

Black Geographies and Black Ecologies as Insurgent Ecocriticism

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■ **ABSTRACT:** Black geographies and Black ecologies are epistemological frameworks that attend to the ideological, philosophical, and material portent of Black movements in dialectical, but not deterministic, relationships with the geographies and environments of Black life and struggle. This article reviews the Black geographies and Black ecologies literature, showing the convergence of these bodies of scholarship around themes of racial, spatial, and ecological justice. The thematic, methodological, and analytical overlaps between Black geographies and Black ecologies are quite apropos for understanding the current realities faced by Black racial-spatial-ecological justice movements; for clarifying the geographies, histories, and ecologies of Black transformation, flourishing, and everyday resistance; and for explicating how global environmental crises are rooted in racial capitalism and regimes of racialization (a sociopolitical crisis).

■ **KEYWORDS:** antiracism, Black radical tradition, environmental history, environmental humanities, poetics, race, resistance

Even before they reached the shores of the so-called New World, where they would be subjected to the brutal violence and unfreedom which would come to characterize, and supposedly confirm, their status as chattel, Africans resisted their destiny as fleshly commodity as *fait accompli*. The hubris of white supremacists' rationalization and the conceit of liberalism meant that the emerging racial capitalist Atlantic economy and pseudo-society was seen as invincible, promising wealth and power for (White) "Man" and nothing(ness) for Black bodies (Wynter 1995, 2003). Mutinies at sea and desertions portended the abjurations of destiny of life-as-death and property that would be diversely and vociferously articulated by Blacks in the plantation Americas and the wider Black Atlantic World. The counter-hegemonic communities Black people established instantiated spaces of Black freedom, cultural experimentation, multi-ethnic solidarity, multi-species kinship, and insurgent social (re)production. For all their symbolic and material significance, the histories of these places, that were hewn out between rocks and hard places, have been subordinated in Eurocentric scholarship just as the people involved in their reproduction have been in a Eurocentric racial hierarchy. And for the same reasons. These places evince agencies, epistemologies, and poetics (e.g., storytelling, songs, poetry archives) that are monuments to capacious and protean Black life and life-making practices. Increasingly this subordination is being unsettled by Black spatial and environmental scholarship that challenges the canons of Western knowledge.

Looking through Black epistemologies and affirming the theoretical and practical purchase of them, both Black geographies and Black ecologies challenge analyses and histories of Black people and their places as additive to existing accounts. In Black ecologies literature, the rela-



tionship between antiblackness, the exploitation of nature and ecological crisis, and the imperative of racial justice to environmental justice are the key themes. Much of this work remains centered on the US context. Black geographies literature centers themes of Black embodiment, Black spatial thought and practice, and the relationship between race and spatial imaginaries and representation. Spreading out from a focus on North America, Black geographies scholarship is increasingly being enriched by consideration of Black Europe, North Africa, Afro-South America, and the Caribbean. By themselves, these two bodies of work provide timely interventions in debates in geography, sociology, the environmental humanities, and African diaspora studies. The combination of these two bodies of work offers even more robust methodological and theoretical tools for understanding the pluralities of global Black nature–space relationships. When taken together, this insurgent scholarship illuminates the varied agency of Black people in the establishment, reproduction, recreation, and preservation of symbolic and physical spaces for Black life and flourishing against, on the outsides of and interior to, white spaces. Combined, Black ecologies and Black geographies allow us to foreground our understanding of space, Black racialization, and antiblackness in the processes shaping the use, management, and experience of the built environment and ecological systems.

This article offers a broad survey of the contours of Black geographies and Black ecologies scholarship. While emerging in parallel but distinct disciplinary spaces, both bodies of literature respond to the subordination of geographical and environmental histories of subordinated and absented Black spaces, spatial knowledges, and instantiations of Black agency. Together, this Black geo-ecological work provides a way to understand the historical and contemporary imperatives of Black social, environmental, and racial justice movements, as well as Black geographical movements and mobilities. This review answers a number of interrelated questions: what is the character of Black spatial and environmental critique? How does Black ecocriticism (analyses and reflections on the relationship between environmentalism, literature, and geographic thought) challenge existing human–environment thinking and constructs? What becomes knowable about symbolic and physical geographical and ecological space, blackness, and race by when poetics are taken seriously? How can methodologies attentive to Black cultures of fugitivity, improvisation, struggle, and place-making allow the disclosure of new insights about Black movement, mobility, geographical, and ecological histories?

Together, Black geographies and Black ecologies constitute what we are considering insurgent ecocriticism. By this we mean to suggest that Black geographies and Black ecologies are unified in their challenge to both ecocriticism that is blind to the race in reproduction of literary ecologies, and ecocriticism that does not consider Black environmental literature and discourses as worthy of critique. The insurgent character of Black geographies and Black ecologies also lies in their focus on not just literary or discursive worldmaking, but also material geographies and environmental outcomes of racialized and antiracist worldmaking. This focus demands an ethical politics for charting Black environmental thought and practices, and Black spaces.

The article proceeds in three substantive sections. The section that follows presents overviews of Black geographies and Black ecologies scholarship. We situate these bodies of work in relation to the Black radical tradition. While we parse Black geographies and Black ecologies into distinct subsections, as our review shows, there is considerable overlap and concomitance between both bodies of literature. In reviewing each body of literature separately, our intention is to offer a focused overview of each body of literature as they have developed relative to disciplinary contexts and become characterized by noteworthy motifs. We then highlight the abolitionist vision that is at the intersection of Black geographies and Black ecologies research. The aesthetics and materiality of Black resistance against marginalization in both Black geographies and Black ecologies has meant a concurrence of interest in building more just futures. Finally, we

consider possible future directions for global Black ecocritical scholarship that builds on Black geographies and Black ecologies. More than a few of these paths are already being given consideration in existing work but would benefit from more sustained and systematic examination.

Black Radical Traditions of Ecocriticism

While the knowledge of Black spaces and Black spatial knowledges have been subordinated, or as Cedric Robinson put it, “nearly grounded under the intellectual weight and authority of the official European version of the past” (2000: 245), a Black radical tradition (BRT) has preserved the legacy of Black defiance against burial and erasure. This tradition has vitalized Black cultural, social, and political resistance movements and counter-hegemonic consciousness, as well as the preservation of the histories of those movements and that consciousness. As Robinson shows, from the very beginning, “the Black radical tradition cast[s] doubt on the extent to which capitalism penetrated and re-formed social life and on its ability to create entirely new categories of human experience stripped bare of the historical consciousness embedded in culture” (2000: 245). As an ongoing social and epistemological posture, the BRT is characterized by the “continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality” (2000: 246). In so doing, the BRT has provided testimony against the normalized systems of antiblack racism, white supremacist sociopolitical oppression, economic exploitation, and Eurocentric cultural criticisms that have worked to deny Black being-ness and Black people’s (symbolic and physical) space. The BRT has preserved and reproduced Black improvisational life and insurgent politics, and this intellectual and political effort has been taken up by both Black geographies and Black ecologies scholarship. For example, Black geographies work insists that racism and capitalism are fundamentally intertwined (Gilmore 2007; Wilson 2000a; Woods 1998) and further explicate how capitalism is dependent on antiblackness (Bledsoe and Wright 2018), while Black ecologies scholarship understands racial capitalism as a political and ecological project (Vasudevan 2019). At the same time, these bodies of work also bring forth the Black struggles of justice that fight against these articulations of power.

The framework of the BRT allows us to situate contemporary Black geographies and Black ecologies scholarship as continuing a long tradition of Black resistance and counter-hegemonic social, intellectual, political, and cultural production. Understanding Black geographies and Black ecologies as nothing new is important not only for historicizing Black labor to make material and symbolic space, but also for remarking on the processes and systems of knowledge that have denied and ignored Black agency and spatiality (McKittrick and Woods 2007). Therefore, we insist on situating the Black geographical and ecological work we review within the BRT to make clear the high political stakes of the insurgency of Black thought in contemporary academic and popular debates. The coalescence, over the past two decades or so, of Black geographies and Black ecologies has responded both to the broad realities of subordinated Black spatial and ecological knowledge and the specific realities of Black abandonment, underdevelopment, mass incarceration, and murder as normalized under racial capitalism, neoliberalism, and color-blind liberal multiculturalism.

Black Human Geographies, Spatial Thought, and Counter-Canonical Poetics

There is a long-standing tradition of geographic studies that explore the relationship between race and space, each with their own theoretical and methodological approach. This history can

be traced to spatial studies from the late 1960s and the 1970s that brought attention to the characteristics and, more importantly, spatial aspects of Black America (Bunge 1971; Rose 1971) and to critical geographies of race. The latter body of work was heavily influenced by the emergent work in critical race theory that had sought to explain the institutionalization of race and racism (Omi and Winant 2014; Schein 2002), and focused on how race is socially and, more importantly, spatially constructed by paying attention to the role of law (Delaney 1998) and the historical development of the racial capitalist state (Gilmore 2002; Harris 1993; Lipsitz 2007, 2011; Williams 2017; Wilson 2000a, 2000b; Woods 1998, 2017). Furthermore, other works (Pulido 2002, 2015) and presidential addresses in the American Association of Geographers (Kobayashi 2014; Rose 1978) have continuously emphasized the importance for a deeper geographical engagement with race and racism within and outside the boundaries of the discipline. The body of scholarship that has thickened into Black Geographies builds on nature–society research and social theory to consider Black spatial epistemologies, spatial agency, and spatial poetics.

Black geographies is concerned with mapping Black production of space and Black human geographies, or the agencies and spaces of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). The Black Atlantic analytic re-reads the space framed and connected by the transatlantic slave trade as something other than a Black hole. This reading first refuses the understanding of the oceanic and New World spaces as a dumpsite for Black bodies or a space of Black inhumanity and second challenges depictions of the African diaspora as a people without spatial history and agency. The Black Atlantic urges us to contemplate the political geographies of Black movement and mobility and how these are rooted in and routed through subaltern spaces and practices (Alderman et al. 2021; Best 2016; McKittrick 2006). In pointing to the racial politics of movement and mobility, this work has shown how, in the United States for example, racism shaped programs of infrastructural development, such as the interstate system. The highways, therefore, functioned as a space-annihilating technology that exploited and reproduced the second-class status of African Americans (Brand 2021a; Brand et al. 2020; Woods 2002).

However, whereas in other scholarship on race, nature, and place, such as political ecology or environmental history for example, where Black space or place connections are conceived of as being obscured or destroyed by racist discourse and can thus be discovered through critical geographical–historical study, the Black geographies tradition asks how Western conceptualizations of knowledges, space, and nature necessarily preclude Black humanity. In so doing, Black geographies show how grappling with the geographies of blackness is not merely a matter of excavating Black landscapes overlaid by Eurocentric landscape histories, but also of explicating how such landscapes have been conceived of as a “nowhere” or “outside” (Allen et al. 2019; Hawthorne 2019; Madera 2015) and positioned as the raw material of development or the spatial excess that remains following meaningful development (Wilson 2000a, 2000b; Woods 1998). The conceptualization of blackness and Black spaces as superfluous or unproductive serves to rationalize the mobilization of antiblack remedies for what are fundamental crises of a white supremacist construct of what it means to be human, citizen, and worker (McKittrick 2013; Wynter 2003).

These socio-spatial fixes to the fundamental crises of racial capitalism, from the entrenchment of a carceral state (Brooks and Best 2021; Gilmore 2002, 2007) to increasingly intrusive contemporary surveillance technologies (Browne 2015; Shabazz 2015), are how white regimes of property, antiblack spatial segregation, and inequality are maintained. As Black geographers show, any appearance of these fixes being simple or even effective technical solutions is maintained only by ignoring the historical and contemporary relationships between race, space, and the law. Since space is neither neutral nor immutable and race must be socially reproduced and policed, the prison and technologies of surveillance must work to reinscribe race through the

organization of space and structuring of temporalities (McKittrick 2013). As Simone Browne (2015: 21) reminds us, such (re)inscriptions of race and racialized space are and have always been contested by “dark sousveillance,” Black acts that resist surveillance and the white gaze. Similarly, Saidiya Hartman (1997: 13) points to the array of Black modes of “stealing away” of themselves, acts of resistance and fugitivity that range from itinerant flight from the plantation for personal pleasure to marronage. In these multiple ways, Black people have challenged the social and physical geographies of racially disciplined society (Bledsoe 2017; Winston 2021; Wright 2020). Black geographies, therefore, show how whiteness and blackness are sedimented in space through imaginaries of belonging, place affects, actual access, and experiences (Brand 2021b; McKittrick and Woods 2007; Pulido 2000).

Indeed, as Asha Best and Margaret Ramírez (2021) argue, the white urban landscapes are haunted by specters of Black devaluation, trafficking, and displacement. Much of this is signaled by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods’ (2007) genre-defining volume entitled *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. By critically engaging with the historical trajectories and ongoing dynamics of the time–space of race and the racial production of space, Black geographies scholars have insisted on taking Black poetics of space seriously (Edwards 2003; Glissant 1990; Hunter and Robinson 2018; Quashie 2021). These poetics, they show, constitute a canon of Black spatial history, epistemologies, and place (re)productions across the Black Atlantic. The material spatial instantiations of Black place-making unsettle the antiblack ordering of normalized conceptualizations of race and spatial formations. The poetics of place are the veritable archive of consciousness, subaltern visions, insurgent spatial practices and knowledge that work to build not only material Black spaces, but socio-symbolic Black worlds. By poetics, Black geographies scholars speak of the stories, recipes, food practices, musical traditions, poetry, and grounded theories that express and instantiate Black people’s understandings and experiences of space and as well as their place-making and place-taking practices (McKittrick 2006; McKittrick and Woods 2007; Woods 1998). Works by Black food geographers highlight how mapping Black food geographies, for example, can elucidate rich culinary heritages, economies of care, and technical knowledge vital to agrarian success, just as these geographies expose cultural appropriations, Black land thefts, and the system production of racialized food insecurity (Garth and Reese 2020; Jones 2019; McCutcheon 2015, 2019; Ramírez 2015; Reese 2019; Williams and Freshour 2022).

Clyde Woods, through his influential book *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, showed how the blues musical tradition “operated to instill pride in a people facing daily denigration, as well as channeling folk wisdom, descriptions of life and labor, travelogues, hoodoo, and critiques of individuals and institutions” (1998: 17). For Woods, the blues epistemology (1998, 2017) is a Black system of knowledge constituted by the grass roots theories of American political economy based in experiences of suffering, enslavement, and social abandonment, as well as by the oral histories that document strategies of resistance and visions of abolition that inform Black hope. The blues as well as other Black Atlantic musical expressions (such as Reggae, Zouk, Jazz, Salsa, Hip-Hop, Samba), storytelling, and performance activities (such as Masquerade or Junkanoo) all form Black social critique. All these epistemologies, which are emergent from Black experiences and political responses to oppression, are part of the Black radical tradition. Importantly, Black geographies show how this tradition is as much about the struggles over physical geographies as it is about consciousness, cultural refusals, and discourse (Moulton 2021).

Black geographies map the nowhere or outside and how these places are tethered to modernity. Further, this literature examines how Black life in these places critiques Western human geographic thought and practice. In so doing, Black geographies analysis carries on critiques of

racial oppression but also carries out examinations that “are also fundamentally concerned with highlighting the various ways Black communities create their own unique political practices and senses of place, thereby acknowledging the spatial capacities of Afro-descendant populations” (Bledsoe et al. 2017: 8). The value of Black spaces and Black spatial knowledge has been denied by reductionist and exclusionist frameworks of human-environmental thought that suggest that the modern Black experience is one devoid of spatial agency or legacy. These suggestions hang on theorizations of the human as the figure who experiences and produces space, and the human as being non-black. This human figure—who Sylvia Wynter (2003) describes as “Man”—is imagined as the default human because it has been historically (narratively and empirically) overrepresented. Wynter’s argument both challenges the deference to one genre of being human as the default and asserts that the habitation of space by those deemed inhuman or unhuman constitutes a demonic ground.

The demonic grounds for Wynter designate a point of view that sits outside of the space-time orientation of the homunculus (or miniature central observer in the mind) of Cartesian materialism. This demonic frame of reference pursues observation outside of the established (hegemonic) interpretative schemas and regulatory systems of being, feeling, and knowing. Wynter and her Black geographies interlocutors theorize Black spaces as peripheral and marginalized, but not external to Euro-modernity. Wynter sees this demonic mode as not voicing the silenced race-gendered subject but centering the systemic function of silencing. The demonic grounds, then, questions what interpretive function of the silence as an absented speech is as a move toward abolishing the dominant figuration of Man as default human (Weheliye 2014; Wynter 1990). Wynter’s “demonic grounds” is a widely significant theoretical intervention in its radical refusal of the colonial overdetermination of not only what it means to be human, but the regimes of power, the nature of truth, and what freedom means. Following Wynter, Katherine McKittrick employs the concept in the title of her book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. McKittrick’s influential text popularized and expanded Wynter’s conception, and made intersectional, interdisciplinary, feminist Black spatial analysis a formative influence on Black geographies. This work has challenged Black geographies scholars to address the empirical and theoretical gaps concerning Black sexualities, and marginalization and erasures of Black queer and femme geographies (Bailey and Shabazz 2014a, 2014b; Eaves 2017, 2020; Ellison 2019).

As McKittrick argues, Black geographies are not “secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is. *Demonic Grounds* reveal that the interplay between domination and black women’s geographies is underscored by the social production of space. Concealment, marginalization, boundaries are important social processes. We make concealment happen; it is not natural but rather names and organizes where racial-sexual differentiation occurs” (2006: xi–xii). An important consequence of this methodological approach is the relocation of the body in discussions of geo-ecological domination. In Black geographies analysis, the “the body weighed down by an unforgettable history—is there, but it is not knowable as a suffering object that reinforces the global web of anti-blackness . . . the nowhere of blackness is not rendered non-existent, rather fosters an outlook that is structured by, but not necessarily beholden to, crass positivist cartographies” (McKittrick 2017: 99). The kind of analysis McKittrick points toward unburdens the body as the sole locus of Black historical experience and knowledge, and consequently expands the scope of liberation from the condition of embodiment. “The geographic puzzle, then, becomes one of cautiously reordering our methodological approach to anti-blackness, so that the question of liberation is not tied to already existing analytical cosmogonies that refuse black life. This is a brutal forgetting that wants a different future for the unforgettable”

(McKittrick 2017: 99). Black geographies have developed understandings of the materiality of Black space-making through examinations of the slave provisions ground, or plots. These sites serve as physical and emblematic demonic grounds where Black communal life is enacted (McKittrick 2006; Wynter 1971, 1990).

Though the plot was not a space outside of the plantation's domain, not least because the planter-class encouraged plots as a means of subsidizing the cost to feed those they had enslaved, it provided just enough space for relations other than those structured by the plantation to be practiced and enacted (DeLoughrey 2011; Wynter 1971). The tension between the plantation and plot is a tension between provincial rootedness and cosmopolitan possibility (Davis et al. 2019; Gilroy 1993; Ruffin 2007). The concept of a Black sense of place is tied to this way of understanding Black spatial practices and histories (McKittrick 2011; McKittrick and Woods 2007). This conceptualization is an assertion that "black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick 2006: xiv), that there is inherent spatiality in Black life, and that Black communities have their own spatial imaginaries and space-making practices based on the social relations that are part of "Black world-making practices" (Hawthorne 2019: 5). The Black sense of place is one that Kimberly Ruffin describes as an "African diaspora cosmopolitanism" (2007: 138), a negotiation of the socio-spatial gap between "provincial and cosmopolitan longings" (2007: 147). Black geographies point to the urgency of examinations of how racial subjects inhabit and transform racially encoded spaces. This scholarship asks that we clarify how regimes of extraction and uneven exposures to violence and disasters are entangled with colonial enterprises, ongoing state-making practices, and racial capitalist development. That is, they examine how Black spaces and Black people has been rendered extractable, exploitable, and exposable, and just as importantly, highlight how Black resistance and production of space articulate a counter-subjective politics and materialize space for Black communal being.

Black Environments, Racism, and Radical Ecological Justice

In a 1970 paper titled "Black Ecology", sociologist and activist Nathan Hare argued that the then emerging concept of ecology excluded the environmental realities of Black people from consideration. Black communities and white communities, he argued, lived in qualitatively different environments and the ecological crises that preoccupied ecologists were tied to white bourgeoisie esthetics. What ecology and the environmental movement promised, therefore, was improvement in environmental quality, health, and wellbeing for white people. Furthermore, Hare argued that in the environmental movement and ecology, Black presence was regarded as pollution and a threat to the health of the (white) social body. As pollution and threat, Hare showed how Blacks were then pushed further and further from suburban spaces and sequestered in the inner cities, which, blighted by racial oppression and abandonment, were made into ghettos. Conceived as the reservoir of Black-people-as-pollution, the ghetto was then rationalized as an appropriate site for locating other forms of pollutants and wastes from white society. Maynard Swanson (1977) shows that a similar kind of logic shaped urban sanitation policy in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Black people were expelled from the cities of the Cape Colony in response to rising illnesses at the ports and public health and safety concerns. Disease and epidemics were interpreted through social metaphors or allegories of racial purity that mapped anxieties about health and cleanliness onto racial relations. This kind of "sanitation syndrome" recreated a racial ecology in line with segregationist ideology, not just in South Africa or the United States, but in a range of contexts where racial ideologies and hierarchies governed life and structured space (Foucault 2008; Kosek 2004; Moore et al. 2003).

The notion of Black ecology allowed Hare to call attention to the “ecological ordeal of the black race” and show how “Black spatial location and distribution not only expose blacks to more devastating and divergent environmental handicaps; they also affect black social and psychological adjustment in a number of subtle ways” (Hare 1970: 4). Challenging Neo-Malthusian explanations of crimes and blight in Black communities as inevitable and indicative of a Black pathology, Hare located the cause in the psycho-social responses to the overcrowding of the inner-cities, and attendant increases in the probability of interpersonal conflict. The environmental crisis and social maladies that characterize Black spaces, he showed, were the consequences of apathy, physical and psychological stress, and frustration with the health outcomes that emanate from the pollution of Black communities. For Hare though, Black ecology was not just a notion that highlighted the blindness to race in ecology, as a framework it demanded economic and social solutions tied to the “decolonization of the black race” (1970: 8). Key to his proposal was a nascent theorization of a form of internal colonization “wherein the colonizer milks dry the resources and labor of the colonized to develop and improve his own habitat while leaving that of the colonized starkly ‘underdeveloped’” (1970: 8). This internal colonization thesis and Hare’s broader analytical approach had similar effects in sociology as the spatial studies scholars of race had in geography.

The concept of internal colonialism is taken up in Dorceta Taylor’s book *Toxic Communities* (2014). For Taylor, internal colonialism offers one of the primary concepts for understanding the siting of hazardous facilities in the US. The notion explains how some communities seem to function as internal colonies that can be targeted for resource extraction, and processing and storage of hazardous materials, for the nation writ large. While Taylor grounds her discussion in the experience of Native American reservations and the South and Southwest regions of the US, her discussion parallels Hare’s earlier discussion. More directly, Hare’s broader conceptualization of a Black ecology framework of critique has been revitalized by an African American Intellectual History Society Black Ecologies Series on the blog “Black Perspectives” edited by historians J. T. Roane and Leah Kaplan, and anthropologist Justin Hosbey. Their engagement with Black Geographies has informed a call to an environmental justice project of clarifying Black ecologies. In so doing, Roane, Kaplan, Hosbey, and others working in Black ecologies have centered racializing practices and discourse as crucial for understanding political and politicized ecologies.

Setting out an agenda for delineating Black ecologies, Roane and Hosbey invite scholars and activists to examine the insurgent knowledge and practices of Black communities whose exposures to disasters has educated them about how racial public policy structures the uneven unfolding and management of environmental catastrophe (Roane 2017; Roane and Hosbey 2019). In an essay outlining their framework, entitled “Mapping Black Ecologies,” Roane and Hosbey take Black ecology as both a historical–ecological orientation and a body of knowledge. For them, Black ecologies analysis produces “deep maps”—“a way of historicizing and analyzing the ongoing reality that Black communities in the US South and in the wider African Diaspora are most susceptible to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, subsidence, sinking land, as well as the ongoing effects of toxic stewardship . . . [and] names the corpus of insurgent knowledge produced by these same communities, which we hold to have bearing on how we should historicize the current crisis and how we conceive of futures outside of destruction” (Roane and Hosbey 2019: para. 1).

Such historicizations and analyses remark on the conditions of African Americans as being among what scholars in other traditions, such as Black geographies, have described as constituting the wretched of the earth (Fanon 1963) or a dammed global archipelago of the poor, the jobless, the homeless, the “underdeveloped,” the criminalized, and the undesired immigrant

(McKittrick 2013; Sharpe 2016; Wynter 2003; Wynter and McKittrick 2015). Those residing in this archipelago of otherness are rendered sacrifice and sacrificial in the name of the contemporary neoliberal global political economy. Thus, Black ecologies as analysis makes clear that environmental catastrophes, from hurricanes, landslides, pandemics, or polluted water sources (Hosbey 2018; McCommons 2020; Moore 2020; Roane 2017; Roane and Hosbey 2019; Wright 2021), and antiblack police violence mobilized under the aegis of development and urban conservation (Opperman 2020; Williams 2020) are inseparable from historical colonialism, as well as contemporary racialized economic and social marginalization (Porter and Rodríguez 2020). More than this though, Roane and Hosbey's Black ecologies also names the crucibles in which "ordinary Black people articulate alternative maps—dissonant and heterodox ecological grammars as well as vision for a different order" (Roane and Hosbey 2019: 9), so that their status as the wretched of the earth, to use Fanon's term, is unsettled as somehow natural.

Foregrounding the physical spaces and environmental realities from which insurgent Black knowledge and critiques are articulated, Black ecologies scholarship calls attention to material place-making practices that evidence Black resistance to displacement and degradation (Hosbey 2018; Purifoy and Seamster 2020). Here, the works of scholar-critics such as Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Sylvia Wynter are central to the conceptual infrastructure used to understand Black landscape and Black relationships to socio-material landscapes (Opperman 2020; Padilioni Jr. 2019; Roane 2017, 2018). For Opperman (2020), as original spaces of communal care, remembering the dead, and self-sufficiency, the slave plots or gardens provide models for contemporary spaces of healing, resistance, and Black mutual aid. As the imperatives of such spaces grows amid contemporary ecological crisis and retreat of the state, Opperman sees the historic Black plots as offering lessons for Black ecological ethics and resilience. Similarly, Roane (2018) argues that the reconstitution of Black plots is key to recreating and maintaining Black commons and providing socio-ecological respite from contemporary racial capitalist enclosures that cause food insecurity and general precarity (Campbell et al. 2021).

In an essay entitled "Plotting the Black commons," Roane (2018) develops a framework of plotting that builds on Sylvia Wynter's notion of the plot. Roane's formulation allows him to read the historical and contemporary development of Black communities in the lower Chesapeake Bay as linked to the process of suburbanization, agricultural change, and industrialization in majority white communities. The concentration of toxic waste, the byproducts of development, in the Black communities disrupts Black ecologies—the degradation of Black ecologies is the corollary to white development. However, even as Roane explicates patterns of racialized inequity that allow waste to spill over into delicate Black ecologies, he maps the cultural practices and environmentalism of Black residents which allow them to make use of space. These practices work to constitute Black commons. Roane uses the notion of the Black commons to designate the ethic of Black stewardship that challenges various forms of racial capitalist enclosures. "Through the fugitive practices of plotting enslaved and post-emancipation Black communities in the region created possibilities for survival, connection, and insurgency through the strategic renegotiation of the landscapes of captivity and dominion" (2018: 241–242). Such grounded discussions of historic and contemporary struggles for the recognition of Black rights and claims making track the migration and recuperation of plantation agri-logistics, even as it centers Black practices of memorialization, curation, and theorizations of life, and life as struggle (McKittrick 2013; Porter and Rodríguez 2020; Roane and Hosbey 2019; Woods 1998).

In this way, Black ecologies have offered readings of Black land, communities, and spaces as memorials that commemorate Black life as critique of white supremacist ecocidal and racial violence. This also means that Black spaces of memories and memorialization practices are

haunted ecologies, spaces grappling with the afterlife or the wake of slavery (Hartman 1997; Sharpe 2016; Wright 2021). Christina Sharpe's (2016) *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* and Kathryn Yusoff's (2018) *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* offer distinct yet related interventions from environmental humanities and geo-humanities that are congruent with Black ecologies scholarship. Sharpe's examination highlights how Black ecologies are haunted by the afterlives of slavery. Black ecologies map the wake or spatial effects of the displacements wrought by Atlantic modernity. However, Sharpe insists that we notice the wake or commemoration and celebration of Black life that characterizes life in Black ecologies. Surviving against anti-blackness, Black communal life puts pressure on the forces that insist on maintaining geographies of despair. Sharpe's "wake work" (2016: 14) therefore moves beyond the kind of political, juridical, and philosophical resolutions to the problems of Black exclusion and abjection and "looks instead to current quotidian disasters in order to ask what, if anything, survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation, and how do literature, performance, and visual culture observe and mediate this un/survival." In this way "wake work" is a Black ecological mapping methodology that centers the Black aesthetic and material disruptions that unsettle antiblack death-dealing patterns and processes (Sharpe 2016).

Yusoff's discussion problematizes the Anthropocene—a time of supposedly universal human peril. The analysis Yusoff offers takes on the supposedly objective and apolitical nature of the geological sciences as well as the racial blind spots of imaginaries of Anthropocene as time of apocalypse and space for constructing new futures. Yusoff shows how blackness and Black ecologies have been constituted through processes of racialization and subjectification that parallel the work in geology to categorize the material-physical earth. Through a Black ecologies analysis, Yusoff argues that we can better notice how "white geology continues to propagate imaginaries that organize Blackness as a stratum or seismic barrier to the costs of extraction, across coal faces, the alluvial plains, and the sugarcane fields, and on the slave block, into the black communities that buffer the petrochemical industries and hurricanes to the indigenous reservations that soak up waste of industrialization and the sociosexual effects of extraction cultures" (2018: xiii). In this way, Yusoff's analysis links the regimes of extractive capitalism, racial classifications, disasters, and various forms of material and epistemic violence.

What the scholars of Black ecologies show, albeit in slightly different registers, is that the persistence of Black communities against uneven exposure to environmental catastrophes works to counteract discourses that distort the fact that racialized socioeconomic marginalization is a feature of much public policy (Hosbey 2018). In this way, the critiques by the Black community both challenge dominant representations of historical land-use patterns and memorialize the struggles of working-class Black communities (Roane and Hosbey 2019; Woods 2002). Notably, Clyde Woods' blues epistemology and broader work, which has informed much of Black geographies critiques of regional political economies (of the US South), also suffuses Black ecologies. Taking a cue from Woods, Roane and Hosbey (2019) center the arguments of rappers Lil' Wayne and Juvenile in analyzing New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. They show how the rappers map out the uneven geographies of racialized citizenship and intergenerational vulnerability. In analyses like this, Black ecologies scholarship's direct engagements with the environmental justice movement, environmental sociology, and critical race theory are easily noticeable. -

Cartographically, mapping Black ecologies shows that those who bear the brunt of exposure to toxic waste and hazardous material do so because of their skin color and socio-economic class (Bullard 1990). This reality informed sociologist and "father of environmental justice" movement Robert Bullard decision to title his book with Beverly Wright, *The Wrong Complex-ion for Protection* (Bullard and Wright 2012).

Abolition and Repair

From our review above, it should already be clear that Black geographies and Black ecologies map the contours of Black life in similar ways. While Black geographies and Black ecologies may have emerged in distinct disciplinary contexts or, more correctly, developed in critique of disciplinary frameworks, there is considerable overlap in the conceptual apparatus that scholars across both genres of nature–space–society work use to clarify the terms of Black life. Moreover, there is significant dialogue between Black Geographies and Black ecologies scholars owing to use of similar texts (such as the works of Franz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Cedric Robinson, Walter Rodney, Alice Walker, Sylvia Wynter), conference activities, as well as special issues (*Southeastern Geographer* 57(1); the AAIHS *Black Ecologies* Series; this issue) and transdisciplinary edited volumes (e.g., Lewis and Hawthorne, forthcoming; McKittrick and Woods 2007; Proglia et al. 2021). Beyond this, graduate students who have written dissertations using Black geographies and Black ecologies frameworks are finding jobs in sociology, geography, anthropology, and African American studies, even when their degrees are awarded by departments different from the hiring one. Here, we want to highlight what we believe is the resounding proposition of the plurality of global Black geographies and Black ecologies (Bledsoe and Wright 2019), an abolitionist vision of futures rooted in multispecies kinship, freedom, ecological stewardship, racial justice, Black repair, and social equity (Gilmore 2017; Heynen 2016, 2018; Heynen and Ybarra 2021; Lewis 2020).

Black geographies and Black ecologies hold the promise of abolitionist futures, ecological justice, and repair at multiple levels because Black place making, epistemologies, and poetics—the Black radical tradition—have always foregrounded addressing the debilitating effects of the colonial plantations and settler-colonial exploitation, racial capitalism, and (white) anthropocentrism in material and not just symbolic space (Davis et al. 2019). Much of this abolitionist orientation and prefigurative politics are informed by histories of marronage and grassroots Black social and political movements. The poetics honed from these historical and contemporary freedom-making practices constitute a pedagogy of Black fugitivity against antiblack racism. Black geographies and Black ecologies scholars insist on analyses that examine the concrete outcomes of the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. Their attention to praxis as well advances the understanding that “freedom is a place” (Gilmore 2017: 227). As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, this understanding that freedom is a place is the “basic premise” of an abolitionist future; the starting point for an ethico-political praxis that “concerns itself with the greatest and least detail of these arrangements of people and resources and land over time” (2017: 227). Crucially, while such a praxis “shows how relationships of un-freedom consolidate and stretch, [it is] not for the purpose of documenting misery. Rather, the point is not only to identify central contradictions—inherent vices—in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past” (2017: 227).

An abolitionist geography and ecology, then, builds on the foundations of Black struggle, to articulate revolutionary politics and policies for reconstituting space, restructuring human–nonhuman ecological relationships and interhuman geographies outside the historically instituted rules of white supremacy. As Nik Heynen puts it, “A driving notion of abolition ecology builds on direct action traditions that began in the abolitionist movement against slavery, were core tactics during the Civil rights movement, and continue today through Black Lives Matter—because as human history shows rights are seldom just granted; they are won through struggle” (2018: 245). Since this abolitionist politics must be routed through and rooted in concrete space, such a politics necessarily means liberatory approaches based in solidarity with Indigenous peo-

ples, immigrants, the poor, and those relegated to the archipelago of the earth's damned (King 2019; Moulton 2021).

Future Directions

As Black geographies and Black ecologies have taken form, more than a few scholars have offered insightful suggestions about directions for expanding the literature. Much of the early work was focused on the North American context, the persistence of antiblackness in the United States, and the racial blindness in the multiculturalism of Canada. Responding to earlier suggestions for greater engagement in the wider Black Atlantic space, scholars are increasingly turning their attention to South America and the Caribbean (Bledsoe 2017, 2018; Hudson 2017; Lewis 2020) and also productively troubling the primacy of the Black Atlantic in theorizations of Black Mediterranean and the racialized border regimes that structure Black mobility from North African to Europe (Gross-Wyrtzen 2020; Hawthorne 2017, 2022; Merrill 2018; Proglío et al. 2021). Black geographies and Black ecologies have also started to engage with themes that intersect with Indigenous and Latinx geographies and ecological critique (Daigle and Ramírez 2019; King 2019; King et al. 2020; Pulido and De Lara 2018; Tuck et al. 2014). An area that has seen less engagement is Africa, particularly the Black urban geographies and ecologies of the continent.

Problematically, much of the scholarship said to define African Studies comes by way of white North American and European Africanist scholars whose framings and analyses of Africa become hegemonic. The racial regimes of power and knowledge attending the reproduction of African Studies and mappings of African geographies and ecologies parallels just the kind of racialized disciplinary systems that Black geographies and Black ecologies have been challenging. We believe that not only are there considerable gaps that could be filled by Black geographies and Black ecologies engagement with the countries of the continent, but also that such engagements would meaningfully challenge existing understandings of blackness, the production of space, and Black anticolonial ecologies. In responding to such challenges, Black geographies and Black ecologies, which have taken form in the Western academy, would narrow the intellectual and empirical distance between North American and North Atlantic Black Studies and Africa and South Atlantic Studies. As Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall have cautioned, “to write the world from Africa or write Africa into the world, or as a fragment thereof, is a compelling and perplexing task” (2004: 348) because to write is the same thing as to form. We believe that this writing or forming of African geographies and ecologies should proceed from African scholars, with Western Black geographies and Black ecologies attentive in dialogue. We envision something akin to the dialogue between James Baldwin and Chinua Achebe to define a Black aesthetic (Tsuruta 1981).

Over the past two decades, African cities' scholarship has centered life in its urban centers to produce new ways of knowing the continent and its cities (Mbembe and Nutall 2004; Pieterse 2011; Simone 2001, 2004a, 2004b). Often plagued by metanarratives of crisis, modernization, and urbanization, African cities scholarship has engaged with theoretical and methodological approaches to defamiliarize these predominant readings and seeks to re-describe (Simone and Pieterse 2017) life within these spaces. This scholarship on African cities aims to map spaces that have been considered uninhabitable by exploring “the oscillations among that which is experienced as habitable or uninhabitable, as a way of extracting untapped potentials from what already exists” (Simone and Pieterse 2017: 61). To defamiliarize the predominant readings of Africa, African cities scholarship identifies new entry and exit points not usually dwelt on in

research or public discourse, works with new archives—or old archives in new ways, and draws on critical pedagogies of writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making; “each of which pairs the subject and the object in novel ways to enliven the relationship between them and to better express life in motion” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 352). We argue that bringing this body of work into conversation with Black geographies and Black ecologies will bring into view thematic, methodological, and analytical overlaps for understanding current ecological realities faced by not only the African diaspora, but also Africa.

Through an assemblage of stories of everyday life in the Mathare area of Nairobi, Kenya, Kimari (2019) details the courses of a simple water instrument made necessary by long-term lack of water in this community. In this article, Kimari brings forth the conceptual metaphor of “ecologies of exclusion” to foreground nature in discussions of urban spatial management. Kimari defines this term as “geographies materialized through the interplay of historical socio-political and economic disenfranchisement that operates in tandem with severe environmental crises” (2019: 2). It is therefore ecological decay produced by an ordering of space managed by political, social, ecological, and economic violence that commingle to reproduce Nairobi. In addition to capturing notions of nature, ecologies of exclusion highlight how the multiple marginalization and violence that condense in spaces of colonial neglect, like Mathare, “become part of the morphology of this terrain, over time enabling and reinforcing phenomena as diverse as lack of water with extrajudicial killings” (Kimari 2019: 2).

At the same time, Kimari highlights that in the wake of colonial planning of neglect and force, residents seek to de-territorialize the normalized spatial practices. Residents of Mathare work through various social infrastructures (Simone 2004b) to contest the re-instantiations of colonial urban governance and its multi-scalar effects. Kimari states that residents’ projects draw on “local histories and ‘fugitive’ subjectivities that are directed towards, and also supplemented by, practical efforts for spatial improvement” (2019: 3). By exploring Black ecologies in Mathare, Kimari demonstrates that coloniality persists—and principally in these ecologies of exclusion—and by examining the stories of everyday life argues that the material and enunciatory struggles of residents against the re-instantiations of empire potentiates fugitive possibilities for Nairobi as a whole.

Conclusion

Calling into question the knowledge of Black life, Black spaces, and Black environmental knowledge that flows from traditional nature–society scholarship which treats race as just another variable, or which wholly elides discussions of the social constructions and politics of race and material outcomes of racializing practices, Black geographies and Black ecologies constitute an insurgent model for ecocriticism. As Black geographies, ecologies, and spatial-ecological knowledges cannot be knowable through a mere addition–compare–contrast approach *vis-à-vis* traditional (white) geographic thought, these aspects of the Black radical tradition cannot be disclosed by use of the same methods that begin with pathologies of blackness, monolithic understandings of Blacks, and aspatial–ahistorical accounts of Black history fixated on plantation scenes of Black denigration, enslavement, and violence. Correspondingly, Black geographies and Black ecologies practitioners show that alternative methodologies are needed to grasp Black spatial matters, which are not only excluded by traditional geographic thought but as a consequence also deemed impossible and inhuman. Black geographies and ecologies scholars have highlighted the intersections of racial ideologies, Black embodiment, gender, class, and space, and the concomitance of Black, Indigenous, and other subaltern peoples’ struggles

against domination and death-dealing political formations. This scholarship necessarily avoids suggesting that there is some definitive “there” of Black geographies and is careful not to present accounts of Black spatial epistemologies and histories as if they were definitive of what it means to be Black. But what this Black ecocriticism shows is that the multiplicity of Black geographies and Black ecologies provide glimpses into the capacious repertoire of Black space-making practices, the innovative and improvisational nature of Black place-based and environmental movements, and the deftness of Black environmental epistemologies.

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