

## Emma Donoghue's Novel *Room* as a Captivity Narrative

### Abstract

*This research paper is a reading of Emma Donoghue's novel, Room as a captivity narrative and points out the features of captivity narratives in the novel. The novel is a pathetic tale of Ma, who is held captive by her captor, Old Nick, seven years ago when she is just 19. He sexually abuses her and rapes her frequently confining her in a room of shed in his backyard. Jack is her son born in the room as a result of the rape and has no knowledge about the outer world. He thinks his mother and things inside the room everything and he displays no knowledge of social etiquette and feels confused even after the rescue. This research focuses on the archetypes the scholars conclude for the captives to follow and points out that Donoghue's protagonist, Ma, falls under the archetype Amazon. She devises her own rescue by her clever plan while the way captives falling under other two archetypes, Survivors and Frail Flowers enact their rescue differently. Though the captivity literature of the current times demands more sentimental Frail Flower archetype for the female captives, Donoghue has used Amazons archetype for Ma. This research attempted to probe into the reason of this use as well as it has pointed the connection of the captivity literature with the nation-building and imperial goals of America and Britain.*

This paper devotes to study Emma Donoghue's novel, *Room* from the perspective of captivity literature. It attempts to trace out the conventions of the captivity narratives followed by the novel. It also examines the nature of captivity that is generally deemed fit by the narrative convention of the captivity narratives and compares it with the captivity depicted in the novel. In the course of the analysis, this research argues that the novel follows the conventions of captivity narrative and takes part in the deeper motive for which captivity narrative are used. Earlier captivity narratives served the motive to help in the nation-building process of America; in the middle phase, they served the colonial purposes and empire-building and in this age, since both the motives are irrelevant, captivity narratives are used for the promotion of human rights and global notion of justice that helps the West to maintain its stronghold around the world with the appearance of universal humanitarian appeal.

*Room* is a novel written by Irish-Canadian writer Emma Donoghue. The novel is a first person narrative narrated from the perspective of five years old boy, Jack, who was confined inside the room with his captive mother whom he calls Ma. His mother was abducted when she was 19, seven years ago, and was kept as a captive inside the room cutting off from the outer world by the character named Old Nick. The single room of a shed is the whole world for Ma and Jack. The room they stay has been a lonely room with a kitchen and bathroom extensions. They have got a bathtub, a wardrobe, bed and a small TV set in the room. Jack is growing up with the belief that whatever he sees on the TV screen is no more than a fantasy and nothing exists outside the room.

The kid narrator, Jack has grown up with the belief that the only things that he sees inside the room are real and his mother has taught him that the things that appear on TV screen only exist on TV screen themselves. The mother is a captive, she has no

hope that Jack will get a chance to come into touch with the real world at any point of his life. That is the reason she does not let him know that the whole world exists outside the room. In case, his wish to see the world may arise that she will be unable to fulfill at any point of his life; it may frustrate or disappoint him. So, she works hard to keep him happy with the things that are available in his surrounding inside the room. She keeps him physically and mentally fit with healthy diet, taking control of his time to watch TV and helping him to maintain his body and oral hygiene.

The mother and the room are whole world for the narrator. He has seen only person except for his mother in his life. He is their captor Old Nick who visits to their room only during night time. Jack is sent to the wardrobe to hide when Old Nick visits the room. The captor of his mother for past seven years, Old Nick, is the only supplier of their foods and other necessities to the room. The captor is his mother's rapist and is raping her for past seven years; he himself was born out of one of the rapes. The rapes are frequent but Jack, as a kid, is innocent and unable to understand what is going on. His mother never lets him know about the dread of her life she is experiencing.

When the novel begins, it is Jack's fifth birthday. He begins narrating the events and his surroundings. He is a very curious and thoughtful child. The opening of the novel shows his childish curiosity and innocence, "Today I'm five. I was four last night going to sleep in Wardrobe, but when I wake up in Bed in the dark I'm changed to five, abracadabra. Before that I was three, then two, then one, then zero. "Was I minus numbers?" (7). He counts his years and is amazed to see that they are increasing gradually. He thinks about his past years and wonders at his curious thought what age he was when he was born or he was zero years old. He thinks about the age minus one, minus two and so on.

A week after Jack's fifth birthday, Ma learns that Old Nick has become unemployed for six months and that may result him his house. Ma is alarmed at the situation as she feels that he never lets them escape whatever his condition turns. They are probably murdered because they are threat to him and he does not want to his threat go beyond his monitoring. So, out of the fear for her and her kid's life, she starts to make a plan for escape. She first tries to devise a pretended illness in Jack; she convinces Jack to pretend to be deadly ill but Old Nick refuses to take him to hospital and spoiling her plan for any chance to escape. Then she devises fake death of Jack. This plan works as Old Nick removes his body from the room wrapped in a rug. Jack remains still until he gets out of the captor's clutch and escapes. He finds a helpful stranger who helps him to inform the police finally leading to rescue his Ma.

The novel presents the various problems created by captivity and violence. Ma and Jack are taken to mental hospital after the rescue from the room. They receive medical examinations and a temporary home there. The police arrests Old Nick and accused of many charges for criminal offenses like abduction, rape and the endangerment of the children. He is likely to get the imprisonment for at least twenty five years as soon as he is found guilty of the charges. It is the first time; Ma reunites with her family in past eight years. There is a chance to interact with the larger world. Jack finds hard time in his socialization because he was not in touch with the world larger than his mother and the confinement of the room. He is overwhelmed by his new environment as there is no safety and predictability in the large world outside the room. There is mixed reaction regarding Ma's return to her family; though the family welcomes her and everybody becomes happy, Grandpa cannot accept Jack as normal because he thinks him as a result of rape. The media does not let them enjoy the

normal life as Ma has to attend number of television interviews that leads her to mental breakdown that further results in her suicide attempt.

Jack narrates the Ma's attempt to commit suicide eating too many pills at the same time:

I don't know what's—Then I see Ma's pill bottles open on the table, they look mostly empty. Never more than two, that's the rule, how could they be mostly empty, where did the pills go? Noreen's pressing on the side of Ma's throat and saying her other name and "Can you hear me? Can you hear me?" But I don't think Ma can hear, I don't think she can see. I shout, "Bad idea bad idea bad idea."

Lots of persons run in, one of them pulls me outside in the corridor.

I'm screaming "Ma" as loud as I can but it's not loud enough to wake her. (220)

When Jack calls Ma, she does not answer him, so he turns on the light and sees Ma's miserable condition as well as the empty bottles of pills on the table. People run into the room as soon as he spreads the news of Ma's condition. As soon as the people rush into the room, they pull Jack outside the room and start paying attention to her condition.

The impact on the victims of captivity is almost unbearable. The negative role of media in a person's mental health and their ignorance of the need for personal and emotional support for the victims of captivity are presented well in the novel. Ma is put back to hospital after the mental breakdown and Jack is kept with his grandmother and her new partner after her divorce during Ma's absence when she was kidnapped and captivated. Jack has no experience living in the surroundings where there is no mother around. The change in the environment makes him very uneasy, confused and

frustrated. Though Grandma loves him well, they have no knowledge about the proper way to treat him. They do not understand how his life experiences, and the boundaries that confined him resulted his odd behaviors.

After some troubles, Ma returns from hospital, recovered. They move to the independent residence and start planning for the future. Though Ma is growing independent, her independence does not match with the desire of Jack to get everything from the mother like it used to be in the room of their captivity. He takes time in growing up emotionally and come into terms with world around him. At the final phase of the novel, Jack asks his mother to go to visit the room where he had spent his five years of life. But he lacks the same emotional attachment with the room as it was in past when they visit it and bids it goodbye. He is more prepared for the larger world rather than the narrow confinement at the end.

The main problem the research studies is to figure out the elements of the captivity narratives in Donoghue's novel and see it along with the continuation of the convention of captivity literature. What the captivity narratives are and what elements of captivity narrative the novel possesses are the major questions this research attempts to answer.

As the narrator, Jack, and his mother, Ma are confined to a room and Jack was born when she was captive of her captor, Old Nick, and Ma undergoes sexual violence and rape for seven years, there is certainly the case of captivity. It is hypothesized that the novel should follow the elements and trends of captivity narrative in the course of delivering the account of sufferings and captivity and later, the escape. The scholars of captivity narrative have pointed out the certain convention of the captivity narratives. This research analyzes whether the conventions are met by the novel or not.

The novel is studied from various perspectives and it has received great critical acclaim as well as the Man Booker Prize for 2010. One among the critics, Dominique Hetu, describes the condition of Jack in the novel:

In *Room*, a shed functions as a dysfunctional home for young Jack, who is kept hostage there with his mother. He develops caring behaviors with ordinary objects and struggles to adjust to the outside world once they manage to escape . . . the objects share Jack's world in a positive and affective manner and are given human traits. (161)

The captivity of the room does not only affect Jack in negative ways; it also has got positive effects. He develops caring behaviors to the ordinary objects around him, that on the one hand, results in his struggle to adjust with the outer world but it also helps him to develop human trait on the other. The effect of the dysfunctional home, a room of the captor's shed has affected him in positive ways to according to Hetu. Hetu further comments on the story narrated in the novel:

*Room* tells the awakening of five-year-old Jack to the world after he manages to escape from Old Nick, a man who abducted his mother seven years ago and holds them hostage in a small shed in his backyard. The reader understands rather quickly that Old Nick is Jack's father because the latter is five years old, which inscribes the narrative in a framework of patriarchal oppression and sexual violence. (162)

The novel tells the story of awakening of Jack to the world outside the room he has been captive and thought as a real world for five years after his birth. It is the escape from the captor, Old Nick that leads him from innocence to experience, ignorance to awakening. Old Nick had abducted his mother and had been holding her as captive for

past seven years in a room of small shed in his backyard. It is easy for the readers to understand that Old Nick is Jack's father because he is just five years old and his mother was held captive by the captor for past seven years old. The narrative can also be read as a representation of patriarchal oppression and sexual violence according to Hetu.

Critic Merritt Moseley has reviewed the novel from different perspective. She looks at the novel from the reader's perspective and shows the fear that the escape of the captives may spoil the reader's reading of the novel as it reveals all the secrets of their escape, their ingenuity and bravery and escape to the outer world despite their difficult adjustment. She suggests the readers not to spoil their reading experience by the revelation of every minute proceeding of escape:

It should not spoil *Room* to reveal that the captives escape through ingenuity and bravery and rejoin the outer world. Donoghue is interested in what that must be like, and it is a brutal adjustment caused complete unfamiliarity with other human beings — he continues to need no one but his mother, while she wants relationships with other adults — and his mothers long ordeal, but also by intrusive media and the public prurience about Jack's uncut hair and prolonged nursing and his mother's sexual victimization. (510)

The adjustment with the society outside the room is almost brutal adjustment for Jack and Ma. The writer is interested in each of the details, the captive experience and experience of freedom after long captivity. There is difference in the process of adjustment in the society for Jack and Ma; Jack continues to need nobody but his Ma wants relationship with other adults and to lead a normal life. His mother faces more ordeals than him from intrusive media, and the society's questions regarding Jack's uncut hair and her sexual victimization.



Critic Sue Leonard hails the novel as good and authentic one and she highly rates the novel justly getting the honor of being listed for Man Booker:

This is an astonishingly good novel. It's compulsive, clever, and filled with authenticity. Donoghue avoids the gratuitous, and makes the horror of Ma's situation acceptable to the reader. She has produced a poignant story of the love between an extraordinary mother and her son. The novel is supremely well thought out, and is brilliantly researched and executed. It's been long listed for the Man Booker. (177)

Leonard gives the novel various adjectives of praise like compulsive, clever and filled with authenticity. The writer has made the horror of Ma easy and acceptable to the readers. The love story between the mother and son is great and the novel is well thought out, well researched and executed.

Keeping all these criticisms and appraisals in mind, this research paper examines the features of captivity narrative in Donoghue's novel *Room*.

Andrea Tinnemeyer in his book *Identity Politics of the Captivity Narrative after 1848* has pointed out the historical connection of the captivity narrative with colonialism. She discusses about the captivity narrative in terms of the categorization by numbers of other analysts of those narratives:

The captivity narrative, with all its historical ties to colonialism, offers an apt trope for railing against Manifest Destiny, or colonialism of the U.S. variety, because in their multiple forms, captivity narratives repeatedly reveal that what is at stake in the fate of captive females is nothing less than the reproduction of the nation. (4)

Major scholar of captivity narratives, June Namias has categorized the female captives into three archetypes or the character types in her book *White Captives*:

Despite the perils of overgeneralizing an enormous literature in surveying hundreds of captivity narratives, western history books, schoolbooks, newspaper accounts of capture, and the like, particular archetypes appear again and again. In the period between 1675 and 1870 these female types can be called the Survivor, the Amazon, and the Frail Flower. (24)

Namias has studied large numbers of books written under the tradition of captivity narratives and even when there is a danger of overgeneralization, she reduced the archetypes the victims/captives of captivity narratives represent into three main types. They are Survivor, Amazon and Frail Flower. These three categories of the captives are based on the nature the captive women behave.

Namias has elaborated these three categories of the archetypes locating them with the historical periods of America. Survivors are the early forms of archetypes followed by the captive women of colonial era, Amazons are the captives of revolution and Early Republican era and the captives of the nineteenth century followed the archetype of Frail Flowers. Namias observes:

All three types originate in the colonial era, but the preponderance of each varies over time and place. Survivors predominate in the colonial era, Amazons flourish in the period of the Revolution and the Early Republican era, and Frail Flowers are most evident in the period 1820-70. The archetypes themselves, although exhibiting continuities, change over time, territory, and with different Indian groups. Indian groups and practices change with the move west. (24)

To make her categorization simple, we can see the women's behavior as a captive in that time differently. In the category Survivors, there are the captive women who are not passive victims rather they mix up with the community and the family of the captor and save their life escaping from captivity. Amazons devise clever plans

and stun the captor to escape and the Frail Flowers are the captives who patiently wait for some male to come to their aid and help them escape.

When we look at the archetypes the captive women follow, we see the traits of Amazons archetype in Ma in Donoghue's novel *Room* and she clearly follows a way of survival like the captives in other captivity narratives. She first cleverly thinks of a plan and tells her captor, Old Nick that Jack is seriously ill and he should be taken to hospital. As he refuses to take him to hospital, she devises more serious plan. She makes Jack to pretend to be dead inside his rug and with this, she is certain that he will take him out of the room to cremate his body. That would be the right time for Jack to escape him:

“When Old Nick comes back—tonight, or tomorrow night, or whenever — I’m going to tell him you died, I’m going to show him the rug all rolled up with you inside it.” That’s the craziest thing I ever heard.

“Why?”

“Because your body didn’t have enough water left, and I guess the fever stopped your heart.” (110)

In this dialogue, there is a clever plan of the mother. She suggests Jack to pretend to be dead. She does not forget to appreciate Jack's successful pretended sickness a night before. She clearly instructs her son that she is going to pretend a death. She has readymade plan that she will tell Old Nick that her son died of dehydration, lacking water in his body. The curious boys asks her the questions and she replies them patiently:

“No, why in Rug?”

“Ah,” says Ma, “smart question. It’s your disguise, so he doesn’t guess you’re actually alive. See, you did a super job of pretending to be sick last night, but

dead is much harder. If he notices you breathing even one time, he'll know it's a trick. Besides, dead people are really cold." (110)

Jack is surprised to see the plan of her mother. He does not see why he needs to pretend to be dead inside the rug. Ma is careful in her plan and she does not want the plan to go wrong and put them both in danger. If the kid pretends to be dead inside the rug, there is high chance that the plan succeeds because Old Nick will never be aware that he is breathing inside the rug. Putting Jack inside the rug is a trick. This execution of clever plan makes Ma as a captive following the archetype of Amazons.

Tinnemeyer discusses captivity narratives in which the females are made captives into three historically marked tropes in reference to June Namias' categorization. Tinnemeyer and Namias' studies are basically the studies of tradition of American captivity narratives; Tinnemeyer discusses historical input in Namias' categorization:

Namias divides the representations of female captives into three historically marked tropes, predicated on an ideological connection between national concerns and the representation of its captives. She identifies the time period spanning the Oatman and Medina captivities (1820–70) with the emergence of what she terms the "Frail Flower," a literary model that coincided with "the rise of True Womanhood and the mass marketing of sentimental fiction" (36).

In the recent times, many of the captive women fall under the category of Frail Flowers. Frail Flowers are likely to experience much of the sufferings, violence and victimization that create the sentimental mood in the readers. As the market demand of sentimental literature is high, Frail Flower archetype dominated the fictions following the convention of captivity literature in the recent times. Ma does not fall into this archetype in the novel because she hides her sufferings from her kid and acts

as if everything is going normal. She makes a clever plan as per the captive fit for the Amazon archetype to escape and trains her son before he pretends to be dead what to do:

“The truck! The first time it slows down at a stop sign, you’re going to wriggle out of the rug, jump down onto the street, run away, and bring the police to rescue me.”

I stare at her.

“So this time the plan is *Dead, Truck, Run, Police, Save Ma*. Say it?”

“*Dead, Truck, Run, Police, Save Ma.*” (111)

Ma is certain that Old Nick takes Jack out in rug and pushes him inside the truck. Then he need to act as his mother instructs him for the rescue from captivity. She instructs him that Jack should get out of the rug and jump down the truck as soon as the truck slows on the traffic sign to stop. Then he needs to run away to see a person who would understand his words Ma has instructed: *Dead, Truck, Run, Police, Save Ma*. The narrator narrates that the plan was well planned. He had eaten well for the extra energy and practiced too be dead before it was executed:

Then we get dressed and practice the dead bit. It’s like the strangest Phys Ed we ever played. I lie down on the edge of Rug and Ma wraps her over me and tells me to go on my front, then my back, then my front, then my back again, till I’m all rolled up tight. It smells funny in Rug, dusty and something, different from if I lie just on her. (111)

Jack practices to pretend his death well; he lies on the margin of rug and his mother wraps it over him. As per her suggestion, he rolls his body tight. He wonders at the smell of rug; it is dusty and mix of funny smell. The tight rug has different smell than his normal sleep on it. He becomes habituated with it before the plan is executed.

There are less sentimental elements than the clever tricks that put Ma in the category of Amazons archetypes of the captive woman than the Frail Flower archetype.

Other important observation here is that Donoghue probably did not want her novel to be considered as a commercial novel selling the sentiments alone. Since the market demand for sentimental novels is high and she could use the central character under the Frail Flower archetype pattern, but that might give her commercially more successful novel but there would be the danger of producing less artistic novel. She probably wanted to create novel that would be considered artistic and evaluated as a good piece of writing rather than being evaluated as a commercially hit sentimental novel. So, she might have avoided the more market friendly Frail Woman archetype for the captive and opted for relatively older and trickier Amazon archetype for her captive character.

Tinnemeyer points out the sentimental elements that are associated with the archetype of the captivity narratives that make them highly demanded in the market in the recent times:

“Frail Flower narratives,” Namias continues, “include brutality, sadomasochistic and titillating elements, strong racist language, pleas for sympathy and commiseration with the author’s suffering, special appeals to her sad lot as a distressed mother, and occasional invectives against dirt and sex among Indians” . . . Note, however, the absence of religious appeal in Namias’s Frail Flower. “By the 1830s,” Namias argues, “a culture of delicate femininity had . . . infiltrated much of the ideology of white middleclass womanhood and an ever-present God had become modified and removed . . . for some captive women” (46).

The Frail Flower narratives include more brutality, sadomasochism, racist language that emotionally touch the readers and gather more sympathy for the captives. They are based on the culture of delicate femininity that is the womanhood expected by the middle class readers of the society. Thus, they are likely to catch attention of the readers and become commercially successful.

The change in archetypes of the captives in the slave narratives over time is the result of the changing taste of the audience. Tinnemeyer observes, “The image of the sexually and physically vulnerable white woman, removed from the safety of her own community and family, symbolized the threat inherent in the Native tribes surrounding the Puritans’ colonies” (xv). The social belief about captives and victimized women keeps on changing according to Tinnemeyer. She backs Namias for this perspective:

As Namias quite rightly points out, the female captive story was not always told the same way; changes in cultural tastes and public policy directly shaped the characterization of the captive, her physical and emotional reaction to her capture, and the depiction of her captors. By the mid-nineteenth century, Namias documents a dramatic shift in the captivity narrative paralleling the rise in domestic fiction and the “Cult of True Womanhood”; she terms the heroine of this particular period the “Frail Flower.” (xv)

According to Namia’s observation, the characterization of the captive, her physical and emotional reaction to her capture, and the depiction of her captors in the captivity narrative change according to the change in the taste of audience and public policy. The level of emotional and physical reaction to the captivity is adjusted according to the taste of audience in captivity narrative. Donoghue has made the painful experience of Ma very easy to bear in her novel *Room* because her readers wanted the

representations of the captives with controlled emotion. It is only in the emotional control, Ma's mind becomes creative and thinks up the ways through which she can escape. Her and Jack condition would be miserable and hard to manage if she were too emotional; they might be dead long ago. It is due to this logical conclusion, Donoghue appears to choose her captive not under the emotionally weak Frail Flower archetype rather she choose her under the Amazons archetype seeing better prospect for the captives, Ma and Jack.

Tinnemeyer's most of the observations of captivity narratives come with the reference of Namias as the authority of the conventions of captivity narrative. She enlists the necessary qualities the characters in captivity narratives possess in most of the cases:

Central to the captivity narrative, whether framed conventionally or tailored for Manifest Destiny, are the circumscribed gender positions of the three quintessential figures — captive, captor, and rescuer. Not surprisingly, the genre readily molds itself to the nation-building project at hand . . . Namias outlines the diachronic dimensions of the captivity narrative in terms of the culturally scripted behavior exhibited and celebrated by its female captives.

(xii)

Namias points out the necessity of the gender positions of all the three kinds of characters in captivity narratives, the captive, the captor, and the rescuer. Clear gender positions of the characters are found as important by Namias, both in factual or imaginary, tailor-made captivity narratives. At the same time, capturing the enemies and using the captivity in the nation-building mission was the general norm for the older time, so molding the project of nation-building with the genre can also be seen. More meaning than simple captivity and escape is generated if the archetype of the



captive serves the national interests and the gain for the country is resulted in a captivity narrative, and the Frail Flower archetype of the captive can serve the US national and imperial purpose. Tinnemeyer points out this interesting connection:

Regardless of the captive's conduct — whether she effects her own rescue as Hannah Dustan or turns into the “Frail Flower,” waiting patiently between fainting spells for her male rescue party — her behavior will always be interpolated to national purpose because, in its multiple versions, the genre's allegiance to U.S. imperial gain prevails. All variation within the captivity narrative results in the same set of overdetermined meanings. (xii-xiii)

The behavior of the captive following the Frail Flower archetype is most likely to serve the national purpose and the imperial gain of U.S. Captive with Frail Flower archetype. The earlier, Survivor or Amazon archetypes were also used for national purpose and glorified as contributions to the national interests as in the case of Hannah Duston. Duston was a Puritan mother captivated by the Indian tribe Abenaki in a war in late seventeenth century. At the time of her capture twenty seven colonists were killed. Duston was given the heroic status, glorified and represented as the mother of American tradition as she avenged the captors killing at least ten members of Native American family that kept her at hostage with the help of two other captives. Duston's case served the national and imperial interests of America so well that her captivity narrative became equally famous even after a century of her death. She was given the honor of first American woman having a statue; she was referred as a folk hero and celebrated as the powerful nation-building legend. She becomes the part of imperial pursuit of U.S.

More than the nation-building process, captive of Donoghue's novel *Room*, Ma can be fit for European empire building process. Many of the readers who are

interested in the dehumanizing cases of captivity that draw international attention point out that Donoghue has based her novel on the real cases of captivity. Critic Sue Leonard also points to the factuality of the captivity in the novel in her question, “Wasn’t it prurient to be basing a book on cases like Elizabeth Fritzl and Natasha Kampusch?” (176) Both the captives, Fritzl and Kampusch are Austrian and the writer is Irish-Canadian. Kampusch is an Austrian woman who was abducted at the age of 10 in March 1998 and held in a secret cellar by her kidnapper Wolfgang Priklopil for more than eight years. She escaped the cellar in August 2006. She has written a book about her ordeal, *3,096 Days* (2010). On the other hand, the Fritzl’s case came to the attention of the world in April 2008, when a woman named Elisabeth Fritzl told police in the town of Amstetten, Austria, that she had been held captive for 24 years by her father, Josef Fritzl. Fritzl frequently assaulted her, sexually abused, and raped her numerous times during her imprisonment inside a concealed area in the basement of the family home. The abuse resulted in the birth of seven children: three of them remained in captivity with their mother, one had died just days after birth, and the other three were brought up by her father Fritzl and his wife, Rosemarie, having been reported as foundlings. The international and imperialist pursuit of European criminology is fulfilled as another European-American highlights such cases. The writer is serving this function and making her captive serve the empire building interest. At the same time, the story of Ma, based on internationally famous cases helps her to get the audiences’ attention quickly and the commercial success of the book is secured. It also gives the realistic tone to her novel. The writer seems to realize this fact quickly and thus, she creates the captive character, Ma, in *Room*.

British convention of captivity narratives is not much different than the convention of American captivity narratives discussed so far. American captivity

narratives are discussed with reference to Namias' and Tinnemeyer's studies. Joe Snader discusses about the British captivity narratives and their nature in his book *Caught Between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction*:

The captivity genre places a premium on empirical inclusiveness, on capturing a broad range of experience, everything that the captive can remember, everything he or she witnessed or heard reported from other captives, and further, on shaping that material as the full truth about an alien, allegedly archaic people. From the late medieval period through the eighteenth century, captivity narratives provided increasingly detailed and influential sources for Western knowledge of alien cultures. (16)

British captivity narratives give emphasis to the empirical inclusiveness, capturing of the various experiences of captives in captivity and the events the captives witness or hear, full truth about the captor and so on. The British readers also appear to have the imperial bias and they believe that the archaic or alien people alone can be the captor rather than a civilized European person. Donoghue's novel *Room* appear to go against the bias as it presents the so-called civilized European male as the captor though her novel fulfills all the other conventions demanded by the British captivity narratives.

The British approach regarding the captivity narratives is well clarified in Snader's analysis of British captivity narratives. He writes, "From the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, with the steady expansion of British colonialism, captivity narratives attained a prominent place in English writing on the foreign" (16). Snader points out that British captivity narrative are colonial in their objective and they serve the British colonial interests. He points out that they occupy the prominent place in English writing on the foreign during the expansion of colonialism. It has pointed to the British mentality to show that everything foreign is exotic, uncivilized,

cannibalistic, captor of humanity informing the captivity narratives in the history of British literature. Snader further clarifies how the captivity narrative served the imperialist motive and colonial civilizing mission of the other parts of the world:

Such narratives offer a crucial point for understanding enlightenment strategies of representing the allegedly savage on the eve of their systematic implementation within the burgeoning science of anthropology. Many of these narratives employed the lists, hierarchies, and other discursive schema of travel description, and these schema enabled the development of detailed portraits of alien cultures as tyrannical, barbaric, and superstitious foils for the modernity of Western civilization. (16-17)

The concepts that alleged savages are to be enlightened and it is white man's burden to civilize them are deeply rooted to the inherent motive of the British captivity narratives. Many of the captivity narratives used the colonial motives and they even used the cases of captivity in their travelogues and portraits of the alien cultures during colonial period. Discursively, it elevated the British image as civilized and helped them to present the native and alien cultures as tyrannical, barbaric, and superstitious foils for the modernity of Western civilization. Thus, captivity literature served the imperialist interest of the British colonizers for a long time.

The difficulty of civilizing the natives for the British colonizers can be compared to the difficulty to teach Jack the social values after the rescue. Ma brings Jack to her family home where Jack sees Ma's brother, Paul. He had been married to Deana only after Ma was kidnapped and made captive by Old Nick. Paul and Deana have got a daughter named Bronwyn who is similar in age with Jack. Jack does not know how to behave with the people because he is habituated only with the narrow life inside the room where he was captive with his mother. At one instance in the

novel, Jack touches the private parts of Bronwyn and Deana slaps Jack and does not let him touch her. It confuses Jack because he was habituated with bath together with his mother at the room and there was nothing offensive or unmannerly for him. He narrates the incident:

Deana bangs my hand away.

I can't stop screaming.

"Calm down, Jack. Did I — is your hand hurt?"

There's all blood coming out of my wrist.

"I'm sorry," says Deana, "I'm so sorry, it must have been my ring." She stares at her ring with the gold bits. "But listen, we don't touch each other's private parts, that is not OK. OK?" (217)

Jack even does not know the meaning of private parts and he needs to be taught the social manner. For him, there is nothing like privacy because he never learns in the room the concept of privacy. His mother sees everything he does and he sees every part of his mother's body in the room. More surprising is the manner of Deana for Jack as she does not only forbid him from touching the private parts of Bronwyn but also she cleans her body parts he touches. Jack learns the social etiquettes after the incidence but it is very hard for him to socialize. He starts to feel comfortable with them; he learns gender norms as well as the ways of addressing other people in the society. The punishment he gets as he does not know the social etiquette is similar to the punishment the native captives used to get in the hand of the Euro-American in the captivity narratives of the beginning phase. Jack is free as well as a captive to the social norms even after he escapes the captivity. He is a symbol of the uncivilized and barbaric native. This research is focused on the uncivilized condition of Jack that is exactly similar to the condition of the natives in the British captivity narratives.

All the etiquettes Jack knows are narrow and they fit for the room and the things around the room alone:

“Good night, Room,” I say very quiet. “Good night, Lamp and Balloon.”

“Good night, stove,” says Ma, “and good night, table.”

I’m grinning. “Good night, Wordy Ball. Good night, Fort. Good night, Rug.”

“Good night, air,” says Ma.

“Good night, noises everywhere.”

“Good night, Jack.”

“Good night, Ma. And Bugs, don’t forget the Bugs.”

“Night-night,” she says, “sleep tight, don’t let the bugs bite.” (39)

Jack has learnt to say good night to the things around his room as he goes to bed. He bids good night to lamp, balloon, table, rug, air, noise and his mother before he goes to wardrobe to sleep. The things around him are not social beings; they are just the things necessary for a social being. So it is not uncommon for Jack, who thinks the things around him as the social beings, not knowing how to behave with other people as soon as he escapes captivity. He finds hard to learn the social values.

The difficulty of learning the social values in Jack can simply be seen as the problems the captives of captivity narratives have to bear to adjust to society. The people who are raised in society and made captives later find it easier to readjust them to the society like Ma but the people who are born inside the captivity and have never been in touch with the society find it difficult. Such difficulties can be only the impacts of the captivity but such instances serve better for the British readers of captivity narratives as they cater to their persistent colonial desires and satisfy their psychological need that the civilization process is very hard for the alien and natives.

The image of uncivilized, barbarian springs up not only with the image of the captor, Old Nick, but also with the image of Jack. Thus, Donoghue's novel well serves the requirements of British captivity narratives and appeals to the British readers with the depiction of Jack.

Justifying captivity in the name of adoption or with the negative image of the Native American captives also served the propagandists and populist literature during colonial America. It served the colonial interest of Euro-Americans as Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt observe:

Instances of adoption and captivity populate the images of populist and propagandistic literature of the colonial period, and the lurid details of the sufferings of individuals in bondage have become a literary *genre* in its own right: the captivity narrative. Imagery of the brutal, violent, and "savage" Indian contained in captivity and adoption narratives created a strong stereotype within popular representations. (8)

Basically, the minute and clear detail of sufferings of the captive became the captivity narrative and it justified the violence as a civilizing act of the savage Indians. The colonizers wanted to justify their abuse on the captives and their colonial interest was served by the savage image of the captive. But the representation of the captive keeps changing as per the change in contextual factors and it serves different functions and takes various forms of representation accordance with the interest of the propagandist. The representation of Ma and Jack in the novel *Room*, thus, may well serves the interest of modern propagandists.

To sum up, after examining Donoghue's novel *Room*, we reach the conclusion that the novel follows most of the conventions of the captivity narrative and it may also be seen that the captivity in the modern time, in the time of globalization, cannot

easily be justified. The captives undergo great deals of sufferings in the captivity narratives and they follow certain archetypes on the basis of how they tackle with their captivity. They undergo great deal of ordeals to adjust to the larger world outside after they escape the captivity. Modern media does not care about the emotional sufferings of the captives; only it wants is to sell the news. So, it also becomes the hurdle in the readjustment of the captive in the society as we see with the case of Ma.

From the very beginning of the captivity narrative as a genre, it served propagandist function. It depicted the captivity and escapes in relation to the Indians in the early times and justified their relevance as the parts of nation-building process of America. It served the European settlers' project of building nation and it has been used to address their interest whoever is the captive. The heroic captivity of Europeans in which the captives escape killing Indian captives was celebrated while the inhuman punishment to the Indian captive in European custody is also justified. Captivity narrative became European propaganda to show the native Indians barbarians and Europeans as civilized and superior. After that phase of captivity narrative, it started to serve the colonial interests. It became a form of colonial propaganda to point out the exotic, barbaric, uncivilized condition of the natives of the colonies and thus, helped them to justify the colonial presence in the colonies. It justified their white men's burden motive and their empire-building process was benefitted from the captivity narrative. In the modern times, the motive behind the genre of captivity narrative appears to be different. It is used to promote Western universalism, human rights and globalized humanitarian purposes. It promotes the need of global approach in criminology as well as the need for common strategy. Donoghue develops the character of Ma, the captive of the novel *Room*, from the research on the cases of two Austrian captive women - Elizabeth Fritzl and Natasha



Kampusch. She neither charges the non-European, third-world natives nor is there apparent colonial interest. She is just promoting the belief of being a citizen of the world; national boundaries are to be crossed and Western universalism and human rights must prevail on the people around the globe to fight against the crimes like captivity. Changing Euro-American interests and the contextual factors that develop in the modern times play crucial role to shape the novel *Room*.

After escape, Ma and Jack undergo medical checkup in a clinic called Cumberland Clinic. The staffs of the clinic see rapid progress on Jack in terms of his adjustability to the unfamiliar new world:

He is “Miracle Jack” to the staff at the exclusive Cumberland Clinic who have already lost their hearts to the pint-sized hero who awakened Saturday night to a brave new world. The haunting, long-haired Little Prince is the product of his beautiful young mother’s serial abuse at the hands of the Garden-shed Ogre (captured by state troopers in a dramatic standoff Sunday at two a.m.). Jack says everything is “nice” and adores Easter eggs but still goes up and down stairs on all fours like a monkey. (190)

The image and condition of Jack is well depicted in the quote. He says everything nice, he adores Easter eggs but still he cannot walk up and down the stairs like a normal boy. He goes up and down with both hands and legs like a monkey. He is represented in the quote as uncivilized barbarian or an animal; not a civilized human being. Jack is the symbol of monkey, a wild animal or a barbarian.

It is also plausible to say that the writer is using room as a symbol of national boundaries in her novel. It is very hard for Jack to adjust to larger world outside the room after escape. With this representation of Jack, she symbolically suggests that globalization, Western universalism and human rights are hard to be adopted by a

nationalist who is habituated to see everything inside the geographical boundary of his/her country. Looking from this angle, it is easy to see the politics behind Donoghue's captivity narrative. This politics is result of the changing contextual factor - the advent of globalization. Thus, this research concludes that Donoghue's tactically uses the elements of captivity narrative as well as she participates in the Euro-American propaganda of the modern time in her novel *Room*.

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