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Voices from the Borderlands
Women Writing from Prison in Germany and Beyond

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> *The born female criminal is, so to speak, doubly exceptional, first as a woman and then as a criminal. This is because criminals are exceptions among civilized people, and women are exceptions among criminals. […] As a double exception, then, the criminal woman is a true monster.*[1]

Prisons tend to be invisible, on the margins of the community and, if not entirely out of sight, largely out of mind. Prisons are border zones in the sense that they are liminal spaces between the community and, in some times and places, banishment or death. When immigrants or asylum seekers are expelled then those whom the community has rejected are literally shifted across borders. Where capital punishment is legal, prison can be the border between life and death.

I am not the first to suggest that women in prison can be read as doubly marginalized.[2] Angela Davies wrote of the "hyperinvisibility" of women prisoners,[3] who disappear, as Diana Medlicott explains, even inside the invisible system: "Concealed within the hidden institution of the prison is the women's prison population, an even more shadowy phenomenon that has generally been […] subsumed, in terms of policy needs, into the male prison population."[4] Yet criminal women, particularly the small minority who commit violent crimes, seem doubly visible in the cultural imagination. The contemporary media still reproduce Lombroso's and Ferrero's notion that criminal women are monstrous;[5] in Ann Lloyd's words, they are "doubly deviant" and "doubly damned."[6]

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[1] Cesare Lombroso and Gugliemo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman (1893)*, trans. by Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 185.

[2] See e.g. Judith Scheffler, *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings, 200 to the Present*, 2nd edn. (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2002), xxii.

[3] Angela Davies, foreword in Michael Jacobson Harvey, *Behind the Razor Wire: Portrait of a Contemporary American Prison System* (New York: New York UP, 1999), xi.

[4] Diana Medlicott, "Women in Prison," in *Handbook on Prisons*, ed. Yvonne Jewkes (Cullompton: Willan, 2007), 246.

[5] Compare Yvonne Jewkes, *Media and Crime* (London: Sage, 2004), 107-138.

[6] Ann Lloyd, *Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned: Society's Treatment of Violent Women* (London: Penguin, 1995).

In this essay I will engage with the study of women prisoners as overlooked objects,[7] to set that research alongside the cultural fetishization of female criminality (rarely mentioned in reports that focus on hard data), and finally to address the subjective responses of women prisoners to their situation in "the marginal texts too often lost in the marginal literature of the prison."[8] Like some others I will suggest that women's experience of prison and of themselves as prisoners needs to be understood as an experience simultaneously of the real (the conditions of their imprisonment) and the ideal (sociocultural constructions of womanhood, motherhood, violence, and crime);[9] but I am also asking: how do women in prison negotiate their experience of marginalization and stigma, as writers?

1.   WOMEN AND PRISON

In the ten years between 1992 and 2002 the male prison population in the UK increased by 50% while the female prison population increased by 173%.[10] In Cyprus the population of women prisoners increased by 410% over the same period.[11] Nonetheless, a report for the European Parliament in 2008 noted that women in Europe still constitute an average of only 4.5% to 5.0% of the total prison population (from 2.9% in Poland to 7.8% in Spain),[12] and find themselves "confined in a system essentially designed, built and run by men for men."[13] Prisons are micro-communities that reflect and intensify the structures and practices of the societies they border on,[14] and women in prison, like women almost everywhere, are measured against a masculine norm. Female prisoners are held to be a lower security risk

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[7] See e.g. Holly Dustin (ed.), *Women and the Criminal Justice System: A Report of the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System* (London: Fawcett Society, 2004); Frieder Dünkel, Claudia Kestermann and Juliane Zolondek (eds.), *Reader: International Study on Women's Imprisonment. Current Situation, Demand Analysis and "Best Practice"* (University of Greifswald, 2005); Quaker Council for European Affairs, *Women in Prison: A Review of the Conditions in Member States of the Council of Europe* (Brussels: QCEA, February 2007); Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassidou, *Report on the Situation of Women in Prison and the Impact of the Imprisonment of Parents on Social and Family Life*. Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (Brussels: European Parliament, 2008); Kings College London International Centre for Prison Studies, *International Profile of Women's Prisons* (London, April 2008); Sharon Smee (ed.), *Engendering Justice – from Policy to Practice: Final Report of the Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System* (London: Fawcett Society, 2009).

[8] Scheffler, *Wall Tappings*, xv.

[9] Compare Medlicott, "Women in Prison," 246.

[10] Dustin (ed.), *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, 5.

[11] Quaker Council, *Women in Prison*, 5.

[12] www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/FindByProcnum.do?lang=en&procnum=INI/2007/2116. The report is drawing on figures cited in 2005 by Dünkel, Kestermann, and Zolondek (eds) in their *International Study on Women's Imprisonment*, 3.

[13] Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, *Report on the Situation of Women in Prison*, 4.

[14] Compare James Thompson, "Introduction," in *Prison Theatre: Perspectives and Practices*, ed. James Thompson (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998), 9.

and less aggressive than their male counterparts,[15] although given the high levels of self-harming among women prisoners[16] we should perhaps not be denying the existence of aggression so much as asking questions about where aggression is being directed. Women are also overrepresented as drug users in the prison population, where drug use in prisons is already significantly higher than in the population at large. Menstruation is still perceived as an oddity for which "special" hygiene arrangements must be put in place;[17] but the clearest indication that prison is conceived and designed as a space to contain men is the system's helplessness in the face of pregnancy, birth, and childcare. The average age of imprisoned women in Europe is between 20 and 40 and in 2008 a half of all women in European prisons were mothers, many of whom had sole responsibility for their children as lone parents prior to their arrest.[18] The small number of women prisoners overall means a small number of single-sex prisons and this situation increases the likelihood of women being held at some distance from their families.[19] When Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou presented her report (on behalf of the Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality) on the situation of women in European prisons to the European Parliament, responding MEPs showed particular concern on the reproductive issue: how are prisons to accommodate pregnant and breastfeeding women, and the growing children of mothers who offend?[20] Without question there are practical issues associated with imprisonment, pregnancy and childcare that need to be addressed. That the reproductive question was the burning issue in the minds of European parliamentarians reflects (I would suggest) the *ideal* as well as the real; effective parenting ensures the future of the species but specifically *maternal* nurturing is the ideological pillar of "safe" family structures that are the discursive microcosms of a "safe" society. The single most positive role ascribed to women across Europe and the world is childcare, and factors around dependants are more likely to affect the sentencing of women than any other factor.[21]

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[15] Katherine van Wormer, *Working with Female Offenders: A Gender-Sensitive Approach* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 4.

[16] "Outside prison men are more likely to commit suicide than women but the position is reversed inside prison, and self-harm in prison is a huge problem and more prevalent among women in prison." Quaker Women in Prison Project Group, *Women in Prison and the Children of Imprisoned Mothers: A Briefing for Friends* (London, August 2007), 9.

[17] Dünkel, Kestermann, and Zolondek, *International Study on Women's Imprisonment*, 12.

[18] Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, *Report on the Situation of Women in Prison*, 13, 15. In the UK in 2004, 66% of imprisoned women were mothers, at least one-third of those lone parents; see Medlicott, "Women in Prison," 255.

[19] See the Quaker Women in Prison Project Group, *Women in Prison*.

[20] "The preservation of family ties and the necessity to create adequate infrastructures for women and their children in conformity with national legislation constituted the common denominator of the interventions of MEPs." mariepanayotopouloscassiotouen.blogspot.com/2008_04_01_archive.html, accessed 6 January 2011.

[21] Medlicott, "Women in Prison," 252; C. Hedderman and L. Gelsthorpe, *Understanding the Sentencing of Women: Home Office Research Study* (London: Home Office, 1997), 170.

2.   BAD MOTHERS: THE SUBJECTS OF GUILT AND SHAME

The idea of the bad mother is, then, both an existential and a social threat, and it attracts particular attention, even revulsion. Describing a project with women in German prisons in the late 1970s, researchers Uta Klein and Gertrud Hardtmann highlight the theme of guilt ("die Schuldfrage") that characterized women's self-perception.[22] Indeed, guilt is a remarkably consistent theme in the self-perception of women prisoners over time and across national boundaries, and this sense of guilt often centers on the issue of maternal failure. "Le sentiment de culpabité est très présent chez l'ensemble des mères" (the sense of culpability is very present among the mothers) reports Juliette Laganier, who observed women inmates of France's Fleury-Mérogis prison in the early 2000s.[23] "Mütter im Knast: "Ich habe schwere Schuld auf mich geladen"" (Mothers in Prison: "I'm weighed down with guilt"), the northern German *Hamburger Abendblatt* titled an article in 2009 about Germany's progressive mother-and-baby units,[24] while a similar article called "Doing time with Mum" a few months later in the UK's *Guardian* newspaper opens: "Kelly Bendall feels appallingly guilty that her baby daughter started life in prison."[25] Research completed for the EU Directorate-General in 2005 observes that

> motherhood featured as a topic of foundational importance in many of the inter-viewed women's narratives about their lives, and especially, in their discussions about the pains of imprisonment. The feeling of failure as mother, and guilt feeling were especially strong, as evidenced by all national reports. […] Fears that children would turn away from their criminal mother were also discussed in some cases.

Imprisonment, the authors concluded, "causes serious ruptures in the life of women due to separation from their children, which becomes a key source of everyday stress, guilt feelings, worrying and experience of failure."[26] Concern for their children is cited by women in custody as one of the most influential factors in depression, anxiety, and self-harm.[27]

Women prisoners write a great deal about the experience of both guilt and shame. In the mid 1980s, in a poem with the title "Meine Gedanken" (My Thoughts), the imprisoned Irene Dreier wrote the following poem to a child:

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[22] Gertrud Hardtmann, "Straftäter müßte man sein," in *Frauen im Gefängnis*, ed. Marlis Dürkop and Gertrud Hardtmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1978), 167.

[23] Juliette Laganier, "La maternité en milieu carcéral," *Lettre de Genepi* 64 (2003).

[24] Hanna-Lotte Mikuteit, "Mütter im Knast: 'Ich habe schwere Schuld auf mich geladen,'" *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 9 May 2009.

[25] Beth Gardiner, "Doing Time with Mum," *The Guardian*, 19 December 2009.

[26] Marta Cruells and Noelia Igareda, *Women, Integration and Prison: An Analysis of the Processes of Sociolabour Integration of Women Prisoners in Europe* (EU Directorate-General for Research, September 2005), 40.

[27] Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, *Report on the Situation of Women in Prison*, 16.

> Meine Gedanken
> drehen sich
> um Dich –
> mein Kind!
> Durch meine Haft
> nahm ich dir
> ein Stück
> von Deinem Leben
> Ich bitte Dich
> versuch
> mir zu verzeihen.[28]
> (My thoughts revolve around you, my child! When I went to prison I took away a
> piece of your life. I ask you to try to forgive me).

Even a political prisoner like the Argentinian Alicia Partnoy, whose criminal "guilt," like that of all political prisoners, is relative to the view of the regime that incarcerated her, feels a need to explain herself, in poetic "letters" to her eighteen-month-old daughter from prison:

> Dear gentle heart, new eyes.
> Listen: […]
> The reason is so very simple:
> I could not
> keep from fighting for the happiness
> of those who are our brothers and sisters.[29]

But the pressure is external as well as internal: "Ich weiß, viele werden mich als *Rabenmutter* bezeichnen" (I know lots of people will call me a wicked mother) worries Patricia, a 27-year-old mother in prison whose son was in the care of his grandparents at the time of her interview in the early 2000s.[30]

In psychology, guilt is often grouped among the "self-conscious" family of emotions, alongside shame, embarrassment, and pride, whereby guilt and shame are particularly closely related emotions (often to the extent of being confused with one another).[31] Research suggests that subjects who describe shame focus on others' evaluations of the self, where guilty experiences are focused on the respondents' effect on others. Shame involves

> a negative evaluation of the global self; guilt involves a negative evaluation of a particular behavior. […] this differential emphasis on self ("*I* did that horrible thing")

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[28] Irene Dreier, "Meine Gedanken," in *Laßt mich leben: Frauen im Knast*, ed. Luise Rinser (Hagen: Padligur, 1987), 114.

[29] Alicia Partnoy, "To My Daughter (Letters from Prison)," in *Wall Tappings*, ed. Scheffler, 195.

[30] Patricia, "Links ein Teufel, rechts ein Engel," in *Die schlimmsten Gitter sitzen innen: Geschichten aus dem Frauenknast*, ed. Katrin Panier (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2004), 154.

[31] See e.g. June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer (eds.), *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride* (New York: Guildford Press, 2007).

versus behavior ("I *did* that horrible thing") sets the stage for very different emotional experiences.[32]

The emotional experience of shame is considered more painful even than guilt,

> because one's core self – not simply one's behavior – is at stake. Feelings of shame are typically accompanied by a sense of shrinking or of "being small" and by a sense of worthlessness or powerlessness. Shamed people also feel exposed […] there is often the imagery of how one's defective self would appear to others.[33]

Shame and guilt are of course often experienced in parallel. In a recent collection of biographical prisoner narratives from Germany, nineteen-year-old Stefanie recalls feeling torn between two possible paths of action, one of which is guilt-driven, the other shame-driven:

> Oft stand ich vor der Polizeiwache. Ich wollte hineingehen und sagen: "Nehmt mich fest! Ich hab ihn umgebracht." Aber ich konnte nicht hineingehen. Es ging nicht! Ich dachte an die Familie – an meinen Bruder, an meine Mutter. [34]
> (I often went and stood in front of the police station. I wanted to go inside and say "arrest me! I killed him." But I couldn't go in. I just couldn't! I thought of my family – of my brother, my mother.)

In this account, guilt drives Stefanie to the police; but shame, projected on to her family, prevents her from confessing (she focuses on their, rather than her own, experience of other people's reactions if her crime becomes known). Her eventual sentencing addresses her guilt but not her shame: "Ich habe mich so geschämt" (I was so ashamed) is her recollection of her feelings on going to prison.

Social pressure on women and girls to "be good" means that women offenders bear a particular burden of shame. Interviews with, and biographical texts by, women in prison often describe a consciousness of being publicly shamed through criminalization. A poem called "Patchwork" anticipates its author's release; but release into the mainstream social context is coded as an experience of shame:

> irgendwann werde ich vor den toren stehen
> rufe mir ein taxi
> nehme mir ein zimmer im hotel
> und maskiere mein gesicht
> daß niemand die spuren darin liest[35]
> (one day I'll stand in front of the gates, call a taxi, take a room in a hotel, and cover my face, so that no-one can read the telltale signs)

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[32] June Price Tangney, Jeff Stuewig and Debra J. Mashek, "Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior," *Annual Review of Psychology* 58 (2007): 349.

[33] Ibid.

[34] "Stefanie, 19 Jahre," in *Knast: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Brigitte and Dieter Kübbeler (Oldenburg, 2003), 97, 102.

[35] Barbara W., "Patchwork," in *Rückkehr in die Freiheit: Ängste und Hoffnungen. Gefangene schreiben*, ed. Hans Jürgen Lehmann (Bonn: Bundeszusammenschluß für Straffälligenhilfe, 1981), 46.

3.   BAD GIRLS

In the late nineteenth century, the new science of criminology developed along-side the now-discredited "science" of sexology. Cross-fertilization occurred, and a long line of criminological writings posited an essential divide between male and female criminality, where the latter depends more heavily on biology and sexuality.[36] But even from the fifteenth century the peculiarly feminine crime of witchcraft was constructed with reference to peculiarly feminine sexual perversity. The Dominican authors of the notorious *Malleus Malleficarum* or *Hexenhammer* (Hammer of Witches) of 1487 point out that Eve seduced Adam in collaboration with the devil, making all womankind the enemy of (masculine) humanity.[37] The discourse of witchcraft (which echoes through the "confessions" of accused witches) describes non-reproductive intercourse with the devil and the murder of newborns; as the polar opposite of the (Marian) ideal of maternal nurturing, the idea of the witch anticipates modern notions of criminal bad mothers in thrall, perhaps, to a violent (devilish) male.

During the six weeks from 8 March to 16 April 2010, a theater project for women prisoners ran in Her Majesty's Prison Greenock, on the west coast of Scotland. HMP Greenock was built as a facility for male offenders in the first decade of the twentieth century. From 1955 it was repurposed as a women's prison for twenty years, but after a specialist women's facility in Scotland was completed at Cornton Vale in 1975, Greenock reverted to its original function. In March 2009, however, women prisoners were re-introduced into one of the prison's three halls (Darroch Hall), and Greenock is now in the unusual situation for the UK of being a mixed prison. The theater project, called *A Woman's Place*, was designed and delivered by Glasgow's Citizens Theatre.[38] As part of the project, the women prisoners wrote song texts that were set to music by Scottish singer-songwriter Carol Laula. One song was called "Bad Girls," and the lyrics betray ambivalence about that stigma: "They punish us because we're bad girls, but we're not; we just like our fun and thrills, because we're bad girls."[39] We are but we aren't, the song says, and that contradiction or confusion mirrors a widespread cultural confusion about the desirability of "badness" in women. Because female deviance is primarily understood to be sexual, "bad girls" are both particularly interesting (because they are constructed as sexually available) and particularly objectionable (because they are constructed as sexually available). When the final show was performed for a mixed prison audience, the men's reaction to this song was vigorous, and, in the view of some of the women performers, disrespectful.

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[36] See e.g. Alfred Springer, "Kriminalanthropologie und Kriminalitätspsychopathologie des weiblichen Geschlechts: Eine ideologiekritische Studie," *Kriminalsoziologische Bibliografie* 6 (1979): 67-100.

[37] Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Institutoris, *Der Hexenhammer*, trans. by J. W. R. Schmidt (Munich: Artemis & Winkler, 1993) [1982], I/105.

[38] In the context of a wider project called *Inspiring Change*, led by Motherwell College and funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

[39] Text kindly provided by Carol Laula.

Conceivably the cat-calling members of the male audience were primarily look-ing to support their own gender identity. Prison is a space that feminizes men (in that it subjects them to kinds of constraints and objectification more normally associated with women's position in society); the male prisoner, if we believe Gresham Sykes, is "figuratively castrated."[40] In the context of the song that was so enthusiastically received, it is worth noting that cultural clichés suggest women turn "bad" when the men around them are insufficiently masculine. Ulrike Meinhof, Myra Hindley, and Rose West were all constructed in the tabloids as women who dominated weak men (even a German government report asserted that Meinhof became a terrorist and a lesbian because her husband was unable to satisfy her will to be dominated).[41] As an imaginary phenomenon, criminal women are exotic and in need of strong rule. Rather like the imaginary Orient they invite objectification and voyeurism, as successful television series such as Germany's *Hinter Gittern* and its English-language counterpart *Bad Girls* demonstrate. The films of the so-called WiP (Women in Prison) genre are an extreme variant, offering the viewer the spectacle of sexual violence against imprisoned women. In the sadistic imagination of the viewer these women clearly "deserve" violence, and the sexual nature of the "punishment" might be imagined as a hair-of-the-dog remedy for the sexualized nature of female crime (a particularly inappropriate fantasy given the high percentage of women prisoners who have been the victim of real sexual violence).[42]

In rare cases we find women prisoners "writing back" in the face of their sexual objectification. A collection edited in the late 1980s by former German political prisoner Luise Rinser (who was incarcerated under the Nazis) contains a couple of such exceptional cases, written in the context of what is probably the apex of the second women's movement and its (since discredited[43]) project to reclaim or create a new language for women. One contributor celebrates her own sexuality with a provocative reference to witchcraft:

> wild und unbändig
> ist die versuchung
> die gier nach dir [...]
> maulhexe

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[40] Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2007) [1958], 70.

[41] *Der Baader-Meinhof-Report: Dokumente – Analysen – Zusammenhänge. Aus den Akten des Bundeskriminalamtes, der "Sonderkommission Bonn" und dem Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler, 1972), 34.

[42] Between 40% and 48% across various countries; see Dünkel, Kestermann, and Zolondek, *Reader: International Study on Women's Imprisonment*, 24. The Quaker Women in Prison Project Group notes that "women prisoners as a group are more likely than other women generally and/or male prisoners to have experienced sexual assault:" Quaker Women in Prison Project Group, *Women in Prison*, 10.

[43] By the late 1980s, feminist linguists already doubted that this project was realisable: words cannot simply mean what we wish them to mean. See e.g. Sally McConnell-Ginet, "The Sexual Reproduction of Meaning: A Discourse-Based Theory," [1989] in *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, ed. Deborah Cameron, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1998), 198-210.

> gierig und sündig
> verfressen und versoffen.[44]
> (the temptation of you and my greed for your are wild, untamed [...] a witch, greedy
> and sinful, gluttonous and drunk.)

Another insists on her intellectual integrity, even in the context of corporeal constraint:

> Dir hat man nun die Hände gebunden,
> und man fühlt sich sicher vor dir. [...]
> Es gibt keine starke Fessel […]
> die Gedanken halten kann.
> Meinen Körper lasse ich sie
> nur für eine begrenzte Weile lang kennen.
> Doch eines gelingt ihnen nie:
> die Fähigkeit, meine Gedanken zu nennen[45]
> (Your hands have been bound and they feel safe from you. […] There are no bonds
> powerful enough to contain thoughts […]. I will let them know my body just for a li-
> mited time. But there is one thing they will never manage to do, and that is to say
> what my thoughts are.)

4.   WRITING BACK FROM THE MARGINS?

The best known names in prison writing are men's. Isidore Abramowitz in his *First Anthology of Literature Written in Prison* (1946) includes twenty-eight men and five women (Joan of Arc, Anne Hutchinson, Madame Roland, Constance Markievicz, Rosa Luxemburg).[46] All are "political" prisoners, in the sense that theirs are crimes of conscience (politics, religion, sexuality). This is the acceptable face of prison writing, where the incarcerated writer figures not as a shameful and marginal figure but as a heroic outsider. But valorizing this type of outsider status, Elissa Gelfand has argued, is the luxury of those who are not already marginalized.[47] Women prisoners who are classed or classify themselves as "political" do regularly characterize themselves as virtuous outsiders - Mme Roland, Rosa Luxemburg, and Luise Rinser, for example.[48] In most cases, however, the focus is on virtue rather than on heroism:[49] women political prisoners are keen to cast themselves as the exception to the sexually deviant rule embodied by the common female offender. We might read this as resistance to stigma. But does the literary production of non-political women prisoners indicate

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[44] Gaby Krücken, "ich kann nicht ewig alles hochziehen," in *Laßt mich leben*, ed. Rinser, 120.

[45] Petra Schulz, "Handschellen," in *Laßt mich leben*, ed. Rinser, 74.

[46] Isidore Abramowitz, *The Great Prisoners: The First Anthology of Literature Written in Prison* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946).

[47] See Elissa Gelfand, "Imprisoned Women: Toward a Socio-Literary Feminist Analysis," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 185-203.

[48] See Kim Richmond, "Re-capturing the Self: Narratives of Self and Captivity by Women Political Prisoners in Germany, 1915-1991," (Ph.D thesis, U. of Edinburgh, 2010).

[49] Ulrike Meinhof is a striking counterexample here. See e.g. Sarah Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism: Language, Violence and Identity* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009).

that they have accepted their shaming as bad girls, wicked mothers, and lascivious witches; or can they, too, find in writing a means of resisting?

Gert-Peter Merk called the work done by a group of women in Frankfurt's Preungesheim prison "Geschichten schreiben gegen das Anderssein" (writing stories to counter otherness).[50] The women who participated in the Greenock theater project wrote a collective letter envisaging a future self emphatically *within* social boundaries:

> Dear Future Me,
> When I imagine you, you are content, sober, homely and settled. Determined and driven with a career ahead of you, you are independent but also motherly and wise. You spend time with your children and family, also working and travelling […]. Compared to how I am now I see you as more lady-like, well dressed and slimmer with good teeth and a nice smile. You make the best of yourself. Comfortable in your own skin, you are a lot stronger, more ambitious, happier, satisfied and smoke free! Your life is settled, stable, comfy, cosy. […] You are loved. My advice for the future is to keep your head down and put family first.[51]

This is no celebration of edginess, of liminality. But in the context of powerfully controlling and long-lived discourses around criminality and femininity, we might consider how remarkable it is for these women to imagine themselves visible: not as monsters or perverts or the objects of sexual torture, but in a mundane and comfortable way.

5.   CONCLUSIONS

> The prison is not an autonomous system of power; rather, it is an instrument of the State, shaped by its social environment, and […] reacts to and is acted upon by the free community.[52]

Prisons are a mirror and a microcosm of the societies that create them. Like the societies that create them they are largely designed for and dominated by men; and the "figurative castration" of incarceration may well—as the metaphor suggests—be felt more keenly by male than by female inmates, for whom constraint, disempowerment and social invisibility are familiar from life outside. When women are visible in the prison context, then (like in society outside) in their sexual and reproductive function: issues around motherhood and childcare attract attention where adequate education and professional training for women prisoners (for example) do not.

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[50] Gert-Peter Merk, "Geschichten schreiben gegen das Anderssein. Eine Schreibgruppe im Frauengefängnis Preungesheim," in *Gefangenenliteratur: Sprechen Schreiben Lesen in deutschen Gefängnissen*, ed. Ute Klein and Helmut H. Koch (Hagen: Padligur, 1988), 140-145.

[51] Text kindly provided by Lynda Radley, playwright-facilitator for the Citizens project in HMP Greenock

[52] Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, 8.

Many women's experience of being imprisoned is colored by the experience of shame and guilt in a sexual and reproductive context: the experience of being perceived and of perceiving themselves as stigmatized "bad girls" and bad mothers. Stigma always brings with it a sense of existential danger. No wonder, then, that contemporary women's prison writing tends to express a will to insiderdom, as the writers seek to reinscribe themselves in the discourse of good motherhood, sexual continence, honor, domesticity and sobriety that seems to promise safety and comfort in society outside. This kind of prison writing may well represent normalization within a patriarchal system "designed to produce greater conformity in […] women;"[53] but it also represents resistance to stigma and a will to survive.

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[53] Madlicott, "Women in Prison," 251-252.