they are the same age. Estrella's position within the family is similarly liminal, and she also mirrors Williams-Garcia's protagonist, Delphine, in that parental abandonment forces her to shoulder adult responsibilities. While Delphine's childhood was marked by her mother's departure, Estrella and her family must contend with her biological father's absence. Anna Marie Sandoval writes that Estrella "acts as a second parent," and Sandoval speaks specifically to Estrella's position as a girl by noting that in taking on this quasi-parental role, "she crosses age and gender borders" ("Acts of Daily Resistance" 81). Estrella assumes a caregiving role for her younger siblings, and she also functions to a certain extent as her mother's helpmate. Despite her young age, Estrella is a

³⁵ Viramontes does not mention Dolores Huerta, labor activist who co-founded the United Farm Workers with Chávez. This is a glaring omission, given the author's stated feminist commitments.

farmworker, and her constant mobility across childhood spaces and adult spaces can be attributed to her age as well as her role as a wage earner who contributes to the family's economic livelihood. As a quasi-breadwinner and a child caretaker, Estrella shatters the boundaries and traditional expectations heaped upon one of her age and gender. As a Mexican American who is consigned to farm labor, her body marks her as part of a laboring class relegated to migrant camps, and her gendered body ties her to domestic spaces. Estrella's bodily identity and bodily power determine her spatial placement, while these particular geographies awaken her political consciousness and frame the parameters of her social action.

In this story, Viramontes zeroes in on the lives of those who are simultaneously visible yet invisible: migrant farmworkers. Estrella's story (and that of her family) counters historical penchant in which popular discourse positions and imagines "people of color...as marginal to the construction of national narratives" (Shea "Don't Let Them Make You Feel You Did a Crime" 132). Estrella is not inconsequential to the U.S. national narrative; she is constitutive of it precisely because she labors in the fields, cultivating crops and contributing both to the social reproduction of families who consume the food she cultivates as well as the commercial success and sustainability of the U.S. agricultural industry. Yet, as a young Chicana³⁶ her labor and her life are by default invisible though indispensable on the national stage. Anne Shea describes "contemporary spatializations of power, such as the segregated work camps and farm fields" as geopolitical spaces that effectively "render the migrant laborer invisible" (141). Estrella operates within such state and corporate-sponsored spatializations, but as a girl, she also moves through gendered spaces that restrict the conditions of possibility for her life and her political activism.

³⁶ Given Estrella's actions throughout the course of the novel and the novel's obvious critique of Anglo society, of the misogyny undergirding Chicanismo, as well as the patriarchy of Mexican families and Catholicism, I see Estrella as a manifestation or embodiment of the very Chicana feminist principles that Viramontes espouses.

In “Spatial Citizenship,” Pokraka notes that children’s political engagement can take different forms. Young people can participate in the process that Lefebvre describes as “the reproduction of public space” as it “is constructed and has meaning assigned to it by individuals as well as institutional stakeholders” (263). Estrella, as a young Chicana, contributes to reshaping and redefining space—some are the typical childhood geographies of home and school, but also national spatial dynamics—with her claiming of space and voice and her unique bodily presence. As a child, Estrella’s story moves outward from the intimate geographies of a dilapidated home to expansive spaces represented by fields, and institutional spaces (i.e. school and a health clinic). In some ways, her story parallels Libby’s journey in Mora and Martinez’s picture book. But there’s a fundamental difference. Estrella’s vision of herself as a social agent, and her vision of an alternate world where farmworkers live free of economic exploitation and racism, take root not from formal civics instruction but from her embodied experiences as a girl child contending with the racial, gender, and age disparities of her social world. Her world is marked by her rootedness as a laborer who fuels capitalism and her family’s poverty which counters the blind consumerism of Anglo characters in the text. Her world is also shaped by her role as a daughter saddled with a dismal reproductive future (economically and biologically) and as a Chicana who is all but nonexistent to dominant culture. Estrella’s life world is connected to her moving through all these spaces in her body at once, and that visceral reality fuels her vision of herself as a leader. It also incites her to take action on behalf of her fellow itinerant laborers.

Just as Huerta acknowledges the power in workers’ bodies, Paul Routledge underscores the embodiment of protest by defining “...political activity [as] that which transforms bodies and places from that which they have been assigned by the political order. Through practices of resistance, spaces become political because they embody (and make visible) challenges to what

can be said, thought, and practised [sic]" (*Space Invaders* 13). Since girlhood, as we see in the two earlier chapters, is often tied to particular spaces that circumscribe girls activities, I want to read just a few moments in the novel which link Estrella's social location, her vision of power, and her ability to act or assert herself in a physical, bodily manner. Estrella's emergent knowledge of her social location, the historical marginalization of Chicana/o communities, and her vision (in the end) of herself as a leader who can bring all exploited laborers together are all intertwined with the racial, gendered, and economic marginalization that she experiences as a child migrant worker. Not surprisingly, the spaces of her childhood include home and school, but we also see her moving, physically and emotionally, through public spaces and adult-oriented ones such as the agricultural fields and a health clinic which proves to be a key site of Estrella's resistance to her supposed powerlessness. I look to the particular spaces in which she's embedded, her family's home, her school, the migrant community, the fields, and the clinic. To understand her vision and her ability to wield her own personal power to reshape spatial relations, we must see how she sits positionally in the world of the novel.

The opening pages situate Estrella in a domestic sphere and creates an initial image of Estrella as a child. We meet Estrella, her mother (often called "The mother"), her younger siblings, and Perfecto ("the man who was not her father") as they approach a "shabby wood frame bungalow" (Viramontes 6) where they will temporarily settle. The chapter depicts Estrella as a playful and inquisitive spirit. When they all exit the station wagon, Estrella runs, "her flowered dress billowing, strands of black hair escaping from her unraveling braid" (7). As the oldest—she's newly thirteen—Estrella bravely investigates the dilapidated barn that's adjacent to the house—despite her mother's protests. Like hooks's *Girlpie* and our early view of Esperanza (pre-migration), Estrella greets readers as a girl who embodies freedom and joy. However, the

images of the family and of the home are far from idyllic and quickly counter her depictions of her girlhood innocence and exuberance.

This opening moment of childhood innocence is short-lived as the novel digs deeper into her association with the home and her relationship to the family's economic life. Estrella's memories of her now-absent biological father are riddled with thoughts of deprivation and tension: "the mother rummaging through shoe boxes of papers, bills, documents" and "screaming arguments, trouble at the border, a sickness somewhere in between" (13). Life for Estrella is contingent upon the weather, their working, and money that never seems to come (13-14). From the beginning, we have a vivid snapshot of how Estrella straddles multiple positions as child, as caregiver, as worker, as a Mexican American. From this angle, the author effectively critiques Estrella's presumed lack of power.

Though Estrella is a worker—like Esperanza in the previous chapter—she possesses some advantages: resources that her mother's boyfriend has (such as a car), siblings to help with work, and U.S. citizenship. Even so, Viramontes is clear that Estrella occupies a precarious social position due to her relationship to the larger economic system as a child laborer. Her situatedness is clearly highlighted by a scene that unfolds in the home, countering notions of separate public and private spheres. Petra, Estrella's mother, sits in the bathroom, overwhelmed by the cries of her hungry children, and when she cannot take it anymore, she bursts into the room, screaming. Estrella, in a move that demonstrates her own liminality, is forced to act, shutting down her mother's scream and comforting her siblings. In this role reversal, she attempts to calm her younger siblings, as she "grabbed the chubby pink cheeks Quaker man, the red and white and blue cylinder package and shook it violently" (18-19). The text tells us "its music was empty" (19). The juxtaposition of this quintessentially American brand (figured as an

old smiling white man) and a young, brown Chicana is striking. The image of the smiling white man on the empty box of oatmeal betrays the artificiality of the American Dream. Though she beats on the cardboard box, attempting to extract music from it, the container is hollow. This scene provides a searing vision, which exposes how the dream and promise of prosperity remain inaccessible to Estrella, though she is U.S. citizen and a productive one at that.

Estrella's critical consciousness slowly develops as a result of her school experiences and her experiences as a migrant worker. In particular, it is in school that Estrella gains knowledge of her ethnic and racial differences as well as her connection to the larger economic system that undergirds U.S. society and exacerbates inequities. The narrative perspective gives us a glimpse of Estrella's language acquisition, when she comes across Perfecto's tool box, wondering about its contents and its purpose in their home. The narrator tells us that "Estrella hated when things were kept from her" (24) and likens Estrella's ignorance about Perfecto's role in their family to her experience in schools, where teachers "never [gave] her the information she wanted" (24). Just as the nurse in the clinic would later dismiss the young girl as dirty and poor, this early moment highlights how Estrella had to ask "over and over, So what is this?" (24). She must depend on "teachers [who] were more concerned about the dirt under her fingernails" (24) than her educational attainment. This is the first time she that she is painfully of how others view her poverty, and since she carries signs of her labor literally on her body (under her fingernails), this moment also positions Estrella as part of a racialized, exploited class. The narrator tells us the teachers mouthed "good luck to her when the pisca was over, reserving the desks in the back of the classroom for the next batch of migrant children" (25). The teachers reek of detachment, showing no emotion or empathy for the students who must work in the fields. Instead, for the teachers—and presumably the school—Estrella and the other migrant children are disposable

and insignificant. They are expendable bodies, and their designated place is in the back of the classroom, physically situated in the margins. Instead of picturing Estrella as comfortable in this normative childhood space, the scene illustrates Estrella's exclusion and difference. Her dirty fingernails mark her as a worker and link her to the land. Her relationships within the socio-economic spaces of the fields and migrant community arguably lead to her developing a critical consciousness which we see manifest in two bodily guerilla tactics in which she inserts herself in space.

The first act occurs as Viramontes embeds Estrella within a larger community of exploited workers. Readers witness how many children, regardless of race, are trapped in the migrant labor system as Estrella works in close proximity to a young white worker, Maxine Devridge, who asks Estrella, "You talk 'american?'" (29). Though Estrella is a "head shorter and two years younger" than her comrade, Maxine presses Estrella to read magazines and comic books for her—underscoring Maxine's own illiteracy. The two get into a fight when Maxine insinuates that Petra and Perfecto were "dry-humping," and Estrella feels "as if she could kill the white girl" (35). Her immediate retaliatory act is not without consequence; the family leaves in order to avoid possible "harm or bodily affliction caused by the devil-sucking vengeful Devridges." The narrator tell us that "Migrant families are tight" (36). The Devridges, although poor farmworkers themselves, have white privilege on their side. Estrella and her family are the ones who must pack up and go, "as they always did" (37). Their movement is habitual and expected despite the fact that the children at least are American citizens. The fight, is just one example of Estrella taking up space, combating social invisibility. In particular, her physical retaliation counters Maxine's insistence that she can decipher and understand the family dynamic that Estrella's family seems to represent.

Throughout the novel, Estrella's connection to the migrant community is solidified through a clear alignment between Estrella and the landscape. The picture we get is of a young girl who is damaged by physical labor, whose work is integral to the functioning of agribusiness, but who remains invisible to the dominant culture. We see this invisibility in a moment that where Estrella references a raisin box in the store (i.e. the Sun-Maid company). Like the Quaker Oats box, this scene contrasts the image on the cover of the raisin box with Estrella's bodily knowledge of the physical impact of labor. I quote this at length:

Carrying the full basket to the paper was not like the picture on the red raisin boxes Estrella saw in the markets, not like the woman wearing a fluffy bonnet, holding out the grapes with her smiling, ruby lips, the sun a flat orange behind her. The sun was white and it made Estrella's eyes sting like an onion, and the baskets of grapes resisted her muscles, pulling their magnetic weight back to the earth. The woman with the red bonnet did not know this. Her knees did not sink in the hot white soil, and she did not know how to pour the basket of grapes inside the frame gently and spread the bunches evenly on top of the newsprint paper. She did not remove the frame, straighten her creaking knees, the bend of her back, set down another sheet of newsprint paper, reset the frame, then return to the pisca again with the empty basket, row after row, sun after sun. The woman's bonnet would be useless as Estrella's own straw hat under a white sun so mighty, it toasted the green grapes to black raisins. (49-50)

Just like the smiling white man on the oats box, this romanticized image of the Sun-Maid girl in a pristine bonnet contrasts sharply with the hard labor that Estrella is forced to perform out of economic necessity. The woman on the raisin box lacks first-hand knowledge of how to harvest the grapes that become raisins. Her body never touches the ground. Her fingernails carry no residue from the soil, and her bonnet is ill-suited for working long hours in the hot sun.

But Estrella's socioeconomic status forces her to work and understand what it means to labor from a very young age. In fact, the text informs us that Estrella was "not more than four when she first accompanied the mother to the fields" (51). And she remembers the physical movement and work of her mother's body, even as Petra had another "swelling child within her" (51). Exposed early on to field work, Estrella acclimates to the repetitive labor, "her body never

knowing how tired it was until she moved once again” (53). The work is so tedious and routine that when she sees her shadow, Estrella is weirdly alienated from herself. She doesn’t realize that *that* shadow is hers because the figure appears “hunched and spindly,” disfigured, and unrecognizable (56). But she is not the only one whose body is damaged by the work and the elements. The novel paints a canvas of a community broken down by labor: “a patch of people charred by the sun: brittle women...young teens rinsing their faces and running wet fingers through their hair, children...and men so old they were thought to be dead when they slept” (57). As the novel pans the fields, we see what Estrella sees and experiences. Moya argues that Estrella learns to read (or interpret) her social environment because of “practical activity” (“Reading as Realist” 184). That practical activity is actually the embodied practice of labor. Her ability to understand her social world and her place in it is contingent upon her physical relationship to the land (as one who labors) and to other exploited migrant workers.

Estrella’s very existence, then, is associated with landscape or nature, one human body to a natural body. Dennis Lopez observes that the children in the novel are consistently portrayed in relationship to farmwork and labor (a double entendre gesturing towards the role as workers as well as the reproductive role of women). Estrella’s body, in particular, is presented using natural imagery that is sexually suggestive. For example, Alejo, a young migrant worker and her romantic interest, initially watches Estrella through trees as she “cupped water to clean the mud off a watermelon....The watermelon slipped from her hand and gently bobbed to the middle of the ditch, softly tumbling downstream” (38). Transfixed, Alejo continues to watch as she moves through the water, “opening her legs like frog to propel herself to the watermelon, the bulbs of her buttocks bobbing” (40). He sees her not as a teenage girl but as “the woman who swam in the magnetic presence of the full moon” (46). The lush images suggest a kind of sexual coming-of-

age, or at least Alejo's vision of her as such. The scene presents a softer image of Estrella which contrasts the harsh effect of labor that we see on her body elsewhere. Though Alejo sees Estrella in this sensual light, there's still an uncomfortable undertone about her role as a body in labor, which resonates with her mother's experience of birthing children who will then work in the fields as well. Seeing her daughter return home, Petra watched as "Estrella cradled a watermelon like a baby, and [the] vision saddened her" (40). Like Libby and Lobo's story in Mora and Martinez's picture book, there's a doubling effect in this scene, in which Petra's life and reproductive role seem to await her daughter. Petra knows all too well the life before her children, particularly Estrella as a girl child who will presumably bear children destined to become the "next batch" of child migrant workers rotating through the local schools and the fields.

The relationship between Estrella and Alejo is a romantic one, but as Arianne Burford acknowledges, the novel's depiction of backbreaking labor and harsh elements work against a vision of the land as a totally "romanticized space" ("Cartographies of a Violent Landscape"). Alejo's fascination with the land and geology forge an image of an idealized space, but it is his discussion of the La Brea Tar Pits that undercuts any easy romanticization and proves key to Estrella's burgeoning critical consciousness and her bodily action. A key conversation between the two centers around oil production when he asks Estrella, "You know where oil comes from?" (Viramontes 86). He proceeds to recount the story of the tar pits: "Millions of years ago, the dead animal and plants fell to the bottom of the sea." He tells her to "Imagine the bones at the bottom of the sea," and he explains that they "lay in the seabed for millions of years. That's how it was. Makes sense don't it, bones becoming tar oil?" (87). Alejo remembers hearing screams while in the fields, which remind him "of the animals stuck in the tar pits" (88). Estrella then asks, "Did

people? Did people ever get stuck?” Alejo’s response is brief: “Only one...in the La Brea tar pits, they found some human bones. A young girl” (88). This conversation cements the reader’s association of children with the land, as Lopez suggests. And it is the image of this unidentified girl’s body, which turns into nondescript bones and eventually to oil and gasoline, that infuses Estrella’s consciousness and leads her to a physical form of resistance at the health clinic.

As mentioned in my introduction, Alejo is a child victim of pesticide poisoning. He and his cousin Gumecindo attempt to run from a biplane that sprays the fields. Alejo is sprayed in the process, and the novel provides visceral descriptions of the physiological effects of the pesticides on his body. Estrella and her family take Alejo in to care for him, and they eventually take him to a clinic. The unsympathetic nurse performs a cursory exam, diagnoses him with dysentery and dehydration, and hurriedly directs them to the local hospital twenty miles away (142). Worse, she calls herself giving them a break by charging “only ten [dollars] because...[she] know[s] times are hard these days” (144). Between the four workers, they only have \$9.07 and a near-empty gas tank, so they offer Perfecto’s handyman services in order to keep the money for gas. The nurse closes the money box, and this moment produces the context for Estrella’s resistance.

In Moya’s extended treatment of this moment, she notes that Estrella first “engages in an cognitive act of ‘reading’ that allows her to better understand the situation” (177). While Estrella scans the room, looking at Alejo, Perfecto, her mother, it is the memory of the girl in the tar pits that fuels her rage:

She remembered the tar pits. Energy money, the fossilized bones of energy matter. How bones made oil and oil made gasoline. The oil was made from their bones, and it was their bones that kept the nurse’s car from not halting on some highway, kept her on her way to Daisyfield to pick up her boys as six. It was their bones that kept the air conditioning in the cars humming, that kept them moving on the long dotted line on the map. Their bones. Why couldn’t the nurse see that? Estrella had it figured out: the nurse owed *them* as much as they owed her.” (Viramontes 148)

In this instant, Estrella perceives a deeper meaning behind the La Brea tar pits story, beyond the admiration that Alejo holds for the formations. As Dennis Lopez points out, Alejo who is “characterized as idealistic from the start,” differs from Estrella in that he “fails to grasp the deep-seated racializing logic that structures and over determines the hierarchies of wealth, power, and wage labor within the US capitalist ‘democracy’” (“You Talk ‘Merican?’” 50). This logic is not lost upon Estrella for whom the tar pits come to spark an awakening of the systemic and historic exploitation of workers, particularly workers of Mexican descent. Estrella’s vision and her growing agency are based upon seeing this intimate connection between her community of migrant workers and the land. Her standpoint crystallizes in this moment. Her quick analysis likens the bones in the tar pit to the countless unnamed and invisible farmworkers who are the fuel and backbone of the nation’s economy. Not only does she play a critical role in the sustenance of the nation, by virtue of her labor in the fields, she now understands how integral migrant labor is to the overall economy and to the lifestyle of freedom and comfort that the clinic nurse represents. Estrella’s epiphany is one that connects her with a sense of history and community, as well as individual and collective power.

Estrella internalizes this contradiction between being simultaneously powerful and powerless, not simply because she empathizes with those she knows and those who suffer (Alejo, Petra, and Perfecto in this case), but also because she identifies with the unnamed girl who lost her life in the tar pits. This is a brief intersubjective moment, in which she refuses to be relegated to a kind of historical erasure and chooses to engage in an act of physical resistance. She walks out to the car, picks up Perfecto’s crowbar, and demands a refund so they can get Alejo to the hospital. Estrella stands firm, resolute before she “slammed the crowbar down on the desk, shattering the school pictures of the nurse’s children, sending the pencils flying to the floor, and

breaking the porcelain cat with a nurse's cap into pieces" (149). The moment casts the white nurse, who clutches "her black patent leather purse" (149), as fearful of the Brown girl whose righteous anger all too easily places her within an easily "available gender script for girls of color, particularly Latinas and African Americans, [which] emphasizes their innate 'badness' (Lopez and Chesney-Lind "Latina Girls Speak Out" 528). Here, Estrella speaks, not only through verbal demands—she repeatedly says "Give us back our money" (149)—but also through a physical act that contests the racial, economic and age dynamics operating within the clinic space.

This moment of direct action is pivotal. The nurse registers shock because the action counters her initial reading, or misreading and misrecognition, of Estrella as a social agent. In the introduction, I discussed the nurse's inability to see Estrella, because she's a young, poor Chicana. Yet, this moment, when the crowbar meets the table, forces the nurse to recognize the little Brown girl who thoughtfully and deliberately enacts a bodily reclamation of her own personhood and agency, and of space and belonging (for herself and her community). Using the "master's tools" of language and the metal instrument, Estrella refashions social space and perceived power differentials to make herself and her fellow migrant workers legible as people deserving of empathy and respect, not simply as human machines designed to pick fruit. Her physical act, though interpreted by the nurse as threatening, does not undo the unequal power dynamic or reverse the histories of racial, ethnic, and gendered marginalization. But Estrella's "acting out," which may seem excessive, erratic and volatile by some adult standards, allows her to claim a space for herself, if only temporarily. It is a guerrilla tactic that shows a glimpse of a new vision of herself as an empowered, not marginal, subject. And in this one act of disruption, Estrella enacts a kind of Brown girl spatial citizenship, reshaping democracy by forcibly creating

a space for herself and other racialized groups who have historically been similarly situated and undervalued as laborers in our national community.

Estrella's consciousness and vision—as she looks around the room—stem precisely from her position(ality) as a raced, laboring, gendered, young girl. Alejo, on the other hand, has the promise of education—which ultimately proves futile as he's poisoned in the fields. As Audre Lorde reminds us of the futility of silence, Alejo's quiet acquiescence to the American Dream (prompted by his grandmother) does not protect him from succumbing to the perils produced by a capitalist agribusiness. Estrella connects the dots in the clinic, realizing with a rush of cognitive, emotional, and physical energy that *that* life is one to which she and her family and community have been consigned. They *are* the energy that fuels not only agribusiness but also the capitalist system of excess and luxury that they can never possess. It is this realization, read *through* (as Moya reminds us) Estrella's own flesh and bone experiences of backbreaking labor that leads her to summon her energy, not in a sustained form of organized protest, but in an intentional and “visible act of equality” (Routledge *Space Invaders* 13). Her protest is fleeting, yet unforgettable. Slamming the crowbar on the desk is an individual act that leads to a temporary disruption of the uneven power dynamic between the nurse and Estrella (as woman vs. girl and as white American vs. Mexican American). This moment opens the nurse's eyes to Estrella's very being and underscores for readers the existence of a social-spatial world that devalues and dismisses the personhood of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Viramontes's novel critiques power, sexism and an exploitative capitalist system built on the backs of farmworkers like Estrella and her family. Estrella comes to voice, not only by speaking her truth but by wielding a tool traditionally used to pry or take things apart. While she uses the device to smash the nurse's desk and get the woman's attention (as well as a refund),

Estrella metaphorically uses the device to upend expectations based on her race, ethnicity, gender, and age. The young Brown girl, who was initially struck silent by the nurse who does not acknowledge Estrella's presence, finds a dramatic means to respatialize the power dynamics embodied by the characters circulating in the clinic. Like Katherine McKittrick's discussion of Marie-Joseph Angélique's torching of Montreal as a form of resistance (*Demonic Grounds* 116), Estrella's radical act constitutes a similar kind of resistance. It is an unexpected spatial act that, unfortunately, will likely result in reifying stereotypical associations between criminality and Brown bodies. But Estrella's action is also a politically progressive and oppositional one that counters knowable narratives of Brown peoples' assumed criminality and economic invisibility, as well as misperceptions of Estrella as just a little girl. On an immediate level, Estrella's unexpected resistance contests the nurse's dismissal of the little Brown girl, and more broadly, it protests the erasure of migrant communities and Mexican American claims to the nation. The nurse may not understand how critical the Brown bodies before her are to national life or our country's history, but Estrella is intimately aware. As Huerta acknowledges, laborers possess personal power that can be harnessed to benefit the greater community, and Estrella's action proves that even child laborers have some measure of insight and power. In this climactic moment, Estrella moves from being an invisible child to being a hypervisible spatial agent. This instance, driven by the hidden geographic story of the girl in the tar pits as well as countless unnamed fruit pickers, fuels Estrella's vision of leading other piscadores whose labor provides essential resources to the larger national body from which they are systematically excluded.

Parable of the Sower

Estrella's vision of herself as a community leader leaves readers with hope for a future where marginalized peoples are no longer exploited. But we do not see that vision of equity come to fruition by the novel's end. Here, I move to Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower* to

consider one literary model that envisions how Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship might take shape. The novel centers a Black girl who actively contributes to the production of space by developing a philosophy of being which enables her to envision and organize a new community. Creating this community constitutes a unique form of resistance in which the protagonist can subvert her marginal position as a girl of color by leveraging her bodily power to refashion the world and reframe the parameters of oppression in which she and others live.

Often described as a science fiction coming-of-age novel, *Parable the Sower* is the first installment in Butler's popular Earthseed series. The novel takes readers to the new millenium as the United States swirls in social chaos. The world Butler paints is bleak as the nation struggles with gross income disparities, a synthetic drug epidemic, and rampant violence. The national government proves ineffective and authoritarian, and profit-driven corporations take over local communities. The backdrop of this dystopian world is a global environmental crisis and water shortage exacerbated by widespread apathy and reckless human activity.

When Butler wrote *Parable of the Sower*, she intended it to serve as a cautionary tale that would warn readers of what could unfold in the *then*-not-so-distant future if the country continued to ignore environmental, economic, and social crises. She was especially concerned about environmental issues such as climate change, as well as the long-term effects of race, gender, and class inequities as evidenced by educational disparities, violence, and poverty. As mentioned earlier, *Parable* seems eerily current given the present-day opioid epidemic, the Flint water crisis, raging wildfires in California, and the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump whose motto, "Make America Great Again," appears as a presidential candidate's slogan in the novel. Abby Aguirre says that "Butler insisted that the *Parable* series was not intended as an augur" ("Octavia Butler's Prescient Vision"). But a glimpse of any newspaper headline can make

readers wonder if Butler wrote next to a crystal ball. Given our fractured cultural and political climate, Butler's novel feels surprisingly current. The book has experienced a resurgence in popular culture, spawning an opera (which featured Toshi Reagon and premiered at UNC-Chapel Hill in 2017), a graphic novel, and an almost cult-like status for Butler and her prescient Black girl protagonist, Lauren Olamina.

The story begins six years from now, in 2024, and it focuses on Lauren, who at the novel's opening is only 15 years old. Lauren lives in a walled community, is an avid reader, and spends her time pouring through books on nature, herbs, animals—all part of her efforts to establish an environmentally friendly, love-based community. What makes Lauren special is that she has an ability that some perceive as a power, or an illness, or a condition, called hyperempathy, which literally allows her to feel others' pain—as well as their pleasure. I focus on Lauren because her character offers us a model of a Black girl (on the cusp of womanhood) who thinks critically and actively works to construct a better mode of living in community.

The novel's hope for a better world hinges upon Lauren, who shows us a slightly different iteration of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship than that represented by Estrella. While Estrella and Lauren are both U.S. citizens, Lauren is slightly older, and she comes from a middle class family. Whereas Estrella's critical consciousness and political standpoint give rise to a thoughtful (but impromptu and forcible) claim to nationhood and equity, Lauren's intervention is a deliberate and focused construction of community that she develops over time. The novel shows her acting on that vision by working to forge a new way to take up and transform space for the future. Her vision-in-action, called Earthseed, is a unique articulation of her oppositional consciousness and constitutes the foundational ethos for her egalitarian community, which she names Acorn. Lauren's vision, I argue, stems not only from her from her

bodily or fleshly experiences as an empath, but equally from her social position as a young Black female in Butler's dystopian world.

Lauren's "guerrilla tactic," to continue using Saldivar-Hull's language, consists of a complete reconstruction of social and physical space. Her oppositional consciousness is solidified in geographic and spatial terms and conceptualized in a series of journal entries that she titles, "EARTHSEED: THE BOOKS OF THE LIVING." In an early journal entry, Lauren articulates her "literal truth" that "God is Power...[and that] God exists to be shaped" (Butler 25). While she sees God as a force that "can't be resisted or stopped," she believes that "we can rig the game in our own favor if we understand that God exists to be shaped" (25). Lauren's meditations reveal her not to be a deeply religious individual but an analytical girl who perceives herself as capable of altering the social landscape in her community and the larger nation.

Lauren believes herself to be powerful, despite her youth and biological vulnerability. Lauren finds inspiration in space exploration, and following the death of Alicia Catalina Godinez Leal, a female astronaut, Lauren thinks, "I intend to remember her. I think she can be a kind of model for me...[because] she spent her life heading for Mars, beginning to figure out how to terraform Mars, beginning to create sheltered places where people can live and work now" (21). The protagonist associates space exploration with progress, and she wholeheartedly believes that "Space could be our future" (20). Early on, the text depicts Lauren as a precocious and philosophical teen who is not simply concerned about the fate of humanity. She perceives herself to have a critical role in creating a different kind of home, a homeplace that is free of suffering and pain.

Like most of the characters in this project, Lauren is depicted as being intimately connected to the ground or the land. She is variously depicted in relationship to a crumbling built

environment and a depleted natural landscape. Lauren and her family live in Robledo, a former bedroom community located outside Los Angeles. According to Lauren's father, the town had "once [been] a rich, green, unwallled city," but now, she muses that it's "crazy to live without a wall to protect you" because "most of the street poor squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general—are dangerous" (10). Lauren may live in a traditional family, unlike Estrella, and she may live in a house, but her existence is still fragile due to the chaotic social world. She writes that "None of us goes to school anymore. Adults get nervous about kids going outside" (7). So while *Under the Feet of Jesus* opens with a fleeting image of Estrella as playful and spirited, *Parable of the Sower* begins with a portrait of Black girlhood marked by the disintegrating social world that infringes on every aspect of public and private life.

Although Lauren comes of age in the midst of a dangerous urban environment, she also seems particularly attuned to the natural world. Butler draws a connection between her protagonist, green spaces, and freedom. Lauren reinforces this association by discussing how she comes to name her belief system while tending to her garden:

While I was weeding the back garden and thinking about the way plants seed themselves, windborne, animal borne, water borne, far from their parent plants. They have no ability to at all to travel great distances under their own power, and yet, they do travel. Even they don't have to sit in one place and wait to be wiped out....Earthseed. I am Earthseed. Anyone can be. (77-78)

Here, Lauren metaphorically compares herself to the seeds that travel, not of their own volition, from their parent plants. She notes that the seeds lack the ability to act independently, a reflection that gestures to her own sense of powerlessness. She has no job, no resources, and while she is educated to a degree, she's but a teenager. Just as she believes the plant seeds do not have to succumb to annihilation, she imagines that she—anyone really—has the ability to travel, to move, to change the course and direction of her life. Lauren's thought process positions her as a girl with an emerging critical consciousness and a keen sense of how power is enacted spatially.

Lauren's standpoint is unique because she possesses or suffers from hyperempathy, a condition in which she feels others' pain and pleasure. The text is ambiguous about the nature of Lauren's condition. In the novel, Lauren's father believes his daughter can simply "shake [it] off and forget about [it]," and even Lauren describes it as a syndrome, admitting that it's "delusional" (11). The protagonist questions the nature of the condition by drawing a connection between hyperempathy, her mother and "how the two are connected" due to her mother's addiction to Paracetco, a drug that she which she used during pregnancy which resulted in a "drug damaged" daughter; this is how Lauren sees it. Doctors call it "organic delusional syndrome" (12). Whether it is an actual physical or mental illness or combination of both, Lauren not only feels what others experience, just *seeing* others in pain causes her to collect "some of their general misery" (11). Boundaries do not exist between Lauren and other beings.

I use "beings" intentionally because her hyperempathy extends to all life forms, not just humans, and not simply individuals with whom she has a veritable relationship. For example, while on a rare outing with her family and community members, the group comes across a pack of feral dogs. Given the threat of violence from humans as well as animals, several members of the group carry guns, and even Lauren carries a Smith & Wesson (40). Someone shoots the dog, and Lauren's journal entry describes the dog's last moments. She writes:

I saw its bloody wounds as it twisted. I bit my tongue as the pain I knew it must feel became my pain...I thought I would throw up. My belly hurt more and more until I felt skewered through the middle. I leaned on my bike with my left arm. With my right arm, I drew the Smith & Wesson, aimed, and shot the beautiful dog through its head. I felt the impact of the bullet as a hard, solid blow—something beyond pain. Then I felt the dog die. ... I saw it die. I felt it die. ...Its life flared up, then went out. I went a little numb. (44-45)

Lauren shoots the dog to end the animal's suffering after the initial gunshot. While she does so, arguably to ensure a more humane death, her compassion and good intent do not spare her from experiencing the physical effects of witnessing and contributing to this loss of life. Lauren's

bodily experience of pain disrupts any notion of boundaries between self and others, and this kind of physical connection informs her perception of justice and community. For example, though Lauren is disgusted by her brother Keith who turns to violence after leaving the safety of their walled community, she nonetheless wonders about the mindset of those who murder her brother. As a result of her hyperempathy, Lauren wonders if there's a potentially noble use of such a condition. She reflects: "It's beyond me how one human being could do that to another. If hyperempathy syndrome were more common complaint, people couldn't do such things. They would kill if they had to and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it. But if everyone else could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain?" (115). Such an empathetic orientation makes her uniquely equipped to imagine a community that honors all life, regardless of difference. In this way, her hyperempathy certainly fuels her vision of Earthseed. But it cannot account for her oppositional consciousness alone.

In *Bodyminds Reimagined: Disability, Race and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*, Sami Schalk discusses what she calls Lauren's "non-realist disability"³⁷ (87). She utilizes the term "bodymind," drawn from Margaret Price's work, "to reference the ways in which mind and body are not distinct yet connected components of our being,...a single entity" (88). Schalk finds Price's term particularly useful as it pertains to "a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience" (qtd. in Schalk 89). Lauren is intensely aware of the socio-political climate and the threat that current conditions pose for everyone. As she tells a friend, "I see what's out there. You see it too. You just deny it" (Butler 129). Lauren, however, cannot

³⁷ Her project is particularly concerned with representations of disability in literature. So she discusses Lauren's hyperempathy using this language, as opposed to calling it a disease, an illness, a condition, or a gift.

ignore the chaos because her hyperempathy does not afford her the luxury of a focusing only on herself and her local community. As critic Jim Miller notes, having hyperempathy leads Lauren to develop “a deep sense of solidarity with others” (“Post-Apocalyptic Hoping” 357). Whether perceived to be a gift or a burden, the condition gives her insight into the suffering of others, just as the story of girl in the La Brea Tar Pits does for Estrella. Lauren accepts her condition and draws upon the knowledge culled from this bodily power to disrupt notions of social distinctions or hierarchies based on any socially constructed category of difference.

Schalk’s reading of the novel squares with mine in terms of emphasizing Lauren’s own positionality. She points out that Lauren’s a “well-educated black [sic] girl from a middle-class background” (*Bodyminds Reimagined* 100). As mentioned earlier, Lauren lives, for roughly half the novel, in the relative security of a walled community. Her father works as professor and minister (the patriarchal leader of two key social institutions—school and church), and her stepmother, Corazon, who happens to be Latina, is an educator as well. With these details, Schalk reminds us that its critical “to read Lauren’s creation and leadership of Earthseed in the context of the totality of her life and intersectional identities as a black [sic] disabled woman from an educated middle-class background” (100). Like Moya’s assertion that we must read *Under the Feet of Jesus* through Estrella’s material conditions, Lauren’s intersectional positioning relates to her gender, her economic status, her exposure to a multi-racial family and community that works together despite racial differences, as well as her age as a young woman growing up in a family where she holds a small measure of power.

Still, her concerns about physical safety, particularly of children point to her acute awareness of her own vulnerability to violence. As she and her group of traveling refugees make their way to north, she tells one of the members, “I was thinking of traveling as a man,” to which

he simply replies, “That will be safer for you” (171). Her comment reveals her own vulnerability due to her gender, and presumably her age. As a young Black woman—she’s on the verge of 18 or 19 by the novel’s end—Lauren’s very being is threatened by a society run amuck that produces gross social inequities and spawns random violence. But she is also particularly vulnerable due to her empathic abilities. Her sensitivity to pain and her desire to birth a sustainable community and a new way of living with others are directly related to the social chaos that she witnesses and experiences in a bodily manner.

In addition to her bodily experience, Lauren’s worldview is shaped largely because, as Schalk notes, Lauren *reads*. This point also coincides with Moya’s assessment of Estrella’s coming to voice and agency. But Lauren’s reading is a combination of social literacy, understanding the social landscape, and actually reading words on a page. Lauren’s access to books, many on science and nature, allow her to develop a deeper understanding of the natural world’s life cycles, the process of cultivating plants for food, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. Lauren creates Earthseed by assimilating knowledge from her reading and her bodily experiences.

Rather than relying on adults such as politicians and even her father—whom she describes as “the best person I know, but even he has blind spots”—Lauren relies on herself and her own ability to gain knowledge that will help her shape their community. She engages in months of self-study, reading “three books on survival in the wilderness, three on guns and shooting, two each on handling medical emergencies, California native and naturalized plants and their uses, and basic living: logcabin building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap making—that kind of thing” (57-58). After the brutal murder of a three-year-old girl, Lauren shares her thoughts with her friend Joanne, peppering her with a litany of pressing social ills

ranging from murders, unemployment, cholera epidemics sweeping the southern United States, tornadoes in the Southeast, blizzards in the Midwest, and a general lack of healthcare (51-52). Joanne asks her, “Why do you want to talk about this stuff?,” and Lauren simply replies “We have to....We can get ready. That’s what we’ve got to do now. Get ready for what’s going to happen, get ready to survive it, get ready to make a life afterward” (55). Lauren even tasks her friend with going home to engage in her own study by locating “any kind of survival information...anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves” (59). Their conversation sets Lauren apart from her friend, who feels a sense of helplessness in the face of so many problems. Though Lauren lives in a world where infrastructures and social institutions fall apart, she still believes she has a role to play as an active citizen. Despite her age, race, and gender, she is the one who holds promise for the future of her community.

Girl Power

I find it telling that Butler and Viramontes position Black and Brown girls as savior figures in their respective worlds. I do not want to linger on the religious symbolism of either text. However, just as in *Parable of the Sower*, in which the protagonist operates as a Christ-like figure, Estrella is the one who carries the promise of leading and saving her people. This role escapes those with education (like Alejo, who is a citizen, who attends school, and supposedly has social and economic advantages, as well as male privilege). The savior role also escapes male figureheads (like Perfecto who can seemingly “fix” everything), and it certainly escapes Petra, the other central adult figure in Estrella’s life, as she is weighed down by her parenting responsibilities, her economic status, and her own precarious citizenship status. In Butler’s dystopian world, Lauren is not the only person who lives with hyperempathy. Yet, it is Lauren who possesses the fragile body of a girl with hyperempathy, and for whom bodies and borders cease to exist, that holds the promise of justice.

Routledge defines political activity as “that which transforms bodies and places from that which they have been assigned by the political order. Through practices of resistance, spaces become political because they embody (and make visible) challenges to what can be said, thought, and practised [sic]” (*Space Invaders* 13). Estrella and Lauren offer different means of political activation that involve transforming bodies within particular places and spaces. For Estrella, it’s an impromptu act of physical force that abruptly brings to light the unacknowledged presence of Mexican and Mexican American migrant workers. For Lauren, it’s an alternative community that values difference, equity, and care of the planet—completely the opposite of the economic and racial logic of capitalism, slavery, and colonization. In both texts, the authors offer some of the unrepresented and invisible stories of girls embedded in precarious social spaces. With both characters, the authors posit just what Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship may look like and what freedom for marginalized communities may entail.

CONCLUSION

In 2015, Marley Dias, a then eleven-year-old Black girl “TBN” (total book nerd) bemoaned the lack of representation in children’s and young adult literature. What she wanted to see, and was hard pressed to find, was “A world where modern Black girls were the main characters—not invisible, not just the sidekick...a world where Black girls were free to be complicated, honest, human; to have adventures and emotions unique just to them. A world where Black girls’ stories mattered” (qtd. in Stevens “Marley Dias, the Brains Behind #1000BlackGirlBooks”). But Dias did more than complain. With her mother’s support, she launched a social media campaign, #1000BlackGirlBooks, in order to collect one thousand books that featured Black girls. Her goal? To amass a collection that she could donate to schools and libraries, not just in the United States, but in the Caribbean and around the world. Now 13 years old and a published author³⁸ to boot, Dias has collected over 11,000 books and currently tours the country speaking to young audiences, particularly girls, about making girls of color visible and affecting change in the world, one book or social act at a time.

In some ways, Dias’s project is a “real-world” expression of Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship. Her work “to create a space...to include and imagine black girls and make black girls...the main characters of our lives” (qtd. in McGraph) parallels the work performed by the writers I have examined. Dias advocates for acknowledging and celebrating Black and Brown girl subjectivity and activism, while the writers in this study imagine and create girls, like Dias, who participate in their communities and shape social space in their own unique ways. The work

³⁸ Dias published *Marley Dias Gets It Done (And So Can You!)* in 2018.

that Dias and these feminist authors undertake demonstrates an understanding of the potential impact and ability of stories to change lives, forge solidarity, and cultivate empathy. Bishop contends that “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (“Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors”). Changing the landscape of children’s, young adult, and youth-centric literature by centering the experiences of Black and Brown girls potentially alters the vision we have of girls of color as individuals, as dependents, and as individuals who are critical members of our national community.

Therefore, the writers under examination here craft stories that do more than represent the complexity of Black and Brown girls’ lives, which is noteworthy in and of itself. These writers also engage in deeply political work by using fiction to counter pejorative or dismissive images of Black and Brown girlhood and to challenge the popular image of what it means to be an American. This use, as acknowledged earlier, is nothing new. In “Art, Activism, and Community,” Tanya González asserts that “Social activism and community building have been part of Latina/o literary history from its earliest moments” (173), and she points to Latina authors whose fiction “illustrated the social and political inequities found in nationalist ideologies” (174). Laura Alamillo, Larissa M. Mercado-López, and Cristina Herrera’s landmark *Voices of Resistance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chican@ Children’s Literature* (2018) argues for viewing “Chican@ [sic] children’s literature as a highly politicized, revolutionary, and dynamic body of work” (xiv). While they focus primarily on children’s and young adult literature, given its persistent marginal status within literary studies, they maintain that Chicana/o literature as a whole, whether adult-oriented or children’s texts, can affect “socially and politically transformative change through stories that reflect the diverse intricacies that can be found in

Chican@ [sic] children's social, cultural, and linguistic lives" (xi). We understand ourselves through stories, whether those stories circulate on social media, through the evening news, or sit within the pages of a book. Whether the story concerns the significance of "The Pledge of Allegiance," 19th century narratives about slavery and the Civil War, Black Power poems, or Chicana/o children's literature, fictional narratives work to influence children's impressions of our country and who literally belongs on this land and in this geopolitical space. Literature, then, becomes not only a mirror or window, or door for readers to walk through; it can also function as a spatial project that creatively reconstructs the boundaries and borders of nationhood.

Toni Morrison argues in *The Origin of Others* that "the cultural mechanics of becoming American are clearly understood," and central to that process is the necessity of becoming white (49). That option does not exist for most people of color, nor is it desirable. In examining these texts, I've attempted to show how feminist writers of color have worked to shift those cultural mechanics through girl-centered narratives. And children's literature has been a critical part of this discourse. Bishop stresses the primacy of children's literature as cultural discourse writing that "when a group has been marginalized and oppressed, the cultural functions of the story can take on even greater significance because storytelling can be seen as a means to counter the effects of that marginalization and oppression on children" (qtd. in Rountree 9). Latina educators echo this call. For example, Alma Flor Ada argues that "no matter what form they take, the worlds that authors create are always shaped by their own worldviews. Thus, *who* is published has continued to determine *what* is available for children and youth to read" (xiii). Pat Mora, whose work I discussed in chapter two, agrees that the work of children's and young adult authors plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of this geographic and social space we call the United States. She admits, "There is certainly a political element. There is delight

that comes from being part of inserting these voices, these stories, this language, and this culture into what is being defined as American literature, whether for children or for adults” (Torres, *Conversations* 263). bell hooks supports literary inclusivity in “Postmodern Blackness” (in *Yearning*) where she expresses a particular excitement “to think, write, talk about, and create art that reflects passionate engagement with popular culture, because this may very well be ‘the central future location of resistance struggle, a meeting place where new and radical happenings can occur’” (qtd. in Davis 41). The literary activism by these Black and Brown feminist writers functions in the same vein as it leads to cultural productions that provide the very mirrors and windows that girls like Dias crave, while building new frames through which readers can access the unacknowledged experiences and spaces of girls of color.

These writers’ use of literature, then, represents a creative means to explore the social inequities and material challenges faced by Black and Brown girls. In these literary renderings, girlhood is clearly positioned in relation to geography. The girls’ stories may unfold in specific locales such as Oakland or Los Angeles, in specific geographic terrains such as Mexico or the United States, or within spaces that highlight social relations and unequal power dynamics, such as the private space of the home or the public space of the school. Regardless of location, the textual geographies do not simply provide a stage for narrative action; they actually chart the spaces of girlhood and underscore how Black and Brown girlhoods are affected by systems of domination. These stories take normative girlhood spaces, like Girlpie’s bedroom or Libby’s classroom, as well as adult-controlled spaces like the workcamps and agricultural fields in which Esperanza and Estrella labor, in order to highlight how girls’ lives and subjectivities are produced by the very spaces which contain them. More importantly, recognizing the intimate connection between the girls’ lives and these various geographic representations allows readers

to witness the emergence of situated girlhood knowledge, Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship, ways of viewing the world that emerge from the girls' unique and marginalized social positions. Their stories demonstrate that Black and Brown girls are not just individuals who stand on the periphery of their communities. Instead, the girls play key roles in shaping their communities. Their visions, or standpoints, is Black and Brown girl spatial citizenship, a view of the world that acknowledges the presence of girls of color, their unique challenges, and the potential creative strategies for action and political power that may emerge if we give space to those who are young, gifted, Black, Brown, and female. Through these characters' adventures and trials, Black and Brown feminist writers levy incisive and compelling social critiques. Whether shared via a children's picture book, a young adult novel or a work of literary fiction, these geographies of girlhood constitute valuable additions to Black and Chicana feminist thought, creating distinctive moral visions that offer readers potential models of social change and new ways of seeing the world.

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