



Corporeal and Spatial Engagements in Emma Donoghue's *Room*¹ Emma Donoghue'nün *Oda* Adlı Eserinde Bedensel ve Mekansal Bağlantılar

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Abstract

Garnered critical acclaim after its publication in 2010, Emma Donoghue's renowned novel *Room* delves into the lives of a woman and her son who are held captive in a confined space for several years. The room where they are imprisoned functions as a coded space in which Ma and Jack are subjected to the disciplinary power of Old Nick. The restrictive space that offers no opportunities and living there according to Old Nick's oppressive regulations lay the basis for analysing the characters' experiences in the work using Foucault's viewpoints. In this respect, the exercise of Foucauldian strategies by Old Nick causes them to lose their autonomy and to damage their self. The restrictive heterotopia and the disciplinary gaze turn them into docile bodies that become mere platforms to be dominated. Even after their breaking free, the traces of the spatial limitation follow them psychologically because transitioning to different spaces further challenges their sense of identity and self-integrity. Jack struggles to adapt to the outside world, which showcases the antinomy of the private and public. In this respect, the room leaves a lasting impact on their bodies, stigmatizing them and becoming a source of trauma that needs to be addressed for their new life. The interplay between the spatial codes of the room and their bodies is complex, with each representing and transforming the other. Therefore, this study examines the complex dynamics between physical and spatial interactions that lead to traumatic consequences through the lens of Foucault's thoughts, by revealing and examining the dimensions of the challenging conditions that trauma victims experience in order to step into the healing process.

Keywords: Docile body, space, public space, private space, Emma Donoghue, Room.

Öz

2010 yılında yayımlanan Emma Donoghue'nün ünlü romanı *Oda*, bir kadın ve oğlunun birkaç yıl boyunca kısıtlı bir mekanda esaret altında yaşadıkları hayatı konu alır. Eserde hapsedildikleri oda, Ma ve Jack'in Old Nick'in disiplin gücüne maruz kaldığı şifreli bir alan işlevi görür. Hiçbir fırsat sunmayan kısıtlayıcı alan ve o alanda Old Nick'in baskıcı düzenlemelerine göre yaşamak eserde verilen karakterlerin deneyimlerini Foucault'nun bakış açısından analiz etmeyi mümkün kılar. Bu bağlamda, Foucault'un stratejilerinin uygulanması, karakterlerin özerkliklerini yitirmesine ve benliklerinin zarar görmesine yol açar. Kısıtlayıcı heterotopya ve disiplin edici bakış, onları hakimiyet altına alarak uysal bedenlere dönüştürür. Özgür kaldıktan sonra bile mekansal sınırlamanın izleri psikolojik olarak onları takip eder, çünkü farklı mekanlara geçiş, kimlik algılarını ve öz bütünlüklerini daha da zorlar. Jack'in dış dünyaya uyum sorunu yaşaması özel ve kamusal alan karşıtlığını ortaya koyar. Bu açıdan oda bedenlerine kalıcı bir etki bırakır ve onları

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damgalayarak yeni hayatlarında ele alınması gereken bir travma kaynağı haline getirir. Bu noktada odanın mekansal kodları ile bedenleri arasındaki etkileşim karmaşıktır, çünkü her biri diğerini temsil eder ve dönüştürür. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma travma mağduru bireylerin iyileşme sürecine adım açmak için yaşadıkları zorlayıcı şartların boyutlarını ortaya koyarak ve irdeleyerek travmatik sonuçlara yol açan bedensel ve mekansal etkileşimler arasındaki karmaşık dinamikleri Foucault'nun düşünceleri merceğinden incelemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Uysal beden, mekan, kamusal alan, özel alan, Emma Donoghue, Oda.

Introduction

Emma Donoghue is a prolific writer producing novels, plays, and short stories. Considering her recent novels, Abigail Palko states that they are thematically similar which connects them tightly to the overall body of works as they deal with “vulnerable women and girls and a commitment to depicting their efforts to fix their lives” (2020, p. 516). Being one of them, *Room* is regarded as artistically successful among her body of works because it “rests primarily on Donoghue’s decision to have five-year-old Jack narrate the novel” (Palko, 2020, p. 516). The issue of vulnerability, as conveyed by a child narrator, situate *Room* as popular in the academic interest as well. Being published in 2010, the novel captures a narrative inspired by the Fritzl case², gaining both critical acclaim and a spot on the Booker Prize shortlist. The story centres on an anonymous woman and her son, held captive for long years in a tightly sheltered place. Throughout their captivity, the unnamed mother, referred to as Ma, endures both physical and psychological abuse, ultimately giving birth to her son, Jack, within the limits of their prison-like environment. Growing up in such a limiting environment as being the child of the attacker alters Jack’s perception of reality, compelling the victims to devise coping mechanisms to survive their ordeal. As a result of their prolonged captivity and oppressive circumstances, both Ma and Jack’s bodies bear the scars of trauma.

To understand the dimension and the dynamics of their traumatic captivity in this respect, docility becomes a crucial concept in Emma Donoghue’s novel. Drawing from Michel Foucault’s theories on power and discipline, docility refers to the process through which individuals are rendered passive and submissive, shaped, and controlled by external forces. In the work, Ma and Jack hinge on the disciplinary power of Old Nick, which causes their docile existence within the room. Old Nick employs various disciplinary techniques to assert control over the victims. These techniques align with Foucault’s notion of discipline, which involves mechanisms of surveillance, control, and normalization. Strict routines, rules, threats, and punishments are used to regulate their behaviour and mould them into obedient subjects. The constant presence of Old Nick’s watchful gaze reinforces their subjugation, as they internalize the need to conform to his orders. The concept of docility extends beyond the physical realm, as it influences their psychological state. Ma and Jack’s experiences in the room shape their understanding of reality, creating a distorted worldview that revolves around the room as their primary and limited reality. This internalization of their docility has profound effects on their mental and emotional well-being.

The spatial features of the room itself play a significant role in maintaining control over Ma and Jack. The room is deliberately designed by Old Nick to be impenetrable, with soundproofing, insulating foam, sheet lead, and a secure door with a code. These features create a physical barrier that reinforces their captivity and hinders any attempts at escape. The room becomes a coded space, symbolizing the power dynamics and functioning as a site of control. The room’s spatial qualities, coupled with Old Nick’s disciplinary strategies, result in Ma and Jack becoming docile bodies. They are stripped of their autonomy and agency, reduced to mere platforms to be dominated and controlled. Their identities and behaviours are shaped by the power dynamics within the room, and they adapt to survive within its confines.

² In Austria, Josef Fritzl held his daughter Elisabeth captive for twenty-four years in the basement of his home where he assaults her and has seven children of his own. The case is first brought to light in 2008 when their daughter Kersten needed medical treatment due to kidney failure. The medical staff at the hospital alerts the police because they are suspected of the story Josef told (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7371959.stm>). In an interview, Emma Donoghue states that “From the Fritzl case I took only the basic notion of an imprisoned woman raising her rapist’s child as happily as possible” (Ue, 2012, p. 102).

The controlled space of the room operates as a heterotopia, a localized counter-site that violates human rights. In their quest for survival, Ma and Jack encounter a disciplinary system that fails to meet their needs, contributing to their submissive nature. As a result, their bodies undergo a transformation within the confines of the room, establishing a complex and interwoven relationship between their physical selves and the spatial codes at play. The stigmatizing impact of the room's codes persists, even after their escape, as they associate the confined space and the scrutinizing gaze with the limitations of the medical ward. For this reason, the interplay between the spatial codes and their bodies takes on a new dimension after their escape. The outside world becomes both liberating and overwhelming for Jack, as he navigates unfamiliar spaces and learns to interact with others. The trauma and confinement of the room continue to influence their perceptions and behaviours as they adjust to their newfound freedom. The transformative nature of this interplay is evident in Jack's evolving understanding of the room. Initially, the room represents safety and intimacy, a familiar and known space in contrast to the vastness and uncertainty of the outside world. However, as Jack gains new experiences and perspectives, his perception of the room shifts. He begins to see its toxicity and the ways in which it has stigmatized their bodies and limited their possibilities.

Within this framework, this study aims to explore the intricate dynamics that unfold between the corporeal and spatial engagements within the novel by employing the theoretical framework provided by Michel Foucault. By analysing the ways in which the characters' bodies are fashioned and transformed by the spatial constraints of the room, as well as the disciplinary power exerted upon them, the study seeks to shed light on the interplay between physical embodiment and spatial environments. To achieve this, the study firstly focuses on the docile bodies and then tackles the spatial politics.

Body Politics: Discipline and Subjugation

Old Nick forcefully abducts a 19-year-old woman as she heads to the college. Deceptively, he lures her into his truck under the pretence of needing help for his dog. Using pills that cause her to lose consciousness, he blindfolds and transports her to his home. Her harrowing days of repeated trauma commence as she finds herself imprisoned in an isolated room. In the context of the body and power alliance, Foucault expounds on the concept that the continual application of productive power on individuals renders them perpetually docile, transforming the body into a malleable area that is "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (1995, p. 136). When applied according to the operator's advantage, this power dynamic turns the body into a passive platform that relinquishes its autonomy and succumbs to the controlling force of the disciplinarian. To achieve this purpose, certain coercive disciplinary techniques are applied: the scale of control, the object of control, and modality (Foucault, 1995, p. 137). The first aspect of discipline involves exerting power over the functional aspects of the body, while the subsequent centres on treating the body as a malleable area that can be manipulated and controlled. The third aspect relates to the continuous and unyielding coercion exerted through time, space, and movement. These tactics collectively exemplify the rigorous domination imposed by discipline upon the body. In a similar manner, Old Nick methodically draws on these devices of power on Ma and Jack over years to maintain their subjugation. His strategy encompasses both physical and psychological tactics, aiming for absolute control over their lives.

Old Nick subjects the young girl to captivity in an enclosed space, leaving her with no means of escape. The physical confinement within the small room, coupled with the deprivation of freedom in the outside world, the sense of isolation from others, financial dependence on the captor, and the loss of rights, all contribute to the rapid development of trauma. The dynamics of spatial politics, as explored in the subsequent section, intertwine with the issue of discipline in the novel since "in the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (Foucault, 1995, p. 141). With the young girl being the sole occupant of the room, Old Nick finds it easier to exert control, discipline, and inflict punishment. He employs various regulating strategies as traumatic stressors to subjugate her. The isolation and helplessness of the captive intensify the impact of these traumatic experiences within the confined space. In this respect, Kai Erickson differentiates between "trauma" and "stress" by stating that "'trauma,' in this familiar distinction, refers to a violent event that injures in one sharp stab, while 'stress' refers to a series of events or even to a chronic condition that erodes the spirit more gradually" (1995, p. 185). Ma's

experience involves both trauma and stress, with her initial trauma stemming from the violent abduction and rape by Old Nick.

However, even after the initial traumatic event, the dynamics of traumatization persist as ongoing stressors, perpetuated through Old Nick's disciplinary tactics. Being held captive exposes Ma to the constant influence of the perpetrator's actions, beliefs, and discourse. His methods of discipline rely on inciting terror and fear, and by doing so, the purpose is "to convince the victim that the perpetrator is omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her life depends on winning his indulgence through absolute compliance" (Herman, 2015, p. 77). Despite the shocking and traumatic event of the attack, Ma, in an instance, displays a courageous act of resistance by using a broken toilet lid as a weapon against Old Nick. In another attempt to gain control and access to the outside world, she firmly places a knife against his throat, exerting pressure to coerce him into revealing the access code for the door. However, her attempt is thwarted when he overpowers her, taking the knife away (Donoghue, 2010, pp. 120-121). The confrontation showcases Ma's determination to defy her captor and seek a way out of the confined space. Old Nick's response to the incident is both threatening and manipulative. He warns her that nothing will make him reveal the access code. Moreover, he threatens her to die of starvation as a way to exert psychological control over her. This tactic of emotional manipulation and deprivation adds to the ongoing stress and trauma experienced by Ma, perpetuating the cycle of power and control that dominates her confined world. Following her unsuccessful attempt to escape, Ma becomes hyper-aware of her reactions and behaviours, as the captor has successfully instilled a fearful atmosphere of control. Lassagne states that "During any period of forced captivity, a captive suddenly finds that his will falls under the control of his captor, that he must control his emotions, and that indeed his behaviour must resemble, if not become, an act of submission" (qtd. in Speckhard et al., 2005, p. 122). Confronted with the relentless control and threats of Old Nick, Ma's latter behaviours become an act of obedience for survival. In order to endure the captivity and protect herself and her son, she is forced to accommodate and comply with his demands, effectively surrendering her will to his wishes. This harrowing transformation not only instils terror and fear in her but also erodes her autonomy and sense of self. The prolonged trauma of captivity has a profound psychological impact on Ma, leading her to internalize the captor's authority and gradually lose her agency. The room, which once served as a place of confinement, now becomes a space where Ma's identity is fractured and replaced by the dominant will of Old Nick. Since "discipline is an art of rank" (Foucault, 1995, p. 146), the abductor skilfully employs techniques to regulate and control Ma's behaviours, effectively placing her in a subordinate status.

In the confined space of the room, Old Nick uses psychological terror as a means to control Ma and Jack. Depriving them of basic necessities, like electricity, serves as a form of punishment, terrorizing them and reinforcing his dominance over them. Any minor actions or sounds can trigger punitive measures, as Old Nick demands absolute silence. Even the noise of a Jack's toy intimidates him:

"Did you try something? Did you? His voice goes downer. 'Because I told you before, it's on your head if –'"

'I was asleep.' Ma's talking in a squashed tiny voice. 'Please– look, look, it was the stupid jeep that rolled off the shelf.' (Donoghue, 2010, p. 60)

Old Nick's fear of any potential escape or threat to his authority leads him to react harshly when the jeep's noise disturbs him. He thinks it as a challenge to his control and penalizes Ma and Jack by cutting off the power, leaving them weak and vulnerable. This form of disempowerment is a tactic used both physically and psychologically to make them submissive and dependent on him. Rather than resorting to physical violence, Old Nick manipulates them through his disciplinary method of cutting off the power, reminding them that their lives are entirely in his hands. He gains a sense of strength from the predictability of his control over the room, asserting his dominance and making them docile subjects. In this sense, Foucault asserts that punishment intends "to supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies, and to continue even when this change has been achieved" (1995, p. 18). For this reason, Old Nick's choice of punishment method is not aimed at simply punishing Ma for her actions, but rather it serves as a means to regulate and control her behaviour. The use of controlling penalties, such

as cutting off the power and depriving them of basic needs, is a form of physical and mental coercion. These penalties do not have a forgiving or pardoning aspect; instead, they are designed to shape Ma and Jack into docile bodies who are completely submissive to Old Nick's authority. The repeated use of such punishments reinforces his dominance and maintains their state of fear and submission, making them entirely dependent on him for their survival.

Another disciplinary technique discussed by Foucault is timetable, which serves three functions: establishing rhythm, imposing specific occupations, and regulating cycles of repetition (1995, p. 149). In a similar vein, Old Nick's use of a strict timetable and control over food serves as powerful disciplinary tools. The timetable establishes predictability and rhythm, reinforcing his dominance and keeping Ma and Jack submissive. By controlling their access to food and necessities, Old Nick exercises complete bodily control over them, leaving them dependent and docile. In this sense, the provision of a "Sunday treat" creates a psychological bond of dependence, while deprivation of food becomes a punitive measure to assert his authority. These disciplinary techniques ensure constant fear and submission, maintaining his control within the room. Foucault asserts that "normalization is one of the great instruments of power" (1995, p. 184). Old Nick normalizes his food timetable by conditioning Ma and Jack to expect food at specific times. Moreover, by consistently employing the same punishment of depriving them of food and electricity, he problematically normalizes his punitive methods.

Providing or withholding food becomes a means of psychological manipulation because Old Nick has "a psychological need to justify his crimes" (Herman, 2015, p. 75). Old Nick's manipulative tactics aim to create a sense of indebtedness in the captive, making her feel compelled to express gratitude for the basic needs he fulfils. By presenting his actions as favours, he transforms the victim into a voluntary captive who perceives his abuse as a form of kindness. This psychological manipulation not only reinforces his control over her but also normalizes his criminal actions, making it easier for him to maintain his power and authority over her. For example, when a broken fan emits the unpleasant smell in the room, Old Nick expects gratitude instead:

"I don't think you appreciate how good you've got it here," says Old Nick. "Do you?"

Ma remains silent.

"Aboveground, natural light, central air, it's a cut above some places, I can tell you. Fresh fruit, toiletries, what have you, click your fingers and it's here. Plenty of girls would thank their lucky stars for a setup like this, safe as houses. Especially with the kid—"

Is that me?

"No drunk drivers to worry about," he says, "drug pushers, perverts..." (Donoghue, 2010, p. 86).

He firmly believes that Ma often asks for things to buy or change, rather than complying with his expectations. Costello-Sullivan observes that "Ma's compliance with Old Nick is conditioned by his expectations and demands for appreciation, despite his role as a kidnapper" (96). In his pursuit of justifications for his actions, Old Nick expects his victims to be grateful for the opportunities he provides. Interestingly, Old Nick does not perceive himself as an assailant; instead, he convinces himself that Ma is safer in the room than facing the dangers posed by the outside world, a way of suppressing his guilt and finding relief. In this context, Old Nick's disciplinary and punishing methods create a coercive relationship between the practicable body and gesture, as described by Foucault, where the disciplined body becomes a "prerequisite of an efficient gesture" (1995, p. 152). As Old Nick anticipates specific gestures of appreciation from Ma, she complies with his expectations. If she fails to be docile, she will be punished through the deprivation of electricity and food. This psychological manipulation serves to maintain Old Nick's domination on Ma, conditioning her behaviour to meet his desires. Losing her autonomy, the forced subjugation leads to subjectivity crises as María Elena Jaime de Pablos illustrates, "This piece of dominant masculinist narrative aims at taming Ma, at depriving her of her voice and agency—and consequently of her subjectivity—and at establishing a clear power relation based on possession—by resorting to terror and by stressing Ma's situation of dependency" (2022, p. 36).

Old Nick's authority on Ma's body extends beyond the previously mentioned circumstances. Primarily, he is a sexual assailant who subjects Ma to rape for seven years, resulting in the birth of their son Jack. While Jack is unaware of the explicit details of their sexual encounters, he can realize that something unpleasant has occurred to her based on her emotional state the following day. Old Nick's regular visits to the room, almost every night after nine o'clock, prompting Jack to hide in the wardrobe until he departs. The darkness of the wardrobe prevents Jack from seeing Old Nick clearly, leading to confusion and uncertainty about Old Nick's physical appearance, making him question whether he is real or even human:

Women aren't real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I am not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half? He brings groceries and Sunday treat and disappears the trash, but he's not human like us. He only happens in the night, like bats. Maybe Door makes him up with a beep beep and the air changes. I think Ma doesn't like to talk about him in case he gets realer (Donoghue, 2010, p. 22).

Because of the limited knowledge Jack has acquired within the confines of the room, his worldview is restricted. For him, his mother is the only woman he knows, and Old Nick is the only man. However, Ma is cautious about Old Nick's interactions with Jack, which perplexes the young boy, leaving him uncertain about Old Nick's existence and human form. Tatjana Bijelic argues that "between his reality and unreality, there is a limbo where he places Old Nick as half-real" (2017, p. 119), which is because he sees Old Nick as fragmented parts through the gaps in wardrobe doors, hears his voice and the bed creak. Hence, his imagination constructs an alternative representation of him. To solve this enigma, Jack questions why she hides him away, Ma's response further deepens the mystery as she expresses her discomfort with Old Nick looking at him (Donoghue, 2010, p. 32). This atmosphere of secrecy and fear compounds Jack's confusion about the reality and identity of Old Nick, leaving him in a state of constant uncertainty. Ma's protective instincts drive her to shield Jack from any potential harm or deception by Old Nick. Jack is completely unaware of the true nature of their captivity, and his imagination runs wild, leaving him with the fear that Old Nick might be some malevolent creature, like a zombie or a vampire, seeking to cause harm. Consequently, Ma takes precautions and hides Jack from Old Nick's sight to ensure his safety and well-being. Her actions reflect a desperate attempt to safeguard her son from the harsh reality of their situation, allowing him to maintain some semblance of innocence and protection within the confines of their limited world. Kinga Földvály notes that "Jack's consciousness transforms his experiences into an uncanny universe in which boundaries between the real and the unreal become dangerously blurred" (2014, p. 216). Jack's inability to differentiate between the real and the unreal is compounded by his limited exposure to the outside world and his heavy reliance on what he sees on TV. As a result, the images and objects he views on television become his reference points for understanding reality, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality. This underlines the significant role that media plays in shaping his understanding of the world.

From another perspective, Old Nick is also lack of an apparent figure of his son in his head. It highlights the detached and callous nature of his character, as he views his captives more as objects to control and dominate rather than as individuals with identities and emotions. His indifference towards acknowledging Jack as his son reinforces the dehumanizing effect of captivity and the traumatic experience Ma and Jack endure within the room. In this respect, his word choice is worthy of note since he calls his son "it" rather than "he": "I wait for Ma to say, but she doesn't. "Five." I whisper it. Old Nick laughs, "It speaks" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 45).

Ma's efforts to shield Jack from any form of interaction with Old Nick reveal the extent of her protective instincts as a mother. By withholding information about Jack's age from Old Nick, she maintains a sense of control over their circumstances, attempting to create a safe atmosphere within the confined space. Her decision not to encourage Jack to speak with their captor is a strategic measure to minimize potential harm and preserve whatever sense of security they can find in their ordeal. This also emphasizes the power dynamics at play within the room, where Ma takes on the role of a fierce guardian. Bijelic argues that "the mother's insistence on keeping her son out of sight in the presence of Old Nick serves not only to prevent confrontation with possibly disastrous outcomes for Jack, but also to keep a vital part of herself hidden yet

flourishing” (2017, p. 123). Within the suffocating realm of traumatic stress, where Old Nick exercises absolute control over every aspect of Ma’s existence, she finds solace in creating a space of resistance through her relationship with Jack. Jack’s body becomes a sanctuary, untainted by Old Nick’s authority, where Ma can find moments of respite and maintain her sanity. In nurturing, teaching, and engaging with Jack through games and stories, she actively carves out a counter-space, a realm beyond Old Nick’s reach, where she can reclaim her autonomy and sense of self. This bond with her son becomes a source of strength and hope, allowing her to envision the possibility of breaking free from the chains of captivity and regaining her freedom and integrity.

As another way of discipline, Old Nick wields control over Ma and Jack in matters of medical care. When Ma gives birth to Jack in the room, she does so without any medical assistance, risking both her own and the baby’s health. The birth is even more poignant as it follows the loss of Ma’s first child due to an umbilical cord entanglement, highlighting the dangerous consequences of lacking proper medical support during childbirth. On Jack’s fifth birthday, they discuss the circumstances of his birth when he notices a stain on the rug. Ma reveals that he was born right there on the spot, and she had to cut the umbilical cord herself (Donoghue, 2010, p. 4). This revelation stresses the desperate and unaided situation in which Jack came into the world, emphasizing the dire conditions of their captivity. Old Nick goes to great lengths to isolate Ma from the outside world, including denying her access to medical care. He views any connection with the outside as a threat to his control mechanism, leading him to prevent Ma from seeking medical aid. This further intensifies the constraints of their captivity and showcases the extent to which Old Nick seeks to strip them of their autonomy and freedom. Besides, their unhealthy diet exacerbates their vulnerability, prompting Ma to try obtaining vitamin pills. However, Old Nick dismisses her request, demonstrating his total dominance over their health and well-being:

“It’s just that if we had a better diet—”

“Oh, here we go. Whine, whine, whine...”

Ma’s voice gets mad. “I bet we’re cheaper to keep than a dog. We don’t even need shoes.”
(Donoghue, 2010, p. 89).

Obviously, they suffer from inadequate nutrition. Old Nick consistently emphasizes the high cost of living, using his six months of unemployment as an excuse. He fails to provide them with a better diet, let alone access to medical assistance. This indicates that if they were to experience malnutrition or any health problems, Old Nick would not take them to the hospital for treatment. Ma regularly relies on painkillers to alleviate the pain from her decaying teeth and recurring headaches. Herman argues that “chronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of physical calm or comfort,” leading to various somatic symptoms such as insomnia and agitation (2015, p. 86). Ma’s prolonged exposure to trauma manifests in her body through intense headaches, toothaches, and insomnia. As a sex captive responsible for caring for her rapist’s child, she experiences disenfranchisement and deprivation of essential needs like security, food, sanitation, healthcare, and education. This not only inflicts psychological trauma but also takes a toll on her physical health. Her persistent headaches are a clear indication of the enduring impact of these circumstances over an extended period of time. Furthermore, Jack often discovers his mother awake during the night, staring through the skylight. McFarlane and Yehuda point out that traumatic stressors can lead to the development of other disorders when the victim’s vulnerability is affected (2007, p. 163). Therefore, Ma’s body develops additional conditions as a direct consequence of the traumatic stress she endures. These somatic reactions serve as evidence of the effects of captivity trauma. While Ma might not immediately develop post-traumatic stress disorder after the traumatic event, her body clearly exhibits evident discomfort and distress.

Spatial Dynamics and the Duality of Inside/Outside

When Ma first enters the room, she does not have any idea about its spatial traits, but later notices its small size and the presence of a skylight. When Jack asks how Old Nick built the room, Ma describes its

structure: “Just a basic twelve-by-twelve, vinyl-coated steel. But he added a soundproofed skylight and lots of insulating foam inside the walls, plus a layer of sheet lead because lead kills all sound. Oh, and a security door with a code” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 106). Furthermore, when she attempts to dig a hole to escape, she discovers a layer of fence all over the place, making it impossible to cut through (Donoghue, 2010, p. 120). Old Nick intentionally designs the shed in his backyard to prevent escape. With the spatial features of the room in mind, Foucault argues that spaces should not be merely seen as containers in which human beings are placed but rather as representations of certain meanings (Foucault, 1997, p. 352). Hence, in the novel, the garden shed is not merely a living space, but a representation of Old Nick's sinister desires. In this sense, the room becomes a tool for wielding power and controlling its occupants on both spatial and psychological levels. Although it physically exists and can be located, it remains unrecognized in the outside world due to its illegitimate and violating nature of human rights. Therefore, the room functions as a heterotopia, challenging and subverting societal norms. According to Foucault, heterotopias are specific places that invert the norms of other cultural sites. He categorizes heterotopias, stating that “heterotopias of deviation are those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault, 1997, p. 353). In his deviation from societal norms, Old Nick creates a space where he wields absolute authority, imposing his own rules upon Ma and Jack. Within this confined room, they are voiceless and devalued, reduced to mere instruments to satisfy his desires. Ma's body becomes a canvas for him to inscribe his toxic actions, devoid of any human worth, turning her into a possession to be dominated and controlled. Therefore, becoming far from neutral, the room serves as a site of crime that imposes the codes of sexual offense upon her body. The novel highlights a deep intertwining of sexuality and space, as the female resident in the room becomes a symbol of sexuality for the assailant. To maintain spatial control, Old Nick implements a panopticon-like system. This constant surveillance ensures his dominance over them, reinforcing the power dynamics in the room. Surveillance recalls the panopticon and in this concept that Foucault borrowed from Jeremy Bentham, architectural structure replaces the human surveillance system (Foucault, 1995, p. 200). The spatial design of the panopticon allows for covert surveillance of the imprisoned, ensuring efficient control without their awareness. This architectural setup depersonalizes and automatizes power, turning individuals into submissive subjects (Foucault, 1995, p. 202). Similarly, Old Nick's use of architecture in the confined space disempowers and traumatizes the young girl, as it restricts her movements and opportunities. The locked garden shed becomes a disciplinary tool that reinforces power dynamics, and gender becomes a significant factor in this context. The clear division between inside and outside, with Old Nick representing the external and Ma the internal, reflects the binary of man/woman, bringing gender roles and power relations into question within the novel. The architecture of the room thus plays a crucial role in shaping the submissive bodies of its occupants, impacting their experiences and interactions within the space.

In his work *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard explores the contrasting qualities of inside and outside spaces, emphasizing that they evoke different experiences and emotions. He suggests that this division influences perceptions and shapes the sense of self. In connection with this, he argues that man and woman have different associations in terms of the dichotomy of inside and outside. While inside is associated with femininity, outside represents masculinity (Mulvey, 1992, p. 56). In the context of the novel, the inside space embodies the feminine sphere, symbolizing domesticity and confinement. It represents the limited world of Ma and Jack, where they are subjected to Old Nick's control and oppression. On the other hand, the outside world belonging to Old Nick symbolizes the male sphere, characterized by mobility and vastness, representing freedom and the unknown beyond the confines of the room. The stark contrast between these two spaces highlights the gendered dynamics and power structures at play in the narrative. Acting upon this argument, Laura Mulvey notes that home is a deeper and more intricate landscape of social and sexual significance. Within this domestic space, various oppositions emerge, such as the distinction between upstairs, signifying privacy, and downstairs, representing the public sphere. Within the female sphere of domesticity lies another layer, a female sphere of emotion, giving rise to a complex and interconnected web of experiences and meanings (Mulvey, 1992, p. 55). Because the patriarchal psyche keeps femininity under surveillance, the feminine psyche opens up a new space of oppression and subjugation interior the domestic roof. As the domestic inside fuels the outbreak of the psychic inside

through internalization, the physical and the psychological constraint leads to emotional suffering. As a continuation of domesticity, the private upstairs not only harbours the secrecy of sexuality but also contains interiority and repressed psychic desires within the unconscious. In the patriarchal psyche, the female body is directly associated with sexuality and is therefore kept hidden and confided, which leads to the perception that women's bodies cannot be fully public (Jordonova, 1989, p. 92). In *Room*, Ma's sexuality is hidden within the room. The interiority of the room symbolizes rape and disenfranchisement for Ma, while for Old Nick, it serves as a space to fulfil his dark desires and release his sexual tension. The room's representation becomes intricate, holding contrasting implications for each gender. From a feminist standpoint, it reveals the toxic projection of patriarchal thought onto the female body. The novel's exploration of these gendered binaries accentuates the power imbalances turning the female body into a subservient site of control.

In *Room*, the architecture plays a significant role in symbolizing the binary of inside and outside, with thresholds like the door and windows holding particular significance. The door becomes a regime of control, only accessible with a passcode and emitting a beep, ultimately representing entrapment for Ma rather than a gateway between public and private spaces. On the other hand, the windows function differently, providing light and allowing for voyeurism through their transparent glass frames. The architectural elements in the novel emphasize the contrasting experiences of confinement and visibility within the room, reflecting the complexities of power and control over the characters' lives. Jacques Lacan notes that in the presence of a window, especially when it becomes dim or when there might be someone observing from the outside, the reciprocity of gaze implies that both parties recognize being an object under the observation (1998, p. 215). Due to transparency, windows allow sunlight, but in this case, they serve for a reciprocal voyeurism. Recognizing each other's presence removes the glass borders and becomes an issue of acknowledging existence. However, to achieve recognition, the position of the windows is crucial. In the novel, the gaze through the window is not mutual, as it is positioned in the ceiling, restricting the view to only the sky. When Ma asks Old Nick to remove the leaves covering the window, it grants him the opportunity to gaze inside, further reinforcing the psychological confinement on Ma. The dysfunctional nature of the window prevents any possibility of a reciprocal gaze, but instead, emphasizes the power dynamics. The builder of the room holds complete authority over the gaze, as the spatial design of the room grants him control over the regime of gazing, highlighting the unequal distribution of power and surveillance within the confined space.

As it comes to the interior space, Jack, the narrator, capitalizes the names of objects like Wardrobe, Carpet, Bed, and Table. This writing technique reflects his perception of the world. Unlike others who use generic names for objects, Jack sees them as individuals. This anthropomorphism humanizes the inanimate objects, but it also serves to dehumanize Ma and Jack, reducing them to mere objects confined within the room. Additionally, Jack's deliberately common name reinforces the idea that any child could be in his place, revealing the universality of their plight and the harrowing reality of their captivity. According to Khem Raj Sharma, Jack's name "is a common boy name used in many fairy tales and folk tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk. Using a common name for the young protagonist, Donoghue creates the idea of an 'everyman' Jack" (2013, p. 146). Ma embodies the archetype of an ideal mother, showing unwavering love and care for Jack even in their dire circumstances of captivity. The narrative highlights her role as a protector, nurturer, and teacher, emphasizing the strength and resilience she exhibits despite the challenges they face in the room. However, the confined space of the room and Old Nick's oppressive control diminish their individual identities. Within these confines, both Ma and Jack become objects in the room, subject to the captor's power and manipulation. Their individuality is overshadowed by the room's suffocating presence, and their lives revolve around surviving and adapting within this limited space. As a result, the objects in the room and the people within it become intertwined. Their transformative experiences within the room blur the lines between subject and object, as they both influence and are influenced by their surroundings.

Television plays a significant role in their room, serving as their primary source of entertainment. However, they regulate their TV viewing time because they are cautious not to let it "rot their brain" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 40) or "turn them into zombies" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 75). Laura Mulvey states that after the spread of TV sets at homes, they function "to conceal tensions and contradictions on both sides"

of the gendered geography (1989, p. 69). From a feminist perspective, television serves as a medium of illusion reinforcing the patriarchal power dynamics that dominate society. It constructs new types of representation of womanhood through TV shows, which accelerates its transition to become a possession of female space. Avoiding the illusion of having a comfortable space with a device of her own, she disconnects herself from watching it, which is an attempt to create a boundary between the outside world and the confined space of the room. By reserving TV time solely for Jack's entertainment, she seeks to protect him from the harsh reality and the knowledge of the world beyond their captivity. However, television becomes a source of confusion for Jack as he struggles to differentiate between the real and the unreal. His limited understanding blurs the line between the objects he sees on TV and the objects within the room. For example, when he notices Ma's pills on TV, he envisions Old Nick living inside the television and retrieving the pills for Ma, eroding the boundaries between the characters in his life and those on the screen. This showcases the psychological impact of their captivity on Jack's perception and understanding of the world. The room becomes a reality in itself for him, and his knowledge is confined to the objects and experiences within that space. Television, which serves as an aperture to the outside realm, reinforces his detachment from reality beyond the room's walls. She says:

“Listen. What we see on TV is... it's pictures of real things.”

That's the most astonishing I've ever heard.

“Dora's real for real?”

She takes her hand away. “No, sorry. Lots of TV is made-up pictures. Dora's just a drawing but the other people, the ones with faces that look like you and me, they're real.”

“Actual humans?”

She nods. “And the places are real too, like farms and forests and airplanes and cities...”

“Nah.” Why is she tricking me? “Where would they fit?”

“Out there,” says Ma. “Outside.” (Donoghue, 2010, pp. 73-74).

The oppressive spatial-psychological features of the room lead to Jack's inability to differentiate himself from Ma and create blurred boundaries between fantasy and reality. However, as he grows older, Ma attempts to broaden his understanding of the outside world, despite his limited worldview. Marisol Morales Ladron argues that “from the beginning of the novel, reality is presented as a construction whose validity relies on the point of view of the onlooker and not on shared common perceptions” (2017, p. 88). The novel presents reality as a subjective construction that relies on the individual's perspective. As a result, it is difficult for Jack, who has lived in a tiny room since his birth, to grasp concepts such as the vastness of the outside world or the scale of airplanes. His perception of reality is based on his personal experiences within the room.

As long as Jack remains inside the room, he perceives everything within its confines as real. However, this perception is challenged when he follows their escape plan. The plan entails Ma staying in the room while he ventures outside for help. Initially, Jack is hesitant to leave because he believes that Ma will continue to be real in the room while he loses his own reality. However, upon stepping outside, he discovers that the outside world is just as real as the room. This realization shatters his previous understanding and expands his perception. When he jumps out of the trunk and encounters various real things, he undergoes a re-evaluation of reality. He observes a baby in a stroller and thinks it is a doll, but realizes it is a real baby. He sees a dog and acknowledges it as a real dog. This overwhelming encounter with the outside world contributes to his difficulty in communicating effectively with the officer:

“Where is Room?”

“Room's not in a house”, I say again.

“I'm having trouble understanding, Jack. What's in it then?”

“Nothing. Room's inside.”

“So what's outside it?”

“Outside.” (188-189).

Jack finds himself outside for the first time and is unsure of the exact location of their room. He manages to convey that the room is in the backyard and has a skylight, which is sufficient information to locate the room and rescue Ma. Eric D. Lister notes that “When one is physically vulnerable, fearing further violence or death, this forced silence necessarily shapes subsequent reaction to the trauma” (1982, p. 872). Therefore, it is not a deliberate choice for Jack to withhold information about the room, as he is still under the influence of the shock of experiencing the outside world. He is overwhelmed and struggling to process the sudden change after spending his entire life in the confined space of the room. When Ma declares, “we’re never going back” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 193), Jack’s tears stem from his longing for the familiar and comforting atmosphere of the room, rather than embracing the newfound sense of liberty in the outside world. The room, despite its captivity, has become a place of security and familiarity for him, which makes the transition to the outside world overwhelming and unsettling. In this respect, Hannah Arendt suggests that our perception of reality is deeply intertwined with appearance, and appearance relies on the existence of a public realm where things emerge from the obscurity of private existence, and therefore the interplay between the private and public spheres shapes our understanding of reality and the world around us (1958, p. 51). Having spent most of his life confined within the private realm of the room, Jack’s abrupt exposure to the outside world shatters his understanding of reality. Everything he knows, from the objects he encounters outside to the concept of publicity itself, is ruined by this traumatizing background, forcing him to reevaluate and reconstruct his sense of reality.

Jack’s transition to the outside world is not without challenges. He struggles to fully accept the presence of other perspectives and, as a result, creates alternative forms of captivity to feel safe. He questions whether they are once again a secret or locked in the hospital, demonstrating his difficulty in reconciling his new reality with the previous confinement of the room. Despite his physical freedom, Jack’s perception is still shaped by his experiences within the room, causing him to perceive the hospital as another form of confinement. In this sense, the medical gaze and disciplinary techniques of the staff also reinforce the sense of surveillance and control. The medicalization of the gaze allows physicians to analyse the body, diagnose illnesses, and impose discipline through spatial organization. Jack and Ma become subjects of medical scrutiny and classification, which adds another layer of control and discipline to their lives.

The transition from the room to the hospital demonstrates the complex interplay between space, power, and control. Jack’s perception of reality continues to be shaped by the disciplinary techniques and spatial arrangements that he encounters, influencing his understanding of freedom and confinement. In this regard, according to Foucault, the medical gaze operates within a confined space where it exercises complete control over itself. He argues:

Medical gaze circulates within an enclosed space in which it is controlled only by itself; in sovereign fashion, it distributes to daily experience the knowledge that it has borrowed from afar and of which it has made itself both the point of concentration and the centre of diffusion. In that experience, medical space can coincide with social space, or, rather, traverse it and wholly penetrate it. One began to conceive of a generalized presence of doctors whose intersecting gazes form a network and exercise at every point in space, and at every moment in time, a constant, mobile, differentiated supervision. (Foucault, 1975, pp. 30-31)

The concept of a ubiquitous presence of doctors whose gazes intersect to create a network that continuously and dynamically supervises every point in space and every moment in time begins to emerge. In this case, the patient has little control over the medical gaze. In this respect, Ma and Jack’s misery of being under Old Nick’s monitoring is complicated by the doctor keeping them under control in the small hospital room. Even though they are no longer within the confines of the room, their confinement appears to be transferred to the hospital room. Within this context, the similarity between the discipline in the hospital and the discipline in the room leads Jack to draw analogies between the two spaces. Both the room and the hospital ward have a restricted spatial layout and include a bathroom. This demonstrates the lasting impact of the confined space and the power dynamics associated with it. As the room is revealed to be a

space with its own set of codes and regulations, Jack and Ma carry these codes with them as they transition to new spaces. The room's influence becomes ingrained in their behaviour and interactions as well, creating a shadow that follows them wherever they go. Bearing the stigma of the room on their bodies and transferring it to the hospital room makes the ward stigmatized as well. Because both the bodies and spaces are attributed to the same negative codes, the interlaced bond between them reaches a point where they begin to represent one another. Because they move from one space to another after their freedom, this dilemma of representation causes a spatial conflict in their new start.

The struggle to navigate this spatial entanglement becomes an integral part of their journey toward finding a sense of belonging and establishing their own identities outside of the room. After they leave the hospital, Jack finds it difficult to integrate social rules. He seeks the familiar and secure environment of the room. He wants to keep the Rug brought from the room which serves as a token that connects him to the safety and familiarity of the room, representing a physical and emotional link to his past experiences. Although Ma does not want to see any reminder from the past, Jack prefers to remember, which shows that they experience trauma in different fashions. Ma rejects the room, seeking to escape its traumatic memories, while Jack clings to it, as his limited experiences within its confines define his reality. Ma and Jack's different perspectives on the room can be linked to Freudian methods of analytic therapy and cathartic treatment such as acting out. As Güzel Köşker states, "Compared to forgetting, remembering forms the basis of the purification of the soul from trauma and similar disorders" (2012, p. 4). Remembering prompts confrontation with traumatic experiences because it brings out the repressed and reproduces it in the same way through acting out. Since this method releases the undesired memories through repetition, it works like catharsis, unburying the buried. In the novel, remembering is significant for the characters because only after repeating the past days do they release their consciousness and step into the future ahead of them. When remembering transitions into acting out, it aligns with Freud's concept of abreaction through repetition. For this purpose, they revisit the room and repeat the old days no matter how traumatic they were. Jack states that "I look back one more time. It's like a crater, a hole where something happened" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 401). This statement reveals a shift in Jack's perspective. With his growing awareness, Jack now acknowledges the room's dark history and no longer associates it with intimacy and safety. This recognition allows him to confront and reconcile with the traumatic past, paving the way for a healthier and more hopeful future.

Conclusion

Unlike other scholarly works that concentrate on narratology or resilience devices, this study offers a new approach because it tackles the functions of the apparatus of power imposed on the characters. In this regard, this study examines both corporeal and spatial engagements as they go hand in hand to achieve control. In the novel, Ma and Jack are subjected to the control and manipulation of Old Nick, who imposes various disciplinary techniques upon them. In this study, these methods are analysed in light of Foucauldian dictum. Initially, Old Nick enforces a strategy of confinement by keeping a young girl locked in a highly secure room for an extended period. This trauma of captivity is achieved through first denying her access to the public realm and subsequently depriving her of essential resources such as food, hygiene, medication, heating, and electricity. These practices of control and manipulation result in the emergence of docile and obedient bodies, subject to the dominant power structure enforced upon them. Hence, the analysis through a Foucauldian lens helps shed light on the complex dynamics and power relations at play within the narrative, showing the unequal power practices between the two genders and reducing the female body into a platform to be dominated. Rather than being simply force, power structures subjugate and regulate, making the victims to obey Old Nick's norms. Along with corporeal control, the spatial characteristics of the room and the contrasting dynamics of inside and outside are crucial in the novel. Doubled with the corporeal oppression, spaces function as an instrument of control rather than being neutral sites. In this regard, Old Nick creates a Foucauldian heterotopia, a mappable counter-site that acts as a rigid apparatus of control. In this heterotopia, Ma cannot find a way out, and Jack, who was born and raised in the room, is subjected to the restrictive perspective of the world. Because they do not have a tie with outside, their existence is equated

with objects within the room, hindering Jack from developing a sense of his self. This blurring of boundaries between the room and their bodies perpetuates a sense of stigma and creates a profound disparity in their experiences of the inside/outside dichotomy. Because the disagreement between the rules of inside and outside, Jack grapples with a sense of longing for the room as he has difficulty to adapt the conventions of society. In this sense, the spatial boundaries and oppressive nature of the room become inscribed on their bodies, both physically and psychologically. This embodiment of the room's codes reinforces the stigma associated with their past experiences, creating a profound impact on their ability to navigate the outside world. To overcome this trauma and break free from the stigmatization, they revisit the room. However, the act of revisiting takes on a symbolic role, offering the characters a chance to reconfigure their understanding of space and reconcile with their past. On the one hand, this complex interplay between the corporeal and spatial dimensions provides a powerful narrative through which the characters embark on a journey toward healing and a new beginning. On the other, it showcases how compelling it is to be imprinted with the disciplinary codes and disengage from them.

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