

Migration and Displacement in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead and *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi

Assist. Lect. Muhanad Adnan AbdulRaheem

University of Kirkuk - College of Education for Humanities, Department
of English Language

muhanadadnan@uokirkuk.edu.iq

African American literature is an important site in the reconstruction and remembering of silenced histories and diasporic memory. This research, therefore, undertakes a comparative analysis of these two novels and contributes to diaspora studies and African American literary criticism, showing how there remains an inherent and significant link between historical and contemporary displacement in the global African diaspora.

Keywords: Migration; Displacement; African Diaspora; Generational Trauma; Institutional Racism; Diasporic Memory.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Migration and displacement are major themes in both African and African American historiography, not only as demographic movements but as violent restructurings of kinship, identity, memory, and belonging. In the field of African diaspora historiography, the term diaspora has been used to describe the dispersal of black people across regions and continents, initially through slavery and then through colonialism, labor migration, exile, and contemporary transnational migration (Akyeampong, 2000). The defining historical feature of the black diaspora is that its central phase was forged under coercion rather than choice. The transatlantic slave trade created a massive forced migration that

Abstract

The current research undertakes an analysis of the themes of migration and displacement in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019) and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) from a comparative literary perspective, grounded in diaspora theory. Migration in African and African American historical contexts has often been controlled and regulated through coercive mechanisms like slavery, colonialism, and institutional racism, and these have significant and far-reaching consequences on culture, psyche, and generations. This research undertakes an in-depth qualitative analysis on how these two novels portray and explore themes of physical, cultural, and psychological displacement and how these impact identity, memory, and intergenerational trauma. From the findings, it has become evident that *Homegoing* places displacement in the historical continuum of the transatlantic slave trade, showing how displacement and forced migration fragment diasporic identities. *The Nickel Boys* portrays internal displacement due to institutional racism in America, showing how displacement can be an outcome of slavery's legacy. Despite these historical and contextual differences, these two novels show that there remains an inherent and significant link between displacement, culture, and resistance. This research has shown that contemporary African and

systems, and labor systems continued to result in displacement. Institutional racism persists through the complex interaction of micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors that perpetuate inequality and racial stratification (Phillips, 2011). In the context of literature and culture, the presence of African American people is marked by displacement not only from the land of their ancestors but also from citizenship, security, freedom of movement, and recognition. Such a system of displacement creates the context for the narrative of African American people through the recurring pattern of displacement, confinement, surveillance, and marginalization. These are all extensions of slavery in the context of modern institutions (Phillips, 2011; Sumares, 2025).

Literature plays a crucial role in the narrative of the history of trauma by providing a human figure to the fragmented history of the people. Literature on the diaspora and trauma highlights the role of literature in the articulation of the history of trauma through the articulation of what is not articulated in the official history of the people. Such literature provides a connection between the past and the present through the articulation of the common experiences of suffering (Chamberlain, 2009; van Rens, 2023). Literature plays a crucial role in the context of the history of the people of Africa and African Americans. Literature provides a connection between the past and the present through the articulation of the common experiences of suffering. Literature provides a connection between the past and the present through the articulation of the common experiences of suffering (Larson, 1999; van Rens, 2023). The novels *Homegoing* and *The Nickel*

disconnected people from land, language, ancestry, and social affiliations and left a legacy of historical and cultural dislocation (Akyeampong, 2000; Fortes-Lima & Verdu, 2021). Migration in black history cannot be understood without displacement because migration was organized through domination, captivity, and racial capitalism (Larson, 1999; Phillips, 2011).

The transatlantic slave trade is one of the largest forced migrations in world history, dispersing millions of black people to the Americas over several centuries (Fortes-Lima & Verdu, 2021; Bentley, 2015). The violence of the transatlantic slave trade did not only involve forced migration from Africa to the Americas but also involved a legacy of racial subjugation, family separation, and social ostracism. Scholars in the field of African diaspora historiography argue that displacement must be understood not only in geographical terms but also in psychological and cultural terms because collective memories are constructed through displacement, disconnection, and reconnection (Chamberlain, 2009; Larson, 1999). Diasporic memories are constructed through acts of narration, recovery, and transmission, especially where official records are silent on the history of displaced peoples (Chamberlain, 2009). This is particularly important for black people whose history has been misrepresented or erased from official records or reduced to administrative records of trade, punishment, and property.

Along with slavery, institutional racism emerged as a key mode of displacement in the history of African American people. Even after the end of slavery, the presence of racially divided institutions such as education systems, penal systems, policing systems, welfare

legacy (van Rens, 2023). The book has been praised as a landmark in contemporary global Black literature owing to its scope, its focus on the Black Atlantic, and its power to connect individual stories to broader narratives on colonialism, slavery, migration, and the search for home (Ogoti, 2025).

The two texts, *The Nickel Boys* and *Homegoing*, collectively portray Black displacement through interrelated yet different temporalities. *Homegoing* explores the *longue durée* of Black displacement through its focus on the slave trade and its legacy on the African continent and its diaspora to the Americas, while *The Nickel Boys* explores modern institutional forms through which racial violence displaces Black life in the United States. These texts are important to contemporary debates on Black displacement owing to their power to bridge history and memory, individual experience and structure, to contribute to debates on African diaspora studies, trauma studies, and African American literary critique (Ogoti, 2025; Sumares, 2025; van Rens, 2023).

1.3 Research Problem

The theme of migration and displacement assumes a central role in African and African-American historiography, especially in the context of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racial oppression. Literary works have shown a tendency to portray these experiences not only in terms of migration and displacement but also in terms of psychological dislocation. While there has been a growing interest in diasporic literature in recent times, there still remains a lack of comparative studies on the manner in which contemporary novels portray the theme of migration and

Boys are not merely articulations of the history of slavery and displacement. These are narrative interventions in the articulation of the history of slavery and displacement (Ogoti, 2025; Sumares, 2025).

1.2 About the Selected Texts

Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019) is a historical novel that takes place in Jim Crow Florida and finds inspiration in the true story of the Dozier Reform School, where abuse, torture, and mass graves were eventually uncovered. The story centers on two black boys, Elwood and Turner, whose lives are controlled by a discriminatory juvenile justice system that translates correction into terror. Contemporary research has shown that *The Nickel Boys* is an influential work that explores black culture trauma, memory, and how race violence is embedded in everyday American culture (Sumares, 2025). Therefore, Whitehead's narrative has some significance not only in revisiting an historical atrocity but in showing how institutional racism translates into physical and spatial confinements and psychic fragmentation even after slavery has been abolished (Sumares, 2025).

On the other hand, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) employs a multi-generational and transatlantic framework to explore the different branches of two half-sisters from eighteenth-century Ghana, with one branch remaining in West Africa and the other being forced into the world of Atlantic slavery and its American aftermath. Scholars argue that through its family saga genre, the novel is able to portray trauma over extensive temporalities to demonstrate how slavery and its legacies are transmitted through memory, suggestion, implication, and

historical legacy of migration and diasporic displacement. By analyzing the two books *The Nickel Boys* and *Homegoing* comparatively, the research highlights the continuity of diasporic trauma from the slave trade to the present day. Moreover, it provides an expansive view of the interconnected narratives of the African and African American experiences and thus contributes to the broader analysis of the themes of identity and historical narratives in contemporary literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Migration and Diaspora in Literature

Migration and diaspora discourse has firmly secured its place as a major analytical category in contemporary literary and cultural studies, especially in dealing with texts that are influenced by colonialism, slavery, globalization, and migration. There has been a growing tendency to regard migration narratives as cultural sites where identity and belonging are worked through in literary form. Diaspora discourse is a major interdisciplinary field that emerged in the second half of the last century, with a focus on the culture associated with forced migrations from homelands (Cohen, 2008). In literary discourse on migration, migration is seen not only as a physical movement from one place to another but as a socio-historical process that produces new forms of cultural identity and belonging.

The concept of diaspora has been extensively theorized to explain a population that has been dispersed from a common homeland while at the same time sustaining actual or imagined links to a common past (Cohen, 2008). Although earlier studies have emphasized diaspora as a form of forced migration, such as the Jewish diaspora or the transatlantic slave

displacement from the historical trauma of slavery to contemporary institutional racism. Therefore, the present research seeks to explore the manner in which migration and displacement have been portrayed in novels such as "The Nickel Boys," written by Colson Whitehead in 2019, and "Homegoing," written by Yaa Gyasi in 2016.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do *The Nickel Boys* and *Homegoing* represent migration and displacement within their historical contexts?
2. In what ways do historical systems such as slavery and racial violence produce displacement in the narratives?
3. How do the novels portray psychological and cultural forms of displacement among their characters?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the representation of migration in *The Nickel Boys* and *Homegoing*.
2. To explore different forms of displacement—physical, cultural, and psychological—depicted in the selected texts.
3. To examine how generational trauma and historical memory are portrayed across both novels through a comparative approach.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on diaspora studies and African American literary criticism by exploring the ways in which contemporary literature grapples with the

between inclusion and otherness, where the very idea of home and identity is constantly being negotiated in different social and historical contexts.

One of the main issues in literature criticism revolves around the influence of institutions on the beliefs and practices of individuals. In this case, educational institutions can be viewed as ideological tools that have the potential to influence the consciousness and the dominant ideologies in society. According to Alnaftchi's argument, "brainwashing means controlling the minds... this strategy causes individuals to mindlessly follow a given ideology" (Alnaftchi, 2025, p. 107). This statement, in my opinion, touches on the influence of institutions on individuals' consciousness, which also relates to literature in the context of issues like control and power.

Current research is more likely to associate diasporic memory with imaginative cultural forms such as Afrofuturism, which attempts to reclaim African histories and cultural heritage while imagining a future for Africans. As AbdulRaheem (2024, p. 545) argues, "Afrofuturism is examined as a framework for visionary thinking that reclaims the past and reimagines the future for people of African heritage." This reflects the association between the memory of the ancestors and the future possibilities of cultural empowerment. In addition, literary studies have examined the role of social structures in the construction of identity and belonging in literature. For example, research on the influence of social structures on the construction of identity in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* has been conducted. As Ali argues, "uses clothing and reading not only as symbols of class, but as tools for shaping the matter of identity" (Ali, 2025, p. 125). Literary

trade from Africa, more recent studies have greatly expanded this concept to incorporate a variety of different migrations and cultures (Clifford, 1994). In literary theory, diaspora has been a significant concept for understanding the ways in which narratives express diaspora, fragmentation, and a search for a sense of belonging within a postcolonial world. The most prominent cultural theorists have greatly impacted the conceptualization of diaspora within literary theory. In fact, Stuart Hall (1990) has argued that diasporic identity is a process that is constantly evolving rather than a static form of cultural identity. In other words, identities within a diaspora are created through historical experiences such as slavery, colonization, or migration that produce a common cultural memory as well as differences within a diaspora. In a similar manner, Paul Gilroy (1993) has theorized the concept of diaspora as a form of "black atlantic" identity that refers to a transnational movement of cultures, ideas, and identities that are connected to Africa, Europe, and America.

The idea of "diaspora space" was first conceptualized by Avtar Brah in 1996. This is an influential framework for understanding diaspora as a social and cultural sphere where migrants, natives, and historically embedded power relations intersect. Brah emphasizes the idea that diaspora is not just a sphere for migrants but a broader arena shaped by the complex interplay between race, class, gender, and nationalism. This framework has also been influential in literary studies, where it has helped scholars to examine the representation of complex issues related to belonging, exclusion, and identity formation in the context of migration and diaspora. As Brah emphasizes, diaspora is characterized by the complex boundaries

"*Homegoing*" a part of the diasporic literary tradition of revisiting the historical trauma of slavery and its impact on the identity of diaspora people. According to their analysis of the novel, "*Homegoing*" demonstrates the impact of slavery on the African diaspora in terms of the destruction of African kinship ties and the identity crisis among the diaspora people.

Another part of the studies of "*Homegoing*" focuses on the depiction of generational memory in the novel. It is generally considered a novel of family sagas that depicts the historical consequences of slavery in terms of memory and trauma. According to van Rens (2023), "*Homegoing*" can be considered a "postmemorial family saga," which highlights the historical consequences of slavery in terms of trauma and memory. It can also be considered a novel of trauma studies because it depicts trauma as a historical and structural phenomenon.

Similarly, communicative memory is emphasized in Bernardi (2024) as an approach that facilitates the retention of pieces of family history within the narrative. From this perspective, the enforced separation that slavery caused interferes with heritage, and descendants become alienated from their ancestral heritage, making it difficult for them to rebuild their identities. It is in this context that the novel portrays how slavery's interruption of historical continuity has become an essential feature of diasporic identity, particularly in the quest to reclaim suppressed family histories on continents.

The significance of *Homegoing* in contemporary Black literature has also been emphasized in recent scholarship. From an analytical perspective, *Homegoing* has been credited with

texts on migration and diaspora often reflect the complex experience of displacement both at the social and mental levels. Diasporic texts often deal with issues related to memory, nostalgia, hybridity, and the construction of new identities in the context of historical displacement and diaspora (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). These texts, in a sense, are a form of cultural archive where the history of forced migration, particularly slavery and colonialism, is reflected, and at the same time, its impact on contemporary identity is also examined. Migration and diaspora, in a sense, have emerged as powerful conceptual tools for understanding the representation of historical displacement and identity formation in literary texts.

2.2 Critical Studies on *Homegoing*

Since its publication in 2016, Yaa Gyasi's novel "*Homegoing*" has garnered a lot of scholarly interest in the studies of the African diaspora, postcolonial studies, and trauma studies. It is generally considered a multigenerational novel that explores the historical consequences of slavery and colonialism in Africa and the African diaspora. It has also been considered a novel of historical reconstruction of the African diaspora (van Rens, 2023).

A major part of the studies of "*Homegoing*" focuses on the novel's depiction of the African diaspora and the historical consequences of the transatlantic slave trade. It is generally considered a novel that depicts the experiences of Africans and African-Americans in a broader context of the diaspora and highlights the historical consequences of slavery and colonialism. For example, in their analysis of the novel in the context of diasporic literature and trauma studies, Addei and Annin (2024) have considered

Nickel Boys is that it makes histories that are erased legible.

Similarly, trauma-focused studies emphasize the significance of the novel's exploration of the psychological impact of racial violence. Using the lens of trauma studies, You (2023) argues that the novel explores the interconnectedness of physical and psychological trauma as a result of racist oppression. It also examines the process of healing for the black subjects who were subjected to prolonged institutional trauma. This argument is supported by the more recent studies that locate the logic of the violence at the Nickel Academy in the presence of white supremacy and segregation. Utami et al. (2025) argue that the novel explores the concept of white supremacy as a system of oppression that organizes the lives of the subjects. Saini & Naqvi (2025) locate the novel as an exploration of racialized state violence. The authors argue that the novel explores the concept of abuse, silence, and repression and reveals how the suffering of the black subjects is located in the institutions. Therefore, the overall argument from the studies on the novel is that it is a novel of historical witnessing. The studies on the novel reveal that the author links the concept of institutional racism with trauma. The studies reveal that the author presents the reform school as a microcosm of the larger racial order that shapes the lives of African American subjects (Martín-Salván, 2022; Saini & Naqvi, 2025; Strickland, 2021; You, 2023).

2.4 Research Gap

The existing research has mainly examined *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* from distinct thematic lenses. For *Homegoing*, the existing research has emphasized diaspora, slavery, and memory, while research on *The Nickel*

attaining an esteemed place in global Black literary studies, particularly due to the thematic journey that the novel undertakes from slavery and colonialism, moving on to diaspora and issues of racism. This has sparked scholarly discourse on issues like postcolonial identity, memory, and the legacy of slavery, among others (Ogoti, 2025).

The cumulative impact of existing scholarship on *Homegoing* suggests that it is an interesting literary study on diaspora, slavery, and memory. By linking individual narratives to historical processes, *Homegoing* portrays how slavery continues to affect diasporic identity and memory.

2.3 Critical Studies on *The Nickel Boys*

The existing research on *The Nickel Boys* mainly focuses on *The Nickel Boys* as a work that critiques institutional racism and as a work of historical trauma. One of the most prominent areas of research focuses on Whitehead's work as a work of carceral violence. In this regard, Nickel Academy is seen as a racialized institution that is as much a prison as it is a reform school. Martín-Salván (2022) discusses *The Nickel Boys* as a work of prison fiction that is centered around notions of concealment and revelation. The research is important as it shows how *The Nickel Boys* itself is a work that reveals the hidden ways in which state violence is normalized. Another important area of research focuses on *The Nickel Boys* as a work that is political. In this regard, *The Nickel Boys* is seen as a work that links historical racial atrocity to existing racial atrocity through its use of fiction. Strickland (2021) discusses *The Nickel Boys* as a work that turns the archive of Black trauma into a form of "critical hope." The research is important as it shows that the political nature of *The*

displacement, and colonialism, but also marked by significant differences in history, geography, and time. This framework, in fact, has significant implications in analyzing Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, particularly in how it portrays two distinct family histories that began in eighteenth-century Ghana. Diaspora theory, in fact, has significant implications in analyzing how diasporic culture and identity are portrayed in *Homegoing*, particularly in how diasporic characters in the text negotiate fragmented diasporic culture and identity.

The idea of a “Black Atlantic” developed by Paul Gilroy in 1993 is another advancement in the theory of diaspora. Gilroy’s idea is based on the cultural links created by the movement of enslaved people from Africa to the Americas. According to Gilroy, the history of Africa, Europe, and America is deeply connected with each other, especially in the context of the slave trade and its cultural legacy. This idea is particularly significant in the context of *Homegoing*, as the novel illustrates the historical links created by the slave trade between Africa and America, while at the same time showing the destructive impact of slavery on families and societies. This is particularly evident in the novel’s focus on the descendants of two sisters from different continents and historical periods.

The concept of “diaspora space” developed by Avtar Brah in her work of 1996 is another significant concept that has shaped the study of diaspora, defining it as a social and cultural arena where migrants, non-migrants, and historical power relations converge. Brah argues that diaspora is not just a phenomenon of migration, but a site where race, class, gender, and power converge. In the study of literature, the concept of diaspora space

Boys has focused on institutional racism, violence, and trauma. However, there is limited research that has examined both novels from an integrated perspective.

In particular, there is limited research that has examined migration and displacement in *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* from an integrated perspective, particularly from the lens of slavery, diaspora, and racism. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the existing research gap by undertaking an integrated analysis of how *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* portray physical, cultural, and psychological displacement in distinct historical contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Diaspora Theory

The current study, in turn, applies diaspora theory in an analysis of how *Homegoing* (2016) and *The Nickel Boys* (2019) portray themes related to migration, displacement, and slavery's legacy. Diaspora theory, in fact, has significant implications in African and African American literary studies, particularly in how it provides an analytical framework that can clarify how forced migration, colonialism, and racism impact culture, history, and transnational connections (Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1993). Diaspora, in fact, is not viewed in terms of mere dispersal from an ancestral homeland, but in terms of processes and negotiations related to culture, identity, and history in diasporic communities (Clifford, 1994).

The foundational concept in diaspora theory, in fact, was provided in Stuart Hall's (1990) seminal work, in which he argued that diasporic culture and identity should not be viewed in static and essential ways, but in dynamic and historical ways. Diasporic culture and identity, in fact, are shaped by common diasporic experiences related to slavery,

the context of the global diaspora of African communities due to slavery, *The Nickel Boys* has depicted displacement in the context of contemporary American society due to institutional racism. These two novels have shown that diaspora is not only about geographical displacement but also about the social, cultural, and psychological effects of historical injustices.

4. Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative textual analysis approach to explore the thematic representation of migration and displacement in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) and Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019). Qualitative textual analysis is an important research approach in exploring literature to interpret various thematic elements in a work of literature.

Moreover, this research utilizes a comparative literary approach to analyze these two texts conjointly to identify various thematic similarities and differences in representing migration and displacement in different historical contexts. With this research approach, this research explores how these texts represent various thematic elements related to displacement in different contexts.

This research utilizes various textual elements such as narrative structure, characterization, and thematic elements to analyze how these texts represent migration and displacement. Additionally, this research utilizes various relevant theories to interpret how these texts represent various thematic elements related to displacement in the context of diaspora.

is useful in analyzing the ways in which narratives represent both external and internal forms of migration, which are a result of social inequalities. The concept of diaspora space is relevant in analyzing Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*, where black characters are subjected to internal migration due to racism, such as the juvenile correctional system, in their own country. Although the novel does not represent external migration as is shown in *Homegoing*, it portrays a form of internal migration that is a result of racism, thereby extending the meaning of diaspora beyond migration.

Diaspora scholars have also emphasized the significant association between diaspora, history, and trauma. According to James Clifford, diaspora communities retain connections with their historical narratives through stories, culture, and history, even if they lose touch with their ancestral homeland. Another diaspora theorist, Robin Cohen, has also emphasized that diaspora communities retain collective identities through memories of displacement and symbolically rebuild their lost homelands. These diaspora theories have significant implications for the two novels that have been examined in this study. In *Homegoing*, storytelling has been an essential tool in rebuilding fragmented family histories that were created due to slavery. On the other hand, in *The Nickel Boys*, memory has been an essential tool in dealing with the untold history of racial violence in American institutions.

Through these diaspora theories, diaspora theory provides an all-encompassing framework in analyzing how displacement has been depicted in *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* in two distinct historical contexts. While *Homegoing* has depicted displacement in

formed because of colonialism. The novel also shows how the slave trade was not just the work of the colonizers but also how the slaves were part of the slave trade. There is one part of the novel where the character thinks about how the slave trade continued even after it was abolished. The character says that the abolition of the slave trade will not solve anything because “there’s more at stake here than just slavery... it’s a question of who will own the land, the people, the power” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 92). This shows that the displacement of the slaves was not just because of the violence that was perpetrated against them but was also because of the politics that were put in place to commodify the slaves and move them around the world.

Both novels discuss the issue of displacement in and outside the context of slavery abolition in different ways and at different scales. Whitehead’s novel, based on the historical context of the Florida Industrial School for Boys in the United States, presents a picture of how an American reform institution treats black children in an abusive manner. Right from the beginning, the novel reveals the hidden violence of the institution through the discovery of the archaeologists of the unmarked graves of the boys who died in suspicious conditions. It refers to the fact that there were no white crosses or white names at the site: “no white crosses, no names. Just bones waiting for someone to find them” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 8). This discovery of the bones waiting to be found symbolically refers to the hidden history of the suffering of blacks in America.

The novel also creates a connection between the violence of the institution and the historical context of slavery through the description of how the violence of the reform school at Nickel reproduces the

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Historical Roots of Migration and Displacement

The narrative of migration and displacement that is presented within *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* is a product of two different historical contexts but is related by the common history of racial oppression that has come to inform the experiences of both Africans and African Americans. While *Homegoing* presents a narrative of displacement that is a product of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial expansion within West Africa, *The Nickel Boys* presents a narrative of displacement that is a product of racial oppression within twentieth-century America. A comparative analysis of both texts suggests that a common history of violence has come to inform experiences of forced migration and a disruption of social belonging within both texts.

Within *Homegoing*, Gyasi presents a narrative that suggests that the experiences of diasporic displacement are a product of both the slave trade and colonial expansion within West Africa. The novel vividly describes the experiences of slaves within Cape Coast Castle prior to their forced migration out of Africa. One of the most poignant scenes is when Esi is placed within the women’s dungeon. The novel describes an unbearable environment within which the slaves are confined: “the ground was littered with their waste, the unbearable smell,” and the cries of imprisoned women filled the dark space” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 29). The description of this environment serves to illustrate that displacement begins with confinement.

Furthermore, Gyasi also shows how the slave trade is part of the larger political and economic systems that were

5.2 Generational Trauma and Diasporic Memory

A comparative analysis of *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* shows how these texts portray trauma across generations through memory, narratives, and identity. Gyasi's *Homegoing* portrays generational memory through a family history that spans across Africa and the African diaspora. On the other hand, Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* portrays trauma through collective memory among survivors of institutional trauma. Despite these differences in structure, these texts show how historical trauma shapes identity and consciousness over time.

In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, generational trauma is portrayed through the structure of the book, which is divided into multiple generations from two half-sisters who were separated during the transatlantic slave trade. The book shows how family history is a product of ancestral memories and trauma. This is seen in a passage where a character says, "The joining of a man and a woman was also the joining of two families. Ancestors, whole histories, came with the act, but so did sins and curses" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 20). This shows how identity is portrayed in the book as being shaped not only by individual experiences but also by ancestral history that shapes future generations. This shows how Gyasi portrays trauma through displacement caused by slavery and colonialism that shapes identity across generations.

The text also delves deeper into the concept of diasporic memory and the symbolic passing on of stories and objects. There is an instance where the mother tries to explain the history of her family to her son and how it is essential to confront the past of their ancestors to comprehend the present. She says, "How can I tell you the

historical context of slavery. Whitehead refers to the fact that the reform school inherited the violence of slavery: "brutal heirloom," teaching successive generations "how to keep a slave in line" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 15). At the same time, the novel presents the institution as a site of displacement through the context of the violence of slavery and the contemporary structures of displacement in America.

A comparative analysis of the two novels reveals that the experience of displacement is both geographical and institutional in nature. In *Homegoing*, for example, the experience of forced migration is portrayed in the physical movement of Africans from their home continent and across the Atlantic, thus creating a historical context for the African diaspora. On the other hand, in *The Nickel Boys*, the experience of displacement is internalized in the United States, where racist institutions cause individuals to be displaced from family, community, and opportunities. Despite the different historical and geographical contexts in which the novels are written, both novels show how the experience of displacement is linked to the creation and maintenance of environments where power is exercised, whether in the context of a global system of commerce and trade or in the context of institutionalized racism.

Ultimately, both novels show how migration and displacement are processes rather than singular historical events, and how these processes are influenced by structural violence. Through the two novels, Gyasi and Whitehead show how slavery has a lasting impact on contemporary institutions and social conditions, thus linking the historical context for the African diaspora to the contemporary experience.

racism is not limited to physical confinement. Instead, trauma shapes individual identities and future paths over time.

A comparative analysis, however, shows that both novels depict the role of memory as a means of preserving a history that may otherwise be lost. In *Homegoing*, for example, memory is portrayed as a means of recalling a diasporic history, however fragmented, by dint of family and ancestral ties. In *The Nickel Boys*, on the other hand, memory is depicted as a collective experience among survivors, recalling a history of racial violence in American institutions. Despite the differing narrative styles, however, both novels show that trauma is not limited to a single generation but has a lasting impact on identity, belonging, and history.

Collectively, these novels show the persistent relationship between displacement, memory, and generational identity. Trauma, in both *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys*, is depicted as a legacy inherited by generations, and thus both novels show how literature may be a means of recalling a history lost to slavery and institutional racism.

5.3 Psychological and Cultural Displacement

A comparative analysis of both novels, *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys*, shows that in both stories, migration and displacement are portrayed not just in physical terms, but also in terms of alienation and cultural dislocation. Both novels, through the narrative and the characters, show how slavery and racism, in general, lead to identity crises, disrupt family lines, and result in a lingering feeling of alienation.

In *Homegoing*, for example, the psychological displacement is portrayed in the context of colonialism, where people

story of your scar without first telling you the story of my dreams? And how do I talk about my dreams without talking about my family? Our family?" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 240). This is an example of how one's personal identity becomes embedded in historical memory. This reinforces the main argument that trauma is passed on through the stories that families tell. The physical scar is linked to the history of their ancestors.

On the contrary, *The Nickel Boys* explores the theme of generational trauma through collective memories from survivors of institutional racism. The novel shows how the memories of the boys who were locked inside Nickel Academy stretch far beyond those years. They shape who these boys are today. The former students gather to rebuild memories and validate the reality of their shared experiences. As the book explains, "digging through decades and restoring to human eyes the shards and artifacts of those days... Reassembling those fragments into confirmation of a shared darkness: If it is true for you, it is true for someone else, and you are no longer alone" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 10). This shows how memories become a social process through which survivors validate each other's stories and fight against the historical erasure of institutional racism.

Moreover, Whitehead highlights the effects of trauma on survivors through how the Nickel legacy influences the lives of former students long after being released from the reform school. The story indicates that the reform school has a lasting impact on the future of the boys. For instance, one character says that "didn't stop when you got out... Bend you all kind of ways until you were unfit for straight life" (Whitehead, 2019). The novel shows how trauma from systemic

communities and subject them to systemic abuse. The prologue indicates that the school had been hiding violent deaths within its compound for decades. The narrator states that the bodies remained hidden at an unmarked site where “no white crosses, no names. Just bones waiting for someone to find them” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 9). The imagery represents the erasure of identity and humanity that occurs within the lives of black boys at Nickel Academy.

Furthermore, *The Nickel Boys* novel explores psychological displacement through the life of a protagonist referred to as Elwood Curtis. The protagonist enters a violent reform setting with robust ideals that are a result of the Civil Rights Movement. He believes in equality and justice. However, the violent setting forces him to rebuild his identity within a system that is intended to control and silence him. The later discovery of hidden graves within the compound represents a system that erases identity and history from the lives of its victims. The theme of cultural and historical displacement is thus represented within the novel.

A comparative analysis reveals that the process of displacement is multidimensional in nature, impacting identity, memory, and a sense of belonging in both novels. In *Homegoing*, the transatlantic slave trade has a devastating impact on families and cultures over generations, creating diasporic identities characterized by loss and historical trauma. In *The Nickel Boys*, institutionalized racism similarly creates a process of psychological displacement in the United States, where African Americans are displaced from their culture and denied a sense of belonging in the dominant historical narrative.

from Africa are displaced from their culture and community. Effia, in the novel, is displaced from her culture when she is forced by the British governor, James Collins, to marry him. Although Effia is physically in West Africa, she is culturally displaced in the sense that she is in a castle and has been separated from her culture and community. When she later discovers slaves imprisoned in the castle, she is filled with despair and cries, “But how can you keep them down there crying... Take me home. Take me home right now!” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 17). This scene shows Effia’s alienation from slavery, and from the culture and community she has come to be a part of. Effia is culturally displaced between two worlds, namely, the culture and community from where she came and the culture and community in the castle. She is, in a sense, in a liminal state.

The novel further portrays Effia’s cultural displacement from her village culture and community when she later comes to understand that, after marrying the British governor, she has been culturally displaced from her community. She is quoted in the novel saying, “cast out, not only of the house but of the village entirely” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 19). This quotation, in a sense, captures the idea of diasporic dislocation and displacement in the novel, where people from Africa are displaced from their culture and community.

Likewise, *The Nickel Boys* explores psychological displacement through the experiences of black boys within a punitive reform setting referred to as Nickel Academy. While *The Homegoing* novel explores transatlantic displacement, *The Nickel Boys* novel explores internal displacement within America itself. The novel focuses on racist institutions that remove black youth from their

Moreover, *Homegoing* illustrates resilience through characters who deliberately choose not to internalize the dehumanizing effects of slavery and colonialism. Despite displacement and slavery, characters affirm their sense of identity, defined by family and heritage. Furthermore, the narrative structure of *Homegoing* itself functions as a form of resistance. Gyasi illustrates that, despite centuries of separation, family ties endure. This narrative approach illustrates that survival is not limited to physical endurance but also includes memory and identity.

The Nickel Boys similarly illustrates the concept of resistance through the lens of moral integrity and the power of collective memory. The main character in the novel, Elwood Curtis, represents a form of resistance through the lens of moral integrity and the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. At the beginning of the novel, the main character repeatedly listens to the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., which promote a strong sense of self-worth. Through the character's reflection on the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr., the importance of maintaining a sense of personal dignity is emphasized: "We must believe in our souls that we are somebody... and walk the streets of life every day with this sense of dignity and this sense of somebodyness" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 25). This philosophy represents a core concept through which the main character approaches the concept of resistance against the brutality and injustice he witnesses at the reform school.

Resistance in *The Nickel Boys* is similarly illustrated through the lens of collective memory and the effort to reclaim the histories of the past. A number of decades after the main character leaves

Ultimately, both Gyasi and Whitehead demonstrate the concept of displacement, moving beyond the geographical experience to incorporate the disruption of cultural continuity and identity. Through the experience of characters struggling with identity and a sense of home, both novels highlight the long-term psychological impact of historical oppression and violence.

5.4 Resistance and Survival

A comparative analysis of *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* reveals that, despite the significant violence and displacement in both narratives, characters exhibit diverse forms of resistance that ensure dignity and identity reconstruction. Gyasi and Whitehead, through narrative architecture and characterization, demonstrate that resilience in these narratives is not limited to physical endurance but also incorporates moral opposition, memory, and personal agency.

In *Homegoing*, resistance is realized through the conservation of memory and making deliberate choices not to forget ancestral histories. Throughout the narrative, characters demonstrate resistance against slavery and colonialism, which fragmented and erased ancestral histories. Instead, they choose to remember and pass down ancestral history. This narrative suggests that identity can be reconstructed. A character reflects on the need to comprehend ancestral history while narrating family history: "How can I tell you the story of your scar without first telling you the story of my own?" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 240). This scene illustrates how storytelling can function as a form of resistance. By passing down memory from one generation to another, characters resist historical fragmentation and affirm their sense of identity and continuity with their history.

from their homeland and migrates them across the globe. Gyasi's novel presents a multigenerational history of slavery that shows how slavery creates both migration and cultural fragmentation. This process of displacement through slavery is consistent with Gilroy's (1993) concept of the Black Atlantic, which presents the migration of people, culture, and identity across Africa, Europe, and the Americas as a defining process of the African diaspora. Through the lives of the diasporic people in Ghana and the United States, the novel presents how displacement creates cultural dislocation and simultaneously generates new diasporic identity.

On the other hand, *The Nickel Boys* presents a different historical context of displacement in the United States. While *Homegoing* presents the migration of people from Africa through the slave trade, Whitehead presents a history of displacement within the United States. It presents how institutional racism acts as a process of displacement in the United States. While the novel does not show the process of migration through slavery, it presents how the experiences of the boys at the reform school represent the "afterlife of slavery," in which slavery and racism define African American life after emancipation (Hartman, 2007). The reform school in the novel acts as a modern institution of slavery in which African American youth are displaced from their families and subjected to violence and marginalization.

Despite these differences, however, these two texts seem to converge on the theme of displacement, pointing to considerable similarities between displacement and systemic oppression in the formation of identity conflicts and cultural decay. These portrayals are consistent with Hall's (1990) suggestion

the reform school, the former students assemble to discuss their experiences and collectively piece together the truth about the abuse they suffered at the reform school. Through the collective effort to piece together the truth about the reform school, the former students resist the official histories that attempted to erase their experiences. A comparative analysis of the two novels illustrates the common thread of resistance through the lens of memory. *Homegoing* illustrates the concept of resistance through the lens of the collective effort to piece together the histories of the past. *The Nickel Boys* illustrates the concept of resistance through the lens of moral integrity. Although the two novels are written about different experiences, a slave trade in *Homegoing* and the racism of the American education system in *The Nickel Boys*, both novels illustrate the common thread that survival is dependent on the maintenance of a sense of self in the face of systems designed to erase identity.

6. Discussion

The comparative analysis of both *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* highlights the research question of how migration and displacement are represented in different historical periods and how these experiences shape identity and memory. Both novels show how displacement is not only a physical migration process but also a historical process shaped by slavery and racism. As diaspora scholars have noted, displacement among the African diaspora often results in fragmented identity and trauma that persist beyond the initial migration process (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990).

In *Homegoing*, displacement begins with the process of the transatlantic slave trade, which forcibly displaces people

of diaspora are interconnected through shared histories of slavery, racism, and resistance.

7. Conclusion

This article undertakes a comparative literary critique of the theme of migration/displacement as depicted in Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* (2016) and Colson Whitehead's novel *The Nickel Boys* (2019). The findings of this critique indicate that both novels depict displacement as a historical phenomenon that is a product of slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression. While *Homegoing* depicts the historical roots of diasporic migration as a product of the slave trade, which led to the forced movement of people from Africa to the Americas, thus creating a sense of identity crisis among those who were displaced, *The Nickel Boys* depicts displacement as a product of racial oppression within the United States, which creates a form of inner displacement through coercive institutions like reform schools for young people.

The findings of this critique indicate that despite the fact that both novels are products of different historical periods, both novels depict displacement as a phenomenon that has had profound psychological impacts on individuals. The novels depict that despite their different historical periods, individuals within both novels are confronted by identity crises that are a product of displacement. However, at the same time, both novels depict that despite the fact that individuals are displaced, they have found ways of resisting their oppression through memory and morality.

Additionally, the study points out the importance of literature in the maintenance of diasporic memory. Through the reconstruction of untold histories and the narration of the stories of

that "diasporic identities are always in the process of being constructed from the antecedent experiences of displacement and cultural reconfiguration." The characters in these texts are confronted with reconciling these fragmented pasts to their present identities and, in this regard, illustrate the legacy of slavery and racism on individual and collective memories.

At the same time, these texts portray considerable differences between the African and African American diaspora experiences. *Homegoing*, for instance, highlights the global displacement of Africans through colonial trade routes and networks, pointing to considerable disconnections between Africa and the diaspora. *The Nickel Boys*, on the other hand, focuses on the daily realities of African Americans in the United States and highlights how systemic racism maintains forms of displacement without any geographical movement. As Brah (1996) argues that diaspora must be seen as a 'diaspora space' inhabited by those who are 'counted as outcasts and its history is characterized by 'countless instances of violence to prevent dispersal of those who sought to escape from subordination. The institutional setting in *The Nickel Boys*, Nickel Academy, is a 'diaspora space' where systemic racism produces a form of internal exile within the nation-state itself.

This comparative analysis has shown that migration and displacement are historical and spatial processes that operate on multiple levels in African and African American literature. *Homegoing* highlights the transatlantic formation of the African diaspora, while *The Nickel Boys* illustrates how these historical structures are felt in contemporary American institutions. These texts collectively illustrate how disparate forms

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marginalized people, literature such as *Homegoing* and *The Nickel Boys* helps readers develop a general understanding of the historical and cultural legacies of slavery. These stories are important cultural documents that not only counter the historical attempt to erase the diasporic experience but also allow readers to engage with the ongoing impact of diaspora.

Further studies on the diaspora literature could be conducted to include more literature on the diaspora experience and the common themes of migration, memory, and identity. Such studies would not only contribute to the ongoing debate on diaspora literature and African American literature but would also help readers develop a general understanding of the ongoing impact of diaspora on the global African diaspora.

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