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The Spatiality of Violence in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*

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Abstract

The present study, emphasizing the significance of interdisciplinary approach in interrogating the phenomenon of violence as comprehensively as possible, explores the concept further through the insights from recent spatial studies and spatially oriented literature studies. Although space was traditionally defined either as a distance between entities or as an empty, natural, and passive container which functions as a backstage for human action, more recent theorizations, with especially the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities since the late 1960s, have approached the term from more critical, analytical perspectives. Space has been conceptualized as an active, dynamic agent participating in social, political and cultural processes. To investigate the active role space, intersecting with a set of cultural, economic and political processes, plays in shaping individual and social experiences, it is significant to go beyond the traditional understanding of space as a physical entity but to include the imagined and lived aspects of spatial production as well. Violence, as an equally contested social phenomenon defying easy theorizations, is a pertinent term to be considered in relation to space with its physical, imagined and lived dimensions, and the present study seeks to explore the relations between these two terms as represented in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*. The play offers significant insights into the subtle workings of violence in everyday spaces, and calls for a comprehensive, intersectional approach in the enquiry of the term rather than focusing on a straightforward perpetrator and victim binary.

Keywords: violence, spatial turn, Thirdspace, spatiality of violence, Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*

Susan Glaspell'in *Trifles* Eserinde Şiddetin Mekânsallığı

Öz

Bu çalışmada, şiddet olgusunun etraflı bir şekilde ele alınmasında disipliner arası çalışmanın önemi vurgulanarak, kavramın tanımlanmasında ve irdelenmesinde son dönem mekân çalışmalarının ve mekân odaklı edebiyat çalışmalarının sağlayabileceği potansiyel katkılar üzerinde durulmaktadır. Genel kanının aksine, mekân yalnızca toplumsal olayların vuku bulduğu bir arka plan yahut pasif, nötr bir düzlem değildir. Aksine, mekân çeşitli vesilelerle üretilerek, toplumsal, siyasi, kültürel süreçlere aktif bir şekilde katılım sağlayıp, bu süreçlerin gelişiminde, yönlendirilmesinde önemli roller üstlenmektedir. Kavramın bireysel ve toplumsal hayatın şekillendirilmesindeki aktif rolünün idrakinde, mekânın fiziksel boyutun ötesine gidilerek, ideolojik ve yaşanan mekân boyutlarını anlamak önem arz etmektedir. Mekân üzerine geliştirilen son dönem kuramlara bakıldığında, mekânın biteviye üretilmekte olduğu, mekânsal bir bakış açısının toplumsal, ekonomik, kültürel, vb. gibi birçok sürece dair önemli ipuçları sunmakta olduğu ortaya koyulmaktadır. Bu noktada, mekânsal farkındalık diyebileceğimiz bakış açısı şiddet kavramının daha etraflı bir şekilde incelenmesine yönelik değerli, derinlikli perspektifler sunmaktadır. Makale; Susan Glaspell'in *Trifles* (1916) isimli tiyatro eserinde şiddet ve mekân kavramlarının arasındaki ilişkiyi disiplinler arası bir yaklaşımla ele almaktadır. Sonuç olarak, *Trifles* şiddetin gündelik alanlardaki incelikli işleyişine dair önemli içgörüler sunuyor ve terimin araştırılmasında doğrudan fail ve mağdur ikilisine odaklanmak yerine daha kapsamlı, kesişimsel bir yaklaşımın gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiddet, mekânsal dönüş, üçüncü mekan, şiddetin mekânsallığı, Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*

Violence is a contested term which defies easy definitions, a fact which necessitates thinking about the concept as comprehensive as possible with the participation of multiple disciplines and perspectives. The term seems to be self-evident to many, and what is meant by it is usually taken for granted without ever bothering us to define in which sense we use it, which is part of the problem with the concept of

violence. It is traditionally and commonly considered in physical terms and climactic moments of crisis. Since especially the second half of the twentieth century however, there have been various ways to theorize the concept of violence in the social sciences and humanities. Despite differences in their names and foci, such diverse critical perspectives have contributed to understand the contested nature and complex workings of violence and called for further exploration of the term as an always on-going process. Thinking more comprehensively about the term with its multifarious social, cultural, structural and also spatial manifestations is urgent, which requires the participation of various perspectives going beyond the boundaries of any discipline. The present study brings the perspectives of spatial studies and literary studies into the further examination of violence as a socio-spatial phenomenon, and thereby seeks to contribute how the study of physical, symbolic and lived spaces as well as their representations in literature can contribute to the theorizations about the concept. Analyzing the American playwright Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916) from a spatially oriented literary approach, I will first delineate the spatiality of violence, and then examine the ways in which the play represents narrative spaces imbued with visible and subtle forms of violence as active participants in understanding the reasons behind a murder taking place in a rural, midwestern farmhouse.

Space, like violence, is an equally contested term. As highlighted by many scholars, such as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey, space is not a passive, objective and container-like background for human action. On the contrary, it is a shaping force participating actively in the production of socio-cultural phenomena. Since the spatial turn of the late 1960s in particular, human geographers and scholars of spatial studies have pointed toward the neglected status of space as a critical category and initiated a broader understanding of the term across various disciplines. Henri Lefebvre's work, in this regard, has called for a radical re-consideration with regard to the significance of space in human life. More precisely, the traditional view of space as empty, natural, objective "thing" has been contested, and the term has instead been conceptualized as a dynamic agent participating in a myriad of social processes and shaping how they are experienced by individuals and groups, a fact explained by Edward Soja as follows: "We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power

and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology" (*Postmodern* 6). Yet, this critical awareness of "apparently innocent spatiality" may often remain lacking in the interrogation of social processes such as injustice, various forms of discrimination and education. For instance, paying attention to the spatial aspects of injustice will not only shed light on how everyday spaces are filled with and produced by injustices but also point toward the roles of physical and symbolic spaces in the continuation of injustices. More precisely, the spatial awareness that the spatial turn in social sciences and humanities call for has the potential of understanding and demonstrating the spatiality of injustice as well as the injustices caused by and experienced on a spatial level. With this renewed interest in the inherent spatiality of human life, a broad spectrum of space-related terms such as mapping and cartography, deterritorialization have been employed as analytical tools in various disciplines including but not limited to sociology, history and philosophy. Likewise, a solid number of scholars from literary studies have turned to space as an interpretive framework and questioned the prioritization of time and traditional tendency to overlook space as a simple, negligible backdrop for action in literary texts. More recently, a few spatially oriented literary approaches, including literary cartography, literary geography and geocriticism have explored the multifaceted relations between space, place and literary texts.

Once its physical, ideological and lived dimensions are considered together, space and all sorts of processes and factors that both contribute to its formation are important. Violence is undoubtedly one of them. More precisely, violence is a complex phenomenon which actively affects the individuals' and social groups' socio-spatial experiences and molded by these very experiences. For example, the production and arrangement of public and private spaces put some individuals and groups at a disadvantage; the location of health centers, libraries, sports fields and bus stops cause injustices on a spatial level; the socio-spatial compartmentalization of social groups according to income, cultural or ethnic specificities in an urban setting, and thereby minimizing contact and interaction between individuals belonging to different economic classes and educational levels with each other are issues closely related to both space and violence, and there is a bilateral cause-effect relationship between them. Recently, there have been a good number of studies that explore the spatial aspects of

violence especially in the field of human geography, but there is indeed more work to be done with the participation of scholars from other disciplines, such as literary studies, in this emerging field.[1]

Correspondingly, the present study, highlighting the spatiality of violence and vice versa, engages with both concepts as explored in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*. Literature offers valuable insights into the ways these two phenomena relate each other and manifest themselves in individuals' lives, and thereby contributes to the further exploration of the spatiality of violence and "violent" real and imagined spaces as they are represented and contested *in* and *through* literary works. Any literary text can be considered a critical space itself which both represents the broader socio-cultural phenomena and functions as a commentary on the existing, conventional paradigms and contributes to different, alternative ways of thinking about violence from a spatial perspective. As my spatially oriented analysis of *Trifles* seeks to demonstrate, literary works, functioning as cognitive maps, chart the complexity, relationality and intersectionality of socio-spatial experiences in understanding, defining and coping with violence as comprehensively as possible.

Trifles is a one-act play published in 1916. It is an example of psychological and analytical drama, focusing on the mysterious murder of a midwestern farmer and narrating how a set of five characters search for clues around the abandoned farmhouse in the absence of his wife who is under custody as a suspect. The plot events are based on true story that occurred in Iowa in the year 1899. Susan Glaspell (1882-1948), working as a newspaper reporter at *Des Moines News* back then, covered the murder trial of John Hossack who, as understood later, was killed by his wife Margaret Hossack in their farmhouse. Being deeply immersed in the event for months from its beginning till the final decision sentencing Margaret Hossack to life in prison, Glaspell decided to turn this actual murder trial to a play years later in 1916 when she, along with her husband and some friends, founded the amateur theater company named the Provincetown Players in Massachusetts. The writer of fourteen plays, nine novels and fifty short stories and the receiver of Pulitzer Prize for her Alison's House, Glaspell is a central, albeit a controversial, figure in American drama known especially for her powerful female protagonists, overt feminist attitudes towards patriarchal institutions, and plots that represent the everyday problems experienced by women especially in rural, traditional settings.

Likewise, *Trifles,* set in midwestern rural town at the turn of the twentieth century, narrates the investigation of John Wright's being strangled to death while sleeping in his house. The play begins in the cold, untidy kitchen of the Wright's midwestern farmhouse, and the Sheriff Henry Peters, the County Attorney George Henderson, Lewis Hale who is the Wrights' neighbor are the first to enter. Mrs. Peters, the Sheriff's wife, and Mrs. Hale join the three men and stand close to the door in a timid, hesitant and disturbed manner. Upon the Attorney's questioning, Mr. Hale explains how he comes across Minnie rocking on a chair in the kitchen without knowing what to do when he comes by to ask John Wright about sharing a telephone line with him only to find about his murder. Minnie tells him that she, too, has found him strangled to death on their bed. After Mr. Hale's claims, the men look for clues around the house, but the kitchen is dismissed because it is a "woman's space" with unimportant, trivial things. However, those "trifles" in the kitchen turn out to reveal the most important clues about the murder. Occupying a liminal space and role in the entire setting, Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Hale pay attention to the kitchen and find proofs of frustration and an abusive, dysfunctional marriage through things such as a piece of quilt with improper stitching and her rocking chair. On several occasions, the men come by the kitchen, and they make stereotypical comments on the women's detective work. An empty, broken birdcage in a cupboard and a canary with a broken neck and wrapped in a piece of textile preserved within Minnie's sewing box are what help the two women conclude that she might have killed John Wright because of her anger at her husband's strangling the bird and her victimization within this claustrophobic space. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Lewis are at first not sure whether their findings should be disclosed to men or should remain as secrets between the two at the expense of covering up these potential incriminating evidences. However, focusing on the socio-spatial processes behind the violent action rather than the crisis moment and the thought that the men would stereotype them once again help Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Lewis decide to protect her by hiding the evidences. The play's ending does not reveal whether Minnie is found guilty or released, but the conversation between the two women in the bleak, domestic space of the Wrights creates a sense of sympathy with her and other women who are enclosed within the patriarchal system and thus can maintain little, if not any, continuum with the rest of society.

As this brief plot summary may already suggest, the themes of violence and subtle relationship between victim and perpetrator are of pivotal significance, and the play provides the reader with complex, comprehensive perspectives in the enquiry of these issues. Especially, the different attitudes of male and female characters toward the violent murder of John Wright is a catalytic event that interrogates the reader by urging us to think more deeply about the contested, complex nature of violence. While the men such as the Attorney and the Sheriff tend to focus on the climactic act of murder and direct all of their action to solve the mystery by finding the perpetrator, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Wright look more at its background and imagine the reasons that have possibly driven Minnie to commit it. Thus, the play is more about the processual and intersectional nature of violence and potential ways of empowerment of the silenced than the victimization of women only. More precisely, it highlights the various processes and relations that circumscribe Minnie's subjectivity within the domestic space opened and regulated by John Wright. That Minnie is remembered by Mrs. Hale as an outstanding, lively girl with full of life before her abusive marriage with John Wright who is described as a "good" yet "hard" man with whom one would not want to "pass the time of day" (Glaspell 1162), her subsequent isolation within the farmhouse without any social contact even to her next-door neighbor are revealing how violence should not be conceptualized solely in terms of physical brutality and why penalizing the perpetrator will not secure its eradication in the society. As the quotation below suggests, the women adopt a more complex, comprehensive perspective in interpreting and dealing with violence:

> MRS. PETERS: But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.
>
> MRS. HALE: It would, wouldn't it? [*Dropping her sewing.*] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when *she* was here. I—[*Looking around the room.*]—wish I had.
>
> MRS. PETERS: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale—your house and your children.
>
> MRS. HALE: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come.

> I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—[*Shakes her head.*]

MRS. PETERS: Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up. (Glaspell 1162)

Mrs. Hale's regret regarding not visiting Minnie before the crisis moment has taken place is indeed significant because it puts the spell not just on Minnie or John Wright but includes herself, therefore the community as well, which, in turn, reveals that the play is not primarily interested in finding and punishing the perpetrator. To put it differently, Minnie's isolation and her subsequent victimization are the consequences of the society's turning its back on her, and this fact is not given to justify the violent act committed in the house but to acknowledge why violence and crime do not exist separately from a whole set of social, cultural and spatial processes and interrelations. This point is significant, for it reconsiders the category of victimization and rejects the representation of women as being pathetic victims. In fact, the female characters' peripheralization in the kitchen in both physical and metaphorical senses of the word empowers them, for this very experience of being stereotyped by men as being frivolous and interested in trifles, helps them adopt a different, more nuanced perspective in looking at the objects and physical spaces around themselves. In spatial terms, the Wrights' house becomes a liminal zone for the female characters or a "Thirdspace" in Soja's taxonomy, albeit a contradictory and contested one, *in* and *through* which they can disturb the patriarchal order and build empathy with Minnie. More precisely, in his *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre, arguing that space is a social and historical product which operates on different levels, introduces three critical concepts that are dialectically related: perceived space (spatial practice), conceived space (representations of space), and lived space (spaces of representation). Similarly, Edward Soja, drawing heavily on Lefebvre's conceptual triad, identifies three categories in his spatial analysis: Firstspace (real), Secondspace (imagined), and Thirdspace ("real-and-imagined"). The house, in this regard, can be seen a socially produced space not only in terms of concrete materiality and spatial practices (Firstspace) and symbolic, ideological constructions (Secondspace) but also with regard to lived,

"real-and-imagined" spaces (Thirdspace) through which the physically and discursively produced spaces are experienced and negotiated by the protagonist. Below, I will examine the role of spatial configurations in Glaspell's call for understanding violence as being closely related to the socio-spatiality of human life.

In *Susan Glaspell in Context,* J. Ellen Gainor suggests that "[o]ne key achievement of [Glaspell's] drama is her ability to make the stage environment come alive as another player in performance" (7), a claim which is especially relevant for *Trifles* on a textual level. The play makes close, causal relationship between the characters, their spaces as well as their spatial practices. It starts with the characters' entrance to Minnie's cold, untidy kitchen. In physical terms, the exposition clearly states that the men, who are introduced by their profession in direct contrast to the women whose first names are not mentioned even, are the first to enter, and they immediately get closer to the stove situated in the kitchen's center. With a more timid and hesitant manner, the women, who are "stand[ing] close together near the door" (Glaspell 1156), are described as occupying a peripheral position. When the County Attorney trivializes Minnie's kitchen as a "mess" and thus her "[n]ot much of a housekeeper" (Glaspell 1158), one of the central conflicts in the play manifests itself, and the kitchen space, occupying a central role, mobilizes action in the plot.[2] For instance, the Attorney's criticism of Minnie's kitchen and thereby her "housekeeping" identity along with his stereotyping claims about women are challenged by Mrs. Hale: "Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be" (Glaspell 1158). Thus, space, from the beginning, asserts itself to be constitutive of the play's themes, and the following spatial analysis informed by Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja's trialectic understanding of the concept, namely physical, symbolic and lived perspectives, will analyze how violence and space construct each other mutually.

To begin with physical space and spatial practices, *Trifles* suggests that the Wrights' house is located in a remote, rural farm in the Midwest. Highlighting the significance of the physical setting, the play literally begins with space: "*The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table— other signs of incompleted work*" (Glaspell 1155-56). This initial description of the kitchen

already contests the traditional notion of home as an enclosed sphere of privacy and peaceful solace for its inhabitants. It is no longer a safe haven but something to be "turn[ed] against her [Minnie]" (Glaspell 1160), highlighting the house's ultimate status as the male figure's property just like the wife. The male characters' ruthless entrance into the kitchen and their describing the place only in negative ways, such as "Dirty towels!", "Here's a nice mess," "Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?" (Glaspell 1158) reveal how domestic spaces are perceived and practiced by the patriarchy even in the absence of John Wright. To the women, coming into the kitchen, "snooping around and criticizing" (Glaspell 1159) is an act of trespassing, especially in Minnie's absence. Furthermore, within the farmhouse, there is an identifiable contrast between the male and female characters' movements. While the men move inside and outside the house freely throughout the text, the women, conjuring up Minnie's physical entrapment in it, are physically fixated in the kitchen. Ironically, the County Attorney and the Sheriff look for evidence outside the kitchen which, from their male gaze, is the least important place in the Wrights' house. Instead, they move constantly and look for evidence elsewhere in the farmhouse. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Wright, on the other hand, do not treat space as a simple, fixated background but approach the kitchen as speaking to them in its own way. For instance, the rocking-chair, which is usually expected to be used in a porch or outdoor space, marks a strong, disruptive presence. Mr. Hale reports that that he finds Minnie rocking back and forth on it when he finds about the murder, suggesting that Minnie's spatial confinement within the farmhouse is epitomized by her circumcised movement on the rocker. Its simple act of moving back and forth gives one an illusional sense of movement, a fact which can also be seen in Minnie's "queer" (Glaspell 1157) state of mind when Mr. Hale comes into the kitchen. She escapes this state of not knowing what to do by shifting to another chair. Similarly, Mrs. Hale, intimidated by this confining aspect of the rocker, avoids sitting down on it with a similar concern. Glaspell provides Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, and thereby the reader, with other objects symbolizing the offstage protagonist's spatial enclosure. For instance, the cage with a broken door and the dead canary wrapped in silk highlight Minnie's dramatic change once she gets entrapped in the domestic space which is largely defined, configured and regulated by the dominant discourse, which I prefer to analyze through Lefebvre's concept of imagined space or Soja's notion of Secondspace. Below, I will explain how the

house is constructed discursively in a way that facilitates Minnie's, and other women's as well, socio-spatial entrapment, which, in turn, causes certain forms of violence to get naturalized.

A spatial analysis of *Trifles* should also include the ways in which physical spaces and spatial practices are imagined, regulated and represented discursively. More precisely, these imagined spaces affect how individuals develop strategies to project and implement their dominant, hegemonic spatial orders on domestic spaces that are considered as safe havens opened by men for women. The men such as the County Attorney, the Sheriff and the offstage character Mr. Wright approach the house as a property or a container-like structure that can be enclosed and ordered in certain ways. For John Wright, his house is separated from the outside to the extent that putting in a telephone line is not necessary, as Mr. Hale comments. The change in Minnie's identity from a lively girl singing in choir to a solitary figure in John Wright's farmhouse is a result of imagining the domestic sphere as a new, disparate spatial structure operating with its own rules supervised by the male figure. Moreover, her isolation is aggravated by the fact that theirs is a childless marriage, and thus their family life, from the patriarchal imaginary, is a "dysfunctional" one. The dominant discursive construction of house prescribes Minnie to renounce her pre-marital identity and keep it in order as prescribed by the society, a situation which applies to the women such as Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale as well. Mrs. Peters, having to perform "a great deal of work" within her own compartmentalized domestic space, fails to realize how abusive Minnie's life could actually become after marrying John Wright, an error in judgment that she compensates by hiding the dead canary as an evidence which may well be considered as a motive for Minnie's killing her husband. The female characters' epiphanic moment reveals that the dominant spatial claim representing domestic space as the domain of security for women is not necessarily true.

Furthermore, the dominant discourse that compartmentalizes spaces as public and private by applying strategies of enclosure for women is at work within the domestic space as well. The kitchen, which is traditionally regarded as the woman's space, seems to be the only locale available for Minnie. There, she is expected to perform duties of housekeeping, a role given yet still seen trivial by men such as Mr. Henderson. The patriarchal gaze which situates women and their separate space in a trivial, complementary position, I argue, is a

form of conceived space which is constructed and performed mostly through "a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs" (Lefebvre 39). For Lefebvre, this imagined, cognitive space "is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)" (38-9), and it can be seen at work in the male characters' attitude toward Minnie's kitchen and the proper spatial practices she is expected to perform "within" it. This dominant conception of the house and the kitchen in particular is a relational space of the socio-spatiality that circumscribes Minnie's, and other women's as well, right to participate in the social production of her lived space. However, space, as Doreen Massey suggests, is "never finished; never closed" (9). Despite the strategies and representations to secure power and control, the physical spaces and spatial practices shaped by the dominant discourse can be disturbed by the alternative practices and perspectives. Below, I will refer especially to the changing attitudes of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Lewis toward the concept of violence and the role of kitchen with its allegedly "trivial" things in transforming these characters' opinions.

Analyzing the interrelations between violence and spatiality should also include the lived spaces of individuals in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the processes in which individuals problematize the dominant claims and practices. While the patriarchy and establishment as represented by the men of authority, such as the County Attorney and the Sheriff, approach the Wrights' domestic spaces as secure, fixed, enclosed, and well-ordered entity, the women call these into question and disrupt the alleged order "in" it. To begin with Minnie, the play explicitly states how she is limited spatially in the house which is the true reason for her isolation. Her pre-marital subjectivity is to be erased once she becomes Mrs. Wright in "farmhouse of John Wright." Alluding to her "out of place" status in the house, Minnie does not appear at all throughout the narrative. In her monograph *Self and Space in the Theater of Susan Glaspell*, Noelia Hernando-Real, drawing on Una Chaudhuri's concept of "geopathology," examines Glaspell's domestic spaces, including the ones in *Trifles,* as the "protagonist's fundamental problem" (18).[3] She further suggests that Glaspell's major characters suffer from the "*victimage of location*" (Hernando-Real 18, italics in original) and this spatial experience leads them to "what Chaudhuri calls *heroism of departure*": "a character gains full independence and fulfills the creation of their own identity by disentangling themselves from the

oppressive place they were fixed to" (Hernando-Real 18, italics in original). Minnie's killing her husband, in this regard, can be understood as a form of "departure". Moreover, a more processual understanding of her lived space can also reveal that Minnie has already negotiated, or attempted to do so at least, her subjectivity before the climactic moment of murder. Despite the physical and symbolic forms of spatial limitation she faces, Minnie participates in the construction of the kitchen through the seemingly simple acts petting a canary or quilting on her rocking chair which, in turn, provide her with the possibility of voicing her subjectivity. Keeping a canary functions as a reminder about her pre-marital identity which has been oppressed by the socio-spatial workings of patriarchy, a fact which, as implied in the text, disturbs John Wright. Similarly, quilting itself becomes a text or an alternative account in which she expresses her *self* along with her anger and discontent with the very structure she feels entrapped. While John Wright is able to silence the canary by breaking its neck, the quilt escapes his attention, and it, along with other "kitchen things," provide the female characters with an alternative account into the background of what has happened in the farmhouse.

That Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Lewis approach the kitchen and the things inside it from a different perspective demonstrate that spaces cannot be controlled entirely. Although the kitchen is presented as the very location of Minnie's victimization, it also becomes a site of possibility and alternative epistemology for the female characters. In and through the kitchen, they not only gain a different account of what has happened there but also develop another way to behave, an act which enables them to connect Minnie and to contest the dominant patriarchal discourse. As mentioned earlier, the two female characters gradually change their opinion in regard of doing the right thing in Minnie's kitchen. While Mrs. Lewis warns Mrs. Hale about the fact "the law is the law" (Glaspell 1160), she later agrees to hide some potentially incriminating evidences from the men. Similarly, Mrs. Hale gets transformed in the kitchen by reflecting on Minnie's isolation. What she realizes about Minnie's socio-spatial victimization is that both she as a neighbor and her own neighboring house are relational to Minnie's experiences and to the Wrights' farmhouse. It is the recognition of this relationality between spaces that leads Mrs. Hale to adopt a more complex attitude toward the "nature" of crime and violence and to acknowledge her own and the society's responsibility

in the mostly overlooked part of Minnie's act. To put it differently, the kitchen, as much as it appears to be a disabling space for Minnie, becomes an enabling space for the female characters, in that it helps them realize how similarly their lived spaces are affected by the workings of patriarchy and empathize with her by (self-)reflecting on how it feels like to be entrapped within this abusive structure:

> MRS. HALE: [*Her own feeling not interrupted*.] If there's been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.
>
> MRS. PETERS: [*Something within her speaking*.] I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—
>
> MRS. HALE: [*Moving*.] How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?
>
> MRS. PETERS: I know what stillness is. [*Pulling herself back*.] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.
>
> MRS. HALE: [*Not as if answering that*.] I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [*A look around the room*.] Oh, I *wish* I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?
>
> MRS. PETERS: [*Looking upstairs*.] We mustn't—take on.
>
> MRS. HALE: I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing. (Glaspell 1163-64)

Mrs. Peter, who is described as being "married to the law" (Glaspell 1164) by the County Attorney, agrees to hide the potential evidence, and thereby a continuum with Minnie is established, which, in turn, marks a disruptive spatial practice and alternative episteme within the allegedly enclosed, ordered domestic space. With this rather unexpected move, the kitchen proves itself to be a contested space, for it divorces from the traditional notion of home which is physically

and discursively constructed "as a place of familial pleasures, a place of leisure and rest—for men a sylvan and tranquil respite from the rigours of the city or the workplace and for women a supposedly safe haven" (McDowell and Sharp 263). To put it differently, as Mrs. Hale suggests, the men "are trying to get her [Minnie's] own house to turn against her" (Glaspell 1160) initially, but it, with the transforming power of the kitchen and the female continuum succeeded in it, works the way around.

In conclusion, *Trifles,* as a critical, conflictual space itself, interrogates the reader by offering a more complex, subtle understanding how violence is not simply about a moment of insanity but a product of stretched-out, intersecting socio-spatial relations. The play charts the intricacies of violence as societal phenomenon and demonstrates that physical and symbolic spaces participate actively in the processes it is experienced on individual and social levels. Correspondingly, spaces are not simple backgrounds for human action, but they are wild cards shaping individuals' experiences while being shaped by them at the same time. The present study, responding to Edward Soja's call "to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life" (*Thirdspace* 1), has sought to bring spatial perspectives in the inquiry of violence-related phenomena, and vice versa as explored in Glaspell's *Trifles*.

Notes

[1] For instance, in 2016, the journal *Political Geography* published a special issue entitled "Violence and Space: An Introduction to the Geographies of Violence" which brought together various articles exploring the dynamics of relationality between these two terms. Likewise, there is a good number of other monographs investigating the spatiality of violence in specific contexts. See, for instance, Monica Duffy Toft's *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory.*

[2] Similarly, a few other scholars have also pointed toward the dynamic role kitchen space plays in Glaspell's writing. See, for instance, Alberola's "Homes and Kitchens: Rethinking on the Works of Susan Glaspell, Tennessee Williams and Lynn Nottage," Alkalay-Gut's

"'A Jury of Her Peers': The Importance of *Trifles*," and Hernando-Real's *Self and Space in the Theater of Susan Glaspell*. A trialectic analysis of the play from the perspectives of physical, symbolic and lived spaces as I propose to accomplish in this study, however, has not been done yet, to the best of my knowledge.

[3] Hernando-Real suggests further: "Two principles integrate the dramatic discourse of geopathology. The first one is *victimage of location*, a principle that describes place as the protagonists' fundamental problem. This spatial problem leads the characters to acknowledge their need for the second principle, which Chaudhuri calls *heroism of departure*. According to this principle, a character gains full independence and fulfills the creation of their own identity by disentangling themselves from the oppressive place they were fixed to." (18, italics in original)

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