



MANICHEAN BLUEPRINT: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE SPATIAL ARCHITECTURE OF RACIAL POWER IN *THE NICKEL BOYS*

Dr. Muhammad Akram,

Assistant Professor, Department of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan Campus Email: muhammadakramw@gmail.com

Tauseef Ul Mohsin Razi,

MPhil English Literature, NCBA & E Rahim Yar Khan Campus
Email: tauseefulmohsin@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

ABSTRACT

This research paper will provide a postcolonial spatial analysis of The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead by suggesting that the carceral setting of the novel is not a passive setting where racial injustice is practiced but rather a material engine of racial injustice. Based on the theory of the Manichean worldview as developed by Frantz Fanon, according to which the colonial universe is viewed as a world cut in two into opposing spaces of being and non-being, this paper unravels the geography of the Nickel Academy as a literal map of the systemic racial power. Going beyond thematic analyses of trauma or resilience, the analysis shows how racism is built in architecture and performed in space. The article, using a strict qualitative textual analysis, explores how the physical design of the institution, including its segregated dormitories (Cleveland vs. Roosevelt), its administrative fronts, and its punitive White House and its secret burial grounds, is made to become reality in an ideology of complete racial segregation. This is an order of space which is also maintained by a discursive architecture of euphemism and official language which disguises violence. It is found that the racial hierarchy is not only exercised in the institution but is actually constructed into the very structure and symbolic order of the institution, making oppression a naturalized, unavoidable setting. Through the spatial dialectic of Fanon, this reading offers a new way of thinking about the novel by Whitehead, making the reform school a practical monument to the logic of colonialism that has been persisting in the American landscape. Finally, the paper argues that The Nickel Boys uses architectural metaphor and spatial narrative to provide a deep critique of the spatial construction, maintenance, and resistance of racial power. It confirms the importance of literature as a type of social and spatial critique, connecting postcolonial theory and carceral studies, and the critical study of built environments.

KEYWORDS

Spatial Analysis; Carceral Geography; Manichean Worldview; Frantz Fanon; *The Nickel Boys*; Racialized Space; Architectural Power; Postcolonial Critique; Systemic Racism; Necropolitics; Discursive Space; Zone of Non-Being

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Racial hierarchy has long needed to be inscribed materially on the world more than ideology. As a power structure, racism must necessarily geographize its logic making geographies that literally construct the dichotomy between the dominant and oppressed. It is through this spatialization of power that abstract prejudice becomes concrete reality and determines movement, access and even the possibility of life itself. *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead digs up this ugly truth, as the microcosm of a Florida reform school, the author shows how the systemic racial injustice is not just reflected in but actually manufactured into the very landscape of America. A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that was inspired by the gruesome, decades-long history of the real-life Arthur G. Dozier School of Boys, the novel is more than a story of personal bigotry, but rather a carceral architecture that was deliberately created to maintain a racial hierarchy. This paper is based on the critical realization that such institutions as the fictional Nickel Academy are not only passive locations of injustice but are its spatial embodiments-machines that are designed to create and reproduce racial subjugation.



To decipher this spatial language of power, this paper conclusively resorts to the postcolonial paradigm of Frantz Fanon. Fanon in his masterpiece *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) refers to the colonial world as essentially and violently divided, as being divided into a Manichean geography: the zone of the settler, the land of light, order, paved streets, and being, and the zone of the native, the land of darkness, chaos, narrow pathways, and non-being. It is not just a social or economical division but a spatial segregation, with power being upheld by the radical segregation and qualitative, hierarchical difference of space itself. The reform school, with its white staff and Black prisoners, its apparent respectability hiding its ugly backlands, its covert cemetery, is the ideal embodiment of this Fanonian pattern. It is a colonial enclave in the domestic United States, where the abstract logic of racism is made concrete, a world divided in two on US soil. This spatial reading shifts the focus of analysis not only out of the sociology of the institution but also out of its geography, not to think of racism as a set of practices but as a built environment.

Although there is a substantial and useful body of research on *The Nickel Boys*, which fruitfully explores the issues of historical trauma, memory, and the carceral state, it lacks a systematic examination of the spatial architecture of the novel in the exact Manichean perspective of Fanon. The setting, which has been the backdrop of previous studies, has taken a grim but often static backdrop, the “where” of the tragedy, understandably. The gap in this research is urgent: the necessity to study how the physical and discursive spaces of the novel, its buildings, grounds, thresholds, sightlines, and the language that naming and justifying these spaces, are active, agential processes of creating racial subjectivity and the processes of control. The existing sociological and psychological critiques are quite useful in interpreting the symptoms and consequences of oppression in the Academy but they tend to ignore the underlying spatial pathology that organizes the whole system on the ground. One of the main actors is the building itself.

Thus, this study transcends the analysis of the functioning of racism in American institutions to explore how the latter are architecturally manifestations of an ongoing colonial racial regime. It makes *The Nickel Boys* an essential literary cartography, which is not only a critique of social policy or personal morality, but also a critique of the spatial planning and architectural design of oppression. This spatial-literary analysis is a vital interdisciplinary approach in an age of increased global consciousness about the issues of systemic racism, carceral injustice, and the politics of space, whether it is the school-to-prison pipeline or the racialized geography of cities. It provides the means of comprehending the literal construction of power, its sustenance, naturalization, and possible subversion in the context of contemporary America. This article aims to show that systemic racism is, essentially, an architectural and spatial project, by carefully mapping out the blueprint of the Manichean blueprint of the Nickel Academy, and that literature offers a singular platform to conduct its forensic examination.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To analyze the spatial architecture of the Nickel Academy in Colson Whitehead’s *The Nickel Boys* through the lens of Frantz Fanon’s Manichean worldview, demonstrating how the institution’s physical design and geographic organization materialize and enforce systemic racial power.

RESEARCH QUESTION



How does the narrative construction of space and architecture in *The Nickel Boys* function as a blueprint for a Fanonian racial hierarchy, and how does this carceral geography shape the subjectivity and resistance of the incarcerated boys?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This work has a strong scholarly, methodological, and socio-political value as it provides a new and integrative critical approach to the analysis of the intersections of systemic racism, literature, and space.

It fills a unique and significant gap in the developing body of research on *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead. Although the current criticisms are very successful in exploring the theme of trauma, carceral logic, and historical memory, this article is the first to offer sustained, systematic discussion of the spatial and architectural poetics of the novel in the particular theoretical framework of the Manichean worldview of Fanon. It re-positions the critical emphasis on what narratively occurs within the institution to how the very design of the institution performs and requires that violence, and thus reform school is no longer a setting or symbolic stage but the major antagonist, a spatial expression of racial power. It provides a new, materialistically-based reading that enriches our knowledge of the literary technique of Whitehead, his employment of architectural metaphor, and his radicalism. It also establishes the novel as a part of a global postcolonial canon, showing that the ideas of Fanon, which were formulated in the context of Algerian revolution, can be applied to the study of racialized domestic spaces in the modern United States.

The study proves and perfects a powerful methodological synergy: the use of Fanonian postcolonial theory, in particular, its little-known spatial dialectic, to the literary study of the contemporary carceral state. It goes beyond metaphorical or analogical interpretations of the divided world of Fanon to demonstrate how this division is literally fabricated into bricks, mortar, fencing and landscaping. Such a method of spatial-textual analysis offers a repeatable template to be followed by literary scholars and critical theorists to read the institutional power structures in terms of forensic analysis of their narrative blueprints. It proactively brings together literary analysis and critical geography, architectural theory and carceral studies in an interdisciplinary conversation. The approach reveals the ideology of form and how the description of space can never be neutral but is always political.

The work urgently addresses to the modern discussions of racial justice, institutional change, abolition, and the history of colonialism. It makes it difficult to believe in liberal accounts of gradual improvement by showing how racism is architecturally constructed, normalized, and naturalized and makes the deeply ingrained belief that eliminating explicitly prejudiced individuals is all it takes to bring about substantive change. The point is even more forceful: that, in order to be truly just, it might be necessary to literally and figuratively destroy the very spatial and structural logics, the blueprints that reproduce hierarchy and dehumanization. Here, the study is consistent with and offers a theoretical prism to the urgent demands of such movements as Black Lives Matter and the academic initiative of decolonizing the academia. It offers a solid model that directly connects the past colonial exploits to the current injustices in housing, urban development, policing and mass incarceration. Finally, it highlights one of the underlying assumptions, namely: the process of racial justice is a struggle over space, who designs it, who controls it, who is free to move in it, and who determines its meaning and memory.

LITERATURE REVIEW



This review summarizes the critical terrain applicable to a spatial-architectural analysis of *The Nickel Boys*, how the general postcolonial theory has developed to particular novel scholarship, and conclusively where the gap that this study is set to fill: the failure to apply the Manichean geography of Fanon to the construction of the carceral space in the novel.

The spatial turn in humanities and social sciences has had a significant impact on postcolonial studies, predicting the manner in which colonialism is, fundamentally, a process of territorial and psychic domination that is carried out by means of the control, production, and representation of space. Although his work is frequently exploited to extract psychological insights, Frantz Fanon is still fundamental to this spatial comprehension. His visceral definition of the colonial world as “a world cut in two” in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) sets the paradigm of Manichean geography - a hard, hostile spatial division that physically separates the “settler’s town” (a place of being, light, and order) and the sector of the native (a place of non-being, darkness, and chaos). This is not an imaginary but a material fact in which power is practised through the absolute, qualitative difference of space: the zone in which the natives inhabit is not complementary to the zone occupied by the settlers. The two areas are contrasted, yet not in the service of a greater unity. Late theorists such as Achille Mbembe have built on this theoretical perspective by introducing the concept of “necropolitics”, which examines how sovereign power produces so-called death-worlds, spatial enclaves in which people are exposed to the conditions of social and literal death. This theoretical tradition offers the key paradigm to the analysis of such institutions as the reform school as not only socially repressive but also as the spatial manifestation of a power of racialization that defines humanity itself in terms of landscape and architecture.

The model by Fanon should be differentiated with other powerful postcolonial spatial theories. The ideas of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space by Homi K. Bhabha contribute positively to the understanding of fixed identity and pure space, emphasizing on ambivalence, interstitiality, and the subversion of the colonial mimicry. Nevertheless, to examine the total institution of the Nickel Academy, a closed system based on radical segregation, total control, and spectacular violence, the model of a Manichean world provided by Fanon is a more directly applicable and diagnostically acute prism. The Academy does not work on ambiguity but fanatical division; its violence aims at eliminating any third space. In the same way, although Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* brilliantly examines how colonial space is constructed discursively, Fanon is concerned with the lived, bodily experience of being put into the constructed geography. Space is not represented to the boys of Nickel, but is inflicted.

The Whitehead scholarship on the novel is abundant and interdisciplinary, but it is concentrated around a few major and frequently overlapping thematic areas which are yet to be brought to bear on a dedicated Fanonian spatial reading.

Much of the most heartfelt criticism uses the theory of trauma and psychoanalytic models (e.g., Sultan, 2023) to explore the deep psychological destruction of such characters as Elwood Curtis. These works skillfully map the inner traumas of PTSD, broken memory, physical pain, caused by institutional racism. But they often consider the institution itself as a traumatic background or precipitating setting, instead of examining how that particular spatial arrangement of that setting is itself a major source of trauma. The structure of punishment is a poorly studied player in these psychological accounts.

The second, more solid body of work puts the novel in the context of sociology of the carceral state and the literary tradition of the neo-slave narrative. Critics such as Martin-



Salvan (2022) can interpret the Nickel Academy as a carceral topography, directly relating its logic to the historical trajectory of slavery, Jim Crow, and modern-day mass incarceration. Such scholars as Junior (2023) effectively apply the concept of necropolitics by Mbemba to describe the school as a death-world. Others use sociological theories such as the conflict theory by Ralf Dahrendorf (Azizah, 2023) or white supremacy theories (Utami et al., 2025) to simulate the power dynamics of the Academy. These studies are analytically savvy and politically crucial, but they tend to concentrate on social processes, economic exploitation, or legal systems in the space, and pay less enduring attention to the way the architectural structure and spatial grammar of the space predetermine, determine, and naturalize the same processes. The blueprint in itself is hardly the focus of analysis.

Though this body of existing scholarship is rich and rigorous, there remains a definite and significant gap. A long-term, literary-critical study of *The Nickel Boys*, making the systematic use of the Manichean spatial dialectic of Fanon its primary subject, of the narrative construction of space in the novel, has not yet been made. Although the novel is often and justly recognized as a microcosm of American racism, the rich architectural and geographical poetics of this microcosm - its intentional literary engineering as a Fanonian zone of non-being - are under-examined. The existing literature is insightful in citing such important spaces as the White House or the burial ground but has not understood this totality as a coherent and novelistic realization of the Fanonian theory, in which racism is not merely practised or represented but constructed and inhabited as an environmental state.

The current criticisms are powerful but have their own limitations to a complete architectural interpretation. Trauma research throws light on devastating effect but may marginalize the spatial mechanism of cause. Carceral and sociological criticisms recognize the system and history of power, but may fail to recognize the underlying spatial ideology - the Manichean delirium- which is the engine and justification of the system. This paper is meant to fill this gap. It states that a Fanonian spatial reading is not complementary but is rather a necessary part of a complete understanding of the most radical formal and political criticism in the novel. The combination of the insights of carceral studies and the accuracy of the geographical framework developed by Fanon enables this study to show how Whitehead employs narrative not only to narrate a story of injustice, but to carefully map the blueprint of racial power, rendering visible and legible the otherwise normalized and naturalized architecture of oppression. This strategy shifts the interpretative aim of comprehending the institution as a place of injustice to the analysis of it as the material expression of that injustice.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research design used in this study is a qualitative research based on the tradition of literary critical analysis. Its main approach is the spatial-textual analysis which is a specialized form of close reading that views narrative descriptions of place, architecture, landscape and geography not as ornamental background, but as constitutive, signifying components of the text's meaning, ideology and critique. Such a method is strictly determined by one, narrow, theoretical prism: the Manichean worldview of Frantz Fanon as a space and architectural law.

Beyond a thematic analysis of the setting in general, this study conducts a systematic and forensic analysis of the production, description, experience, and contest of space in *The Nickel Boys*. The main data is the literary text itself (Whitehead, 2019). The analysis will be based on three layers that are interrelated:



The close reading of the passages describes the physical layout, materials and aesthetic of the Nickel Academy. This involves the isolating of the dormitories (Cleveland vs. Roosevelt), the role and symbolism of certain buildings (the schoolhouse facade, the White House, the infirmary), the palimpsestic topography of the burial grounds (the garden) concealed. The focus is made on dimensions, visibility, access, and the qualitative variations between spaces allocated to the different racial groups.

Study of the movement of characters and their imprisoned involves official practices (roll call, marches), punitive immobilizations (solitary confinement), and unlawful practices (the secret night school, escape attempts) and the racialized organization of work. This layer looks into the way the blueprint determines choreographies of power and resistance.

Furthermore, the analysis of the language through which the spaces of the Academy are labelled, justified, mystified and obscured includes the study of euphemisms (Ice Cream Factory, reform school, the garden) and official language (speeches of Spencer) and the slang of the boys themselves. This explores the functioning of language as a parallel architectural system, and creates a discursive reality that reproduces and masks the physical one.

This three-fold approach assumes that the narrative construction of space by Whitehead is not an accident but a core element of his attack on systemic racism. This study illustrates the ways in which power is represented, but also architecturally designed and performed by mapping the carceral geography of the novel.

This spatial reading is analytical in the precise sense that it is based on the Manichean worldview articulated by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon imagines the colonial world not as a politically or economically divided world, but as a world that is essentially and violently divided in space:

“The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations... The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. They are both subject to a principle of reciprocal exclusivity.” (Fanon, 1961, p. 38)

This exclusive opposition constitutes a Manichean geography of two extremes that can never be reconciled.

The Zone of Being: The space of the settler, which is orderly, light, clean, spacious, and has complete humanity. It is a sovereign, rational, and subjective space.

The Space of Non-Being: The space of the native, which is chaotic, dark, crowded, filthy, and animal. It is a place of objectification, in which the residents are not fully humanized, but victims of arbitrary, constitutive violence.

This is not figurative but real and existential to Fanon. The need by the colonizer to view the native as the absolute evil, according to him, is “the direct projection of the colonizer’s need to see the native as the absolute evil” (Fanon, 1961, p. 41). Such a psychological projection needs a physical landscape to correspond to its metaphysical assertions. The neatness and order of the town of the settler is evidence of his virtue and civilization; the alleged squalor and disorder of the native quarter become evidence of his natural depravity and savagery. Therefore, the spatial hierarchy actively generates the visible evidence of the racial hierarchy it only alleges to mirror. It is a closed system which is self-justifying and the built environment is its own alibi. The application of this to a reform school, an establishment whose very name assures moral and social rectification, shows a deep, calculated hypocrisy: Nickel is not in the business of rectifying men to a universal morality; it is in the business of strengthening, by the help of bricks, mortar, wire, and terror, the very geographical division



which is the very thing that demonstrates the necessity of rectifying the boys in the first place.

This framework will be used to suggest that the Nickel Academy is an accurate, intentional literary realization of a Fanonian colonial enclave in the American landscape of the 20th century. The analysis will explore how the design of the Academy imposes an inflexible, visible division between the space of the white oppressors (administrative offices, staff quarters) and that of the Black oppressed (the dormitories of the boys, the punishment cells, the fields). This is not merely segregation but rather a qualitative hierarchy of space which literally imprints racial hierarchy on the land.

It will further explore the way the very architecture realizes the Manichean logic. The grand, dignified front of the school building conceals the White House out the back, which is a reflection of the facade of the colonial town of civilisation hiding its system of violence. The concealed cemetery symbolizes the final spatial secret of the zone of non-being in which the socially non-existent are literally erased, which is the logic of erasure.

It will elucidate how the power to move, see, and be enclosed in this partitioned geography becomes the main process of dehumanization and the generation of colonial subjectivity. The spatial logic of the institution determines the life, thoughts and even the very sense of self of the boys and naturalizes their position as the residents of a zone of non-being.

This narrowed theoretical-methodological treatment, spatial-textual analysis in the prism of Fanonian Manichean geography, offers the exact potent instruments to decipher the blueprint of power in the novel. It radically changes the question of “what occurs in the reform school?” to “How does the very structure of the reform school make occur and naturalize the racial injustice that it enforces?”

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION

This discussion uses the Manichean geography of Fanon as a diagnostic device to decipher the space architecture of the Nickel Academy. It states that the physical structure of the institution is not a neutral vessel of racism but rather its active, material machine, which creates a Fanonian zone of non-being that systematically generates dehumanized subjects and organizes all possibilities of resistance. The discussion is organized in such a way that it passes through the macro-level of the plan of the institution to the micro-level of the subject in terms of the internalized space.

The design of the Nickel Academy is a literal narrative blueprint of the compartmentalized colonial world of Fanon. It is geographically imposed in a strict, visible division between the domain of the oppressor and the oppressed, an architecture of absolute division. This is most directly manifested in the very division of living quarters: Cleveland to black boys, Roosevelt to white boys. It is not just a policy, it is an architectural fact that dictates all the spheres of life, sleep, and sociality. The very naming is important--the reference to U.S. presidents--to imply that this racial hierarchy is not an exception, but an American value, literally embedded in the sleeping quarters. The suggested lower state of affairs in Cleveland (more crowding, more neglect) is a material implementation of the qualitative distinction Fanon outlines between zones. The boys do not simply get taught that they are different, but they are taught by the tangible reality of the place where they live, that their side of the line is inferior.

This space logic reproduces itself in an organic way and shows its internalization. The narrator notes, “The racial division of the school recreated itself in the gym, with white boys taking the south half and black boys claiming the north” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 87). This self-policing division, which is automatic and occurs in a theoretically communal space, proves



the metabolism of the Manichean logic; the architecture of division has created a similar geography of the mind. The gym is a microcosm, a “topography of mind” in which the “us versus them” dichotomy is literally acted out and solidified on a daily basis, and does not necessitate overseers immediately. It demonstrates how horrifyingly successful the system is: the colonized start to impose the spatial limits of their own imprisonment.

The final architectural representation of this divided sovereignty is “the white house”. The name itself is a harsh ideological signage, which directly and cynically correlates absolute, punitive power with whiteness and executive power. The quote, “The White House delivered the law and everybody obeyed (Whitehead, 2019, p. 56), is the perfect summary of the Fanonian reality of colonial law: not a social contract, but an edict of violence, which is issued in a racialized space of terror. This space is in a dialectical connection with the rest of the academy. The administrative buildings of the school are clean and ordered and publicly facing, and form the performative zone of being, a stage set of alleged rehabilitation, civility, and benevolent order. The concealed White House and the concealed burial grounds are, in stark, deliberate opposition to the visible, unconcealed zone of non-being, the zone of non-being that is constitutive of the overall dichotomy, the zone of non-being where the constitutive violence of the overall dichotomy is exercised. This architectural hypocrisy, a facade of reform behind which is the facade of torture, resembles the typical colonial town, in which the clean, well-organized sector of the settler is literally supported by the latent savagery of the native quarters.

The last, or terminal, layer of this hierarchy of space is the burial ground, or “the garden”. Not only is it a negative space, but a hidden space, a void in which human bodies are turned into anonymous soil, literally planted out back. This is the necropolitical final stage of the Manichean plan: the zone of non-being is turned into a death-world. It is epistemologically fundamental to the functioning of the Academy that it be hidden; it is the geographical secret that cannot be revealed to the front of the reform to stand. The archeological finding of the grounds in the present-day frame of the novel is thus the final spatial counter-narrative. The land itself is the one that cannot hold the secret, anarchically opposing the official architecture overhead. The exhumation is an apocalyptic breakdown of the spatial arrangement of the Academy its secret centre torn open, offering indisputable, material evidence that the zone of non-being was never, as well, a killing field.

The Manichean worldview is also realized in the racialized system of organization of labor and minute regulation of the movement of the body in the space of the Academy. Work assignments are not chores, but rather spatial practices which strengthen hierarchical identities and ontologies. “The white students handled construction and the reassembly... and the black students did most of the painting” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 95). It is an exact architectural metaphor in the everyday life. White students are occupied with structural and foundational work literally building and rebuilding the environment, whereas the Black students are relegated to surface, finishing, work, and veneering. This spatializes the hierarchy of Fanon, whiteness as agentic, creative, and architectural (mind), and blackness as decorative, subsidiary, and surface-oriented (body). It is a pedagogy of space, which is practised on a daily basis, educating each group of people about their natural location in the racial and physical hierarchy.

It is also controlled by arbitrary, capricious power to re-assign spatial identity, according to epidermal perception. The example of Jaime, who was taken out of the white to the Black dormitory when his skin turned dark in the lime fields due to the sun (Whitehead, 2019, p.



51), illustrates the unstable and visual dictatorship of such a racial-spatial order. The lime fields serve the purpose of racializing, and the decree of Superintendent Spencer is a form of what can be called spatial transubstantiation: a word, he transforms the essence of Jaime and thereby his proper place on the Manichean map. This highlights the fact that the blueprint is dynamic and is being redrawn by the ruling elites to sustain its rigid and fantastical categories against the reality of human life. Their movement is therefore never free since it is a product of their racial designation in the blueprint, whether they are being marched to a worksite, or dragged to the White House, or redesigned through a whimsical interpretation of their body. This epidermalization - the de-identification to skin color imposed by spatial rule - is ruthlessly imposed by discourse. The architectural segregation is reflected in the verbal one, the blunt, pedagogical statement that is smashed into the boys, "You are a colored boy in a white man's world" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 141). It is ideological interpellation that attempts to directly project the external racial-spatial order onto their subjectivity, to educate them to view themselves as always outsiders, whose identity is determined by their subordinated position in a world made by others.

The spatial violence of the Academy is not only intended to discipline the body, but also to colonize the mind, to make the boys internalize its geography. This leads to the Fanonian schizophrenic division or "psychic duality", in which the outer Manichean world generates an inner division. The most devastating account of this internalization in this novel is the path of Elwood Curtis. His early idealism, inspired by the documented addresses of Martin Luther King Jr., is a valiant effort to have faith in a moral world that is not divided into Manichean poles, a world in which justice is blind and hard work is paid off.

But the system of spatial brutality of the Academy systematically destroys this cosmology. His psychic breakdown reaches its peak following a traumatic accidental wound. His thought at the moment of great pathos is, in his immediate, instinctive thought: "He yelped like a dog and then curled on the floor for a few minutes. The bathroom tile cool on his skin. It was his own fault" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 109). With this instinctive self-accusation the final, chilling triumph of the spatial-ideological apparatus is manifested: the victim has internalized the logic of his own punishment. He makes pain and misfortune his natural failing, which is their right, and leaves the system of oppression out of the equation. The physical order has been transformed into a mental order. His next, agonized move was to compose an anonymous report on the corruption at the school—"He didn't put his name down, to kid himself that they wouldn't know the author's identity. They'd know he was the snitch, of course, but they'd be in jail" (Whitehead, 2019, p. 141). He exists in two conflicting psychic spaces simultaneously, between the moral geography of the justice he subscribes to, and the brutal spatial reality of the law of the White House.

Turner, on the other hand, is a practical, cynical interpretation of the blueprint. His survivalism is a kind of professional, though pessimistic, spatial navigation; he interprets the obscure codes and treachery of the geography of the Academy with a realism which Elwood does not possess. His opposition is not an effort to cross over or ethically criticize the Manichean divide but to use its cracks, fissures and blind spots to survival. His final escape and his life long, haunted adoption of the name of Elwood is possibly his greatest spatial action. It is a symbolic act of taking over the identity of a dead friend, of carrying Elwood, a soul killed by the geography, out of the zone of non-being and into a future, however psychologically traumatized and geographically limited. Turner fails to reach the collective, revolutionary liberation that Fanon did but it is a story of painful spatial alienation on an



individual level, which could never be forgotten by him as it was the blueprint he escaped but could never forget in his mind.

In this totalizing space order, resistance should be conceived, following Fanonian vocabulary, as a kind of counter-violence, which aims at re-mapping the self and the land. This is not necessarily a great uprising, it is frequently a non-verbal, spatial repossession. The hidden classroom in the basement where a teacher secretly trains the boys is a gorgeous example. It is the invention of a subterranean, interstitial “zone of being” in the heart of the “zone of non-being”. This is an underground space that is a direct counter-architecture, a psychic refuge in which mind and potential are cultivated against the design of the institution to stultify and brutalize. It is the secret of its power, a spatial conspiracy with the dominant map.

The final anti-violence against the spatial regime of erasure is the frame narrative of the novel: the archaeological excavation. “The discovery of the bodies was an expensive complication... Now they had to start a new inquiry, establish the identities of the deceased and the manner of death” (Whitehead, 2019, p. 8). This is a radical spatial act that is covered by this bureaucratic language. The exhumation is a forced, collective redrawing. It pulls the secret, negative space of the burial ground to the light of the day, compelling the official geography to see what it was constructed to hide. The naming of the so-called “seven remained unnamed” in the course of the forensic procedure (Whitehead, 2019, p.9) is a discursive counter-violence, which reinstates identity to the erased, violently redressing the official account. It is the land and the truth bursting out of the blueprint, and showing that the map is not the territory, and that the territory has its own ugly testament.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that a Fanonian spatial analysis is not only possible but necessary to unveil the deep architectural criticism that Colson Whitehead explores in *The Nickel Boys*. Using the Manichean worldview of Fanon as a spatial and architectural principle, the research has been able to go beyond interpreting the Nickel Academy as a place of injustice and to examine it as the active producer and generator of the injustice through its very form. The novel not only comes out as a narrative of a racist organization, but as a detailed literary mapping of racism as the architecture of the institution.

The main conclusions of this spatial-textual analysis are united by the thesis that the Nickel Academy is a literal, working literary embodiment of the “world cut in two” as suggested by Fanon. Its power is inscribed in many ways in its architecture:

The architecture of the Academy is made to produce a physical and rigid separation between a “zone of being” (the administrative, outward-facing spaces of performative order) and a “zone of non-being” (the punitive, secretive, and deadly spaces of the White House and burial grounds). It is not some chance segregation but the constitutive architectural principle of the institution. It makes racial hierarchy a fact of the environment, material and sensual, and makes it look as natural and inevitable as the walls.

The discussion shows that buildings and landscapes in the novel are active agents of narrative, and they have ideological agency. The White House is not only where beatings are done, it is the royal residence of racial terror, its name is a literal ideological substitute of whiteness with absolute, punitive law. The rational, necropolitical conclusion of this spatial logic is the final, secretive geography, the ultimate, concealed geography, where the individuals who have been pushed to social non-being are literally erased, and the erasure process is closed. The very structure of architecture does the violence of classification and destruction.



The internalization of racism-- the tragic, instinctive, response of Elwood, who concludes that his suffering is his fault -- is revealed to be a direct psychological effect of living in the Manichean blueprint. This geography of oppression, which the boys are constantly and violently forced to negotiate, through segregated dormitories to racialized work placement, educates them on their location within a spatial and social hierarchy. This process disintegrates the sense of coherent self and substitutes it with what Fanon termed a “psychic duality” in which the subject perceives himself as the hostile gaze written on the landscape.

To sum up, this paper has demonstrated that the novel by Whitehead presents a masterpiece of spatial criticism. *The Nickel Boys* makes the readers realize that systemic racism is not merely a collection of policies, prejudices, or economic inequalities but a spatial project. The reform school is a plan, a well-planned and comprehensive space in which racism is put into practice in terms of walls, thresholds, sightlines, and territories. This Fanonian reading is a much-needed corrective and an addition to the current scholarship. It demonstrates that the violence of the Academy is not an exception in its system, a perversion of its ideal mission. Instead it is the system operating as intended, as the architecture of the system serves its purpose of demarcating, containing, and dehumanizing along racial lines.

It is resistance that is ultimately re-framed in this spatial paradigm in the novel. Resistance is not only a complex of actions, but a complex of practices of re-positioning the self within the oppressive space. The attempt of Elwood to use the moral channels of the system itself is a disastrous mis-mapping on the basis of the inadequate cognition of the terrain. The art of navigation and escape by Turner is a triumphant, but deeply mutilated, re-plotting of a route beyond the official map. The archaeological excavation several decades later becomes the land itself, and historical truth, executing the final act of counter-mapping. It violently amends the official account, revealing the secret co-ordinates of death under the lawn. Accordingly, the fundamental conflict of *The Nickel Boys* is uncovered as a cartographic war -- a struggle over who is entitled to draw the authoritative map of reality, to set the space, and to write memory on it.

The lasting usefulness of this analysis is that it has a wide applicability beyond the page. This study sheds light on a stark spectrum between fictional Nickel Academy and carceral institutions in the real world, segregated neighborhoods, exclusionary urban planning and the militarized architecture of borders by offering a rigorous framework of how to read the racial politics of built environments in literature. It confirms, with a new theoretical power, the fact that the struggle of racial justice is the struggle of space, of who plans it, who dominates it, who is free to move in it, and who is entitled to its history and its future. Colson Whitehead, with his careful literary construction, and Frantz Fanon, with his geographical theory of radicalism, both present invaluable, complementary instruments with which to deconstruct, both analytically and practically, the patterns of oppression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the insights that this spatial-literary analysis has produced, it is possible to suggest the following recommendations to scholars, educators, and policymakers:

Spatial theory (including Fanonian geography, critical geography, and architectural theory) should become a formal part of the analytical methodology of scholars of contemporary literature, especially the literature that deals with race, carcerality and social justice. This shifts interpretation out of thematic analysis to the role of narrative form itself, i.e. descriptions of place, architecture, and movement, in constructing ideological meaning and influencing the perception of the reader.



Fanonian spatial lens should be applied in future studies to broader comparative corpus of carceral narratives, neo-slave narratives and postcolonial texts, both in and outside the American context. Comparative studies would be able to follow the transnational logics of architecture of oppression and resistance and how various literary traditions have a way of spatializing power.

The methodology of this article offers an example of a successful interdisciplinary conversation. Critical prison studies, architecture theory, urban geography and environmental psychology are the areas that literary scholars should be involved in. This kind of collaboration can add to textual analysis concrete historical and sociological information about institutional design, and the humanities can add to the interpretive knowledge of the lived experience and symbolic power of space in social science research.

Teachers of *The Nickel Boys*, postcolonial theory, African American literature, or law and society courses ought to include special modules on spatial justice. Pedagogical strategies may involve showing students how to map the geography of the Academy visually, how to interpret the symbolism of the buildings and make direct comparisons to the spatial politics of their respective campuses, communities, and the national terrain of incarceration.

The results highlight the significance of working with the concealed or deleted geographies of violence. The projects to memorialize the sites such as the Dozier School should be supported and funded by policymakers, public historians, and community activists, but they should not be viewed as historical crime scenes only, but also as pedagogical landscapes. These spaces unveil the architectural character of state power and the need to have spectral literacy, the capacity to read the histories of violence in seemingly mundane spaces.

The arguments of abolition of prisons, reform of education, and fair urban planning should also include the explicit architectural and spatial critique. This discussion shows that it might be necessary to literally and figuratively deconstruct and redefine the physical designs of racist institutions. The advocacy must contend that architectural designs that isolate, segregate, surveil, and dehumanize should be opposed and instead, architectural designs that encourage community, transparency, dignity, and free movement should be encouraged. The struggle against injustice should involve a struggle against unjust space.

This study in short suggests a deliberate, critical move towards reading space as text and text as space. The acknowledgment of racism as not just a matter of law but also a matter of environment, which is made evident through literature, can help us more effectively criticize its structures in the past, in current policy, and in the world we actually inhabit. This is the awareness that is critical and the first step to imagining and even demanding more just, humane and liberatory alternatives.

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