‘We Asked for Life!’: Women’s Prison Zines in 1970s America

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Abstract

This dissertation discusses the previously unexamined and little-acknowledged genre of women's prison zines in America. Beginning in the 1930s, these works of art and literature gave insight into the invisibilised world of women's prisons and challenged preconceived ideas and stereotypes about female incarceration. The genre reached a peak in the 1970s—the decade on which I focus. Establishing the genre and its core characteristics for the first time, I define women's prison zines as a form of "collective outsider writing" and place them into key theoretical and academic contexts that otherwise exclude them. Chapter One defines women's prison zines as a distinctive and compelling subgenre of American protest literature, with a complex protest aesthetic aimed at wider social change beyond penal reform. Chapter Two goes one step further to place zines within the feminist protest writing tradition. The zines offer a concentrated perspective on women's rights through collaboration with external feminist organisations and discussion of gendered concerns. Finally, Chapter Three argues that women's prison zines develop the tradition of feminist collective autobiography, as they offer a powerful, collective narrative voice that establishes solidarity and kinship in an otherwise confined and alienating space. I argue that women's prison zines sit at the intersection of these three genres—protest literature, feminist writing and collective autobiography—and that they fuse together elements of all three traditions to form a key example of what I term "collective outsider writing."

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Contents

Introduction: 'We Asked for Life!': Women's Prison Zines in 1970s America ...1

Chapter One: *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* and the American Protest Literature Tradition.....22

Chapter Two: *no title at all is better than a title like that!* and Feminist Writing in the 1970s.....51

Chapter Three: *Through the Looking Glass* and Collective Autobiography 79

Conclusion:.....114

Bibliography.....120

Introduction

'We Asked for Life!': Women's Prison Zines in 1970s America

TO ALL THE WOMEN BEFORE,
TO ALL THE WOMEN AFTER,
FROM THE WOMEN NOW.

- 'Dedication', *no title at all is better than a title like that!* (California Institution for Women, 1974), 14

For nearly a century, women have created collective, radical publications within the walls of America's prisons. These zines represent the forgotten and ignored world of female incarceration and offer profound insights into what it was like to be a woman in twentieth-century American society. Zines circulated outside mainstream culture, both within the prison in which they were produced and amongst other penal facilities in America, with some reaching the general public. Through discussions of discrimination, alienation and imprisonment, women verbalise and visualize their experience of race, poverty, motherhood, addiction and sexual assault. Yet incarcerated women are among the most invisible members of American society, and are largely invisible in literary scholarship as well. This is the first research project to examine women's prison zines, and one of the first on any kind of women's prison writing. It examines the zines' status as 'collective outsider writing' by placing them within the feminist protest literature tradition as a form of 'feminist collective autobiography' that demonstrates their value as American protest literature. I collected the majority of the primary materials for this dissertation through original archival research: primarily from a trip to the Rubenstein Library at Duke

University, but also from archives at Harvard University, the University of Michigan and Louisiana State University.

By theorising women's prison zines as a genre for the first time, this project shows incarcerated women dismantling the stereotypes that label them as 'fallen women' and bad mothers, and demonstrates their attempts to self-define through zines by forging a complex protest aesthetic that grapples with race, sexuality, motherhood, education, violence, and wider social change beyond penal reform. These are texts that go beyond mere informative description to use poetry, artwork and creative writing to form an artistic and literary response, in an attempt to inspire, rally support and encourage revolutionary action. Women also express an awareness of a literary tradition and aesthetic for female prison writing, influenced by feminist protest writing and demonstrating a literary lineage of confinement literature going as far back as slavery. Their autobiographical style and 'collective outsider' aesthetic demonstrates the human desire to share, record, protest, engage, create, gather, speak and refuse to simply accept the status quo, regardless of their situation.

In this dissertation I focus on women's prison zines from the 1970s. Many scholars view the period as a nadir of political activism and often overlook it in favour of the radical 1960s. Yet, in many regards, the 1970s was a period of thriving political engagement and protest. The influence of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, as well as the advancing feminist movement, made waves culturally, socially and politically. Dan Berger has argued that 'some of the most significant aspects of "the sixties"

actually occurred in the 1970s' and that, quoting Ruth Rosen, the 1970s were 'arguably the most intellectually vital and exciting [period] in the history of American women.'[1] In addition, the decade saw the rise of the prison reform movement and an unprecedented growth in prison literature, leading prison poet William Aberg to describe this period as a 'prison renaissance'.[2]

H. Bruce Franklin and Cynthia Owen Phillips have written about individual political prisoners and the poetry and life-writing that emerged from prisons during the decade. However two problems arise when viewing prison writing exclusively as such. Primarily, critics often focus on recognized writers from the period and place them within the context of a specific protest movement connected with their incarceration, for example, the Black Power Movement. This means scholars tend to study incarcerated writers under the guise of separate protest movements rather than acknowledging them as part of a prison reform movement that exists in its own right. For instance, Assata Shakur and Angela Davis may be read as Civil Rights or Black Power writers, owing to the context of their incarceration. Similarly, in Joy James' edited collection of writings by political prisoners, she groups texts into two categories: Black liberationists, and internationalists and anti-imperialists.[3] Although this is useful from a structural point of view, it neglects the complexities of prison writing, some

[1] Dan Berger, *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 4.
[2] William Aberg cited in Bell Gale Chevigny, *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999) xv.
[3] Joy James, *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003).

of which deviate from these definitions. Secondly, it suggests that the prison literature tradition was entirely focused on the individual, and that although they can be read together, redemptive autobiographies tend to define the genre. I argue, rather, that women's prison zines of the 1970s resist categorization because they remove the individuality of specific writers which, in turn, subverts traditional theories of the prison literature genre as individualistic. As a result of their inclusivity, they exist at the intersection where all movements from the period meet.

As well as expanding understandings of prison literature, the zines also continue the protest literature tradition, from which they have previously been excluded. In particular, the zines can, and should, be read as an important contribution to American feminist writing; they offer a concentrated perspective on what it meant to be female in American society, champion women's rights, and demonstrate how women interacted with print culture at the time. More specifically, they physically represent the desire for involvement and inclusivity on behalf of the women, a subgenre I term 'feminist collective autobiography', that distinguishes women's prison zines as feminist, collective outsider writing and an important subgenre of American protest literature. The term 'collective outsider writing' builds upon Caren Kaplan's definition of 'out-law genres' which she uses to describe certain forms of autobiography.[4] In her definition, Kaplan sees outlaw genres as destabilizing mainstream forms of

[4] Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography: Outlaw Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects", in *De/Colonizing the Subject : The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography,* ed. Sidonie Smith et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

production and distribution, and de-emphasizing the singular narrative voice. Yet Kaplan uses this definition largely in the context of writing produced in the developing world that resists conventional western genres, such as feminist autobiography. Conversely, in this thesis the term 'feminist collective autobiography' is used to categorize women's prison zines as a unique and neglected form of protest literature that articulates the otherwise invisible concerns of incarcerated and marginalized women in America.

The originality of the zines produced by women in prison in America echoes the unique experience of female incarceration facilities more generally. The early prisons and penitentiaries that housed both male and female prisoners differentiated by gender stereotypes and expectations to define the level of care women received. As one penitentiary chaplain wrote, 'to be a *male* convict in this prison, would be quite tolerable; but to be a *female* convict for any protracted term, would be worse than death.'[5] Once women were housed in their own institutions in the 1870s, these gender-based disparities continued to define the female incarceration experience as women were treated according to traditional female roles and, overwhelmingly, were neglected. These differences were further emphasized with the establishment of women's reformatories in the late nineteenth century. Unlike men's facilities, which were shaped around the housing of criminals, women's reformatories were designed to transform

[5] From New York, Auburn State Prison, *AR 1832*: 17, cited in Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 5.

'fallen' women, housing them for indeterminate periods of time in the hope of improving their morals and thereby reaffirming their femininity. Described as 'patriarchy at its finest', the reformatories were originally created to punish mainly white, middle-class women who openly disregarded societal norms of femininity.[6] As a result, many women were incarcerated for minor crimes in an effort to instill traditional feminine values of 'sexual restraint, genteel demeanor, and domesticity.'[7] The same rules did not apply to women of other races and ethnicities however. Prejudices and discriminations inherited from America's history of racialised slavery led to the treatment of black women as inherently less 'feminine' and sent them to custodial institutions that resembled men's prisons, with no hope of redemption.

Over time, this blatant racial segregation was officially removed from American prisons and the reformatory movement lost momentum in the 1930s.[8] What remained in place were disproportionate incarceration rates of black and Latina women and the rehabilitative structure and innate sexism that permeated the penal system. In the 1960s and 1970s, when both feminist and prison reform movements were gaining momentum, many protestors noticed distinct disparities between male and female incarceration facilities and began focusing their efforts exclusively on the female incarceration experience. At the same time, the 1970s saw a shift in

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[6] Stacy L. Mallicoat, *Women and Crime: A Text/Reader* (New York: Sage Publications Inc., 2015), 462.
[7] Rafter, *Partial Justice,* xxviii.
[8] For more information on reformatories or the reformatory movement, see Rafter, *Partial Justice,* Chapters 1-3.

prisoners' attitudes. The Attica uprising in 1971 marked the start of a period of resistance within both male and female incarceration facilities. Liz Samuels claims that the number of uprisings increased steadily from five in 1967, to forty-eight in 1972: the most in any year of American history.[9] This new, radical attitude was also reflected in the copious literature produced from inside prison in the decade. Political prisoners such as Malcolm X and Angela Davis are just two of the people who wrote extensively about their experiences of incarceration and have come to represent the sole prisoner voice from the period. Yet whilst these texts have proved popular, the collective writing tradition within prisons has been disregarded. James McGrath Morris[10] and Russell N. Baird [11] have dated prison zines in male facilities back to debtors' prisons in the 1800s and the first zine *Forlorn Hope* in 1800, but omit the long and vibrant female tradition. Beginning in the 1930s with *The Eagle,* women's prison zines flourished throughout the twentieth century, documenting and discussing the female incarceration experience in a collective and marginalized voice.

A similar emphasis on the male experience of incarceration marks the scholarly literature on U.S. penal policy. The high rates of men, and African American men in particular, incarcerated in the United States has led to an invisibilisation of imprisoned women, despite the fact that they

[9] Liz Samuels, "Improvising on Reality," in *The Hidden 1970s* ed. Dan Berger, 25.
[10] James McGrath Morris, *Jailhouse Journalism: The Fourth Estate Behind Bars* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008).
[11] Russell N. Baird, *The Penal Press* (Evanston: Nothwestern University Press, 1967).

represent nearly a third of all incarcerated women world-wide.[12] Nevertheless, academics began to acknowledge the female prison experience more frequently as the prison reform movement and the feminist movement grew in the 1970s. In addition, the period saw female incarceration begin to permeate American society and popular culture more generally. These conversations gained traction from the 1980s onwards, with the implementation of the 'war on drugs' and 'tough on crime' policies that had a significant impact on women in particular, causing the rates of female incarceration to increase by 646 percent in just twenty years.[13] However, much of the emerging dialogue was concerned with the socio-economic factors that led to female incarceration, rather than women's own voices or the creative work they produced while in prison. This attitude is best captured in Judith A. Scheffler's 1984 essay 'Women's Prison Writing: An Unexplored Tradition in Literature,' where she emphasises the breadth and transcendence of men's compared to women's prison writing. 'The works [of women in prison] are not, generally, theoretical or cerebral,' she writes; 'they are practical, empirical records of events, attitudes, persons and physical surroundings' and 'the reader must not approach these works with the expectation of reading manifestos or inspirational poems.'[14] Not only is this a reductive view of women's prison writing, it is also unfounded.

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[12] Nina Bahadur, "The U.S. Is Home To Nearly One-Third Of The World's Female Prisoners", *The Huffington Post,* Oct 1st 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/01/women-in-prison-prisoner-population-us-incarceration_n_5900364.html, Web. 20/07/16.

[13] Jessica Pishko, "A History of Women's Prisons", *Jstor Daily* (2015), accessed 16/01/16 http://daily.jstor.org/history-of-womens-prisons/

[14] Judith A. Scheffler, 'Women's Prison Writing: An Unexplored Tradition in Literature', *The Prison Journal,* Vol. LXIV, No. 1 (1984), 60.

Women's prison zines include art, literature and life writing that evoke classical and contemporary art and literature; through their own creative radicalism, women protest, oppose, and resist. Nevertheless, Scheffler's view reflects a more general critical neglect of women's prison writing and the female incarceration experience more broadly.

As a result, male prison writing has received substantially more academic attention, resulting in a significant gap in scholarship on women. Yet the literature provides a valuable, if somewhat gendered, theoretical foundation for examining women's incarceration literature with an emphasis on collective outsider traits. For women in prison, their status as outsiders is marked by their outcast position from society as well as through the subcultural form the zine takes. But the women also *choose* to write collectively, taking on a distinct quality that enriches the pre-established genre of American prison literature, and supports theories of protest literature. In his various works on prison writing, H. Bruce Franklin plots a incarceration narrative from slavery to the 1980s, effectively capturing the influences on authors of race, community, and political and historical contexts. Despite mainly writing about individual autobiographies, he manages to emphasise the core collectivist and activist traits of prison writing in the sixties and seventies. He argues that writers ask us not 'to admire the creative genius of each individual artist, but to see each artist as merely representative of a collectivity … We are not supposed to sit around

admiring the authors, but to get up and put their message into action.'[15] He applies this theory, however, to individual works that should be read together, rather than forms of collective writing such as zines and newsletters that were created together and thus show to a greater extent the sharing, borrowing and inclusivity of the collective prison writing tradition. Franklin also observes how, in 1978, 'the literature emerging today from the prisons of America constitutes an unprecedented phenomenon. The quantity itself is so large that it makes for the first qualitative distinction: this is a coherent body of literature.'[16] This emphasis on the sixties and seventies as a period of heightened prison creativity is one shared by many. Dan Berger describes it as 'a strategy of visibility' as prisoners wrote themselves into the public consciousness. He associates this theory with the efforts of the black freedom struggle after World War II: 'black activists thrust the prison into public view, established prisoners as symbols of racial oppression, and conceptualized confinement as a persistent feature of black life woven throughout the American racial landscape.'[17] He also goes one step further than Franklin to include discussion of newsletters and magazines, arguing that as the environment in prisons became more politically aware and engaged during the sixties, so did their print culture, becoming the 'backbone' of prison organizing.[18] Although these are important reflections on the significance of the external

[15] H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 251.
[16] Ibid., 223.
[17] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 4.
[18] Ibid, 226.

political and cultural factors at the time, particularly the influence of race on prison writing, both Berger and Franklin barely mention female prison writers in the period.

This masculization of prison writing is evident throughout scholarship. Although James McGrath Morris gives a thorough and methodical history of the prison press, he concentrates his efforts almost entirely on male writers, only twice referring to the very first women's publication, *The Eagle*. Despite offering a comprehensive narrative of print culture within prisons from the eighteenth-century debtors prisons to the late-twentieth century, by failing to adequately discuss women's role he falsely predicts the genre's demise in the 1990s; women's collective prison writing continued to grow throughout the latter half of the decade and into the twenty-first century. A similar text is Russell N. Baird's *The Penal Press,* which, like Morris's book, examines the history of male print culture within prisons without discussing the female equivalent. Baird's omission of women in his text could arguably be because it was published in the 1960s, before the influences of the prison reform movement and the feminist movement brought women's prisons into the public consciousness. As such, he concludes that 'the great literature from prisons came from men who were articulate, who had the stamp of greatness upon them as a *cause* for their confinement. Most other works have tended to be autobiographical discourses that got public attention because of the prisoners circumstance

and not his contribution to literature.'[19] The fact that women's prison zines do not conform to traditional definitions of 'good' art seems somewhat secondary to their influence as works of political and protest art. Sociologically and historically, they can provide a sense of the culture and concerns of distinct periods in the continuous and original ways they handle issues such as race, sexuality, motherhood, violence and the criminal justice system.

Baird also struggles with definitions. He describes how 'the content of many [of the publications] is contrary to the norm. Newspapers may be loaded with literary material, and magazines may be full of news. Mechanical facilities, rather than content, often seem to determine the form.'[20] This uncertainty over whether a publication is either a magazine, newspaper or periodical, is why 'zine' is an effective term for collective prison writing. Scholars of zines provide definitions that are applicable to material created within prison, despite never overtly referring to the form itself. Janice Radway, Stephen Duncombe and Michelle Kempsom, for instance, define zines as self-created collections of art and literature that represent thoughts, experiences and opinions that are otherwise ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media. Duncombe describes the self-identified communities as 'subcultural ghettos … fascinate[d] with the margins.' [21] Although none of these scholars make any reference to prison

[19] Baird, *The Penal Press*, 110.
[20] Ibid, 12.
[21] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Cleveland: Microcosm Publishing, 2014), 13.

zines in their writing, their definitions are still applicable. The same subcultural, outsider environment can be found within prisons, and the desire for self-representation and self-expression is important within prison-zine, collective communities. It is for these reasons, therefore, that I choose to define the publications as zines over other forms of print culture.

Yet despite the masculization of scholarship and invisibility of female writing, there has been an increased focus on women in more recent years. The first writer to deal exclusively with the female incarceration experience was Kathryn Watterson Burkhart who used over 400 interviews nationwide to explore what it meant to be a woman incarcerated in America. Since then, more scholars have followed suit in an attempt to redefine the prison literature tradition in order to encompass ordinary women. Research by Tobi Jacobi, Ann Folwell Stanford and Lori B. Girshick has attempted to redefine the scholarship on prison by prioritizing the voices of women incarcerated in America through interviews with inmates, and essays and creative writing from individuals both inside and outside of prison. In the introduction to *Women, Writing, and Prison,* Ann Folwell Stanford writes that 'words can knit together broken narratives, break through silences and create new worlds, new visions. Within the dehumanising social practices within the jail, writing becomes an act of resistance, sometimes obvious, sometimes masked.'[22] Here Stanford reflects a popular stance held by recent scholars of women's prison writing: how women use the genre to

[22] Ann Folwell Stanford, "Introduction: Not Much Silence Here", in *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out,* ed. Tobi Jacobi et al. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 8.

verbalise and visualise their experiences of confinement and destroy stereotypes that continue to define them. *Inside this Place, Not of it: Narratives from Women's Prisons* is a similar collection of writings from women in prison that emphasises the same personal struggles: 'these are women who have been silent for most of their lives, whose desire and needs were ignored by often abusive families and spouses, and, later, by prison authorities. They tell us their stories here because it is, for many of them, the first chance they're had to be heard.'[23] Victoria Law examines this desire to be heard historically, through women's riots, protests and movements. Contrary to the large body of scholarship that depicts women as passive and submissive, women's actions demonstrate how they have made attempts to break the silence surrounding their imprisonment. In her discussion of resistance, Law includes women's writing, and collective writing in particular, arguing that 'women's acts of writing – and publishing – often serve a dual purpose: they challenge existing stereotypes and distortions of prisoners and prison life, framing and correcting prevailing (mis)perceptions. They also boost women's sense of self-worth and agency in a system designed not only to isolate and alienate its prisoners but also to erase all traces of individuality.'[24] In this, Law captures the essence of women's prison zines as a form of protest. I build upon this by arguing that the print culture produced by women in prison is an unacknowledged and

[23] Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, eds, "Introduction: A Battalion of Survivors" in *Inside this Place, Not of it: Narratives from Women's Prisons* (San Francisco: McSweeney's Books, 2011), 5.
[24] Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles Of Incarcerated Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), 128.

untheorised form of collective, feminist protest literature, that encourages support and involvement from its readers, and interacts frequently with other subculture publications at the time.

Some scholars have made attempts to include women's prison zines in the context of incarceration literature, although, more often than not, they are referred to on an individual basis and normally within wider discussions of women's prison resistance or examinations of the value of educational programmes and literacy within prisons. Donna L. Rowe's PhD thesis is one of the few attempts to acknowledge women's prison zines as part of the incarceration literary tradition. She attempts to fill an intellectual gap by discussing how the experiences of women prior to, during and after prison are reflected in their writing and what one can learn from reading them. Although one chapter deals with women's prison zines (or 'newsletters', as she refers to them), she gives a thorough overview of the themes and content, and includes useful primary interview material about the zines' creators. Rowe also only alludes to two zines in her dissertation and writes how her research 'has not brought to light any other women's prison newsletters published in the 1960s or 1970s'[25] demonstrating the continuing lack of knowledge about the period's flourishing female prison print culture. In this dissertation, I analyse three key women's prison zines from the 1970s that demonstrate the period's fruitful female print culture. As each zine was born out of different circumstances – protest, educational

[25] Donna L. Rowe *From the Inside Out: Women Writers Behind Prison Walls* (PhD Diss, University of Maryland, 2004), 68.

programmes and external editors – it gives a greater sense of the extensive prison zine community and demonstrates the various ways in which they came into existence.

Feminist, womanist and lesbian organisations played an important part in the creation and distribution of women's prison zines, many of which did not develop independently. The zines were frequently created with the aid and influence of organisations that also maintained a thriving, underground, feminist print culture of their own in the period. Zines such as *Off Our Backs* and *The Amazon Quarterly* distinguished their brand of radical, subcultural print from the white male outsider familiar in the sixties 'underground press.' Red Chidgey and Elke Zobl have argued that zines must be 'taken seriously as tools for feminist cultural and political expression and intervention,'[26] and in fact the past thirty years have seen a growth in scholarly discussions of feminist print culture. Linda Steiner categorizes women's media as crying out for 'social change and justice for women.' She argues that they 'deal with gender issues buried, ignored, or distorted in mainstream media… [they] are oppositional, alternative [and] resistant in both product and process.'[27] Similarly, Laurel Foster writes of the diversity and 'polyvocal'[28] nature of magazines as they vary wildly between conservative, consumerist women's magazines and the radical, underground

[26] Elke Zobl, "Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines", *Signs,* Vol. 35, No. 1 (2009), 5.
[27] Linda Steiner, "The History and Structure of Women's Alternative Media", in *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*, ed. Lana F. Rakow (London: Routledge Library Editions: Communication Studies, 1992), 209.
[28] Laurel Foster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 5.

feminist magazines, which together enter into a particularly female discourse. Both Foster and Steiner offer a broad analyses of women's magazines in their work but fail to include women's prison zines. I show instead that there are clear similarities between their definitions of feminist print culture and the women's prison zine genre. They share core elements of collectivity and an underground protest aesthetic, as well as the gender-conscious ambitions and focus, placing women's prison zines centrally amongst discussions of feminist print culture.

As a subgenre of feminist protest literature, women's prison zines also can be read as part of the American protest literature tradition more widely. However, just as women's prison zines are omitted from scholarship on feminist writing, they are also forgotten about in discussions of protest literature. Zoe Trodd[29] and Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell McMillian[30] have written extensively on the American protest tradition but omit prison writing. This could arguably be because of the emphasis placed on the 1960s as a period of protest and radicalism, rather than the 1970s, during which time most female prison writing occurred. Dan Berger attempts to correct this gap in scholarship by focusing exclusively on movements from the decade. Yet despite an essay on 'The Roots of Prison Reform', which gives valuable context for prison movements and resistance in the seventies, he does not discuss the literature produced in prisons, nor

[29] Zoe Trodd, *American Protest Literature* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).
[30] Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell McMillian, *The Radical Reader: A Documentary History of the American Radical Tradition* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

women's prison zines. Conversely, Rachel Schreiber's collection of essays *Modern Print Activism in the United States* focuses entirely on the radical print culture produced in America during the 'long twentieth century'[31] and includes a chapter on the feminist press in the 1970s. She defines print activism as 'one among other strategies employed by modern social and political movements as they strived to achieve their goals'[32] and again emphasizes the desire of the women's liberation movement to redefine femininity and reject stereotypes imposed upon them. As with the previous texts, this is also particularly significant for women's prison zines, which use the creative space to challenge prevailing prejudices about women in prison. Once again, however, zines are left out of the discussion.

As evidenced by much secondary scholarship, women's prison zines are severely under-researched and undervalued texts. Very few scholars are even aware of the publications' existence. But the zines can provide original and multifaceted insights into an ostracised and isolated community and, through their collective form, challenge existing perceptions and definitions of the feminist protest tradition and American protest literature more generally. The enclosed world in which zines are produced provides a unique environment, as incarcerated women are both physically and psychologically confined. In the literal sense, they are denied spatial freedoms and restrained behind bars and cages but, more significantly, these women are stripped of identity and confined by negative stereotypes.

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[31] Rachel Schreiber, *Modern Print Activism in the United States* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 1.
[32] Ibid, 7.

This leads to a unique form of protest literature, inspired by confinement and the feminist protest tradition, and produced in a collective autobiographical form.

Chapter One establishes women's prison zines as central to discussions about American protest literature by examining the North Carolinian zine *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery.* The zine emerged directly out of a protest that occurred at the North Carolina Correctional Centre for Women in 1975 as the inmates rioted against the inadequate working conditions within the prison's laundry room. The zine, produced over a year later, also goes one step further to detail the various injustices experienced by American women, and verbalize women's experiences of confinement both within prison and outside. In doing so, the zine embodies a clear protest aesthetic influenced by prison reform, feminism and civil rights, that epitomises the unique problems of incarcerated women. In addition, through the sharing of mutual experiences and opinions, the zine demonstrates an embrace of 'we' over 'I' as a strategy of protest literature and as a core element of the women's prison zine protest aesthetic.

Chapter Two narrows the discussion of women's prison zines as works of protest literature to examine them within the subgenre of *feminist* protest literature, through the work of the inmates at the California Institute for Women (CIW) in Frontera. The zine *no title at all is better than a title like that* was the product of an educational programme brought to the prison by a feminist organization called The Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project. The zine, along with CIW's existing zine *Clarion,* and a one-off publication

created in collaboration with women in prison in Vietnam, demonstrates a distilled discussion of the issues faced by women everywhere, as well as offering a unique perspective on the female experience of incarceration. Moreover, the zines demonstrate the influence and involvement of feminist organizations in their creation and dissemination, and their innate links to the feminist print culture of the time. The various publications produced by the women at CIW suggest a camaraderie, forged through gendered confinements, that influences the form and content of their works of writing. The inclusion of incarcerated women worldwide forges a global community of subcultural, incarcerated, female writers, encouraging action and involvement from all.

Chapter Three discusses this communality further by reading women's prison zines as 'feminist collective autobiography,' a subgenre of feminist protest literature as well as of autobiography more broadly. The chapter concentrates on the Seattle based zine *Through the Looking Glass.* Edited and published outside prison by a feminist organization, the zine includes material from women's prisons across the United States and sometimes even internationally. As an externally edited zine, *Through the Looking Glass* engages frequently with other feminist zines and the underground press at the time, sharing and borrowing content as well as advertising and fundraising. In doing so, it demonstrates the extent to which women's prison zines were in conversation with each other, and shows the desire of incarcerated women to reach out to other women in a similar situation in order to form a community and a dialogue.

Together, these chapters identify 'collective outsider' writing as the defining feature of the women's prison zine aesthetic. The subcultural, collective form of the publications and the observational, radical content, places them in the protest and feminist writing contexts that otherwise exclude them. Emphasizing community and involvement, women's zines challenge existing ideas of prison writing as individualistic, masculine and redemptive, and broaden our understanding of the nature of American protest literature as a tradition forged by collective outsiders.

Chapter One

Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery and the American Protest Literature Tradition

"We are not beasts and do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. The entire prison populace has set forth to change forever the ruthless brutalization and disregard for the lives of the prisoners here and throughout the United States."

- Elliott James "L.D." Barkley, reading *The Attica Manifesto,* 1971

'I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life' wrote Etheridge Knight shortly before his release from prison in 1968.[1] Incarcerated for robbery in 1960, Knight encompasses the experiences of many prisoners in America the sixties and seventies who turned to art as a means of self-expression and protest whilst incarcerated. As the rest of American society experienced political upheaval, American prisons transformed into new sites of protest, as political activists were incarcerated and existing prisoners became politically aware. Dan Berger argues that this politicization was a result of the effort of the Black Power movement who 'expanded the prison from a singular institution of repression to a central node in the reproduction of social struggle' and pursued a 'strategy of visibility'[2] through prison writing and protest in order to be acknowledged by the general public. The 1970s saw the numbers of revolts and riots rise to new heights as prisons became a hotspot for

[1] Etheridge Knight, *Poems from Prison,* cited in H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 243.

[2] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014), 5-6.

conversations about inequality and prejudice. In 1971, the Attica rebellion sparked a wave of prison reform and prison abolitionism whilst establishing a collective prisoner consciousness. Scholars often see Attica as the catalyst that inspired all other protests in the decade.[3] Yet this emphasis also reflects the masculinization of prison resistance which, combined with prevailing stereotypes of women as passive and submissive, has meant that much scholarship has focused on male resistance in prisons and male prison writers. Such emphasis has led to a popular misconception that women incarcerated in the U.S. did not organise and resist. Victoria Law rejects this view, arguing that women in prison in the 1970s challenged the system through prisoner-organised programmes, written complaints to the administration and physical riots and protests.[4] Indeed, despite a lack of acknowledgement, there were numerous cases of rioting and rebellion in women's prisons. On the 28th August 1974, women at Bedford Hills held seven staff members hostage for two and a half hours in protest of the savage beatings of one of their fellow inmates.[5] Similarly, in 1971, the women at the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia held a four-day work strike in frustration at the lack of progress with prison reform at the facility.[6]

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[3] Liz Samuels, "Improvising on Reality" in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 25.
[4] Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009).
[5] "The Invisibility of Women Prisoners' Activism", Austin Anarchist Black Cross (Date not known), 3.
[6] Kathryn Watterson Burkhart, *Women in Prison* (New York: Popular Library, 1976), 166.

Nevertheless, Law emphasises in her text that not all forms of female resistance in the 1970s involved physical riots or rebellions, as the decade also witnessed a popularization and growth in prison literature, both male and female. Autobiographies of famous political prisoners such as Malcom X and Eldridge Cleaver popularized the incarceration narrative of crime and redemption, and even female writers such as Angela Davis and Assata Shakur became popular reads. However the scholarly focus on individual narratives and life writing has meant that the extensive collective prison writing tradition has been ignored, including zines. Yet both forms, despite their quantity and the radical nature, are frequently left out of the American protest literature tradition. Many prison writers are often categorised as part of another movement, rather than seen as part of an autonomous prison protest movement, such as Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam and race rights. Nevertheless, by examining women's prison zines from the period, they can be seen as a vibrant subcategory of protest literature in the 1970s owing to their subcultural, collective form and radical content. To date, John Stauffer's foreword to Zoe Trodd's *American Protest Literature* is the only attempt at defining the characteristics of protest literature. He writes how, broadly, the genre attempts to 'transform the self and change society', emphasising the significance of the collective as it 'strives to give a voice to a collective consciousness, uniting isolated or inchoate discontent' as they comment on society from the outside. [7] He defines three rhetorical

[7] John Stauffer, Foreword to *American Protest Literature,* ed. Zoe Trodd (Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), xii.

strategies: empathy, which encourages the reader to participate in the writer's experiences; shock value, which invites outrage; and symbolic action, the ambiguity of which invites dialogue and debate. By using Stauffer's definition, women's prison zines can be read as part of the American protest tradition as they encompass all of his characteristics, even broadening some. Primarily, the poetry, art and writing created by the women evoke empathy and shock through accounts of maltreatment, abuse and neglect, as well as encouraging debate not only about their incarceration, but also about American society more generally through their unique confinement aesthetic. The creators of the zines also personify the outsider status that Stauffer deems necessary in order to critique society from afar, as the women are physically and psychologically removed from society and held in a liminal space. But more significantly, they encapsulate the importance of the collective; in form and content, as the zines create - as outlined in chapter three - a 'collective autobiography' consisting of similar, shared experiences that establishes a community and changes the focus from 'I' to 'we'. When examining women's prison zines therefore, Stauffer's argument that the collective is one of the most significant factors defining protest literature seems valid, as much of the potency and authority of the women's writing comes from the cacophony of anonymous voices and shared experiences.

Women's prison zines resulted from a variety of different catalysts and, on some occasions, as a direct response to protest as a means of documenting events and clarifying their demands. One such example is

Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery,* a literary and artistic response of inmates at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women (NCCCW) to the riots that took place at the facility in 1975. According to inmates' testimonies, the spontaneous protest took place on the evening of the 15th of June, when a group of around 150 inmates refused to return to their dormitories for evening lock-up. Despite no apparent forward thinking, the protest lasted several days as the incarcerated women refused to work and violent struggles broke out between inmates and guards. The protest climaxed four days later on the Thursday in a violent conflict between prisoners and armed police with many incarcerated participants being taken to solitary confinement and others removed to higher security facilities. The subsequent publication over a year later of the zine *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery was not only a response to the shocking events that unfolded over the four days, but also a radical, creative statement about issues beyond penal reform.

The content of the publication was created by ten contributors from the facility, with the help of outside organizations the Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists (TALF) and the North Carolina Hard Times Prison Project. These groups facilitated the zine's production through the 'collection and arrangement of articles, fundraising, layout, typing, paste-up, printing, collation, binding and distribution,'[8] but made 'absolutely no "editorial"

[8] Triangle Area Lesbian Feminist, Prison Book Project, Untitled, *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

changes, like not even the "spelling or grammar".'[9] The women of NCCCW received particular support from the feminist and lesbian communities in the Triangle area, including TALF, who supplied the women with radical materials and offered individual support.[10] The members of TALF, as well as offering logistical support, also brought *Break the Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery* publicity through their own feminist zine *Feminary,* which was started in 1969 as a space where feminist lesbians could write 'to fill the silences that have obscured the truth about our lives and kept us isolated from each other.'[11] This publication, having gained popularity beyond the state, increased the publicity of *Break de Chains* and was occasionally utilized for fundraising purposes. One such advert read 'Nine people from two groups Triangle Area Feminists and the North Carolina Hard Times Prison Project---are collecting and printing the book. One thousand dollars is necessary for its publication. This money will cover materials. Labor is being donated.'[12] By interacting with other radical, underground media at the time, *Break de Chains* demonstrates the adaptability and inclusiveness of women's prison zines. Despite being largely concerned with prison reform, most zines also discuss the contradictions and prejudices within American

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[9] Jinni M. Stroman, Introduction, *Break de Chains*, 2.
[10] Neal Shirley, *Dixie Be Damned: 300 Years of Insurrection in the American South*, (Oakland: Ak Press, 2015), 229.
[11] 'A Feminist Journal for the South: Emphasizing the Lesbian Vision' (History of Feminary, Box 30, Folder "Notes on Newsletter 1973-1978," Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, 1870-2005, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina), accessed 05/01/16, http://sites.duke.edu
[12] *Feminary,* July 4 1976, accessed 05/01/16, http://atthekitchentable.blogspot.co.uk/2007/07/fighting-fire.html

society more generally, with topics ranging from feminism and Black Power, to LGBT rights and anti-war protests.

There is also evidence that *Break de Chains* was advertised in the local mainstream press. In July 1977, *The Carolina Times* published an advert reading 'A book of articles, poetry and graphics exploring the lives and thoughts of 10 women who are incarcerated in one of the most repressive prison systems in this country,' accompanied by an image of hands breaking chains. A further article from *The Carolina Times* lists '*The Durham Carolina Times*, Raleigh's *Carolinian*, *The Anvil*, *The Progressive Seven Days* and the *North Carolina Sun*' as other state newspapers that advertised *Break de Chains* for free.[13] Yet it also managed to gain coverage beyond just the state. Other feminist zines such as *The Amazon* included the same advert as *The North Carolina Times* in their 1979 Summer edition and in December 1976, the *Liberation News Service* (LNS), a New Left, antiwar, underground press publication based in New York also published an advert for *Break de Chains.* As an organization aimed at the centralizing of 'newsgathering and dissemination of the underground media,'[14] the inclusion of a publication like *Break de Chains* suggests that women's prison zines were positioned far more centrally in the underground press culture than any scholar has previously suggested. Interestingly, the riot at NCCCW and the publication of *Break de Chains* was also included in other women's prison zines across

[13] '"Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery" Banned', *The North Carolina Times,* Saturday 7th May 1977, accessed 07/01/16, http://newspapers.digitalnc.org
[14] John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 83.

the country. A 1977 edition of *Through the Looking Glass* – a Seattle based zine and the subject of Chapter Three – included information on the rebellion at NCCCW over a year later, and emphasizes the importance of outside support for the women involved: 'isolation is so powerful because it leaves the individual with no resources. She is completely at the mercy of her keepers. This is why it is so important not to let the prisons isolate the women inside them.'[15] This demonstrates the intricacies of women's prison zines as they interacted with each other across the country in order to establish a community of support. Moreover, the emphasis on resistance through solidarity demonstrates the protest nature of the writing, as the women collectively resist the oppressions of incarceration, reiterating Stauffer's definition that emphasized the importance of establishing a community.

Break de Chains experienced immediate success with the initial 1,000 copies printed selling out in just over five months and a second round of printing due the following May. Yet the publication was not without opposition. In May 1977, *The Carolina Times* published an article explaining that although the ten women who contributed to *Break de Chains* received a copy from within prison, a further four inmates who requested copies were denied. The *Times* quoted commissioner Ralph Edwards as saying 'these articles read together call for violence and criminal activity from the

[15] Anon, 'Women in Prison – Organizing', *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 6, July 1977, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 2.

inmate readers,' going on to refer to the facility's policy arguing that 'inmate publications intended to exert pressure on correctional officials or create tension between inmates or between inmates and staff will not be tolerated.' The *Times* then goes on to include the written response of an unnamed contributor to the zine arguing that 'this book gives accurate, detailed information of the conditions, treatment and events that necessitated the protest. Because of these truths that are expressed in this book, the department of Corrections and Director Ralph D. Edwards has "banned" the book from entrance to this prison. We believe our expresses feelings [sic] to be just and non-incitive, and that Mr Edwards' statement of denial to be without base and results from prejudiced analization.'[16]

The somewhat lengthy zine contains sixty-five A5 sized pages, with a large proportion made up of the 'truths' referred to in the *Times* article as inmates gave their various accounts of the inhumane working and living conditions at the NCCCW. Of primary concern were the poor conditions of the prison's laundry room where the women washed the entirety of the state's correctional and psychiatric facilities' laundry with no protective clothing or safety precautions. In 'Open Letter to the People' Anne C. Willett describes her experiences of the washroom stating: 'I along with others had to handle infested clothing from sanitoriums, local hospitals and various institutions along with N.C.C.C.W.'s clothes. We had no protection what-so-ever from any such germs that came in those clothes. And with our bare

[16] '"Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery" Banned', *The North Carolina Times,* Saturday 7th May 1977, accessed 7th January 2016, http://newspapers.digitalnc.org

hands we sorted through those clothes because we were forced to.'[17] Although by the end of the revolt the closure of the laundry room was the only tangible result, according to the accounts in *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery,* the laundry was just one of multiple issues within the NCCCW's facilities that the women were protesting against, including poor medical conditions, solitary confinement, inadequate diet and harassment from prison guards. The accounts of their traumatic experiences can be read in light of Stauffer's rhetorical strategies as examples of shock value and empathy. They were also accompanied by a 'respectfully submitted' proposal of reforms found halfway through the zine. Like other movements in the period, the inclusion of a list of reforms, similar to a manifesto, demonstrates the text's intended informative and practical element as it acts as a vessel for communication and change and also gives support to the protest as a movement, beyond the single event. The reforms are split into several sections: criteria for staff, prisoners' community (prison), medical department, educational/vocational programmes, disciplinary committee, visiting, and parole board. In doing so, the women identify their issues and concerns and attempt to 'take a stand against the system.'[18] This radical rhetoric immediately contradicts Judith Scheffler's claims that 'the works [of women in prison] are not, generally, theoretical or cerebral' and that 'the reader must not approach these works with the expectation of reading

[17] Anon, "Open Letter to the People", *Break de Chains*, 28.
[18] Anne C. Willett, "Proposal", *Break de Chains*, 40.

manifestos or inspirational poems.'[19] Not only does *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* include a powerful manifesto, it goes beyond mere informative description to use poetry, artwork, and writing to form an artistic and literary response, and through impassioned language, attempt to inspire change, rally support and encourage revolutionary action. Victoria Law has argued that 'the act of expressing oneself… becomes not only a means of drawing attention to prison conditions but also an act of subversion against both their own lack of agency and the isolating effect of prison.'[20] For the women at NCCCW, the act of writing itself is a form of protest as they write in order to make themselves heard, reiterating the idea of Berger's 'strategy of visibility.'

Zoe Trodd in *American Protest Literature* claims that 'protest writers… try to close the gap between blueprint and reality, between what should be and what is.'[21] Superficially, for the women at NCCCW, the gap between reality and blueprint was outlined in their list of reforms and accounts of maltreatment. But the physical demands of prison reform were only part of their greater struggle for total revolution. As one of the major contributors Marjorie Marsh emphasizes, 'the new equipment is irrelevant to our demands. We did not ask for a softer bed, a night stand, a locker etc., WE ASKED FOR LIFE!!'[22] Despite appearing to be concerned solely with poor health care and unacceptable working conditions within the prison, the

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[19] Judith A. Scheffler, "Women's Prison Writing: An Unexplored Tradition in Literature" The Prison Journal Vol. LXIV No. 1 (1984), 60.
[20] Law, *Resistance Behind Bars,* 129.
[21] Trodd, *American Protest Literature,* xix.
[22] Marjorie Marsh, "Contradiction", *Break de Chains*, 17.

protest, regardless of its relatively contained nature, and the subsequent publication of *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* suggests a more complex, comprehensive commentary on the perpetual confinement experienced by women, and women of colour in particular, in the United States. Jinni M. Stroman of The North Carolina Hard Times Prison Project notes in the publication's introduction that 'their June protest was an intensification of all the sistas' opposition to racism, sexism, oppression and repression,'[23] thereby suggesting a wider dissatisfaction at American society and its prejudices. This sentiment is reiterated throughout as the women discuss what Stroman refers to in the introduction as 'all amerikkkan cages'[24] from the judiciary system to employment and housing. Many of the writers comment on the relentless feeling of imprisonment, with Suzan Stuart writing 'Cold steel fills up the skyline – all the buildings have bars on the windows. Inside the bars the people shift in their chairs. They sigh.'[25] Similarly Anne Willett in her piece 'Life's Shadow' writes that 'the steel-barred door of my brick cell casts a shadow over my entire body; it follows me; there is no escape.'[26] Both women write of this prolific, all-encompassing confinement that goes outside of the prison industrial complex to deny them freedom within society owing to ongoing structures of prejudice and discrimination.

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[23] Jinni M. Stroman, Untitled, *Break de Chains*, 2.
[24] Anne C. Willett, "In Our Peaceful Struggle", *Break de Chains*, 3.
[25] Suzan Stuart, Untitled, *Break de Chains*, 54.
[26] Anne C. Willett, "Life's Shadow", *Break de Chains*, 24.

Many writers allude to this perpetual imprisonment within *Break de Chains* by calling for a greater revolution outside of prison reform. Aminah Aliyah writes that 'we [female prisoners] are the captives of societies dungeons… Psychological humiliation and physical mutilation is an everyday occurrence in our lives. Your problems will never be fully solved until and unless we are also recognized and treated as human beings.'[27] In emphasizing the everyday sexism within America, Aliyah reflects the feminist rhetoric at the time suggesting that women are seen as inherently inferior to men and treated as less than human. Again this shows the complexities of women's prison zines as their aims include the objectives of many of the movements at the time: race rights, gender equality and the alleviation of poverty. What is more, Aliyah and Stuart's use of confinement imagery, inspired by their incarceration, creates a unique protest aesthetic as they use their physically confined spaces to act as a metaphor for their societal and psychological oppression.

A further example of this creative radicalism is Tarishi Maisha's poem 'What do You Say to Hungry Children Amerikkka?' in which she asks the country what it does for children – in this sense a child of the state rather than an infant – who are hungry for food, education, employment, housing and freedom. In each instance the response is damning, suggesting that 'you [Amerikkka] ignore his calls for help' and 'put those chains on

[27] Aminah Aliyah, "Dungeons of Despair", *Break de Chains,* 46.

him/Before he/was born/His Daddy/Wore them too'[28] evoking images of slavery and its legacy, and suggesting a confinement that is present even before birth and inherited in a new form. This use of imagery from previous movements such as Maisha's use of shackles, is something that Trodd claims is a feature of much protest writing; placing ideas and imagery into new contexts creates a 'living protest legacy.'[29] Just as Civil Rights and Black Power protestors utilized abolitionist protest techniques and images of slavery, the creators of women's prison zines use ideas of whips, chains and bars to highlight the similarities in the injustices of their incarceration. The poem ends with a call to arms as Maisha writes 'Join with me in arms/My bruthas/sistas/For We/Can Save the Children!' This militant statement encouraging participation is an important aspect of women's prison zines as they attempt to incite support from their readers and reiterates the collective, communal element, beyond the prison community to American society more generally. The poem is accompanied by a drawing of women, both black and white wearing uniforms and carrying heavy-duty weapons (fig. 1). Sketched into the side of the gun is the name 'EMORY' evoking the Black Arts Movement artist Emory Douglass's work and perhaps even suggesting that artwork and creative tools, represented by the inscribed gun, can be used as weapons within revolution. For the contributors, the creation and dissemination of the zine acts itself as a form of resistance and

[28] Tarishi Maisha, "What do You Say to Hungry Children Amerikkka?", *Break de Chains,* 41-2.
[29] Trodd, *American Protest Literature,* xxv.

empowerment, reiterating Law's previous notion of prison literature being a form of artistic agency.

The inclusion of art in *Break de Chains* serves a variety of purposes. Superficially the photographs, along with their accompanying text, would suggest that they are used largely as evidence, documenting and supporting the women's written accounts. However, the composition of the images would suggest that they go beyond any such seemingly self-evident status to visually demonstrate the perpetual confinement experienced by the women. For instance, many are taken through the wire fences and metal bars casting an eerie shadow around the women and the empty beds of a medium custody dormitory, aestheticizing their sense of imprisonment. In one image, the photographer is positioned behind heavily armed guards who are lined up ready to disperse supporters. This composition, much like the images through the bars, gives the viewer a sense of being a witness – being outside but also being a part – and acts itself as a call for support. Despite the bars and



Figure 1 - "Liberation: Movement In Our Time", *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery,* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

guards, the photographs also show the women's resistance as they hold up their clenched fists and are captured, mid-shout, with their mouths open. This, accompanied by the blurred fences and guards, suggest resistance behind bars and emulates one prisoner's poetical subversion of the famous Civil Rights song *We Shall Overcome*:

so listen here whitteys,
i think it's time you pass,
cause you got a whole lot of sistas,
on your mutha-fucking ass,
and we ain't giving up,
and we ain't gonna run,
we gonna keep on trucking,
till we overcome.[30]

Break de Chains also includes drawings by women throughout, which creatively demonstrate the women's experiences of incarceration. For instance, page twenty-three shows a naked woman who, through the absence of clothing, is shown to be stripped of identity and vulnerable. This is emphasized by her position on the floor and the inclusion of chains. Nevertheless, like the women contributing to *Break de Chains,* the woman is neither placid nor accepting of her situation. Her arm is reaching above her, through the chains with clenched fist symbolizing her resistance. Similarly, the other drawings contain symbolic images of captivity such as chains, bars and whips. The cover image is the only one in full colour and shows a half-naked black woman standing over the Pan-African flag, holding up a chained world with 'U.$.A' written on it (fig. 2). This powerful image shows strength despite adversity, and immense responsibility for the unidentified woman who seems to be chained to the world, supporting it alone with a bowed

[30] Shirley J. Herlth, "Til We Overcome", *Break de Chains,* 20.

head. This evokes ideas of the Greek Titan Atlas who was condemned to hold up the sky for eternity and who has been envisioned multiple times through art. Reimagining classical mythology and placing black women at the centre suggests that the individual carrying the burdens of the world is black and female and that, like this woman symbolically holding the weight, the women within *Break de Chains* are also suffering under the strain of American oppression.

As well as rewriting history to include repressed women, the presence of artwork in *Break de Chains* is also relevant for the ongoing struggle to reshape negative images of women, and incarcerated women in particular, that are propagated by the press. Lawston suggests that 'the images of orange jumpsuits, prisoners shuffling in shackles, and inmates peering from behind iron bars are images that are widely disseminated in society' and that acts such as strip searches that are frequently referenced in the media are 'state ritual[s] that symbolize complete subjection of the prisoner's body to the vigilant eye of

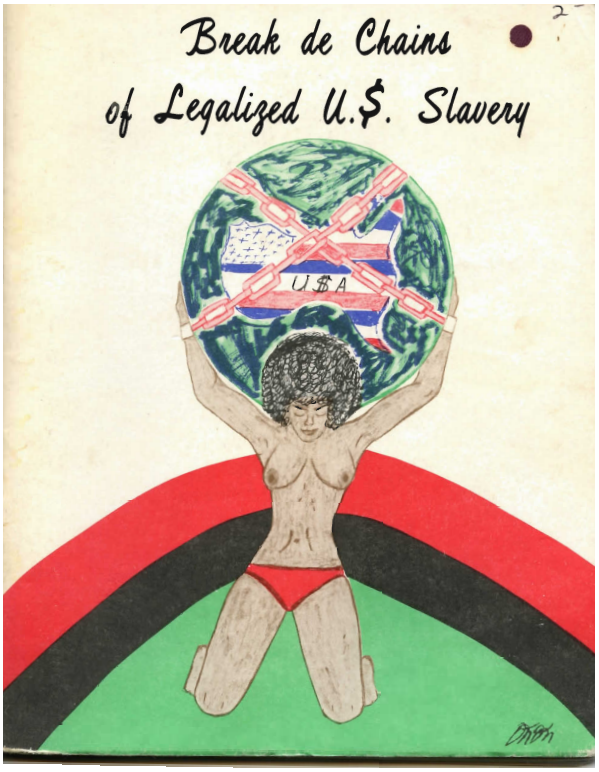


Figure 2: Cover image of *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery,* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

the state.'[31] By creating artwork that shows incarcerated women as individuals and independent of the state and the prison system, the women are able to challenge preconceptions and self-define. This not only means challenging fixed ideas of what incarcerated "fallen" women look like, but challenging the notion of female prisoners as evil and unfeminine altogether. Law acknowledges this challenge in her work by arguing that 'because women do not fit this stereotype, the public, the politicians and the media often choose to overlook them rather than grapple with the seeming paradoxes inherent in women prisoners, who, by virtue of their incarceration, have somehow defied the societal norms of femininity.'[32] Similarly, many of the women comment on the dehumanizing nature of prison, arguing that 'just because we are inmates does not mean we are animals.'[33] This not only refers to the women being caged like animals, but is also reminiscent of pro-slavery propaganda that defined enslaved African Americans as less than human and as a commodity like cattle, available to be bought and sold, and inscribed into law in the 18th century as "three-fifths" of a human. Anne Willett suggests that the same stereotypes are being imposed upon prisoners who are seen as 'animals in a cage' rather than 'recognized as human beings'.[34] Like Lawston, Victoria Law has argued that this detachment and removal of identity is particularly significant for female prisoners who are not only dehumanized, but are also seen as less

[31] Jodie Michelle Lawson, "Women, the Criminal Justice System and Incarceration: Processes of Power, Silence and Resistance" *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (2008), 8.
[32] Law, *Resistance Behind Bars,* 4.
[33] Ellen Amana Porter, "The Court System, Fair or Unfair? An Inmate's View", *Break de Chains*, 34.
[34] Anne C. Willett, "In Our Peaceful Struggle", *Break de Chains,* 3.

stereotypically feminine because of their incarceration. She argues that incarcerated women 'have already defied societal norms by transgressing both laws and acceptable notions of feminine behavior and morality',[35] and as such, these 'fallen women,' as they are so often described, are stripped of both their humanity and gender as they fall outside of prescribed roles. This identity vacuum within the prison system is further reason for the women articulating themselves through art and literature within *Break de Chains.*

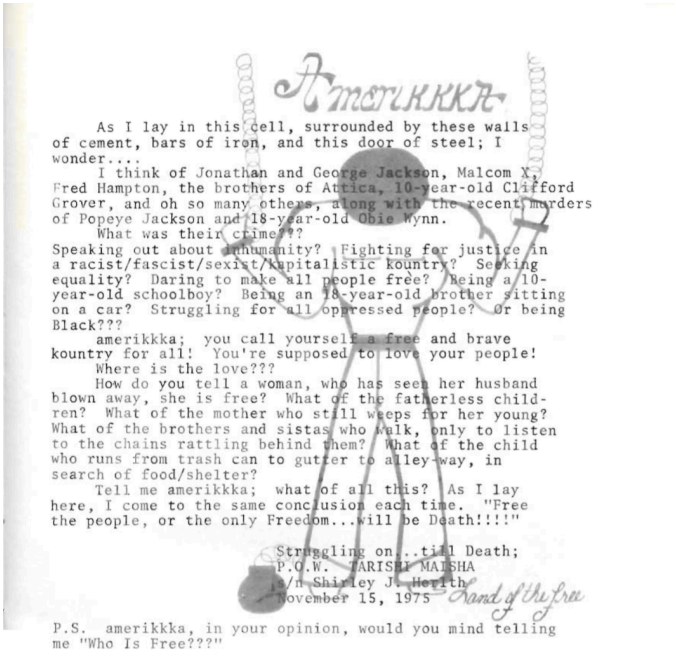
Despite at least one of the ten contributors being a white American female prisoner, chains, whips, and references to slavery are prolific throughout the text. The title of the zine itself asks to 'break de chains of legalized U.$ Slavery.' Primarily this title suggests that incarceration is a modern and legal manifestation of slavery, a premise echoed by Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow,* who noted that in America currently, there are 'more African-Americans under correctional control — in prison or jail, on probation or parole — than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.'[36] But moreover, like much of the protest art and writing at the time, the women suggest that American slavery is endemic, as African Americans are not only being incarcerated at disproportionate rates, but are no freer on the outside within American society, with the '200 years of freedom' reserved for 'the Select Few

[35] Law, *Resistance Behind Bars,* 9.
[36] "Legal Scholar: Jim Crow Still Exists In America", NPR *Fresh Air* (January 16th, 2012), accessed 9th September 2016, http://www.npr.org/2012/01/16/145175694/legal-scholar-jim-crow-still-exists-in-america

Kapitalists.'[37] Ann Willett echoes this sentiment. She writes: 'The State of N.C…. holds the prisoners as slaves' and asks that 'Sistas/Bruthas everywhere join in our united efforts to break the chains and bars of Injustice',[38] titling the piece 'NCCCW – 1865'. In doing so, she compares NCCCW and their resistance to the US and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 making slavery illegal. Aminah Aliyah writes: 'For too long we have been used and abused by this so-called Amerikkka, a land of bondage',[39] referencing the legacy of slavery within the U.S. but also the ongoing abuse and confinement experienced by African Americans. Julia Sudbury goes as far as to compare women's prison writing to slave narratives as it 'can be deployed strategically against dehumanizing official and popular discourses, in this case about female offenders and evil criminals'.[40] The borrowing of slave imagery is a conscious choice, not merely because the spatial-symbolism of chains and bars are compatible for both slavery and prison, but also as the comparison of incarcerated women with enslaved women attempts to highlight the systematic prejudices that lead to confinement. The injustices that led to racialized slavery, they argue, are also evident in the judiciary system within modern America.

[37] Anne C. Willett, Untitled, *Break de Chains*, 47.
[38] Anne Willett, "NCCCW – 1865", *Break de Chains,* 22.
[39] Aminah Aliyah, "A Luta Continua", *Break de Chains,* 48.
[40] Julia Sudbury, "From the Point of No Return to the Women's Prison: Writing Contemporary Spaces of Confinement into Diaspora Studies", Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2004), 159.

Many of the images within the zine feature chains and shackles, such as the drawing on page twenty-five which is positioned behind Tarishi Maisha's article 'Amerikkka' about male political prisoners (fig. 3). In the image, a muscular male figure is chained by the arms and by a ball and chain, next to which the caption paradoxically reads 'Land of the free.' The figure's bowed head means that he is faceless which is arguably a comment on the dehumanizing aspects of incarceration. Similarly, page fifty-eight has a drawing of a faceless pregnant woman who is shown as being instructed to work by a bodiless guard. This abstract art with missing faces and limbs contributes to the sense of alienation, detachment and loss of self of which the women powerfully and poignantly write. What is more, the idea of freedom and America as a 'land of the free' is explored continuously throughout the zine. Aminah Aliyah writes 'the struggle is a continuous one with no stopping, only Freedom/Liberation is certain.'[41] As prisoners, freedom seems like a natural and somewhat obvious theme for the zine, particularly for Americans for



AMERIKKKA

As I lay in this cell, surrounded by these walls of cement, bars of iron, and this door of steel; I wonder....

I think of Jonathan and George Jackson, Malcom X, Fred Hampton, the brothers of Attica, 10-year-old Clifford Grover, and oh so many others, along with the recent murders of Popeye Jackson and 18-year-old Obie Wynn.

What was their crime???

Speaking out about inhumanity? Fighting for justice in a racist/fascist/sexist/kapitalistic kountry? Seeking equality? Daring to make all people free? Being a 10-year-old schoolboy? Being an 18-year-old brother sitting on a car? Struggling for all oppressed people? Or being Black???

amerikkka; you call yourself a free and brave kountry for all! You're supposed to love your people!

Where is the love???

How do you tell a woman, who has seen her husband blown away, she is free? What of the fatherless children? What of the mother who still weeps for her young? What of the brothers and sistas who walk, only to listen to the chains rattling behind them? What of the child who runs from trash can to gutter to alley-way, in search of food/shelter?

Tell me amerikkka; what of all this? As I lay here, I come to the same conclusion each time. "Free the people, or the only Freedom...will be Death!!!!"

Struggling on...till Death;
P.O.W. TARISHI MAISHA
s/n Shirley J. Heath
November 15, 1975

Land of the Free

P.S. amerikkka, in your opinion, would you mind telling me "Who Is Free???"

Figure 3: "Amerikkka: Land of the Free" *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery,* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

[41] Aminah Aliyah, "Dungeons of Despair", *Break de Chains,* 46.

whom, Eric Foner suggests, 'no idea is more fundamental to [their] sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom.'[42] Yet contrary perhaps to expectation, none of the women in *Break de Chains* discuss their individual crimes or attempt to exonerate themselves. For the contributors, freedom represents total freedom, outside of prison and within American society. It is a popular feature of much protest writing within America to emphasize the gap between the idea of America and the reality. The promised 'land of the free' is often shown to be in contradiction with the various prejudices and confinements of modern America such as poverty, racism and sexism. Throughout *Break de Chains,* the women seek to demonstrate their experiences of the inadequacies of America with Suzan Stuart writing 'America - - where have you gone?/Land of the free, corrupted by the pigs/and rusting by the wayside.'[43] Tarishi Maisha also writes 'Amerikkka; you call yourself a free and brave kountry for all! You're supposed to love your people! Where is the love???'[44] The excessive use of exclamation marks and question marks work to stress their point and demonstrate the immediacy of their concerns. What is more, the use of rhetorical devices seeks to accentuate to the reader the inadequacies of modern America and encourage their support as citizens of the United States.

[42] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), xiii.
[43] Suzan Stuart, "The Window", *Break de Chains,* 10.
[44] Tarishi Maisha, "Amerikkka", *Break de Chains,* 25.

Break de Chains is a publication that is heavily influenced by its cultural and political climate. Lee Bernstein places particular emphasis on the Black Power and Black Arts movements and their influence on prison literature writing:

> In particular, the cultural life of American prisons became intertwined with the Black Arts and Black Power movements in shared ideological goals, aesthetic principles, and institutional arrangements throughout the 1970s. By the end of the decade, the two movements would symbolically embrace the plight of incarcerated African Americans as symptomatic of the broader black experience in the United States.[45]

This influence is clearly visible throughout *Break de Chains* as the women employ various features and aesthetics of both the Black Power and Black Arts movements. Primarily, the comparisons with slavery are a feature of much black radical writing at the time as they compare the modern manifestations of rascialised confinement to America's legacy of slavery. Similarly, the majority of the women have alternative names, usually African in origin, emphasizing their cultural roots and black identity: Bessie Bouler is Aminah Aliyah, and Shirley Herlth is Tarishi Maisha. Moreover, certain spellings, such as the use of 'K' instead of 'C', are a feature of black radical writing at the time and are used throughout the text. This technique is particularly prevalent in Tarishi Maisha's 'Open Letter to Amerikkka' in which the address reads 'Morganton Slave Kamp, Morganton, North Karolina, United States of Amerikkka'.[46] As well as being anti-establishment and making obvious connections with the Ku Klux Klan, this use of alternate letters and varied spellings suggests that the women need to form an

[45] Lee Bernstein, *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in The 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 99-100.
[46] Tarishi Maisha, "Open Letter to Amerikkka", *Break de Chains*, 8.

alternate language in order to express themselves, as the dominant language (in this case English) is seen as inadequate due to its racially coded inflections that commit acts of dehumanization and invisibilization. Therefore the subtle differences offer individuality and self-definition within the language's confinements. The text is also saturated with militant language similar to much of the Black Power discourse which was seen as violent and aggressive, calling men to arms and encouraging self defense. Through use of militaristic language and references to 'battles' and 'war', the women suggest a violent struggle between the state and individuals. When Tarishi Maisha prefaces her name with P.O.W. she is suggesting that her incarceration is part of a greater battle within society, echoing fellow female writers such as Assata Shakur who, in her autobiography, describes the racial climate of the US as a war fought with guerilla tactics, with the sides decided by the colour of one's skin.

Dan Berger stresses the influence of black prison writers in the sixties and seventies by arguing that 'black prison narratives helped popularize an idea that prison was both a metaphor for and the epitome of the hidden constraints in American society.'[47] Yet Berger manages to go one step further to include radical feminist writers who 'made similar arguments about the confining limits of patriarchy.' He goes on to reference Pat Halloran of the Free Our Sisters Collective who 'defined the prison as a ubiquitous component of patriarchal power. "For women, to be outside the

[47] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014), 164.

walls of jail is in some sense an allusion [sic]… We must work not only to break down the stone walls that enclose some of our sisters, but to break down the barriers of written and unwritten laws that would call us criminal if we refused to be slaves."'[48] Influences of both Black Power and feminism can be found within *Break de Chains*, which gives the zine a distinct aesthetic influenced by the various movements and suggests an awareness amongst the women of a literary tradition of female prisoners' writing. Anne Willett writes 'join the women's movement now. Become a part of the beautiful army of comrades/sistas such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Assata Shakur and the sistas of N.K. Koncentration kamp.'[49] This acknowledgement, albeit of a specifically black female tradition, gives strength to the women's writing and demonstrates a literary lineage of confinement protest literature going as far back as slavery.

Nevertheless, despite Anne Willet's references to African American female writers and the obvious influences of the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement and even slave narratives, *Break de Chains* is not a text concerned solely with African American women. Aminah Aliyah emphasizes in her piece 'Dungeons of Despair' that 'it is not a negro problem, white problem nor an American problem. This is a world problem.'[50] All of the contributors emphasize a worldwide struggle against oppression of all kinds, with many using the Second World War, fascism, and

[48] Pat Halloran, "Free Our Sisters!", *The Anvil,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1971), 7, ECP, Carton 4, Folder 33, cited in Berger, *Captive Nation,* 164.
[49] Anne C. Willett, Untitled, *Break de Chains*, 44.
[50] Aminah Aliyah, "Dungeons of Despair", *Break de Chains,* 46.

concentration camps as a comparison. In doing so, the women compare their situation both within prison and in American society more generally to that of a concentration camp. Many of the women frequently refer to the NCCCW itself as a concentration camp (or 'Koncentration Kamp' in some cases) emphasizing the barbaric and inhumane elements of the incarceration facility, and penal system more generally, encouraging the reader to resist repeating history. This idea is also emphasized by some of the drawings included by the women.

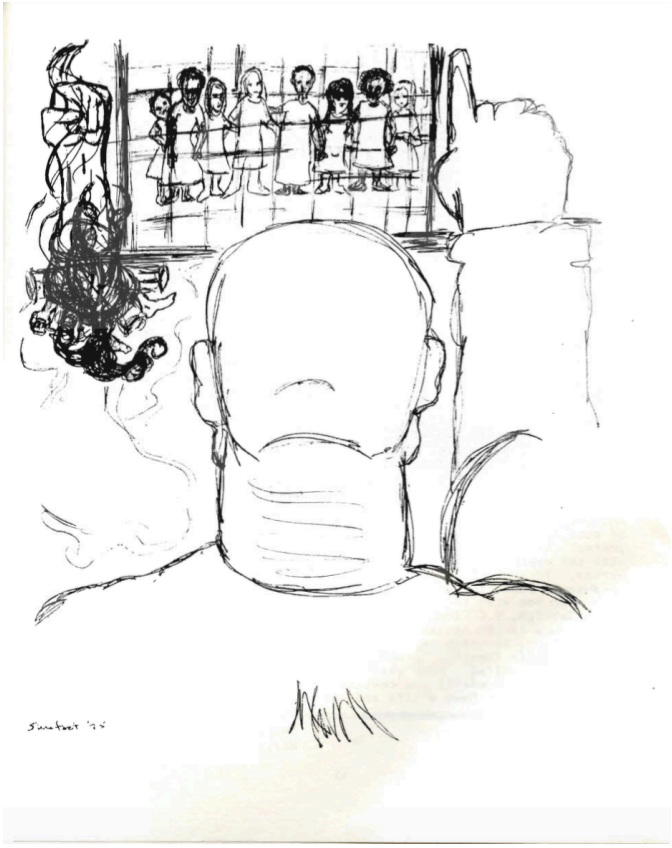


Figure 4: Image from *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery,* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

For instance, page fourteen shows the back of a blonde male head with an outstretched arm pointing towards a group of women behind bars (fig. 4). The blonde hair and uniformed back, alongside the arm raised in a nazi-style salute, are all reminiscent of World War Two iconography and juxtapose the women, who are a mixture of both white and black, standing arm in arm, again demonstrating the solidarity and resistance shared by the women in their efforts to 'overcome.'

For the women at NCCCW, an important aspect of the creation of the zine was the establishment, and subsequent maintenance, of a movement and a community of likeminded individuals. Most of the writing included in the zine ends with a call to arms such as Marsh's 'can you/will you continue to turn deaf ears on a cry for help. Stand my people! Save a life and end oppression!'[51] Similarly, Willett writes how 'they will no longer capaitalize on our incarceration because we will not become slaves again.'[52] Here Willett demonstrates the importance of plural pronouns in protest writing, emphasizing the collective 'we' over the individual 'I'. But the form itself is also a creation of a community. As with all zine communities, the collective outsider status of the creators and the non-conforming content of the zines means that they circulate outside of mainstream media channels. For women in prison, this is even more pronounced as their incarceration physically restricts how they distribute their materials, relying instead on external sympathizers who can aid their circulation. The zine community of women in prison is not one created naturally through mutual tastes and opinions. Rather, the women are forced together and through their circumstances and shared oppressions, choose to write collectively. In his book *Captive Nation,* Dan Berger argues that:

> Print culture was the backbone of prison organizing in the second half of the 1970s. These publications marked a new era in prison politics, enabling prisoners to continue functioning as political actors – to read the news, write their opinions, and debate political theory – after the high tide of prison organizing had ebbed. They provided prisoners with a means to define the issue on their terms. With less public

[51] Marjorie Marsh, "Life for a Life, Unity to Live", *Break de Chains*, 13.
[52] Anne C. Willett "In Our Peaceful Struggle", *Break de Chains,* 5.

> backing and little in the way of a mass movement to support them, prisoners used media to sustain connections with other prisoners and sympathetic outsiders.[53]

As well as reaching out to women in a similar situation nationwide, the women who engaged in the protest at NCCCW used the creation and dissemination of the zine as a continuation of their own resistance. The writing and distribution of *Break de Chains* was as much an act of protest in itself as it was a tool for communication.

Despite being influenced by other protest movements in the 1970s, *Break de Chains* demonstrates the power of women's prison zines as distinct, autonomous works of protest literature. Their verbalization of their dissatisfaction with NCCCW through the 1975 rebellion and the creation of the zine, as well as its interactions with other radical publications at the time validates it as part of a larger movement pertaining to women's prison reform. Yet *Break de Chains* does more than just document the events of the 1975 rebellion at NCCCW. They use their experiences of incarceration as a form of symbolic action, to use Stauffer's phrase, to establish a confinement aesthetic that encapsulates the various imprisonments experienced by women – and women of colour in particular - in modern America, beyond just incarceration. Yet it is their collective creation that differentiates them from the individual protest writing from prisons. The collective form and voice shifts the emphasis from 'I' to 'we', and the subsequent formation and encouragement of a community - built by their use of empathy, shock value and symbolic action - is a defining feature of

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[53] Berger, *Captive Nation,* 226.

women's prison zines and is a key factor in their status as protest literature more generally. Chapter Two will focus the discussion to examine women's prison zines as pieces of *feminist* protest literature, taking the idea of communality one step further to examine how the creation of community is only part of their goal, as they strive to encourage tangible action from their supporters.

Chapter Two

no title at all is better than a title like that! and Feminist Writing in the 1970s

In the 1970s, the feminist, black feminist, womanist and lesbian protest movements were at their most influential. Described by Baxandall and Gordon as 'the largest social movement in the history of the United States,'[1] the woman's movement fought for women's liberation both in the public and private spheres with debates ranging from the Equal Rights Amendment to abortion and education. As well as making waves politically, the women's movement also impacted creatively through feminist art, literature and criticism, and in particular, a successful and extensive print culture through the creation and dissemination of zines: self-created, radical publications used for protest, self-expression and creativity that filled a gap left by mainstream press and media. Zines such as *The Amazon* and *Off Our Backs* became a central element of feminist print activism in the 1970s and worked to 'spread their opinions, [elicit] support, [create] networks among like-minded individuals, and attempt to establish cohesive group identities for the larger world.'[2] Creators of zines worked to articulate their particular concerns, beyond any mainstream media filter, and redefine underground, outsider literature from the white, male, middle-class objector of the 1960s in order to establish a distinct feminist community and aesthetic. Although

[1] Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, "Second-wave Feminism" in *A Companion to American Women's History,* ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 414.
[2] Rachel Schreiber, *Modern Print Activism in the United States* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 1.

unacknowledged by scholars of feminist print culture, women's prison zines in the 1970s played a significant part in this tradition for two main reasons. Primarily, the influence and involvement of feminist organizations in the creation and distribution of women's prison zines meant that they were intrinsically tied to the feminist print culture of the time. The sharing and borrowing of material from other feminist publications influenced the contents of the zines, and the feminist groups who were involved in founding them also inevitably shaped the women's visions and ideas. Secondly, despite having their own, distinct perspective on gendered confinements as a result of their incarceration, the issues discussed in women's prison zines are a distilled version of the issues faced by women everywhere and thus add a new perspective to the women's liberation conversation. Where Chapter One emphasized the importance of the collective, this chapter takes it one step further, to outline the importance of encouraging involvement from the readers of women's prison zines and amongst protest writing more generally.

In 1975, the Resources for Community Change based in Washington D.C. published a booklet on *Women Behind Bars* as an attempt to educate communities on women in prison. In the introduction they note that 'the problems of women in prison are often ignored because they are a minority of prisoners in a sexist system… there is little specific prison information and organizing material aimed at women; this booklet is an attempt to help fill

that gap.'[3] The booklet interviews a number of prisoners and ex-convicts one of whom explains that 'the social problems of women prisoners are, strangely enough, the same problems of women everywhere. I see the women's movement as centered around prisons because that is a typical manifestation of the social phenomena that have been going on for women for a long, long time.'[4] The booklet reflects an increased focus on women in prison in the 1970s as 'new critical analyses of prisons emerged, prisoners' rights organizations and unions were created, and there were new communications amongst prisoners, academics and community activists.'[5] Leading the way were lesbian and feminist organisations who 'targeted the prison as a site which represented and reproduced patriarchy, sexism and homophobia, while naming those systems as metaphoric prisons.'[6] As with the organisations that collaborated with the women at NCCCW to create *Break de Chains,* many zines appeared with the aid of external lesbian and feminist organisations who began to notice distinct disparities between the male and female experience of incarceration. Karlene Faith found that in the 1970s when male prisoners were taking 'the first initiatives in filing one court case after another to protest the inhumane conditions of the institutions in which they were incarcerated,' female prisoners were, paradoxically, filing 'gender discrimination appeals in the courts, pleading

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[3] *Women Behind Bars: An Organizing Tool,* (Washington D.C.: Resources for Community Change, 1975) 4. Accessed 8th December, 2015, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/archive/prison/WomenBehindBars.pdf

[4] Interview with Marilyn Isabel, 'Inside View', *Women Behind Bars,* 9.

[5] "The Invisibility of Women Prisoners' Activism" (Austin Anarchist Black Cross, Date not known), 1.

[6] Dan Berger, ""We Are the Revolutionaries": Visibility, Protest, and Racial Formation in 1970s Prison Radicalism" (PhD Diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 5.

for reforms on the grounds that they lacked equal rights with incarcerated men.'[7] Indeed, Nicole Hahn Rafter argues that women in prison 'have fewer opportunities for job training and work-release; they have less access to social services, visitors and lawyers; [and] they are more likely to be treated as children.'[8] In addition, women in prison are generally single parents, unemployed or even homeless, have had some experience of sexual abuse or trauma and have high rates of mental illness.

Yet one of the primary focuses of prison reform groups was the lack of diverse and stimulating educational programs provided by prisons. Although both male and female prisoners received limited access to higher education, the courses offered by women's facilities were shaped almost entirely by sexist preconceptions that limited female education to practical, vocational courses such as hairdressing, secretarial school and kitchen training, which one prisoner in *Women Behind Bars* described as 'a joke'.[9] As a result, during the 1960s and '70s there was an increased focus on alternative educational opportunities for female prisoners, far removed from the limited vocational options offered previously, as well as options for higher education offered to both sexes. According to Lee Bernstein, 'between 1965 and 1973 the number of college level programs in U.S

[7] Karlene Faith "The Politics of Confinement and Resistance: The Imprisonment of Women", in *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis,* Ed. Elihu Rosenblatt, (Boston MA: South End Press, 1996), 166.
[8] Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), xxxi.
[9] Ibid.

prisons increased more than fifteenfold to 182,'[10] reflecting this rising trend. Most of the programmes were established in collaboration with universities or with well-known writers or poets who would work with the women for a designated period of time, sometimes for credits or qualifications, and most of the time initiated or orchestrated by feminist groups. Sadie Reynolds, founder of *Inside Out Writing Project,* has argued that a substantial portion of these programmes were flawed in that they were designed with rehabilitation in mind, and wrongly assumed that the inmates taking part were deviant in some way and in need of a form of 'moral or psychic transformation.'[11] That being said, Reynolds argues that if the rehabilitative element is removed from a programme, it can do the exact opposite:

> By striving to create with participants free spaces in which all present are affirmed as thinkers, writers, and human beings, it poses fundamental challenges to predominant correctionalist discourses and practises that would strip people of their agency and humanity. By sharing critical knowledge with participants it is extending a potentially revolutionary tool to a group that, overwhelmingly, has been systematically denied access to education.[12]

Successful educational programmes therefore seem not to be concerned with rehabilitation, but rather they focus on providing a platform from which women can learn freely and connect with one another.

The first programme to establish university level courses within women's prisons in America was the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project

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[10] Lee Bernstein, *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in The 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 76-77.
[11] Sadie Reynolds, "Good Intentions Aside: The Ethics of Reciprocity in a University-Jail Women's Writing Workshop Collaboration", in *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out*, ed. Tobi Jacobi et al. (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2014), 100.
[12] Ibid.

(SCWPP) at the California Institute for Women, Frontera (CIW) in 1972. [13] The project was created by PhD student Karlene Faith after she discovered during her time teaching political science at Soledad Maximum Security Men's institution in 1970, that the male prisoners she was teaching 'knew nothing at all of women in prison, not even the location of the one state facility for women.'[14] This ignorance towards the female experience led Faith to focus her efforts exclusively on women behind bars, and in 1972 she began conducting interviews over a five-month period with more than one hundred inmates from CIW. From these interactions, the women at the facility requested that Faith establish university-level courses within the prison in the hope that they might acquire skills valuable to them: 'In contrast with the existing vocational and school programs in the prison which offered instruction in sewing, hairdressing, office work or Grade 12 equivalency, we [the SCWPP] introduced the study of critical theory and substantive social issues affecting women's lives.'[15] Indeed, the university level course 'women in society' was inherently gender-focused from the output as they 'analyzed crime as a socially constructed condition, and criminal justice as a discriminatory system that criminalized people from the least socially empowered groups. [They] rejected patriarchal and class-based presumptions of fixed gender roles, [and] thus… did not accept the

[13] Victoria Law, "Nor Meekly Serve Her Time: Riots and Resistance in Women's Prisons", *New Politics* (2010), accessed, 30th June, 2016, http://newpol.org/content/nor-meekly-serve-her-time-riots-and-resistance-womens-prisons

[14] Faith, "The Politics of Confinement and Resistance", 174.

[15] Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993), 287.

common view that women in conflict with the law de facto suffer from non-conformity to "feminine" standards.'[16] In doing so, the SCWPP went beyond basic literary skills to arm the women with analytical and theoretical tools to be able to accurately diagnose and critique their situation, as well as discuss wider social and national structures of disempowerment.

Meeting at the weekends so as not to interfere with the women's prison jobs and the volunteers' own careers, SCWPP ran for four years working with several hundred inmates at CIW, before finally coming to an end in 1976. The plethora of workshops aimed to 'extend to women in prison the benefits of higher education and the empowerment that accrues from gaining political knowledge, recognizing constructive life choices, (despite structural goal limitations), and acquiring skills to act on them.'[17] The classes acted as more than just credits for the inmates of CIW, few of whom had graduated from high school. The broad range of relevant and politically engaged courses offered the women a chance to learn more about the American penal system and American society at large, recognizing their own place within it. One participant of the SCWPP explained how 'groups like the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project are very, very important. Because what they're doing is making people politically aware that they're being used and that they put themselves in positions of being used as pawns in a fucked-up system. Our lives are very restricted prior to being

[16] Faith, 'The Politics of Confinement and Resistance', 177.
[17] Ibid, 179.

incarcerated and we just didn't know what was happening.'[18] One of the courses offered by the SCWPP was a creative writing and literature workshop. In her book *Unruly Women*, Faith describes the course:

> The first section of the course focused on writing skills in the genres of informational articles, poetry, short stories, plays, essays, and autobiography. Tutors offered critical feedback and the students shared their writings with one another and discussed and evaluated one another's work in a supportive classroom environment. The second section of the course introduced students to literary analysis and criticism in a variety of workshops, with such foci as the interpretation of modern fiction, which explored writers of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and primal myths, a study of pre-literature stories of gods and goddesses with themes such as metamorphosis, matriarchal and patriarchal cycles, initiation, rebirth and death.[19]

This description highlights the eclecticism of genres and themes discussed within the course, emphasizing the necessity of it being broad and experimental in both language and form in order to encompass a vast range of women's experiences. From these extensive classes on creative writing and literary analysis, one of the workshop coordinators Debra Miller established a one-off, self-published collection of the women's poetry, short prose and artwork. Faith writes how 'after what seemed like endless debates on what to call their book, they settled on *no title at all is better than a title like that!*'[20] - the ambiguity of which hints at the women's own desire to reject stereotypes and labels that are often forced upon them.

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[18] Interview with Joanne Johnson, 'Inside View', *Women Behind Bars: An Organizing Tool,* 14.
[19] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 193.
[20] Ibid.

Published in 1974, the A5-sized zine comprises of 22 pages of mostly art and poetry by 22 women from CIW who participated in the programme over the four-year period. Although the poetry covers a variety of topics, some of the more poignant pieces deal both explicitly and subtly with ideas of prison and confinement. One poem by Mara Reves Moryas describes a woman's acquisition of a fish, a fish bowl and tropical snails, which die overnight. Moryas ends the poem by writing 'It's evident these snails require more than a simple fish bowl.'[21] Arguably whether the story of the snails is true or not (and it seems unlikely within prison), the significance of the final line is more symbolic as the death of the snails acts as a metaphor for the women in prison who themselves require more than the basic care provided by the facility in order to survive, both physically and mentally. Moreover, the fish bowl analogy also accurately captures the claustrophobic environment within prison and the constant

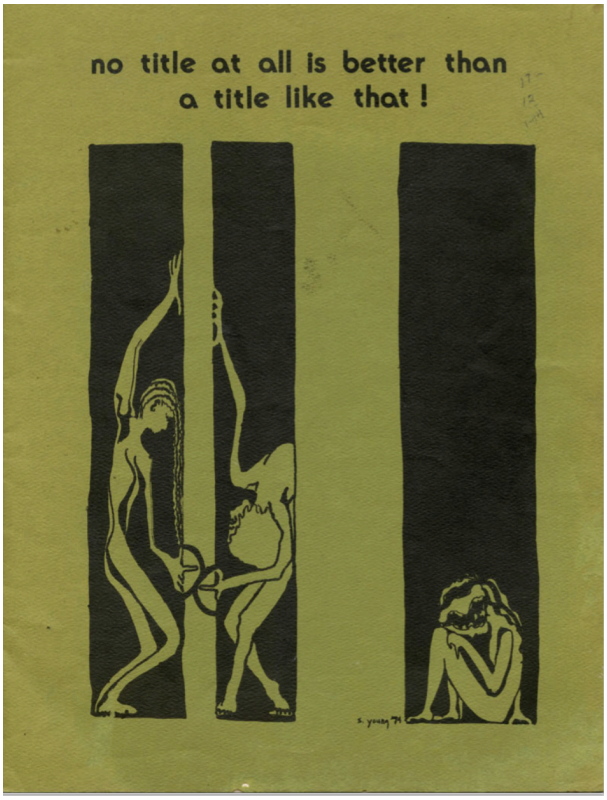


Figure 5: Front cover to *no title at all is better than a title like that!, !* (California Institute for Women, Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, 1974, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org/)

[21] Mara Reves Moryas, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that!* (California Institute for Women, Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, 1974, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org/), 8.

surveillance of the women. Several other poems within the zine describe the constricting environment within the prison—the cells are 'cages'—and vividly depict the cacophony of sounds that echo throughout the prison. One poem depicting a woman's first night at CIW describes 'the sound of sobbing' and 'the banging of the drunk down the hall' punctuating 'that endless night.'[22] Interestingly, 'First Night' and many of the other poems in *no title at all* are written in the third person, describing the events and feelings as detached from the author. This is an important distinction as it removes individuality from the experience. This is a feature of much prison writing and prison zines in particular as authors emphasize the communality of female incarceration and show that their 'individual experience is not unique or even extraordinary, but typical and representative.'[23] It is also comparable to the use of 'we' in *Break de Chains,* which used the plural pronoun to give a multidimensional voice to their writing.

A further example of the use of third person in the zine is the poem 'Lights Out!' by SuSun Young, which depicts an inmate and a guard engaged in a dispute over a contraband light in the woman's room. Young refers to the guard as 'she' throughout and the inmate as 'her', which leads to a disjointed, stilted style, arguably representative of the scene which Young is describing as the two women argue over the lamp. Young manages to capture the rift between the guards and inmates, primarily by the use of different pronouns for each, which creates a language divide and is also

[22] Pat Williams, "First Night", *no title at all is better than a title like that!*, 2.
[23] H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 250.

suggestive of the 'us and them' idea. She writes 'There were lots of hers. No shes,' suggesting an innate difference between them that is almost biological. Moreover, Young described 'her' as mechanical and robotic as the inmate talking back 'put a clot in her mechanical nuts and bolts bloodstream.'[24] This not only separates 'her' further from the women as she is not seen as human, but also emphasizes the guard's lack of humanity; she is unable to comprehend human emotion and is programed to only understand the prison guard-inmate relationship. The poem is accompanied by an image of a man staring down at a tiny indistinguishable person in his hands in a threatening and controlling manner which again reflects the authority of prison staff against the small, powerless person in his hands who he could destroy in one squeeze (fig. 6).

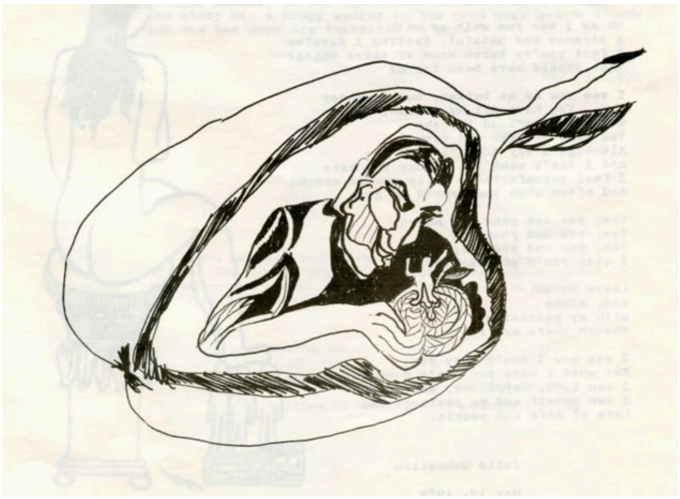


Figure 6: Accompanying image to 'Lights Out!' (*no title at all,* 1974, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org), 11.

Nevertheless, first-person narration is used in some of the poetry, particularly when expressing agency and protest. For instance, one example reads:

> Three-fourths of the gum chewed in Amerika is bubble gum. Someone needs to pop the bubble. Not someone, me and my sisters – I don't know why I want to bother though – I don't like Amerika, can't find

[24] SuSun Young, "Lights Out!", *no title at all is better than a title like that!*, 10.

> peace of mind here, or the freedoms the liberals talk about – please release me, USA – I promise never to come back.[25]

The first person here, in contrast to the previous poem, exhibits agency as the author suggests that she is willing to take control of her future and pop the idealistic 'bubble' that surrounds society, separating it from women in prison, with the help of her 'sisters' inside. Yet even then she admits that she does not know if she wants to be a part of American society, as she does not experience more freedom outside of prison. In this sense, the poem is similar to much of *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* as the author experiences similar feelings of disenchantment with America as the promised ideals of freedom are not realised. What is more, the use of radical language, form and spelling seen in both zines demonstrates the influence of the political and cultural climate on prisoners throughout the 1970s and their cultural production. The use of the word 'sisters' or 'sistas' to describe their fellow inmates is particular to womanist/black feminist culture that was popularized throughout the decade, and in using the term, include the women in the tradition.

Although most of the poems within *no title at all* are related in some way to the women's incarceration, many discuss human experiences and emotions—such as love, loss, jealousy, and hope—that go beyond physical confinement, with a focus on shared female concerns such as domestic abuse. Statistics have shown that over half the population of women in prison and jail in the US have reported past experiences of physical or sexual

[25] Anonymous, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that!*, 1.

abuse. One poem entitled 'Poem for a Jealous Lover' discusses a woman's experience of being in an abusive relationship: 'You would constrict my vision/make faithfulness into opaque glasses/through which I could see only you… You would love me – and in loving/me love yourself/and I would die your prisoner.'[26] The author writes of the all-consuming nature of abusive relationships, as she uses confining language like 'constrict' and 'prisoner' to reflect the oppressiveness of her partner, and suggests that by being trapped within the relationship, a part of her would 'die'. The poem's final line 'Don't ever let me go…. But please don't make me stay' demonstrates the complexities of emotionally abusive relationships, as she is aware of her situation but unable to leave it.

In addition to *no title at all is better than a title like that!,* the participants of the SCWPP writing workshops contributed to CIW's own prison zine *Clarion* as an alternative space to exhibit the women's writing. Established in the 1950s and produced monthly by the women in the prison, *Clarion* had a circulation of 1,300 readers and primarily circulated news among incarcerated women. For instance, the Aug-Sept 1976 issue included a page-long article dedicated to one of the staff of the CIW clothing factory who was leaving, and a lengthy article detailing the new changes to the Board Procedures. The editorial at the start of the zine also included references to women who had finished their sentences and were getting out: 'the rest of the Clarion staff wish Mozell the best of luck on the bricks

[26] Claudia Grayson "Poem for a Jealous Lover", *no title at all is better than a title like that!*, 5.

and know that her family is once again happy to have her among them.'[27] This example demonstrates the communal aspects of *Clarion* and prison zines more generally, as the women share their stories and experiences, both good and bad, and celebrate in this case a fellow inmate's release. Some scholars argue that the creation of educational programs such as those established by the SCWPP foster a more collective and shared environment through the reading and discussion of each other's work in an open environment. In *Resistance Behind Bars,* Victoria Law explained that 'an unexpected result of the SCWPP was the emergence of a dialogue between groups of prisoners who might otherwise never speak to each other.' She quotes a prisoner involved in the program as saying, 'I witnessed something I would have believed [three years ago] was impossible. We had an [illegal] meeting where Black and White were united, under one common cause. There were women there who in the past would never have spoken to each other but here they were standing together, agreeing, touching shoulders.'[28] As outlined in Chapter One, the creation of a shared platform shifts the emphasis from 'I' to 'we', both textually and personally. The creation of the SCWPP and the writing course, and the subsequent creation of the collective publication *no title at all* meant that women generated a space both physically and emotionally for a new self-defined prison community that invited discussion, creativity, sharing and support, united by

[27] Leslie Van Houten, 'Editorial', *Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, (Women's newsletter and periodical collection, 1923-2011, Carton One, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University), 1.
[28] Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (Oakland CA: PM Press, 2012), 79.

their gender, and acted against the system's environment of isolation, separation and stereotype. In addition, the program and zine empowered the women, as many learnt to read for the first time and were able to give themselves a voice.

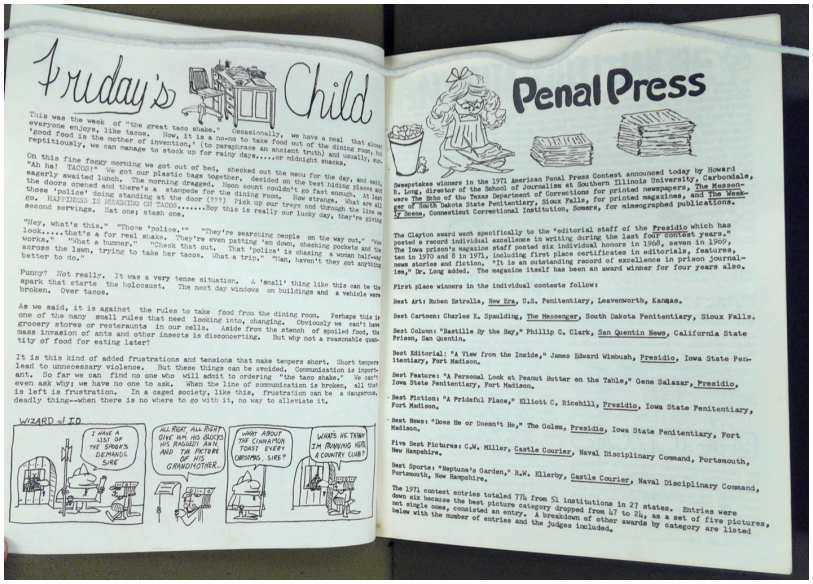


Figure 7: From inside the Jan/Feb 1972 edition of *Clarion*. Each edition regularly included hand-drawn titles, pictures and even cartoons, although sometimes borrowed from external sources. Both editions referenced were printed on coloured, A4 paper. The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Jan-Feb 1972, (Special Collections Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Special Collections Library), 6.

Much of *no title at all* and *Clarion* was made up of articles about issues directly related to the women's own situation as prisoners at CIW.

The Aug-Sept 1976 issue of *Clarion* contains an impassioned opinion article which outwardly encourages support and protest for carceral issues, critiquing child custody and writing that 'the whole point of this article is to wake you up, to ask you to support other women in prison. … Thanks for reading this, now it's your turn to start discussing it, writing letters and articles, and to get involved.'[29] Similarly *no title at all* includes a poem by a woman who writes about one of her acquaintances, Cupcake, who has been abused by the system. She writes: 'Now - - with Cupcake on my mind my

[29] Anon, "An Opinion: Child Custody", *Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, 13.

pen seems helpless to save her - - but that's all I want to do. I want Cupcake and me and you to be free.'[30] This rhetoric is comparable to *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery* for its encouragement of action and suggests a more radical element to the zines. H. Bruce Franklin has suggested that part of the significance of prison writing and collective prison writing in particular, is not to 'sit around admiring the authors, but to get up and put their message into action.'[31] For *Break de Chains, Clarion* and *no title at all,* this is an important part of their aesthetic as protest literature and distinguishes them from other newsletters or periodicals as they encourage engagement and action from their readership. This is an aesthetic that Stauffer fails to emphasise in his definition of protest literature, yet for women's prison zines, seems invaluable. The formation of a community is only part of their intention as pieces of protest writing, with the overall aim focused on encouraging action.

In an article titled 'Anyone Out There?' the author implores the women of CIW to contribute written work, saying 'Can't spell? ..Neither can I. But we have a dictionary and I finally figured out how to use it. Don't have the time? ..What else do we have… Don't insult my intelligence by telling me you can't express yourself. Cons are better at expressing themselves than most people.'[32] Primarily, this piece raises the ongoing issues of literacy for women in CIW. Faith notes how 'the majority of enrollees had not

[30] Donna Hansen, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that!,* 17.
[31] Franklin, *Prison Literature in America,* 251.
[32] Anon, "Anyone Out There?", *Clarion,* The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Jan-Feb 1972, (Special Collections Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Special Collections Library), 6.

completed high school, as was true of the prison population at large.'[33] The result was that many of the women lacked confidence in their writing abilities. Moreover, time becomes a complex idea in prison. Julia Sudbury has argued that 'despite the allusion to temporality, "doing time" is also fundamentally about space. It is the confinement within the closed space of the prison and the brutal monotony of the cell that makes "doing time" a punishment.'[34] Therefore arguably time takes on a new meaning within prison: it is no longer about the passing and filling of days, but more the punishing emptiness and slowness of captivity. By suggesting that all her fellow inmates have is time, this writer is not merely referring to it in a temporal sense, but also encompassing the hollowness and confinement of incarceration, suggesting that it acts in some way as a form of motivation and inspiration. Her final point that 'cons are better at expressing themselves than most people' suggests that imprisonment gives women the experiences about which to write, and that incarcerated women therefore offer the most succinct and powerful experiences of gendered confinements, both literally and metaphorically.

Clarion also reported on protests and riots in CIW, some of which were directly related to the SCWPP which experienced some criticism during its time at CIW. Although some of the staff were encouraging and accommodating of the programmes, others were 'unrelenting in their

[33] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 288.
[34] Julia Sudbury, "From the Point of No Return to the Women's Prison: Writing Contemporary Spaces of Confinement into Diaspora Studies", *Canadian Women Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2004), 154.

intolerance.'[35] Faith describes how she 'was frequently alerted by prisoners to ways that the project was kept under surveillance, with unfriendly guards lying in wait for someone to trip up and discredit the program so as to justify our expulsion from the institution.'[36] Mail was often interrupted, teachers' vehicles and belongings were searched coming in and out of the facility and some teachers were even banned from entering.[37] However, the women did not readily accept the harassment. In 1972 when the program was temporarily suspended because of one of the SCWPP founders was banned from the prison, the students responded by organising a work strike and a sit-in before the warden's office. Similarly, in 1973 when the project was suspended again, the inmates responded by circulating petitions, holding work strikes, and organizing meetings with the administration to protest the project's removal.[38] Some members of staff went the opposite way, also to detrimental effect, as they altered women's sentences because they had gained academic credit, whilst denying others parole as they had not yet completed courses in which they were enrolled.[39]

The women at CIW also protested independently of the SCWPP about other penal issues. In the Jan-Feb 1972 edition of *Clarion*, an article entitled 'Friday's Child' outlines the "The Great Taco Shake" week in which women at CIW broke windows and rioted after being searched for smuggled food when leaving the cafeteria. The author of the article explains that the

[35] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 300.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Victoria Law, "Nor Meekly Serve Her Time".
[39] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 298.

cause of the riot went beyond the incident itself, and was a product of a frustrated, confined community unable to communicate with prison officials: 'when the line of communication is broken, all that is left is frustration. In a caged society, like this, frustration can be a dangerous, deadly thing --- when there is no where to go with it, no way to alleviate it.'[40] Many women writers in *no title at all* and *Clarion* emphasize this psychological struggle over the absence and creation of space. For instance, in the poem 'Someday' the writer laments:

There's a better life
for me and you.
Greener greens
bluer blues.
Wide open spaces
for us to see.
Bigger places
for us to be.[41]

Emphasizing the struggle and desire for space, this poem can be interpreted not merely as a longing for physical and mental freedom from the confines of a prison cell, but also as a yearning for a better life on the outside, within society. The desire for 'greener greens' and 'bluer blues' suggests that the writer seeks a society that is greater than it is; the 'wide open spaces' symbolize not only physical freedoms, but also a freedom of opportunity, void of discrimination and prejudice.

Some scholars have argued, however, that the presence of creativity, writing and artistry within prison can help to lessen these feelings of

[40] Anon, "Friday's Child", *Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Jan-Feb 1972, 3.
[41] Fella, "Someday" from *Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, 10.

frustration and confinement. Throughout the Aug-Sept 1976 edition of *Clarion* the editors emphasize the role of art within prison and actively encourage it at CIW. Leslie writes in the editorial: 'Anyone who has thoughts, or any poems, illustrations, jokes or other written works please feel free to stop by the Clarion office and contribute.' Additionally, page 12 includes a promotional article about the popular PEN writing competition for prisoners, accompanied by an image showing a woman writing in front of a window and the sun coming out from behind the clouds (fig. 8). This imagery implies a dreamlike, open space with clarity and freedom forged through writing, despite the writer herself being behind walls. Karlene Faith describes the creative writing class and the act of writing itself as a way to create and maintain 'their [the prisoners'] sense of private space or "sanity"'[42] against the confining environment of prison. In a space that is limited both physically in the form of bars, cages, jail cells and solitary confinement, and psychologically through limited mental stimulation and subtle removal of identity, the opportunity to self-define and "escape"



Figure 8: Image accompanying an article on the PEN Writing Competition for prisoners. *Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, (Women's newsletter and periodical collection, 1923-2011, Carton One, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University).

[42] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 193.

through creativity could offer some relief. Anita Wilson argues that 'on the one hand, prison tries to push prisoners into an institutional space which prioritizes institutional literacy, while, on the other hand, prisoners resist by defending their personal space with contextualized literacies that carry traces of outside world practices and activities' thus creating a 'third space' whereby prisoners can 'occupy their minds' whilst incarcerated in order to retain some element of their "outside" selves.[43] However, Faith has argued that, in her experience, the defiant statement of 'they can take my body but they can't take my mind or soul' is 'more a battle cry than a statement of fact' and that 'despite the prevalence of such testimony, for many women the body/mind/soul can't be separated, and for such women one of the most devastating aspects of imprisonment is indeed losing control over one's own body.'[44] Nevertheless, Judith Scheffler has argued that women's writing workshops such as the SCWPP are important not merely for their individual benefits, but also as a collective, reflecting Victoria Law's observations of increased communality amongst the women at CIW following the SCWPP program. She writes:

> The words that a woman writes about her life story, crime, and responses to prison may serve as therapy for her own personal situation, but a workshop environment extends their reach… In the context of a writing workshop, they work to defeat those negative forces as they take responsibility for themselves and for each other.[45]

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[43] Anita Wilson, "Four Days and a Breakfast: Time, Space and Literacy/ies, in the Prison Community" in *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice* ed. Kevin M. Leander et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 70-74.
[44] Faith, "The Politics of Confinement and Resistance'", 167.
[45] Judith Scheffler, '"…to speak in one's own voice": The Power of Women's Writing", in *Women, Writing, and Prison*, 181.

The final poem in *no title at all* reflects this sentiment as the author begins each stanza by saying what prison is about: isolation, barriers, restriction, pain and corruption. Yet the final two stanzas reflect a different side to prison, beyond confinement writing:

> Prison is about the eternal attempt –
> to call out and be heard,
> to reach out and be felt,
> to act out and be seen.
> Prison is about the loss of and the
> search for familyhood, togetherness,
> and love.[46]

This poem disrupts the anticipated role of prison as an environment of isolation, punishment and silence. Although it acknowledges this is still prison's primary function, it also suggests that the women are actively reclaiming the space for themselves in order to forge bonds, create a community and develop a voice despite adversity. Zines act as a space to 'call out and be heard' and through the sharing of ideas, experiences and opinions, form relationships through solidarity.

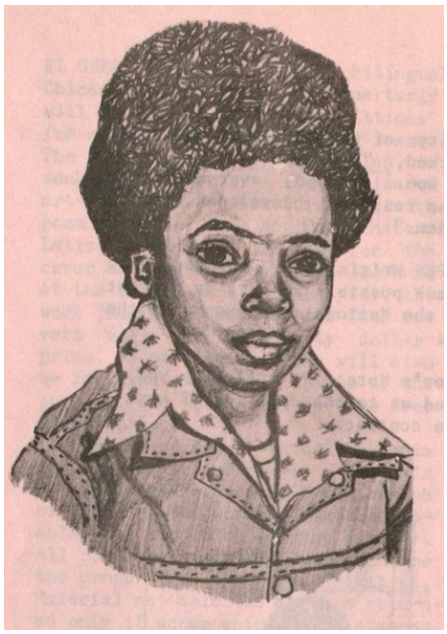


Figure 9: Andre, son of inmate Beverly Bates and subject of her poem 'Andre' (*Clarion*, The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, (Women's newsletter and periodical collection, 1923-2011, Carton One, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

Another uniquely female experience discussed at length within *Clarion, no title at all* and prison zines more generally is children and motherhood. Ann Folwell Stanford in the introduction to *Women, Writing and Prison* argues that 'those who have

[46] Anonymous, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that!,* 22.

spent even a minimal amount of time writing with incarcerated women will attest to the dominance of the thinking and writing about children and the profound desire to reconnect, be forgiven, and start over.'[47] In the Aug-Sept 1976 edition of *Clarion*, Beverly Bates, one of the women incarcerated at CIW writes about her twelve year-old son Andre in a poem: 'Everyone knows how important children are./I'm writing this poem about my son, Andre,/A very special man.'[48] A detailed drawing of her son accompanies the poem (fig. 9). Despite the minimalist form, it embodies the *need* to communicate, both to Andre, the readers, and herself as she reaffirms her identity as a mother.

Similarly, one of the pieces in *no title at all* depicts a woman who is unable to speak to her children from within prison and her longing to see them again. She ends the poem by writing: 'waiting/impatiently for anger/alternatives arrived/so now I am/waiting/impatiently for joy.'[49] Estimates of the number of women incarcerated who are mothers range from sixty to eighty per cent, and most are the primary providers for their children at the time of their arrest.[50] As a result of being incarcerated, women behind bars are frequently labeled by society as 'bad mothers,' as they are seen to further defy conventions of femininity and womanhood. Karlene Faith has argued:

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[47] Ann Folwell Stanford, "Introduction: Not Much Silence Here", from *Women, Writing, and Prison*, 5.
[48] Beverly Bates, "Andre", *Clarion,* The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, 11.
[49] Claudia Grayson, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that!,* 12.
[50] Mary Dodge and Mark R. Pogrebin, "Collateral Costs of Imprisonment for Women: Complications of Reintegration", *The Prison Journal,* Vol. 81 No. 1 (2001), 43.

> In sociological jargon, the "master status" of a mother in prison is not her mother identity but her criminal identity. Women's parental credentials are called into question on the grounds that no woman who has used drugs, worked as a prostitute or otherwise shown "deviant" or criminal tendencies can be a "good" mother.[51]

According to studies from *The Prison Journal*, this leads to feelings of guilt and depression, as the women feel vulnerable and helpless when they cannot provide or care for their children. An article in *Clarion* reiterates this point on child custody: 'we recognize that inadvertently, our children are victims of our crime by our absence from their lives due to our imprisonment. That does not mean that all prisoners will always be in prison or that all women in prison are bad mothers.'[52] The SCWPP worked to challenge and dispel these prejudices built on patriarchy and gender stereotypes, and by creating zines that convey their love for their children and heartbreak at separation, the women are able to voice their feelings and self define, acting against the dominant narratives that confine them and women everywhere.

The Aug-Sept 1976 issue of *Clarion* also includes a poem by Jerri Rochelle Lancaster, the daughter of a woman incarcerated at CIW, entitled 'The Being.' It gives the alternate side to the incarceration of mothers, discussing similar themes of detachment. The poem grapples with the disconnection between the mind, body and soul as the writer wrestles with her feelings of loss and vulnerability: 'It is to possess the mind of my

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[51] Faith, *Unruly Women,* 204.
[52] Anonymous, "An Opinion… Child Custody", *Clarion,* The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, 3.

body/for it is the being/that I cannot control,/The Soul.'[53] Lancaster writes that the body is 'the clownish friction of/flesh created out of nothing,/a mock up of its begetters. A miraculous puppet of God…'[54] suggesting a clumsiness of the 'act of love' itself and the artificiality of bodily transmission through generations ultimately leading to a sense of superficiality and hollowness of the human body. Subsequently, she writes of a search for identity beyond physicalities, offering self-harm as a means of seeking, clarifying and affirming one's sense of self as she marks her body in order to hear her 'soul shout[s] out' and her mind 'pout.' The poem has strong elements of disassociation as the consciousness is split between mind, body and soul which Freud has argued is a result of the ego, or consciousness, repressing memories that are too painful.[55] Although this trauma could arguably be Lancaster's experience of her mother's incarceration, the poem manages to go beyond issues of incarceration and child custody to speak of timeless issues of selfhood, identity and trauma that affect both women in prison and those left outside.

In addition to the personal and prison-related news, *Clarion* and *no title at all* also engaged with wider issues related to incarcerated women as part of the SCWPP efforts to educate them about their status as incarcerated women in the US. The organisation's focus on political and

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[53] Jerri Rochelle Lancaster, "The Being", *Clarion,* The California Institution for Women at Frontera, California, Aug-Sept 1976, 15.
[54] Ibid.
[55] John C. Nemiah, "Early Concepts of Trauma, Dissociation, and the Unconscious: Their History and Current Implications", in *Trauma, Memory, and Dissociation,* ed. J. Douglas Bremner et al. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Press Inc., 1998), 11.

social education as well as teaching the women literacy skills meant that the women were increasingly aware of current worldwide political issues such as the Vietnam War. In response to learning about the ongoing conflict, the women created a second one-off zine in 1975 entitled *From Women in Prison Here to Women of Vietnam: We Are Sisters* comprising of letters written to women imprisoned in southern Vietnam. The cover image, designed by the short-lived organization The San Francisco Women's Union,[56] shows the silhouettes of women, some wearing nón lá (traditional Vietnamese leaf hats), in a circle, holding hands with fists raised in the air as a sign of solidarity and protest (fig. 10). This camaraderie between the women is emphasized throughout *From Women in Prison Here to Women of Vietnam*. Typed and handwritten letters underscore the importance of the communal aspect of women's prison zines beyond the single facility and beyond the US, emphasizing a universal female experience and community. The introduction to the zine quotes the Vice Minister of Health for the PGR (Provisional Revolutionary Government) in Vietnam as saying: 'We're part of a worldwide family of militant women. We here in Vietnam



Figure 10: Cover of one-off zine *From Women in Prison Here To Women of Vietnam: We are Sisters,* SCWPP 1975, design by The San Francisco Women's Union, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org

[56] The San Francisco Women's Union was an organization that ran from 1974 to 1976 and aimed to look at the impact of race, class and gender on women's lives.

follow the women's liberation movement in the U.S. very closely. Your movement and ours are complementary. The oceans cannot separate our emotions of unity.'[57] This quotation emphasizes the relationship that existed between the women's movement and the prison reform movement and demonstrates the zine's role as a piece of feminist literature. The comparison of incarcerated peoples in America and the Vietnamese population is not entirely unusual for the time. Tens of thousands of men who refused to be drafted between 1964 and 1968 were sent to prison along with protesters against the War, leading them to feel more camaraderie with the Vietnamese people than their own government.[58] For the women whose incarceration was not directly related to the war, however, their solidarity stems from a greater disillusionment towards American society at large, and the gendered and racialized prejudices that led to their imprisonment. As well as the letters, the zine ends with information on Thieu's prisons and on CIW, and how the reader could aid both causes, again highlighting the protest and participation element of prison zines, although this time on a world-wide scale.

From Women in Prison Here to Women of Vietnam demonstrates the desire of the women incarcerated at CIW to reach out to women in a similar situation to them and form a dialogue based on shared oppressions. Just as creators of zines in the women's movement used the print format to

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[57] Arlene Eisen Bergmen, introduction to *From Women in Prison Here to Women of Vietnam: We Are Sisters* (People's Press, 1975, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org), 2.
[58] Franklin, *Prison Literature in America,* 242.

communicate freely with likeminded individuals, the women incarcerated at CIW wrote to form a community and encourage support. This pursuit of involvement from their readers adds to definitions of protest literature as the women write not only for catharsis or community, but also for tangible action. Women's prison zines demonstrate the important and complex intersection between the women's movement and the prison reform movement in the 1970s, both in the involvement of feminist organisations in their creation, and in the content of their art and writing, discussing a broad range of themes from prison resistance to motherhood and sexual violence. Although it is their status as prisoners which forcibly creates the environment in which they collectively make zines, more broadly, it is their experiences as women that encourages them to write. In viewing them as part of the feminist writing tradition of the 1970s, it adds imprisonment imagery to the overall aesthetic and expands discussions of gender issues at the time. The final chapter defines women's prison zines as 'collective autobiography' and examines how the genre's aesthetic adds to ideas of protest literature to include the extraordinary, passionate, and complex writings of a group of invisiblised women who are otherwise ignored.

Chapter Three

Through the Looking Glass and Collective Autobiography

Women's prison zines go against the traditional individual narrative of prison life writing that focuses on the person's crime and emphasizes transgression and redemption. Rather, through form and content, they stress the communal nature of incarceration and the shared experience of women in America. In doing so, the women establish a 'collective autobiography', redefining the female incarceration experience against dominant media narratives and seeking authority through camaraderie. John Downton Hazlett writes about collective autobiography in terms of the 1960s and 70s, but does so from the perspective of generational autobiography. He chooses to writes about individual works of literature that represent a generational community, as opposed to women's prison zines which are written and produced as a collective and do not allow one voice to speak for all. As a result, they are arguably more reliably representational of the female prisoner community. Hazlett suggests that those who came of age in that period experienced a self-consciousness that was accompanied by 'the development of a new collective identity' separate to that of the previous generation.[1] This is comparable to creators of zines (or 'zinesters'), as according to Stephen Duncombe, they come together and write as a way of expressing and consolidating a collective identity against

[1] John Downton Hazlett, *My Generation: Collective Autobiography and Identity Politics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 5.

the dominant media.[2] Although this is similar for incarcerated women, the heterotopic environment of the prison creates a unique, forced community of individuals, rather than one based on mutual interest in music, sci-fi or politics and different to that of a generational self-consciousness. As such, their environment determines their communal identity, but the subsequent choice to write collectively remains the same. Reasons for this are varied. Dan Berger argues that the primary purpose of prison newspapers 'was to establish connections between prisoners and outside supporters under the mantle of revolutionary nationalism.'[3] Although this is true of women's prison zines, they also sought to establish a collective, relatable, self-defined identity in collaboration with incarcerated women everywhere in order to achieve strength through solidarity.

Where the previous chapters have focused on zines written and produced almost entirely by incarcerated women themselves, this chapter examines externally edited zines through the example of Seattle zine *Through the Looking Glass.* The term 'externally edited zines' (as opposed to 'internally edited zines') is used here to differentiate between the varying levels of editorial control the women in prison have over the publication. Where *Clarion* and *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* had help from outside organisations with printing, advertising, distribution, and in some cases the initial creation, they retained control over the editing of the zine,

[2] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997).
[3] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014), 236.

albeit with some institutional censorship. For both publications, the editors were chiefly women "inside" who collected materials from women within their own institution. *Through the Looking Glass* differs in this respect, offering an alternative model of prison zine with the editorial authority remaining, for the most part, outside of prison walls; it also avoids any affiliation to a particular institution, thus creating a nationwide – and even global – textual community of incarcerated women. In doing so, however, the finished product can and must be viewed as inherently different from an internally edited zine, as the access to resources and relative ease of creation impacts upon the zine's content and publication.

This is not to say, however, that externally edited zines are any less worthy of discussion. Indeed, Donna L. Rowe when discussing *Through the Looking Glass* in her 2004 PhD dissertation *From the Inside Out: Women Writers Behind Prison Walls* claimed that 'no other women's prison newsletter that was published outside of prison walls with a consistent and strong collaboration of activists and ex-prisoners during the 20th Century had such a mass impact on the feminist movement and the national community of female prisoners simultaneously.'[4] Although a rather bold claim, Rowe makes a compelling argument as she uses unique interviews with the founders to discuss the zine's value. She argues that 'the newsletters served to link women's communities across the barriers of bars

[4] Donna L. Rowe, *From the Inside Out: Women Writers Behind Prison Walls* (PhD diss, University of Maryland, 2004), 68.

and miles by inviting anyone to contribute her work'[5] and thus establish a broad and diverse conversation around women in prison. Nevertheless, her argument is somewhat weakened as attempts to place *Through the Looking Glass* in a wider context are unsuccessful. She writes 'there were other feminist and lesbian newsletters published during this period, and at least one other newsletter *No More Cages*, dedicated to women in prison that began publishing as late as 1980. However my research has not brought to light any other women's prison newsletters published in the 1960's or 1970's.'[6] The other publication she writes of, *No More Cages,* is similar to *Through the Looking Glass* in that it is an externally edited zine from New York, meaning her argument does not include the numerous zines, such as those mentioned in the previous chapters, produced inside prisons. As such, her work discussing women's prison zines is not as wide reaching and she, like many other scholars, demonstrates the lack of extensive knowledge in the area.

Based in Seattle WA, *Through the Looking Glass* was a newsletter that ran for eleven years; from 1976 to 1980 in monthly installments, and then bi-monthly until 1987 as the staff decided that they would alternate with *No More Cages,* producing fewer editions in order to focus on fundraising, campaigning, educating and writing themselves.[7] At its peak 1,500 copies were printed and distributed throughout the country to

[5] Ibid, 81.
[6] Ibid, 68.
[7] Anon, "What's happening with TTLG?", *Through the Looking Glass* Vol. 5 No. 6, July 1980, Through the Looking Glass, Seattle WA. (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 30, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University) 2.

libraries, community centres, prisons, and bookstores such as Left Bank Books and It's About Time Bookstore.[8] Owing to its external editors and their connections with other feminist and lesbian communities, *Through the Looking Glass* circulated more widely than the previously discussed zines over the eleven years. However, for a lot of its publication life span, *Through the Looking Glass* was running on little or no money, causing the editors to occasionally include an article trying to raise funds. One such article read 'Right now we need money or we will not be able to survive for too much longer. Over half of our newsletters are sent free to prisoners. We need the subscriptions ($5/yr) and donations (as much as you can) of those of you on the outside so we can continue to get the news inside.'[9] All of the members of the editorial team were voluntary and varied, with women of diverse ethnicities and sexualities taking part, who were, on average, employed, in their mid-thirties and

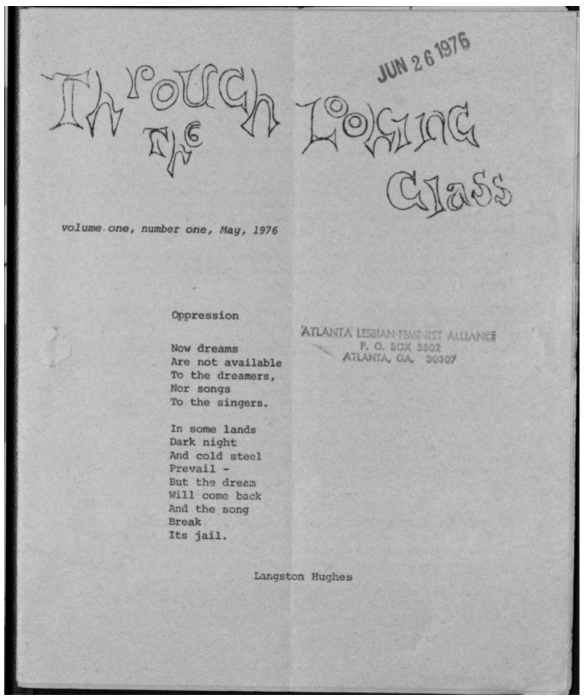


Figure 11: Front cover of the first edition of *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 1, May 1976, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

[8] Rowe, *From the Inside Out*, 69.
[9] Anon, "Dear Folks", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 3 No. 8, October 1978, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 26.

advocates of prison reform, with some even having experience of incarceration themselves. According to Rowe's source "Jane", the team ranged from four to fifteen contributors per issue who were not always harmonious in their visions for the zine. She writes, 'we were always struggling as a group with our politics and our stances', adding that she herself struggled in the group owing to her personal attitudes towards literacy: 'There was all this judgment about what somebody's written. Or if they've written it well enough… I had just learned to read back then. I started on this newsletter before I could read it. So there were always issues around that. And I'd say "well I can read it, it must be all right! What's the matter with it?"'[10] This disagreement within the organisation over literacy and its relevance within the zine highlights a clear issue of authority and intervention on the behalf of the publishing supervisors: a concept challenging for any editor but perhaps especially so for the external editors of *Through the Looking Glass* who have to compile the women's work and choose to what extent they influence and edit it. But the organisation's members also disagreed over the content of the zine, with some wanting increased focus on LGBT rights, others mental health, and some wanting to sanitize everything in order to avoid institutional censorship and reach the most people.

Nevertheless, regardless of clashing visions for the zine, from this group the organization formed around a collective objection to working-class women being jailed for minor offences and discrimination by the

[10] Rowe, *From the Inside Out,* 82.

Seattle law enforcement against members of the LGBT community. This led to involvement with the Purdy Correctional Facility in Washington where the publication evolved as the editors strove to expose the poor conditions and maltreatment. [11] From this, the newsletter grew to cover a broader range of facilities and prisoners, outside of the Seattle/Washington State area. The organisation's manifesto, printed in each edition, begins 'Through the Looking Glass is a monthly newsletter that focuses on women and children incarcerated in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the world.' The all-encompassing nature of the publication is one of the main factors differentiating externally edited zines from their more centralised counterparts. The outside editors are able to access people and resources than would be possible within prison and can consolidate them within one publishable text. Over the eleven-year publication span, *Through the Looking Glass* printed articles from multiple prison, mental health, international, youth, and feminist sources. In doing so, they aimed to 'remind people that women and children are locked up' whilst providing education on 'the conditions they live under'[12] and forming a dialogue around reform, aid, and the varying manifestations of confinement.

The title of the zine *Through the Looking Glass* is a nod to Lewis Carroll's book of the same name, extracts from which were included throughout the zine. By invoking Carroll's book, it creates various effects. Primarily, like women's prison zines, it centralizes women in the narrative

[11] Ibid, 71.
[12] Anon, "Manifesto", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 1, May 1976, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

through Carroll's protagonist Alice. Additionally, the idea of moving 'through the looking glass' suggests breaking out of a confined space, such as prison. Donna Rowe links this to a quotation from the book where Alice crawls into the room through that glass and comments that 'I'm nearly sure they [the kings and queens] can't see me. I feel somehow as if I were invisible.'[13] This perfectly captures the invisibility of incarcerated women and their own feelings of a loss of identity. The warped world that Alice moves through within the book is separated and juxtaposed against society as she travels through bizarre and liminal spaces that seemingly make no sense. For incarcerated women, prison can be seen as a similar distorted and removed space and many of the contributors to *Through the Looking Glass* share similar feelings of loss, confusion and bewilderment at the prison industrial complex and the judiciary system at large.

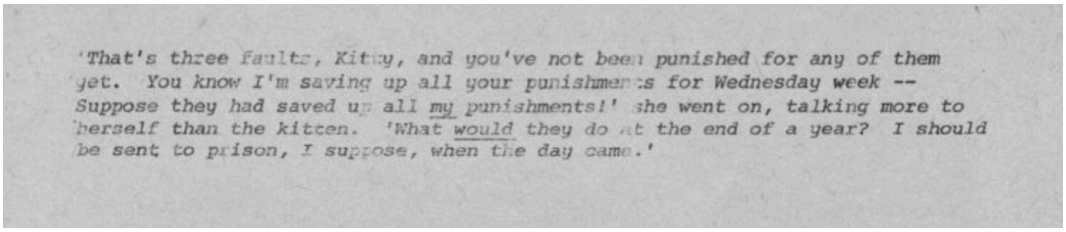
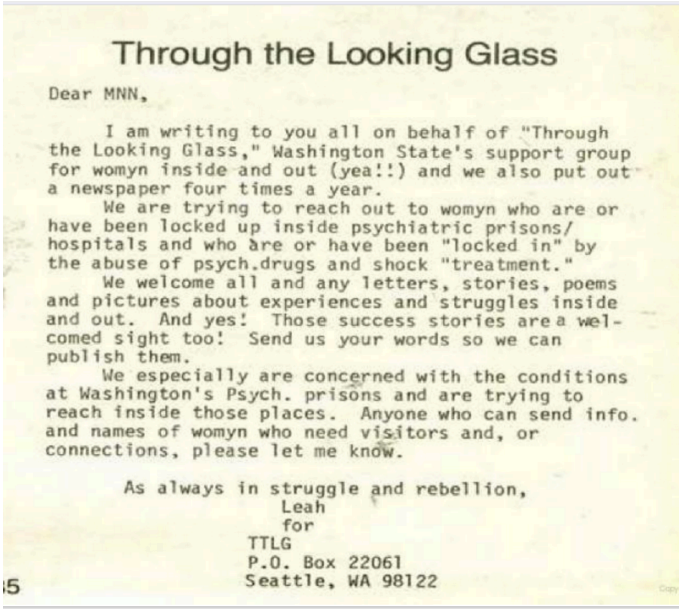

'That's three faults, Kitty, and you've not been punished for any of them yet. You know I'm saving up all your punishments for Wednesday week -- Suppose they had saved up all my punishments!' she went on, talking more to herself than the kitten. 'What would they do at the end of a year? I should be sent to prison, I suppose, when the day came.'

Figure 12: Example of a quotation from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* included in *Through the Looking Glass.* Some of the quotations were related to prison or court whereas others intended to emphasize the confusion and senselessness of incarceration. *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 4, April 1977, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

For women in prison, their status as outsiders is owing to both their position as incarcerated females and to the form of collective writing that they choose to use. Primarily, their incarceration renders them the most

[13]Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (New York: St Martin Press, 1977) p. 15, cited in, Rowe, *From the Inside Out: Women Writers Behind Prison Walls,* 67.

invisible members of American society as they are physically removed and cut-off from society and confined by stereotypes that label them deviants and criminals (there is a certain irony therefore to being described as being "inside" as they could not be further "outside" of society). In addition to this, the majority of women who are incarcerated are already within a minority in society: they are women (and disproportionately women of colour) from poverty stricken areas; are frequently unemployed at the time of their arrest; are single parents; have a history of mental health problems; have been physically or emotionally abused; and the majority have not completed high school.



Through the Looking Glass

Dear MNN,

I am writing to you all on behalf of "Through the Looking Glass," Washington State's support group for womyn inside and out (yea!!) and we also put out a newspaper four times a year.

We are trying to reach out to womyn who are or have been locked up inside psychiatric prisons/ hospitals and who are or have been "locked in" by the abuse of psych.drugs and shock "treatment."

We welcome all and any letters, stories, poems and pictures about experiences and struggles inside and out. And yes! Those success stories are a welcomed sight too! Send us your words so we can publish them.

We especially are concerned with the conditions at Washington's Psych. prisons and are trying to reach inside those places. Anyone who can send info. and names of womyn who need visitors and, or connections, please let me know.

As always in struggle and rebellion,
Leah
for
TTLG
P.O. Box 22061
Seattle, WA 98122

Figure 13 – Letter from Leah to readers of 'Madness Network News', *Madness Network News* (Vol. 7 No. 6, Summer 1985) 35.

These factors already render the women as 'other' which, combined with their physical separation, create a vast spatial and psychological divide. Nevertheless, this detached and isolated space fosters a unique environment from which women in prison create collections of art and literature. Their perspective as 'outsiders' offers a unique view of American society from which they can write back against dominant ideas. Furthermore, the zine form in which they choose to write also embraces the outsider status as they write, produce and circulate their

work outside of dominant media circles and subvert classical and mainstream ideas of print culture, encompassing the 'other' that is so often ignored in the media.

Much of *Through the Looking Glass* comprises of articles either directly taken from external sources or informed by them. It includes information from a broad range of publications, with some appearing more frequently than others, such as *Guardian, Sinister Wisdom* and *Off Our Backs,* a feminist news journal that ran from 1970 to 2008. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the relationship with lesbian and feminist zines and the underground press was common within women's prison zines in the period, which all advertised, shared and borrowed from each other in order to create a large alternative press separate from mainstream capitalist media. Indeed, articles from and advertisements for *Through the Looking Glass* can be found in numerous other publications. For instance, a 1985 edition of *Madness Network News*[14] includes a letter from Leah, one of *Through the Looking Glass*'s organisers, urging people to contact them with materials. It reads 'I am writing to you all on behalf of "Through the Looking Glass," Washington State's Support group for women inside and out (yea!!)' and is signed 'As always in struggle and rebellion, Leah'.[15] In return, *Through the Looking Glass* included extracts and articles from various sister

[14] *Madness Network News* (MNN) was founded in 1972 in the San Francisco Bay Area as an effort to articulate the thoughts and concerns of the 'Mental Patient Liberation Movement' at the time. Publishing quarterly, the journal's readership extended across the US and even internationally. For more information, see the website http://www.madnessnetworknews.com/index.html

[15] Letter from *Through the Looking Glass* member Leah from *Madness Network News* (Vol. 7 No. 6, Summer 1985) 35.

publications. Interestingly, on several occasions this included articles on both the California Institute for Women, Frontera and the North Carolina Correctional Centre for Women, the latter of which was lifted directly from *Break de Chains* which demonstrates the complex and intricate intersections where the publications of the period meet and the thriving community around women's prison zines.

Owing to the cacophony of voices contributing to the publication from within and outside of the organisation, and the broad range of sources from which the editors got their materials, the content is rich and varied. Article topics range from national penal law to individual court cases, and domestic abuse to drug addiction and international women's news, demonstrating the diverse forms of gendered confinement. Despite sharing common interests with similar zines and small press publications at the time, it is safe to assume that *Through the Looking Glass* was within a minority by producing a zine primarily concerned with the female prison experience. Victoria Law writes that 'many activist-orientated publications mirror the mainstream media's masculinization of prisons and prisoners, contributing to the invisibility of women behind bars.'[16] She goes on to highlight the role of feminist media and prison rights groups, such as *Through the Looking Glass,* in countering this invisibility by publishing the work of women in prison. Law argues that this adds to the women's sense of self-worth, self-esteem and camaraderie as 'for these women, having their

[16] Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (Oakland CA., PM Press, 2009), 128.

words and thoughts taken seriously is, in and of itself, a major achievement.'[17] When reading the letters printed in *Through the Looking Glass* one can indeed ascertain a sense of empowerment through the vocalization of their experiences. The Volume Two, Number Seven edition includes two letters from women incarcerated at Purdy Correctional Facility writing of the challenges facing them inside such as being denied basic medical attention and the oppressive environment. One woman writes 'by taking this stand against the institution, I hope to at least make a small step in the direction of our human rights, and perhaps to educate in some way these people to see us as individuals and grant us the respect we are due, whatever our circumstances.'[18] By enabling the women to express their concerns and act upon them through writing, it not only contributes to the women's sense of agency by making them feel as though they are actively participating in prison reform, but moreover, it contributes to their own sense of self through vocalizing and sharing their thoughts, concerns and feelings, and having an active audience to listen to them.

In one letter from a woman who had recently been transferred from Pleasantown to C.I.W. after establishing a books-to-prison programme there with the help of *Through the Looking Glass,* she writes: 'however, keep the faith as I would like to thank 'Through the Looking Glass' for all the support you gave me and for printing my letters which were of great help…So lets

[17] Ibid, 129.
[18] Anonymous, Letter from a Woman at Purdy, *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 7, August 1977, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 10.

put some positive energy on good thoughts for women in desperate need of a women's group inside Pleasanton!'[19] *Through the Looking Glass* printed more than just letters from women in prison, however. The zine includes articles, prose, poems and artwork submitted by incarcerated women across the country and sometimes even internationally. By incorporating such a broad range of materials alongside the articles, *Through the Looking Glass* emphasizes the collective in women's prison zines and becomes an intricate tapestry of voices and stories, coming together to give an expansive and comprehensive view of women in prison in the 1970s. It is for this reason that they can be viewed as collective autobiographies, as they feature work by various women, many of which do not include names or titles in order to encourage this collective voice and remove individual authorship. In doing so, the experiences of one become the experience of many and a group identity built around their shared confinement is created. All of the separate zines of the period then work in harmony with each other, enhancing the narrative and offering different perspectives and alternate experiences to form a complex tapestry of voices of women in prison.

Despite discussing a variety of topics in each issue, materials related to prisons and penal law remain the most prevalent subjects within the zine. *Through the Looking Glass* provides updates in almost every issue on famous lawsuits and court cases of women such as Joanne Little, Assata Shakur and Yvonne Wanrow, women who were all unjustly incarcerated,

[19] Letter from Ramona J. Santa Cruz from CIW, *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 6, July 1977, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 25.

and gives details of their ongoing cases. In addition to this, there are regular updates on large female incarceration facilities across the country, with particular emphasis on CIW, Bedford Hills NY, Purdy WA, Florida Correctional Institute, King County Jail in Seattle, and NCCCW. The majority of the time these articles provide information on protests and riots taking place within a facility and the repressive, inhumane conditions that initiate them. But they also frequently offer suggestions of how readers can become involved in helping the case, such as writing to prisoners and protesting on the women's behalf. One such example reads:

> On February 16th, 1975, one hundred women prisoners at the Florida Correctional Institute responded to the outrageous and unconstitutional abuse of the prisoners by the guards. The response resulted in broken windows, damaged fixtures and furniture, at least one small fire and injuries to two of the guards and nine prisoners. The next day sixty-six women were isolated and ten later received felony charges. Many of the women were put in solitary confinement cells in the segregation unit known as "flat top". The cells are six by nine feet of concrete and often held two women at a time… A civil rights suit has been filed against Florida Correctional Institute in the name of Sikes and Hunter vs. Superintendent Booring, F.C.I. Hopefully the suit will open doors for women in every U.S. prison.[20]

Similarly, in an article on the new maximum-security female facility at Alderson West Virginia, the report states 'What we can do: Write Carson W. Marley, FCI, W. Virginia, with your concerns, start petitions directed to FED or Prison System Wash, D.C. 20534; send copies of everything to the National Prison Project, 1346 Connecticut Ave. NW., Suite 1301,

[20] Anon, Untitled, *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 2, June-July 1976, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 7.

Washington, D.C. 20036.'[21] The inclusion of this explanation of how people can aid the protest is another distinguishing feature of an externally edited zine, as although *Break de Chains* encouraged involvement for their strike, *Through the Looking Glass* does so on a wider scale, encouraging support for protests all over the country and worldwide, broadening the imprisoned community. *Through the Looking Glass* also provides information on bills and legal matters pertaining to women in prisons. For instance, in the April 1978 edition, they include an extensive article on 'SB 1437' (or 'The Criminal Code Reform Act of 1977'), a piece of legislature reforming existing federal criminal law. The article reads: 'Although a massive revision is necessary, SB 1437 is a frighteningly repressive piece of legislation purposely designed to destroy personal liberty by stifling free speech, criminalizing political activity, undermining labor unions, and greatly increasing the severity of prison sentences.'[22] This type of informative article about issues relating to prison and penal policy is comparable to some of the articles included in *Clarion* as the zine acts as an educational tool for its readers.

Many of the letters received by *Through the Looking Glass* are similar in form to the articles about incarceration as they outline various issues they have experienced personally within prison, and call for help from the organization and its readers. It was common for *Through the Looking Glass*

[21] Anon, "Alderson: Where Max is MAX", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 3 No. 4, May 1978, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 11.

[22] Anon, "Son of SB-1", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 3 No. 3, April 1978, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

to include the demands of a group of incarcerated women currently engaged in protest. For instance, inmates from the Women's Prison in Marysville, Ohio wrote a list of fifteen demands 'for the basic human rights' such as an end to 'slave labor' and, interestingly, 'the establishment of an inmate controlled newspaper.'[23] *Through the Looking Glass* was often used as a free platform from which incarcerated women could openly disclose their concerns and frustrations with the criminal justice system through letters and actively seek help. Yet the discussion of prisons within the zine was not just confined to informative letters and articles. Much of *Through the Looking Glass's* content consists of poems and artwork protesting against prisons and verbalizing their resistance. One poem entitled 'The Pits' by Rita D. Brown is set inside a standard, nondescript American prison and describes various anonymous incarcerated women by their crime. Brown lists each woman, from a single mother to a drug addict, and a prostitute to a victim of domestic abuse, ending each stanza with what "they" (the police/the state) call her. For example, she writes 'She's here cuz her child was/hungry/she took food without/permission/and now the state/stole the baby/thief, unfit mother they say.'[24] By keeping the women anonymous, it adds to the dehumanizing aspects within prison as they are nameless and identifiable only by their crime. But moreover, the vagueness allows the

[23] Anon, "A Fight at Marysville", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 4 No. 1, January 1979, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 28, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 6.

[24] Rita D. Brown, "The Pits", *Through the Looking Glass* Vol. 3 No. 2, March 1978, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 19.

women in the poem to represent the average woman commonly incarcerated in the United States, thus contributing to the idea of a collective autobiography. M. Susan Galbraith in her article 'So Tell Me, Why Do Women Need Something Different?' describes some of the common features of women in U.S. prisons:

> [They] are disproportionately African American, have grown up in communities with high rates of homelessness and unemployment, and were unemployed at the time of their arrest. Certain themes emerge as women report their histories. They have tragically high rates of sexual abuse and trauma… They have high rates of alcoholism, drug addiction and mental illness. They are mothers of young children… The women have typically committed a non-violent drug related offense, and the offense has often been tied to their relationship with a man.[25]

There are remarkable similarities between the features described by Galbraith and the women Brown depicts in her poem. Yet despite the somewhat pessimistic tone, the poem ends with a powerful statement of protest: 'We are womyn/We are strong/More and more/We are becoming one and/We will win.'[26] This type of protest poem is common within *Through the Looking Glass* as the women write back against their experiences of prison. What is more, similar to the prolific use of 'K's in *Break de Chains,* occasionally some of the contributors also use varied spellings within their work, such as the use of 'womyn'. This not only hints at the influence of the feminist movement that sought to eradicate male authority from female pronouns, but also suggests a desire to form an alternate language that better expresses the women's experiences.

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[25] M. Susan Galbraith, "So Tell Me, Why do Women Need Something Different?" in *Criminal Justice: Retribution vs. Restoration,* ed. Eleanor Hannon Judah et al. (New York: The Haworth Press Inc., 2004), 198.
[26] Rita D. Brown, "The Pits", 19.

One poem titled 'Numbers' whose author is unidentified writes 'i am a number/nothing more/page #389/in your text on "crime/and punishment"/case #24/of your course/on abnormal psychology/and chapter #11/in your books/on Sexual Behavior.'[27] Like the anonymity of Brown's women in 'The Pits', this poem speaks of the dehumanization experienced by women in prison. By being labeled as a number as soon as they are admitted, incarcerated women lose a part of their identity, emphasized in many of the poems by the author remaining anonymous. Silja Talvi, in her book *Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S. Prison System* writes of the numbering system from the perspective of a new inmate arguing that 'the totality of her personhood, life experience and unfulfilled hopes and desires is far, far more complex than the seven-digit number that will identify, regulate, and control her existence for years to come.'[28] Yet, as with 'The Pits', 'Numbers' ends with a positive empowering sentiment of self-definition: 'i am a number/nothing/thousands strong… even so/i am a number called womyn/and one you can count on/to stand proud/despite your dehumanizing/numberings/for millenniums to come.'[29] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the use of first-person pronouns demonstrates agency as the woman vows to resist and 'stand proud' regardless.

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[27] Anon, "Numbers", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 3 No. 8, November 1978 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 16.

[28] Silja Talvi, *Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S. Prison System* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), xx.

[29] Anon, "Numbers", 16.

Owing to the frequent anonymity of the authors, the zine does not always say whether the woman who produced the poem or image was incarcerated or not, but in some cases it can be inferred from the item's content. If not explicitly about incarceration, many of the images and poems are about the hypocrisies of the American justice system and about confinement more generally. For instance, the August 1976 edition has two images in quick succession that perfectly capture the juxtaposition of America as the land of the free but also a nation that incarcerates a disproportionate percent of its population. The first shows a woman who appears to be wearing no clothes and is covering her face with her shackled hands, accompanied by the caption 'I Am Free.' Similarly, the second image, found two pages later, shows a small figure escaping through bent bars made out of the American flag.

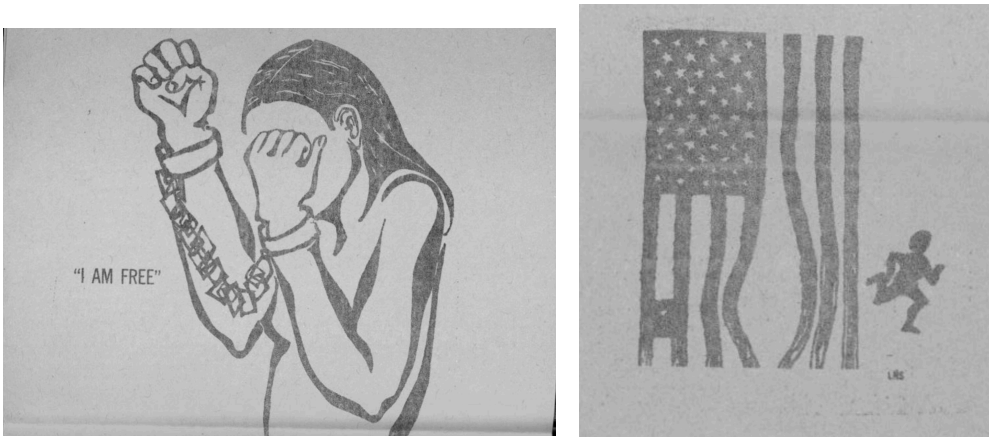


Figure 14: Images from *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 3, August 1976, p. 3, p. 5.

Additionally, in a later edition they include an image of Lady Justice being blind folded by the American flag with a sign 'Out of Order' hanging round her neck. This image is accompanied by a poem that opens 'Justice isn't blind/she merely turns her head./For those of wealth and social standing,/Punishment

is dead.'[30] All of these images, particularly when viewed together, show the women's frustration at America and its judiciary system– shown here through the symbolism of the flag and the personification of justice – as they are viewed as being inherently unjust, prejudiced and hypocritical.

Alongside the large quantity of writing and imagery that discusses confinement and freedom more generally within *Through the Looking Glass,* some pieces consider more specific issues within prison. Barbara Batchelder in her poem 'Purdy's Treatment' writes 'they torment all/unconquered souls/in hope we'll forfeit/our control/but those of us/so strong of will/entrust our rage/to Mellaril/& with hate and rage/immobilized/tho stripped and stabbed/by raping eyes/with bitten nail/anxiety/we will remain unchanged/til free.'[31] This disturbing poem refers explicitly to Purdy's use of antipsychotic drugs (Mellaril) on inmates who resist their confinement either physically or, as Batchelder suggests, mentally. The use of psychiatric medication within prisons is an issue frequently raised within *Through the Looking Glass* both in articles and creative pieces. Volume Two, Number Nine, contains an article titled 'Chemical Chains' about the different forms of 'psychotropic drugs' found in American prisons and mental hospitals. Similar to the articles about legal procedures and bills, the article acts as an educational tool for the women. It explains 'the first step in prisoners taking

[30] Bjb, "Untitled", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 6, November 1976 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 3.
[31] Barbara Batchelder, "Purdy's Treatment", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 2, February 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 5.

back the control of their bodies, thoughts, feelings and actions from the use of these chemicals is to understand what the drugs are, what are their possible effects, and what are their dangers.'[32] Later in *Through the Looking Glass's* publication span when they decide to produce bi-monthly, the editors begin to have topic specific issues, one of which was dedicated to psychiatric prisons. This, alongside the articles included in the zine, demonstrates the editors' views that the provision of information and education is a crucial tool and important form of empowerment, allowing the women to acquire a full understanding of the various factors that effect their incarceration and, indeed, their lives outside of prison.

Another topic that frequently appears in *Through the Looking Glass* is sexual harassment and domestic abuse. In 1998, eighty percent of women in the California prison system had experienced some form of abuse in their lifetime,[33] and by 2008, around twenty-five percent of women in prison throughout America reported being sexually abused whilst incarcerated.[34] According to Stephanie Covington in her article 'Women in Prison', the forms of custodial misconduct documented by The Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project included 'verbal degradation, rape, sexual assault, unwanted visual supervision, denying good and privileges, and the use or

[32] Anon, "Chemical Chains", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 9, Oct-Nov 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 7.
[33] Covington, "Women in Prison", 145.
[34] Jodie Michelle Lawson, "Women, the Criminal Justice System and Incarceration: Processes of Power, Silence and Resistance", *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (2008), 4.

threat of force.'[35] Many articles documenting sexual abuse and harassment from male guards feature in *Through the Looking Glass,* such as one featured in Volume Two, Number Ten outlining an ongoing case in Vancouver in which female prisoners at Oakala prison 'demanded that an investigation be made into allegations of forced sexual relations between male guards and women prisoners, that the enquiry be made public, and that all male guards be removed from the prison.'[36] Again, by *Through the Looking Glass* printing the details of this protest, the women involved are able to get their voices heard which, regardless of the outcome, is empowering in itself. What is more, women elsewhere experiencing similar conditions and abuses can benefit from reading the women's shared experiences and learn from the actions they take. Stephanie Erickson, a writer for *Through the Looking Glass* wrote in a letter to law student Laurie Hanson:

> In terms of sexual harassment inside it certainly happens often and consistently. That's why women inside often put forth the demand for all female guards. The harassment occurs on many levels – from a guard walking in on a woman undressing (that happens regularly), to sexual attacks by guards and staff. Any prisoner would say there's sexual harassment inside (if she wasn't afraid of the repercussions, that is).[37]

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[35] Covington, "Women in Prison", 145.

[36] Anon, "B.C. Women Join to Expose Male Guard Abuses", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 10, December 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

[37] Letter from Stephanie Erickson, writer for Through the Looking Glass, to Laurie Hanson (Sept. 6, 1982), from Laurie Hanson, "Women Prisoners: Freedom From Sexual Harassment - A Constitutional Analysis", *Golden Gate University Law Review,* Vol. 13 Iss. 3 (1983), 667.

The zine also includes a variety of poems and images that discuss issues relating to sexual abuse. Volume two, number two contains a particularly disturbing image filling an entire page. The drawing depicts a woman in a box room, sitting naked at a desk in a shadowy corner and cowering behind her hands. Around the room, which is depicted almost shoebox-like, are three giant men with no hair and strange, alien-like features, watching her, pointing, and clutching clipboards. This abstract picture not only suggests confinement, but also humiliation, constant surveillance and maltreatment, and gestures to the distinctive forms of abuse that appear within prison.

As a prison zine, *Through the Looking Glass* is particularly successful at bridging the gap between life outside of prison and women on the inside, predominantly due, perhaps, to the editors being outside of the confinements of prison walls and therefore able to access both with relative freedom. As outlined in their manifesto, their desire to 'encourage analysis of different kinds of incarceration'[38] including systems of oppression such as poverty, means that they dedicate much of the zine to life outside and the grey area in between that links the two together. Discussions of sexual and domestic abuse is an area that frequently crosses over life inside and outside of prison. There are numerous articles within the zine that relay accounts of women imprisoned for self-defence against abusive partners or attackers, many of which are extremely disturbing and upsetting. One such example is the case of Gloria Timmons who was being incarcerated for four years for shooting her abusive partner in self-defence. The article explains

[38] The zine's manifesto is printed in every issue.

how her husband had, on one occasion, beaten her so violently that she had to be hospitalised, and then proceeded to attack her again whilst still at the hospital. As with previous articles, the article goes on to explain how the reader can help by donating to Timmons' defence fund and follows the case in later editions.[39] Moreover, much of the poetry in the zine looks at domestic abuse outside of prison as well. One poem by Leslie Simon is taken from 'Western State Shelter Network Newsletter' and is entitled 'On Top of Men Beating Women'. In the poem she explains the systems in place throughout America that encourage and maintain the suppression of women. Simon writes:

> on top of men beating women[…]
> is the government
> is the program
> is the master plan
> to keep us down
> women under men
> men under all
> with liberty and justice[40]

This stanza satirically alludes to the pledge of allegiance, altering the 'one nation under God' to 'women under men' and by highlighting this inequality, emphasises the irony of the line 'liberty and justice for all', the last part of which is omitted from the poem.[41]

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[39] Anon, "Free Gloria Now!", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 1, May 1976 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 4.

[40] Leslie Simon, "On Top of Men Beating Women", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 3 No. 8, Nov 1978 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 27, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 10.

[41] The current American Pledge of Allegiance reads "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation

One of the more distinctive aspects of *Through the Looking Glass* that differentiates it from other externally edited zines, is that it is a 'Women's and Children's Prison Newsletter'. This adds another complex layer to the zine as the creators also attempt to represent children's experiences of confinement. The fifth issue of volume two is dedicated entirely to youth in honour of International Children's Day. It opens by defining types of child confinement:

> Young people are in prison whether behind bars or not, under patriarchy (where men have the power) and capitalism (where the rich have the power)… Ageism is part of every institution our society has. The lives of young people are regulated by denial… Because there is no place for them as wage earners, there is no place for them at all… If young people do not accept their non-status, they are punished by the law… The oppression of youth is a vital part of the system we are going to change, and this oppression is carried out through the prisons we are going to abolish.[42]

The edition goes on to detail the various reasons that young people are brought to court: '"dependant" or "neglected" children, status offenders [and] those who violate criminal laws ("delinquents").' By having a large variety of causal factors, children that end up in prison-like systems, the writer argues, are unjustly punished for 'the man's or the parents' crimes'.[43] The issue also includes accounts of maltreatment experienced by children within the system, including an article listing various incidents on the West

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under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." accessed 19th April, 2016, http://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm

[42] Anon, "We are the people our parents warned us about", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 5, May/June 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

[43] Anon, "Status Offenders & "Dependents": locked up for being young", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 5, May/June 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 16.

Coast within juvenile detention centres. One such account reads 'there is an 18-year-old woman who has been sent up for the past four years. She is totally institutionalised – there are scars on her wrists from suicide attempts.'[44]

Apart from the editions that celebrate International Children's Day and dedicate whole issues to the discussion of youth-specific confinement, the majority of the content relating to children is interwoven with the rest of the zine. This, on some occasions, creates a disturbing contrast as the brutal accounts of adult confinement are juxtaposed with images and poems that imply innocence, purity and themes with similar connotations of childhood. Nevertheless, it could be argued that this is, in many ways, a successful method to evoke empathy from the readers, as it attempts to place them in the position of the child whose innocence, represented by their artwork and poetry, has been corrupted by the varying forms of imprisonment. For

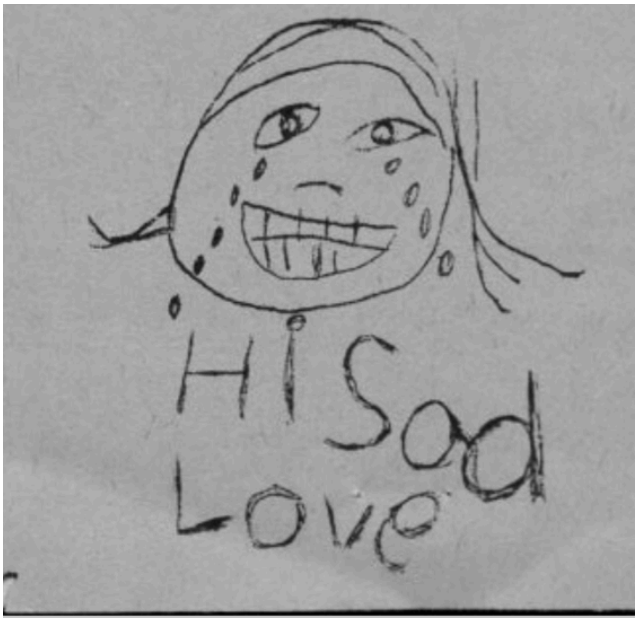


Figure 15: "Hi Sad Love", image from *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1976, (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University)

[44] Anon, "Tales from Seattle Youth Centre", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 5, May/June 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 15.

instance, in the first edition, an article titled 'Women Lose Babies in C.I.W.' about children being taken away from their mothers once they are incarcerated, is accompanied by a child's drawing of a crying face along with the writing 'Hi Sad Love' (fig.15). This contrast between the article and child's drawing brings to the foreground the repercussions for children when they are separated from their mothers, reminding the reader who the innocent victim always is in cases of separation. One account from a young girl included in an article about mother's in prison said 'I think the saddest time of my life was when my mom went to prison. I was nine years old then. It was hard for me because she used to do a lot for us; it was hard not to see her everyday. She was only gone for three months but it was awful.'[45] Although the use of children's pictures did not continue for very long in the zine, the inclusion of children's poetry and articles on children's rights were prevalent throughout.

Much like *Clarion,* the issue of child and parent separation is a prevalent topic within the zine, particularly when groups such as Aid to Incarcerated Mothers (AIM) in Boston and The Children's Centre at Bedford Hills were created. According to Galbraith, 'many more women than men had been living alone with their children before their arrest, underscoring the profound and disproportionate impact of a mother's arrest and incarceration on her children, who lose their primary caretaker when their

[45] Anon, "Moms and Kids", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 9 No. 2, July, 1984 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 31, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 4.

mother goes to prison.'[46] As a consequence, many children grow up in the foster care system, moving from house to house and lacking stability, with some losing touch with their families altogether. For the mother, it is argued that they 'suffer more than men from the stigma of incarceration with a societal tendency to view women as unfit and indifferent mothers.'[47] As a result, the separation from their children can lead to damaging feelings of guilt and inadequacy. One account from an incarcerated woman details her experiences of being a mother in prison. She writes, 'I was pregnant when I was arrested. Five months later I gave birth to my son. The hardest most painful thing I've done since I've been here was not giving birth, but two days later, when I gave my son a kiss goodbye and came back to the institution, leaving him there for a foster family to come for him… I didn't realise how much it would hurt, in my heart and mind.'[48] Similarly, one poem reads: 'My eyes will turn misty but my lips will curve to smile……/Hold on my daughter dear, for just a little while……./No mama, she repeated, I just can't wait no more……../I sadly nod my head casting misty eyes to the floor……/Oh, my precious child… whose innocent face I cup……/Please wait for mama dear……../'cause I gotta' grow up!' This poem highlights the inevitable rift that occurs between children and parents who are separated

[46] Galbraith, "So Tell Me, Why do Women Need Something Different?", 200.
[47] Sylvia I. Mignon and Paige Ransford, "Mothers in Prison: Maintaining Connections with Children", *Social Work in Public Health*, Vol. 27, No.1-2 (2012), 70.
[48] Anon, "Letter from a Woman in Prison", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 1, January, 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 12.

by prison walls for prolonged periods of time, as the child grows up and the mother remains stuck in a form of limbo within prison.

As with *Break de Chains,* a recurring topic within *Through the Looking Glass* is race and the biases of the American justice system. As a West Coast publication, much attention is give to Native Americans and the continuing oppressions they face both within society and in prison. They give regular updates on persecuted Native American women, such as Yvonne Wanrow who was incarcerated for defending herself and her children against an attacker, as well as articles and poetry relating to Native American issues more generally. One poem by Mary Tallmountain depicts herself as a young child, forced to stand in front of an audience as they call racial slurs at her such as 'DO YOU LIVE IN AN IGLOO?' and 'YOU EAT BLUBBER HA HA HA'. Interestingly, she writes 'in the mercy of time/I got away/and toward night I crept/into a closet/there in my little cage/I bit my hand till it was pierced/with moons of dark/Indian blood.'[49] Where many of the other poems in the zine write about cages and bars in a negative way, desiring instead open spaces, in this poem, a small, confined space is seen as a safe haven where she can be alone in the dark. This juxtaposition between the safety and suffocation of confinement is one echoed throughout women's prison zines. In *no title at all,* one of the women writes how 'it

[49] Mary Tallmountain "A Jury of My Peers", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 8, September 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 15.

shouldn't be this hard… to go home'[50] hinting at the complexities that surround incarceration and freedom, with one not necessarily opposing the other.



Figure 16: Through the Looking Glass regularly included a page of "shorts" detailing the up to date information on high-profiled cases.

Through the Looking Glass also dedicated content to African American issues, with influences from the Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement, like *Break de Chains,* prevalent throughout. The zine follows the cases of many persecuted black women such as Joanne Little, Assata Shakur, Dessie Woods and Maxine Smith, and includes poetry and artwork from some of the most well known black female political prisoners at the time such as a poem by Erika Huggins that reads:

> we believed in their constitution
> and they violate it in their courts.
> we defend ourselves from attack,
> they murder us and claim self-defense.
> we run from their rifles, guns, sirens, ---
> they shoot us and call it justifiable homicide…
> they have all the rights, we have none.
> they try to co-opt the land in all of its beauty,
> while we fill the jails, the prisons,
> the internment camps.[51]

[50] Jann Datson, Untitled, *no title at all is better than a title like that! (*California Institute for Women, Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, 1974, The Freedom Archives, http://search.freedomarchives.org/), 8.

Through the Looking Glass also attempts to represent Latina women within the zine, and at the start of one edition, publishes the opening article (on International Women's Day) in Spanish as well as English, going on to say 'we recognize the need to have information like our newsletter available in Spanish and other languages. However our resources are too limited to print all our articles bilingually.'[52] Despite seemingly equal representation within the zine, an article written by Susan Saxe, herself a white woman, for *Through the Looking Glass* shows a greater dissatisfaction within the feminist movement as she writes 'If we are about revolution, then we must be about it boldly… White women must stop standing within the safety of a reformist movement, calling upon black and third world women to join us in a struggle which sees male sexism as the primary or only contradiction, while our white skins shield us from the day to day violence of racist Amerikkka.'[53]

As well as being an organisation that was created by and run almost entirely by lesbians (indeed on some occasions exclusively), *Through the Looking Glass* was established at a peak moment for LGBT rights with the gay liberation movement of the 1970s. As such, content related to LGBT

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[51] Erika Huggins, Untitled, *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 1 No. 7, December 1976 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 7.

[52] Anon, "March 8th is International Women's Day!", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 3, March, 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 1.

[53] Susan Saxe, Untitled, *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 7, August 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 7.

issues appear in most editions. Similar to discussions of race, *Through the Looking Glass* published articles to do with the discrimination of LGBT individuals both inside and outside of the criminal justice system including one reporting on the segregation of lesbians in L.A. County Jail for women (The Sybil Brand Institute). In the article they quote the Sherriff Department's policies writing; 'inmates who are determined to be homosexual… shall be segregated if such segregation is determined to be necessary in order to obtain the objective of protecting the welfare of inmates and staff…' and follow it by commenting 'apparently the prison adm. Interprets "if" as "mandatory".' [54] Additionally, in the January 1977 edition, they reported on police harassment of transgender individuals and the experience of Jane, a male to female transsexual who was sent to Walla Walla after being arrested on a sodomy charge. They write 'besides the intense cultural differences of being one of the few woman-identified prisoners in an all male institution, Jane was subjected to direct physical brutality. Our society can't deal with much that falls outside of the heterosexual (ab)norm, and transsexuals are a complete threat and bafflement to the pigs.'[55] By including issues of sexuality, race and gender, *Through the Looking Glass* attempts to give voice to every woman in the United States who has experienced some kind of confinement.

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[54] Anon, "Down on Dykes", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 8, September 1977*,* (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 4.

[55] Anon, "Harassment in Seattle", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 1, January 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 25, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 5.

However, the zine also suggests how LGBT content led to the banning of certain publications, including their own. In one article the editors write: 'It seems that the Federal Bureau of Prisons has decided to ban certain publications from federal prisons. Those publications that advocate or support homosexuality are seen by one warden as a "threat to the security of the institution".' As a publication that ran out of a larger umbrella organisation called 'Gay Community Services', *Through the Looking Glass* faced its own hostilities because of its connections with the LGBT community. In one early edition the editors noted how 'Marion Prison… in Illinois will no longer accept our newsletter and they dare to say it's because "the publication will tend to isolate the inmate from his peers"… and recently, a King County Jailer (Seattle) returned a newsletter to us marked "NO LONGER HERE" and the hated word "gay" crossed out, in the same red ink, and replaced with "QUEER".' The editors go on to write 'Gay represents to us love and unity among women, the strength that enables us


ATLANTA LESBIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE
P. O. BOX 5502
ATLANTA, GA. 30307

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

A quarterly women's prison newsletter

COLLECTIVE STATEMENT:
WE JOIN WITH ALL PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET IN MOURNING THE LIVES LOST, DESTROYED, DENIGRATED, BY THE BRUTAL AND RACIST SYSTEM OF WHITE RULE CALLED APARTHEID. WE CALL TO ALL THINKING PEOPLE TO SPEAK OUT, TO DO WHATEVER YOU CAN, WHEREVER YOU CAN, TO

in a state of WAR

END APARTHEID FOREVER!

Grenade injures 7 at South Africa funeral

International solidarity

U.S. out of South Africa!

Remember Soweto

BOYCOTT SOUTH AFRICAN PRODUCTS
STOP APARTHEID

GOLD

Time for talking is over, says Mandela

Freedom

only u.s. money talks.

Figure 17: Over the publication's lifespan, *Through the Looking Glass* changed format from A5 size to A3 newspaper size. Articles were in column format and photographs began to be regularly included.

to reach across prison walls to each other. We will not deny who we are and what we work for.'[56] According to Donna L. Rowe's source, 'newsletters were routinely confiscated, defaced or destroyed… Sometimes the newsletters were seized because of their very existence as unsanctioned publications in the correctional facility, but newsletter staff members argued that more often they were undelivered because of the content.'[57]

But *Through the Looking Glass* continued to print for over a decade despite adversity, ending only when they did not have enough volunteers to continue to print the zine. The letter from the editors in the final edition reads 'if anyone out there (in Seattle or anywhere else) is interested and able to carry on with the newspaper part of TTLG, please get in touch with us -- we have supplies, resources and a mailing list of women inside and out who desperately need and want contact with other women, both inside and out.'[58] In this final word from the editors, they capture the role of *Through the Looking Glass* as a free space for incarcerated women, and women more generally, where they can come together to share, as the mainstream channels are insufficient or unwilling. But they also capture the essence of women's prison zines as feminist protest literature more generally; the need to speak out with a shared voice and be heard, and to forge community

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[56] Anon, "Our Return Address is Different this month…", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 2 No. 4, April 1977 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 26, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 18.

[57] Rowe, *From the Inside Out,* 84.

[58] Members of TTLG, "Last Issue!", *Through the Looking Glass,* Vol. 12 No. 2, Summer 1987 (Guide to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994, Box 41, Folder 31, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 2.

through mutual experience and collective autobiography beyond individual understanding. In doing so, they can actively challenge their circumstances and self-define through their own words.

Conclusion

Sisters, let us take the blindfold from our eyes,
lay down those weighted scales, and use the sword!

- Suzan Stuart, 'Now have you ever seen Justice?'
Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery

Protest is a fundamental part of American identity. The United States was built on revolutionary actions and words and has, since then, used protest movements to define and shape its purpose. Yet scholars have not included the full array of literature that forms the protest tradition. Women's prison zines, and women's prison writing more generally, are autonomous genres almost entirely ignored in discussions of protest literature, prison literature and feminist writing. This thesis has shown that 1970s women's prison zines lie at the intersection of all three genres; they are genre in their own right and a form of collective outsider writing that adds to the existing understandings of each tradition.

Emerging directly out of a protest at NCCCW in 1975, *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery* dispels the myth that female prisoners are passive or submissive. As well as providing supporting evidence and an argument for the physical riot at the prison, the subsequent publication of the zine extended women's intellectual protest to embody their dissatisfaction at America more generally and challenge prevailing stereotypes. The writing exemplifies John Stauffer's three rhetorical protest strategies of empathy, shock value and symbolic action, through the use of shared experiences and confinement imagery, to establish a community and encourage support. In the introduction, Jinni M. Stroman articulates the

importance of the zine as 'a call for unity and solidarity that is definitely needed to achieve our final goal -- total liberation.'[1] In this, Stroman encapsulates the importance of community within protest literature, both from its creators and its readership, in order to achieve tangible results.

This emphasis on the collective also defines the zines' role as feminist protest literature. Despite the existence of a well-established and theorized feminist print culture tradition, women's prison zines are once again unacknowledged and omitted from the discussion. Yet as exclusively female-authored texts that deal predominantly with issues relating to gendered confinements, the zines offer a concentrated discussion of the issues faced by women everywhere, thereby adding a new perspective to the women's liberation conversation. Additionally, the involvement of feminist organisations in their creation and dissemination meant that women's prison zines were influenced by the feminist protest aesthetic and interacted with feminist zines at the time, forming a nationwide - and even global - community of active sympathizers.

More specifically, the zines embody a collective autobiography form within the feminist protest literature genre. By adapting John Downton Hazlett's definition of collective autobiography from the individual works of literature that speak for a group, to co-authored, subcultural publications in the form of women's prison zines, it allows a more thorough, extensive perspective on women's experiences of incarceration. Although the

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[1] Jinni M. Stroman, Introduction, *Break de Chains of Legalized U.$ Slavery* (North Carolina Women's Prison Book Project, 1976, Library Service Center, Rare Books, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University), 2.

heterotopic environment of the prison fosters an inimitable, if somewhat forced, community based around shared oppressions as opposed to interests, the writing style and aesthetic of the zines encapsulates the mutual desire for justice and self-representation. The frequent anonymity of the authors and the use of third-person pronouns helps form a singular, coherent voice that speaks for an entire community of oppressed individuals.

Defining women's prison zines as feminist collective autobiography, therefore, introduces new aesthetics and structures to protest writing. Primarily, the zines expand the form of protest literature from the individualistic 'I' narrative to the collective 'we': in *Break de Chains* Marjorie Marsh writes 'We have staked our very lives on the continuation and further development of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Our "love" for the people strengthens our decisions daily.'[2] Here she emphasizes an unspecified collective, possibly referring on one hand to the women who were involved in the protest at NCCCW, but also incarcerated persons everywhere. By prioritizing the collective over the individual within protest, the zines stress the importance of community, both within the zines' creation and form, and to their readership. When discussing women's writing from within prison, Judith Scheffler notes that 'the emphasis is on shared power and the potential of group literary productions to effect

[2] Marjorie Marsh, "To the People", *Break de Chains,* 2.

positive, practical change.'[3] In this, she also captures the second important feature of women's prison zines as protest writing: action. All three of the zines included in this dissertation, frequently encourage involvement, with the authors occasionally giving frequent, specific instruction on how readers can help. The genre takes collectivity one step further to place emphasis on participation from its readers, beyond just empathy, to encourage tangible support and effect definite change.

All of these factors, when taken together, identify women's prison zines as collective outsider writing. The isolated and confined environment provided by incarceration, and the communal nature of the zines creates a distinct form and aesthetic. Together, these aspects contribute to understandings of the protest literature tradition, feminist writing and even American prison literature, expanding it from individual, redemptive, masculine life writing, to empowered, feminist, collective autobiography.

As a genre that extends over nearly a century, these factors that define women's prison zines can be utilized in continuing scholarly debate. Although the 1970s saw an increase in prison-related publications and protest, women's prison zines continued to be created in the present day. One example is *Tenacious,* a zine established in 2003 by women incarcerated in Oregon with the aid of Victoria Law. Despite the thirty-year time gap, the zine's influence and objectives remain largely the same as the 1970s zines. The creators still rely on outsider organizers to aid the printing

[3] Judith Scheffler, "Imprisoned Mothers and Sisters: Dealing with Loss Through Writing and Solidarity", in *Prose and Cons: Essays on Prison Literature in the United States* ed. D. Quentin Miller (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2003), 123.

and distribution of the zine, and the contributors still use writing as a means of self-definition and self-expression. As one of the founders Barrilee Bannister explains, 'prison officials do whatever they can to strip prisoners of their self-worth… writing is my way to escape the confines of prison walls. It's me putting on boxing gloves and stepping into the ring of freedom of speech and opinion.'[4] The zines today still act as works of feminist protest literature as they battle against negative stereotyping and injustice both within the criminal justice system and in society. Law writes how the topics discussed within *Tenacious* 'cover subjects like the health care (or lack of health care) system, being HIV-positive inside prison, trying to get an education while in prison, sexual harassment by prison staff and general prison conditions, and giving up children for adoption.'[5] These gendered concerns make up the majority of the zines content and continue to determine the genre as feminist protest writing.

However, the characteristics that define the coherent, century-long genre stretch beyond practical similarities and topic choices. As a form of feminist collective autobiography, the gender-specific desire to create and share communally defines the zines, both new and old. As the manifesto printed at the start of *Tenacious* reads:

> We associated with "Tenacious" strongly believe that everyone has a story to tell, something to share and are in need of someone who will listen and will offer some kind of support and/or understanding. It is important to us that women (in and out of prison) find the power of

[4] Victoria Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles Of Incarcerated Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), 141.
[5] Victoria Law, interview by Red Chidgey and Elke Zobl, *Grassroots Feminism Blog,* February 13th, 2009, accessed September 23rd, 2016, http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net/cms/node/117

> their voice. We encourage women to share with us and others in the hopes of educating those in society and to empower other women to take a stand for their rights and the rights of others.'[6]

The collective outsider impulse to write, and the desire of the women to be a part of a community, continue to inspire incarcerated women across the United States. And although scholarship on women's prison zines is still in its formative stages - with this thesis marking the first extended analysis of the genre - we can identify a a clear aesthetic. Born of collective, feminist, protest autobiography, zines open doors onto an invisibilised, enclosed world, letting those on the outside in, and those inside, speak out.

[6] Anon, "Word From Tenacious", *Tenacious: Writings from Women in Prison,* Issue 2 (2002), Schlesinger Harvard Depository, Box 4, folder, Harvard University, 1.

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no title at all is better than a title like that! California Institute for Women, Santa Cruz Women’s Prison Project, 1974, The Freedom Archives. http://search.freedomarchives.org/

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