

DISPLACEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF *SEGU* AND *I, TITUBA: BLACK WITCH OF SALEM*

Lawal Garba

&

Ezekiel Solomon Akuso

Abstract

This article examines displacement and the politics of space in the construction of diasporic consciousness in Maryse Condé's novels *Segu* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*. Situating the analysis within postcolonial spatial theory and diaspora studies, the study interrogates how geographic rupture, forced migration, and ideological re-territorialization shape fragmented, yet resistant subjectivities across African and transatlantic contexts. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theorization of the production of space, Homi Bhabha's notion of the "unhomely," and Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic paradigm, the article argues that Condé reconfigures space not merely as physical geography but as a contested ideological terrain where power, race, religion, and gender intersect. In (*Segu*), spatial disruption emerges through the collapse of precolonial African sociocultural structures under the pressures of Islamization, slavery, and European imperial expansion, producing diasporic consciousness as historical awakening and existential dislocation. Conversely, (*I, Tituba*), dramatizes the racialized and gendered politics of space in colonial America, where forced migration and carceral environments transform the body into a surveilled and marginal site of resistance. Across both texts, displacement becomes both a condition of trauma and a generative space for reimagining identity beyond fixed national and cultural boundaries. The article contends that Condé's narrative strategies reclaim silenced histories by mapping transnational trajectories that connect Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas, thereby

constructing a multidimensional diasporic consciousness grounded in memory, resistance, and spatial negotiation. Ultimately, this study contributes to postcolonial literary discourse by foregrounding the centrality of spatial politics in understanding Black diasporic identity formation.

Keywords: Displacement; Politics of Space; Diaspora; Spatiality; Transnational Identity

Introduction

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed what many scholars describe as the “spatial turn” in the humanities, a critical reorientation that foregrounds space as a dynamic category of analysis rather than a passive backdrop to historical events. Thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Edward Soja demonstrate that space is socially produced, politically regulated, and ideologically charged. Lefebvre’s influential assertion that space is “produced” through relations of power unsettles traditional notions of geography as fixed or neutral and opens new possibilities for literary and cultural interpretation (Lefebvre 26). Within postcolonial studies, this reconceptualization of space has proven especially significant because colonialism itself functioned fundamentally through spatial practices such as territorial conquest, cartographic inscription, plantation economies, forced migration, and carceral confinement.

Diaspora, both as a historical phenomenon and a theoretical framework, is deeply implicated in these spatial processes. The African diaspora cannot be separated from the violent geographies of the transatlantic slave trade, imperial expansion, and plantation slavery. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy reconceptualizes modern Black identity as transnational and intercultural, shaped through movement across the Atlantic rather than rooted in a singular homeland. By privileging “routes” over “roots,” Gilroy challenges ethnocentric nationalism and foregrounds mobility as constitutive of diasporic consciousness (Gilroy 4). Yet this mobility is neither voluntary nor innocent; it is structured by coercion, displacement, racial violence, and capitalist exploitation.

Consequently, the slave ship emerges as a defining chronotope of modernity, functioning simultaneously as a site of terror and a crucible for new cultural formations.

The question of space has therefore become central to contemporary postcolonial literary studies, particularly in analyses of migration, displacement, and identity formation. Space is no longer understood merely as geographical location but increasingly theorized as a socially constructed and ideologically contested terrain shaped by memory, power, and resistance. Within this framework, displacement signifies more than physical relocation; it constitutes a rupture in lived spatial experience that destabilizes belonging while simultaneously generating new forms of consciousness. For diasporic subjects, space becomes both a site of alienation and a medium through which identity is continually negotiated and reconstructed.

This dialectic between rupture and reconstruction lies at the core of the historical imagination of Maryse Condé. In *Segu and I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, Condé traverses Africa, the Caribbean, and colonial America to map the violent spatial histories of the Black diaspora. Her fiction foregrounds enslavement, forced migration, exile, and religious transformation not merely as historical events but as spatial dislocations that unsettle ontological security and communal belonging. By dramatizing how imperial expansion, Islamization, slavery, and Puritan colonialism reorganize both physical and symbolic landscapes, Condé situates diasporic identity within a politics of space where race, gender, religion, and power intersect and contend.

Recent diaspora scholarship increasingly emphasizes the spatial dimensions of diasporic consciousness. Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* paradigm destabilizes nationalist historiographies by tracing networks of cultural and political exchange that connect Africa, Europe, and the Americas. However, while his model privileges mobility and circulation, it also implicitly foregrounds the spatial violence underlying such movement: the slave ship, the plantation, the colonial settlement, and the prison. These are not incidental settings but structured

environments that discipline bodies, regulate subjectivities, and enforce imperial power.

Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" illuminates the psychological dimension of displacement, wherein the boundary between home and world collapses under colonial pressure (9). The unhomely condition signifies more than exile; it reflects a profound estrangement in which familiar spaces become destabilized, and identity itself is fractured by imperial intrusion. In Condé's fiction, this condition manifests in the gradual disintegration of precolonial African sociocultural structures in *Segu* and in the racialized surveillance imposed upon Tituba's body in colonial New England. In both narratives, space functions as a medium through which domination is enacted and contested.

This study argues that displacement in *Segu* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* operates as a foundational mechanism in the construction of diasporic consciousness. Rather than presenting diaspora solely as geographical dispersion, Condé represents it as a continuous spatial negotiation involving the struggle to inhabit, reinterpret, and resist imposed geographies. In *Segu*, the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade, the spread of Islam, and European imperial ambitions fracture indigenous spatial coherence, producing a historical awakening that is simultaneously traumatic and transformative. Characters experience exile both within and beyond their homeland as communal structures and sacred landscapes undergo profound disruption. Diasporic consciousness consequently emerges from an awareness of historical contingency and spatial instability.

Conversely, *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* dramatizes the Atlantic crossing and the Salem witch trials as intensely racialized and gendered spatial regimes. The Middle Passage compresses Black bodies into conditions of carceral confinement, transforming the ocean into a corridor of terror and dispossession. In Puritan New England, domestic and judicial spaces operate as mechanisms of surveillance, exclusion, and ideological control, rendering Tituba's Black female body both marginalized and criminalized. Yet within these oppressive spatial

formations, Condé inscribes acts of memory, spirituality, and resistance that challenge colonial spatial order. Displacement therefore emerges not only as a condition of subjugation but also as a generative site for the reimagining of identity beyond fixed territorial, cultural, and national boundaries.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesizes spatial theory and diaspora studies to examine the relationship between displacement and diasporic consciousness in *Segu* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé. The framework draws principally on the theories of Henri Lefebvre, Homi K. Bhabha, and Paul Gilroy, whose interventions collectively illuminate the material, psychological, and transnational dimensions of spatial politics in postcolonial literature. Through this synthesis, the study conceptualizes displacement not merely as geographical relocation but as a complex spatial condition produced through colonialism, racial ideology, religious transformation, and transatlantic circulation.

Lefebvre and the Production of Space

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre challenges the conventional assumption that space functions as a neutral backdrop against which history unfolds. Rather, he argues that space is socially produced and politically structured through relations of power, ideology, and economic organization (Lefebvre 26). For Lefebvre, space is simultaneously the product and instrument of domination because those who control spatial organization also regulate social relations and lived experience.

Central to Lefebvre's theory is the spatial triad comprising spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practice refers to the material and everyday routines that structure social life; representations of space designate the conceptualized and institutionalized dimensions of spatial order; while representational spaces concern the symbolic and affective experiences

of individuals within those environments. This triadic formulation provides a productive framework for analysing Condé's fiction because displacement in her novels destabilizes each dimension of spatial existence.

In *Segu*, the spatial practices of communal life, trade, kinship, and religious ritual are disrupted by Islamization, warfare, and the expansion of Atlantic slavery. These transformations alter representations of space by reorganizing political authority, sacred geography, and economic systems. Consequently, the lived experiences of characters become fragmented, producing existential uncertainty and historical dislocation. Space in the novel therefore emerges as an arena of ideological struggle where competing systems of belief and power reshape social reality.

Similarly, in *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, Lefebvre's framework illuminates how colonial and Puritan spaces are deliberately organized to regulate racialized bodies. Domestic interiors, plantations, prisons, and courtrooms function as disciplinary structures through which authority is spatially enforced. Tituba's experience within these spaces exposes the coercive logic underlying colonial spatial organization. Displacement, therefore, extends beyond physical relocation; it signifies insertion into systems of surveillance, exclusion, and ideological control.

Bhabha and the "Unhomely" Condition

While Lefebvre foregrounds the material production of space, *The Location of Culture* shifts attention to the psychological and cultural dimensions of spatial displacement. Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" describes the unsettling condition in which the boundaries between home and world collapse under colonial pressure (Bhabha 9). The unhomely does not simply denote homelessness; rather, it signifies estrangement within familiar environments, where domestic space becomes permeated by anxiety, surveillance, and ideological intrusion. This concept is particularly useful for understanding diasporic consciousness in Condé's fiction. Colonialism destabilizes familiar

coordinates of belonging and transforms home into a contested site. Consequently, displacement becomes interiorized, producing forms of psychic exile that persist even without physical migration.

In *Segu*, the unhomely manifests through the gradual erosion of sociocultural cohesion within the Bambara kingdom. Religious transformation, political instability, and economic restructuring render indigenous spaces increasingly unfamiliar. Characters experience alienation within their own homeland as external ideologies fracture communal continuity and destabilize traditional systems of meaning.

In *I, Tituba*, the unhomely acquires explicitly racialized and gendered dimensions. Tituba inhabits domestic and institutional spaces structured to exclude and criminalize her presence. Puritan households and courtrooms, ostensibly organized around moral order, become sites of suspicion and persecution. Tituba's declaration, "I was the other," encapsulates the spatial logic of colonial exclusion in which racial difference is socially constructed and ideologically policed. Bhabha's framework therefore clarifies how colonial power penetrates intimate spaces, transforming home into a locus of fear, estrangement, and psychic fragmentation.

Tituba's experience within Puritan society reflects what Bhabha conceptualizes as the "unhomely" condition. Describing her exclusion:

It was as if I wasn't there, standing on the threshold of the room. They spoke about me, but at the same time, they ignored me. They erased me from the map of human beings. I was a non-being. An invisible... (*I, Tituba* 44).

The metaphor of cartographic erasure reinforces the spatial logic of colonial racism, whereby Black subjects are denied social visibility and human recognition. Colonial space thus functions not only materially but psychologically, producing forms of existential displacement and alienation.

Gilroy and the Black Atlantic Paradigm

If Lefebvre theorizes the production of space and Bhabha explains psychic estrangement, The Black Atlantic situates these dynamics within a transnational Atlantic framework. Gilroy reconceptualizes modern Black identity as constituted through movement, circulation, and intercultural exchange rather than fixed national origins. By privileging “routes” over “roots,” he argues that diasporic consciousness emerges through transoceanic mobility, historical trauma, and cultural hybridity (Gilroy 4).

The Black Atlantic paradigm destabilizes nationalist historiography by conceptualizing Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas as interconnected nodes within a shared historical network. Within this framework, the slave ship becomes a central symbol of modernity: a mobile space embodying both violence and cultural transformation.

Read through Gilroy’s lens, *Segu* and *I, Tituba* reveal diaspora as an ongoing transatlantic process rather than a singular historical rupture. In *Segu*, diaspora begins before the Atlantic crossing itself. Internal conflict, religious realignment, and economic disruption destabilize indigenous African structures and produce forms of spatial dislocation that prefigure later dispersal. The fragmentation of the Traoré family described metaphorically as being “scattered like seeds in the wind,” symbolizes the emergence of diasporic rupture even prior to physical migration.

In *I, Tituba*, the Atlantic crossing extends this trajectory into colonial America, where racialized systems of domination crystallize into institutionalized exclusion. The novel links Africa, the Caribbean, and North America within a continuous imperial geography shaped by slavery and colonialism. Gilroy’s framework also illuminates the multidirectional character of diasporic identity in Condé’s fiction. Africa is not represented as a static origin, nor the Americas as a destination; instead, identity emerges through ongoing circulation, negotiation, memory, and resistance across spatial boundaries.

The violence underpinning Black Atlantic modernity is evident from Tituba's very origins. Reflecting on her birth, Tituba recounts:

Abena, my mother, was raped by an English sailor on the deck of the _Christ the King_, one day in 16**, as the ship was sailing to Barbados. It is from this assault that I was born. From this act of hatred and contempt, (*I, Tituba* p. 3).

The slave ship here becomes not merely a vehicle of transportation but a spatial site where racial violence, imperial power, and diasporic identity converge. Tituba's existence is thus literally produced through the violent structures of the Atlantic world.

Spatial Politics and Diasporic Formation

Taken together, the theories of Lefebvre, Bhabha, and Gilroy provide a comprehensive analytical matrix for examining spatial politics in Condé's fiction. Lefebvre demonstrates how space is produced through power relations; Bhabha reveals how such structures generate psychic estrangement; and Gilroy situates these processes within the transnational history of the Atlantic world.

This synthesis enables the central argument of the present study: that displacement in *Segu* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* functions not merely as geographical movement but as insertion into contested spatial regimes that generate diasporic consciousness. In these novels, space is simultaneously material, symbolic, psychological, and transnational. It is shaped through religion, slavery, imperialism, patriarchy, and racial ideology, yet it is also reimagined through memory, storytelling, spirituality, and resistance.

By integrating spatial theory with Black Atlantic studies, this research moves beyond reductive interpretations of diaspora as either rootless fragmentation or celebratory hybridity. Instead, it conceptualizes diasporic identity as emerging from continuous negotiation with historically contingent and politically charged spatial structures.

Historical and Cultural Contexts of Displacement

To fully understand how Condé constructs diasporic consciousness, it is essential to situate *Segu* and *I, Tituba* within their broader historical and cultural contexts. In both novels, displacement reflects the intersection of political, religious, economic, and imperial forces that reorganize space and destabilize identity.

Precolonial West Africa and Spatial Rupture

Set during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *Segu* dramatizes the sociopolitical upheavals affecting the Bambara kingdom in present-day Mali. Precolonial West African societies were characterized by intricate political structures, spiritual cosmologies, and regional trade networks (Keita 42). However, the spread of Islam, internal warfare, and the intensification of the Atlantic slave trade disrupted these systems and transformed indigenous spatial organization.

Condé demonstrates that displacement originates not only through transatlantic migration but also through internal political and ideological transformations within Africa itself. Characters navigate communities destabilized by conquest, slavery, and religious conversion, experiencing their homeland as increasingly fragmented and contested. Consequently, diasporic consciousness emerges from spatial rupture within Africa prior to Atlantic dispersal.

Colonial America and Carceral Space

If *Segu* maps the fragmentation of African space, *I, Tituba* relocates diasporic consciousness to the racialized landscapes of colonial New England. The novel exposes how Puritan society organizes space through discipline, surveillance, and exclusion. Salem functions as a coercive spatial order in which domestic interiors, courtrooms, and prisons materialize ideological authority.

Tituba's displacement from Barbados to Massachusetts is simultaneously geographical, corporeal, and epistemological. Her Black female body becomes inscribed with colonial anxieties surrounding

race, religion, and gender. The Salem witch trials reveal how colonial societies construct internal “others” in order to stabilize communal identity.

The prison becomes especially significant as a carceral space that literalizes displacement. Through imprisonment, Tituba is transformed into an object of surveillance and confession. Yet Condé complicates this process by granting her narrative voice, thereby reclaiming subjectivity within structures designed to silence her. Narrative itself becomes a form of spatial resistance.

Transatlantic Circulation and Black Atlantic Consciousness

Beyond their distinct regional settings, *Segu* and *I, Tituba* are connected through a broader transatlantic framework. The Atlantic Ocean functions not merely as a geographic boundary but as a connective medium linking Africa, the Caribbean, and North America within a shared history of slavery, imperialism, and cultural exchange. In Condé’s fiction, ships transporting enslaved Africans, merchants, missionaries, and settlers establish networks of circulation that generate what Gilroy describes as a counterculture of modernity. The Atlantic becomes simultaneously a site of trauma and a space of cultural formation.

While the Atlantic crossing produces profound displacement, it also generates relational awareness among dispersed Black subjects. Through memory, spirituality, storytelling, and ancestral invocation, Condé constructs what may be termed an affective Atlantic sustained by shared histories of suffering and resistance. Diasporic consciousness thus emerges through movement, circulation, and historical interconnectedness rather than territorial rootedness alone.

Memory, Narrative Space, and Historical Reclamation

Memory and narrative function as crucial counter-spaces through which diasporic subjects reclaim agency within oppressive spatial regimes. In both novels, storytelling reconstructs fragmented histories and symbolically restores displaced identities.

In *Segu*, communal memory preserves traces of precolonial identity despite political and religious disruption. However, Condé avoids romanticizing Africa; memory becomes not nostalgic idealization but critical engagement with a complex historical past.

In *I, Tituba*, narrative space assumes an explicitly revisionary function. Historically marginalized within official archives, Tituba is granted narrative authority through first-person narration. By restoring her voice, Condé constructs a counter-archive that challenges dominant historiography surrounding the Salem witch trials. Narrative therefore becomes an act of historical reclamation and resistance.

Condé complicates the notion of return by presenting homeland as both wounded and emotionally sustaining. Reflecting on return, Tituba declares:

I come to the land I lost. I return to the deserted ugliness of its wounds. I recognize it by its smell. The smell of sweat, suffering, and labor. But paradoxically, a strong, warm smell that comforts me. (*I Tituba* p. 107).

The passage illustrates the ambivalent character of diasporic memory in which suffering, labor, and emotional attachment coexist. Homeland is therefore reconstructed not as an untouched origin but as an affective and historically scarred space.

Resistance, Hybridity, and Reimagined Belonging

Ultimately, Condé's fiction demonstrates that displacement generates not only trauma but also resistance and cultural transformation. Characters negotiate multiple belief systems, identities, and cultural worlds, producing hybrid forms of consciousness that challenge rigid spatial and ideological boundaries.

In *Segu*, resistance often appears through subtle negotiations between indigenous traditions and external influences. In *I, Tituba*, resistance emerges more explicitly through spirituality, memory, and narrative agency. Tituba's refusal to internalize Puritan ideology

represents a form of epistemological defiance that challenges colonial authority.

Condé therefore reimagines belonging as relational rather than territorial. Homeland is no longer fixed exclusively to geography but sustained through memory, ritual, storytelling, and communal bonds. Diasporic consciousness becomes a dynamic and adaptive mode of being shaped through rupture, negotiation, and historical survival. Through this theoretical and historical framework, the study demonstrates that displacement in Condé's fiction operates as both a condition of domination and a catalyst for the reconfiguration of identity, memory, and resistance across the Black Atlantic world.

Despite moments of emotional attachment, Tituba remains conscious of the irreducible racial and cultural boundaries separating her from Puritan society. She acknowledges "We did not belong to the same world, Mistress Parris, Betsey and I, and all the affection I felt for them could not change that fact. (*I, Tituba* p. 102)"

This recognition underscores the impossibility of full belonging within colonial structures that define Blackness as perpetual otherness. Diasporic consciousness therefore emerges through the painful awareness of social and spatial exclusion.

Conclusion

This study has examined how displacement and the politics of space function as central mechanisms in the construction of diasporic consciousness in *Segu* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé. Through an interdisciplinary framework grounded in postcolonial spatial theory, diaspora studies, and Black Atlantic criticism, the analysis has demonstrated that diasporic identity in Condé's fiction emerges through complex negotiations with histories of spatial rupture, colonial violence, memory, and transnational mobility.

The study first established that space in Condé's narratives is neither neutral nor passive but ideologically produced and politically regulated. Whether situated in precolonial West Africa, the Caribbean,

or Puritan New England, spatial environments are structured by religion, empire, racial hierarchy, and patriarchal authority. Drawing on the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, the analysis demonstrated how space functions simultaneously as an instrument of domination and a terrain of contestation. Colonial and religious institutions reorganize physical and symbolic landscapes in ways that profoundly shape identity formation and lived experience.

The study further revealed that the body constitutes a crucial site where displacement, power, and resistance converge. In *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* particularly, the Black female body is subjected to racialized surveillance, ideological control, and spatial exclusion. Yet Condé also foregrounds corporeality as a medium of memory, spirituality, and resistance. Through Tituba's voice and embodied experience, the novel exposes the intersectional dimensions of diasporic oppression while simultaneously affirming the agency of marginalized subjects within coercive structures.

Additionally, the analysis highlighted the significance of memory and narrative space in the reconstruction of diasporic identity. Across both novels, storytelling, ancestral invocation, and historical remembrance function as counter-spatial practices through which fragmented histories are reclaimed and reinterpreted. Condé transforms narrative into a site of resistance that challenges colonial historiography and restores visibility to marginalized Black experiences traditionally excluded from dominant historical archives. Literature therefore becomes a medium through which historical rupture is negotiated and alternative modes of belonging are imagined.

The comparative dimension of the study also underscores the gendered and relational character of diasporic consciousness. While mobility in *Segu* frequently reflects political and historical transformations within African societies, *I, Tituba* foregrounds the embodied and gendered experiences of racial displacement under colonial modernity. Across both texts, diasporic identity emerges through relational networks of community, spirituality, collective

memory, and transnational connection rather than through fixed territorial belonging.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that Condé situates diasporic consciousness within a broader Black Atlantic framework. Displacement is represented not as an isolated or localized phenomenon but as part of a transnational system linking Africa, the Caribbean, and North America through slavery, imperialism, migration, and cultural exchange. Drawing on Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, the analysis reveals how Condé reimagines identity as relational, mobile, and historically interconnected across diverse yet entangled geographies.

Beyond its thematic concerns, Condé's fiction performs an important historiographical intervention by centering voices historically marginalized within colonial discourse. Her novels challenge Eurocentric narratives by reconstructing suppressed histories of slavery, exile, gendered oppression, and cultural fragmentation from the perspective of Black diasporic subjects. Through this literary reconfiguration, Condé transforms fiction into a counter-historical space where silenced experiences are reclaimed and reinterpreted.

Ultimately, this study affirms that diasporic consciousness in Condé's fiction is simultaneously spatial, embodied, historical, and transnational. Displacement functions not merely as physical movement but as a continuous negotiation with systems of power that shape identity, memory, and belonging. Yet within these fractured spatial regimes, Condé also locates possibilities for resistance, self-fashioning, and cultural reimagination. Her novels therefore reveal diaspora not as a condition of rootlessness alone, but as a dynamic process of survival, relational identity, and historical transformation. In this sense, the study contributes to postcolonial literary scholarship by emphasizing the centrality of spatial politics, intersectional subjectivity, and transatlantic relationality in the formation of Black diasporic identity. It further demonstrates how literature serves as a critical site for recovering suppressed histories and reimagining alternative cartographies of Black existence across the Atlantic world.

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