



# THE POLITICS OF SPACE: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF CONFINEMENT

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## Abstract

Depending on how it is imposed and the purpose of imposition, confinement can take many forms. Solitary confinement, for instance, is a type of imprisonment where the person is separated from social contact, with the exemption of the prison employees. In this type of confinement, the effect of power is more evident than in others. When it comes to postpartum confinement, which is still in practice in the adapted forms, the women are supposed to stay away from the general public following childbirth so that they can recover quickly. This type of confinement is said to have advantages and disadvantages to the person who is being confined. Regardless of the type of confinement, however, the process of being confined has serious impacts at the psychological level. Psychologists have been probing the mental impacts of solitary confinement on the imprisoned. There are also concerns regarding the human rights of the person who is confined by the system. It all boils down to the concept of freedom and how it is affected when a person is confined, regardless of the effect on power, choice, and autonomy.

A person is fettered from the very birth itself. He is imprisoned by his societal surroundings. His key to the window of freedom rests with society. Every man is caught in his society's web, and even

while he enjoys his freedom, society has its firm hold on the individual. Confinement cannot always be thought of as something negative as it cannot be avoided sometimes. There are also instances where we use coercion, thereby restricting individuals. Many women are confined within the walls of their 'home' without having a say in things, an instance of confinement which cannot be justified, whereas a convict is imprisoned so as to ensure the safety and security of society. There is always a physical form of obstruction in these forms of confinement. Curtailing one's freedom of expression is also part of this incarceration where one's ideas, views, and perceptions are controlled.

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## Introduction

In literary studies, the past two decades have been increasingly concerned with the ways in which space and place enlighten aesthetics, culture, and politics. The idea of space had witnessed a tremendous transformation over the ages. A few centuries back, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning which evoked the idea of an empty place. The general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. The philosophical works of Rene Descartes can be viewed as providing a decisive turning point in the concept of space to its present understanding. The ideas of Descartes reread the Aristotelian tradition, which held space and time as categories that facilitated the naming and classifying of the evidence of the senses.

Different kinds of space include open space and closed space. In an open space, human beings are not hindered by any kind of mediating things. They can act according to their will, and nobody puts any kind of restrictions there. But whenever we are closing the space, individual freedom is curtailed to some extent. Different kinds of restrictions and confinements are necessary for the proper functioning of our society. Though freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed by our constitution, most often, people do not enjoy their freedom in its fullness. Even denying the freedom of expression for writers can be thought of as an encroachment into their literary space. Though space is an abstract concept, there are certain asymmetric, uneven power relationships that play a greater part in these spaces. It can be gender, race, etc. People become confined as they are caught in the play of these power structures. Even the

members of our own family can become asymmetrical power structures, and changes will come over the lives of those victims.

Contrasting to the confinements thrust upon an individual by the closed space, an open space allows individuals to live their lives in their fullest essence and vigour. The open space is characterized by the lack of any power institution, whether subjective or objective, which seeks to deprive mankind of its infinite freedom. Akin to this concept, theorists such as Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, in their prominent works including *Anti-Oedipus*; *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and *Thousand Plateaus*, developed the concepts of ‘territorialization’ and ‘deterritorialization’. According to them, deterritorialization, as the name suggests, opposes any kinds of ‘territories’ that curtail individual freedom emphasizing the intrusion of capitalism into individual lives. They envision the potential of individuals to transcend the hindrances of any nature, whether cultural, religious, social, political, personal, or moral, and to emerge above these obstacles to become, in the phraseology of Deleuze and Guattari, a schizo or more ambitiously an Anti-Oedipus.

Unlike an open space, a closed space denies humans their potential to grab the infinite possibilities present in the territories of open space. A closed space is the field where the power structures engage themselves in a play of different statures consisting of political, social, cultural, and religious nature. In contrast to the concept of deterritorialization, the closed space emphasizes territorialization, a concept developed by different theorists of academia. A closed space is the sight of oppression, subjugation, coercion, often dragging down an individual into the stature of a slave. The oppression encountered by the individuals in this closed space can be of any nature; in the closed space, an individual is often oppressed and ends up often as an outcast depending on their race, class, religion, gender, and political sentiments. Here, in this closed space, the status or the duties of an individual is predetermined. Elaborating upon this concept, Jacques Lacan observed that even at the birth itself, as the individuals are born into the oedipal triangle (constituted by the father, mother, the child), they are deprived of their freedom. It is from this oedipal triangle that Guattari and Deleuze envision the Anti-Oedipus to rise. Thus a closed space can be defined against the concept of deterritorialization propagated by Deleuze and Guattari.

The open space and closed space constantly confront each other. This confrontation can be traced even to the stage of a foetus. Sigmund Freud tried to explain this concept as the traumatic separation of the child from the familiar space of the womb during childbirth. For Freud, the physical encounter with space is capable of provoking psychological responses that disrupt the flow of time and propel the individual into repetitive behaviour and other obsessions, thus curtailing the freedom of the individual.

Unlike the open space, the closed space lacks any kind of variety that may occur amidst individuals. The closed space, more or less as time passes, reflects the concept of governmentality as developed by Michael Foucault. Michael Foucault, in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, written in 1975, offers an analysis of the social and theoretical mechanisms that triggered a massive change in the western penal systems during the modern age. Foucault for attributing a sense of authenticity to work based on his observations on historical documents that he acquired from France. In their work, he propagates different dimensions and aspects of power that subjugates an individual or group of individuals. He observes three dimensions of power- one dimensional, two dimensional, and three dimensional. According to Foucault, the one-dimensional power involves force; it is an aspect of power in which a person is made to follow certain rules by the dominant forces of society by exerting power over the individual, either physical or mental in nature. The second dimensions of power consist of both force and consent. The way in which citizens of a particular country are made to follow certain rules by law is an example of the second dimension of power. In the third dimension, the element of force is eliminated, and the individuals follow or accept their subjugation wholeheartedly, mistaking it for comfort and freedom. The way in which people belong to a particular community, following a set of traditional rituals and customs, can be interpreted as an example of the third dimension of power.

These three dimensions of power can be seen as playing an integral part in the claustrophobic space. The power that begins as the one-dimensional version of power involving force often acquires transformation across the passage of time often ends up in the third dimension of power, which involves no coercion but consent or acceptance.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault also offers three aspects in which state exert power upon its citizen. It consists of hierarchical observations, normalization, and governmentality. According to

Foucault, the government constantly tries to uniformize the society for smooth and effective functioning. Through the institutions such as education, law, military, etc., the government explicitly or strategically thrust into individuals the ideologies and principles which make them loyal to the government. The government brings the society under their surveillance, adopting the method of the panopticon. It is a type of institutional building and a system of control designed by Jeremy Bentham. Later as a counterpart to this method, Thomas Mathiesen developed the method of *Synoptic*. It is the concept of surveillance of the few by the many.

These two methods, despite their magnitude of intrusion into the individual's lives, end up curtailing the freedom of a particular individual or group of individuals in society or the society at large. The hidden agenda behind this practice of governmentality is prominently to make a society with individuals sharing the same outlooks, which can be broadly defined as the practice of uniformizing the society. This can be viewed as confinement of individuals in one's own country. This kind of governmentality can only be made practicable in a field like the closed space. This is the paramount factor that deprives the closed space of individuals with diverse outlooks or attitudes. Broadly speaking, to put the human beings in the closed space tends to look upon society as a mere mass than as a collection of worthy individuals.

As the term suggests, the closed space constantly attempts to diminish the infinite possibilities that await the individuals in an open space and shrinks them back to a field characterized by predetermined roles and duties. This approach as the representative feature of the closed space can be defined in the terminology of 'interpellation' as developed by Louise Althusser. He developed this idea of interpellation to explain the effectiveness of ideologies in capitalist society. Interpellation, which can be literally translated as hailing, denotes the process of the society 'calling the individuals for particular duties, positions or social interactions'. Althusser traces such a pattern of societal structure to the influences of different ideologies. According to Althusser, every society is made of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), which are instrumental to the constant reproduction of the relations of production of the given society. While ISA belongs to the private domain and referred to private institutions such as family, church, etc., the RSA denotes public institutions consisting of police, military, etc., which are controlled by the government. Thus, interpellation can be summarized as a process by which ideologies shape a given society. This kind of

influence that different kinds of ideologies can impose into a particular society is only possible in a closed space.

A closed space also witnesses a wide array of domination as it emerges as the centre of structures of interconnected powers. In the closed space, people are subjected to oppression in various ways. One among them is racial discrimination. It refers to the practice of treating an individual or group of individuals less favourably or denying them the same opportunities which are given to others in similar situations because of their race, the country where they were born, their ethnic origin or their skin colour. Though the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of his or her race, colour, descent, national origin or ethnic origin, or immigrant status, racial discrimination is still in vogue in different corners of the world. The works such as *The Open Society and its Enemies* by Karl Popper, *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, *The Language of the Genes* by Steve Jones, *The Ordeal of Integration* by Orlando Patterson, *The Ethics of Identity* by Kwame Anthony Appiah etc. address such kinds of racial discriminations occurred in the society. This kind of racial discrimination deprives an individual of his freedom and forced to stay desolate and deprived throughout their life.

A discursive medium through which power is enacted in a closed space can also be that of gender discrimination. Gender inequality is the idea and situation that women and men are not to be treated equally. Gender discrimination can be defined as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex or treating a person usually in an unfair manner because of their sex. The works such as *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction* by Kate Chopin, *The Female Persuasion* by Meg Wolitzer etc., speak about such discriminations in society. Women's entrapment in a domestic space can also be categorized under discrimination based on sex. Society itself assigns roles for both genders. Professions are always attributed to men while women are assigned to be in the embodied stifling experience of being at home. They suffer from smothering confinement in the home. Imprisoning woman in houses is still very much alive in the present. They get confined to space, not of their own choosing. Violence has always been tied up with domestic space, even if the woman in the house fails to recognize it. The famous one-act play by Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* is a perfect example of this classification. In the play, the woman protagonist is represented by the use of a caged bird, a common symbol of women's roles in society and the male characters are prejudiced in

believing that nothing important can be discovered by women. Whatever they engage themselves can be only defined as ‘trifles’. However, the emancipation of women from such closed spaces is addressed and advocated by various writers, thinkers and activists. Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simon de Beauvoir, Alice Walker, Sylvia Plath etc., have worked for the liberation of women from these claustrophobic spaces. A similar kind of treatment or appreciation can be seen in the monumental work *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen.

The institution of marriage also paves the way for the ill-treatment and subjugation of women across the world. Abuses are upheld by privileges of possession and entitlement in some cultures, and the well-being of women is undermined by a powerful act of subordination. Many men in society consider marriage as an authorization to have power and supremacy over a woman. Critics of marriage argue that it is an institution that contributes to the maintaining of traditional gender roles, thus preventing women from achieving social equality and reinforcing the idea that women exist to serve men, which in turn increases the abuse of women. Marriage thus acts as a tool that chains women into a confined space between the walls of a home.

## Conclusion

The individual in a closed space is often conditioned in such a way that they knowingly or unknowingly participate in their own subjugation. The same kind of attitude is propagated in the concept of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argues that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power not by direct and overt means but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression. When side-lined and confined by such diverse institutional power dominance within a space, that space will shape or condition their lives in a way that they find happiness within that restrained space.

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