Re-capturing the Self: Narratives of Self and Captivity by Women Political Prisoners in Germany 1915-1991

Kim T. Richmond

PhD, German Studies
The University of Edinburgh
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My signature certifies that this thesis represents my own original work, the result of my own original research, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract

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This project represents one of the few major pieces of research into women's narratives of political incarceration and is an examination of first person accounts written against a backdrop of significant historical events in twentieth-century Germany. I explore the ways in which the writers use their published accounts as an attempt to come to terms with their incarceration (either during or after their imprisonment). Such an undertaking involves examining how the writer 'performs' femininity within the de-feminising context of prison, as well as how she negotiates her self-representation as a 'good' woman. The role of language as a means of empowerment within the disempowering environment of incarceration is central to this investigation. Rosa Luxemburg's prison letters are the starting point for the project. Luxemburg was a key female political figure in twentieth-century Germany and her letters encapsulate prevalent notions about womanhood, prison, and political engagement that are perceptible in the subsequent texts of the thesis. Luise Rinser's and Lore Wolf's diaries from National Socialist prisons show, in their different ways, how the writer uses language to 'survive' prison and to constitute herself as a subject and woman in response to the loss of self experienced in incarceration. Margret Bechler's and Elisabeth Graul's retrospective accounts of GDR incarceration give insight into the elastic concept of both the political prisoner and the 'good' woman. They demonstrate their authors' endeavours to achieve a sense of autonomy and reclaim the experience of prison using narrative. All of the narratives are examples of the role of language in resisting an imposed identity as 'prisoner', 'criminal' and object of the prison system.

Contents

Introduction: 'Die Absicht des schreibenden Gefangenen ist die Bewahrung seiner Identität.'[1]

The prison and twentieth-century German Studies

In the scholarly analysis of German-language narratives of incarceration during the twentieth century, attention is most often given to those accounts which detail the maltreatment and mass annihilation of individuals in concentration camps during the Third Reich. The vast amount of autobiographical writing in the public realm attests to a need by those involved in the atrocities to represent their experiences. But the 'traditional' prison both during the Third Reich and in the years following its demise has been overlooked in scholarly research. The historian Nikolaus Wachsmann, in his examination of prisons in Nazi Germany, reveals that up until 1942 there were more inmates in prisons than there were in concentration camps,[2] a statistic that is not reflected in the number of published accounts from Nazi prisons. The field of Third Reich incarceration testimony may be dominated by accounts from extermination camps – *Vernichtungslager* –, such as Auschwitz, but other less extreme categories of camp existed too (such as the *Arbeitslager, Aussenlager, Konzentrationslager, Durchgangslager*). Ruth Klüger writes of a general reluctance to differentiate between the different types of internment: 'The death camps seem easier to comprehend if we put them all into the basket of one vast generalization, which the term *death camp* implies, but in the process we mythologize or trivialize them'.[3] Just as it is important to acknowledge different categories of camp, prison – as another form of internment –

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[1] Sigrid Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur* (Marburg/Lahn: Guttandin und Hoppe, 1982), p. 8.
[2] Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 394-5.
[3] Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 77.

requires attention too. There has been a tendency to view prisons and camps as entirely separate institutions – according to Wachsmann, post-1945 prison officials claimed that prisons were entirely unconnected to concentration camps.[4] But during the Third Reich, prisons and camps co-operated institutionally: the writer and political prisoner Luise Rinser, if found guilty, was to be relocated from Traunstein prison to a concentration camp. This is true for the early GDR too: Margret Bechler was transferred between a number of different camps and prisons until those camps that had been kept in operation after 1945 were dissolved in 1950.[5]

Exploring the relationship between the prison and the camp in their various manifestations (and prisons come in different forms too – such as the *Zuchthaus* or *Untersuchungsgefängnis*) is a problematic undertaking: one risks conflating planned annihilation with 'normal' incarceration. It is nonetheless important to point out the similarities between the two institutions, especially since both have historically been sites of political oppression. Both are what Erving Goffman would term 'total institutions', places in which the individual's life is strictly regimented. Goffman writes that a total institution 'may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.'[6] Goffman includes a number of other institutions such as asylums and hospitals in his study, so it is worth being more specific about the parallels between prisons and camps. Although Ruth Klüger claims that something good can come out of the prison in the shape of 'reform',

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[4] Wachsmann, p. 6.
[5] Gerhard Finn, *Die politischen Häftlinge der Sowjetzone, 1945-1958* (Berlin-Nikolassee: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1958), p. 32.
[6] Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 11.

this was not possible in the concentration camp because, according to her, 'they weren't good for anything'.[7] But she later writes that she did 'learn' from her experience in Auschwitz and changed for the better through it, despite her tendency to represent it as wholly bad. She also asserts the need to compare the Holocaust with the world outside it: even though it has been perceived as a barbaric anomaly in the context of the post-Enlightenment Western world, the Holocaust and concentration camps have roots and reflections within the 'civilised' world.[8] In this study, the prison and Auschwitz are not conflated: prison writing is singled out as a separate genre in order to be able to distinguish it as an appreciable field of study. We must, however, be able to comprehend the prison within the historical context of other methods of incarceration such as the concentration camp.

Given the predominance of the Holocaust (often represented by 'Auschwitz') in academic discourse, there has been very little in the way of research into women's prison narratives from the pre-1945 and early GDR period.[9] The most notable attempts at constructing a framework for reading prison writing in German focus on post-1945 West German men's texts, and do not take gender as a methodological starting point, as I intend to.[10] International studies of prison writing also tend to focus on men's literature, such as Ioan Davies' *Writers in Prison* and H. Bruce Franklin's *Prison Literature in*

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[7] Klüger, p. 32. Camps, especially the KZ, tend to represent pure punishment, rather than the reform purported by the modern prison system, as elucidated in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.
[8] Ibid., p. 107 and p. 261. Klüger hereby responds to post-1945 debates concerning the Holocaust, in which art was seen as an inappropriate mode of representation after 1945: Theodor Adorno, for example, wrote of the Holocaust as a cultural break in history, a return to barbarism that many had prided themselves on escaping through the Enlightenment. Theodor W. Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz?: Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), pp. 27-49.
[9] Apart from a minor study by Uta Klein in 1988 involving Rosa Luxemburg and Luise Rinser: Uta Klein, "Texte inhaftierter Frauen," in *Gefangenenliteratur: Sprechen, Schreiben, Lesen in deutschen Gefängnissen*, ed. Uta Klein and Helmut H. Koch (Hagen: R. Padligur, 1988), pp. 124-140.
[10] Nicola Keßler, Sigrid Weigel, Uta Klein and Helmut Koch have undertaken research into German prison writing.

America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist. Davies' account is particularly problematic when it comes to the analysis of women's prison writing because of his declaration that 'prison writing is centrally about violence.'[11] Such a methodological starting point does not, as we will see, apply to women's texts, and it is questionable whether it is even a useful way to set out a study of men's prison writing. One must look to other disciplines such as sociology and criminology as well as to the limited but developing international research into women's prison narratives, in order to gain further knowledge. This may involve looking to other political and historical climates and, although I remain aware of different cultural and historical contexts in my use of such international research, I feel that such studies can still provide valuable insight into the concerns of the incarcerated writer in twentieth-century Germany.

Prison, self and narrative

One key theme shared by all incarceration narratives is an articulation of the prison or camp's momentous effect on the prisoner's or former prisoner's sense of 'self'. Goffman writes of total institutions as 'the forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self'.[12] Looking at prison specifically, its objective has been, depending on the penal system in place, to punish inmates and/or reform them into obedient citizens (as described in more detail with reference to the East German prison in Chapter 4). It may seem contradictory to punish inmates whilst, in some cases, attempting to reform them but what remains is an institutional attempt to initiate a change in the personality of the prisoner. Those texts which document the experience of prison

[11] Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 16.
[12] Goffman, *Asylums*, p. 22.

often reveal the ways in which the prison, as the dominant authority, attempts to impose this change.

Prison acts as a seemingly unified method of imposing the moral beliefs and objectives of the state upon the prisoner. In prison writing, two oppositional elements emerge: the prison and the prisoner. Both forces are in themselves diverse: the prison consists of several different layers of authority – from law and policy-makers at the top to prison guards near the bottom – which are subject to change. This is seen in the possibility of bribing or subverting prison guards or in the ever-changing decrees of the state, which alter the criteria that determine illegality. Nor does the category 'prison writer' represent a homogenous grouping: she/he varies across time, geography, gender, class, sexuality and subjective experience. Despite the diversity of the prison/prisoner categories, there is still a clear distinction between prisoner and authority. As an extension of this divide, there exists a discrepancy between a government's public statements about what confinement is supposed to achieve and the experience of incarceration described by the prisoner. Official statements, for various reasons, often do not fit with first person accounts of experiences of prison. There are competing discourses within the judicial and penal systems, each representing a different version of events and grappling for dominance over each other.[13] The issue of competing discourses within the prison space is given particular attention by Paul Gready in his research into

[13] A fascinating example of competing discourses within the judicial system is to be found in: Michel Foucault, *I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother ..: a case of parricide in the 19th century*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), in which Foucault presents numerous differing and conflicting narratives concerning a young man's parricide and emphasises the role of various types of discourse within the process of judgement-making.

prison writing in South Africa. Gready examines the ways in which the prisoner is 'rewritten' by the institution of punishment.[14]

Prison may be represented as having an impact upon the writer's sense of self, but throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the rather elusive signifiers 'self' and 'identity' have generated much scrutiny across the disciplines. For my purposes, the 'self' represents an understanding of who 'I', or the subject, is in the world. For the purposes of this study I shall describe the ways in which the subject represents her 'self' rather than interrogating the concept of 'self' itself. Jerome Bruner refers to 'our need to tell stories in order to elucidate what we mean by "self" '.[15] Bruner proposes that 'in effect, there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words'; instead, it is through language, or, more specifically, narrative, that 'we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves'.[16] Bruner here establishes a dependency on narrative for the creation of 'self'. He has faced opposition within the field of philosophy: Galen Strawson argues that narrative scholars, such as Bruner and Oliver Sacks place too much weight upon the role of narrative in the formation of self.[17] The degree to which narrative is responsible for 'selfhood' is often disputed; indeed it remains an ongoing philosophical debate whether events (the *fabula* or story) precede narrative (the *sjuzet* or representation of events) or whether it is actually the process of narrativisation that creates the events it describes. H. Porter Abbott refers to Jonathan Culler's concept of a 'double logic' here that cannot be resolved 'since at one

[14] Paul Gready, "Autobiography and the 'Power of Writing': Political Prison Writing in the Apartheid Era," *Journal of South African Studies* 19, no. 3 (1993), pp. 489-523.
[15] Jerome S. Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," in *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 63.
[16] Ibid., p. 64.
[17] Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004), pp. 428-452.

and the same time story appears to both precede *and* to come after narrative discourse.'[18] This is of particular significance to stories related in the past tense: 'since the narration seems to start at a point after the completion of the story. On the other hand, before the narrative discourse is expressed, there is no story'.[19] Whatever point of view one adopts, it is difficult to ignore the momentous impact that language can have on the creation of self, of identity – as Bruner notes with reference to Henry James: 'adventures happen to people who know how to tell about them'.[20]

Even if it is not the only source, narrative is a vital component in the creation of self, particularly for the prison writer. One of the many 'pains of imprisonment'[21] involves what could be termed a loss or change of former self. Central to the perception of self is how much control the subject has in her life. Pat Carlen writes: 'Prisons (as institutions) are, from the perspective of the prisoners, essentially about loss of control over personal space' and 'also about loss of control over time'.[22] The prison space is a foreign environment, especially to those incarcerated for the first time. Regardless of his or her choice, the inmate is placed in cramped quarters with others or in an isolated cell with limited social contact. Common to many accounts of incarceration is a sense of lack of space – be it in a crowded cell or solitary confinement. Combined with these foreign living conditions is the regulation of everyday life: food, eating times, clothes and activities are decided by the authority rather than the prisoner herself. Forms of communication with the outside world too are strictly controlled by the prison, as well as

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[18] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 20.
[19] Ibid, p. 20. His emphasis.
[20] Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," p. 68.
[21] Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), Sykes was the first sociologist to use the term 'pains of imprisonment'.
[22] Pat Carlen, *Sledgehammer: Women's Imprisonment at the Millennium* (Basingstoke: Pan Macmillan, 1998), p. 83.

the opportunities for and modes of self-education. In short, the prisoner's sense of *agency* – i.e. how much control or choice she has to act in the world – is greatly inhibited.[23] The existence of a sense of agency is vital to the process of effective identity construction. Christine Korsgaard writes: 'an action is a movement attributable to an agent as its author, and that means that whenever you choose an action – whenever you take control of your own movements – you are constituting yourself as the author of that action, and so you are deciding who to be.'[24] The diminished agency involved in imprisonment has a severe impact on the prisoner's self. Michel Foucault would describe such a prisoner as a 'docile body', upon whom the power of the authority, in this case the prison, is enacted.[25] Mary Bosworth writes that much of the criticism directed at Foucault's seminal *Discipline and Punish* (1979) centred on the lack of agency with which Foucault imbued his 'docile' prisoners. Foucault depicts his prisoners as completely controlled by the total institution and unable to assert themselves.[26] For Bosworth '[t]he capacity to define oneself as an agent is crucial to surviving imprisonment'.[27] In the case of most prisoners, an assertion of agency, often through resistance to the dominant power, is an essential part of their survival. Bosworth and other critics of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* have asserted that prisoners are not docile, that they can and do assert their agency through, in various ways, resisting authority, with differing levels of success. The prisoner therefore constitutes herself as a subject through the process of becoming an

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[23] Mary Bosworth, *Engendering Resistance: Agency and Power in Women's Prisons* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1999), p. 131. Bosworth describes the prison situation as a negation of individual agency because everything is controlled from above.
[24] Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xi.
[25] 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used transformed and improved.' Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 136.
[26] Bosworth, p.17 – according to Bosworth, Foucault's prisoners are 'neither subjects nor agents'.
[27] Ibid., p. 127.

agent, of choosing action, rather than being an object. As we will see, narrative plays a pivotal role: it is a means of resistance to prison and in this it becomes a key means through which the prisoner creates agency and a sense of self. There are, of course, other non-linguistic means of obtaining agency available to the prisoner, such as physical acts of resistance to authority (rather than writing thereof) but the focus here is on how she uses language to assert who she is in response to incarceration.

The political prisoner: context and labelling

All of the writers in this study can be defined as political prisoners, but the term itself has differing interpretations. Loosely-speaking, the political prisoner is one who has been charged with crimes pertaining to his or her political beliefs or activities. The category 'political prisoner' is most commonly associated with authoritarian governments, who persecute those who do not share their ideology. Most often, scholarly analysis of prison narratives concentrates on those accounts involving political oppression and/or authoritarian governments: South America and South Africa have been prolific sites of prison writing and subsequent academic research.[28] I concentrate chiefly on accounts from National Socialist and East Germany, the exception to which are the prison letters of Rosa Luxemburg, who was imprisoned in Wilhelmine Germany, within what is now referred to as the *Obrigkeitsstaat*, a type of authoritarian state adhering to certain

[28] An international selection of women's prison writing is given in: Judith Scheffler, ed., *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings, 200 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2002), although, the anthology does not include any writing from East Asia.

democratic principles.[29] The term political prisoner is culturally and historically dependent: it is used by those who have a different ideology than the government in power, and often refers back to a political system that no longer exists. Latotzky writes of those arrested in the early years of the GDR: 'Der Großteil wurde zu Unrecht verhaftet, nach der unglaubwürdigsten Denunziation und aus Gründen, die *heute* als politische Verfolgung gelten'.[30] Ideas of who is a political prisoner can alter greatly over time and rely heavily on how we view such governments today, on how the audience partakes in the process of designation. For instance, one could argue that there is much wider knowledge about Third Reich atrocities than there is about the injustices of the GDR. It is more common to use the term political prisoner with reference to the Third Reich than East Germany, although this is changing as more attempts are made to come to terms with the recent past in the form of memorials and publications.

Political crime has, depending on historical context, encompassed a broad spectrum of 'illegal' activity throughout the twentieth century: in both the Third Reich and the GDR, even the smallest subversive activities, such as complaining about the government, were punishable by prison-sentencing.[31] However, at the other end of the spectrum are activities which involve what we still see as serious crimes, such as kidnapping and murder for political purposes. They pose a violent threat to the established order and are designated 'terrorism' in the public discourses of democracies.

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[29] Peter M. R. Stirk, *Twentieth-Century German Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 219.
[30] Alexander Latotzky, *Kindheit hinter Stacheldraht: Mütter mit Kindern in sowjetischen Speziallagern und DDR-Haft*, (Leipzig: Forum Verlag Leipzig, 2001), p. 9, my emphasis.
[31] Gabriele Schnell, *Das 'Lindenhotel': Berichte aus dem Potsdamer Geheimdienstgefängnis* (Berlin: Links, 2005), p. 38. Everything which the East German government did not like politically was punishable with prison, for example: spreading pamphlets, threatening to strike, oral/verbal criticisms. During the Third Reich too, those who, even casually, voiced their disregard for the regime, such as Luise Rinser, faced punishment.

It seems the category political prisoner depends on the ideological and historical positioning of the *designators*. Many prisoners identify themselves as political prisoners, such as those in West Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF), as well as members of the IRA in Northern Ireland who went to extreme lengths in their attempts to be designated political prisoners by the British government. But often this self-designation does not match dominant or public discourses which name such prisoners criminals, or terrorists. There is a complex crossover between political and criminal identity – the prisoner may be described by some audiences or judges as criminal but can identify her/himself as a political prisoner and may be described as such by those with a similar ideology.

Incarceration can incur shame and insecurity, given the domination of the institution over its inmates, as well as the stigma attached to being in prison, but political imprisonment can be perceived as honourable by both the prisoner and those who share his or her goals. In a wide range of discourses, the political prisoner has been described as a kind of martyr suffering for the good of humanity. The martyr model connotes agency: he/she has *chosen* to suffer.[32] In addition, self-designation as political implies that the government is in the wrong and allows the prisoner to justify illegal, sometimes immoral actions. In extreme cases the 'terrorist' (as designated by public discourses) can identify as a political prisoner as justification for extremely violent activity, as the RAF did. The flipside to this is the labelling of Rosa Luxemburg as a 'Terroristin' by her opponents when she is now predominantly viewed as a political prisoner and martyr.[33] Again definitions depend greatly on the context and beliefs of the designators: what emerges is

[32] Frances Heidensohn discusses political prisoners as a particularly autonomous group of prisoners in Great Britain. Frances Heidensohn, *Women and Crime* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 23-27. Margret Bechler's account, discussed in Chapter 3, gives an interesting example of this issue.
[33] Ute Speck, *Ein mögliches Ich: Selbstreflexion in der Schreiberfahrung; zur Autobiographik der Politikerinnen Lily Braun, Hedwig Dohm und Rosa Luxemburg* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 241.

the idea that designation, naming, or labelling is an empowering process for the speaker, just as it can be disempowering for those labelled as criminal or terrorist.

Gender subversion, criminal labelling and punishment

The main focus of the following chapters is on how the writer's representation of herself as female interacts with her account of herself as prisoner. This gender-oriented analysis of the texts employs the post-structuralist philosophy of Judith Butler, as well as the earlier philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom posit gender as a cultural and historical construct, rather than a natural consequence of the subject's biological sex. For Butler, femininity and masculinity are unconsciously learned and *performed* in the belief that such performances conform to some sort of 'true' biological femaleness or maleness. Butler claims that gender is 'an identity tenuously constituted in time' – it is constituted differently throughout history and, because it is constantly repeated, there is room for transgression. Butler states:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.[34]

Subversion of gender roles is possible, but the subject who transgresses can also face disapproval, even punishment from her audience. As Butler emphasises, the repetition of gender performances provides the possibility of change and subversion but only within the limits of the given society: 'As a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences […] those who fail to do their gender right are regularly

[34] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 402.

punished.'[35] If gender is 'done' wrong then punishment can ensue, because such transgression can pose a threat to the dominant heterosexual binary.

This issue of gender subversion and punishment is of particular significance to the imprisoned woman. Each writer in this study may identify, in one way or another, as a 'political prisoner', but some face labelling as 'criminal' both during and after imprisonment. One example of the power of labelling and stigma is to be found in an exhibition on women's GDR imprisonment currently taking place in the Stollberg Stadtbibliothek in the Erzgebirge region of Germany. A former prisoner and participant in the exhibition, 'Helga R.,' says of her time after incarceration: 'Als wir dann in Westdeutschland lebten, sagte man uns: 'Wenn Sie 25 Jahre Zuchthaus hatten, müssen Sie wohl etwas verbrochen haben.' Ich habe es nicht mehr erwähnt.'[36] The criminological concept of labelling theory (or social reaction theory), popular in the 1960s and 1970s, posits that labelling someone a criminal encourages them to commit deviant behaviour. It 'focuses on the reaction of other people and the subsequent effects of those reactions which create deviance.'[37] Labelling theory is a useful concept because it elucidates the powerful role of language and of naming in the formation of identity, but it is problematic when applied to those who identify as political prisoners, largely because it implies that in being labelled as criminal, the writer is propelled towards criminal behaviour. In the texts I examine, they are not. My interest in labelling theory lies purely with the effect that criminal labelling has upon the author's self-representation, rather than on whether or not they commit 'crime'. Literary studies provide a more usable, if more nascent, way of

[35] Ibid., p. 405.
[36] Stiftung Sächsischer Gedenkstätten, *Politische Haft in Hoheneck* (Stollberg Stadtbibliothek Erzgebirge).
[37] *Overview of Labelling Theories* (accessed May 2007) http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/curric/soc/crime/labeling.htm.

theorising the imprisoned self, distinguishable in Paul Gready's Foucauldian concept of the self 'rewritten' as criminal through imprisonment: 'What Foucault calls the 'power of writing' plays an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline. Individuals are situated in a 'network of writing', 'in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them'.' Gready continues:

> To varying degrees, spanning interrogation, imprisonment and even release, a prisoner's sense of self and world was undermined. Through such mediums as statements made during interrogation, legislation, the political trial and prison regulations, the prisoner was rigorously and violently rewritten.[38]

One such method of 'rewriting' is labelling as criminal and as prisoner.

Such labelling is particularly problematic for the female prisoner, given that female criminality has historically been theorised as a particularly 'deviant' behaviour and an unfeminine 'act', as Butler would term it. Criminal activity has long been associated with men rather than women. The violence which characterises many criminal activities is traditionally associated with masculinity, in the stereotypical belief that men are physically stronger and more 'naturally' aggressive than women. The role of man has been typecast as that of perpetrator and active participant, with woman as victim and passive target. In this non-aggressive role, woman is seen as less capable of criminality than man. The sociologist Marlis Dürkop writes that woman has been and continues to be widely perceived as incapable of criminality: 'Ein Berliner forensischer Psychiater äußerte 1974 – auf dieses Problem angesprochen –: 'Frauen? Die können ja nicht einmal kriminell sein'.'[39]

The framework for examining female crime has, up until the 1970s and the advent of feminist criminology, been dominated by the flawed positivist criminology of the

[38] Gready, p. 492.
[39] Marlis Dürkop, *Frauen im Gefängnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 7.

nineteenth century. Positivist criminological research proposed that female crime could be explained by the criminal's biology; it sought to establish what it saw as the 'natural' reasons for female criminality, which were grounded in deeply embedded cultural perceptions of woman as mentally and physically inferior to man. The emphasis here was on perceiving crime to be a result of the person's body and inborn nature, rather than seeing it as a consequence of social circumstances such as upbringing, background and education. The belief that women were mentally deficient and less intellectually, morally and physically developed than their male counterparts informed many criminological theories, especially those of Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero.[40] The female criminal was often treated as a child, with an inferior and weak mind, unable to take full responsibility for her behaviour. This typology of the female criminal corresponds to widespread beliefs of woman as victim, who was to be granted a more lenient punishment from a chivalric judicial system.[41]

Frances Heidensohn mentions criminal law's 'dual assumptions about women, some of which are sometimes lamentably confused: virgin and whore, witch and wife'.[42] In line with the patriarchal construction of an angel/whore dichotomy, and in order to protect the feminine ideal of childish passivity and innocence, the criminal woman was often pathologised and represented as more deviant, indeed more dangerous than her male counterpart. Research into criminal behaviour in women was preoccupied with the body of the female criminal. The woman who fell into the deviant category 'criminal' was

[40] Their most well-known work on the subject was: Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), translated from the original: Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (Rome: Torino, 1893).
[41] Mechthild Rotter, "Die Frau in der Kriminologie," *Kriminalsoziologische Bibliografie* 6, no. 23/24 (1979), p. 92.
[42] Heidensohn, p. 39.

represented as sexually abnormal in positivist discourse. It was thought that women committed crime as a consequence of their biology as female; that, for example, menstruation could, in 'abnormal' cases, cause a potentially deadly and murderous imbalance in the woman's mood.[43] The cause of hysteria, often given as an explanation for female criminality in nineteenth century discourse, was traced back to the woman's supposedly abnormal womb.[44] Lombroso and Ferrero claimed that the prostitute, whom they saw as the 'classic' female criminal, was sexually abnormal as well as being the female equivalent of the male offender: 'Die Prostitution ist nur die weibliche Erscheinungsform der Kriminalität.'[45] Thus the female criminal was theorised as an example of the female body – and by extension the woman's status as female and feminine – gone wrong. To the nineteenth-century criminologist, the female criminal showed non-feminine, indeed masculine characteristics.

Feminist theory has provided insight into positivist explanations of women and crime. Many feminists theorise a patriarchal norm of woman as always already deviant, Other, purely on the basis of being female, as opposed to man's norm.[46] If crime is a masculine domain, then the female criminal not only performs an illegal act, she also subverts a gender role, transgressing her gender boundary and becoming 'doubly deviant.'[47] In mainstream culture there is a strong sense that female criminality is much worse than that

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[43] Alfred Springer, "Kriminalanthropologie und Kriminalitätspsychopathologie des weiblichen Geschlechts," *Kriminalsoziologische Bibliographie* 6, no. 23/24 (1979), p. 71.
[44] Springer, p. 74.
[45] Ibid., p. 69. Sander Gilman also writes of scientific observations made by Lombroso's former student Pauline Tarnowsky in her nineteenth-century study into prostitutes which claimed that: 'as the prostitute ages, she begins to appear more and more mannish.' Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," in *'Race', Culture and Difference*, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage Publications in association with Open University, 1992), pp. 186-7.
[46] As declared by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Cape, 1953), p. 53. Translated from the original French: Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).
[47] Carlen, p. 88.

of men. Whereas male criminality ties in with acceptable stereotypes of men as masculine and violent, the female criminal (if not treated as childlike and non-culpable) becomes 'male' and, in losing her femininity, even inhuman. Judith Butler has written that gender identity is needed in order to 'be' in the world; she discusses the widespread belief that when there is a loss of femininity there is the possibility of a much more extensive loss of who the woman is as a person. These 'defeminising' (as I term it) positivist criminological theses were highly influential and fed into more widespread cultural discourse; they re-appear, for example, in Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* plays, in which the protagonist, Lulu, is represented as a dehumanised and psychologically damaged monster in her sexually dominant actions.

As Butler has stated, the transgressing of gender roles can entail punishment within society. But the women in this study have already been punished by imprisonment (although their punishment is not ostensibly based on their gender subversion). Differing types of 'punishment' emerge here: there is the judicial, which depends largely on the type of government in place and the historical period. Then there is the more abstract type of societal punishment, exemplified most clearly by the ways in which 'transgression' is dealt with in the public discourses of the media. This depends once again on era, but also on who is doing the judging. The concept of audience is important here: within the societal response to female crime there is more stigma attached to the 'double deviance' of female criminality than to male criminal activity: the stigmatised individual 'is disqualified from full social acceptance' in having broken a gender and judicial law.[48]

[48] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 9.

But the woman who identifies as a political prisoner faces less stigmatisation than the 'criminal' prisoner. The political woman can appear transgressive given the connotations of power associated with the term 'political'. However, the term is open to varying interpretations, which locate it within a less stigmatising context: there can be honour and self-sacrifice associated with political imprisonment.

One particularly significant implication that accompanies the term 'political prisoner' is associated with class. Contemporary criminology theorises crime as a working-class phenomenon but the political prisoner is more often associated with those from a well-educated, middle-class background. In the prison space, she is often a separate type of prisoner from many of those around her. In the public sphere in which her text appears, however, middle-class values have been taken as the norm:[49] she who shows that she conforms to middle-class conventions faces less stigma than her 'criminal' counterpart.

Audience, performance and agency in the text

The creation of narrative and the performance of gender identity are heavily affected by the writer's awareness of her real or imagined audience. Bruner writes that although much of the self may be constituted from 'inside' – by one's memory, feeling and subjectivity, 'much of self-making is from outside in – based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad expectations that we pick up from the culture in which we are immersed'.[50] The writer (un)consciously writes with an awareness of what those who

[49] Eileen Yeo writes of Jürgen Habermas' theories about the "the emergence of a middle-class public sphere of literary culture and political association, first in eighteenth-century Britain and later elsewhere in Europe." Eileen Yeo, *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[50] Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," p. 65.

read and judge her actions may expect. This includes writing a suitable gender identity in order to avoid punishment or rejection by the audience. The writer has a certain view of herself that she wishes to convey to her audience, but this must merge with what she thinks others want to read. There is a *negotiation* between how the writer sees herself and how others should see her. There is an effort on the part of the writer to negotiate as 'ideal' an identity as possible. This involves, consciously or not, using rhetorical tools in order to meet the expectations of the readership. In the field of life-writing one of the most important factors in being accepted lies in self-representation as an 'honest' subject who shows the reader her true self through her autobiographical writing.[51] This issue of identifying who the 'real' writer is raises questions of truth within the sphere of women's prison writing. First person accounts from or about prison function as a type of evidence – the writer's truth – presented to the reader in order to explain the writer's incarceration. Gready has pointed out that 'little attempt has been made to unravel the 'truth' equation and identify ways in which prison writing should be read.'[52] Throughout this thesis I investigate the fraught concept of 'truth' and 'integrity' in women's prison writing in an attempt to suggest the ways in which such writing could, in the context of twentieth-century Germany, be read.

In focussing on self-representations I am aware that the writer is constructing an identity for a particular audience but am less concerned about how their texts were actually received. Rosa Luxemburg, given her status as a much discussed political icon, is an exception to this, indeed her letters seem to encapsulate prevalent notions about the ideal female political prisoner which are also visible in the texts discussed in subsequent

[51] Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Autobiographie* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), pp. 3-4.
[52] Gready, p. 491.

chapters. There is little critical material available on the other texts in this study, including reviews at the time of publication. I concentrate on the *writer's* voice rather than anyone else's: on how *she* represents herself in relation to the world around her. This involves being aware of how the writer *imagines* her audience, rather than the audience response itself. Interestingly, with the exception of Luxemburg, all the writers in this study create a kind of dialogue with *themselves* in the subsequent editions of their accounts.

If the writer negotiates with her audience then this has an impact on her level of agency. Bruner writes of the 'self-making narrative' as a balancing act which

> must, on the one hand, create a conviction of autonomy, that one has a will of one's own, a certain freedom of choice, a degree of possibility. But it must also relate the self to a world of others – to friends and family, to institutions, to the past, to reference groups.[53]

There exists a negotiation in all narratives between autonomy and commitment to others, indeed the two are interdependent (one needs others to constitute the self and vice versa). Bruner sees commitment to others as agency-robbing, but I perceive it as part of a whole process of agency-creation: all that is written is there to serve the approval of an audience and in this way to constitute, or repair, the self. Through the rhetorical function of language, the writer has power over her audience as well as being judged or partly constituted by them.

Language is a powerful force in the creation of self as well as in the creation of agency. As the 'political prisoner' category indicates, designation can be empowering: the rhetorical nature of language gives the writer power over her audience. But criminal labelling (combined with imprisonment) proves destabilising: the writer/subject is partly

[53] Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," p. 78.

constituted by her audience or labellers. It is through writing that the author has a way of becoming an agent. In her examination of prison writing, Sigrid Weigel writes: 'Gefängnisliteratur konstituiert sich durch die Doppelrolle des Autors als Schreibsubjekt und als Objekt der Bestrafungsinstanz und –methoden'.[54] Leigh Gilmore takes this one step further, although not in specific relation to prison writing. Her research analyses 'how women use self-representation and its constitutive possibilities for agency and subjectivity to become no longer primarily subject to exchange but subjects who exchange the position of object for the subjectivity of self-representational agency.'[55] For Gilmore, writing allows the woman to reposition herself as a subject rather than an object, where Weigel sees a crossover in the two positions within prison writing. Perhaps the situation of imprisonment means that the subject has no other option but to partly submit and adapt to the total (objectivising) institution in order to survive. Peter Paul Zahl's concept of 'Unterleben' is a useful way of visualising both the objectification of the prisoner as well as the methods by which they retrieve autonomy. Zahl's term 'Unterleben'[56] is partly a submission to prison and partly 'eine tätige Auseinandersetzung mit der Haft, eine Überlebensstrategie im Gefängnis'.[57] Through interchanging adaptation and resistance, the prisoner is able to survive the experience without losing too much of her former 'self'. In many ways, this correlates with the function of prison writing: adaptation to the situation of incarceration and to the readership, but empowering the self through writing.

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[54] Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, p. 18.
[55] Leigh Gilmore, "Autobiographics," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: a Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 183.
[56] Ralf Schnell, *"Schreiben ist ein monologisches Medium": Dialoge mit und über Peter Paul Zahl* (Berlin: Ästhetik und Kommunikation, 1979), p. 35.
[57] Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, p. 18.

A main theme running through this thesis is that of the writing process as a healing, therapeutic *act* that in some (inestimable) way assists the subject in coming to terms with her incarceration.[58] Narrative 'repair work', as it is termed in sociological studies is, of course, not limited to dealing with the experience of prison.[59] With reference to prison writing itself, Nicola Keßler's research concentrates on the ways in which subjectivity is articulated during and after imprisonment in order to help the prisoner cope during the 'crisis point' of prison and thereafter. Keßler's research is extensive and, at times, works with ideas of identity performance through the illocutionary act of writing.[60] She touches on J.L. Austin's theory of the illocutionary act or speech act in which: 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.[61] Language does not just state, it actually performs a function in the world. Although Keßler does discuss this branch of study, there is much scope for taking the concept of the speech act further and using it as a methodology for the analysis of the primary texts in the following chapters of this thesis. It is through language and, in this case, writing, that the prison writer can 'perform' and create an identity which suits her desired self-image. As Paul Gready puts it, she can 'rewrite' and thus recreate her identity.[62] The illocutionary nature of life-writing serves an important purpose in the following chapters, there to right the wrongs done by incarceration. Writing becomes a

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[58] Two primary texts of relevance here are: Sibylle Plogstedt, *Im Netz der Gedichte: Gefangen in Prag nach 1968* (Berlin: Links, 2001), and Birgit Schlicke, *Knast-Tagebuch: Erinnerungen einer politischen Gefangenen an Stasi-Haft und das Frauenzuchthaus Hoheneck* (Wiesbaden: Books on Demand GmbH, 2001), in which the authors claim to write their accounts as a form of therapy.
[59] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[60] Nicola Keßler, *Schreiben, um zu überleben: Studien zur Gefangenenliteratur* (Godesberg: Forum Verlag, 2001), p. 172.
[61] John Langshaw Austin, J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisà, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 6.
[62] Gready, p. 492.

means of 'survival' (as Keßler identifies in the title of her book: *Schreiben, um zu überleben*[63]), a step towards attempting to gain public acceptance in order to combat the stigma of imprisonment and, perhaps more significantly, a way of gaining control over a situation in which much autonomy over one's identity has been stripped away.

Self-representation is dependent not only on audience but also on the context in which the text is written, and published, as well as the genre in which it appears: all of the texts in this thesis may be autobiographical but each chapter deals with a different autobiographical sub-genre. Rosa Luxemburg's letters from prison, written between 1914 and 1918, provide the basis for a discussion of women's writing of political imprisonment. In Luxemburg's self-representation she creates differing 'types' of femininity in her various incarnations of herself and gives insight into the concerns of the political writer and woman during the crisis of incarceration. As one of the most renowned female political prisoners of the twentieth century, Luxemburg provides an interesting starting point for the texts that follow her, contributing to a collective 'masterplot' of the female political prisoner. [64]

The prison diary, too, acts as a means of coping during an unsettling experience, steadying the writer through allowing her to articulate and therefore confirm her identity to herself as an addressee. Luise Rinser's diary of her incarceration in National Socialist Germany points towards key issues in the field of women's prison writing, largely because of Rinser's construction of a self-representation that relies heavily on the 'inferior' position of the female 'criminals' around her. Lore Wolf, too, was imprisoned

[63] And as Gready points out in his study of the writing of the South African prison writer Breyten Breytenbach – the act of writing allows the author to come to terms with his incarceration, Ibid., p. 510.
[64] In his exploration of narrative, H. Porter Abbott refers to 'masterplots' as 'stories that we tell over and over in myriad forms and that connect with our deepest values, wishes, and fears.' Abbott, p. 46 and p. 157.

by the Gestapo and, although her diary seems to serve the similar purpose of self-preservation, her construction of her self is quite different from Rinser's, and concentrates instead on using models more commonly associated with politically powerful women such as Luxemburg.

Autobiographies of East German incarceration are the subject of the second half of the study: I ask how the writer retrospectively constructs an identity in response to the aftermath of the prison experience and to appease her audience. Such an examination involves questions of agency, authenticity and constructions of ideal 'femininity'. Chapter Three examines Margret Bechler's narrative of her eleven years in East German confinement, focussing on how she constructs herself as the 'right' kind of prisoner and woman in the context of her potentially controversial 'crime.' In many ways Elisabeth Graul's *Die Farce* expands the issues raised in Bechler's narrative; it is a text which represents a negotiation between the world of the prison and the world of the imagined audience, especially in regard to questions of lost femininity. Central to Graul's account is the representation of her self as an agent and even authority, who through narrative tries to take control of her experience.

As discussed above, political crime is historically and politically contingent. Furthermore, Judith Butler examines gender as a historically variable identity, subject to transgression and change over time.[65] It is with this idea of ever-changing perspectives about the nature of acceptable identity that the framework for an 'ideal' female political prisoner is created by the prison writers. Although prison is often described as an institution that robs its inmates of identity, it is useful to regard autobiographical

[65] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," p. 402.

narratives of imprisonment as a method of creating identity, or more specifically, prison writing as simultaneously identity-giving.

Chapter One: 'Ich bin hier ach! so schwach': Rosa Luxemburg's prison letters

Introduction

Rosa Luxemburg spent three short terms in prison between 1904 and 1907 and served two longer sentences between 1915 and 1918 for her anti-war activities. During this time Luxemburg wrote numerous political articles as well as hundreds of letters. Of particular interest are her prison letters written during the First World War, from prison in Berlin Barnimstrasse in 1915, and from the Festung Wronke in 1917, where she was interned under *Schutzhaft* – a form of administrative custody often used in cases of political imprisonment, in which no trial was required.[1] Many of these letters were published in various smaller publications made available after Luxemburg's death in 1919 by those who were eager publicly to defend her memory after her violent murder.[2] Most of the correspondence was collated and published in 1982 as her *Gesammelte Briefe*, the most extensive collection of her correspondence available, by the East German publishing house Dietz, in what could be read as an attempt on behalf of the East German government to market and promote Communism's most famous female political figure.[3]

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[1] J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Abridged ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 399.
[2] Such as: Rosa Luxemburg, *Das Menschliche entscheidet: Briefe an Freunde* (Munich: List, 1951), Rosa Luxemburg and Charlotte Beradt, *Rosa Luxemburg im Gefängnis: Briefe und Dokumente aus den Jahren 1915-1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1973), Rosa Luxemburg and Luise Kautsky, *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky, 1896-1918* (Berlin: E. Laub, 1923).
[3] Some of these letters had been edited in those previous publications, but the editors of the *Gesammelte Briefe*, Annelies Laschitza and Günther Radczun maintain that their edition holds the most 'original' of Luxemburg's correspondence. Annelies Laschitza and Günther Radczun, "Einleitung," in *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Georg Adler et al. (Berlin: Dietz, 1982), p. 45.

Of those different sets of letters contained in the *Gesammelte Briefe*, it was the publication of Luxemburg's prison letters to Sophie Liebknecht (the wife of Karl Liebknecht) shortly after Luxemburg's death in 1919 that attracted particular public attention. The letters prompted a wave of sympathy for the woman previously dubbed 'blutige Rosa'[4] and seen by some bourgeois opponents as an 'unweibliche Terroristin'.[5] It seems the focus of much of the criticism directed at Luxemburg was a result of her subversive gender performance – she was vilified because she was a woman operating in the male-dominated sphere of politics. But Luxemburg also had a radical political vision, one that attracted much criticism from political opponents. Bronner remarks on the widespread image of 'the revolutionary as a dour, sneering, paranoid automaton.' [6] As a left-wing revolutionary, Luxemburg was exposed to the criticism that she lacked warmth and humanity. If the political revolutionary was already seen as transgressive and cold, then the female revolutionary, in her doubly transgressive role, was even more demonised – for many she was a monstrous anomaly, a 'Schreckgespenst'.[7]

But the Luxemburg portrayed in the prison letters to Liebknecht (published by the Communist organisation 'Die Jugendinternationale') has been described as a kind-hearted, compassionate woman who loved nature and art.[8] The letter that has generated the most discussion, written on 24 December 1917, includes Luxemburg's description of her heart-felt sympathy towards a herd of oxen that she saw being maltreated in the

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[4] Charlotte Beradt, "Einleitung," in *Rosa Luxemburg im Gefängnis; Briefe und Dokumente aus den Jahren 1915-1918*, ed. Charlotte Beradt (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1973), p. 7.
[5] Ute Speck, *Ein mögliches Ich: Selbstreflexion in der Schreiberfahrung; zur Autobiographik der Politikerinnen Lily Braun, Hedwig Dohm und Rosa Luxemburg* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 240-1.
[6] Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Revolutionary For Our Times: Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Pluto, 1981), p. 73.
[7] Beradt, p. 7.
[8] See for example, Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, pp. 86-7 and Nettl, p. 412.

courtyard of her prison in Breslau. According to Bronner, this letter 'caused a scandal for her opponents and stimulated a new popular evaluation which exposed Luxemburg's kindness, sensitivity, and humanity.'[9] In the various responses to Luxemburg's prison letters, her 'humane' character is linked to her interest in the natural world and her literary ability.[10] In 1920, Karl Kraus gave a public reading of the same letter and reproduced it in his Austrian newspaper *Die Fackel*, describing it as 'dieses […] einzigartige Dokument von Menschlichkeit und Dichtung.'[11] Stephen Bronner further connects Luxemburg's concern with the natural world to her poetic writing in prison: 'Particularly in prison, her letters assume a lyrical power of poetic proportions as her gaze shifts from the infighting with the International [an international socialist organisation – KR] to the little world of her confinement: a world of insects, plants, and birds.'[12] In various responses to Luxemburg's prison letters lies the implication that her poetic side highlights her humane character. One of Luxemburg's most sycophantic biographers, Paul Frölich, emphasises the poetic element in her prison letters: 'the lyrical chords within her were quite powerful. Her letters prove it; many of them are pure poetry, particularly those written in prison, when, hungry for the pleasures of life, she sought and found them in her memories'.[13] It seems Frölich and others who read and responded to Luxemburg's letters interpret the lyrical quality in the writing as a sign of

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[9] Bronner, p. 74.
[10] For example: Elzbieta Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (London: Pandora, 1988), p. 119 and Evelyn Radczun and Günther Radczun, "Wirklichkeitsbewältigung in den Briefen Rosa Luxemburgs aus dem Gefängnis 1915-1918," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 27, no. 2 (1979), p. 104.
[11] *AAC-Fackel: Die Fackel. Herausgeber: Karl Kraus; Wien 1899-1936*, (accessed June 2009); http://www.aac.ac.at/fackel.
[12] Bronner, p. 72.
[13] Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*, trans. Joanna Hoornweg (London: Pluto, 1972), p. 184.

her human qualities, reflecting a wider belief that those lacking in humanity cannot be cultured or literary, and vice versa.

The Luxemburg presented to the world after her death was viewed as a better woman than the seemingly cold, stern revolutionary figure evoked by her 'transgressive' political activities. She was represented as compassionate and caring – characteristics which are not only humane, but also conventionally feminine, even maternal. Indeed, at the same time as Luxemburg's newfound humanity and poetic ability was under discussion, there came an overt campaign to re-feminise her public image through Luise Kautsky's publication of Luxemburg's letters to her and Karl Kautsky in 1923. Kautsky claimed of her friend: 'Wer sich unter Rosa […] ein Mannweib vorstellt, geht vollständig fehl, sie war eine echte Frau'[14]. In the cultural discourse surrounding Luxemburg in the years after her death there is an implicit connection between what has been described as her love of the natural world, her humanity, her aesthetic character and her status as an acceptable woman. This does not necessarily imply that humanity or literariness are 'feminine', rather it reflects a wide belief that the unfeminine woman, as monstrous and inhuman, cannot be compassionate, poetic, or nature-loving.

Luxemburg's identity as a woman has been under public scrutiny and subject to conflicting discourses – that of the bloodthirsty female radical versus that of the sensitive, caring woman. Discourses that defend Luxemburg against those who saw her as deviant, and even inhuman, often try to pinpoint who the 'real' Luxemburg was in their attempts to discuss her as an ideal woman. In the critical reception of Luxemburg's autobiographical writing, there is an assumption that this 'real' Luxemburg is feminine

[14] Speck, p. 241.

(with its connotations of humanity, poetry and affinity with the natural world) rather than political. Bronner writes: 'after her death, friends like Henriette Roland-Holst and Luise Kautsky sought to show that Rosa Luxemburg was *fundamentally* an apolitical person'.[15] For Bronner, Roland-Holst and Kautsky, that Luxemburg was apolitical provided more room for her to be perceived as feminine. The representation as aesthete, nature-lover and good woman has thus been set in opposition to Luxemburg's status as a political revolutionary.[16]

Scholars and critics have often described Luxemburg's letters either to Mathilde Jacob, Hans Diefenbach or Sophie Liebknecht as authentic confirmation of her 'real' self, for various reasons. The letters to Jacob are described as more spontaneous and less literary, whereas the Diefenbach letters seemingly expose hidden weaknesses, and the Liebknecht ones show her humanity and poetic ability.[17] In this claim to have found the 'real' Luxemburg, there lies an assumption that a woman is actually always traditionally feminine, even if she masks it with that transgressive public performance as masculine. There is a desire not only on the part of her friends but also on the part of her critics to believe that Luxemburg is 'really' feminine.[18]

During incarceration, Luxemburg's communication with the outside world was greatly restricted. The prison censors prohibited any writing on political matters, but she

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[15] Bronner, p. 69, my emphasis.
[16] See: Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, pp. 86-7 and Klein, p. 131 for discussion of this division between the two spheres.
[17] According to: Laschitza and Radczun, p. 4 and p. 42. Günther Radczun, in an earlier publication with Evelyn Radczun, indicates that it is those letters to Diefenbach and Liebknecht that reveal her 'true' self. Radczun and Radczun, p.108. According to Beradt, p. 9, the letters to Jacob are more spontaneous and less literary than those to her other addressees.
[18] This is most often exemplified in the 'body politic'/'body natural' division created for powerful women in order to preserve the ideal of the 'real', natural woman as conventionally feminine.

was able to smuggle out a significant portion of her writing, including her political writing for the *Spartakusbund*, the revolutionary left-wing movement and precursor to the German Communist Party (KPD), of which she was a co-founder. Although it is known for certain that her political writings were smuggled out and therefore uncensored, very little information is available concerning whether or not those personal prison letters discussed in this analysis were censored.[19] Luxemburg's political writings and her prison letters were her main mode of participation in the intensifying political climate. Annelies Laschitza and Günther Radczun give their interpretation of her isolated situation: 'Diese zwangsweise Abgeschiedenheit wurde ihr um so unerträglicher, je mehr die Revolution in Europa heranreifte. Der Brief wurde für sie zu einem wichtigen Kommunikationsmittel.'[20] Writing, even that which was subject to censorship, was a vital means of communication for Luxemburg, especially since she spent the majority of her custody in solitary confinement. Such confinement entails little or no social interaction for extended periods of time, although there are various degrees of isolation and Luxemburg, especially when incarcerated in Wronke, had fairly regular social contact.[21] Nonetheless, she was isolated for most of the time, and writing and reading provided a substitute for those more substantial communicative modes found in the outside world. It allowed her to sustain relationships that she had established outside, to which prison posed a constant disruption. As we will see, maintaining friendships

[19] According to Annelies Laschitza, who has worked extensively with Luxemburg's prison documents, it is not possible to ascertain which of the letters in this analysis were censored and which were smuggled out. This highlights a significant, if challenging area of research still to be carried out on Luxemburg's letters.
[20] Laschitza and Radczun, p. 39.
[21] Frölich, p. 227 and 'Gespräch mit Mathilde Jacob' in Rosa Luxemburg, *Ich umarme Sie in grosser Sehnsucht: Briefe aus dem Gefängnis 1915-1918* (Berlin and Bonn: Dietz, 1980), p. 23 and p. 39.

through letter-writing allows Luxemburg the opportunity to preserve a sense of who she was before imprisonment. In creating a dialogue she attempts to break through the isolation of solitary confinement.

Luxemburg was skilled when it came to both written and spoken composition and it is often said that she adapted according to whomever she was addressing. According to Charlotte Beradt: 'Rosa Luxemburg schrieb an jeden Empfänger in einem anderen, ihren Beziehungen zu ihm angepaßten Ton.'[22] Ute Speck explains of Luxemburg's letters: '[das Ich] muss sich immer wieder und für jeden und jede, an die es schreibt, neu erfinden; es ist für die Ansprüche seiner Adressaten offen'.[23] The author made it a priority to change her self-representation in order to interact fully with her addressee, something that is reflected not just in her prison letters but in most of her personal correspondence. Although for reasons of space I do not intend to make a comparison between the prison and non-prison letters, it does seem that letter-writing in prison requires a particularly intense cooperation and negotiation with the reader, given Luxemburg's disconnection from the outside world.[24] In the quest for the 'real' Luxemburg by those who wrote about her subsequently, we are presented with a problem, as we will see in an analysis of her letters: Luxemburg presents a number of sometimes conflicting selves, and not all of these can be described as fundamentally feminine or apolitical.

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[22] Beradt, p. 8.
[23] Speck, p. 211.
[24] Such a comparison of prison and non-prison letters to establish the impact of prison upon Luxemburg's self-representations would be a fascinating area of future research, but would require a full research project rather than that to which I am confined in this chapter.

I propose to focus primarily on Luxemburg's performance of her gender as a response to the isolation and change of identity imposed by incarceration: to examine how Luxemburg, unconsciously or otherwise, 'performs' femininity (and masculinity) in Judith Butler's sense of the word. For Butler, gender performance enables a certain level of flexibility in self-representation as 'feminine', but there are restrictions on this, and, if it is 'done' wrong then it can provoke punishment.[25] I shall examine Luxemburg's various constructions of 'appropriate' gender roles in a selection of her prison letters, paying particular attention to her different uses of the word *schwach*. Her self-representation varies according to each correspondent and produces different creations of Luxemburg the political prisoner: from the weak, feminine self to the maternal and dominant woman to the strong patriarchal leader. It seems her differing self-representations pertain to the power relations between her and her addressee. I shall consider the conflict between Luxemburg's self-representation as a political and public figure, speaking to a wide audience, and her more private self-representation as feminine. Of particular import throughout Luxemburg's letters is the *function* of self-expression within the prison context of isolation and self-doubt. I investigate how Luxemburg, unconsciously or not, performs gender roles in order to 'survive' and understand her imprisonment.

'Shameful' weakness and femininity

The belief that weakness is a desirable feminine characteristic has long permeated Western culture. The writer and linguist, Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818)

[25] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," p. 405.

reminded young women that they were created as both physically and emotionally weaker than men. According to Campe, woman is supposed to be: 'schwach, klein, zart, empfindlich, furchtsam, kleingeistig,' unlike the man who is 'stark, fest, kuhn, ausdauernd, groß, hehr und kraftvoll an Leib und Seele.'[26] Luxemburg's correspondence with her close friend Hans Diefenbach (1884-1917) provides a particularly interesting example of her use of what were clearly still relevant cultural ideas of femininity and weakness, through her use of the word 'schwach' in relation to herself. Diefenbach was a doctor who was also friends with Luxemburg's colleague Karl Kautsky and his wife Luise. He was younger than Luxemburg, an acquaintance of her former lover Kostja Zetkin, and it has been alleged that he and Luxemburg were involved in a romantic relationship – a claim that is supported by the flirtatious tone of their correspondence.[27] Luxemburg sent Diefenbach long, cheerful letters from prison to comfort him during his time as a military doctor on the Western Front, where he was later killed in October 1917.[28] In her position as a political leader, Luxemburg seems to occupy an intellectually superior role with Diefenbach, as was the case with many of Luxemburg's close friends in Germany. According to Bronner: 'in the intellectual realm, she was fully aware of her superiority. In fact, what was probably most important to Luxemburg in the friends that she chose was a lack of pretentiousness, a warmth, and even a certain naivety.'[29] As is the tendency with many Luxemburg biographers, Bronner assumes knowledge of Luxemburg's feelings, but in this case he does support part of this claim

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[26] Joachim Heinrich Campe, "Väterlicher Rat für meine Tochter," in *Ob die Weiber Menschen sind: Geschlechterdebatten um 1800*, ed. Sigrid Lange (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992), pp. 26-7.
[27] Ettinger, p. 211.
[28] Laschitza and Radczun, p. 42.
[29] Bronner, p. 69.

with evidence from the letters themselves. He informs us that, in her relationship with Diefenbach, Luxemburg 'quite consciously sought to take [him] in hand', and her letters to him demonstrate her wish that he become more intellectually ambitious.[30]

Luxemburg's authoritative stance vis-à-vis Diefenbach has a maternal tone, visible in her use of pet names such as 'Hänschen' and 'Kindermund', as well as in her warning to him about the heat in a letter from 20 June 1917: 'Ich bin in großer Sorge, wie Sie diese kannibalische Hitze ertragen'.[31] Luxemburg's maternal performance situates her within what could be termed an 'ideal' feminine role as selfless carer, reinforcing the claim that Luxemburg's real self was feminine. But performance as 'mother' is not without transgressive undertones. Just as there exist opposing cultural constructions of femininity, exemplified in the angel/whore dichotomy, the mother too has been, albeit less obviously, constructed in binary terms. In psychoanalysis, the good mother's evil counterpart is the 'phallic mother' who, in her supposed state of penis-envy, exerts a domineering, masculine presence over the lives of those around her.[32] In self-representation as a mother, there is a fine line between being caring and exerting dominance through being overbearing. In her role as mother and intellectual superior, Luxemburg may take on a potentially dominant role, but it is one in which, as we will see, she attempts to play down any authority by employing acceptable stereotypes of femininity, such as weakness.

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[30] Ibid., p. 72.
[31] Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Adler, and Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, *Gesammelte Briefe* (Berlin: Dietz, 1982), Volume 5, p. 261. Subsequent references to Luxemburg's letters all come from this volume and will be given in the main text.
[32] As discussed in E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), especially chapter 6.

In a particularly interesting letter written on 23 June 1917, Luxemburg writes that she is weak (‘so schwach bin ich!’ (263)) because she has broken a self-enforced rule which prohibits her to write letters. Presumably she has implemented such a rule in order to optimise her output of political writing. In this context, the word ‘weak’ invokes characteristics such as a lack of self-control and frivolity because she is writing personal letters rather than working. Luxemburg shows that she fully understands the gendered nature of the word ‘schwach’ and even explains that it is expected of women and can be used to please men:

> Wenn, wie Sie in Ihrem letzten Brief schrieben, dem starken Geschlecht die Frauen am meisten gefallen, wenn sie sich schwach zeigen, dann müßten Sie jetzt von mir entzückt sein: Ich bin hier ach! so schwach, mehr, als mir lieb ist (263).

Luxemburg gives an example of her ironic wit in the feigned ‘Ich bin hier ach! so schwach’, as if she is consciously performing the role of weak woman. Luxemburg parodies a stereotype and seems very aware of the roles that women perform; indeed there is a distinct separation of herself from other women and even a disdain for weakness and its connotations of femininity.

An awareness of the behaviour expected of women extends to how Luxemburg represents her conduct in the political world. She talks of a mutual hatred between herself and the prominent Belgian socialist politician Camille Huysmans (1871-1968). Luxemburg believes he does not like politically active women (presumably because of the threat they seemed to pose in a male-dominated arena). However, Huysman’s disdain for Luxemburg disappeared when he was told of what Luxemburg describes as her ‘Hilflosigkeit in “irdischen Dingen” ’ (264) such as

travelling by train. Luxemburg describes his transformation from unfriendly colleague to warm and accommodating gentleman who accompanied her to the train station at the end of the day. Luxemburg says: 'Er hatte mich endlich schwach gesehen und war in seinem Element' (264). In this context, weakness is used to convey women's unpractical and dependent nature.

Luxemburg's melodramatic exclamation: 'Ich bin hier ach! so schwach' is, as Elzbieta Ettinger has said, only 'half in jest'[33] and the more serious element emerges in her admission: 'mehr, als mir lieb ist'. There is a distinctly confessional tone to this clause, as if Diefenbach is being exposed to Luxemburg's inner feelings, her 'real' self. She admits weakness and, despite the overtones of irony and parody, Diefenbach is given a brief glimpse of what can be read as her hidden weakness, in other words her 'inner femininity'. At the same time as admitting what the reader is to believe is her inner self, Luxemburg shows how such weakness is unbecoming to her, implying that she should be strong rather than weak. Indeed, she seems to disdain her own weakness and, by extension, a part of her own femininity.

Such an apparent admission of weakness is not uncommon in Luxemburg's letters to her close friends, as demonstrated in the correspondence to her secretary and most frequent addressee Mathilde Jacob (1873-1942), to whom she writes concerning practical matters such as food, visits, and her administrative affairs in the outside world. As with Luxemburg's friends such as Diefenbach and Sophie Liebknecht, Jacob was not as intellectually or politically active as Luxemburg and

[33] Ettinger, p. 212.

these letters to her, although pleasant and friendly, reflect once again Luxemburg's intellectually dominant position. However, it is important to note that Jacob was Luxemburg's main link to the outside world and Luxemburg depended on her greatly.[34] Jacob not only ensured that Luxemburg received the right food and medication (her health was poor in prison), but played a key role in the smuggling of articles for the *Spartakusbund.* Without her, Luxemburg's political activity and general health would have suffered greatly, which meant that Luxemburg was keen to please her. Luxemburg's letters to Jacob are comprised of instructions; Luxemburg is telling Jacob what to do. The way that Luxemburg uses the language of weakness is perhaps a means of redressing her letters' instructive, sometimes demanding content. It has also been suggested that Luxemburg's party colleague and former lover, Leo Jogiches, read the Jacob letters and that Luxemburg was aware of this third addressee.[35] This gives added complexity to Luxemburg's correspondence: she may have felt intellectually superior to Jacob, but this was not the case with Jogiches. At the time of a letter to Jacob, dated 23 February 1915, Luxemburg had just been arrested and taken to prison in Berlin. There are potentially three audience members here: the censors (the letter in question was almost certainly official given that Luxemburg had only just been placed in custody and would have not yet had any smuggling opportunities), Jacob and Jogiches.

In this letter, Luxemburg takes a reassuring tone, writing that she is cheerful and somewhat amused by her predicament. This stance conveys strength: her ability to

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[34] Beradt states that: 'Mathilde […] ermöglichte ihr das Dasein im Gefängnis.' Beradt, p. 9.
[35] Ibid, p. 201. Luxemburg refers to Jogiches as 'Mimis Vormund' in one letter: Luxemburg, Adler, and Marxismus-Leninismus, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 5, p. 65.

cope with a new and isolated environment. Still, she allows herself no heroics and seems reluctant to expose any fragility to her reader:

> Damit Sie übrigens keine übertriebene Vorstellung von meinem Heldentum bekommen, will ich reumütig erkennen, daß ich in dem Augenblick, wo ich zum zweiten Mal an jenem Tag mich aufs Hemd ausziehen und betasten lassen mußte, mit knapper Not die Tränen zurückhalten konnte. Natürlich war ich innerlich wütend über mich ob solcher Schwachheit und bin es jetzt noch (47).

Luxemburg both reveals her hidden weakness (brought about by the degradation of prison) and chastises herself for it. Weakness is represented as shameful, especially public displays thereof, such as tears in front of prison officers. Once again, Luxemburg shows or performs contempt for a stereotypically feminine characteristic. Nonetheless, she continues to highlight her 'feminine' concerns when describing her surprise at the overwhelming concern she felt for her appearance on entering prison: 'Auch entsetzte mich am ersten Abend nicht etwa die Gefängniszelle und mein so plötzliches Ausscheiden aus den Lebenden, sondern – raten Sie! – die Tatsache, daß ich ohne mein Nachthemd, ohne mir das Haar gekämmt zu haben aufs Lager mußte' (47). Luxemburg writes that this worry takes priority over the greater issue of being incarcerated. She emphasises a preoccupation with what is widely held as a female concern, demonstrating to Jacob and Jogiches that prison has brought out her 'feminine' side. She makes it clear throughout, however, that this is an unusual experience for her. It is a side of her that requires protection, which appeals to the gender roles of both addressees: Jacob becomes the maternal protector and Jogiches is the chivalric shielding figure to Luxemburg's childlike feminine vulnerability.

Luxemburg's letters to Jacob also highlight a maternal and caring side to her own character, especially in her consistent references to her beloved cat, Mimi. Every letter to Jacob ends with wishes sent to both her and Mimi. She writes on 30 March 1915: 'Küssen Sie von mir die Mimi auf beide Äuglein, was sie von mir gern litt' (50). Although Luxemburg shows disdain for weak femininity, she seems happy to show herself as *maternally* feminine, with its connotations of strength and protectiveness, rather than of weakness or passivity.

Luxemburg's letters to her colleague Franz Mehring (1846-1919) provide another dimension to her performance of weakness**.** Mehring was a co-founder of the Spartakusbund as well as a Marxist theoretician and influential writer. He was older than Luxemburg and her way of addressing him reflects that she looks up to him, seeing him as a figure of authority. In a letter written 31 August 1915, she mentions the difficulties she has concentrating on her work while in prison. Luxemburg positions herself as Mehring's student here, giving reasons for her low output, and expressing a wish to explain herself in case, as she puts it, she disappoints his expectations regarding her work (72). The power relations between Luxemburg and Mehring may have been different from those between her and Diefenbach, but Luxemburg still makes Mehring aware of her weaknesses in order, perhaps (as with Diefenbach) to minimise any threat she may pose to his sense of masculinity. She writes that he encourages and shames her into work when she is on the brink of daydreaming or becoming impatient: 'Sie kennen nur zuwenig meine schändlichen Schwächen' (70). But in her correspondence with Mehring, she does not seem to 'expose' hidden weakness, rather she portrays her

weakness as a constant element in her character. There is much less of a sense of a strong, tough façade disguising her feminine frailty; she is always weak with Mehring.

Despite the differences in the ways that Luxemburg portrays her weakness and femininity, she seems to be drawing on it as a way to please her reader: to Diefenbach she writes light-heartedly of her: 'ganz blamable Schwäche, die Ihnen schon so viel frohe Augenblicke bereitet hat' (264). It is this positioning as a weak woman that allows Luxemburg to occupy a 'safe', inferior status next to her addressees, countering any potentially authoritative or transgressive role that she may have. It allows Diefenbach, Mehring and Jogiches to inhabit various socially comfortable roles as masculine and strong. Luxemburg portrays her weakness in various ways according to her addressee, and this reflects the type of relationship she has with him/her. It flatters her male addressee's sense of his own masculinity and provides the opportunity for Jacob to occupy the comfortable female role of mother, caring and providing for Luxemburg during her incarceration. These letters – containing Luxemburg's performance as weak and feminine – are an important means of communication because they allow Luxemburg's relationships with her friends and acquaintances to continue, despite the restrictions placed upon them by her imprisonment. The letters thus operate as crucial substitutes for the interaction that would normally take place face to face: a context in which voice, tone, body language and gesture function as further modes of communication. In the letter, however, all communication has to be performed through using words on a page.

Public strength and masculinity

Luxemburg's more political and public letters contrast starkly with her private correspondence. A 'political', 'strong' Luxemburg is seen in a letter dated 16 February 1917 to Mathilde Wurm (1874-1934), wife of Emanuel Wurm (1857-1920). Mathilde Wurm was a Social Democratic parliamentary representative who often wrote on socialism and feminism and had a turbulent political relationship with Luxemburg.[36] Speck tells us that, due to the political tone of the letter, Luxemburg wrote to Wurm 'mit zumindest einem Blick auf die Aufmerksamkeit der betrachtenden Nachwelt.'[37] Indeed, as a famous and powerful figure, it is quite credible that she would write certain letters in the knowledge that they would later be widely read, especially if they involved political dispute.

Luxemburg had viciously attacked Wurm in a letter dated 28 December 1916 about her lack of action to prevent the war: ' >Ihr< seid überhaupt eine andere zoologische Gattung als ich, und nie war mir Euer griesgrämiges, sauertöpfisches, feiges und halbes Wesen so fremd, so verhaßt wie jetzt' (150). The response from Wurm cannot be found, but according to J.P. Nettl, Wurm 'must have defended herself as stoutly as she knew how' provoking the more diplomatic letter of truce from Luxemburg (16 February 1917).[38] This letter may be less fierce but Luxemburg still maintains her role as a strong and authoritative comrade, positioning herself as Wurm's teacher: 'Freundin bleibe ich Dir gern. Ob ich Dir auch […] Lehrerin bleibe, hängt von Dir ab' (176). She also uses

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[36] Charmian Brinson, *The Strange Case of Dora Fabian and Mathilde Wurm: A Study of German Political Exiles in London During the 1930's* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 64.
[37] Speck, p. 313.
[38] Nettl, p. 409.

diminutive names such as ‘Lämmchen ‘ and ‘Mädchen’ (176). In her letters to Diefenbach, such monikers are terms of endearment, there to reflect Luxemburg's role as a caring woman, as good mother rather than a domineering authority. However, they come across as patronising when used in the Wurm letter, connoting dominance over her correspondent.

Luxemburg takes this dominant performance further by describing the masses as ‘feig und schwach’, thereby distancing herself from weakness and emphasising her own strength (176). This stands in direct contrast to her letter to Diefenbach in which she tempered any (maternal) dominance by admitting weakness. As she used femininity to connote weakness, so strength becomes a masculine characteristic, demonstrated in her comparison of herself to a chivalric figure: ‘Mädchen, ich sitze fest im Sattel, mich hat noch keiner in den Sand gestreckt’ (175). This self-representation may conflict with the Luxemburg seen in her letters to Diefenbach, Jacob and Mehring, but the two versions of Luxemburg do converge in places. Both privilege the masculine/strong over the feminine/weak: Luxemburg derides weakness in her letter to Wurm and emphasises her own strength – an implicitly masculine characteristic. This echoes her disdain for a certain type of weak femininity in her letters to Diefenbach, Mehring and Jacob. In showing awareness of the shamefulness of weakness, she implies even in her private correspondence that such behaviour is a deviation from her habitual ‘public’ self – that self that she presents to Wurm.

To Luxemburg, as a politician, it was important that she come across as strong, dominant and ‘masculine’. When she writes: ‘ich sitze fest im Sattel, mich hat noch keiner in den Sand gestreckt’ she follows it by a self-assured remark: ‘auf den, der’s

kann, bin ich neugierig' (175). The reader is to believe that anyone who can destabilise her will be met with curiosity rather than fear. Luxemburg's assertion of her strength is particularly persuasive here: language serves to cement Luxemburg's sense of herself as an authoritative figure during a time when her leadership skills have been challenged by Wurm. Although it is important to her to perform as weak and feminised with Diefenbach, Mehring and Jacob, it is equally vital that she take on this authoritative role with Wurm (and whoever else may read this letter) in order to stabilise her public status as a political figure.

Negotiating female authority

The letters to Sophie Liebknecht, wife of her colleague Karl, again provide a conflicting view of femininity. The letters also give further insight into how Luxemburg constructs her identity for a private, female audience, in contrast to the public one seen in the Wurm letter. They too deal with the concept of weakness in conjunction with femininity and, despite being the letters that initiated her public 're-feminisation', they problematise her identity as an ideal woman. Two days after her stern letter to Mathilde Wurm, Luxemburg writes to Liebknecht, to whom she regularly composed lengthy letters of encouragement and comfort during Karl Liebknecht's imprisonment. Bronner tells us that Sophie Liebknecht was prone to bouts of depression and, as with many of her close friends, Luxemburg wrote cheerful letters to her with very little information about any of her own worries.[39] Liebknecht had studied art history and was therefore in some ways

[39] Bronner, p. 73.

intellectually equal to Luxemburg, but generally she took on a domestic and non-political role as the young wife of Luxemburg's colleague.[40] In their relationship, Luxemburg's intellectually superior position is reflected in her sometimes condescending tone.

In a letter dated 18 February 1917, Luxemburg writes an in-depth and complimentary review of Irene, a female character in John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* – a novel that she and Liebknecht had both recently read. Luxemburg places herself and Sophie in united opposition to Luxemburg's socialist colleague Clara Zetkin, an activist for women's emancipation. Zetkin and Luxemburg did not share the same views on the women's movement, indeed Luxemburg distanced herself from it.[41] Ettinger tells us that Luxemburg was interested in it only in terms of socialism:

> [T]he belief that people should not be divided by sex but united against the exploiters shaped her views on women's emancipation. It was, from her point of view, yet another harmful division, comparable to the division by class, race, or nationality that split the international proletariat.[42]

Luxemburg highlights her differing viewpoint from Zetkin in her musings about the book to Liebknecht, declaring: 'Klara schrieb mir begeistert über den >Reichen Mann<. Aber wie puritanisch-herb ist ihr Urteil über unsere – Ihre und meine – Irene' (180). Here, Luxemburg puts her own and Liebknecht's views of the character Irene on the same level and therefore in the ensuing assessment of Irene, Luxemburg represents Liebknecht's opinion too. In Luxemburg's review, Irene is described as 'dieses entzückende Geschöpf, das zu schwach ist, um sich mit den

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[40] Radczun and Radczun, p. 110.
[41] Speck, p. 291.
[42] Ettinger. Introduction. *Comrade and Lover*, p. xxvii.

Ellbogen den Weg durch die Welt zu bahnen, und wie eine zertretene Blume am Wege liegenbleibt' (180). Luxemburg seems to enjoy Irene's weakness aesthetically, comparing the character to a flower. Here weakness is attractive, delicate and there to be protected. Luxemburg links the concept of aesthetic pleasure with 'feminine' traits further in her descriptions of the role of beautiful women in the world:

> als ob schöne Frauen nicht schon deshalb ein Geschenk des Himmels wären, weil sie unsere Augen erfreuen […] Laß uns die zarten Irenen, wenn sie auch zu nichts gut sind, als die Erde zu schmücken, wie die Kolibri und die Orchideen. Ich bin für Luxus in jeder Gestalt (180).

In writing 'unsere […] Irene' (180, cited above), Luxemburg shows that she and Liebknecht are both in favour of weak and beautiful women, but she also makes it clear that she herself is not such a woman. But for Luxemburg, Liebknecht is – she writes: 'Und Sie, Sonitschka, werden sicher diese meine Fürsprache für holde Frauen, deren Liebenswürdigkeit ihr ausreichendes Daseinsrecht ist, unterstützen, denn bei Ihnen wird es ein Plädoyer pro domo sua sein.'[43] When Luxemburg describes an ideal woman, or, more specifically, a weak woman as a positive model, she is referring to Liebknecht and showing support for her identity as such. It seems she is actually allowing or *creating* an identity for Liebknecht; this functions as a means of encouraging and supporting Liebknecht during a distressing time, helping to steady her identity and assure her that it is acceptable and attractive to be a 'weak' woman.

Interestingly, the above quotation, in describing Liebknecht as weak, employs the attributes of beauty ('holde') and kindness ('Liebenswürdigkeit') as further

[43] p. 180: 'in eigener Sache' – Liebknecht would be pleading on behalf of herself.

characteristics of the beautiful, delicate, weak woman. These descriptions perhaps soften Luxemburg's rather harsh assumption that weak women (such as Liebknecht) are 'zu nichts gut […], als die Erde zu schmücken' (180). Such a statement may seem offensive to the twenty-first century reader, but in the context in which Luxemburg was writing, beauty was seen as an important characteristic of good womanhood.[44]

Luxemburg is not offending Liebknecht here, rather she is demonstrating the influence that she exerts over the definition of 'weakness' – here it is a positive attribute. In all the letters discussed above, she writes of the concept as feminine and infuses it with various meanings according to how she wishes to appear to her addressee. For her male addressees and Jacob it invokes frivolity, lack of self control, a dependent nature and a preoccupation with domestic rather than political matters. For Wurm, it is the opposite of Luxemburg herself, given the distance she creates between herself and the term.

Meaning is changed according to addressee, context, and to the other words that are used in the letter. In his pathbreaking 'Course in General Linguistics', Ferdinand de Saussure theorised the word, or the 'sign', as a combination of a concept (the signified), and the 'sound-image' (the signifier) that represents that concept. Saussure writes of the arbitrary relationship between the signified and signifier – concepts and the sound – images, or words, that are used to represent them are not naturally related. [45] According to Saussure, meaning is created through difference: the meaning of a word is established

[44] Campe's succinct interpretation of the 'proper' role of men and women is as follows: 'Er die Eiche, sie der Efeu.' Campe, p. 27.
[45] Ferdinand de Saussure, "Course in General Linguistics," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 79.

through its opposition to other words.[46] Since meaning is 'differential', the meaning of a word, such as 'weak', or 'feminine', can be established by its relation to the words around it.[47] For post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, meaning is endlessly deferred; it is never fixed and prone to change depending on the other signs in the narrative: 'the movement of signs defers the moment of encountering the thing itself'.[48] So we might see the meaning of *schwach* (and, indeed, of feminine) as unfixed and dependent upon a number of other factors in the narrative. *All* meaning is created through context and difference and this is by no means unique to Luxemburg's construction of the meaning of *schwach.* Although there are restrictions, the meanings of words such as 'good', 'bad', 'feminine' and 'masculine' can be altered according to the context in which they appear. But what is striking in Luxemburg's letters is the control she exerts through her redefinitions of weakness. In being able to define her friend in such a way, Luxemburg exercises a distinct control over her identity, telling her who she is and what her role in the world is. A function of the first person account is not only to define the self, then, but to classify others too.

Luxemburg's strong influence and dominance is also seen in her maternal performance with Liebknecht. She is determined to care for her and scolds her for not writing to her about her distress at visiting her husband in prison: 'Ich habe ein Anrecht, an allem, was Ihnen wehtut, teilzunehmen, und lasse meine Besitzrechte nicht kürzen!' (179). Although her tone is jokingly affectionate, there is something forceful about her desire to maintain a nurturing role with Liebknecht while in prison. Again, the letter

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[46] Ibid., p. 82.
[47] Ibid., p. 87.
[48] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Rivkin and Ryan, p. 391.

emerges as a distilled, concentrated form of maintaining relationships during absence, substituting for other forms of physical communication. Luxemburg cannot be there in person to comfort Liebknecht and cannot write as often as she would like to, so her sentiments must be condensed within the letter.

This sense of forcefulness does conjure up the concept of the domineering, 'phallic' mother too – as discussed in relation to Luxemburg's letters to Diefenbach. At the same time, Luxemburg's expressions of ardent empathy with Liebknecht's position evoke a more caring maternal performance. She assures Liebknecht that she shares her pain, even wishing that she could help by taking on her husband, Karl's, prison sentence: 'Wie gern und freudig würde ich jetzt dort im Luckauer Käfig sitzen, um es Karl abzunehmen!' (179). This seems not only to demonstrate how much Luxemburg cares but, more significantly, it conveys her will to make a martyr of herself in order to ease Sophie's (and Karl's) suffering. That situates her on the ideal side of maternal performance. But there is a fine line between ideal and transgressive maternal self-representation. Speck notes that in comforting Liebknecht by aligning herself with Karl, Luxemburg *becomes* Karl, she becomes male. Of Liebknecht's response, Speck writes: 'Wie sie ihren Mann sah, sieht sie jetzt, beim Lesen, auch ihre Freundin.'[49] Luxemburg also constructs herself as an almost superhuman protector, prepared to take on terrible punishment. In her willingness to sacrifice herself lies an implication that she has enough strength to withstand harsh prison conditions. Furthermore, Luxemburg may condone weakness in women, but she does not refer to herself as weak (unlike in her correspondence with Diefenbach et al). Her self-separation from weak women and

[49] Speck, p. 300.

Liebknecht is apparent when she states: ‘als ob schöne Frauen nicht schon deshalb ein Geschenk des Himmels wären, weil sie unsere Augen erfreuen’ (180). When Luxemburg says *unsere* this time, she does not seem to be referring to herself *and* Liebknecht, because Liebknecht is the object rather than the subject of the gaze. Luxemburg takes on the ‘masculine’ role of the observer. She thereby risks defeminising herself. However, the archetype of the protective and strong mother serves her well. She has positioned herself as a feminised protector-figure: physically and emotionally strong yet nurturing and self-sacrificing. Although Luxemburg transgresses gender boundaries, her self-characterisation as lioness or martyr (probably unconsciously) utilises potent cultural myths and seems to be there to shield her from any accusations of gender transgression.

Prison as a ‘feminising’ space?

In comparing Luxemburg’s letters to Sophie Liebknecht, which are particularly poetic and descriptive, with those written to her acquaintances in the worker’s movement, it could be argued that there exist ‘two Luxemburgs’: the compassionate, aesthetic nature-lover and the stern politician. Luxemburg seems to favour one self over the other depending on whom she is writing to. For instance, her declared approval for luxury in her letter to Liebknecht (‘Ich bin für Luxus in jeder Gestalt’) stands in direct contrast to a letter written to Marta Rosenbaum on 6 April 1915. Rosenbaum was a wealthy socialist who supported the Spartakusbund financially.[50] Given Rosenbaum’s role as benefactor, she was clearly someone whom Luxemburg wished to impress. In her letter

[50] Laschitza and Radczun, p. 43.

to Rosenbaum, Luxemburg implies that luxury is only an occasional extravagance for her.

Rosenbaum's intellectual and political status was closer to Luxemburg's than that of close friends such as Sophie Liebknecht and Hans Diefenbach. In the same letter, Luxemburg highlights her own courage, confidence and efficiency whilst in prison, as well as expressing a friendly desire to see Rosenbaum again and fondly remembering a time when they went walking together. She then goes on to describe a Turner picture that touches her deeply. Although she mentions art in this letter, as she does in much of her correspondence, Luxemburg is restrained in her enthusiasm for the painting, quickly adding: 'Aber denken Sie ja nicht, daß ich hier bloß ästhetisiere! Das sind nur manches Mal so Luxusgaben, die ich mir spende. In der Hauptsache sitze ich beim trockensten Zeug und suche >nützlich< zu sein' (52). In her correspondence with Rosenbaum, (which is tinged with irony!) Luxemburg constructs an identity that prioritises political work far above the world of art. Here, she counters the aesthetic, luxurious world with the rational political world and chooses the latter, sustaining the image of a work-oriented politician.

In her correspondence with Liebknecht, not only does Luxemburg demonstrate a more enthusiastic approach to aesthetics, but her representation of her commitment to political work is much less keen than in her correspondence with her political friends, especially when we remember her declaration to Mathilde Wurm: 'Mädchen, ich sitze *fest* im Sattel' (176, my emphasis). In a letter sent to Sophie Liebknecht on 2 May 1917, Luxemburg writes extensively about the birds and insects she sees in her garden, as well as of the pleasure that she takes in the

sunshine. She even puts her love of nature above her commitment to the party when she describes the potential extinction of birds in Germany and berates herself for being so affected:

> Aber ich bin ja natürlich krank, daß mich jetzt alles so tief erschüttert. Oder wissen Sie? Ich habe manchmal das Gefühl, ich bin gar kein richtiger Mensch, sondern auch irgendein Vogel oder ein anderes Tier in mißlungener Menschengestalt; *innerlich* fühle ich mich in so einem Stückchen Garten wie hier oder im Feld unter Hummeln und Gras viel mehr in meiner Heimat als auf einem Parteitag. Ihnen kann ich ja wohl das alles ruhig sagen: Sie werden nicht gleich Verrat am Sozialismus wittern (229, my emphasis).

Even though Luxemburg is happy to die at her post she says: 'Aber mein innerstes Ich gehört mehr meinen Kohlmeisen als den "Genossen" ' (229). Here Luxemburg reveals another 'hidden' side to her character in prioritising nature over her allegiance to the party.[51] This does not fit with how she creates herself for Mathilde Wurm and Marta Rosenbaum. But it does correspond to the self-representation she gives Liebknecht, one in which the importance of politics pales in comparison with the natural and the aesthetic world, just as it seems to for Liebknecht.

It seems that, for Luxemburg, commitment to art and nature implies a narrowing of her political commitment;[52] yet a self-representation as nature-loving, artistic and poetic dominates her letters. Even in her letters to Wurm and Rosenbaum she takes a significant interest in her natural surroundings and recalls music or art, writing descriptively, nostalgically and, it could be said, poetically. In a letter to Mathilde Wurm

[51] She made similar assertions in her letters to Luise and Karl Kautsky too according to Frölich, p. 187 and Bronner, p. 69: 'Again and again, she maintained that she was happier sitting in a garden than at a party congress.'

[52] Such a belief is not unique to an analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's letters – the lyric subject of Bertolt Brecht's 1939 poem 'Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik' speaks of the seemingly inimical relationship between aesthetics and politics. 'In meinem Lied ein Reim/Käme mir fast vor wie Übermut/ In mir streiten sich/Die Begeisterung über den blühenden Apfelbaum/Und das Ensetzen über die Reden des Anstreichers [i.e. Hitler].' Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Gedichte*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 744-5.

from 16 February 1917, she writes: ‘Ich fühle mich in der ganzen Welt zu Hause, wo es Wolken und Vögel und Menschentränen gibt’ (177), and discusses a Mörike poem at length. So the ‘feminine’, less political Luxemburg is visible in her ‘male’, political letters too. Luxemburg’s apparent commitment to these seemingly non-political areas situates her within a more conventionally feminine sphere. Statistically speaking, it is those ‘feminine’ letters to Diefenbach, Jacob and Liebknecht (as well as those to Jogiches and Kostja Zetkin) that dominate the prison sections of her *Gesammelte Briefe*.

In her prison letters to Diefenbach, Mehring, Jacob and Liebknecht, Luxemburg, while she is critical of feminine frailty, in various ways constructs a persona as feminine. This is done either through highlighting her weaknesses in order to flatter Mehring’s and Diefenbach’s masculinity, or through approving of weakness in her letters to Liebknecht, and creating an authoritative identity that *allows* Liebknecht to be weak in a time of crisis. As she flatters the men’s masculinity, so she flatters Liebknecht’s femininity. In her maternal performance with Liebknecht, she creates a potentially transgressive identity as dominant ‘phallic mother’, and as an onlooker with a‘male’ gaze. This transgression may well be counteracted by Luxemburg’s exposure of a hidden identity as aesthete and nature-lover rather than politician, which is perhaps why her letters to Liebknecht were so immediately popular: they showed the public that she was not really a politician ‘inside’, that she was feminine and caring. The letters to Diefenbach and Mehring, in which she admits an ‘inner’ femininity and weakness, serve to reinforce such an assessment.

This ‘feminine’ Luxemburg (according to those who wrote in praise of her posthumously) may dominate her *Gesammelte Briefe* as a whole, but it is her prison

letters that show her to be particularly 'feminine' and non-political. Within the prison space, Luxemburg was not allowed to write letters with political content, although she did write political pamphlets which she smuggled out. This, combined with the isolation and monotony of prison life, meant that she concentrated far more on those natural aspects around her: plants, animals, and the surrounding environment (as Lore Wolf does in my analysis in Chapter Two). As with many prison writers, Luxemburg relied too on memory in her writing, spending large portions of letters writing fondly of and recreating past events. Her reading of political texts too would have been restricted, and she read (and wrote about) many novels while in prison. According to Nettl, whereas Luxemburg's political writing became repetitive, and her political ideas stale, it was in her letters to friends in her two years at Wronke that her literary, non-political talent was at its greatest:

> Prison life, instead of stifling her, in fact enabled her to reach a spiritual and emotional maturity which is remarkable – as are the means which she developed to convey the flow of feelings and ideas. For the next two years the political aspect of her life was bound to cede primacy to the demands of a bursting personality confined in a relatively small space.[53]

This may be a rather speculative claim to make about Luxemburg's character but it does emphasise something which is indicated by Luxemburg's letters and the responses to them by Luxemburg scholars: that through prison, she is 'brought back' to the domestic, female space. In her letters to Jacob and Diefenbach, she gives the reader insight into prison's weakening influence upon her: the body searches that make her cry, her concern for her appearance, her isolation and loneliness.

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[53] Nettl, p. 402.

Conclusion: the public Luxemburg versus the personal function of her prison letters

In her letter to Mathilde Wurm however, Luxemburg explained that prison actually makes her harder: 'ich [bin] in der letzten Zeit, wenn ich schon nie weich war, hart geworden wie geschliffener Stahl' (151). This public self-representation conflicts with the suggestion that prison brings her back to femininity. The party-focused, rational politician is at odds with the private, aesthetic, feminised one. But when biographical and scholarly discourses claim that the 'real' Luxemburg was feminine, there lies therein the implicit assumption that the public, political Luxemburg is fake, a deceptive identity, a lie.

There is a scholarly and cultural split in the Rosa Luxemburg myth: the sensitive, humane female poet versus the masculinised ruthless politician. What is most interesting about some of the academic and biographical responses to Luxemburg is the suggestion that she *combines* these supposed polarities in her legendary and influential status. Frölich writes of her as a combination of the positive attributes of each sex: "The great talents of her heart and intellect and a flaming will to action united in her to a full-toned harmony. Our century will never see her like again."[54] This is reflected in how her political theses have been received. According to Georg Lukács 'she did not divide reality into two halves […] Rosa Luxemburg analysed the imperial phase of capitalism as a whole, not – as in vulgar Marxism – in its individual aspects, but as a *total process.*'[55] Radczun and Radczun apply this 'whole' identity to Luxemburg's time in prison. For them, it seems as if: 'die große Politikerin und Agitatorin begleitet wurde

[54] Frölich, p. 193.
[55] Ibid., p. 307.

von einer ‘anderen’, sensiblen Frau’ in Luxemburg’s prison letters.[56] But they insist that there is no split in Luxemburg’s personality, that both sides are intrinsic parts of her character. Indeed, they attempt to piece these ‘polar’ characteristics together under Luxemburg’s overarching political (and humane) identity by insisting that her poetic nature writing is ultimately political in its symbolism.[57] Luise Kautsky does this too in writing of Luxemburg’s political but artistic essence: ‘diese Künstlerseele war durch und durch politisch. Politisch zu denken, politisch zu handeln war ihr Lebensbedürfnis’.[58] For Kautsky and Radczun, Luxemburg is both political and artistic at heart, but if we look at Luxemburg’s self-representation in her prison letters, there is the sense that it is prison that has created this ‘whole’ Luxemburg by exposing her hidden side. Nettl declares that despite Luxemburg’s limited contact with the outside world during incarceration: ‘she was determined to live – perhaps more fully than she had ever lived before; and her friends were turned into delegates, pressed and moulded to live her life for her.’[59] Her identity as a legend and martyr is supplemented not just by her violent death, but also by these public responses to her prison letters. Cultural discourse has created a double-sided identity for Luxemburg, one which requires *both* masculine and feminine attributes in order for her to be accepted as a politically active woman and legend by her audience. The editors of her *Gesammelte Briefe* claim that it contains letters that Luxemburg wrote to those in or connected to the German worker’s

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[56] Radczun and Radczun, p. 100.
[57] Ibid, p. 106
[58] Luise Kautsky, "Einleitung," in *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky, 1896-1918* (Berlin: E. Laub, 1923), p.13. This does, however, contradict Stephen Bronner’s claim that Luise Kautsky tried to prove Luxemburg was *a*political, discussed above.
[59] Nettl, p. 414.

movement.[60] In publishing only those letters written in correlation with Luxemburg's political career, it seems Laschitza and Radczun do not provide a fully comprehensive survey of the letters that Luxemburg wrote during her life. There are no letters to her family or those friends not connected to her work, although such documents do exist.[61] The *Gesammelte Briefe* is thus a *selection* of Luxemburg's correspondence and one which focuses on those relationships connected to her political work and career. Although the emphasis has been on Luxemburg as non-political, her legendary status is fully reliant on her political relationships and political identity.

Luxemburg's prison letters give insight into how she writes of *herself* as a woman amidst these ongoing public discourses. An analysis of her self-representation problematises the 'political'/'feminine' binary proposed by some of those who opposed or supported her. It is a self-representation that negotiates between those transgressive and ideal femininities and one that blurs the boundaries between the cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity.

As with the majority of first person accounts, even when the writer is a talented rhetorician, it is important to acknowledge Luxemburg's self-representation or self-scripting as weak, strong, feminine or masculine as a valid and valuable expression of how she *feels* about herself when in communication with a particular audience.[62] In

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[60] Laschitza and Radczun, p. 47.

[61] Ettinger, pp. 66-68 and pp. 104-105: Luxemburg may have written rarely to her family members but there is correspondence between her and her parents and siblings in existence. Ettinger mentions that many of the letters written between Luxemburg and her family are unpublished or only published in a Polish edition of her collected works, edited by Feliks Tych, p. 259.

[62] Shadd Maruna has conducted extensive sociological research into the function of language and 'scripting' as a way of rehabilitating criminals after imprisonment, and, although it is problematic to apply such research to the political prisoner, Maruna's work is still of significance to my research because of the importance he places on the transformative and healing power of language. Shadd Maruna, *Making Good:*

emphasising her weakness, Luxemburg expresses her emotions and her cultural context, actively participating in that culture and highlighting a societal demand that women perform a particular type of femininity. Writing is vital for the subject to gain or re-establish a sense of control over her own life, especially since prison is a situation which strips the subject of autonomy and thus alters her sense of self. Luxemburg's mastery of language is an important means of obtaining a sense of agency and control within her restricted world. Luxemburg's words perform what J.L. Austin would describe as an 'illocutionary' function:[63] through language, she seeks to create or preserve who she wants to be – be it a powerful politician, supportive friend, or weak woman – during this time. As Luxemburg writes to Diefenbach, writing refreshes her: 'Ich fühle mich heute so einsam und muß durch Plaudern mit Ihnen ein wenig erfrischen' (263). Luxemburg's emphasis on her feminine and masculine identity, then, should not be viewed as merely a strategy for negotiating with her audience – creating a self to please her reader – but as a way of staving off both the de-feminisation and feminisation of prison, preserving that sense of self which prison has stripped her of.

A paradigm for the ideal female political prisoner of the twentieth century has been inadvertently created: one who negotiates typically masculine traits with feminine ones in order to please her audience, and to survive the damaging effects of imprisonment. In her recognition of issues related to gender, and her use of language to maintain a sense of self and a sense of agency, Luxemburg's prison letters touch on a number of key issues that we will see in the ensuing chapters. Her various self-representations as

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How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives (Washington, D.C.; London: American Psychological Association, 2001).

[63] Discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

woman and politician provide a model for other female prison writers throughout the twentieth century. It is, however, important to remember that the narratives of Luxemburg biographers and scholars contribute to this model too. Femininity is seen as the basis but it is possible for ‘transgressive’ identities to become – in Luxemburg’s case an integral – part of the self-representation.

Chapter Two: 'Das Wort schiebt sich gnädig isolierend zwischen mich und das nackte Erlebnis der Haft': narratives of survival in two prison diaries

Introduction: published letters and diaries

Much literary criticism of autobiography calls attention to the difficulty of assigning firm definitions and characteristics to the genre and its assorted sub-genres.[1] After all, the various types of diary and letter serve diverse purposes: from the community journal to the private diary, from the letter to the editor to the love letter.[2] The private letter or diary showcases an apparent spontaneity that has, time and again, been proved dubious. Robert Fothergill explains that Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) claimed to write his diary every day, but his writings are not 'the freehand improvisations they were imagined to be. Rather they are composed from notes and rough drafts.'[3] Pepys, who is often discussed by critics as the original European diarist, reporting on significant historical events, emerges as a conscious diarist. He may have claimed to write spontaneously, but did not write events and thoughts down on the day that they happened; instead he retrospectively constructed his text. Something similar can be said for the letter: for

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[1] 'Autobiography […] has norms but not rules'[1] Robert Folkenflik, *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 13.Laura Marcus notes this as well, but emphasises the 'distinctive genre of autobiographical *criticism*': Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 1. James Olney, according to H. Porter Abbot, 'has proposed shelving all restrictive definitions of autobiography and pursuing definitions at the level of subgenres': H. Porter Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," *New Literary History* 19, no. 3 (1988), p. 599.

[2] Cheryl Cline, *Women's Diaries, Journals, and Letters: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York; London: Garland, 1989), p. xiii.

[3] Robert Antony Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 42.

Cheryl Cline, both diary writing and letter writing are to be considered as constructions; both may seem to have 'the same qualities of spontaneity, effortlessness and 'artlessness'' but 'these effects are learned, practised and perfected.'[4]

Although Cline regards diaries and letters as 'art', and Fothergill highlights the conscious and constructed nature of some, Rosa Luxemburg, Luise Rinser (1911-2002) and Lore Wolf (1900-1996) participate in a tradition of writing which has not enjoyed the esteem associated with genres such as drama, prose and poetry. Those letters and diaries which are published are in most cases written by venerated writers who have already proved their worth in the 'higher' literary forms. There is, it is assumed, no particular talent or ability associated with the writing (or reading) of a diary or a letter: they are everyday activities that many people undertake. Susanne Kord identifies a 'Das kann ja jede'[5] element in the perception of the letter, one which pertains to the diary too.

The issue of audience in the diary and letter expands the issue of the text as a construction. Margo Culley explains of the diary, that:

> The presence of a sense of audience, in this form of writing as in all others, has a crucial influence over what is said and how it is said […] it shapes the selection and arrangement of detail within the journal and determines more than anything else the kind of self-construction the diarist presents.[6]

In the prison letters of Rosa Luxemburg, an awareness of her audience shaped the self-representation of the letter writer; we shall see something similar in the diaries of Rinser and Wolf. According to convention the letter is written from one party to another and the

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[4] Both quotations, Cline, p. xxiii.
[5] Susanne T. Kord, *Sich einen Namen machen: Anonymität und weibliche Autorschaft 1700-1900* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), p. 64
[6] Margo Culley, "Introduction to A Day at A Time," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 218.

diary is written to the self. But these basic characteristics are contestable, especially in prison writing: in a prison situation in which letters are not allowed, the diary can be partly used as a letter substitute (as we will see in Lore Wolf's diary), and the letter is open to the extra audience of the censor, as seen in Luxemburg's correspondence.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the personal, non-fictional diary became a more public document.[7] Indeed for the twentieth-century author, diary-writing and publication often went hand-in-hand: 'Gerade zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts verstanden mehr und mehr Schriftsteller ihr privates Empfinden als einen Appell an die Öffentlichkeit.'[8] Luxemburg was aware of an audience beyond her addressee in certain letters; for diarists such as Rinser and Wolf, who edited and published their writings themselves (unlike Luxemburg whose letters were published posthumously), the sense of a wider audience plays an even greater role in the representation of self. Rinser compiled her diary from scraps of paper written in shorthand and even added in material: into the entry from 6 November 1944 she inserts the account of her arrest and entry into prison, as well as two letters at the end. As a published document subject to retrospective editing, Wolf's diary also has a public element to it, despite her lack of experience as a writer: it is not unlikely that she inserted or omitted elements in the editing stage. The original notes or diaries cannot be seen and so what the authors

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[7] Felicity Nussbaum, "Toward Conceptualizing Diary," in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 131. This is applied specifically to Germany: according to Elke Frederiksen, diary-writing was 'one of the primary forms of expression' for writers in nineteenth-century Germany. It became an increasingly popular form of writing so that by the late 1960s and early 1970s: 'the diary developed into one of the most popular German literary genres for both female and male writers.' Elke Frederiksen, "Luise Rinser's Autobiographical Prose: Political Engagement and Feminist Awareness," in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, ed. Alice Kessler-Harris; William McBrien (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988), p. 168, note 4.

[8] Rüdiger Görner, *Das Tagebuch: Eine Einführung*. (Munich: Artemis, 1986), p. 29.

'really' wrote in prison remains a mystery.[9] In this chapter, I shall consider the final published accounts as the representations of themselves in the prison context that Rinser and Wolf wished to make public.

Female political prisoners in the Third Reich and the 'rewriting' of the self

Political prisoners made up a considerable percentage of those held in National Socialist prisons and concentration camps, especially in the pre-war years.[10] The 'political' was a type of prisoner who was set apart from the 'normal' prisoner in the Third Reich. The relationship between the two was complex and variable, as an analysis of Rinser's and Wolf's diaries will show. Wachsmann points out that sometimes political prisoners were given privileges, but sometimes it was the regular criminals who received better treatment.[11] He mentions the often tense relationship between prisoners: 'Political prisoners often referred to regular criminal inmates with open hatred, both in contemporary and in post-war accounts.'[12] What is clear is that political prisoners often saw themselves in a superior territory to the normal prisoner. Class and education play a key role in the relationship between the political prisoner and her non-political counterpart. Judith Scheffler says of the writer Agnes Smedley (1892-1950), who was imprisoned for espionage in the U.S.A in 1918: 'observing the women prisoners, she

[9] According to Luise Rinser's son, Christoph Rinser, the original diary has been destroyed as he detailed in an email from 2 July 2007: Christoph Rinser, "Re: Rinser Nachlass," ed. Kim Richmond (2007). Lore Wolf's diary remains untraceable due to the demise of the diary's publishing house.
[10] Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Hill and Wang, 2001), p. 198.
[11] Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons*, p. 125.
[12] Ibid, p. 124

notes that she was separated from them by her more highly developed ability to reason.'[13]

Rinser and Wolf were punished because their so-called political activity went against the dictates of National Socialism but the term 'political prisoner' itself can have various interpretations. The meaning of the term can change over time and according to the designator. In the National Socialist regime, for example, the reasons for 'political' imprisonment could be fairly trivial, such as listening to foreign radio stations or expressing anti-Nazi opinions in casual conversation. The punishment for such behaviour was particularly harsh because of the threat that activism posed to the volatile National Socialist dictatorship. Rinser and Wolf were luckier than many political prisoners in that they escaped with their lives. Wolf was particularly fortunate to escape a death sentence for her anti-fascist campaigning, since most of her comrades who were caught by the Gestapo were executed. Although the term 'political prisoner' is open to different interpretations, it can carry with it connotations of involvement in the traditionally male sphere of politics, indicating that any woman labelled as such has engaged in behaviour outwith her assigned gender role. But, especially during the Third Reich, little 'political' activity was required to earn the label political prisoner. In other words, there was less gender transgression connoted by the political prisoner label during the Third Reich than we might be tempted to assume. Furthermore, both female 'criminal' and political prisoners were not at all uncommon in Third Reich Germany, given the dramatic increase in the rate of imprisonment of women during World War

[13] Judith Scheffler, "Agnes Smedley's 'Cell-Mates'," in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, ed. Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien (New York; London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 201.

Two. Wachsmann explains that during the first half of 1943 'some 40% of convicted Germans were female.'[14] Wolf and Rinser are two amongst thousands of women convicted of either 'crimes' or political crimes.

The criminal label, when associated with women, has historically carried with it connotations of a specifically sexual deviance: something that is not implied by the political label. However, being imprisoned carries with it implications of criminality, despite the seeming superiority of being a political prisoner, and can force a stigmatised criminal identity on the prisoner. Rinser and Wolf were writing at a time when essentialist ideas about female criminality were culturally embedded and had not yet been disputed from a feminist viewpoint. Indeed, unlike the progressive and liberal Weimar Republic of the 1920s, National Socialism retreated into essentialist gender values of the nineteenth century, which said women's 'natural' place was in the home and producing children. Emphasis was on the value of the female body in reproduction while Goebbels declared the running of National Socialism itself to be an entirely masculine affair.[15]

Within the still-influential sphere of nineteenth-century positivist criminology it was claimed that women were mentally deficient and less developed than their male counterparts. It was thought that women committed crime as a consequence of their biology, for example that menstruation supposedly caused a potentially deadly and murderous imbalance in the woman's mood.[16] Female criminality was explained in

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[14] Wachsmann, p. 221.
[15] Erin Krumel, *Into Silence: Feminism Under the Third Reich* (2001, accessed June 2007) http://www.loyno.edu/history/journal/Kruml.html
[16] Springer, p. 71.

terms of sex and also madness, which, it was claimed, was linked back to the sexually deviant female body.[17] The female criminal was often seen as either psychologically damaged or as a dehumanised monster, (such as the heroine in Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* plays which appeared in Germany at the start of the twentieth century). Imprisonment, with its connotations of criminality, invokes stereotypes of the deviant woman and imposes a stigmatised identity upon the female prisoner.

But it is not only through language that an identity as criminal or prisoner is imposed upon the subject, it is through her physical positioning within the total institution. That she is in prison in the first place imposes a criminal or carceral identity upon her. She is not only rewritten, she is also re-located. It is only through examining her use of language rather than her physical location that the literature scholar is able to evaluate how she deals with imprisonment. Despite this restriction, it is important to remember the significant weight that her geographical location in prison will have on her sense of self. If the prisoner is 'rewritten' by imprisonment and the stigma associated with it, as Paul Gready puts it,[18] then there is the possibility of resistance in her own rewriting of herself. Gready does not refer to the effect that the physical relocation of the prisoner into the carceral space can have on his or her sense of self, but it seems that writing can contribute to resisting this too. Cline suggests of the female diarist: 'She is the central figure and everyone else – mothers, husbands, children – are secondary characters, perceived through her eyes, interpreted through the pages of her book.'[19] Although the diary may be seen as a non-public, modest, less valuable form of literature, Cline makes

[17] Ibid, p. 74.
[18] Gready, p. 492. As discussed in more detail in the Introduction.
[19] Cline, p. xiii.

us aware of the agency that the subject acquires in writing it. The diary writer is monologic and at the centre of their text: this can make the diary a particularly empowering form of writing. Language becomes a crucial tool for the female prisoner to create her life and to resist the effects that incarceration has on her identity. Language, however, is not the *only* tool of representing resistance; it can be enacted through art, music, sound and physical movement. The language of the published text serves an important function for the text's author and, more importantly, it is accessible to the researcher in the form of written material. I compare the different ways in which Rinser and Wolf use language to create versions of their identities, but remain aware that there are other non-textual means of self-representation possible to them.

Although the debates surrounding the definition of autobiography continue to have relevance, it seems more pertinent to ask not so much what autobiography *is* but what it 'does', or more specifically, what the writer is doing (unconsciously or otherwise) when she writes of her life experience. In *Autobiographical Acts,* Elizabeth Bruss posed this question in her analysis of four autobiographical texts, using J.L. Austin's theory of the illocutionary act or speech act. In focussing on the illocutionary, it is possible to see speech, and by extension autobiography, not just as a statement but as an action.[20] Bruss questions what kind of action an autobiographical text performs, what the intentions behind it were, as well as the different ways in which those intentions are enacted, showing the various ways in which: 'the communicative unit not only states but

[20] See: Austin, Urmson, and Sbisà, in which Austin explains: 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something,' p. 6.

performs'.[21] I shall now examine the autobiographical acts of two female political prisoners in their construction of diaries as a response to incarceration.

Luise Rinser's *Gefängnistagebuch*

Soon after publishing her first novel in 1941, Luise Rinser was prohibited by the Nazis from writing. In October 1944 she was arrested by the Gestapo for expressing anti-Nazi views and taken to Traunstein women's prison in Bavaria. There she awaited sentencing for high treason. Shortly after arriving in prison, Rinser found a pencil and paper hidden under a floorboard in her prison cell and soon started writing her diary secretly in abbreviated form on whatever scraps of paper she could find. In writing clandestinely, Rinser risked punishment, even death, if discovered, but also avoided any official censorship, unlike Luxemburg. The end of the war brought her freedom from prison and possibly saved her from a death sentence.

Rinser's diary was among the first post-1945 publications in West Germany to document experiences during the Third Reich, and has met with continuing popular acclaim.[22] It has also been taught in schools across Germany and is currently in its twenty-third printing. The prison diary has a significant place within Rinser's life's work. She had published her first book, a well-received novel called *Die gläsernen*

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[21] Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," p.600 and Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), especially the introduction.

[22] Sigrid Weigel, "Luise Rinser," in *Luise Rinser, Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Hans-Rüdiger Schwab (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1986), p. 142. The diary was also published in the GDR in 1967.

Ringe, in 1941.[23] The *Gefängnistagebuch* was her second major publication. In the decades thereafter she published more than thirty major texts and was awarded numerous literature prizes.[24] Much of Rinser's fiction contains autobiographical elements and she published a number of diaries and autobiographies throughout her life. The experience of writing and releasing the prison diary seems to have had a significant influence on her subsequent life: Rinser writes in the foreword to the first edition of her prison diary: 'Für mich wurde der Aufenthalt im Gefängnis zur Wende meines Lebens' (14).

Rinser constructs her diary as the point from which much of her subsequent work and life was shaped. Despite this, as well as its continuing popularity, surprisingly little in-depth scholarly engagement with the diary has been undertaken, perhaps because of an academic focus on accounts of Third Reich concentration camps rather than prisons. Analysis focuses instead on Rinser's other work, especially novels such as *Mitte des Lebens* (1950) and *Mirjam* (1983) and any criticism of her autobiographical work is confined to that written in the decades after her release from prison, most notably her later diary *Baustelle* (1970).[25] The few critical responses to Rinser's prison diary tend towards the descriptive and concentrate on the text's supposedly factual, realistic depictions of prison life in 1940s Germany – a common tendency in the criticism of

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[23] Stephanie Grollman, *Das Bild des "Anderen" in den Tagebüchern und Reiseberichten Luise Rinsers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), p. 10.
[24] Ibid., p. 13.
[25] See Hans-Rüdiger Schwab, *Luise Rinser, Materialien zu Leben und Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1986), and Albert August Scholz, *Luise Rinsers Leben und Werk: Eine Einführung* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Peerless Press, 1968), for an indication of which Rinser texts are the focus of academic attention.

much non-literary autobiographical writing.[26] Rinser herself testifies to the diary's authenticity in her foreword to the first edition: 'Was hier berichtet wird, ist Tatsache, nicht Literatur' (13).[27] Such a concern with the factual correlates with the *Dokumentarliteratur* or *dokumentarische Literatur* movement, already popular in the Weimar Republic of the 1920s, but reaching its peak in West Germany during the 1960s. Its literature was created for political purposes and made from 'real-life' documents; it was most commonly seen in works of drama (Peter Weiss' *Die Ermittlung* (1964) being one of the better known works) and claimed to be closer to the 'truth' than fictional literature.[28] The trend for *Dokumentarliteratur* reflects widespread beliefs in a distinct split between the factual and the aesthetic. Rinser makes it clear that she is on the side of the objective and factual in her diary: the majority of the text is taken up with describing the people (mostly women, including the guards) and the grim conditions of the prison. Rinser writes that she is obsessed with others' stories and makes repeated reference to her thirst for knowledge of other people: 'Da meine Neugierde, Menschen und Schicksale kennenzulernen, unüberwindlich ist, gelang es mir, in aller Kürze aus heimlich geflüsterten Sätzen eine Menge zu erfahren' (30). Instead of being a creative writer, Rinser represents herself as a reporter, who will risk anything in order to document real prison conditions.

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[26] Elke Frederiksen, "Luise Rinser," in *Neue Literatur der Frauen: Deutschsprachige Autorinnen der Gegenwart*, ed. Heinz Puknus (Munich: Beck, 1980), and Albert Scholz's work and are two prime examples.

[27] This emphasis on the factual is not unusual in the field of prison writing, as Nicola Keßler explores in relation to the prison narratives of post-1945 West German prison writers Ernst S. Steffen and Günter Wallraff: Keßler, p. 474.

[28] Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Stephan Reinhardt, *Dokumentarliteratur* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1973), p. 8.

It is problematic to view first-person accounts as 'factual' or objective, and an exploration of the text's subjectivity prevents the assumption that they are the one 'real' account of the events they describe. Sidonie Smith states that autobiographical telling is not 'a 'self-expressive' act' because there is not one essential inner self being expressed, as some autobiographical theory assumes.[29] This is in-keeping with what Smith describes as the third generation of autobiographical criticism, which incorporates structuralist and postructuralist theory. The second generation of criticism assumed a belief in 'the referentiality of language and […] in the authenticity of the self.'[30] But the third challenges these assumptions: identity does not exist outside language, multiple identities are possible and one single truth is not: 'The autobiographical text becomes a narrative artifice, privileging a presence, or identity, that does not exist outside language.'[31] In this theoretical field, no one narrative represents the ultimate truth, just as no one self-representation can be said to ultimately represent the self, since the self is, in its very nature, unfixed and subject to change. Instead of one truth, one identity, there are different truths representing differing subjectivities.

Rather than being 'factual' (as she claims), Rinser's diary is a particularly subjective account, as the few more careful scholarly references to the issues it presents show. For example, Sigrid Weigel makes brief reference to the superior attitude that Rinser takes towards others in some of her autobiographical literature, including the

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[29] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 108.
[30] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 5.
[31] Ibid., p. 5.

Gefängnistagebuch.[32] This, although a valid point (as will be shown later), by no means represents an extensive engagement with Rinser's diary. However, it does suggest that, far from reporting 'factually', Rinser injects a distinct level of subjectivity into her text. I aim to explore the subjectivity inherent in Rinser's reportage of events, others' stories and her own place within the prison, looking at the ways in which she selects what she wishes to say about others and herself. Rinser may not be at the centre of her diary in terms of the descriptions she provides of prison life, but whatever is written, even if Rinser does not mention herself, helps create the self that she presents to the reader.

It is important to consider the self-referential function of Rinser's text, in other words, to examine her autobiographical act. Rinser herself points out that diary-writing protects her from the starkness of the prison experience: 'Das Wort schiebt sich gnädig isolierend zwischen mich und das nackte Erlebnis der Haft.'[33] The diary serves a cathartic, comforting purpose, as does documenting (and hearing) other prisoners' stories. Further comfort and strength comes from being a writer: the thought of writing her experiences down in a fictional form is a survival technique that puts her outwith and above the situation that she describes:

> Manchmal tröstet mich nichts als der Gedanke, daß ich all diese Erlebnisse eines Tages, falls ich diesem Verfahren entrinnen sollte, als Roman oder Erzählung gestalten werde […] aber das Geheimnis dieses Trostes liegt darin, daß es nicht nur mein dahinschwindendes *Selbstbewußtsein stärkt*, sondern auch mich schon jetzt, während des Erlebens stellt, so daß ich nicht mehr nur leide, sondern bereits, *halbwegs über dem Leiden stehend*, es gestalte (63, my italics).

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[32] Weigel, "Luise Rinser," p. 148. Also see Manfred Jurgensen, *Das fiktionale Ich: Untersuchungen zum Tagebuch* (Bern: Francke, 1979), pp. 266-268.
[33] Luise Rinser, *Gefängnistagebuch*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002), p. 17. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

The diary allows her to bring her observations and judgements of others into existence. At one point, Rinser questions whether three and a half years in prison will do anything to help a cell-mate who has been convicted of infanticide, then she adds: 'Ich möchte kein Richter sein' (39). Despite what Rinser would have the reader believe, she does judge: her diary allows her to be the superior watcher. For example, her fellow prisoner, Lotte, starts criticising National Socialism and Rinser decides whether Lotte's line of reasoning is valid: 'Ihre Argumente waren nicht immer stichhaltig.' (68) Rinser's diary is rife with authorial and didactic statements about the world and human nature. When she hears the story about her cell-mate's imprisonment for infanticide she declares: 'Der Mensch ist zu wilden, dunklen Handlungen fähig' (39) – this refers not only to some of her fellow prisoners but to the guards of the National Socialist regime. Rinser creates herself as an authority through the act of diary-writing and, later, in her location as a political prisoner; I shall argue that she gains a level of control over her situation in being able to create a satisfactory version of herself within the diary.

The dehumanisation and defeminisation of imprisonment

Wachsmann writes of the changes implemented in the penal system during the National Socialist era: 'the instruction to prison officials in the 1923 guidelines to treat inmates in a 'humane' manner was replaced in the 1934 regulations with the demand that imprisonment had to be a 'painful evil'.'[34] Rinser's diary demonstrates the dehumanisation and degradation imposed on the prisoner. One of many examples

[34] Wachsmann, p. 81.

documents how they are left in extremely cold conditions after a communal shower: 'Offenbar hält man es für unmöglich, daß Gefangene ebenso unter der Kälte leiden können wie Freie. Wir scheinen eine niedriger entwickelte Art von Menschen zu sein' (100). In Rinser's depictions, the prisoner is not worthy of the respect shown to 'real' people, exemplified further in the humiliation she describes on arrival when she is forced to strip and deprived of most of her possessions (61). Alongside the dehumanisation of imprisonment, Rinser mentions the effect that it has on her perception of herself as a woman. When her husband 'K' (the writer Klaus Hermann) comes to visit, Rinser writes: 'K war entsetzt über mein Aussehen, vor allem über die vielen grauen Haare, die ich bekommen habe […] an seinen kummervollen Blicken merkte ich, daß er mich häßlich fand' (130). Particularly because she is a woman (and in line with expected notions of how women should look), Rinser feels shame at her deteriorating appearance: for her, an aspect of her femininity is lost because of her incarceration.[35]

Rinser mentions that she is referred to as a criminal on numerous occasions during her incarceration. She describes an incident in which she and her fellow prisoners are led through a busy street on their way to work – a woman on the street declares: 'Ach was. Zuchthäusler sind's, Diebinnen halt oder so was.' (147) Name-calling from members of the public has a great effect on Rinser: an old man wearing a National Socialist badge sees her and some other prisoners when they are on their way to work and hurls abuse at them. Rinser reports shouting out defensively: 'Es laufen eine Menge Leute in Freiheit

[35] Rinser's marriage to K was a fake one in order to prevent him from being arrested for being a homosexual, so this point is rather problematic, although I believe it still stands as a valid remark about her femininity.

herum, die mit mehr Grund im Gefängnis sitzen müßten als wir' (85). Rinser's account of her angry, defensive reaction shows that her experience in prison threatens her sense of self, especially when people call her a criminal in a *public* setting. Within the prison itself, prisoners are insulted by the guards using sexual terms of abuse: one calls them 'schlampige Weibsbilder.'(100) As mentioned above, early criminologists proposed a link between female criminality and active female sexuality, with prostitution discussed as the female manifestation of criminality.[36] Given this influential cultural discourse, imprisonment carries with it labelling as criminal and deviantly sexual. It is the task of Rinser's diary to counteract such accusations to herself and a wide audience and to represent herself as a non-criminal, 'good' woman. Although I focus on issues of gender, Rinser's diary also functions as a means of proving to herself and to her readership that she is a human being worthy of respect. Rinser shouts back at the old man who shouts abuse at her: 'Wir sind Menschen wie andere. Sie wissen nicht, weshalb wir im Gefängnis sitzen' (85).

Non-ideal prisoners

Rinser's extensive descriptions of her fellow prisoners often invoke negative stereotypes of femininity, including that of the prattling, gossipy woman: 'Die anderen schwatzen' (44). Rinser's fellow prisoners (and guards) are also described as stupid – in her description of Resi's involvement with a young man and her subsequent arrest, Rinser writes: 'der junge Mann war Deserteur und hatte obendrein sich und Resi von

[36] Springer, p. 71.

Lebensmitteldiebstählen ernährt. Resi behauptet, sie habe nichts gewußt von allem. Es ist ihrer Dummheit zuzutrauen' (45). Rinser's *Gefängnistagebuch* presents numerous references to her fellow prisoners' sex lives. Resi's 'Dummheit' (45) is presented alongside details of her two illegitimate children and the possibility that she may be pregnant again. Rinser clearly disapproves of their sexual conduct. Of Mariechen, she says 'aber sie ist, was ihr erotisches Leben betrifft, ein leichtes Tuch' (55). In fact, Rinser aligns criminal behaviour with deviant sexuality, drawing striking parallels with the 'findings' of much early criminology. She accusingly and judgementally describes Susi as 'schlicht und einfach eine Diebin. Außerdem ist sie mannstoll' (77). Susi's desire for men is, for Rinser, yet another deviance on a par with stealing.

Not only does Rinser represent her fellow prisoners as highly sexualised, she claims that they are in need of psychiatric treatment instead of penal sentencing: 'Viele Delikte sind in einem Zustand begangen worden, der den Psychiater mehr angeht als den Richter.' (53) Rinser's view here correlates, to some extent, with later theories of the modern judicial system (of the 1960s and 70s) in which, according to Gelfland, there was a 'change in emphasis from the physiological to the psychological' (61). Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* details how punishment changed from the physical torture of the pre-industrial era into modernity's notions of psychological rehabilitation in the punishment of both men and women. Rinser's descriptions draw more parallels with the theories of early criminologists, who claimed that women's crime and hysteria were closely connected, because female criminality was so often linked to a woman's

body and to her apparently inferior, weak mind.[37] Rinser invokes gender stereotypes in her descriptions of her fellow prisoners: 'Lotte tut mir unendlich leid. Sie ist hysterisch, unberechenbar, streitsüchtig…' (49). Lotte was arrested for fraudulent activities and Rinser implies that a secret but significant mental trauma led her to such criminal behaviour. Rinser's description of Mariechen – arrested for having an affair with a French man (whilst married to a violent, unfaithful SS officer) and having a subsequent abortion – blends a description as hysterical with a high sexual drive, as the positivist criminologists Lombroso and Ferrero did: 'Sie weinte und lachte abwechselnd, scheint ein wenig hysterisch und ist offenbar mannstoll' (55).

The ideal female political prisoner

In resisting the criminal label imposed upon her by imprisonment, Rinser uses several devices to separate herself from her criminal cell-mates. She writes of herself as non-criminal, for example when a priest comes to hear confessions: 'Mag sein, daß Gefangene mit wirklichen Vergehen großen Trost dabei finden, zu beichten' (117). Unlike the 'real' criminals, Rinser has nothing to confess. The first diary entry confirms her identity as a specific and detached type of prisoner through her observation that a guard labels her 'eine Politische' (17). Rinser asserts her status and her 'real' label right from the start of the text, giving the reader and herself no doubt as to her status in their interpretation of the ensuing account. The political prisoner has a superior status both for Rinser and, according to her, for her fellow prisoners. Rinser does not use the term

[37] Ibid., p. 74.

'class' as a determiner, but, in her comments on intellectual ability, she does imply that she occupies a middle-class position with most of her fellow prisoners in a lower class. This is demonstrated in Rinser's power struggle with the prison cook, a woman interned for stealing children's provisions, and described with contempt. On one occasion, Rinser asks her mockingly if she is a political prisoner in order to humiliate her (101). This episode illustrates the power to be gained by the author in highlighting her political status, not just in her isolated dealings with the cook but in a more widespread sense: such statements contribute to her general performance as a political prisoner. Rinser's diary represents the political prisoner as more intelligent than her criminal counterparts. In one entry a guard mocks Rinser and the one other 'genuine' political prisoner's intellectual discussion: 'Politisieren, nichts wie politisieren' (106). Rinser responds patronisingly and, indeed, provocatively: 'Ja Fräulein H, wir sind auch gern bereit, Sie ein wenig aufzuklären' (106). For Rinser, political discussion, and its connection to her status as a political prisoner, is related to intellect and education, something that the guard, and many of Rinser's fellow prisoners, lack. Indeed, Rinser fears she will lose her intellect, she does not want to end up like the other prisoners: at one point she discovers that she has forgotten how to read since being in prison. She warns herself against becoming more like the others: 'Ich muß sehr achtgeben, daß ich nicht so stumpf werde wie sie' (103).

The repressive nature of the dictatorial National Socialist regime meant that one was likely to be severely punished and labelled a political prisoner for even the most minor of subversive behaviours. Rinser writes that a wide range of prohibited acts – including trading on the black market, listening to illegal radio stations, relationships with

foreigners and speaking out against the regime or the war – led to labelling as a political prisoner or a war criminal, and claims that three quarters of those in Traunstein prison are there for 'political' reasons (126). For Rinser, and implicitly for the rest of the prisoners, being political is fashionable in prison: 'politisch zu sitzen gilt nämlich als vornehm.' (81). The use of 'vornehm' highlights the political prisoner's association with a higher social class than that of the other prisoners. Rinser, however, does not locate all political prisoners on the same high level as herself: 'Frau H ist eine >Politische<. Allerdings scheint ihr Verbrechen recht lächerlich und ihre politische Einstellung äußerst fragwürdig.' (46) Frau H may have been a pioneering National Socialist but she was imprisoned as a political (i.e. anti-Nazi) prisoner because she listened to prohibited radio stations. Rinser is suspicious of the other 'Politischen' because of their minor political 'crimes' and because they lie about their political prisoner status. One such example is Susi, who told Rinser she deserted her post as a Red Cross worker but, as Rinser discovers, was actually a thief (77). 'Wirtin B' is another dubious political: 'sie sagt >politisch< […] Mag sein.' (90). Rinser's designation of her cellmate as 'Wirtin' implies that, because of her 'uneducated' profession, 'Wirtin B' does not belong to the higher class of 'real' political prisoners such as herself.

In the diary, Rinser writes of herself and 'Frau R' as the real political prisoners. Frau R is the only other inmate whom Rinser shows respect towards in her account. Frau R, in contrast to the other prisoners, 'spricht mit niemand, sieht hochmütig und kühl über alle hinweg, scheint fortwährend inständig und ingrimmig mit irgendeinem Gedanken beschäftigt zu sein […] Ich müßte mich sehr täuschen, wenn sie nicht eine Politische ist' (82). Frau R matches Rinser's criteria for how an ideal political prisoner should behave.

Interestingly, the criteria for such an identity involve a level of arrogance and separation of the self from other prisoners – which Rinser has already displayed in her interactions with the cook. Whereas other prisoners are often characterised as gossipy, Rinser never describes herself, or Frau R, in such a way. Furthermore, Rinser's 'intellectual' profession as an author not only separates her from the situation and puts her above the suffering but it also allows her to place herself on a level above her fellow prisoners.

The madness of other prisoners stands in direct contrast to Rinser herself. Whereas many of her fellow prisoners and their stories are confused, Rinser remarks on her own calmness during her cross-examination and subsequent arrest. Of the interrogation she states: 'Ich ließ mich nicht verwirren.' (57) Rinser records that she was strong enough to pull herself together at her arrest: 'In diesem Augenblick war ich einer Ohnmacht nahe, aber ich faßte mich sofort und bat ihn, noch einmal nach Hause zu dürfen.' (58). She represents herself as the strong, reliable, rational one in prison. Near the end of the diary she writes of her depression and her cell-mates' surprise at this: 'Zum erstenmal war ich trostbedürftig, aber niemand wollte daran glauben' (154).

In Rinser's first cell she describes the drawings that previous inmates made on the walls. There are 'obszöne Bilder von verschiedener Hand' (19), detailing the sexual fantasies of other women. Rinser writes: 'Ich wundere mich darüber, daß man hier noch eine andere Begierde empfinden kann als die nach der Freiheit.' Rinser is concerned with freedom rather than sex: she represents herself as rather prudish, as well as judgemental about the pictures which she says are 'naiv und überdeutlich.' Rinser later makes direct reference to her own 'Prüderie' (66) showing that she is aware that her sexual morals differ from those of her fellow prisoners. Rinser constructs herself as

more intellectual and rational than her fellow prisoners, but she emphasises her stupidity when it comes to sexual matters. At one point the cook implies that she is sexually attracted to their priest, a suggestion that Rinser does not understand: 'Ich bin viel dümmer als die meisten hier.' (118) Despite having two children, Rinser is adamant about her sexual inexperience. The culmination of this comes in her rendering of an incident in which 'die Schmiede' (a group of women who indulge in sexual activity with each other in their cell) give a present to Rinser's table at lunch. Rinser has no idea what it is when it is unwrapped:

> Nachdem die äußere Hülle gefallen war, kam ein längliches Ding zum Vorschein, das mit Kreuzbändern gebunden war. Es sah aus wie ein Wickelkind. Ich staunte. Wozu das? Plötzlich ein wildes Gelächter der anderen rings um mich. Ich begriff nichts. Man belehrte mich sanft über den Zweck dieses Dings. Es war ein künstlicher Phallus (141).

Rinser comes across as a naïve, almost childlike character who has to be gently educated by her less intellectual, more sexually experienced, more criminal fellow prisoners about sex toys. Elissa Gelfland, one of the few academics writing about women's prison narratives, uses the example of Madame Roland (1754-1793), a political prisoner involved in the French Revolution, who, in her memoirs:

> uses co-prisoners as a contrasting means to support her claim to womanhood, a strategy that is common to the solipsistic focus of many female prison texts […] Roland portrays the other women as archetypal female deviants, that is, debauched, vulgar and insensitive […] These women are also portrayed as stupid, possessing to an extreme degree the criminal woman's supposed mental inactivity. In this way, Roland, by her superior sensitivity and intelligence, can stand in marked contrast to her criminal sisters.[38]

[38] Elissa Deborah Gelfand, "Imprisoned Women: Toward a Socio-Literary Feminist Analysis," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), p. 196.

Rinser differs from Roland in that many of her co-prisoners are in prison for war crimes because of the National Socialist regime, yet Rinser treats them as if they are 'real' female criminals. Both Rinser and Roland use the criminalised representations of their fellow prisoners to construct themselves in a more ideal light.

National Socialist criminals

Mary Bosworth writes that female political and non-political prisoners: 'rely on notions of an idealised femininity to survive imprisonment which are often similar to those used to punish them.'[39] Criticism of others through the use of prescribed gender roles can be a key tool in gaining agency while in prison. Judith Butler's theory of gender performance posits that those who do not perform their prescribed gender role correctly can be exposed to societal punishment.[40] Representation of gender conformity or transgression thus acts as a means through which power can be obtained or lost. This is at its most perceptible in the *Gefängnistagebuch* in Rinser's derogatory representations of the women who oversee her at work in the bakery or at the female guards in prison. She represents National Socialism and its followers as criminal, as her angry reaction to the old man's abuse demonstrates (85). Furthermore, Rinser's descriptions of women using stereotypes of criminality and femininity are not just confined to other prisoners. She describes the guards and those who support National Socialism as stupid – one female guard is described as 'mehr dumm als bösartig' (130). Although some non-political prisoners are referred to as stupid, the word 'dumm' is used predominantly in relation to

[39] Bosworth, p. 4.
[40] Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," p. 405.

situations caused by the severity and senselessness of the regime: Rinser mentions Frau H's 'Dummheit' in still supporting Hitler (121). In addition to this, Rinser criticises one of the female guards using stereotypes of the gossipy woman: 'Sie plaudert mit uns auf ihre unangenehme Art, die sich aus plumper, schwatzhafter Anbiederung und künstlichem Autoritätsanspruch mischt. Sie ist unbeschreiblich dumm' (30). Rinser dehumanises the female guards: she says of the guard's face: 'Es ist nicht häßlich, es ist nicht einmal böse, es ist nur trocken, ausdruckslos, tot.' She also describes her as an 'Aufsichtsmaschine' (31), saying that it is a sense of duty ('Pflichtbewußtsein') not evil that causes her to act in such a cruel way. Rinser even expresses sympathy with the guard because, as Rinser puts it, she is unable to experience emotions (31). But the description of the female guard as non-human and lacking empathy with others makes her seem more criminal. The guard is criminalised and dehumanised by Rinser, which serves to counter that dehumanisation and criminalisation imposed on Rinser by the prison authority.

The woman who runs the bakery where Rinser and her fellow prisoners are forced to work is described as 'eine Art Dragoner, die einst Dienstmädel bei dem Besitzer war, ein Kind von ihm bekam und zum Lohn dafür nun die schöne Stelle innehat' (94). Here Rinser demonstrates that the 'Dragoner' sold herself sexually to the factory owner, produced a child for him and thereby took charge of the factory – so she is a type of prostitute, which, in early criminology, represents the archetypal female criminal.[41] Nazi women and deviant sexuality are further amalgamated in the entry about Frau L, the youngest auxiliary supervisor ('Hilfsaufseherin') who is 'ohne Zweifel mannstoll' (132).

[41] Springer, p. 68.

Frau L flirts with a man and he mocks her. Rinser is a witness to this incident and is disgusted by Frau L's flirtatious behaviour and ignorance that she is being made a fool of: 'Ich habe noch nie einen so stupiden Menschen gesehen. Und so jemand setzt man als Aufseherin über uns.' (133)

Rinser highlights Frau L's masculine characteristics and the fact that Frau L has great power over her: 'Wir sind ihrer Willkür, ihrer rohen, gedankenlosen Macht ausgeliefert. Sie hat Schuhe Nummer 43, eine Stimme wie ein Mann und dumme, vorstehende Glotzaugen.' Frau L is clearly masculinised by Rinser in her descriptions of her blatant sexuality and in her manly appearance. Rinser's disgust reflects how 'deviant' gender performances are punished in the outer world and her employment of such imagery allows her to use Frau L's traditionally unfeminine characteristics as a weapon against her. After all, Rinser is a desperate prisoner struggling for some sort of authority in a situation of incarceration, which robs her of autonomy. Rinser is the one in prison, being punished. By writing disparagingly about Frau L's masculinity, Rinser turns the tables: her diary allows her to castigate the figure of authority who is part of the regime that punishes her. Throughout the diary as a whole, Rinser increases her own status by devaluing others in terms of gender – this happens not just with the rather extreme case of Frau L, but with most other women who she describes. Rinser's resistance strategy is to dehumanise and defeminise those who oppress her or threaten her sense of self, as seen in her dehumanisation and defeminisation of the guards. Rinser uses the same method in her descriptions of the male figures of authority: In one entry, the prison supervisor – a man – is kind to Rinser, but changes radically when a female guard appears, and seems afraid of her (95). Rinser is not as hateful of the men as she is of the

women, but she still describes their fear of the female guards, which not only makes the female guards seem more terrifying, but also acts as a method for punishing the male authorities by emasculating them.

The Nazi women are representatives of a system that Rinser and her (eventual) readers deplore; they are worse than the prisoners they oversee. In Rinser's diary, National Socialism is represented as the greatest, most inhumane crime; its representatives are the worst criminals. Such a representation highlights the historically variant nature of both crime and stigma: during the Third Reich, Rinser and those who shared her political convictions were seen as criminals and stigmatised by the government and much of the German population, but in the decades afterwards they were lauded as politically persecuted and righteous individuals. Rinser may not have seen herself as a criminal at the time, but writing her diary allowed her to preserve this innocent identity during a time in which she was not certain that National Socialism would be defeated and in which she was labelled deviant.

Conflict and self-awareness

Although Rinser is particularly damning in her descriptions of those who support National Socialism, she does show sympathy with many of those prisoners whom she observes and judges. Rinser notes that it is because of prison that she has come to develop a more sympathetic attitude: she has come to see many as victims who have been caught in a trap: 'Wie leicht habe ich früher die Menschen abgeurteilt. Nun sehe ich jeden Menschen wie in einem Netz gefangen.' (53) Within the microcosm of

imprisonment, Rinser attempts to realign how she sees her fellow prisoners: here she sees them as victims, albeit criminalised ones. There is a sense that she makes a conscious attempt to become part of that world that she derides and to discard some beliefs she held in the outer world. For instance, she is aware of her disapproving attitude towards sex and relates it to her bourgeois prejudices, in her reaction to Mariechen's and her friend's conversation about sex and abortion: 'Ich muß hier immer wieder einmal die Reste meiner bürgerlichen Vorurteile überwinden. Ich sah das Leben nie so, wie ich es hier zu sehen bekomme: nackt, häßlich, hart, aber unverfälscht und wirklich' (66). She shows awareness that prison brings out her own instincts of self-preservation, when she admits that she secretly swaps her mattress for her cellmate's more comfortable one: 'Man verliert allmählich das Bewußtsein der Menschenwürde […] Es bedarf großer geistiger Reserven, um hier Mensch zu bleiben. Erst im Gefängnis lernt man seine bösen Instinkte kennen. Ich beobachte das an mir selbst.' (54) Despite her persistently condescending attitude towards those around her, she admits that she cannot be superior to those who supervise and incarcerate her because she fantasises about putting Nazis in prison: 'Es besteht für mich nicht der leiseste Anlaß zur Überheblichkeit' (118). Peter Paul Zahl's concept of *Unterleben* is useful within this context. *Unterleben* describes the process by which the author adapts or submits herself to the forces of imprisonment, whilst simultaneously resisting it. In Rinser's prison diary, there is a conflict between this assimilated, integrated self and her 'outside' or previous self. Her diary shows how she uses narrative as a means of *Unterleben:* of joining in prison life whilst simultaneously attempting to resist it through narrative.

Rinser attempts to be part of the prisoner group, despite simultaneously separating herself from and deriding her fellow prisoners. She includes herself in the prison group when ruminating about what the rich factory owners must think about the prisoners: 'Wahrscheinlich halten sie *uns* Gefangene obendrein für dumm und ungefährlich.' (152, my italics). Rinser belongs to the prisoner collective and there is solidarity involved in this. In highlighting her socialist beliefs, she narrows the ideological distance between herself and her fellow prisoners: 'Wäre ich nicht längst Sozialistin, ich wäre es heute geworden' (95). She is accused by some prisoners of being a 'feine Dame' and reacts angrily 'Ich war ärgerlich, denn ich hatte mich nie als >feine Dame< gegeben' (93). Rinser's anger reveals her desire to belong, but in mentioning this incident she simultaneously emphasises her difference from those around her. The diary therefore performs a double function: it allows her to represent herself as both part of a group but also superior to that group.

This conflict between Rinser's assimilated self and her non-prison or resistant self is in evidence throughout the diary: her disapproval and derision of her fellow prisoners exists alongside her solidarity with them and her desire to be part of their group. Rinser shows the reader the conflict that she faces when she and a few other prisoners visit the dentist. Rinser acknowledges that she is ashamed of her dirty appearance next to the civilians: 'Ich kam mir recht sonderbar vor, als ich in meiner schmutzigen, vielfach zerissenen Gefängniskleidung plötzlich neben zivilisierten Menschen saß, die mißtrauisch von uns abrückten […] Außerdem stinken wir alle nach Staub, Schweiß und schmutziger Wäsche.' (127) Rinser tries to redeem herself by using formal German and talking loudly about her work, demonstrating that sense of superiority and separateness,

which is linked to her profession and educated background. But she is immediately aware of her vain desire to keep up appearances: 'Ich konnte doch nicht einfach so eine Gefangene sein wie die anderen. Wie dumm der Mensch ist, wie dumm und eitel. Ich schwieg also gleich wieder beschämt' (128). Rinser's shame at her appearance and being a prisoner is replaced by her shame at her vain behaviour. She seems to swing back and forth between the two poles. She makes the reader fully aware of her conceited desire to be better than the others: 'Ja, aber – da steht schon wieder das Aber: bin ich doch nicht besser als die anderen? […] Aber bin ich doch nicht klüger als die anderen? […] Ach, ich weiß nicht' (128). This excerpt serves to present Rinser's dialogue with herself, in which she articulates her own conflict between her prison and non-prison identity.

However, it also serves a more didactic function in presenting a moral problem to the reader. The posing of questions represents an active interaction with the reader and encourages them to take part in the discussion. Rinser demonstrates that she may judge her cellmates, but she also learns from them, as the reader of her prison diary should too. In a similar way, Rinser's apparent naïveté could therefore be a way of educating the reader about criminal women: how they get involved in crime and how they are treated by the judicial system. As a writer, she shows that she is better able to communicate their muddled stories than they are. Scheffler makes reference to this in her examination of the American political prisoner, Agnes Smedley: 'Smedley, as naïve observer, is most often present in the scene, learning from her cell mate so that she is later prepared to describe the encounter from a more *sophisticated* perspective, with editorial comment.'[42] Rinser's portrayal of her self as simultaneously separate from those around her as well

[42] Ibid, p. 202, my italics.

as being understanding of them, even part of their group, thus functions as a means of communicating this 'other' world of imprisonment to the reader. There is the sense that this, in turn, is supposed to educate the reader and make them more understanding of the issues involved in female crime and imprisonment: 'Man bessert Menschen niemals durch Demütigung sondern nur durch Erziehung, durch Hebung des Selbstbewußtseins und richtige Lenkung der Kräfte. Wenn man das einmal begreifen wollte' (54). Rinser campaigned throughout her life for prison reform and even edited a collection of women's prison writings.[43] For Rinser, prison writing functions both as a means of self-help, resistance, and preservation of identity, but she also interacts with her public reader in self-consciously exposing her weakness and posing moral questions concerning her reaction to her time in prison.

Conflicting narratives

Rinser's *Gefängnistagebuch*, its two forewords (one written in 1946 and one in 1973), and her 1981 autobiography *Den Wolf umarmen*, present different versions of Rinser and provide an interesting and contradictory set of personas. Her forewords colour the tone of the rest of the diary. The forewords also highlight the multiple identities that different texts within the same publication can present. Margo Culley mentions 'the charged experience of encountering past selves'[44] when the diarist reads over an old diary. The present self is confronted by an altered self, belonging to a previous time and place. Rinser too is shocked at the representation of herself in her prison diary – she is

[43] Luise Rinser, ed., *Lasst mich Leben: Frauen im Knast* (Dortmund: R. Padligur Verlag, 1987).
[44] Culley, p. 219.

estranged from herself, writing of the diary: ‘Es schien mir hart und kalt, und es verfälschte dadurch meine Erfahrung der Gefangenschaft’ (6). The forewords allow her to minimise any unpleasant elements of her diary, for example in admitting that she came across as cold and ‘schonungslos’ (8) in the diary. She is at risk of seeming unfeminine or inhumane in her judgemental descriptions of her fellow prisoners and surroundings – something the public may disapprove of. In what seems to be a response to such accusations, Rinser adds that, rather than being unfeeling in prison: ‘Ich hatte Tieferes erlebt, und ich hatte es mit größerer Leidenschaft erlebt’ (6). In the foreword, Rinser explains that her diary misrepresents the ‘actual’ experience of prison because when she was there she had more profound emotions.

The forewords are also there to maximise certain elements of the text. In the foreword to the first edition, she expressly mentions that her diary is a factual, historical document: ‘Tatsache, nicht Literatur’ – meaning it is to be read as the objective report, despite her claim in her later foreword that the diary falsified the real experience of prison. In this foreword to the first edition, the purpose of her diary is to educate others, especially future generations and to make people start talking about the atrocities of the National Socialist regime:

> Es ist begreiflich, daß viele nichts mehr hören wollen von dem, was sie selbst erlebt haben. Für sie ist dieses Buch auch nicht geschrieben. Es ist für jene, die nichts dergleichen sahen und erlebten, die kaum oder gar nicht gelitten haben unter den teuflischen Methoden, die Freiheit des Menschen auszurotten (13).

The diary differs from her autobiography *Den Wolf umarmen* in the information it provides about her prison conditions. For example the autobiography is elliptical about the work that Rinser had to do whilst in prison: it describes nothing of her experience of

working in the prison's sewing room and she claims that she was in solitary confinement even though this is not mentioned in the diary. Although her diary is generally unemotional, she does once make reference to a yearning for her husband Klaus: 'K war hier, hier in diesem Haus, und ich habe es nicht gewußt' (25). However, in her autobiography she describes her friendship with him as a reluctant one and writes that she was forced into marriage in order to protect him from the Gestapo.[45] Rinser is preoccupied with representing herself as asexual in her diary, but makes no reference to this in her autobiography, in fact she does the opposite in it – in writing of her solitary confinement Rinser says: 'Man befriedigt sich selbst, lustlos und gequält, um sich einzuschläfern, und dann schämt man sich und fühlt sich elend.'[46] Rinser may mention her shame at her sexual activities but the fact that she mentions it at all shows a significant contrast to her self-representation in the diary.

At the time of writing the autobiography she is obviously less concerned with seeming criminal and more willing to expose a more sexual and therefore 'deviant' side of her character. Rinser has thus created a number of differing, sometimes conflicting versions of herself within her autobiographical texts, showing that the version that this prison writer presents of herself changes according to the time in which she is writing, and continues to change throughout her life.

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[45] Luise Rinser, *Den Wolf umarmen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1981), p. 367.
[46] Ibid, p. 381.

Writing as survival in Lore Wolf's *Ich habe das Leben lieb*

Lore Wolf's diary *Ich habe das Leben lieb: Tagebuchblätter aus dem Zuchthaus Ziegenhain* provides a fascinating contrast to Rinser's account. The diary was published in West Germany in 1983, but Wolf's autobiography, *Ein Leben ist viel zuwenig,* which documented her experiences during the Third Reich, had been published ten years earlier in 1973 and in the GDR. The autobiography proved more popular than the diary, running into several editions and was even translated into English in 1982, although both the diary and the autobiography are now out of print. Wolf was a former secretary and member of the German Communist Party (KPD). The KPD was banned when Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933 and run as an underground organisation until the end of World War Two. Wolf worked in the KPD's *Rote Hilfe* resistance movement which gave aid to political prisoners and their families. She was forced to flee Germany for Switzerland then France in order to escape arrest and continue her work in the resistance. Eventually she was arrested by the Gestapo in Paris in August 1940 then later sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment for treason and incarcerated in Ziegenhain prison in Rhineland-Palatinate until the end of the war.

Whereas Rinser was in prison for a matter of months, Lore Wolf spent a total of five years in incarceration. Her relationship with the outside world and the people she knew there would have been much more estranged than Rinser's. Long-term imprisonment and separation from previous life has a momentous effect on the prisoner's sense of who she was before prison and who she is during imprisonment. Wolf's punishment also involved being kept in solitary confinement for most of the five years she spent in prison

(apart from a few isolated periods): it is a form of punishment that has well-documented effects on the health of the prisoner: 'Prisoners subjected to prolonged isolation may experience depression, despair, anxiety, rage, claustrophobia, hallucinations, problems with impulse control, and/or an impaired ability to think, concentrate, or remember.'[47] During the widespread controversy surrounding the imprisonment of members of the Red Army Faction in the 1970s, solitary confinement was depicted as a means of torture, of 'Zersetzung', in which the prisoner's former identity was slowly broken down by restricting their senses.[48] For both men and women, solitary confinement has a huge effect on their emotional well-being as well as on their perception of themselves as a subject, especially since their world consists of a restricted and monotonous space, rather than a communal, more varied prison environment. Reto Volkart mentions that it is an inability to maintain conversation as a result of isolation that can make prisoners lose their sense of self, and can lead to suicide attempts.[49] In other words long-term isolation can entail a loss of narrative, which is a crucial element of identity formation and survival.

Wolf was permitted to write a diary after three years of confinement, an extremely unusual allowance, given National Socialism's stringent prison regulations.[50] Her diary

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[47] Human Rights Watch (Organization). *Out of Sight: Super-Maximum Security Confinement in the United States* (New York; London: Human Rights Watch, 2000), p. 2

[48] For a full discussion of the RAF debate see: Martin Jander, "Isolation," in *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, ed. Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), p. 974 and 980. The isolation most often mentioned in relation to the RAF prisoners involved not only social isolation but acoustic and visual isolation too, which Wolf did not experience.

[49] Vera Bueller, *Einzelhaft ist Folter: Interview mit Reto Volkart* (2006, accessed July 2009); http://www.beobachter.ch/wohnen/artikel/isolationshaft_einzelhaft-ist-folter/.

[50] Martin Habicht, *Zuchthaus Waldheim, 1933-1945: Haftbedingungen und antifaschistischer Kampf* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), p. 28. See also: Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons*, p. 91. Stefan Lorant writes that he too was given paper and pen to write a diary during his imprisonment in Munich for 6 months in 1933, so it was not unheard of: Stefan Lorant, *I Was Hitler's Prisoner* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), p. 9.

was more 'public' because the prison authorities knew she was writing it, and perhaps even had access to it.[51] It was likely that censors oversaw Wolf's diary and prohibited her from writing on political matters – a concern that Rinser did not have to contend with.[52] But Wolf does not strictly adhere to personal, rather than political, subject matter in her diary. She may claim to avoid any political topics, but sometimes her allusions to politics are not even thinly disguised. She mentions the 'Taten der Menschen dieser Epoche und [der] grausige Abgrund, in den die Menschheit zu versinken droht.'[53] In recalling her trial and subsequent sentencing she declares: 'Das Unrecht des Stärkeren hat gesiegt!' (86) in frank reference to National Socialist injustice. A direct reference to Hitler comes in talking about the bloody war: 'Der Führer watet im Blut' (87). Wolf makes known her political beliefs and possibly incriminates herself in recalling the sentencing of her comrade Sepp Wagner: 'In der Wachstube stehe ich plötzlich einem Menschen gegenüber, mit dem ich viele Jahre gegen das Hitler-Regime gekämpft und illegal gearbeitet habe' (129). Here she admits working illegally against National Socialism and even claims that she knows more about illegal activities than the judges inside the courtroom do: 'dann sehe ich ihn in der Illegalität. Aber davon wissen die da drin sehr viel weniger als ich' (130). It is puzzling that Wolf incriminates herself in her diary – if her supervisors had read it they would have had reason to sentence her more

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[51] In summer 2007 I undertook an extensive search for documents pertaining to Wolf's imprisonment in an effort to find out whether and how Ziegenhain prison censored her diary. The Bundesarchiv in Berlin holds numerous documents on Wolf, but none on her diary, and a search in the more localised area of Ziegenhain where she was imprisoned uncovered suspiciously little. Wolf's prison documents apparently went missing during the reunification process in 1990 and have not been found since.

[52] Wolfgang Abendroth and Lore Wolf, "Widerstand 'von unten'," in *Ich habe das Leben lieb* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983), p. 12.

[53] Lore Wolf, *Ich habe das Leben lieb* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983), p. 47. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

harshly. It seems that Wolf's diary was either not censored, or perhaps – and more likely in my opinion – the incriminating entries were added after she was released from prison. It is, however, probable that in most sections of her diary she writes as if she is aware of the presence of the prison authorities.

Lore Wolf was not a professional writer as Rinser was, and the format of her diary reflects this. The published text contains two forewords: Wolf's foreword comes second and provides biographical information about her life and details surrounding her imprisonment, providing little to conflict with her self-representation in the diary itself. The first foreword comes from Wolfgang Abendroth (1906-1985), a prominent left-wing political scientist. His introduction serves to give an increased level of importance to Wolf's diary: he presents her diary to the public and acts as her patron. This is partly because Wolf is not an established author and so is not qualified to introduce her own text as Rinser does. It also recalls the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition in which men wrote forewords to women's texts in order to validate the work of the woman writer.[54] Furthermore, Abendroth's involvement prevents Wolf's diary from being assigned the dubious label of 'Frauenliteratur': which is commonly (and contentiously) thought to be writing by women that is for women.[55] That a man writes the foreword is supposed to make the text both 'worthy' and accessible to men and women.

Wolf's diary provides a very different response to incarceration than Rinser's, both in its style and content. The sporadically written entries and poems are introspective and

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[54] Kord, pp. 104-05.
[55] Inge Stephan, "Frauenliteratur," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Klaus Weimar et al (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1997), p. 626.

repetitive, unlike the descriptive reports found in Rinser's diary. She does not seek to report on prisoners and their conditions, partly because she was alone most of the time, in the monotony of solitary confinement. Wolf either writes to herself, or participates in a fantasy dialogue in which she communicates with members of her family, particularly on special occasions such as birthdays and sometimes in the form of a letter. The irregular way in which Wolf writes implies that she has limited paper (although she does not mention this) and that she only writes when she feels it is wholly necessary to her state of mind. Wolf claims of her diary in her first entry: 'Ein Kräftereservoir soll es mir werden für trübe Stunden' (37) later remarking that her diary documents her 'bitterste[n] Zeit' (94). Wolf's diary acts as an emotional support, a confidante in times of need, to whom she can express her inner turmoil. It seems that it is the *process* of writing in the diary that is of import to Wolf's sense of self as well as the content itself.[56] Once again, language performs a particular act and function. I shall explore the ways in which language is used to help Wolf cope with and resist her incarceration and to help her perceive herself as both a good woman and political prisoner.

A representation of the misery and lack of autonomy within prison is one of the distinguishing features of Wolf's diary. Prison constricts her both physically and verbally: 'So entsetzliches Leid herrscht ringsum, und man ist gefesselt an Händen und Füßen, und der Mund trägt ein Siegel' (76). She often feels helpless, especially regarding the war in Germany in which she can neither support her family nor her comrades (52, 152). She repeatedly expresses grief at her continuing isolation, separation from the outside world, concern for her family, the war and her great desire to

[56] See Keßler, p. 465 for further discussion of the importance of the process of writing.

be free. Wolf's control over time has been removed by imprisonment. Not only is her daily routine dictated by the prison, but she also has no control over how long the war will last and therefore how long her incarceration will go on: 'Wie lange noch?' is an oft-repeated question. Furthermore, she feels frustration at the fact that prison has already robbed her of a significant portion of her own life:

> Jahr um Jahr hetzt dahin. Ein jedes nimmt ein Stück Jugend mit. Jedes angefangene Jahr lastet schwer auf den Schultern, weil das ungelebte Leben in diesem Hause, in dieser Zelle mein Lebenskonto belastet und das Defizit von Jahr zu Jahr steigt (121).

This element in Wolf's diary reveals both its function as a vent for her frustration and unhappiness and a depiction of the amount of agency that she has lost through imprisonment. Although the diary serves a cathartic purpose, I explore its function as an escape from incarceration in which Wolf constructs a self-strengthening, autonomous life narrative in contrast to the more descriptive prison reportage found in Rinser's text.

The maternal, strong political prisoner

Wolf uses her diary as a substitute for real interaction with her daughter, Hannelore; this reminds her of her pre-prison identity as a mother. Most entries are addressed to Hannelore: 'Mein Mädel, nun will ich noch ein wenig mit dir plaudern.' (63) Even the entries written to her husband Hannes are written with her daughter in mind: she refers to her husband as 'Däti' (for example 125), presumably the American pronunciation of Daddy (the Wolf family lived in the United States for several years before returning to Germany in 1934). In these entries Wolf gives her daughter advice and comforts her,

enacting her maternal role and emphasising an identity as a mother rather than as an isolated prisoner. Addressing these entries to Hannelore in this way implies that Wolf writes purely in order to record her experiences for her daughter's sake. An examination of the diary reveals, however, that Wolf not only addresses her daughter but also, and perhaps more importantly, herself: she seems to be writing primarily to restore her own perception of who she was before prison, repairing her sense of self during a time of self-doubt.

It is Wolf's self-narration as a strong, politically active and gifted woman that is the most striking part of her diary. The painful, frustrating aspects of being in prison are described at length, possibly as a means of freeing herself from negative emotions. This outpouring of misery stands in stark contrast to Wolf's simultaneous emphasis on her inner strength and ability to overcome isolation and worry for her family. In a poem entitled 'Ich bin und liebe', Wolf represents herself as a strong woman, with a lust for life: 'Nie ward ich am Lebenstisch satt,/ Immer mußt ich mein Sehnen zügeln' (39). She describes herself as an active person who does not belong in prison and declares that she will fight to get her life back: 'Über alle Gefängnisse hinweg will ich mir den Weg zur Höhe, den Weg zurück ins Leben ertrotzen' (146). Wolf's ability to overcome her own isolation and fear for her family's safety during air-raids is represented as a sort of supernatural power – she describes the 'ungeheure Seelenkräfte zur Überwindung der Schwierigkeiten, die sich innerhalb und außerhalb des eignen Ichs auftürmen' (52*)*. Wolf's autobiography, *Ein Leben ist viel zuwenig*, reinforces such self-representation as supernaturally gifted; in it she recounts that she awoke one night in great fear. It

transpires that her friend Juliane Salzmann had died on that very night.[57] This story is written differently in another account of Wolf's – here she suddenly starts crying in the prison's work-room during the day and realises later that it is because of her friend's death.[58] These accounts may conflict in terms of information but the representation of Wolf's mystical powers remains.

In the diary itself, the contradictory stance of the self as miserable and self as strong, functions both as a means of catharsis, and as an enactment of her strong character in order to strengthen her sense of self within the period of crisis and isolation. Wolf takes this self-strengthening persona further in her construction of herself as a political prisoner. Wolf's focus is not only on her inner strength but also on her political identity, on combating the effects of incarceration, as she writes in her first entry: 'nur das Bewußtsein des inneren Wertes und das Vertrauen in einen erfolgreichen Kampf um eine bessere Zukunft stärkt den Willen zur Überwindung der Schwierigkeiten, die die Zeit der Unfreiheit mit sich bringt' (42). Wolf identifies strongly as a Communist and subsequently as a political prisoner. According to what she writes in the diary, it is through the process and act of writing down her strong political ideology and belief in the future that she is able to get through the ordeal. Her political beliefs also prevent her from seeing herself as criminal. Wolf sees herself as one amongst many who faced punishment for their activities – she mentions a number of other comrades during her incarceration who fought for the same cause. In mentioning them she reminds herself that she is one of a large group fighting for their own beliefs. She is a member of the

[57] Lore Wolf, *Ein Leben ist viel zuwenig* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1973), p. 135.
[58] Lore Wolf, 'Erinnerungen an Juliane Salzmann' Bundesarchiv SgY30/1031.

KPD, which, were it not for the National Socialist dictatorship, would still have been a legitimate political force. Her statements of political commitment allow her to see her imprisonment as a product of the political despotism that has culminated in international war.

Like Rinser, Wolf sees the political prisoner as a superior type of prisoner. She recalls an experience with a guard called Beermann that demonstrates the moral uprightness of herself and other Communist prisoners. Wolf had the opportunity to escape when being supervised by Beermann but says she did not do this in order to protect him from punishment. He returns her goodwill and decency by being kind to her. Here Wolf demonstrates how considerate and accommodating both she and Beermann are. Wolf reports that Beermann emphasises the courtesy of previous Communist prisoners: 'Bevor sie abtransportiert wurden, haben sie sich mit einem festen Händedruck von ihm verabschiedet, und ihm für die anständige Behandlung gedankt' (90). As a Communist, Wolf belongs within this group. In describing this incident Wolf shows her desire to show her own and other Communists prisoners' inherent goodness. She shows the humanity of the political prisoner, the type of prisoner who deserves kind treatment because of their courteous attitude. This incident demonstrates the non-criminality of the Communist prisoner and of Wolf herself: she belongs to a group of people who have done nothing 'wrong' and who do not belong in prison. For her, Communists are good people and far from being a threat to society, they actually improve it.

Cultural narratives and writing for survival

Wolf takes her political self-representation further in writing that her imprisonment is worth it for the greater good of a Communist or peaceful future: ‘es lohnt sich, um der Zukunft willen alles zu ertragen’ (38). She invokes religious metaphors in her self-portrayal as a martyr, gladly suffering for the good of mankind. In an entry addressed to her husband (who was also active in the resistance) she uses more religious imagery to describe their Christ-like sacrifices: ‘Weil wir uns selbst treugeblieben sind, mußten wir den Golgotha-Weg gehen, den so gar viele schon vor uns gegangen sind und viele noch gehen müssen’ (126). For Wolf, she and her husband, Hannes, are two amongst many political martyrs of the past and the future. Her use of religious imagery allows her to locate her suffering and isolation within a larger historical context of self-sacrifice and through this to account for her time in prison as worthwhile.

As a woman, Wolf presents herself as a special kind of martyr. She has sacrificed her role as a mother to her loved ones for her political beliefs: ‘In meinem Kampf um ein lebenswertes Leben für alle Menschen mußte ich zum Schuldner werden an meinen Lieben’ (42). Imagery of martyrdom allows her to account for her separation from her loved ones, especially her daughter and assists her in overcoming any guilt she may feel at such separation. Wolf also implies that, as a political prisoner and mother surrounded by non-political prisoners (who were in the majority in her prison according to Wolfgang Abendroth (12)) and mothers, her burden and pain is greater than that of her fellow prisoners: one Christmas she is gathered with hundreds of other women to ‘celebrate’ the occasion. Hundreds of women cry but she cannot: ‘Es gibt einen

Schmerz, den kein Seelentau lindern kann' (113). Wolf implies that her 'Sehnsucht nach Freiheit, nach lieben Menschen, nach daheim' (113) is greater and deeper than that of the other women. Her pain as a mother and as resistance fighter is double that of her fellow prisoners and more than that of a male martyr, who, one is to presume, would be less concerned with the traditionally female job of caring for the family. Wolf becomes a paradigm for the ideal female political prisoner: brave and strong yet maternal. Consciously or not, Wolf seems to utilise those cultural ideas of the female political prisoner seen in the numerous biographical and scholarly appraisals of Rosa Luxemburg's prison letters, which combine the 'polar' forces of political might and a maternal, caring identity to create the ideal female political prisoner.[59]

Wolf's diary contains around twenty of her own poems, as well as regular references to classical music and literature.[60] Her own sense and iteration of her creative and cultural capabilities seems to provide a source of comfort in her incarceration. Creative use of language and affinity with culture enables her to refer back to a previous identity and to inhabit a role as a humane political prisoner. Wolf positions the barbarity of the war and her incarceration in opposition to high culture and humanity: 'Zwanzigstes Jahrhundert, wo ist deine Kultur? Menschheit, wo ist deine Würde?' (70) Here, Wolf's language has a Biblical element to it, reminiscent of Corinthians 15:55 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' Such language imbues her statement with increased authority and reinforces her identity as a harbinger of culture and humanity.

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[59] For example Paul Frölich mentions that Luxemburg combines the positive attributes of each sex: Frölich, p. 193.

[60] Michael Moll has examined poetry within the context of National Socialist incarceration: Michael Moll, *Lyrik in einer entmenschlichten Welt: Interpretationsversuche zu deutschsprachigen Gedichten aus nationalsozialistischen Gefängnissen, Ghettos und KZ's* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988).

Wolf emphasises her affinity with high culture in one excerpt, where she looks back to a time when she and her daughter went to the opera. Both are entranced by Mozart's composition and Wolf compares herself and her daughter to him:

> Ganz nahe ist uns Mozart in unserer Armut. Auch er hatte einmal in einem armseligen Dachstübchen gewohnt, hungrig und von Kälte geplagt. Und doch er war so reich […] hatte ein schönheitstrunkenes Herz […] war ein Schöpfer, ist ein Unsterblicher. Seine Zeitgenossen haben ihn nicht beschützt (107).

Wolf represents Mozart, like herself, as a talented martyr who was not understood in his time. In the foreword to *Ich habe das Leben lieb*, like the diary itself, Wolf represents herself as politically-minded and extraordinarily artistic. She explains that the prison guard was persuaded to let her write a diary after reading a letter from her daughter, in which she wrote, in response to not being permitted to write in prison: 'Was wüßten wir wohl von Goethe, wenn es damals keine Schreibgeräte gegeben hätte!' Here Wolf aligns herself with the so-called father of German literature, in a similar way to her comparison of herself with Mozart. What may be seen as arrogant in Wolf's diary functions as a source of comfort for her in finding a historical narrative to be a part of during and after the possibly degrading and damaging experience of incarceration. Her comparisons are also an attempt to make clear to the reader how serious it was that she was not allowed to write. Conjuring figures such as Goethe and Mozart gives authority not only to her own individual plight but to the anti-fascist struggle as a whole.

Wolf's appeals to high culture are reminiscent of Luxemburg's extensive descriptions of books, paintings and music in her prison letters. Furthermore, both authors rely heavily on nature as a means of representing their predicament, perhaps because there is little visual stimulation within the isolated solitary cell. Where possible,

the author turns her attention to those natural, non-carceral surroundings outwith the prison cell.[61] There is a gendered element to this self-representation because, knowingly or not, Wolf calls upon a cultural discourse in which the acceptable kind of female political prisoner is literary, poetic and, nature-loving.

Wolf's self-representation as a Luxemburg-esque martyr is, however, not fully realised because she does not die at the hands of her enemies. A kind guard puts Wolf in the death cell ('Todeszelle') in Moabit prison in order to provide her with more food and better conditions. When Wolf arrives she is asked by a cellmate if she is a political prisoner: 'Fast schäme ich mich zu sagen, daß ich nicht den gleichen Weg gehen werde wie sie' (134). Wolf expresses shame at being allowed to live whilst those in the cell are to be executed. For Wolf, these are the 'real' female political prisoners. She writes: 'Die Frauen sind sehr tapfer, verbergen ihren Schmerz' (137). She recalls the story of a group of women who were arrested for protecting their anti-Nazi husbands and sons. She describes them as wives and mothers who bravely sacrificed their lives for their beliefs and loved ones. They fulfil Wolf's vision of a collective group of female political prisoners who were arrested together and support each other as well as their fellow prisoners. Wolf does not see herself as part of this group; whereas she is usually forcefully strong, in this episode she is weak and unable to control her tears. She eventually asks to be transferred to another cell where she receives less food but is not burdened by the experience of the 'Todeszelle'. There is the implication that she

[61] There is a strong link between nature and freedom in many representations of prison, not just in first person accounts of prison. See, for example Marc Rothemund's film, "Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage," (Germany: Broth Film, 2005). Language and indeed visual imagery can represent freedom, even a freeing of the self. There is considerable scope here for future research into prison writing through looking at the ways in which nature is represented and how that links to questions of self and captivity.

somehow fails to live up to the criteria that characterise the martyr and ideal maternal political prisoner. A part of this regret at being around the women is the guilt that Wolf must feel as a survivor when her resistance activities were just as subversive as those of the women. Interestingly, she mentions little of these feelings, instead concentrating on self-representation as a martyr: 'Das sind meine schlimmsten Tage und Nächte hier […] Ich sterbe tausend Tode. Das Mitleid frißt mich physisch und psychisch auf' (137). Wolf seems to suffer more than the women who are executed, her narrative allows her to become more of a martyr than they.

Wolf as leader

Wolf's desired self-representation as a politically active prisoner is created, both by writing of herself as a martyr, but also by creating a fantasy dialogue in which she communicates with those in the world outside prison whose homes have been destroyed during air raids: 'Ich flüchte mit euch, stehe mit euch vor dem Rest eurer Habe, führe eure Kinder an den Händen' (58). In this dialogue, she represents herself as a martyr suffering with them: 'euer Leid ist mein Leid' (58). This entry also highlights Wolf's compassionate character: she assumes a level of authority but also shows her affiliation to conventions of femininity in showing her caring, maternal side in her concern for 'her' people. In the same entry Wolf refers to herself as a champion of the outside world, writing: 'Arme Menschen der Großstädte, wie sehr, wie innig ist mein Herz bei euch!' (58) Here she addresses all people in destroyed cities and shows her commitment to them, enacting an identity as someone who wishes to save them in their time of need.

This persona is further emphasised in Wolf's representation of her relationship with other female inmates. This differs greatly from Rinser's but can tell us much about how she deals with the issue of being an 'incomplete' political prisoner (in not facing execution). Wolf goes into less detail about the women she encounters than Rinser, indeed they are often merged into a faceless mass: the women in the work room are represented as a collection of identical, anonymous machines: 'gebeugte Frauenrücken' (64). Wolf relates this anonymous assemblage to herself. In one entry she assumes that the mass of women in her barracks are all mothers, all pained by prison and the war, as she is: 'Über verhärmte, eingefallene Frauengesichter läuft ein Zucken. In großen, starren Augen brennt die Sehnsucht nach verlassenen Kindern daheim' (44). Wolf sees her incarceration as a product of wartime and assumes that the war is the cause of the other prisoners' misery too: 'Trauer deckt die Erde' (44).

Wolf not only represents her fellow inmates as affected by the war but also as a politicised collective; rather than being shown as criminal, as many were,[62] they are made akin to Wolf herself. In referring to this group of fellow prisoners she does not distinguish between the political prisoner and the normal prisoner and certainly makes no reference to the blurry issue of what constitutes a political prisoner: she sees the whole group as political. For example, in a poem entitled 'Der Sturmwind' she depicts her and her fellow prisoners' struggle against a storm wind – an analogy for the struggle they face in prison. Wolf was not permitted to directly reference certain topics and so the symbolism of poetry allowed her to express her political beliefs. The struggle to

[62] Wachsmann explains that most inmates of Nazi prisons were 'normal' criminals: Wachsmann, pp. 10-11. Wolfgang Abendroth, in his foreword to Wolf's diary says that she was surrounded by non-political prisoners (12).

overcome the hardship of prison is something that clearly affects both political and non-political prisoners, but Wolf's poem is an attempt to represent a unified collective, with a common belief in a better (implicitly Communist) future: 'Doch wir in unserm festen Haus,/Wir fürchten nicht das tolle Wüten/ […] Wir wissen, daß die finstre Nacht/Schon schwanger geht mit neuem Morgen' (50-51). Wolf positions herself and her fellow prisoners as a strong like-minded group, looking past the war to the future, as she so often does. Writing her diary allows to her to imagine that she is surrounded by a group of comrades, even though we know little about the fellow prisoners as individuals. Judith Scheffler explains that political prisoners 'often discuss the plight of their sister prisoners with the same fervour and immediacy that they use in describing themselves. Frequently the prisoner's identification with her people leads to her imprisonment in the first place.'[63] The political prisoner often feels a significant connection to the troubles of non-political prisoners, and Wolf's left-wing political engagement demonstrates that she too feels this bond with 'the people'. In her diary she talks of this group of women in order to back up how she wants to see herself: as part of a strong collective instead of as an isolated and therefore weaker individual. She uses language to create a group in order to make herself feel stronger in her solitary confinement, as well as to reinforce her identity as a political prisoner.

In the commotion surrounding the end of World War Two and the possible release or execution of prisoners, Wolf writes of her central role in the action and that she became the leader of the anonymous collective when they are transported away from Ziegenhain prison. She describes that she is active in helping the women retrieve their civilian

[63] Scheffler, 'Introduction' *Wall Tappings*, p. xvi.

clothing from the prison storeroom (156) and thereby commence their lengthy passage to freedom. Wolf too writes of herself as the representative in the railway wagon where she and sixty other women are transported to (and then away from) Bergen-Belsen concentration camp: when a guard wishes to speak to the women, she calls Wolf's name (163). Wolf separates herself from her weaker counterparts when describing the transportation out of Ziegenhain prison: 'Fast zweitausend abgehärmte, magere Gestalten gehen im gleichen Schritt' (156). Wolf implies that she is stronger than those she describes, only to immediately thereafter include herself in the group: 'Unterm Arm tragen wir unsere geringe Habe' (156). There is an implication here of a Rinser-esque conflict between wanting to be separate from the masses and wanting to belong to them. In portraying herself on the one hand as part of a collective – seemingly with the same ideological goals – but at the same time stronger than everyone else, she takes on a role as leader in being the most able member of the group.

This identity is underscored in Wolf's portrayal of her loyalty when she is twice offered the opportunity of escape. That she is given such a chance implies that she has a number of supporters who wish to save her. But she turns the offer down on both occasions, explaining in the first case:

> Es ist unser aller Glück. Später erfahre ich, daß sich die Frauen geschworen hatten, alles so zu tun, wie ich es tue und mich nicht aus den Augen zu lassen. Meine Ausbruch wäre zu einer Massenflucht geworden. Das hätte der SS eine willkommene Gelegenheit geboten, uns alle niederzuschießen (157).

Wolf writes of herself as a member of a group, a great desire of hers in prison, which is realised at this crucial time. She also demonstrates that, as a leader figure who would be followed by many, she influences every female inmate in the whole prison. In her

portrayal, it is her self-sacrificing devotion to this nameless group that has saved them all from death. At the second opportunity she shows her self-sacrificial nature more clearly: ‘Aber ich fliehe nicht. Was soll mit den anderen werden?’ Although Wolf does not die in her fight for other people, as Luxemburg did, she proves to the reader and herself that she is willing to die for them. When both male and female German political prisoners are officially freed in a special ceremony in Fuhlsbüttel, Wolf is the one who is called out first, becoming the head of a group consisting of only political prisoners.

Autonomy within the prison narrative

Wolf perhaps uses her portrayal of herself as a leader in order to substitute for the more politically active life she may have led outside prison. Additionally, Wolf’s self-representation as the leader of the anonymous mass she has created in her own image establishes her authoritative position over her fellow prisoners. In not fleeing, she implies that she is needed in order to help the prisoners, as if she is a saviour, with more power than others. Furthermore, Wolf makes it clear that she *chose* to help others when given the opportunity to escape, imbuing her narrative with agency and self-determination. This performance as leader not only helps Wolf to align herself with ideal political prisoners such as Luxemburg, but also counteracts the degradation and terror of her last few days in prison. She and her group are loaded into cattle wagons, kept in squalid conditions, deprived of food and face possible extermination in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. That Wolf focuses primarily on her role as a leader, seemingly in

control of her and others' fate, allows her to resist an imposed passive identity as object rather than subject.

Such an assertion of agency is emphasised at other points in the diary too, especially in relation to labelling as criminal. Whereas Rinser mentions a number of incidents in which she is referred to as a 'common' criminal, this issue only comes up once in Wolf's diary and she presents herself in a much more controlled way than Rinser. On being transported to hospital to be treated for a glandular infection, Wolf writes that she is referred to by the guards as 'eine 'Langjährige'' who has to be carefully watched and is to be handcuffed. Wolf refuses to be tied up, at which point an officer steps in and asks her ''Sind Sie Polin, oder haben Sie ein Verbrechen begangen?' Wolf asserts: 'Ich bin keine Polin und keine Verbrecherin. Ich bin Deutsche. Meine politische Gesinnung, meine Einstellung zu diesem Regime haben mir zwölf Jahre Zuchthaus eingebracht. Aber ich lass mich nicht fesseln!' (89) She calmly but emphatically distinguishes herself as a political prisoner and is proud of her status. Unlike Rinser, whose angry retorts indicate a lack of agency (as well as demonstrating her outspoken, justice-seeking character), Wolf writes of her composure and gains control of the situation. The officer does not chain her hands, implying that he too sees her as a less violent, 'dangerous' prisoner, perhaps one who deserves more respect than non-political prisoners. Mary Bosworth has remarked that resistance in prison is, in most cases, unsuccessful,[64] but Wolf's refusal to be handcuffed and subsequent resistance of a criminal/dangerous identity is a victory, at least in her version of events.

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[64] Bosworth, p. 150.

In mentioning the respect she is treated with by an officer (who is of a more authoritative rank than a mere prison guard), Wolf shows that others believe she should be shown respect: her representation of the officer's actions fits with how she wishes to be treated and how she wishes to perceive herself. Indeed, apart from one violent incident at the end of the diary, Wolf writes that she is treated with great respect throughout her internment. She is even given special care by a guard in Moabit prison who gives her extra food. According to her text, it seems that others see her as a political prisoner and not only that, they help her and are sympathetic to her and her cause, contrary to how most guards are represented in Rinser's diary. That Wolf portrays people in such a way supports her righteous political self-representation but also gives her a sense of equality with her superiors and an illusion of control over her incarceration. The positive reaction of others towards her reinforces her identity as a dignified and authoritative political prisoner.[65] Rinser's diary does not give this sense of her equality with her guards because she uses it to separate herself from the prison authorities and place herself *above* them.

Rather than writing of any particular failures, Wolf is keen to stress her victories, or special treatment in prison, showing herself as an agent in order to raise herself above the disempowerment of imprisonment. In contrast to Rinser, it seems that it is what Wolf does *not* describe about her imprisonment that is important to an analysis of her self-representation. Wolf may write about feeling miserable in prison but she keeps such descriptions on an abstract level and does not go into detail about how prison affects her

[65] Although this self-representation contrasts with that in Rinser's diary, it is reminiscent of Albie Sachs' prison diary from a South African prison in the 1960s. Albie Sachs, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (London: 1966), although this diary was much more commercially successful than Wolf's.

self-esteem. She only mentions that she is seen as a criminal once, and even then she manages to assert her dignified, political identity. Furthermore, the degradation of prison is only mentioned in detail at the end, and counteracted by her emphasis on her role as a leader. Although Wolf does mention some negative aspects of prison, she seems less vociferous about prison's negative effects than Rinser, giving the impression that, apart from the horror of solitary confinement, she is treated rather well. There is little reference to any humiliation she experiences as a prisoner or to any damaging experiences she may (or may not) have had. There is a brief implication that Wolf feels shame at being a prisoner when she is one day suddenly taken out of prison: 'Wie ich bin, in schmutziger Zuchthauskleidung und zerissenen Schuhen komme ich auf den Transport' (129). As Rinser does on several occasions, Wolf shows a concern for her unsightly appearance, perhaps demonstrating the loss of femininity and consequent shame that the female prisoner may feel. But Wolf does not go into the same level of detail as Rinser; she concentrates only on the shabby state of her clothes, rather than on her own body – her face, hair and degree of cleanliness. She does not describe her shame to the same degree that Rinser does. Furthermore, Wolf may mention the degradation and demoralisation that come along with imprisonment but only in an evasive manner: 'In Unfreiheit leben, das ist [die] furchtbarste Erniedrigung im Leben des einzelnen wie im Leben der Völker' (41) and: 'Untätigkeit, sie wirkt demoralisierend, zersetzend, im Leben des einzelnen, wie im Leben der Völker' (42). This is a rather hesitant way of conveying the humiliation and depression of confinement: Wolf applies it to herself in a distanced, third person style and puts it in a wider context – it is not just she who is

punished, but a whole nation of people suffer as a result of the war too. Unlike Rinser, Wolf seems much less willing to articulate how prison affects her directly.

It is the political prisoners and 'true' martyrs whom she encounters in the 'Todeszelle' whom Wolf describes in the most detail, despite the fact that she writes that she got to know hundreds of women during her time in prison (171). In writing of the anonymous mass of women she avoids any descriptions of them as individuals, perhaps to limit any association of herself with criminal women. Wolf does, however, write about a non-political prisoner with whom she shares a cell. This is the only mention she makes within the diary itself of a 'real' female criminal, describing the woman as a 'Mörderin' who repeats litanies throughout the night: 'Stunde um Stunde geht diese gespenstische Kasteiung' (both 147). It could be that Wolf sees her cellmate as a monstrous, mad character, given her unsettling behaviour and her past as a murderer. This recalls the stereotypes of the hysterical female criminal described with reference to Rinser's fellow prisoners. But Wolf is more ambiguous in her representation of the murderer than Rinser. She eventually moves out of the cell, saying: 'Ich fürchte mich vor den schlaflosen Nächten' (147). Wolf claims she is not scared of the woman herself, rather she is concerned about the practical prospect of not being able to sleep. She is also sympathetic to the girl, referring to her as 'die Unglückliche.' The cellmate's story is also represented sympathetically, with emphasis placed on the woman's regret over her crime rather than the deviance itself: 'Viele Jahre quält sie sich schon und kasteit sich' (147). Despite her sympathies, Wolf writes of her distance from her cellmate, not even mentioning her name. Wolf describes the story of the woman's infanticide, but it is a guard rather than the woman herself who tells it to her. Wolf does not write of any direct

communication between herself and her cellmate. In moving out of the cell she further demonstrates her distance from the nameless woman, using her narrative to insist that she and this woman have no connection.

In using the diary in response to the 'pains of imprisonment', Wolf is able to turn the harmful, isolated experience of long-term imprisonment into a positive and useful one, akin to that historical and cultural narrative found in the German *Bildungsroman*; a sub-genre which follows 'the psychological development of one central protagonist.'[66] That which Wolf writes is there to serve as a means of catharsis as well as to strengthen her identity as a female political prisoner. This happens not just through either omitting or neutralising any unpleasant or degrading incidents, or unsavoury characters, but also within the context of her whole life narrative. In one of the flashbacks in which Wolf looks back on enjoyable moments of her life, there is an implication that her current self is an improvement on her previous, often reckless self: 'Das Feuer der Leidenschaft, das oft wild aufloderte, ist niedergebrannt, doch nicht erloschen. Geblieben ist eine ruhige Flamme, die in treuer Pflichterfüllung weiterglüht' (145). Throughout the whole diary, Wolf shows the reader that the seemingly damaging, punishing experience of prison has only made her a stronger person in her political convictions and spirit: 'Die qualvollen Jahre haben mich nicht geschwächt, mein Vertrauen in die Zukunft wurde gefestigt.' (86)

Wolf explains that the pain of prison improves her mind: 'Der Schmerz ist mir zum Erkenntnisquell geworden, aus dessen Tiefe ich schöpfen durfte' (86). Wolf's

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[66] Todd Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1993), p. 8.

knowledge is improved by her time in prison, unlike Rinser who feels that the lack of intellectual stimulation, combined with the influence of her less educated criminal cellmates, make her less intelligent. Wolf believes that her self-knowledge is also improved by prison: 'Reifer bin ich geworden in dieser Zeit unerhörten Erlebens, klarer sehe ich die Fehler, die ich früher als kleine Schwächen zu entschuldigen suchte, und mit dem Erkennen verbindet sich zugleich der Wille, sie zu bekämpfen und ganz abzulegen' (53). However, she does not go into detail about exactly what weaknesses she previously had, focusing only on the positive aspects of her character and thereby showing less self-awareness than Rinser. What Wolf does emphasise is that she is better, wiser, more mature and ready to fight the good fight. Rather than bringing her down as it is supposed to, she writes that prison only makes her stronger and thus defeats its purpose, a narrative of resistance that is common to female prisoners according to Bosworth.[67] Wolf raises herself above the misery and the lack of control of prison by continually saying that her experience is worth the pain for what she personally gains from it, but also draws on her identity as a martyr to imply that those outside prison gain from it too. A sort of mantra runs through the diary: 'Ja, es lohnt sich, in der Tiefe gelebt zu haben, um den Wert des Lebens ermessen zu können' (74). She needs to account for the years she has lost against her will by telling herself, and the reader, that she is not in prison for nothing and has become a better person, once again achieving a level of agency over those years in prison. Herein also lies the implication that Wolf is reformed by her incarceration. Her diary shows that she comes out of prison a better person than

[67] Bosworth, p. 135: 'despite their limited choices, the women in prison constantly endeavoured to resist the restrictions placed upon them inside. They frequently described themselves as having been strengthened by the experience of prison.'

when she went in. According to her diary, prison has cured what she sees as her previous, flawed identity. Paradoxically this issue of reform aligns to the rehabilitative aim of modern (but non-Nazi) penal institutes.[68] However, Wolf comes out with fortified rather than reformed political convictions. Her reform has had the opposite effect from what the National Socialists wanted: prison has allowed Wolf to become the sort of person she wants to be, rather than the person that her captors want her to be.

Conclusion

The self-representation as an improved subject, ideal woman and 'good' political prisoner provides the author with a means of resisting the damaging effects of imprisonment. The diary gives each woman a sense of agency: it allows her to choose who she wants to be at a time when her identity is under threat, allowing her the opportunity to re-label or 'rewrite' her self during incarceration.

Rinser's rewriting of herself occurs through disempowering those fellow inmates and prison authorities around her by describing their supposedly deviant gender performances. In setting herself in contrast to them, she creates an image of herself as an ideal woman: sexually naïve, educated and non-criminal. Whereas Rinser's account deals with her identity as a woman, Wolf's concentrates more on her political identity. In her diary she becomes a political leader, positioned within the kind of historical narrative identified in the prison letters of Rosa Luxemburg. Wolf combines this political identity with a maternal one, creating a self endowed with an acceptable

[68] Nazi prisons serve as a disruption in the reforming history of the prison since, in contrast to the Weimar penal system, their goal was extreme punishment rather than rehabilitation – Wachsmann, p. 81.

superior and authoritative status within the prison environment. Both authors use narratives of superiority in their self-representation as political prisoners to put themselves above the degradation and isolation of prison, but Wolf does so without the same degree of criminalisation and belittlement of others found in Rinser's account. Within these narratives of superiority a striking contrast emerges: Rinser treats most of her fellow prisoners like 'real' criminals, be they political or not, whereas Wolf treats most of hers like a mass of political prisoners.

Rinser shows the reader that she is, at least partly, aware of her arrogant and superior attitude to others and this self-awareness gives the reader a sense that she has heightened agency: she is able to analyse and judge not just the behaviour of others but her own behaviour. She becomes both the observer and the observed, occupying a position held by the sometimes judgemental readership. Wolf, however, avoids any degrading subjects and seems to have tunnel vision for positive, self-boosting matters rather than allowing the reader to see her specific weaknesses, as Rinser does. Wolf's emphasis on her strength as well as her literary, artistic ability creates a self-representation in which she becomes a sort of superwoman. It is by avoiding references to her own flaws that Wolf tries to achieve a sense of self and of agency in this self-representation, whereas it seems that some of Rinser's agency is gained through her self-conscious emphasis on her weaknesses and flaws.

Rinser's text was far more popular than Wolf's, partly because of its earlier publication period and Rinser's status as an author, but also because, as a sophisticated writer, Rinser adapts herself for an audience. In her somewhat defensive account, she seems aware that she is being judged by an outside perspective. This awareness extends

to the forewords of her diary, it changes over time in response to her audience (as well as to her own changing perception of herself), as demonstrated in the conflicting narratives and differing versions of herself presented in her forewords and autobiography.

Wolf was inexperienced at writing for an audience and, in her lack of basic description and attempts to strengthen her sense of self, she risks alienating the reader by elevating herself without giving any sense of consciousness about the sort of persona she is creating. Wolf's diary is focussed on linguistic 'repair work': narratives which either vent her frustration or boost her sense of self, rather than describing her imprisonment for the benefit of a wider audience. In contrast, her 1973 autobiography, *Ein Leben ist viel zuwenig,* gives far less detail about prison life and concentrates instead on the events before and after prison in which Wolf worked actively for the Communist party. It was more widely distributed than the diary, partly because it was published in the GDR (a climate in which such published accounts of Communist history were promoted by the government) and partly, one suspects, because it is a more complete and reader-friendly account.

Two kinds of prison narrative emerge here: the subject-focussed narrative 'repair work' of Wolf's diary and the narrative, such as Rinser's, which appeals more to a readership. But in identifying these different kinds of writing, there lies the implication that Wolf's text is the one that provides her with more agency, that the established prison writer such as Rinser in some way compromises her sense of self for an audience, and thus loses that sense of autonomy found in diary-writing. But this is problematised if we consider the autobiographical act inherent to prison writing: that of preserving a

sense of self. Rinser identifies as an author and an intellectual, so one could argue that, in ‘compromising’ herself to her audience through writing in a conventional, suitable way for them, Rinser preserves that very identity as a professional writer.

Chapter Three: 'War ich nicht selbst jemand?' Locating the maternal self in Margret Bechler's *Warten auf Antwort.*

Introduction

Margret Bechler's (1914-2002) collaborative autobiography *Warten auf Antwort: ein deutsches Schicksal* is an account of confinement in East Germany between 1945 and 1956, spanning the duration of the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) as well as the early years of the German Democratic Republic, which was formed in 1949. First published in 1978 and a commercial success, the text has generated eight editions and is currently in its twenty-second printing. This success is attributable to the extraordinary and tragic nature of Bechler's story. Arrested by Allied forces at the end of World War Two for denouncing an anti-fascist resistance member during the war, Bechler spent the next eleven years in prisons and camps in East Germany and was even sentenced to death for 'Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit' during the Waldheim war crimes trials of 1950, a verdict that was later reduced to a life sentence. According to Bechler, her husband, Bernhard Bechler (1911-2002), was aware of her incarceration but he declared her dead, remarried and went on to a successful military career in the GDR. Bechler had two children from whom she was separated during her incarceration and who, at the time of writing her account, she had not seen since her arrest more than thirty years earlier.

Bechler was incarcerated in both Soviet camps and GDR prisons between 1945 and 1956. During the first half of her incarceration, she was held in the Bautzen, Jamlitz, Mühlberg and Buchenwald camps. All Soviet camps on German soil were dissolved in

1950 and detainees were transferred to prisons.[1] In February 1950, Bechler was taken to Waldheim prison in Saxony. That she was held in camps for half of the time that she spent in incarceration raises pertinent issues for my research. My objective is to analyse prison writing rather than writing from prison camps because they are different systems of punishment. The institution of punishment has a significant effect on both the experience and how that experience is articulated; the experience of a Soviet camp is bound to be very different from that of a prison. This is particularly clear when we compare the poor conditions and barbaric treatment of prisoners in the Mühlberg camp where Bechler was held between 1947 and 1948 with the relative comfort in which she lived when held in Waldheim prison in 1950. Not only do the conditions in camps differ from those in prisons but each individual carceral space is different from the next. Because of the varying institutional frameworks, no two institutions will affect the subject's experience in the same way.[2] Bechler's text exists as an account from *both* institutions. In my analysis of it I do not wish to imply that prisons and camps inflict comparable levels and types of punishment but I do not confine my analysis to her representation of her time in prisons, as I feel that any discussion of her narrative should apply to how she represents her self throughout the whole text.[3]

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[1] Finn, *Die politischen Häftlinge der Sowjetzone*, p. 64.

[2] See e.g .Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, p. 8. Weigel discusses the different types of prison institutions and the influence of these on different types of writing. Also see: Keßler, p. 156. Keßler discusses the issues surrounding how literature reflects the 'reality' of imprisonment, as well as how the experience shapes what is written about it. Ioan Davies too stresses the importance of context on the language that is used to represent it – all total institutions affect experience and the subsequent narrative differently, Davies, p. 15.

[3] There may be differences evident in her portrayal of her time in each total institution but these are problematic to pinpoint and outwith the scope of my current research. The problems of such an undertaking arise given the difficulties inherent in ascertaining what effect each carceral system has on the subject. Although the institution itself has a big effect, it is not the sole factor in Bechler's representation

Bechler's text falls within the genre of 'autobiography', even though the words 'Autobiographie' or 'Memoiren' do not appear anywhere in the title pages or the text itself. [4] However, the name of the subject matches that on the cover in the most recent editions of the text (in the first edition from 1978, the names on the title page are Mine Stalmann and Margret Bechler, as I discuss later), indicating that the text is to be categorised as autobiography.[5] The paratext also adheres to autobiographical criteria: in most editions, Bechler's photo is on the cover, alongside photos of her and her family in the middle of the book. This real-life documentation establishes Bechler as a real person and her text as non-fiction. This is part of what Lejeune would call an 'autobiographical pact': an implicit agreement between author and reader in all autobiographical texts that what they are reading is fact rather than fiction.[6] But the belief that the text is autobiographical does not end with the paratext or the author's name; its content must also reinforce its non-fiction label and its author must be believed to be telling the truth in order for the autobiographical pact to be maintained.[7] 'Truth' is a contestable category, but at the very least, the author must show that she *attempts* to tell the truth: 'Wenn die Autobiographie nicht im Stande ist, die 'wahre Wirklichkeit' zu protokollieren, so hat sie doch 'wahrhaftig' zu sein, d.h. nach bestem Wissen und

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of her time in incarceration. There are other variants to be considered such as the effect of prolonged imprisonment on the subject as well factors external to the prison space such as family circumstances.

[4] I use this term to refer, not to all life-writing, but to a more specific type of writing: that of recording the life's events in first person form *after* they have happened.

[5] Philippe Lejeune, *Signes de vie: le pacte autobiographique 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 32. For Lejeune, the existence of what he refers to as a 'signature' is one of the main indicators that the text is autobiographical.

[6] See Ibid., for a fuller discussion of the autobiographical pact.

[7] Of course there is a parallel strain of autobiography, exemplified by James Frey's controversial 2003 'memoir' *A Million Little Pieces,* that becomes famous and successful partly *because* it has been proved untrue. Such cases, however, are exceptional, although worthy of further examination in their relationship to the autobiographical pact.

Gewissen zu berichten. So jedenfalls führen sich zahlreiche Autobiographien namentlich früherer Jahrhunderte ein'.[8] The reader must believe that the author is trying to provide a *true* account of herself in order to relate to the text as autobiography. In order for autobiography to succeed as non-fiction, it must be perceived as truth – an authentic rendering of events. I shall examine the numerous ways in which Bechler's text operates as an 'authenticated' account of her time in incarceration, presenting an image of 'realness' to the reader.

A key concern in the examination of Bechler's text is that she did not write her autobiography herself: it is a collaborative account, written with Mine Stalmann; this throws up additional problems relating to authenticity. Alongside my examination of the quest for authenticity, it is important to question what function writing autobiography rather than diary serves the author in her attempts to deal with the effects of incarceration, to (re)build a sense of self after the crisis of imprisonment and, in Bechler's case, the crisis of losing her children. Long-term incarceration throws up a new set of concerns in the analysis of women's prison writing: Bechler must negotiate between the world of prison into which she has become immersed over the years and the world of her audience, challenging as well as adhering to expectations of how 'respectable' women should be. In doing so, she attempts to reveal both to herself and the reader who the 'real', authentic Margret Bechler is. Bechler's representation of her character development and changing position throughout her years in prison provides a way of representing the female prisoner not seen in the texts of Rinser and Wolf.

[8] Wagner-Egelhaaf, pp. 3-4.

The function of prison autobiography

Whereas the diary helps its author locate herself during incarceration, autobiography serves retrospectively to establish the author's sense of self. Autobiographical scholars, especially post-structuralists, have theorised a self always in flux and prone to contradictions.[9] Self-representation is subject to change as long as the writer is alive, because their self-perception can vary as the years of their life pass. Such an unfixed self is evident in an analysis of Luise Rinser's conflicting narratives: Rinser gives differing self-representations in her diary, its forewords, and her later autobiography. An autobiography takes a significant period of time to write, sometimes years. Bechler's was composed over a number of different time frames and from different sources: a tape-recording of an interview with a journalist in the late 1950s; Bechler's own notes written over a six-year period; and contributions she made in the 1970s when Mine Stalmann was writing up the account.[10] Since Bechler's account was written at several points over the twenty years between her incarceration and the book's publication, she had time to change how she perceived herself and how she wished to be perceived by others. However, it is difficult to gauge how far self-representation alters over time because of the author's changing self-perception from moment to moment rather than year to year. It could be argued that contradictions are always present since the subject is divided in the present, regardless of how much time passes. Paul Jay cites Roland

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[9] For closer theoretical examination see: Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1999), and James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[10] Mine Stalmann and Margret Bechler, *Warten auf Antwort: ein deutsches Schicksal* (Munich: Kindler, 1978), p. 413. This information is taken from the epilogue to the 1978 edition but was removed in later editions.

Barthes' autobiography: ' "I am not contradictory, I am dispersed," ' in reference to those contradictions that exist whenever one speaks of oneself, regardless of which time frame in which the utterance occurs.[11]

There may be a substantial philosophical framework in which the 'dispersed' self is the focus of attention, but there exists a widespread parallel belief that autobiography presents a 'whole' self. This serves an important function for the autobiographer trying to establish a sense of who they are. The existence and process of writing autobiography gives the impression that identity is complete and fixed. Paul John Eakin explains of autobiographical writing:

> we are not what we were; self and memory are emergent, in process, constantly evolving […] Responding to the flux of self-experience, we instinctively gravitate to identity-supporting structures: the notion of identity as continuous over time, and the use of autobiographical discourse to record its history.[12]

Autobiography creates the impression of a consistent identity over time and therefore it can, in many cases, represent the author's pursuit of continuity and wholeness of self. According to Judy Simons, the autobiography helps 'to impose a sense of wholeness on the disparate and transient concept of selfhood.'[13] This retrospective self-location is particularly important when it comes to prison writing. In the diaries of Rinser and Wolf, we see their response to the change of self imposed on them by incarceration and their attainment of agency within the disempowering environment of prison. The writing of autobiography presents another means of responding to the destabilising experience of imprisonment and a means of attaining autonomy over the self damaged by

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[11] Paul Jay, "Being in the Text," *MLN* 97, no. 5 (1982), p. 1057.
[12] Eakin, p. 20.
[13] Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 13.

incarceration; the prison autobiography acts as a means of *cementing* identity, because it gives the writer the opportunity to articulate their sense of who they are in printed text and to a public audience.

The retrospection involved in writing autobiography, rather than diary, is a key means of gaining control over the experience. A significant amount of time passes between the event and the author's description of it.[14] Because of this, the former prisoner and autobiographer, unlike the diarist, has had time to change how she perceives her experience and is, perhaps most importantly, no longer within the particular situation of crisis represented by prison. Although they are edited retrospectively, the diaries of Rinser and Wolf are intended to show the authors' immersion in the moment of crisis: they show their shock at being trapped in prison and have no knowledge of when or if they will be released.[15] The diary acts as a source of comfort and control during this period of immersion. The author of autobiography is no longer trapped in that moment of imprisonment and disempowerment; she has temporal distance from the events she describes and from her past self. Crucially, the author knows how the prison narrative will end: there is more certainty and control over the experience and how that experience is rendered.

The distance of years endows the author with self-awareness, i.e. the ability to look back to past events and her past self, and judge them accordingly. Elissa Gelfland

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[14] Traditionally, autobiographies (such as those of prominent politicians) are written when the subject is at a later age and span a whole lifetime. This contrasts quite remarkably with the recent spate of celebrity autobiographies, especially in the U.K., which are often written when the subject is in their late teens or early twenties.

[15] Suzanne Juhasz writes 'the perspective of the diarist is immersion, not distance.' Suzanne Juhasz, "The Journal as Source and Model for Feminist Art: The Example of Kathleen Fraser," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984), p. 16.

explains that the choice of genre is pertinent to the prison author's self-representation because the autobiography alerts the reader not to the writer's deviance but to 'the future righted appreciation of the whole woman and her whole life.'[16] The retrospection central to the autobiographical form serves her self-representation and any justifications of her 'crime' well, because it is her 'present', post-incarceration voice speaking and imposing upon the past self, the wisdom and supposed wholeness of the current self. Weintraub tells us:

> When the autobiographer has gained that firm vantage point from which the full retrospective view on life can be had, he imposes on the past the order of the present. The fact once in the making can now be seen together with the fact in its result. By this superimposition of the completed fact, the fact in the making acquires a meaning it did not possess before. The meaning of the past is intelligible and meaningful in terms of the present understanding.[17]

Weintraub may contentiously assume that there is a stage at which the self reaches completion, but this excerpt still has value for the study of retrospective accounts of incarceration because it shows that in the autobiography it is the present self that is represented; in our context it is the post-prison author judging her past experiences and her past self through the process of writing. Such imposition of the 'current' self upon the past one is also demonstrated in Rinser's retrospectively written forewords to her prison diary in which she identifies turning points in her character and casts judgements upon that past self portrayed in the diary.

In retrospective writing, the author has the power to re-write the experience into a 'whole' narrative with a beginning, middle and end, unlike the diarist, whose text is

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[16] Elissa Deborah Gelfand, "Women Prison Authors in France: Twice Criminal," *Modern Language Studies* 11, no. 1 (1980), p. 59.
[17] Karl Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (1975), p. 826.

often a series of entries with no 'literary' structure (although prison writing often transgresses generic conventions, since, in some cases, it starts and ends in conjunction with the period of imprisonment[18]). This creation of a unified identity involves the construction of a character arc, especially in the prison autobiography, in which the author goes through life-changing experiences. The author retrospectively charts her character's 'journey', giving her life a literary narrative, and, as with Lore Wolf's *Ich habe das Leben lieb*, evoking the *Bildungsroman* literary model. This makes the account more readable, since it involves a recognisable script to which the reader (and author) can relate.

Despite the agency to be gained in the writing of autobiography, retrospective self-representations are open to the criticism of being inauthentic. After all, constructing a text complete with character arc and literary structure could be seen as distorting the 'truth'. Furthermore, the 'present' self of the autobiography, in describing a past experience and identity, could be accused of being unable to 'capture' that previous self, because it is writing at a later time. This raises the issue of memory: how do we know that Bechler's memory was accurate? Bechler recounts quite specific and detailed events from her eleven years' incarceration, including conversations she had in prison. It is unlikely that she would have remembered them word for word, which exposes her to accusations of fabrication. In moulding her experiences into a literary, readable

[18] As seen in Lore Wolf's diary, as well as: Mascha Rolnikaite, *Ich muss erzählen: Mein Tagebuch 1941-1945*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004), and in Stefan Lorant, *I Was Hitler's Prisoner* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), which was first published in English in 1935 and later in the original German. Both Rolnikaite and Lorant documented their incarceration in concentration camps and prisons during the Third Reich. Interestingly, Luise Rinser's diary does not end with her release because she ran out of paper after only a few months of diary-writing.

structure, Bechler may gain agency and a sense of identity, but she must be careful to appear as authentic as possible.

Because the prison diary is written when its author has less time to deliberate or to construct a story with a literary structure to it, it is less susceptible to accusations of inauthenticity. The diary could be read as 'truer' and 'more real' than the autobiographical account, written years after the events it describes. Of course the published diary undergoes an editing process, during which certain elements are possibly added or omitted, so there is retrospective activity involved in the publication of both the diary and the autobiography. This means that another self can be imposed on both the diary as well as the autobiography: that 'self' may be the diary's author (if the author is the editor as Rinser was) editing the text at a later time, or an entirely different self and voice if the editor is another person, such as Ulrike Riemann, the editor of *Warten auf Antwort*. Crucially, though, the diary at least *seems* more authentic and direct than the autobiography, regardless of whether or not it actually is.

There is a definite attempt to authenticate the text in *Warten auf Antwort*: each chapter opens with an introduction – written by the book's editor Ulrike Riemann, which provides the 'factual' historical context to Bechler's incarceration, confirming her narrative's place within real, and indeed momentous, past events. It seems her text has a particularly 'real' link to the world outside the text too. As an autobiography, *Warten auf Antwort* is, of course, written for the general public but Bechler's account also markets itself as a personal, earnest attempt to regain contact with her estranged children, with whom she had not yet been reunited at the time of writing up the account, more than thirty years after she was first incarcerated. A foreword to the 1978 edition written by

the text's co-author, Mine Stalmann, reveals Stalmann's tentative hopes that the book might actually help reunite Bechler with her children.[19] That the book is posited as serving a function in the outer world is of particular significance when taken in relation to Austin's concept of the illocutionary act – the idea that words 'do' something rather than just reflecting the world or making statements about it. Although the notion of the speech act is broadly recognised in literary studies and often applied to fictional works of prose or poetry or drama, it is in autobiographical works where speech acts can have the greatest 'action', simply because an autobiography is about a real life and real people.[20] Bechler's account takes this 'action' further than in the letters of Luxemburg and the diaries of Rinser and Wolf because she is attempting to exert a specific influence on the outer world, using language to get her children back.

The book may be presented as a means of communicating with Bechler's children, but practically speaking it remains unlikely that it ever reached them, at least not before 1989. Bechler's children lived in East Germany and the book was published in the West. There is a small possibility that they may have been able to obtain it, although Bechler does claim that her children were indoctrinated against her and had no desire to be reunited with her, given her status as 'Mörderin' (409-410). It is unclear to what degree her children would have even wanted to (illegally) obtain her book. The book may purport to be written for her children but this is by no means its only purpose. Bechler's publishers were involved in the creation of the text too. It is likely that they wanted to use the text as a method of attacking the GDR, part of West Germany's agenda to

[19] Stalmann and Bechler, p. 9.
[20] See: Bruss, especially the introduction.

publicise the oppression of the East German dictatorship. What remains crucial, however, is that sense of a heartfelt dialogue with her children that permeates the text: as if the public is given insight into an extremely painful and private event and through this to the 'real' Bechler. She appears not only to be exposing her inner self for her audience but doing something with words in real life. She is using words to reunite herself with her children, creating the sense that a real act is taking place outwith the narrative as it is being read and through this creating an even more authentic, 'real-life' autobiography. This matter of authenticity is problematised further in Bechler's text because, as I discuss below, it is not just her voice that speaks and represents her past self, that voice is accompanied by the voices of those with whom she wrote her collaborative autobiography.

The pursuit of authenticity in collaborative autobiography

Bechler's autobiography was co-written with the journalist Mine Stalmann, who, alongside Jochen von Lang (who transcribed a tape-recorded interview with Bechler) and Ulrike Riemer (the book's editor) created the book from Bechler's extensive notes and tape recordings.[21] Bechler had written an initial manuscript of the book herself – which stretched to seven hundred pages and was not accepted for publication – but Stalmann created a four-hundred-page book from these notes, which was accepted.[22] *Warten auf Antwort* thus contains at least two individual voices within one 'I'.

[21] According to the introduction and afterword of the 1978 edition of the text.
[22] Stalmann and Bechler, 1978 edition, p. 413.

According to G. Thomas Couser, all collaborative autobiography 'speaks with a cloven tongue […] because it conflates two consciousnesses […] in one undifferentiated voice.'[23] There is a discrepancy between the 'I' as written in the text, and the person to whom that 'I' refers – it should refer to Bechler but it was written by Stalmann. It could, however, be argued that the 'I' of the text is separated from its author in *all* writing. It is widely accepted that in the fictional spheres of prose, poetry and drama, the 'I' of the text is not the writer, although autobiographical elements are to be found. From a modernist literary perspective, author and subject can be seen as separate entities, not just in fiction but also in autobiography. Paul Jay states that autobiographers in the modern literary period, Proust and Joyce in particular, tended to 'acknowledge the inherent disjunction between the writing self and the subject of its text.' [24]

For Lejeune, the existence of collaborative autobiography draws attention to the difference between the 'I' of the text, and its writer in all autobiography.[25] Collaborative autobiography exposes that all autobiography is mediated: in admitting that more than one person wrote it, it highlights that the 'I' of the text is always separate from the person who wrote it. What has been neglected by critics of collaborative autobiography, such as Thomas Couser and Paul John Eakin, is the possibility that there may be *more* than two voices within the collaborative autobiography, because of the participation of editors and publishers. In all

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[23] G. Thomas Couser, *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 208.
[24] Jay, p. 1051.
[25] Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write," in *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 186. For further examination see: Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Fernand Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), in which Foucault discusses the interdependent relationship between the author and text.

autobiography, including the published diary or letter, it is not just the subject who speaks: there is always mediation involved. As an editor, Ulrike Reimer may have amended *Warten auf Antwort*, as an editor would non-collaborative autobiography, she represents yet another voice and another subjectivity in the text.

Collaborative autobiography may function as an exposure of the way that all published literature or autobiography operates and as an illustration of the post-structuralist disjuncture between the 'I' and the author, but according to Lejeune's concept of the 'Autobiographical Pact', it is that belief that the 'I' is the author that contributes to the text's more commercial (rather than academic or intellectual) success as an autobiography. The author's name on the cover, or their 'signature' as Lejeune calls it, is 'part of a textual device (cover, title, preface, etc) through which the reading contract is established.'[26] The reader must know that the text's author is its protagonist and narrator in order for it to be read as autobiography. The belief that the author is a real person and the writer of the account becomes part of the reading of the story itself, rather than a reflection of any 'reality' outside the text. That Bechler's name is the only one on the cover (apart from in the book's first edition) conveys to the reader not only that her story is true, but that she is the only author; that the 'I' in the text refers to her only.

In this sense, there is a degree of insincerity in the fact that Bechler is presented as only a secondary author in the first edition of *Warten auf Antwort* – Stalmann's is the primary name on the cover and she also writes the foreword. Because it has been openly stated on the book's cover (in the first edition) that the text is collaborative, the reader is

[26] Lejeune, "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write," p. 193.

being hereby told that they do not have direct access to the subject of the text, because she is mediated by the writer. It may be Stalmann's voice that the reader is reading, rather than that of Bechler. It can be disconcerting and uncanny to the reader that someone else 'speaks' for her, as if someone else is pretending to be her. The reader may question if they are reading the 'real' Bechler, thus potentially disrupting the autobiographical pact between reader and writer: if the text does not involve the author writing about her own experiences, then can it be regarded as proper autobiography?

Although Stalmann is presented as the primary author in the first edition and even writes its foreword, in subsequent editions her name is removed from the title page and she contributes only a brief epilogue. In this she says that because she was unable to uncover the other side of Bechler's story (from her ex-husband Bernhard Bechler), she does not wish her name to be on the title page (412). It is particularly striking that Stalmann appears as the party who is most concerned with objectivity, with finding out the true story, rather than Bechler, as if she, in her position as ghost-writer, pursues authenticity more than Bechler does. Whether this change of signature (as Lejeune calls it) really does stem from a conflict with Bechler, or the publisher, or whether it is actually because of Stalmann's moral position as she claims, is not known. Both Bechler and Stalmann are deceased and little information is available from the publishing houses Ullstein and the now non-operational Kindler Verlag, who initially published the text. Conveniently, in withdrawing Stalmann's name from the cover, *Warten auf Antwort* looks, if we disregard the existence of Stalmann's rather discreet epilogue, like a 'normal' non-collaborative autobiography, fulfilling the autobiographical pact, and seeming to provide full unmediated access to the 'real' Margret Bechler who seems to

be speaking for herself. Although Stalmann writes that it was her own choice to withdraw her name, it was perhaps felt that the book would sell more successfully if it were marketed as an account written only by Bechler. I will be examining the text as Bechler's text, but not without an awareness of the concerns inherent in doing so. It is not only her voice speaking, indeed someone else is controlling her words; this means there are potential problems relating to an analysis of Bechler's performance of agency.

The role of Bechler's audience

Both diaries and autobiographies operate as documents of personal catharsis and self-formation (as I discuss below) as well as public products, in which the author attempts to create a self-representation which fits both her own sense of self and that of her imagined audience. Jerome Bruner's discussion of the negotiation between personal autonomy and commitment to the audience in all life narratives is useful here,[27] but so too is the wider corpus of study looking at the concept of the imagined audience. Whereas doubt exists over how much the published diary is written with a public audience in mind, autobiography is always written to be read by an audience. The author too, acts as an audience member, speaking to herself through her narrative. It is difficult to pinpoint what kind of audience Bechler (or Stalmann or the publishers) had in mind because of the heterogeneous nature of audience. There have been long-standing debates surrounding the 'imagined audience' dating back to the classical rhetoric of Ancient Greece, which posited an essentially antagonistic, one-directional relationship between

[27] Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," p. 78.

speaker and audience, in which the speaker tries to persuade the audience. This differs from the more communicative conception of rhetoric theorised in modern rhetorical studies.[28] R. J. Willey explains that there exists an ongoing debate in this more recent research concerning 'whether writers *address* actual readers external to their texts or whether they *invoke* an audience within their texts, teaching their readers through textual cues how to relate to and read a given text.'[29] Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor see writing as 'a means of acting upon a receiver'[30]: they privilege the addressed audience over the invoked, implying that it is the audience that shapes the author and the text. Russell Long, however, stresses that the audience is a 'created fiction,' that writers can never know their readers and seek to shape them, rather than be shaped by them. Walter Ong refers to two understandings of the audience as a fiction: 'First, that the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role …Second, we mean that the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself'.[31] For Ong, the experienced writer has creative power in being able not only to imagine an audience, but to modify them too.

The invoked/addressed audience debate raises issues of agency, as briefly mentioned at the end of Chapter Two in relation to Luise Rinser's prison diary. Is the writer passively compromising herself in addressing her audience, or is she actively shaping her audience through her narrative? It seems the theory of the invoked audience

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[28] Robert J. Connors and others, *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 40.
[29] R.J. Willey, "Pre-Classical Roots of the Addressed/Invoked Dichotomy of Audience," in *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*, ed. Gesa Kirsch and Duane Roen (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1990), p. 26.
[30] Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor, "The Integrating Perspective: An Audience-Response Model for Writing, " *College English*, 41, no. 3 (1979), p. 250.
[31] Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90, no. 1 (1975), p. 12.

overemphasises the writer's power and undervalues that of the reader, whereas the addressed audience theory does the opposite, devaluing the agency of the writer in relation to her audience. It is perhaps more useful to perceive the relationship as not only a combination of the invoked and addressed audience but as a *balance* between the two: the writer is always speaking to, as well as constructing an audience in her text. Minot argues that the writer must 'both analyse and invent an audience.'[32] Bechler may create a role for her reader, but there are significant constraints on that role, she does not have free rein in her text and must *negotiate* her way through what she sees as public expectations and her own personal ones. Her concern is to create an identity that both reflects the experience of prison as well as fitting in with what her putative audience expects.

At this point it is useful to examine the social and historical context in which Bechler first published her text. Bechler's text may document an experience that took place in the 1940s and 1950s but it was written and published in West Germany in the 1970s. Political upheavals which came with the 1968 student movement and the ensuing 'sexual revolution', meant that traditional female gender roles in West Germany had shifted since 1946, when Rinser first published her diary. The accepted role of women was beginning to change to incorporate a less domestic, more politically active and sexually open role. But a backlash against the women's movement had also begun: the tendency to 'mock feminism in the most derisive terms had become commonplace,'

[32] Walter S. Minot, "Response to Russell C. Long," *College Composition and Communication* 32, no. 3 (1981), p. 337.

according to Herzog.[33] Bechler, then, was writing at a time when there were increasing disputes within public discourse concerning the role of women in society. Her account is therefore open to contrasting levels of criticism or praise depending on the type of audience that reads it, be they liberal feminists, conservative women and men, or those in-between certain ideologies.

There were, however, certain cultural beliefs that dominated the public sphere (and indeed still do), especially those involving women's involvement in National Socialism. Bechler's autobiography was being written and published at a time when there was an increased effort to address the atrocities of the Third Reich within public discourse. Public acknowledgement took the form of memorials and publications, after the relative silence of the 1950s and first half of the 1960s. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1967) marked a change in how the Holocaust was dealt with in the German public sphere and instigated a more widespread, public approach to the discussion of the National Socialism. Although it had become more common to talk publicly about one's role within the Third Reich, this was a controversial task for Bechler, given her position as a Nazi wife and implicitly as a sympathiser and/or perpetrator. Luise Rinser's representation of the female prison guards as the most criminal women she encounters during incarceration reflects a widespread perception of the woman who supported or sympathised with National Socialism as a particularly dangerous kind of criminal.[34] Such women have been represented as worse criminals than their male counterparts, demonstrated in the notoriety attached to the brutal

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[33] Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 237.
[34] See chapter 2, especially discussion of Rinser's representation of the guard Frau L.

concentration camp guard Ilse Koch, which outweighs the infamy of the more numerous and equally brutal male guards. In such portrayals women are depicted as inhumane, and monstrous, but most of all, unfeminine, deviating from the feminine role assigned them. Claudia Koonz makes reference to the particularly brutal behaviour of female guards but emphasises how few there were compared to men, and suggests that they '*seemed* more cruel because their behaviour deviated farther from our conceptions of 'feminine' models than men guards' behaviour deviated from stereotypes about men.'[35] The violent National Socialist woman became a scapegoat: she faced more castigation and punishment than her male counterpart, because she deviated not only in committing brutal acts but also in crossing a gender boundary.

It is in response to such accusations of deviant or non-femininity that the figure of the mother was often employed. The symbol of the ideal mother was and continues to be a potent mode of representation; but it was particularly within the public discourses of the Third Reich that there was discussion of what 'good' motherhood entailed. National Socialist propaganda advertised the value of domestic womanhood: the ideal Nazi woman was to produce as many 'Aryan' children as possible and to keep a clean, orderly home. Those who conformed to such expectations received the *Mutterkreuz* medal.[36] In National Socialist Germany the symbol of the mother was thus embedded in public consciousness. Angelika Ebbinghaus, in her study of the self-representations of women involved in National Socialist violence remarks that those women accused of

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[35] See: Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 404: her emphasis.
[36] Nancy Ruth Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 113.

criminal activity in their National Socialist past use their maternal role to justify any deviant behaviour under the regime: 'Die meisten Fürsorgerinnen haben ihrer Auffassung nach immer nur aus mütterlicher Fürsorge gehandelt.'[37] Many women emphasised the motherly element to their deviant or violent activity – maternal caring was their primary duty, which functions as a means of neutralising any criminality.[38]

Although Bechler could not be described as violent in the same way as National Socialist concentration camp guards, her text acts as a response and resistance to an imagined audience who may see women like her as deviant and fascist. There is an imposition of a non-feminine identity upon Bechler, both by her audience's views of fascist women and by the prison itself. It is in prison that she is separated from her children and therefore unable to fulfil her role as mother and wife. This defeminisation is compounded by the defeminising environment of prison. On arrival in remand prison in Zwickau when she is first arrested, Bechler is confronted by the regulations of a very different world from her previous one – it is a world in which she loses the right to be referred to as female: 'Ohne mich anzusehen, löschte die Wachtmeisterin das Frau vor meinem Namen sorgfältig aus.'[39] Hair is seen as a physical manifestation of Bechler's 'femininity' and she is horrified at the possibility that she, like other prisoners, may have to have her head shaved to prevent lice (67). She tries to avoid such a defeminisation for as long as possible. Although Bechler is unable to be a wife or mother in prison, this

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[37] Angelika Ebbinghaus, *Opfer und Täterinnen: Frauenbiographien des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Ingeborg Mues (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1997), p. 11.

[38] That they acted out of an overriding sense of duty too was a dominant method of exoneration used by Germans in the years after 1945. See: Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich; Zurich: Piper, 1977), and Ebbinghaus, especially her 'Vorwort'.

[39] Margret Bechler, *Warten auf Antwort: ein deutsches Schicksal*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Ullstein Taschenbuchverlag, 2001), p. 46. Subsequent references will be given in the main text.

extends to her post-prison life too: she cannot get her family back and does not remarry. Her account functions not only as a response to long-term imprisonment, but also to a continuing loss of her pre-prison life and femininity, imposed on her not only by her imaginary audience but by herself as audience member too. Bechler addresses those concerns of her imaginary audience and, simultaneously invokes that audience through creating a narrative in which her agency is paramount and in which she shapes the audience's response to her self-representation, as I detail below.

The ultimate female victim

Bechler constructs a domestic, maternal self-representation throughout her text: the book is dedicated to her children and the photos accompanying the main text trace Bechler's history as daughter, wife and mother. The emphasis throughout the text is on Bechler as a good woman rather than a criminal. Her response to her involvement in Anton Jakob's murder comes mainly at the start of the account and in it Bechler justifies her actions chiefly by maintaining throughout that she denounced him in order to save her children and herself from being sent to a concentration camp, which, according to her, would have been the only alternative if she did not report him. Bechler recounts her response when questioned about her actions and accused of being a fascist: 'Ich sagte, ich sei weder Fascist noch Nationalsozialist, ich sei Deutsche, und ich hätte gehandelt, wie ich als Mutter hätte handeln müssen' (54). Although Bechler was not as directly or heavily involved in war-crimes as the women in Ebbinghaus's study, it seems her justification of

her participation in Jakob's execution is the standard excuse of many women involved in Nazism: her duty as a mother was her main priority. Bechler thus utilises strong cultural beliefs of motherhood and duty at a time when she is accused of fascism, criminality and inhumanity.

Bechler draws a distinction between good and bad motherhood in her account. She portrays herself as a better mother than many of the women she comes across during her internment. She often goes out of her way to care for youngsters and those in need (for example: 78, 184, 197) – showing that she can still be a good mother, even though imprisonment prevents her from being a mother to her biological children. In the Mühlberg camp which consists predominantly of former National Socialists (128), Bechler contrasts her maternal identity with that of the 'bad mothers' (i.e. National Socialist women) in the camp. She separates herself from these women again when she rejects the camp's annual mother's day celebrations, during which the National Socialist women prove themselves to be bad mothers whose behaviour towards the children in the camp is described as 'unmütterlich und egoistisch' (144). Bechler by contrast takes great joy in working hard in order to help a fellow prisoner, Lilo, make a more attractive outfit out of her shapeless prison attire. Bechler documents Lilo's reaction to these implicitly bad mothers: 'Die sind doch alle Mütter, sagte Lilo, warum benehmen sie nicht so, sie denken nur an sich, uns beachten sie nur, wenn wir etwas für sie tun sollen' (137). Bechler shows that she alone possesses the characteristics of a good mother: selflessness, compassion and helpfulness.

According to National Socialist propaganda, the mother's duty during the Third Reich was not just confined to the domestic sphere but pertained to the broader National

Socialist political doctrine. Women's domestic duty fed into the growth of the German nation as a whole: their main commitment was to produce and raise as many Aryan children as possible with which to further the strength of the Third Reich.[40] Hitler even compared child-bearing Aryan women to men undertaking military service.[41]

But Bechler has made it clear that she is not a National Socialist mother by separating herself from those 'bad' National Socialist 'mothers' during incarceration. Neither does she portray her own implicitly more ideal maternal role as a political one. She insists that, as a good mother, she can have no political direction. In asking herself about her own political beliefs at the start of the account she writes: 'Und ich? Wo stand ich?' (16), but can only refer to the beliefs of the men around her: 'Ich liebte meinen Vater, der Monarchist war. Ich liebte einen Mann, der Nationalsozialist war. Ich liebte meine Kinder, die zu klein waren, um irgend etwas anderes zu sein als meine Kinder und seine' (16). Bechler positions herself firmly in the domestic, feminised role of daughter, wife and mother and uses this role to exempt herself from occupying a political position. At this early stage in the account, political direction implies fascism. There is a strong link here between support for National Socialist politics and criminality, because those who actively supported this political system were internationally stigmatised and represented as criminals after 1945. The good mother – Bechler – has at this stage no political beliefs, as a means of avoiding judgment as fascist and therefore criminal. As I discuss

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[40] Kate Lacey, "Driving the Message Home: Nazi Propaganda in the Private Sphere," in *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (London: UCL Press, 1996), p. 190.
[41] Patrizia Albanese, *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 33.

below, Bechler's interpretation of motherhood and of political belief changes significantly as her journey through the prison world progresses.

That Bechler is forced to denounce Jakob is presented not just as a consequence of her maternal nature but also of her status as an honest but powerless victim. She describes living in Altenberg (in Thüringen) with her two children during World War Two, while her husband – a National Socialist officer – was fighting on the Russian front. According to Bechler, from 1943 onwards, a succession of people began visiting her house and sending her letters to inform her that her husband had joined the antifascist movement on the Russian front, but maintains that she did not believe their claims. Bechler stresses that, although she tried to protect the people who came to her door from being apprehended by the Gestapo, she was not strong enough in the case of Jakob. She writes of how she was coerced by her vigilant, treacherous neighbours into taking action when Jakob (whom she represents as a fairly unpleasant man anyway, limiting the reader's sympathy with him) comes to her door (23). Representing herself as a victim allows Bechler to avoid taking responsibility for her actions. Ebbinghaus explains of the women in her study: 'Der psychologische Vorteil dieser Unschuldsbehauptung liegt unter anderem darin, die Welt so in gute Opfer und böse Täter aufspalten zu können; wobei das Opfer per definitionem keine Verantwortung für sein Handeln übernehmen muß.'[42] There is a significant, often unacknowledged space between the concepts of victim and perpetrator, referred to as the 'grey zone' by Primo Levi. He uses the term to denote to the complexity of victim and perpetrator roles during

[42] Ebbinghaus, p. 15.

the Holocaust, specifically, but not limited to, Auschwitz.[43] For Levi the roles of the victim and perpetrator are often merged, especially in the concentration camps where prisoners often governed (and abused) other prisoners. The two roles cannot be clearly defined for Levi, but in Bechler's attempt to absolve herself, she keeps within the 'black and white' categorisation of the victim to avoid any association with the perpetrator category. Such an approach is employed not just to exonerate herself to her imagined audience but also to herself. It acts as a means of self-protection, in which she shields herself from blame.

In her representation of her feelings towards National Socialism, Bechler makes it clear that her adherence to fascism was reluctant and passive. She writes that she was not a member of the Nazi Party and refused to greet neighbours with 'Heil Hitler!' (21); she describes her husband Bernhard as 'der einzige Nationalsozialist in dieser Familie' (15). But, as someone who did not actively resist the regime, she could be described as a 'Mitläuferin'. She confesses a certain degree of sympathy and reveals that she believed in many of its tenets (14). In doing so she endeavours to give the reader a more authentic, 'honest' account of her past feelings towards antifascists with repeated use of the word 'damals' to prove that those feelings belong to her previous identity as Nazi wife: 'damals war ich wie so viele fest davon überzeugt, daß es in einer Situation, wo Deutschland in Gefahr war, nur eines gab, nämlich zusammenzuhalten. Das Ausmaß nationalsozialistischer Gewaltherrschaft habe ich zu der Zeit nicht durchschaut' (18). Of the anti-fascists who sent her letters she admits self-consciously: 'ich will da nichts

[43] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Joseph, 1988), especially the chapter entitled 'The Grey Zone'.

beschönigen, hielt ich diese Leute für Vaterlandsverräter'(19). Bechler's attempt at honesty represents her fulfilment of a basic convention of autobiographical writing. One of the functions of her exposure of her 'real' feelings and her honesty is to prove that she is an honourable autobiographer and to temper the reader's attitude towards her potentially deviant pro-Nazi past self.

Bechler adheres to other devices used by 'Mitläufer' to justify why they went along with such a barbaric regime, stating: 'Wie viele meiner Generation war ich mit jener Vaterlandsliebe großgeworden' (19). Bechler here conveys that she was part of a whole generation which had been indoctrinated, thereby shirking any individual responsibility. Her self-representation is that of a woman trapped by the actions of her thoughtless husband, by the oppression of National Socialism and the watchfulness of those around her. At this point, Bechler is a passive, maltreated follower of the regime. She tries to gain some agency in her attempts to protect the anti-fascist visitors and create other small resistances to the regime but these attempts are shown to be in vain.

This self-representation as victim is taken further in that the defining feature of Bechler's account is of herself as an unjustly punished, victimised mother. From the outset, *Warten auf Antwort* confronts the reader with a representation of Bechler as a tragic, maternal figure: the cover of the 2001 edition displays a picture of her with her young children Heidi and Hans-Bernhard. Bechler's tragic fate, or 'Schicksal' as the book's subtitle calls it, is that she is a mother who has been separated from her children. A further tragedy lies in Bechler's claims that her husband, Bernhard, knew of her arrest but remarried and abandoned her in prison in order to further his career, prohibiting her any contact with their children. In the context of the continuing cultural potency of

'motherhood', Bechler has thus received one of the worst punishments possible for a mother and wife. It is the ultimate defeminisation, which both overshadows and is exacerbated by the defeminisation of imprisonment. *Warten auf Antwort* has been described as 'erschütternd', 'tragisch' and 'ungewöhnlich'[44]. Bechler is a woman victimised in the most extreme way and her story thus becomes more meaningful and readable to her audience, given its extraordinary yet recognisable nature. The implication is that, as a particularly tragic victim, Bechler requires sympathy rather than castigation. The reader's response is further shaped by Bechler's descriptions of the way that she is treated during imprisonment. Prisoners and guards around her are often sympathetic to her tragic predicament and give her special treatment. The humanity of those around her is a recurring theme in the text, that Bechler identifies early on when she first hears of her husband's defection and an officer is particularly kind to her: 'Von diesem Augenblick an wußte ich, daß meine Mitmenschen mich nie verlassen würden, und ich habe recht behalten' (31). This shows the reader that Bechler is someone worth caring about, encouraging their own sympathy towards her, mirroring the behaviour of the characters in her narrative.

Bechler's self-representation as victim continues quite far into her account of her time in prison. During this stage she strives to avoid characterisation as criminal through separating herself from many of the prisoners around her. Bechler's case differs from that of Rinser and Wolf, because in the early years of her imprisonment she separates herself from political prisoners. These political prisoners are criminalised because they

[44] See reviews by: Werner Hellman, "Deutsches Schicksal," *Deutsche Zeitung*, 20 October 1978. Ilse Leitenberger, "Das Buch der Woche: Ein deutsches Schicksal," *Die Presse*, 3 January 1979, Ernst A. Stiller, "Margret Bechler - ein deutsches Schicksal," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7 February 1979.

are former Nazis, in prison for their participation in the regime. Bechler is horrified to be associated with such women and labelled a Nazi criminal by a young boy who urinates on a vehicle in which she and other prisoners are being transported. He calls the passengers 'Verbrecher,' who are to blame for the current state of Germany. Bechler writes of this incident: 'es war mir schrecklich, so gesehen zu werden' (106). Bechler further de-nazifies, de-politicises and de-criminalises herself by demonstrating her exclusion and persecution by Nazi groups in prison. Of her relationship to the 'Planauer Frauen', a sewing group arrested for making Nazi uniforms, Bechler says: 'für diese politisierende Nähstube blieb ich immer eine Außenstehende, ich war eben keine Nationalsozialistin' (58). Bechler is persecuted for her lack of political belief as well as for her husband's actions (in turning against National Socialism when based on the Russian Front), describing herself as: 'Nichtmitglied und zudem Frau eines Verräters' (129). She even suggests that she identifies more with victims punished within the National Socialist regime than those in her own prison or camp who are being punished by the Soviet regime. Inmates in the Mühlberg camp consist of a number of former BDM-leaders (Bund Deutscher Mädel, a Nazi organisation for girls), who have high ranks in the camp hierarchy and who torment Bechler. She writes that because of this abuse, she became 'die letzte Verfolgte des Naziregimes' (129). Indeed she admits: 'heute nach so vielen Jahren vermag ich es fast mit einem Anflug von Heiterkeit zu sagen' (129) The years that have passed between the experience of prison and the writing of her account have allowed her to construct an identity in which she is no longer the criminal, but the victim, and to some degree the 'acceptable' victim of the Third Reich. She resists responsibility and minimises her own role as a sympathiser of

the regime through demonstrating how she too suffered. Elaine Martin mentions the post-1945 discourse of victimisation in Germany in which many former Nazis highlighted that they too suffered during the Reich 'as a shield against recognition of personal responsibility, feelings of guilt, and the articulation of mea culpa.'[45] Bechler takes this one stage further by turning herself not only into someone who suffered during the regime, but into someone who was actively persecuted by Nazis. Her account of her incarceration allows her to become a proper victim, giving her an acceptable identity, unlike other Nazi sympathisers.

There emerges a correlation between Bechler as victim and her account as a highly authentic document of events. There is a sense of the authentic throughout Bechler's life narrative, in the historical introductions opening each chapter and in the intimate dialogue it seeks to establish with Bechler's children. The text's title implies a particularly strong level of factuality and reality. Rather than being directly referred to by its autobiographical sub-genre, as in Luxemburg's letters, and Rinser and Wolf's diaries, Bechler's account is sub-titled 'ein deutsches Schicksal.' In this label there is a distinct narrowing of the gap between the narrative – the language Bechler uses in her text – and the actual experience that those words represent.[46] The subtitle therefore gives the impression that there is less room to doubt the authenticity of her account because it

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[45] Elaine Martin, *Gender, Patriarchy, and Fascism in the Third Reich: The Response of Women Writers* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), p. 190. This is also indicated in: Joanne Sayner, *Women Without a Past?: German Autobiographical Writings and Fascism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 188, p. 190 and p. 206.

[46] One could draw comparisons with the way in which Holocaust testimony has been regarded as *proof* rather than representation – see: James E. Young, "Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs," *New Literary History* 18, no. 2 (1987), pp. 403-6. However, because of the fundamental differences between the experience of Auschwitz and that of the traditional prison and SBZ camp, there are problems inherent to such an approach.

locates the narrative so closely to the experience it represents: her account is not to be disputed because it appears to *be* the story rather than just to represent it.[47] There is a further sense of non-disputability in her text because of the tragic nature of her life story and her status as ultimate female victim. There is a reluctance to question legitimacy when such unfortunate events befall the subject of autobiography because of the potential for causing offence to her as well as to others who have had similar experiences. That Bechler's story is represented as both 'Schicksal' and the worst thing that can happen to a woman, positions her seemingly above representation, as if her fate transcends narrative: there seems to be less room to question her honesty or innocence. Bechler's account seems to become *the* narrative of the experience, rather than *a* narrative.[48]

In order to combat labelling as a National Socialist, Bechler writes of herself as both a victim of National Socialism, and of the Soviet government. In this role as a victim, Bechler demonstrates that she lacks political direction: 'Langsam würde es mir zu dumm, immer zwischen dem kommunistischen und dem nationalsozialistischen Stuhl zu sitzen. War ich nicht selbst jemand?' (119). She is trapped in a liminal space between opposing authoritarian systems, seemingly with no sense of agency. Interestingly, in asking 'War ich nicht selbst jemand?' in the context of the opposing political authorities of Communism and National Socialism, Bechler aligns political allegiance with her own

[47] Such authentic representation is by no means confined to Bechler's account: Wilhelm Ernst Freiherr Gedult von Jungenfeld, *Ein deutsches Schicksal im Urwald* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1933), Hellmuth Lenz, *Deutsches Schicksal an der Memel: Die Wahrheit über das Memelland* (Munich: Lehmann, 1935), Noldin, *Ein deutsches Schicksal* (Munich: Langen, 1936), Walter Stuhlfath, *Deutsches Schicksal: ein raum- und volkspolitisches Erziehungsbuch* (Berlin: Beltz, 1937), interestingly, many such titles were published in the 1930s within the Third Reich.

[48] I discuss this concept of the authentic in more detail in relation to Elisabeth Graul's *Die Farce* in Chapter Four.

sense of self. In this excerpt she implies that, because she is a victim of these regimes with no political allegiance, then she lacks a sense of self. As I will show, the rest of her account functions as a means of locating that self and of gaining agency.

Bechler's autonomy is diminished not only in self-representation as a victim but also within the disempowering structure of the prison. One way in which she initially attempts to gain agency is through her self-representation as a martyr. Bechler writes, in response to being treated badly in prison:

> da suchte ich mir einen Ausweg, suchte einen Sinn: Wir hier drinnen müssen neben der eigenen Schuld auf uns nehmen, was das ganze Volk zu tragen hätte, damit die dort unbelastet einen neuen Anfang finden können. So wollte ich es sehen, so tröstete es mich (106).

She takes on an active role in choosing to carry the guilt of her nation. Bechler even compares her situation to that of Jesus Christ, becoming a Christian martyr: 'Aber ich sagte mir damals: Auch Jesus is hingerichtet worden, der hatte überhaupt nichts Böses getan' (257). Bechler draws on religious imagery in her search for self, something that Shadd Maruna sees as a particularly useful type of narrative to allow the former prisoner to come to terms with their incarceration. These two examples demonstrate Bechler's attempts to gain agency as a means of counteracting her passive identity as victim and prisoner.[49] But, in writing 'so wollte ich es sehen' and 'damals', Bechler implies that this was how she spoke to herself in order to cope *during* imprisonment rather than at the time of writing. Self-representation as martyr helped her cope during prison but it does not seem the most satisfactory means of gaining agency for Bechler now: now she uses a

[49] See Maruna, *Making Good* for a study of the role of narrative in the former convict and prisoner's sense of self. Maruna's text, however, cannot be fully applied to the narratives of political prisoners given that they are non-criminal, but it still stands as a testament to the crucial role of life-narratives in the process of self-making.

number of other means of attaining agency, as I discuss below. Nevertheless, her attempt to identify as a martyr acts as a bridge into her self-representation as non-passive, and I now explore the other ways that she empowers herself during long-term imprisonment.

From non-prisoner to non-criminal inmate: the empowerment of prisonisation

Bechler may be looking for her non-passive 'self' but this involves establishing that which she is *not* within the prison environment, especially given her need to prove her innocent character. During the initial phase of her imprisonment, Bechler portrays herself as a non-prisoner in her efforts to appear non-criminal. In Zwickau prison, where she stays during the first weeks of her imprisonment and interrogation, Bechler shows that she does not belong in prison partly because she does not know 'wie man sich in einem Gefängnis zu benehmen habe' (50). Prison is wholly unfamiliar to her, as she emphasises rather defensively: 'Ich hatte noch nie ein Gefängnis von innen gesehen, wie sollte ich auch?' (45). Bechler is a respectable middle-class woman after all, and, as her representation of her sometimes snobbish attitude to her fellow prisoners (such as her first cellmate, the lower-class Müttchen Müller, 46) shows, she is not used to being in an institution associated with lower-class or deviant women.

Bechler describes that she is often given special treatment during her incarceration, because people show pity for her given her tragic predicament. She is separated from other prisoners: in the prison camp at Bautzen her talent for sewing is spotted and she starts working in a separate location from her fellow prisoners (73). It is an

advantageous separation: her boss is a caring man who looks after her well. Bechler writes that the other prisoners, specifically the former Nazis, are jealous of her closeness to figures of authority and the special treatment she is given because of her talent for sewing (89). It is not only from the former Nazis that Bechler physically separates herself. She is allowed to work in the camp hospitals in Bautzen and Buchenwald instead of with the other workers. Here Bechler becomes part of a collective of hospital workers rather than identifying with other prisoners – when she says 'we' it is with reference to her own separate group (200). The hospital workers are represented as a separate and superior type of inmate who are given extra food and a better standard of care. More significantly, their appearance marks them as non-prisoners: the 'real' prisoners have shaved heads because of the proliferation of head-lice in the camp, whereas hospital workers do not (222). They have retained a feature that distinguishes them as clean, civilised and female. Bechler has thus staved off entry into the prison world and some of the accompanying defeminisation of prison.

Near the start of her account, however, Bechler remarks: 'Man lernte das ungeschriebene Gesetz der Gefängnisrangfolge schnell' (95). Prison is a different world to which she quickly becomes accustomed and into which she assimilates and becomes a prisoner. By the end of her account Bechler writes of herself as an 'erfahrene Häftling' (353) although her integration still involves a level of separation from other prisoners, as I will discuss below. One convention of the prison writing genre, if it can be perceived as such, is the transition of the subject from 'citizen' to 'prisoner'. Within the social sciences such a process has been theorised using the term 'prisonisation,' coined by

Donald Clemmer in 1940 to describe the prisoner's assimilation into the prison world.[50] Prison is seen as a subculture into which the new prisoner is thrown and in which new social conventions have to be learnt in order to survive. In this sense the term is reminiscent of Peter Paul Zahl's concept of *Unterleben*, which involves subordination to the total institution as a means of surviving it. But Clemmer's concept of prisonisation involves adjusting not only to the rules as set by the authority, but to those within the prisoner hierarchy itself. The level of assimilation into the prison culture varies according to each prisoner and prison, but often depends on how long the prisoner resides in the institution. Bechler shows that she too becomes prisonised during her eleven years spent in incarceration, but shows that this is a process in which, although she assimilates to the prison environment, she is not *subject* to prison's influence, as Foucault's concept of the prisoner as a 'docile', passive body suggests.[51] Indeed, Bechler's assimilation into the prison is characterised by a gradual gaining of agency and status within its hierarchical structure.

Central to the process of integration as an empowered rather than 'docile' prisoner is Bechler's representation of her identity as part of a group. In order to avoid a deviant identity, Bechler has to show that she belongs to the 'right' group: she separates herself from National Socialist factions and criminals in the first half of her account, in order to avoid labelling as such.[52] Bechler is often vague about those women with whom she

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[50] Donald Clemmer, "Prisonization," in *The Sociology of Punishment and Correction*, ed. Norman Johnston et al (New York, Chichester: Wiley, 1970), pp.479-484. See: Candace Kruttschnitt and Rosemary Gartner, "Women's Imprisonment," *Crime and Justice* 30 (2003), for a particularly insightful discussion of women's prisonisation.

[51] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 136.

[52] In the first half of her account, Bechler was incarcerated mostly with prisoners who had been arrested in the months following the end of the war, for their role in National Socialism (many were sentenced by

spends time, indeed the lack of detail about her cell-mates is reminiscent of Lore Wolf's construction of an anonymous collective in her diary. At numerous stages, Bechler mentions 'we' but does not specify to whom she is referring. Such a lack of information is common to autobiographical narratives in order to keep the story flowing, but it also conveys Bechler's dissociation of herself from potentially deviant women during confinement. As Wolf did in her prison diary, Bechler presents her 'we' in a vague but distinctly non-criminal light: when she and an unspecified number of female prisoners are placed in a freight car and told they are being transported to a prison for 'Schwerverbrecher', one of the prisoners exclaims 'Aber wir sind doch keine Verbrecher' (209). Bechler's group's innocence is thus voiced and conveniently preceded by a passage detailing the kind-hearted, non-criminal qualities possessed by Tea, Bechler's friend, whom she describes as 'Dieser wirklich gütige Mensch' (209). In describing the good, non-criminal nature of her 'we', it seems Bechler is making a statement about her own character.

During the latter stages of her confinement Bechler is placed in a cell with a new group of political prisoners whom she refers to as: 'Neupolitische, also solche die sich nach den Gesetzen der DDR schuldig gemacht hatten' (367). Bechler's descriptions show that she is happy to be involved with these non-National Socialist women and that they have a positive influence on her: 'die Neupolitischen hatten mehr Reserven und Lebenshoffnung, das übertrug sich auf mich. Auch war der Gemeinschaftssinn groß'

Soviet Military Tribunals). During the late 1940s and early 1950s thousands of these prisoners were released in various amnesties. Finn, *Die politischen Häftlinge der Sowjetzone*, p.64 and pp. 77-78. In the years following these amnesties, many (but not all) of the National Socialist 'criminals' were replaced with increasing numbers of anti-GDR prisoners, which is one reason why there is a shift in Bechler's group identity.

(367). Bechler becomes part of a group which has an acceptable political identity for her West German readership (who are also expected to be critical of the GDR). This new group of Bechler's consists of active resisters to authoritarian oppression; they are the 'good' type of political prisoner with whom she wishes to be associated.[53] But Bechler still represents her politicised group as somewhat anonymous: she does not go into significant detail about any of these women apart from a brief mention of the rebellious political prisoner Ilse Bauer (367). Additionally, she only implies that she spends a lot of time with them rather than stating this directly. It may be that Bechler's affiliation to such a group was less strong than she insinuates or that the group itself did not exist as a politicised unit.

Barbara Harlow mentions the importance of 'collective solidarity' for giving the political prisoner strength to get through the ordeal of prison.[54] Despite its anonymous and vague nature, Bechler's use of 'wir' acts as an empowering narrative device because it demonstrates that it was not she alone who went through the trauma of imprisonment. Writing that this happened to other, possibly innocent, certainly in many cases good, people, gives her self-representation a strength and non-criminal element that it would not have if she were just talking about herself. When she describes herself and other prisoners being left for hours in a transport vehicle, she writes 'ich glaube, uns alle beschlich die gleiche Angst, vergessen worden zu sein' (104). Bechler gains comfort and strength from the fact that others (whom she assumes to have the same feelings as

[53] They are not, however, acknowledged as political prisoners, rather labelled as dangerous criminals by the SED government and authorities. I discuss this in more detail in relation to Elisabeth Graul's account in Chapter Four.

[54] Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York; London: Methuen, 1987), p. 145. I do not hereby imply that non-political prisoners do not have collective solidarity, however, my analysis is limited to discussion of political prisoners.

herself) are going through a similar crisis. There is a distinct safety to be found in numbers. In showing that she belongs to a group, Bechler gains a sense of agency and self: this is something that she had much less of when she wrote of herself as separate from the National Socialist groups of women in the Mühlberg camp.

The agency to be attained through group identity is symbolised in Bechler's description of losing her hair, an episode halfway through her account which also serves as a symbol for her initiation as a 'proper' prisoner. In this part of the narrative, Bechler and her colleague Hanna are dismissed from their hospital jobs (for selflessly smuggling food out to other prisoners) and transformed from hospital workers – separate from other prisoners – to members of the normal prisoner collective by having their heads shaved. Head shaving is a fear that has haunted Bechler and her group of hospital workers throughout the narrative: it is a symbol of a loss of femininity brought about by prison: 'Wir konnten uns das nicht vorstellen: Frauen mit kahlen glänzenden Schädeln' (222). Indeed, the prison authorities instruct the women to wear headscarves at all times, because they cannot bear to look at their shorn heads (226). To the prison authorities, baldness is a particularly shameful consequence of imprisonment for the women. But when it actually happens, Bechler turns the experience into a positive one which reinforces her agency and group identity, rather than concentrating on feelings of shame. Losing their hair may be a distressing experience, but Bechler demonstrates that it initiates her and Hanna into a strong group of women who almost embrace having no hair: 'Sie erzählten, es sei ein seltsames Erlebnis gewesen. Erst Grauen natürlich, dann aber eine neue Offenheit, eine andere Blickweise' (226). Bechler too comes to see the head-shaving as a positive and self-strengthening loss: 'Wir hatten unser Haar verloren,

das blieb schmerzlich, aber wir hatten etwas Wichtiges gewonnen: eine tiefere Erkenntnis unserer selbst und eine stärkere Gemeinsamkeit' (227). Without hair, Bechler identifies more strongly with a group and thereby gains agency. In Bechler's account of events, the experience is not about a loss of femininity, it is represented as a ceremony which will allow her a more positive sense of belonging within the prison world as well as a stronger sense of self in response to the destabilisation of prison.

It is this group identity, initiated by the head-shaving episode, which turns the prison into a kind of home and a retreat for Bechler, as demonstrated in her portrayal of her relationship with the new group of anti-GDR political prisoners. Bechler's relationships with her anonymous group come to replace those she has on the outside world. Her assimilation into the prison world as opposed to the outer world is emphasised when she receives her first ever prison visit, from her godmother, whom she calls Aunt Lene, in 1955. Bechler is greatly disappointed at her alienation from this person and from her pre-prison life. Although she is pleased that her godmother has made an effort to come and see her, she is aware that Aunt Lene has no 'Verhaltensregeln' for the prison environment. This is confirmed by Aunt Lene's overt and unreciprocated friendliness to the guard: 'Die Wachtmeisterin wahrt eisiges Schweigen' (368). That her aunt does not know prison protocol emphasises that Bechler does: she belongs in prison. Aunt Lene is part of a different world and Bechler is part of her own separate microcosmic 'we':

> Wir sehnten uns nach Besuch, aber oft kamen wir niedergeschlagen und bedruckt aus dem Zimmer heraus. Man spürte nichts als Fremdheit. Ich wußte nicht, was in den Köpfen meiner Besucher vorging, wenn sie die Wachtmeisterinnen einbezogen oder gewollt politische Bemerkungen machten. Und ich sah auch, daß sie mich nicht verstanden. Da hatte man sich große Mühe gegeben, menschenwürdig auszusehen, und dann sagten sie, dir geht es aber gut (368).

The restrictive nature of the prison visits (and indeed any legitimate communication from prison) as well as the paradox of trying to appear well-groomed means that Bechler and her fellow inmates are unable to communicate to pre-prison acquaintances how they really feel. Prison acts as a barrier to their expression of their real, authentic selves to the outer world.[55] Her group within the prison world has its own communication system and social order in which different behavioural expectations exist from those on the outer world, creating a chasm between Bechler and those on the outside. For Bechler, only fellow prisoners can understand each other's predicament during incarceration and support each other. As such they act as a substitute for her estranged family on the outside; indeed her bonds with them are stronger than those she shares with her remaining family – even her mother who lives in West Germany – demonstrating her estrangement from both East and West Germany.

Prison becomes a haven from an unfamiliar and disempowering outer world. Bechler was incarcerated for eleven years and had little knowledge of what was happening outside. The world of the GDR is alien to her; for example, she writes: 'Entnazifizierung und Bodenreform, was bedeutete das?' (116). At least in prison Bechler has some idea of what is going on around her; she makes herself familiar with her environment and becomes an established, influential prisoner. Bechler has many good friends and close connections both with other prisoners as well as some prison guards. It is as a member of a group and, by extension an active part of the prison world, that she is able to exert

[55] Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, p. 19. Weigel also mentions other barriers to authenticity, as I discuss in more detail below.

more control over her environment and everyday life. Her contacts make prison a more familiar environment, indeed she even describes it as home on occasion (153, 308). Bechler's connections with others are especially strong when she is in the men's prison in Waldheim awaiting a death sentence: 'Ich hatte Kontakt im Haus, ja sogar eine Postverbindung zu meiner Mutter. Aber sie [die Volkspolizei] wußten nur, daß sie existierte, nicht, wie sie zustande gekommen war, das ganze Haus hatte sich gegen sie verschworen, sogar ihr eigener Spitzel' (318). Bechler's influence reaches far and wide and is so strong that she is able to evade the police. The agency she attains in prison does not mirror that which she has in the unfamiliar outside world.

Barbara Harlow writes of the more extreme case of Akhtar Baluch, a Sindhi woman held in Pakistani prisons for subversive political activity in 1970. Baluch too formed strong bonds with her fellow inmates, and when being returned to prison from the outer world, Baluch writes in her diary: ' "I was so anxious to get in, I felt as if I had returned home from a foreign land." '[56] Bechler is in a different culture from Baluch and does not necessarily have Baluch's strong social and political connections with her fellow prisoners, but both authors' accounts demonstrate that being assimilated and having strong bonds with other prisoners can make the prison seem more familiar or comforting than the outside world, especially when the outside world, as in the cases of Baluch and Bechler, is an unsettling place to live. For Baluch, prison is almost a choice, a place she wishes to enter in order to retreat from political upheaval and take refuge in and strength from her strong alliances there. Prison only gradually becomes a retreat for Bechler: she does not want to go there, as Baluch does, but the disempowerment of incarceration is

[56] Harlow, *Resistance Literature,* p. 141.

counteracted by the agency she attains within prison. Through representing prison as a retreat, Bechler reclaims the experience: she is no longer a victim and certainly not a docile body but a prisoner reinforced by a strong group, who has a high place within the prison hierarchy, and much influence.

Bechler's ideological trajectory

Bechler uses her narrative to reclaim (a level of) control over the disempowering experience of involuntary incarceration, by showing how the institution's subjection of her not only improves her by making her stronger but also allows her to locate what she represents as her 'real' self. This self is strongly bound to Bechler's representation of her changing political beliefs. For Bechler, given her controversial position as a Nazi sympathiser, her self-location involves dealing with her National Socialist past and belief system as well as beginning to locate a political identity outwith the deviant one of the fascist and criminal. It is important to remember that Bechler's sense of self is closely tied to her adherence to a political belief system, as exemplified when she asks: 'War ich nicht selbst jemand?' (119), when discussing being trapped between the opposing political systems of Communism and National Socialism.

Bechler shows the reader how her attitude towards Nazism changes during the period of her imprisonment. This conversion is arguably not unique to being in prison, rather it is connected with being a German citizen post-1945, since many former Nazi sympathisers changed their political views after the fall of the Third Reich, especially as

a result of the denazification programmes in West and East Germany.[57] Bechler's text traces her growing disregard for National Socialism, but her account of her 'reform' from Nazism is contradictory and problematic. Although she claims that she was a reluctant Nazi sympathiser, she gives the reader the impression that her commitment to the tenets of fascism was actually quite strong because of the extent to which she represents her conversion into a non-Nazi. A turning point in her attitude towards the regime comes early on in the account: 'waren wir so blind gewesen?' (36). And yet she continues to demonstrate her changing feelings towards the regime throughout the text: 'Je länger ich in Mühlberg war, desto mehr wurde mir klar, warum ich zur Nationalsozialistin keine Eignung hatte' (143). Bechler's time in prison makes her anti-Nazi feelings clearer and clearer. Numerous turning points gather in her narrative, culminating in a reformed attitude towards Jewish people late on in her incarceration. She befriends a Jewish doctor in a rather unsubtle demonstration of her non-Nazi standpoint. Bechler ends up using the Jewish doctor's toothbrush (a rare item in prison) and encounters yet another turning point in her narrative: her attitude towards Jews changes. Of the time before prison she writes: 'Ich habe nie ein Haßgefühl gegen einen Juden oder die Juden gehabt, ich hatte nur das Gefühl, sie seien von anderer, mir fremder Art,' but after this incident she says 'hier änderte sich etwas in mir' (311). When it comes to her National Socialist beliefs, it seems that prison reforms Bechler in the way that it is supposed to (unlike Rinser and Wolf who become more convinced of

[57] Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Die Wahrheit verpflichtet: Texte aus fünf Jahrzehnten zur Geschichte der DDR* (Berlin: Links, 2000), p. 258. See also: *Im Namen des Volkes?: Über die Justiz im Staat der SED*, (Bonn: Bundesministerium der Justiz, 1996), and Clemens Vollnhals and Thomas Schlemmer, *Entnazifizierung: Politische Säuberung und Rehabilitierung in den vier Besatzungszonen 1945-1949* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), for a more detailed discussion of denazification in Germany.

their previous beliefs). But this incident is problematic and possibly incriminating because it exposes the extent to which Bechler was influenced by Nazism, even until this late stage in her incarceration. This reminds us that there is, in Bechler's mind, a constant threat that she may be exposed to accusations of Nazism.

In further establishing her identity and countering a National Socialist one, Bechler traces her increasingly proactive behaviour, which in turn aligns her with acceptable models of political imprisonment. The longer Bechler stays in prison, the more she actively contests her imposed criminal identity and speaks out when it comes to injustices. From the start of her narrative, Bechler shows resistance when faced with authority, humiliation or injustice: for example, she refuses to strip when ordered to (although eventually concedes) and she plans to escape but is dissuaded because of the risk to her fellow prisoners (62). It is not until she is in Waldheim prison between 1950 and 1954 that Bechler, fuelled by her disputes with the chief prison warden Schönfeld, begins to openly assert herself and initiate conflict in her resistance to prison rules. Bechler clashes with Schönfeld on several occasions because of his brutal treatment of prisoners and bullying nature, and receives severe punishments in the process. One example of this is her rebellious solidarity with a fellow prisoner, Melanie, who was told to stand with her face to the wall as punishment for waving to a male prisoner. Bechler chooses to stand next to Melanie and receives extra punishment (284/5). Her main focus of protest is on the inhumanity of the prison – on being sent to underground cells as a punishment for talking back to Schönfeld, Bechler reports: 'Ich sagte, was er hier mache, sei ein Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit' (300). This appeal for humanity is central to Bechler's acts of resistance: she shows that there is a social, compassionate,

rather than selfish or pointless purpose behind her rebellion and that she is supported by her fellow prisoners and even some prison authorities in her protests (e.g. 301 and 303). In this role as ambassador for an improved, more humane way of life, Bechler, by her own account, attains the reputation, amongst prisoners and guards alike, of being akin to a political prisoner, in the most positive, acceptable (i.e. non-Nazi) understanding of the term. When authorities plant a spy in the cell next to her in order to befriend her and glean information from her, the spy pretends to be a political prisoner, rather than a criminal one (312). In describing this incident, Bechler shows that the political is the type of prisoner with whom she will most likely bond. Bechler's strength of mind is highlighted when she is placed in a cell with a Jehovah's Witness, who is known for her persistent attempts to convert her cell-mates. For the prison guards there is no possibility that Bechler, whom they call by her maiden name, Dreykorn, could be brainwashed: 'Dreykorn ist nicht zu beeinflussen, da besteht keine Gefahr, daß sie sich bekehren und taufen läßt' (334). Indeed the Jehovah's Witness and Bechler are eventually separated because of *Bechler's* influence rather than her religious cellmate's. Bechler is the one who has ideological influence and agency within the prison world and promotes the 'right' kind of rebellion.

A key step in Bechler's development into a politicised prisoner is in her solidarity with what she refers to as the 'Neupolitische', whose beliefs she prefers (although she is not specific about them) to those in the outside world of East Germany. Indeed, she purposely cuts herself off from the outside political world; of her godmother's visit she writes: 'Sie erzählt mir […] von den großen Leistungen des neuen Regimes, bis ich sage: ach weißt du, das interessiert mich nicht so sehr, laß uns lieber von Menschen

sprechen' (368). Bechler demonstrates her disapproval of the regime and its followers in refusing to hear it praised, instead wishing to hear about people, especially her children.

In her proactive, humane performance and allegiances with this group of anti-GDR political prisoners, Bechler takes on the identity of a political prisoner, although she never defines herself using those exact words. Given her National Socialist 'crime', Bechler has to tread a careful path when representing herself as a prisoner, since the term 'political prisoner' has such a fluid meaning. After all, she could be defined as a political prisoner in the negative fascist understanding of the term. Her incarceration was a result of interactions between National Socialist Germany of pre-1945 and Soviet East Germany post-1945: she is punished by the Soviets for activity that was legal in Nazi Germany but became illegal post-1945.[58] She is also often referred to as a 'Kriegsverbrecher,' which in itself is a kind of political prisoner. Therefore, if she defines herself as a political prisoner she risks taking on a political identity that she denied having at the start of her account and could thus be exposed to labelling as National Socialist and criminal. Whereas politics, and by extension the political prisoner, is associated with Nazism and criminality at the start, Bechler now links it to anti-GDR resistance. Although she avoids using the term in relation to herself, she nonetheless taps into the common cultural model – exemplified by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht – of the political prisoner as the righteous and proactive (rather than

[58] See: Susanne Leonhard, *Gestohlenes Leben: als Sozialistin in Stalins Gulag* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenaeum, 1988), the author was imprisoned in German camps between 1936 and 1948. Heinz Brandt, *Ein Traum, der nicht entführbar ist: mein Weg zwischen Ost und West* (Munich: List, 1967), Brandt too was incarcerated during the Third Reich and the GDR.

passive) victim of an oppressive system, the martyr-figure who sacrifices herself for the good of others and fights for justice.

It is through the experience of long-term confinement that Bechler identifies as a political prisoner; this is a common feature in prison narratives, and many other prisoners, male and female, seem to become politicised *during* prison, rather than arriving into prison with a political consciousness. Harlow mentions the case of Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a Bolivian woman who was imprisoned twice for participating in political activities and who suffered abuse in prison: ' 'with everything I'd suffered in the arrests, in jail, and in Los Yungas, I'd acquired a political consciousness. In other words, I'd found myself.' '[59] It is in prison that Chungara finds her identity, and that identity is political. This strikes a chord with Bechler's questions about her own identity ('War ich nicht selbst jemand?') when she is trapped between the National Socialist and East German regimes. Bechler's search for her self is a search for political identity in the liminal space between the two regimes. In finding her political belief in prison, Bechler suggests that she finds her 'self'.

One key difference between Bechler and Chungara is that Bechler is less aware of gaining a specific political conscience than Chungara is. Although she bonds with the anti-GDR political prisoners, she is not guided by one particular belief or affiliation to an organisation. She retrospectively constructs the identity of a woman who need not be taught political awareness; rather, given her strength of mind and her maternal nature, such awareness is portrayed as inevitable. Prison has given her identity but it is represented as a merging of rebellious and feminine identities rather than being

[59] Harlow, *Resistance Literature,* p. 144.

associated with a particular party or belief system. As I discuss below, this 'self' is founded upon an identity as maternal and feminine.

Negotiation between two worlds

Despite demonstrating that she attains agency and a sense of 'self' in prison, Bechler continues to use ideal gender performance to neutralise potential accusations of deviant femininity in her self-representation. Since her integration into the prison subculture, there are two ways in which Bechler could be publicly regarded as criminal or deviant. Firstly, in the existence of her initial 'crime', which associates her with National Socialism, as well as her subsequent denunciation of Anton Jakob, which she must always defend. Secondly, there is her assimilation into the subversive environment of the prison, which has, despite its initial unfamiliarity, gradually become a retreat to her. Within the microcosm of prison, she accesses an alternative perspective on the world and on gender relations, not least in encountering the defeminising rules of prison. In addition to this possibly transgressive representation, many of Bechler's readers may have predetermined beliefs about prison as a space filled with deviant women.

It is worth noting that the prison is not a completely subversive world: Mary Bosworth maintains that although there may be alternative norms there, women do still judge each other on the basis of 'outer' norms of femininity, meaning there is a strong connection to the outer world.[60] Prison cannot be regarded as completely

[60] Bosworth, p. 4.

different from the outside; however, there is still an element of transgression given the subversion attached to the prison space. Bechler documents her involvement in this subversive world and attempts to neutralise, or translate it into the more conventional outer world of the autobiography. She does this during the head-shaving episode by aligning herself with a respectable group instead of highlighting the lack of femininity inherent in the loss of hair. Bechler does not describe any of the women in her new group in any detail, omitting details of any unsavoury or directly criminal members. The group that she joins may consist of prisoners but they are portrayed as non-criminal, therefore Bechler, as a new member, is non-criminal too.

This neutralisation and negotiation between outer and inner is illustrated further in Bechler's descriptions of her relations with men during incarceration. She writes frequently of the attention she receives from men, especially when in the Bautzen camp (77). She shows more of a desire to talk to men than Luxemburg, Rinser or Wolf: her dentist in Mühlberg is a potential love interest: 'es war anregend, ab und zu mit einem Mann sprechen zu können' (141, 201). Such an attitude may come across as immoral, and perhaps even deviant, but Bechler is careful to represent herself as an ideal rather than deviant woman. For example, she starts a romantic relationship with a young male prisoner – Pahlen – who works as a caretaker. He proposes marriage to her when she is in solitary confinement awaiting a death sentence in Waldheim men's prison (254). He is later caught receiving a letter from her and is punished severely by being kept in a cell without food. Bechler helps him by kissing a prison guard in return for providing Pahlen with food: 'Für jeden

Kanten Brot, den er mit hinübernahm, hat er mich geküßt' (274). There are two potentially deviant acts here: Bechler's relations with another prisoner out of wedlock, as well as the exchange of intimacy for food, which could be perceived as indecent given its association with prostitution, which is seen in positivist criminology as *the* female crime.[61] In order to avoid self-representation as deviant, Bechler lays emphasis on this exchange as another example of her ideal femininity. Firstly she makes it clear that it was the guard who kissed her – she was sexually passive rather than predatory. Also, she kisses the guard for the sake of another person's survival, emphasising her role as maternal and caring. Furthermore, Pahlen never finds out about it, which means that Bechler is not seen as licentious within the prison. Although Bechler had a romantic relationship, the incident in which she kisses the male guard is the closest she comes to describing physical contact with anyone in prison, underscoring the non-sexual nature of her relationship with Pahlen. Bechler upholds her chastity and her sexual loyalty to her husband, whilst portraying the exchange of affections with the guard as an action that is appropriate to her prison (rather than non-prison) identity. Moreover, and perhaps more important to her negotiation between worlds, the reader is shown that Pahlen is generous and caring to Bechler: his letters and acts of kindness give her much-needed comfort during her confinement: 'Das sind alles Kleinigkeiten, aber sie sind so wichtig in einem solchen Augenblick, man lebt von ihnen' (247). Her relationship with Pahlen is essential, a means of *survival* for Bechler within the prison world and this helps to surpass any subversion.

[61] See Chapter Two.

In her descriptions of her relationship with Irma, a nurse who cares for her in the hospital of the Buchenwald camp, Bechler once again negotiates a path between subversion and conformity. Bechler highlights Irma's masculine features and behaviour – her fierce, intimidating disposition, eyebrows that meet in the middle (176), her 'Männertaschentuch' and long strides (187). Bechler is fairly indignant at Irma's lack of femininity and blames the men who do not treat her like a woman, but instead show her 'fürchterliche Kameradschaftlichkeit' (188). Bechler wants men to treat women as women, showing her desire to uphold 'outside' hetero-normative principles. Irma takes an immediate liking to Bechler and even comes to her bed one night to embrace her, which comforts Bechler greatly (188); such an act is once again represented as a means of survival for Bechler. She writes that she is unaware that Irma's intentions are romantic or sexual until a fellow prisoner tells her that Irma is a lesbian. Even then Bechler appears clueless: 'Ich wußte nicht, was das war' (188). This innocence of homosexuality upholds Bechler's heterosexual, non-deviant character. Her motives for asking Irma to stop coming to her bed may partly be because she has become aware that Irma is a lesbian but are primarily because of what people say behind her back (188). Bechler does not seem uncomfortable with Irma's affectionate behaviour; it is the rumours circulating that are her main concern. However, she neutralises any implication that she participates in homosexual activity by describing the child-like role she performs in being protected by Irma: 'Ich kam mir vor wie ein Kind' (188). That Irma takes an almost maternal role in Bechler's description creates a role for Bechler that is innocent and child-like rather than sexual or sexually deviant.

Within the alternative or subversive environment of the prison, Bechler demonstrates that she acts as ideally as she can. Imprisonment entails a new set of rules for survival. In her account, Bechler begins a relationship with Pahlen in order to combat the isolation of solitary confinement. It is because of this relationship that she becomes involved in the 'deviant' situation of sexual/intimate exchange, acting subversively in order to continue her performance as a mother and reinforcing her role as a superior woman. Furthermore, it is because, in her now child-like role, she craves comfort and affection that she is responsive to Irma's advances. In Bechler's account, being incarcerated changes how women may perform their femininity: there may be behaviour which, outside prison, is construed as deviant, but in the prison world it is a means of survival. Bechler makes it clear, however, that underneath that 'deviant' gender performance which is unique to the prison world; she is still performing as an ideal woman should. Unlike Rinser, who, in her 1981 autobiography, frankly describes experiencing sexual desire when in prison, Bechler does not.[62] Bechler's attempts to prove her innocence and ideal femininity exceed those of Rinser possibly because she is still separated from her children at the time of writing. She is still being punished because she is not allowed to be a mother. It is as if she still has to prove that she can be a good woman and mother.

In her negotiation between subversion and traditional gender norms, it is probable that Bechler compromises between how she feels about herself and how she thinks an audience will perceive or judge her. It could be said that Bechler addresses her imagined audience,[63] thus lessening her autonomy. It is impossible to ascertain how much of a

[62] Rinser, *Den Wolf umarmen*, p. 381.
[63] See the above discussion on the invoked or addressed audience.

compromise is made between her own perception of the experience and that presented within the narrative itself, but it does seem that there is a loss of agency here. It is the task of the prison autobiography (and indeed any published text about or from prison) to bridge the gap between the world of prison in which alternative rules apply and the outside world. But this endeavour need not primarily involve a loss of agency, because, as we will see below, Bechler's text creates a model for the maternal political prisoner; she contributes to and shapes a discourse rather than just being shaped by the expectations of her audience.

The feminine political prisoner

Bechler's self-representation as a female political prisoner is one which involves assimilation into the prison world, and initiation as a real prisoner. However, she simultaneously separates herself from non-political female criminals and reminds the reader that her femininity is superior to their criminal behaviour. On being transferred to the women's prison in Waldheim after spending three years in the men's prison there, Bechler writes of her preference for the men's wing. For her, the women's prison is a more temperamental place, because of the volatile moods of the highly strung female prisoners: 'Einige der isolierten Frauen veranstalteten regelmäßig einen Zauber, der kaum zu beschreiben ist' (331). The female prisoners' mental state is shown to be much more unstable than the men's, and their temper tantrums indicate their childishness. They shriek too, a noise that Bechler describes as 'nichts Menschenähnliches' (331). In this case their shrieks do not come across as childish but as animalistic: here Bechler

suggests that women in this prison correlate to nineteenth-century positivist criminologists' views of the female criminal as either childlike or non-human, and in many cases a monstrous being.

Shortly after her arrival in the women's prison, Bechler is forced to share a cell with a young street girl called Anita who is 'schmuddelig, zierlich und zigeunerhaft' and in the late stages of syphilis (348): a sexually transmitted disease that causes insanity. Again a female criminal is described using stereotypical markers of deviant femininity. Bechler describes the girl as 'schon nicht mehr ganz zurechnungsfähig' (345), mentioning that she is prone to suicide attempts and that her attacks of insanity coincide with the full moon (347). Anita's mental illness contrasts with Bechler's refusal to even feign insanity in order to avoid execution when she is on trial for murder. On being advised to act as if she is insane by a fellow prisoner she asserts: 'Ich lehnte ab. Das sei nicht mein Weg' (257). Bechler makes it clear that she is separate from Anita and later another syphilis patient, Erika, who again embodies the stereotype of the highly sexed hysterical criminal. Bechler belongs to another category of prisoner, the political prisoner, whose resistance to incarceration involves fighting for justice and humanity.

Although Bechler portrays the girls as over-sexed and mad, she does not judge them as negatively as Rinser does. Bechler describes Melanie as both mentally unstable and sexually deviant in her temperamental behaviour and predatory flirtation with men. But when Melanie is caught waving at a male prisoner, and told to stand with her face to the wall, Bechler stands with her and faces punishment for this act of solidarity (284/5). In Bechler's account, the deviant woman, although separate and 'other', can still be part of prison resistance. All prisoners can perform politically – indeed for many political

prisoners, the function of prison is not necessarily to reform criminal behaviour, rather to instil a political consciousness in all of the inmates; in prison, the ordinary criminal can be politicised (see my discussion of Chungara above). It is worth noting here that Bechler too has attained political identity through her incarceration, although she is careful, through her self-representation as victim, to emphasise that she was not an 'ordinary' criminal in the first place.

Bechler incorporates an identity as humane and cultured. The grand majority of her rebellious, political activities in prison indicate her belief in humanity rather than her adherence to an unjust set of laws: 'Ich wollte mich nicht anpassen, wo menschliche Würde so verletzt wurde' (374). For Bechler, humanity and culture go hand in hand, although she shows that the prison and camp represent a disruption to this linkage. This interruption is demonstrated when Bechler sets the Mühlberg camp's inhumane treatment of former Nazis against its attempts at high literary culture, such as regular performances of Schiller plays: the two opposing aspects of culture and barbarism do not fit together for her (145). Since culture implies humanity, Bechler finds it disconcerting in such barbaric circumstances.[64] Bechler is dismissive of the Mühlberg camp's 'Kultura' programme: 'ein scheußliches Wort, es war, als schwände jede Kultur daraus durch das angehangte a' (144). She implies that her interpretation of culture is superior to that put forth in the camp, underscoring her own cultured character in her reliance upon 'good' literature such as works by Goethe, especially during the monotony and isolation of solitary confinement (120, 185 and 338). In this self-representation as

[64] Such a stance reflects widespread post-1945 intellectual attitudes towards the atrocities of the Holocaust: that 'Auschwitz' was a break in the civilised world, most notably examined by Theodor Adorno.

cultured, she not only responds to a label as criminal through showing her educated and implicitly non-criminal character, but also demonstrates her superiority to the inhumanity and ignorance of the carceral systems in the SBZ and the early years of the GDR.

In her self-representation as a humane and cultured prisoner, there is a sense that Bechler is a good political prisoner but also a good woman, reminiscent of Rosa Luxemburg's self-representation in her letters. Not only does her humanity link her to political and intellectual culture and non-criminality but it connects her with widespread beliefs about the role of woman as self-sacrificing nurturer and carer. It seems her humane attitude to imprisonment is an extension of how she represents her crime: she was protecting her children, acting humanely and maternally. Bechler's account thus merges the supposedly opposing ideas of rebellious politics and motherhood through its representation of her maternal humanity.

In merging a political, defiant performance with ideal femininity, Bechler refutes the stereotype of the ideal woman as passive and weak through creating a maternal self-representation which is strong, defiant and determined. Bechler proves how physically strong her links to femininity are when her head is shaved. Her particularly long hair continually broke the hair trimmer (227), insinuating not only a strong femininity but also an innate and physical tendency towards resisting injustice and humiliation. Resistance is here a part of Bechler's physical self and part of her femininity. No such description is given of her friend Hana or of any other women who have shaved heads. Bechler may become part of a group but she constructs herself as a stronger woman than her fellow prisoners. Bechler's refusal to be referred to as a prisoner rather than a

woman symbolises her defiant fight for her femininity: ‘als beim Zählappell eine andere Form der Meldung eingeführt wurde, auf neue Entwürdigung abzielend. Bis dahin hatte es geheißen: Zelle 39 belegt mit einer Frau. Nun sollte ich melden: Zelle 39 belegt mit einer Strafgefangenen. Ich lehnte ab’ (287). Bechler wins this fight. She is allowed to define herself as a woman rather than as a prisoner: she is more active and powerful than the Bechler who was no longer referred to as ‘Frau Bechler’ in the early stages of her imprisonment, and merges rebellion with femininity.

In her proactive quest to uphold her self-perception as a good woman and mother, Bechler refuses an official pardon and early release; for her, accepting such a pardon would be tantamount to admitting that she is a criminal woman: ‘Ich bin kein Verbrecher, ich brauche Ihre Gnade nicht’ (361). Paradoxically, it is through staying in prison that she substantiates her innocence and ideal femininity. This proactive performance stands in contrast to the conduct of Tea, who was ‘sanftmütig genug, Urteil und Begnadigung hinzunehmen’ (353). Bechler’s praise here is somewhat disingenuous: the ideal female political prisoner should not be gentle and virtuous in the same way as Tea. As Bechler does, the woman (unjustly) accused of a crime should fight against injustice, and go to extreme lengths to prove her innocence rather than adhering to stereotypes of the passive, gentle woman.

In her performance as an imprisoned mother, Bechler also continually attempts to make contact with her children, against the advice of many around her, as well as her own mother (282, 363). Her determination is represented as the most natural thing for a mother: ‘Konnte eine Mutter sich schaden, wenn sie nach ihren Kindern fragte?’ (363). Maternal strength is seen alongside political integrity and rebellion when Bechler’s

repeated wishes to hear about her children are positioned alongside her refusal to be led astray by the contents of a Maxim Gorky book within her narrative (282): Bechler combines these two 'poles' into one self-representation. Maternal strength is, in her account, naturally synonymous with political action and strength of mind.

The prisoner who does not obey the rules of the institution is, in Bechler's account, the determined mother; she is the ultimate acceptable rebel. For Bechler, it is becoming a bad prisoner (in the eyes of the prison authorities) which enables her to confirm her ideal, maternal identity: 'Ich war immer noch kein guter Häftling, ich wurde es nie' (371). When she is described by the prison police as 'ein ganz gefährlicher Mensch' (379), this may be a display of her subversion but only in the opinion of her adversaries. Such a statement empowers Bechler because it highlights not only her resistance to her total institution, but shows that that resistance has an effect, that she has agency within the prison. She is only dangerous in the eyes of the prison; to her readers, she is a strong mother. Bechler thus draws on the humane femininity perceptible in Rosa Luxemburg's letters and the cultural discourse surrounding her, but takes this much further through her demonstration of her maternal rebellion.

It seems Bechler creates an identity that, in refuting stereotypes of the ideal woman as passive and weak, situates her within a matriarchal tradition. She is a defiant but ideal mother, a lioness archetype and, although she does not write of herself using this sort of imagery, it is evoked in her self-representation. Such an archetype of femininity crosses the border into masculine stereotypes such as aggressive, rebellious or politically active behaviour. Relying on the archetype of the strong maternal protector allows her to negotiate any dubious gender roles she assigns herself. This is an acceptable female

identity only because the woman primarily acts in such a ‘masculine’ way in order to sustain her role as a mother or martyr.

Bechler represents her rebellious and angry nature, but this is the right sort of rebellion, a rebellion that will fit with the gender and political expectations of her readership. She constructs a narrative that is appropriate for a time in which there was confusion about appropriate female gender roles. Her account demonstrates her conformity to the female role of chaste mother but incorporates rebellion and political activism into this. There may have been a more liberal attitude to sex at the time that *Warten auf Antwort* was published, in light of the sexual revolution and 1968 student movement (given that the text was published in West Germany), but Bechler’s self-representation does not engage with this (presumably in an attempt to avoid criminal labelling). However, she does assimilate to what could be seen as post-1968 models of female political engagement, but this identity is presented indirectly through her use of traditional archetypes, which pre-date 1968.

In her self-representation, Bechler is first and foremost a mother rather than a political prisoner. The basis of her account is, after all, the tragedy of her separation from her children and victimisation by her husband and the SBZ/GDR governments, rather than being a historical ‘document’ recounting the incarceration of a female political prisoner. It thus fits into a different genre from the letters of Luxemburg and the diaries of Rinser and Wolf, a genre which focuses on a tragic or painful life. In it Bechler is distinguished as an imprisoned mother rather than a political prisoner. Bechler’s behaviour demonstrates that she acts as a protective mother should. She creates a model for the female political prisoner in which political activism is an

extension of maternal caring. For Bechler, motherhood no longer stands as an exemption from political involvement (i.e. involvement in Nazism), indeed it is a vital part of being active in the right sort of politics: that of anti-Nazi, anti-East German dictatorship. By the end she stays in prison because she is a good mother, radically altering the traditional concept of prison as a 'male' space.

Conclusion

According to her account it seems that prison unlocks Bechler's 'true' self. It is within the prison space that she is able to live more honestly and truthfully:

> Wir sind durch dieses ungewöhnliche Leben auch beschenkt worden. Mit Erkenntnissen, die uns ohne die Belastungen der Haft nie zuteil geworden wären. Heute empfinde ich nicht selten, daß unsere Lebensnähe in den Lagern viel *wahrhaftiger* war. Natürlich hat ein Gefangenendasein viel Begrenzendes und Einschränkendes, aber oft hatte ich das Gefühl, als hätte ich damals intensiver gelebt (196, my emphasis).

In Bechler's narrative, prison involves reaching into the basics of real life. The experience of head-shaving has also given Bechler a deeper understanding of herself ('eine tiefere Erkenntnis unserer selbst'). This sense of deep reality is something that Luise Rinser is also aware of when she writes in her diary: 'Ich sah das Leben nie so, wie ich es hier zu sehen bekomme: Nackt, häßlich, hart, aber unverfälscht und wirklich' (66). In this sense, prison writing can assert the subject's exposure to the raw, bare, 'reality' of the world and to a seemingly more authentic means of perceiving the self.

Bechler's real self, as created by the experience of prison, involves an improved kind of humane political awareness which feeds in to her maternal, defiant persona. She

becomes a better mother in prison through developing a political, protective consciousness. There is an implication that prison had a momentous effect on her life after her release because she went on to become a primary school teacher, taking her maternal, pedagogical role into her post-prison life. What is striking in such a self-representation is its relationship to traditional notions of woman as naturally belonging to a domestic space. Being confined to a particular space such as a prison or camp is, in its restrictive, monotonous, non-public nature, akin to the domestic space into which women were previously confined. That the domestic space of the prison actually *improves* Bechler as a woman implies, rather startlingly, that prison is an ultimately refeminising place, something which counters many sociological interpretations of prison as both defeminising and ill-adapted to the needs of female prisoners. But we are not dealing with empirical notions of what prison 'does'; we are looking at Bechler's representation of prison. That she interprets the experience as refeminising reinforces the non-deviant nature of prison. The carceral space is reclaimed as a feminised rather than deviant, defeminising location for Bechler.

But it is not just through imprisonment that this 'real' self is laid bare, rather is it through narrative that she is able to realise her reformed, 'true' character. Narrative has a crucial effect on the creation of identity. According to Bechler's text, it is the prison narrative that exposes an even 'realer' Bechler than prison itself does, because of the glimpses she gives the reader of her 'real' self in prison. There is a distinct discrepancy between Bechler's representation of how she appears to people in prison and how she represents her real, inner feelings. She shows the reader that, in prison itself, she puts on a brave face, even when she does not feel brave inside. She admits, especially during her

conflict with Schönfeld, that her outer performance did not fit in with her inner, real emotions: 'Daß sich dahinter Furcht verbarg, wußte keiner' (288). Here she shows the reader – rather than most of her fellow prisoners and guards – her 'real' weaker side, stereotypically speaking her more feminine side, as she does when mentioning that she cries secretly, expressing her weakness and emotion only to the reader (132). Weigel writes of the barriers to authenticity created both within prison and in the outer world: 'in den verschiedenen Ausdrucksformen Gefangener ist die Authentizität ihrer Erfahrungen/Aussagen immer gebrochen durch informelle oder formelle Barrieren, durch institutionelle Strukturen, Erwartungen, Schreibanlässe und –motive.'[65] It is in the prison world that the 'real' self cannot be expressed, whereas in autobiography, Bechler gives the impression that she is showing her 'real' self. Of course, as Weigel indicates, in the world of published life narratives different barriers, such as reader and publisher expectations arise, to which the author is subject. Despite these barriers, what remains in *Warten auf Antwort* is the sense that the reader is given special insight into Bechler's 'true' self.

And it is a 'true' self that has undergone a great deal of improvement. Bechler uses her narrative to demonstrate that prison was almost a *privilege*, because of the opportunities for self-improvement that it provided. For Bechler, such opportunities for authenticity are implicitly not available in the outside world. In presenting such an improved, more authentic self through her narrative, Bechler gains autonomy over her life and the disempowering experience of prison. It is important to remember that

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[65] Weigel, *"Und selbst im Kerker frei ...!": Schreiben im Gefängnis: Zur Theorie und Gattungsgeschichte der Gefängnisliteratur*, p. 19.

Bechler never chose to be in prison and separated from her family; she was desperate to contact them but was refused any communication by the authorities (for example, 282). Through showing the extent to which it improved her, Bechler is able to account for the lost years and the loss of her family, gaining a sense of having more control over that time: this is vitally important in coming to terms with the loss inherent in long-term imprisonment. Her words allow her to actively 'do' something; to reclaim her experience as an empowering part of her life.

It is through narrative that she is able to (attempt to) gain control over her life, constructing her autobiography in a way that reflects how she wishes to perceive herself. Narrative enables her to infuse the 'mother' signifier with a meaning which incorporates potentially subversive characteristics. Through associating such subversions with ideal femininity, Bechler neutralises their transgressive features. In this narrative she is able to move beyond the passive space of victimisation into one of autonomy and gain an identity that is both acceptable to herself and to her putative readership. It is through writing her account that she is able to construct an identity in which she has more agency than she did in her pre-prison life. The autonomy to be gained through language is encapsulated in Bechler's attitude towards her name both during prison and afterwards. Bechler is, during prison, particularly defensive of her right to be referred to as a woman rather than a prisoner and wins the fight to be allowed to define herself as 'Frau' (287). Bechler reclaims the right to be referred to as a woman *in* prison, and such a reclaiming of her status as woman and mother is to be found in her use of her married name on the cover of the book. By calling herself Margret Bechler on the cover and throughout the book, Bechler contests her divorce and subsequent loss of her name in

prison – in Waldheim prison she was persuaded to sign divorce papers and lost her married name (236). In using the Bechler name to write her autobiography, she publicly reclaims it, challenging what was done to her in prison and taking up her original role as mother and as wife. Using 'Bechler' allows her to partially right the wrongs done to her by prison and by her husband. She hereby takes control over a situation in which she previously had none. She thus gains a sense of self as an agent not only through prison, but also, and perhaps more importantly, through writing about prison. It is language and by extension narrative that gives her identity, as Jerome Bruner theorises.[66]

However, narrative is not an unproblematic means of gaining agency. It is not wholly powerful, especially when we consider that Bechler did not write her own words, or construct her own account: Mine Stalmann and the publishers are also in control of the narrative. Indeed, it seems that Mine Stalmann was the one who decided whose name was to go on the book's cover, since she removed her name after the first edition. The published prison narrative and especially the collaborative one represents a diminished agency for Bechler. Perhaps Stalmann is imposing her own agenda upon Bechler's narrative, distorting Bechler's 'original' story for her own purposes. On the other hand it could be Bechler who exploits Stalmann, as is often the case when the subject is more famous than the author.[67] Whatever the power relations or personal agendas of Bechler and Stalmann, what remains in the existence of the collaborative life narrative is the possibility of disempowerment on the part of Bechler. Also there is the presence of the imagined 'addressed audience' in Bechler's (and indeed every writer's) account. It is

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[66] Bruner, "The Narrative Creation of Self," p. 63.
[67] G. Thomas Couser, *Making, Taking and Faking Lives: the Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing* (1998), accessed October 2007; http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2342/is_2_32/ai_54637199, p. 3.

difficult to pinpoint the exact compromises that are made for an audience but one potential example is in Bechler's avoidance of the label 'political prisoner'. In representing her politicised character but not defining herself using the words 'political prisoner', Bechler shows that she is aware of the possible criticism of her audience, who may either refer back to her as a Nazi political prisoner, or a fraud, pretending to be an anti-GDR resister, when that is not what she is in prison for. The label political prisoner holds a lot of weight, and it is perhaps because of her imagined audience that Bechler does not allow herself to fully identify as such. The audience, the co-writer and the publisher represent further barriers to Weigel's understanding of 'authenticity' in prison writing, and also to agency, because Bechler is not in ultimate control over the words that she uses. But such barriers to agency are inevitable in many kinds of writing and perhaps even intrinsic to the process of creating a 'readable' document. After all, perhaps using a professional writer, and a publisher, is necessary in order that Bechler's self-representation traverses the space between prison and the public world appropriately. Bechler may seem to compromise in creating her narrative, but I propose that the autonomy that she gains through writing outweighs the compromises made in the process. Bechler's text acts as a testament to the possibilities of self-creation and autonomy present within narrative. Language may not be able to do everything in the location of the self, but its benefits in such an endeavour are manifold.

Chapter Four: 'Die Gefangene ist die Überlegene': agency and femininity in Elisabeth Graul's *Die Farce.*

Introduction: disempowerment in prison and prison writing

The writer and civil rights campaigner, Jürgen Fuchs (1950-1999) wrote of his experience of East German incarceration between 1976 and 1977: 'Und wenn man widerkommt, ist man ein anderer'.[1] The German Democratic Republic is remarkable for the diverse ways in which it attempted to change the personalities of its prisoners in an effort to transform them into ideal citizens. This is of particular import to those arrested for their resistance to the regime, whom we would now regard as political prisoners. The 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands' (SED) fervently denied the existence of political prisoners within the GDR, instead labelling them dangerous criminals. Leonore Ansorg writes: 'Eine formale Trennung zwischen dem Strafvollzug an politischen und kriminellen Gefangenen existierte nicht. Da die DDR offiziell keine politischen Gefangenen kannte, gab es folglich auch keinen speziell auf sie zugeschnittenen Strafvollzug mit besonderen Normen und Regelungen.'[2] This refusal to designate these prisoners 'political' combined with their extreme criminalisation had a significant effect. Ansorg writes that not being recognised in one's status as political can degrade the prisoner: 'Die moralische Diskreditierung von politischen Gegnern als Kriminellen

[1] Jürgen Fuchs, "Bearbeiten, dirigieren, zuspitzen: Die >leisen< Methoden des MfS," in *Zersetzung der Seele: Psychologie und Psychiatrie im Dienste der Stasi*, ed. Klaus Behnke, Jürgen Fuchs and Mitchell G. Ash (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995), p. 47.
[2] Leonore Ansorg, *Politische Häftlinge im Strafvollzug der DDR: die Strafvollzugsanstalt Brandenburg* (Berlin: Metropol, 2005), p. 9.

bildete eine Konstante in der politischen Strafverfolgung und im Strafvollzug der DDR.'[3]

It was not only through criminal labelling that the GDR attempted to impose an altered sense of self upon its imprisoned opponents. The interrogation process was intended to have an extremely disorienting effect upon the prisoner. There were seventeen Stasi remand prisons in the GDR and, unlike Margret Bechler, Elisabeth Graul (born 1928) was kept in such a prison – Hohenschönhausen in Berlin – for the first seven months of her confinement. Ansorg mentions of prisoners' first person accounts that the experience of 'Untersuchungshaft' was described more often than the prisons or camps to which the prisoner was subsequently sent, because it left enduring psychological and physical effects on the prisoner.[4] The authorities of the Stasi remand prisons employed psychological torture methods, in some cases alongside physical torture, in their interrogation of the prisoner. Hans Eberhard Zahn writes of the shift from physical to psychological interrogation tactics: 'Weil die DDR ja schließlich als ein richtiger 'normaler' Staat anerkannt sein wollte, sollte die Untersuchungsverfahren 'human' sein und allein mit der – im übrigen viel wirksameren – psychischen Folter arbeiten.'[5] This new approach had its roots in Soviet methods of interrogation. Stalinist 'white torture' aimed to change the prisoners' beliefs and therefore their sense of their role in the world in order to obtain a confession and information about accomplices. According to Karl Wilhelm Fricke:

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[3] Ibid., p. 9.
[4] Ibid., p. 8.
[5] Hans-Eberhard Zahn, *Haftbedingungen und Geständnisproduktion in den Untersuchungshaftanstalten des MfS*, (Berlin: Der Berliner Landesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen DDR, 2007), both citations p. 22.

> Unter Anwendung von Erkenntnissen der modernen Psychologie und Physiologie soll der Gefangene nicht nur zu einem Geständnis, sondern auch zur Einsicht in seine vermeintliche Schuld gegenüber der Gesellschaft gebracht werden. Ihre Methodik zielt zunächst dahin, die Persönlichkeit des Häftlings durch massive psychische oder physische Einwirkung zu zerstören.[6]

Psychological 'Zersetzung' consisted of methods such as sleep deprivation, isolation and night-long interrogations which aimed to change the prisoner's orientation within their world: 'Nachgerade wird der Häftling seiner Erlebniswelt entfremdet, er verliert sein geistiges Orientierungsvermögen, sein Bewußtsein schrumpft auf ein >bewußtes Sein< als Häftling.'[7]

At the same time there existed a parallel and potentially contradictory tendency in the GDR towards viewing prison not only as a place of social isolation and punishment, but also as a place of reform ('Erziehung' or 'Umbau' as it was called by the SED), a process by which the prisoner was to be transformed into an ideal GDR citizen. Fricke writes that according to GDR criminal law: 'Die Freiheitsstrafe soll demnach den Rechtsbrecher einerseits unterdrücken und gesellschaftlich isolieren, andererseits erziehen'.[8] Penal theorists of the time did not see extreme punishment and reform as conflicting.[9] However, the aim of *Erziehung* was supposedly to change the political allegiance of the prisoner from dissent against the regime to concurrence with its ideological tenets. With this in mind, there were regular film screenings in GDR prisons

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[6] Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR: zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung 1945-1968: Bericht und Dokumentation* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979), p. 232.
[7] Ibid., p. 232.
[8] Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR: zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung 1945-1968: Bericht und Dokumentation*, p. 525.
[9] Hermann Wentker, *Justiz in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953: Transformation und Rolle ihrer zentralen Institutionen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), p. 393. Wentker describes a shift from a 'humane' penal approach to a more punitive one during the late 1950s. However, an overlap remained and it is possible to see both systems alongside each other in Graul's account.

as well as re-education classes and prison libraries containing Soviet books.[10] Reform was supposed to occur primarily through work – not an unfamiliar concept to either Communists or National Socialists.[11] Labour was thought to impose a more proletarian work ethic upon the prisoner, part of the GDR's attempts to rid its prisoners of their 'bürgerliches Bewußtsein'.[12] The public line may have been that work transformed prisoners but Hermann Wentker argues that, at the time when the penal system was transferred to the MdI (the Ministerium des Innern or Home Office) in the early 1950s, the central concern was 'eine möglichst optimale Ausnutzung von deren [der Gefangenen] Arbeitskraft'.[13] Furthermore, Michael Walter suggests that the concept of *Erziehung* was primarily the GDR's public strategy for dealing with its prisoners: 'Die Behandlung der Gefangenen stand nach außen hin unter der Devise der Erziehung zur Einhaltung der Gesetze des sozialistischen Staates'.[14] What happened behind the scenes was a different story, especially in the dilapidated and overcrowded Hoheneck prison.[15] It is unclear how exactly work or indeed *Erziehung* was to change the beliefs of the prisoner and questionable how much the authorities expected this to succeed, but what we do know is that there was a drive towards changing prisoners' political identity and it is one to which many respond in narratives of their incarceration.

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[10] Finn, *Die politischen Häftlinge der Sowjetzone*, p. 155.
[11] Gerhard Finn, *Die Frauen von Hoheneck: Protokoll einer Anhörung* (Bad Münstereifel: Westkreuz Verlag, 1995), p. 34.
[12] Brigitte Kaff, *"Gefährliche politische Gegner": Widerstand und Verfolgung in der sowjetischen Zone/DDR* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1995), p. 57.
[13] Wentker, p. 398.
[14] Michael Walter, *Strafvollzug* (Stuttgart: Boorberg, 1999), pp. 48-9.
[15] A number of first person accounts have been published which describe the rundown conditions in Hoheneck prison, for example: Petra Koch, *Menschenwege - politisch inhaftiert auf Burg Hoheneck: eine wahre Geschichte* (Berlin: Frieling, 2002), Ulrich Schacht, *Hohenecker Protokolle: Aussagen zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung von Frauen in der DDR* (Zürich: Ammann, 1984), Ines Veith, *Klipp, Klapp, Holz auf Stein--: Frauen in politischer Haft: Hoheneck 1950-1989*, (Berlin: A-Verbal Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996).

There is a gendered perspective to take into account when examining the GDR prison's attempts to change its prisoners. Meinhard Stark writes of the Soviet remand prison, a precursor to the DDR one: 'das Haftregime, die Aufenthaltsbedingungen und die Untersuchung hatten gerade das zum Ziel, die persönliche Integrität, die geschlechtliche und kulturelle Identität der inhaftierten Frau zu zerstören.'[16] It could be said that the GDR prison forced a particularly disorienting identity upon its female prisoners because of its extreme criminalisation of political resisters. Hoheneck was the largest women's prison in the GDR, where Elisabeth Graul spent most of her eleven-year prison term. Former prisoners tell stories like Brigitte Kaff's, who recalls being told by the guard on arrival at the prison: 'Jeder kriminelle Mörder ist mir lieber – denn er hat nicht wie sie zur Planung eines neuen Volkmords beigetragen.'[17] Kaff recalls that this phrase: 'blieb für viele Jahre ein ständiger Refrain, der den düsteren Gefängnisalltag begleitete.' Such labelling as criminal can have a defeminising effect on the prisoner given its connotations of the female prisoner's body as sexually abnormal, and the subsequent implication that the subject's femininity has somehow 'gone wrong'.[18] So too can internment within the space of prison – which is often theorised as a 'male' space given its historical association with men rather than women. There is the potential then, for imprisonment to impose an identity which is at odds with how the prisoner may have perceived her femininity beforehand. At the same time, female prisoners were

[16] Meinhard Stark, *Frauen im Gulag: Alltag und Überleben, 1936 bis 1956* (Münich: C. Hanser, 2003), pp. 39-40.
[17] Kaff, p. 55. See also: Finn, *Die Frauen von Hoheneck: Protokoll einer Anhörung*, p. 25, in which two former political prisoners – Ellen Thiemann and Bärbel Kramer – mention that their 'crimes' were put on par with murder by officials in Hoheneck prison.
[18] As discussed in previous chapters with reference to positivist criminology such as that of Lombroso and Ferrero.

often given ‘feminine’ tasks such as housework and mending in GDR incarceration.[19] The defeminisation involved in criminalisation and incarceration therefore stood alongside rather vague attempts at ‘re-socialising’ them into ‘better’ women. What emerges as the main issue is the multifarious disempowerment of the prisoner at the hands of the institution. Aside from interrogation and re-education, the prison as a total institution controls the lives of its inmates on an everyday level and they have little choice and limited autonomy over how they spend their time within prison. Striking in an examination of GDR incarceration is the sense that the prison infrastructure places limitations upon how the incarcerated subject develops as a person, through forcefully instructing the prisoner on how their personality and sense of self should change.

Prison writing and its readers

Prison writers use narrative to respond to and resist the disempowering experience of prison and through this to gain a sense of autonomous self, as we have seen in the previous chapters. Any kind of writing, regardless of its content, can be an empowering mode of resistance to the impositions of imprisonment. More specifically, writing can provide its author with the opportunity to take control over how they have developed in prison, combating the sometimes overbearing narrative of the dominant justice system with their own version of who they are and what their personal history consists of. But issues arise when that writing is exposed to a public. The audience can often represent a judgemental force, especially in the context of prison writing because there is significant

[19] Finn, *Die Frauen von Hoheneck: Protokoll einer Anhörung*, p. 34.

stigma attached to having been incarcerated. The prison writer writes as a defendant in court – Holdenried writes that ever since Socrates' *Apology*: 'Elemente wie Spurensicherung, Dokumentation, Belege und Verifikation durchziehen die Autobiographie so gut wie den Justizprozeß. Die Versicherung der Identität entspricht den Angaben zur Person vor Gericht'.[20] The reader-judge decides whether the author is guilty of their 'crime' or not. There is, then, potential for disempowerment not only in the fact of imprisonment, but in the process of engaging with the task of writing itself. The imagined audience will tend to be an ever-present and judgemental force upon the writing of any text, a force exercising its own authority over that of the writer herself. The writer may use her narrative to defend herself and her actions to her putative audience. She may negotiate with her audience, *addressing* them in trying to appear innocent – a possibly disempowering form of self-representation. Nonetheless, there is authority or agency to be obtained through writing of the self in a particular way.

This is pertinent to Elisabeth Graul's 1991 text *Die Farce.* Written in 1990, the text records the author's eleven years' political imprisonment in GDR prisons between 1951 and 1962, for her participation in an anti-GDR resistance group that had links to a right-wing extremist organisation in West Germany. Graul had been involved in the group for several months from 1950 until leaving it in mid-1951, several weeks before her arrest. For Graul the need to explain herself to her audience and to be seen as innocent was especially strong, given the dubious political connections that precipitated her incarceration. The text was first published in a recently reunified Germany – a country

[20] Michaela Holdenried, *Im Spiegel ein anderer: Erfahrungskrise und Subjektdiskurs im modernen autobiographischen Roman* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), p. 187.

attempting to come to terms with the immediate East German as well as the National Socialist past. In this environment, Graul faced judgement for her role in a group that had right-wing affiliations. The *Widerstandskreis der Jugend der SBZ* was a student resistance group based both in East and West Germany that opposed the oppressive strategies of the new East German administration and wished for a more democratic approach to governance. They were led by the writer and doctor Paul Lüth (1921-1986) who also fronted the controversial West German *Bund Deutscher Jugend*. This extreme right group (supposedly funded by American companies) was founded in 1950 and banned in 1953.[21] It is to these accusations of deviance as well as to the 'transgressive' environment of prison that Graul responds in her account, constructing an ideal self in order to counteract any accusations of deviance.

My aim in this chapter is to examine the ways in which Graul attempts to obtain a sense of who she is after the disorienting experience of imprisonment, and in response to the stigma associated with her crime and incarceration. I shall argue that, in writing of herself in a particular way she attempts to gain control and even authority over her experience as well as over her imagined readership. This examination incorporates an analysis of the role of the 'authentic' or the 'real' in gaining an autonomous and authoritative sense of self. More specifically, I look at Graul's representation of herself as the ultimate truth-teller and therefore the narrative authority. I then move onto examining how she constructs a character arc not unlike Bechler's, in which her 'real' self is gradually unearthed during prison. Central to her narrative of personal growth are questions of femininity: I look at how Graul constructs herself as an 'ideal' female

[21] Jens Mecklenburg, ed., *Handbuch deutscher Rechtsextremismus*, (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996), p. 154.

political prisoner and one who has increased authority within the prison space. Moving on from my examination of Bechler's *Warten auf Antwort,* Graul's text provides us with further insight into the complex and unfixed nature of the 'political' and the 'feminine'.

Autobiography, truth and literary truth

It is important, firstly, to examine the elusive notion of 'truth' in order to begin investigating the ways in which Graul constructs herself as a 'good' autobiographer. 'Truth' is a key factor in the interpretation and reception of any autobiographical text and it was with that concept of 'truth' or non-fiction within autobiography in mind that Lejeune coined the concept of the 'Autobiographical Pact': that agreement between the reader and author of any text designated 'autobiography' that what they are reading is non-fiction, in other words, 'true'. For Lejeune, it is because this pact has been established that the text can be read and understood as autobiography, although as mentioned in Chapter Three, the rules do not apply solely to the text's generic designation: the rest of the text must be perceived as 'true' in order to reinforce its label as autobiography. This notion of the text's truthfulness is, according to H. Porter Abbott, not an essential, empirical 'truth', rather it is a belief of such on part of the reader. Abbott remarks that the 'difference […] between an autobiography and a novel lies not in the factuality of the one and the fictiveness of the other but *in the different orientations toward the text that they elicit in the reader*'.[22] Whether or not the text is 'factually' true is less important (and, indeed, far more elusive and contestable) than the

[22] H. Porter Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," *New Literary History* 19, no. 3 (1988), p. 603, my emphasis.

reader's belief that it is true or factual. The most important factor is that the text *appear* as true as possible in order to be meaningfully received as an autobiography (rather than as a work of fiction) by the reader.

But what exactly constitutes 'truth' is a more contentious question. It seems that it is a literary or poetic, rather than factual, truth that is venerated in German autobiographical writings. From Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster,* the 'ideal' German autobiography has been an amalgamation of artistic creation and biographical 'fact': 'Importance is attached to interpreting experience within an imaginative context so that one may understand its broadest implications without falsifying the original biographical source.'[23] 'Truth' in the literary autobiography becomes a combination of creation and fact, with imagination enabling the most effective transmission of 'fact'. Indeed, Roy Pascal has suggested that it is the autobiographical novel, a fictionalised rendering of life experiences, that communicates a deeper truth than the straightforward autobiography, partly because in the novel the author is able to inhabit many different perspectives and use literary symbolism in the place of a factual relaying of events.[24] Christa Wolf's semi-autobiographical texts *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969) may explore the author's past as a child during National Socialism and then within the GDR, but Wolf is reluctant to state what her own autobiographical role is within these texts. *Kindheitsmuster* is predominantly written from a second person perspective and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* does not make clear whether or not it is Wolf who is the

[23] Barbara Saunders, *Contemporary German Autobiography: Literary Approaches to the Problem of Identity* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1985), p. 3.
[24] Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1960), pp. 175-177.

narrator, or, indeed, the protagonist. Wolf's work has initiated renewed debate and examination of the role of the fictional in communicating truth and the boundaries between truth and fiction. Wolf's work instigated discussion of her own concept of 'subjective authenticity', in which fiction enhances the authenticity of the account. The narrator in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* speaks of: 'was man erfinden muß, um der Wahrheit willen.'[25] Although Wolf's subjective authenticity could be said to be a response to the oppressive creative climate of the GDR (where *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was initially banned), in which she was not at liberty to write of herself directly for fear of reprimand, there has been a strong sense within German cultural discourse since Goethe that fiction can communicate a higher truth than factual writing, implying that factual language cannot do the past justice. The examination of 'literary' autobiography has dominated scholarly research into life-writing in German Studies, at least studies of autobiographical texts written before the National Socialist era.

But the framework for literary autobiography cannot straightforwardly be applied to historical memoirs documenting, most notably, experiences of the Holocaust, as well as experiences of oppression during the GDR. This is because the concept of truth within historical autobiography differs from that of the literary autobiographical work; truth in the representation of oppressive historical events means factual accuracy, a desire on the part of the author for factual clarity as a means of exposing injustices committed during the oppressive regime. The years immediately following the collapse of the German Democratic Republic saw a sharp rise in the publication of both literary and historical

[25] Quoted in Owen Evans, *Mapping the Contours of Oppression: Subjectivity, Truth and Fiction in Recent German Autobiographical Treatments of Totalitarianism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 17.

autobiographical accounts, with those who had lived in the GDR finally able to write openly about their experiences within the oppressive regime.[26] Karen Leeder has identified a public requirement particular to accounts of the GDR past that they appear as accurate as possible in their rendering of history. Leeder explains:

> In the fraught atmosphere of the new Germany (especially in cases with *Stasi* involvement) 'truth' has been taken by many to be a non-negotiable category […] It might be argued that, since the majority of people who lived the GDR experience will never have the opportunity to tell it like it was, those writers who do owe it to them to get as close as possible to historical truth […] Any writer who appears to abuse the inherent ambiguities of literary fiction runs the risk of being suspected of opportunism or cowardice.[27]

'Truth', in this context means factual accuracy, or at least an appearance thereof. There is a strong public demand for authenticity – Astrid Herhoffer writes: 'Doch bildet die Frage nach Wahrheit die Achse, um die sich die meisten Rezensionen drehen.'[28] This type of text is thus evaluated primarily on whether the reader believes it to be truthful or not. A public need for 'truth' has been seen previously in attitudes towards autobiographical accounts of Holocaust incarceration. Indeed the misrepresentation of Auschwitz in autobiography has been viewed as a particularly offensive act which undermines the tragic experiences of other victims and devalues the great suffering of the Holocaust itself. Binjamin Wilkomirski (otherwise known as Bruno Dössekker), Herman Rosenblat and Mischa Defonseca all published accounts of their experiences

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[26] As discussed in Karen Leeder, "'Vom Unbehagen in der Einheit': Autobiographical Writing by Women Since 1989," in *Autobiography by Women in German*, ed. Mererid Puw Davies, Beth Linklater, and Gisela Shaw (Berne; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 249-273, and Julian Preece, "Damaged Lives? (East) German Memoirs and Autobiographies, 1989-1994," in *The New Germany: Literature and Society after Unification*, ed. Osman Durrani et al (Sheffield: Sheffield Acad. Press, 1995), p. 352. Walter Janka's memoir *Spuren des Lebens*, documenting his four years in prison and his showtrial in 1956 was particularly popular and much-discussed.

[27] Leeder, p. 262.

[28] Astrid Herhoffer, "Auf der Suche nach Wahrheit," in *Germany in the 1990s*, ed. H. Hahn (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), p. 27.

during the Holocaust that were later exposed as, to differing degrees, historically inaccurate.[29] All of the texts created a media stir and their authors were subsequently vilified. The controversy surrounding such accounts acts as a testament to this obligation of factuality within historical autobiography, as well as once again indicating the empowered judgemental role of the audience.

All life narratives, and especially those reliant upon a fraught historical backdrop, function in a similar way to the accused's statement of defence in court. The reader acts as judge and decides whether the author is guilty or not based on whether or not they think they are telling the truth. Holdenried tells us:

> Das Eingeständnis von Schuld, wenn auch nicht in einem justitiablen Sinn, und die eine Vorverurteilung ansprechende Erkenntnis, von Anbeginn verurteilt zu sein, korrespondieren mit einer von außen an die Autobiographie herangetragenen Einforderung der Wahrheit, die oft genug tatsächlich justitiabel geworden ist.[30]

The reader decides whether the author is innocent or guilty, although, of course, they do not assign the same punishment as that given in a courtroom. In this context of judgement, innocence is strongly connected to truthfulness, and guilt to deception. A key component is therefore the writer's endeavours to show their text as truthful and authentic and themselves as honest.

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[29] Binjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke: aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), Herman Rosenblat, *Angel at the Fence: the True Story of a Love That Survived* (New York: Berkley Books, 2008), Misha Defonseca and others, *Surviving With Wolves: the Most Extraordinary Story of World War II* (London: Portrait, 2005).

[30] Holdenried, *Im Spiegel ein anderer: Erfahrungskrise und Subjektdiskurs im modernen autobiographischen Roman*, p. 187.

Authenticity and authority in Graul's prison narrative

That the literary autobiography, with its representation of what we might call higher truth, occupies such an esteemed and indeed authoritative place within German literature, presents something of a conflict for the former political prisoner Elisabeth Graul, and indeed her publishers.[31] As with many political prisoners who document their experiences,[32] Graul represents herself as a cultured, indeed an artistically gifted individual, with a talent for playing the piano.[33] Graul's self-representation as artistically talented extends to her portrayal of herself as something of a literary figure, rather than as a 'mere' autobiographer. Graul subtitled the first edition of her account of imprisonment 'Autobiographischer Roman'.

Leeder identifies a tendency towards the hybridisation of genres in autobiographical accounts of the GDR published in the years immediately following 1989. A number of works of autobiographical fiction were published during this time, among them Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* (1990); Angela Krauss' *Der Dienst* (1990); Elke Erb's *Winkelzüge* (1991).[34] It seems Graul mirrors this immediate post-Wende inclination to mark work as 'hybrid' in designating her text an 'autobiographical novel'. In doing so, she attempts to position herself amongst well-respected authors and create an intellectual identity. Not

[31] Although I view Graul as the main author in the writing process inasmuch as it assists her as a subject to come to terms with imprisonment, it is important to acknowledge the influence of her publishers in the creation of *Die Farce*. To what degree the *ImpulsVerlag* contributed to the final version is not known but it is safe to assume that they did, at least, play a role in how the text was marketed.

[32] Rosa Luxemburg, Luise Rinser and Lore Wolf are the most immediate examples of this, see also: Brandt, Sachs, Plogstedt, not to mention the playwright Ernst Toller: Ernst Toller, *Prosa, Briefe, Dramen, Gedichte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1961), who wrote prolifically during his imprisonment between 1918 and 1923.

[33] This is emphasised by the photo on the last page of the text's first edition which depicts a young Graul playing a piano.

[34] Leeder, p. 261. It seems there were more autobiographical novels published by women than men in the post-Wende period, although Wolfgang Hilbig's *Ich* was also published at this time: Wolfgang Hilbig, *Ich: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1993).

only is such a cultured self-representation visible from *Die Farce's* subtitle; there are a number of novelistic elements to be found in the main text itself. Unlike Margret Bechler's largely chronological and straightforward account, *Die Farce* is characterised by its non-chronological structure. The sequence of Graul's imprisonment is interspersed with sketches from her life both before and after incarceration. Her account begins near the end: it opens with Graul visiting the public prosecutor's office of the former East in 1990 to view her 'farcical' indictment and verdict.[35] Graul's account includes poetry and literary devices such as the 'farce' metaphor running through the text which conveys a metaphorical, non-literal 'truth' about the ridiculous injustice that the author experienced.[36] Literary elements are common to autobiographical writing. But what emerges is the sense that, in writing in such a 'novelistic' way, Graul creates a literary text: its complex/non-linear structure and designation as an autobiographical novel evoke embedded concepts of 'good' literature – that which contains a seemingly 'higher' literary truth based on creative ability.

Graul here attempts to create an intellectual identity for herself as the author of such a text. This articulation of an intellectual self may well serve a function in Graul's

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[35] Elisabeth Graul, *Die Farce: Autobiographischer Roman* (Magdeburg: imPULS Verlag, 1991), p. 7. Subsequent references will be given in the main text. Such narrative (dis)order is reminiscent of Wolf's highly influential *Nachdenken über Christa T*, published in 1969, which takes the reader backwards and forwards in its description of its protagonist's life.

[36] The farce trope is particularly common to accounts of GDR oppression and imprisonment, although Margret Bechler does not use it. For example: Amanda Bohlken, *Die dritte Dimension der Tränen: DDR-Flucht; Haft und Trauma; Heilungswege* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 2007). See also: Fricke, *Die Wahrheit verpflichtet: Texte aus fünf Jahrzehnten zur Geschichte der DDR*, 2000 for more usage of the term. It is the coping strategy of many writers to mock and even emasculate the regime, unlike accounts of National Socialist oppression in which there is much less of a sense of ridicule. Cf. Koch's account, which differs to one such as Luise Rinser's *Gefängnistagebuch*. Perhaps the trope even connects to the development of 'Ostalgie' post-*Wende* because there is a common belittlement of the GDR in both 'Ostalgie' and 'Farce'. Additionally, the subtitle adds an extra dimension to a discussion of genre: in being called *Die Farce,* the 'autobiographical novel' refers back to a theatrical genre, producing a multi-layered generic representation.

response to being designated criminal. There is a widespread belief that art is not only redemptive but a sign of goodness, and prisoners who successfully demonstrate their artistic abilities can overturn criminal judgement and achieve a level of exoneration from their crime through literary activity.[37]

Using the model of the artist and intellectual may help absolve Graul from the criminal identity imposed upon her by imprisonment, but it is a problematic strategy because, even though a literary self-representation can decriminalise the subject of autobiography, so too does a self-representation as truth-teller and writer of an authentic account. However esteemed its literary tradition, the autobiographical novel represents a blurred boundary between fact and fiction, which confuses the reader about whether the text is truth (represented by 'autobiography') or fiction (represented by 'novel'). In designating her text thus, Graul inserts an element of fiction and therefore factual unreliability into her life narrative. By the third edition, however, published in 1996, the subtitle had been changed to 'Ein Stück Autobiographie'.[38] It is not clear whether Graul herself or her publishers instigated this change in subtitle, but the title change does seem to reflect a desire that the text appear as truthful as possible in representing Graul's experience. This seems to be a result of the text's location within an environment in which authenticity was of crucial importance in autobiographical writings about GDR

[37] There is a significant tradition of the male criminal (not just political prisoners), released from prison after achieving status and public sympathy as a writer – from Jack Abbott of the U.S.A. – a violent criminal and talented writer whose release Norman Mailer petitioned for – to Austria's notorious Jack Unterweger – released from prison after earning the support of Austrian intellectuals through his prolific writing. See: Gary Rosenshield, "Crime and Redemption, Russian and American Style: Dostoevsky, Buckley, Mailer, Styron and Their Wards," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42, no. 4 (1988), especially p. 678 and p. 683. As a female political prisoner, Graul may not fit into the same category as these male criminals, but I believe her text can still contribute to a cultural discourse in which artistic ability and intellect can have an exonerative effect.

[38] Elisabeth Graul, *Die Farce: Ein Stück Autobiographie* (Magdeburg: imPULS Verlag, 1996).

oppression. Also, given that *Die Farce* was her first publication, Graul was not a known literary figure, unlike the established writers and 'hybrid' autobiographers Wolf, Krauss and Erb. Graul cannot be a literary truth-teller because of this status and because of the potential stigma associated with her status as a former prisoner. It is more appropriate to her desired role as innocent that she be represented as truthful above all, rather than as unreliable (and therefore less innocent). There is more advantage (and more authority, as we will see below) in appearing truthful and factual than there is in emphasising her role as a literary figure.

Die Farce has certain novelistic characteristics but at the same time it is presented as an historical and factual, rather than a literary, autobiography. Even a cursory analysis of the first edition exposes an appeal to factuality: the author on the title page and the protagonist are both called Elisabeth Graul; there is a photo of Graul on the last page of the book, and a further photo on the book sleeve, together with a biographical note referring to her incarceration and life afterwards. All of this information corresponds to the content of the book itself. Furthermore, the account is written in the first person, and is littered with pieces of 'real-life' evidence such as exact dates to authenticate her story (e.g. 7). Graul is insistent on the factually reliable and truthful status of herself as the author of the account. She shows her commitment to uncovering the 'true' story of her prison experience throughout the text, using her account partly as a means of protest against what she describes as others' 'Falschaussagungen' (236). She takes on the role of journalist or detective by returning to Hoheneck prison almost twenty years after her release in order to correct what she describes as any 'Gedächtnisfehler' (239) about her experience there. She represents this return as – quite understandably – an intensely

disturbing experience, but it is one that demonstrates the self-sacrificial extent of her determination for 'truth': 'Es muß sein, ich will mein Gedächtnis prüfen und so genau wie möglich beim Berichten sein' (240). She becomes a figure battling her own fears in order to find the authentic narrative. Graul even insists that truth is fundamental to her own character and sense of self. She berates a former political acquaintance for publishing an inaccurate article about her resistance group, writing: 'Dieses Machwerk ist so schlimm und so verlogen, daß es mir Übelkeit verursacht' (236). Factual inaccuracy repels Graul not just emotionally but physically, which demonstrates that telling the truth is integral to her as a subject. Graul shows that her performance as truth-teller has not only been defined by her but by others too. She recalls that during her incarceration she was one of the few prisoners chosen by independent prison inspectors to tell the 'real' story about what goes on in Hoheneck prison (221-4). The inspectors are represented as more concerned with truth than are the prison authorities, and say to her: ' "Wir sind an der Wahrheit über diese Anstalt interessiert, und die glauben wir nur von Leuten wie Ihnen erfahren zu können" ' (223). Graul is thus presented as one of the most reliable narrators in prison. To reinforce this status as reliable truth-teller, Graul writes of her return visit to the jail in 1991 that the new prison director there is keen to know the 'true' history of Hoheneck prison and so turns to Graul for the truth, dismissing other, unreliable reports that had been published: 'Es gibt Irritationen durch inzwischen veröffentlichte Bücher und Reportagen. Wie war alles wirklich? Das menschliche Gedächtnis ist nicht immer zuverlässig. Ich beantworte ihm seine Fragen nach bestem Wissen' (241). Although Graul acknowledges her potentially unreliable memory, she still shows that her truth is taken above that of other (unspecified) public discourses,

suggesting that, since she is taken as a factual authority by the new prison supervisor as well as during incarceration itself, the reader must take her as such too.

Herein lies the implication not only that there exists one sole true narrative to be found but also that Graul is the one who is prepared to find and articulate it. This is not far removed from the 'quest for truth' depicted in *Nachdenken über Christa T.,* in which Wolf uses written and spoken evidence to reveal the real life story of her protagonist, (although she concedes that much of her story is fiction). But unlike Wolf, Graul cannot afford to reflect on the contestable and subjective nature of truth and of conflicting narratives because of her need, due to her text's location as a historical account of imprisonment, to stress the existence of one ultimate truth and to show her own position as the designated speaker of that truth. There is here an important connection between Graul's self-representation as truth-teller and her construction of herself as an authoritative figure. Not only does Graul show that she tells the ultimate truth, she exerts her authority over others' truths in her account. Margret Bechler's *Warten auf Antwort* contains what could be seen as an attempt at authenticity in the introductions to each chapter, in which a seemingly objective voice imparts a political-historical context. Graul takes this a step further: in her quest for authenticity and, indeed, authority, she makes use of real archival documentation such as transcripts from interrogations and her trial as well as letters, reflecting what Karen Leeder has discussed as a post-1989 tendency towards documentary-based literature to reflect life in the GDR.[39] Leeder discusses the crisis of identity that occurred throughout the former GDR after reunification, referring to Frank Schirrmacher's statement: ' 'Ein ganzes Volk geht in

[39] Leeder, p. 253.

die Archive, um seiner Vergangenheit zu begegnen''.[40] The archives became a place to confront one's past identity, although they held biased and fairly unreliable material, what Leeder refers to as 'an alternative history – an alternative autobiography – of the GDR.'[41] The use of such documentation serves to maintain Graul's position as a detective in pursuit of the truth – it is, after all, real-life, authentic evidence that she has collected. But Graul also demonstrates that these documents are not to be believed and often amends them by inserting her own comments into the excerpts she selects. For example, she cites from a prison report about her conduct:

> In ständiger Briefverbindung steht sie [Graul – KR] mit einer gewissen Frau Eva Pohle, die sie als 'Mütterlein' bezeichnet und von der sie auch besucht wird. An dieser Verbindung ist sie sehr interessiert, und es ist eine äußerst herzliche, jedoch sehr undurchsichtige (!) Freundschaft (199-200).

The insertion of an exclamation mark in brackets succinctly represents Graul's mocking disagreement with what has been written about her.

Through this insertion, Graul casts doubt on the integrity and authority of the prison report and asserts that she is more reliable than those supposedly authentic *Stasi* documents she provides: it is her truth that is more authoritative, her narrative is the dominant one, to be believed and to be taken above all others. Graul thus imposes her own truth upon others' narratives and upon one rendering of 'history'. In doing so, she obtains a sense of authority both over her audience and the possible narratives they could use to disempower her, as well as over the GDR prison narrative that oppressed her for so long. Thus narrative provides a sense of agency with which to combat any disempowerment that comes along with addressing that imagined audience, as well as,

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[40] Ibid., p. 256.
[41] Ibid., p. 257.

perhaps more importantly, creating a sense of an autonomous self after the disempowering experience of incarceration.

Prison as damaging

Writing and the representation of 'truth' function as a key means of gaining a sense of authority, both over the audience and over the dominant GDR prison narrative of the *Stasi* files within *Die Farce*. Graul takes this further by using her account to take narrative control of how her personality changes during her time in prison. First, however, it is important to examine the ways in which Graul indicates how the experience of prison threatens to overwhelm her sense of self. Prison quite literally has a focal place within her life narrative: her account starts and ends in the present day, with her time in prison occupying a central position within the main text.[42] The narrative of her time in prison is interspersed with flashbacks of her pre-prison life and sections describing how prison affects her in the years following her release. Although not all of the text is temporally set within the prison, prison is always there, both before and after the experience of actual incarceration, because each section is in some way related to her time in confinement. The sections detailing her life before prison explain how she came to be there, looking at her younger life and her involvement with anti-GDR politics. Those after her release describe the ongoing after-effects of her experience. Prison's lasting effects are also visible in Graul's descriptions of her traumatic interrogation in

[42] In contrast to: Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riss: ein Lebenslauf* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1981), in which the writer's account of his seven-year imprisonment in the GDR is positioned at the beginning and the end of the narrative, with his non-prison life narrative occupying a central position.

Hohenschönhausen remand prison, where she was deprived of sleep and underwent night-long interrogations, as well as having ongoing dental problems and losing a number of teeth. This extreme and obvious distress may be temporary, but there is a more constant and ongoing after-effect of confinement: Graul writes that she cannot emotionally escape her experience of confinement in the years after her release: 'Man wird es nicht los, denke ich, man wird es nie ganz los…' (188). The majority of *Die Farce* is written in the present tense: at the time in which she wrote her account, prison is still very much part of her life and of her sense of self.

Not only does she represent prison as central, inescapable, and, indeed damaging, Graul too focuses on the loss of femininity she experiences, especially in her portrayal of her initial entrance into prison. Clemmer's concept of prisonisation, which I touch on in relation to Margret Bechler's account in Chapter Three, refers to changes in the subject over a significant period of time – often over several years. But many prison writers concentrate on the changes they undergo during the first hours and days of incarceration. Norbert Blaichinger refers to the initial stage in prison as the 'Eingewöhnungsphase'.[43] In Hohenschönhausen remand prison in Berlin, on entry into the prison, the detainee was placed in a special cell in order to be 'transformed' into a prisoner.[44] Ellen Thiemann, a former prisoner of Hoheneck, mentions the 'Zugangszelle' there.[45] Such a space represents the transition from the 'free' space of the outer world into the confined space of the prison. The majority of women's prison accounts, from before, during and after

[43] Norbert Blaichinger, *Frauen hinter Gittern: Menschen, über die man nicht spricht: ein Gefängnisreport* (Wien: Norka-Verlag, 2000), p. 35.
[44] From a tour of Hohenschönhausen prison in Berlin.
[45] Finn, *Die Frauen von Hoheneck: Protokoll einer Anhörung*, p. 25.

Graul's era, mention this stage, often focussing on the 'Leibesvisitation' and the degradation caused by it.[46] Graul describes her shock at being forced to strip naked in front of a guard: 'Mir stürzen die Tränen aus den Augen. Ich fühle mich entsetzlich gedemütigt' (24). After this, Graul's civilian underwear is taken from her and replaced with men's underwear: 'Sie nimmt mir die Wäsche weg, gibt mir eine baumwollene Unterhose und ein ebensolches Männerunterhemd' (24). Thus a non-feminine identity is imposed upon her by the prison institution, through the clothing assigned to her. The significance of material items to the prisoner's sense of self is of particular import here. That her clothes are taken away from her represents an enforced shedding of previous identity, in this case a shedding of femininity.[47] Graul makes it clear that she enters a 'male' space, in which women's needs are not accounted for. She shows how, in remand prison in Hohenschönhausen, she was made to feel ashamed and embarrassed during menstruation – when she asks a guard for sanitary material she does so 'mit hochrotem Kopf' and there is no effort on the part of the prison to make her feel less awkward about having her period: 'Jedes einzelne Stück muß ich extra anfordern. Mancher Wachmann grinst' (32). In Graul's account, prison is represented as a space that is not designed for women, indeed it is shameful to have specifically female needs (such as for sanitary towels) there.

[46] For example, Schlicke, p. 33.

[47] Although my focus is on gender, it is also possible to analyse Graul's account in terms of a shedding of class, national, age identity. Prison does not just affect gender, there are a number of factors constantly at play. Furthermore, material objects – especially the subject's own possessions from pre-prison – have a more concentrated meaning within the prison microcosm than they do in the outside world. This is seen in the diaries of Rinser and Wolf as well as in Bechler's account and is yet to be researched in the field of prison writing.

Graul emphasises that prison has a particularly damaging effect on how women look. Her narrative is remarkable for its concentration on her own and other female prisoners' clothing. During her trial, Graul describes the members of her political group who also stand accused:

> Elend, abgemagert, gealtert sind sie. Dort sitzt Gudrun. Sie trägt wie wir alle noch dieselbe Kleidung, in der wir im Juli verhaftet worden sind. Jetzt ist es Februar. Gudruns Sommerkleid aus buntbedecktem Stoff weist große Löcher in gleichen Abständen auf. Alle roten Blumen sind herausgefallen […] Wie eine Truppe Stadtstreicher werden wir vorgeführt (15).

Graul concentrates on the state of her female friend's clothes, with no remarks about those of the men. The faded flowers on Gudrun's civilian dress (prison clothing was not worn during the trial) may serve as a trite literary symbol of prison's destruction of the delicate woman, but nonetheless, the message remains that prison is particularly damaging to women. For Graul, men's clothing and by extension men are more suited to imprisonment: prison is a space in which the female prisoner does not belong, indeed it damages her perception of her femininity.

Prison's eradication of the woman's 'feminine' appearance is an infliction to which, according to her account, Graul initially responds with resistance, rather than passive 'docility' (in Foucault's understanding of the term). She writes that when she is given the men's underwear, including long johns, she refuses to put her civilian (i.e. female) clothing over them, as instructed, saying: 'Wenn man mich so häßlich macht, soll man mich auch so sehen!' (25). She here defies and subverts prison regulations by taking them further than intended by the authority, mocking that exertion of control undertaken by the prison in giving her men's underwear. However, this rebellion is short-lived and

she is gradually persuaded by her cell-mate to fit in with how others prisoners appear. A level of subversion still remains, however, as she refuses to roll her long john legs up under her skirt in order to hide them: 'Aber auf die Idee, die Hosenbeine hochzurollen, komme ich noch immer nicht' (26). Graul makes it clear that she dresses this way because she is suffering from shock – she is even taken to the sick-bay because the authorities think she is 'nicht richtig im Kopf' as a result of her choice of attire (26). Despite Graul's reasoning behind her behaviour, her disdain for prison rules serves to show her initial rejection of prison and prisoner identity.

Nonetheless, Graul's representation of her failed attempts at resisting the defeminising elements of prisonisation indicate that she is unable to stave off the entrance into a defeminised world. It is with resignation that she describes the damage to her body as a result of malnourishment in prison: 'Als wir nach Wochen wieder einmal zum Duschen geführt werden, sehe ich die Knochen überall herausragen. Beim Blick über die Schulter finde ich, daß mein Po nur noch einem größeren Brötchen gleicht' (65). Because of prison, Graul is unable to look like the woman she was before her arrest. This defeminisation involves a sense of loss not only of herself as a woman but the more extensive loss of herself as a subject too. Judith Butler has written that gender identity, however problematic, is needed in order to 'be' in the world; she discusses the widespread belief that if one can be neither male nor female then one cannot be a human being, a subject.[48] In defeminisation then, comes a much more extensive loss of who the woman is as a person. Graul uses her narrative to resist this imposed identity partly

[48] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 7-8.

through limiting those instances of defeminisation to the superficial level of clothes and general appearance. The role of appearance in creating a sense of femininity is most obviously demonstrated in Graul's descriptions of the build-up to her release from prison in 1962, during which she prepares for re-entry into the outside world. Such a build-up has not been seen to this extent in the earlier accounts because Rinser, Wolf and Bechler were not notified of the exact date of their release. Clothes and hairstyle play a decisive part in Graul's reintegration into the outside world. The preparations for her release involve, alongside memorising messages to pass on to her fellow inmates' loved ones, wearing her hair in rollers. A guard chastises her for this, demonstrating that sophisticated hairstyles do not fit into the prison world, as defined by him (224). Despite the guard's disapproval, Graul is allowed to keep her hair in rollers: such an overt form of femininity is allowed at this liminal stage. She is moving from the prison world, in which 'feminine' appearance is less prevalent, to the outside world, in which such an appearance is the norm. Of the experience of putting her new civilian clothes on she writes: 'Keimendes Gefühl, sich wieder als Frau zu empfinden' (227). In putting on her new clothes, she puts on her identity as a woman, carefully wobbling around in her new shoes like a child playing with adults' clothes. But this excerpt makes it clear that the type of womanliness to which Graul is referring is appearance-based – she has not lost her *inner* sense of self as a woman, it is only the exterior part that she shows is lost in prison.

‘Deviance’ in the prison microcosm

Graul uses her account predominantly to show how her inner femininity developed and improved through prison. Prison is represented as a central and influential factor within Graul’s life narrative and one which she cannot escape. It is focal to her whole life but, as we will see, she turns it into an empowering, rather than damaging experience by writing of how it improved her and brought forth her ‘real’ self, bringing to mind the words of the Bolivian political prisoner Domitila Barrios de Chungara, cited in Chapter Three: ‘with everything I’d suffered in the arrests, in jail, and in Los Yungas, I’d acquired a political consciousness. In other words, I’d found myself’.[49]

The reader of *Die Farce* is not only supposed to be the viewer of an authentic and real document of German history, there is a strong sense that they are privy to the ‘real’ Elisabeth Graul too. This sense of insight is established in the early stages of the account, when Graul describes her interrogation in remand prison. Many of the questions posed by the interrogators are akin to those that Graul answers for the readers’ sake, as a kind of exposition of her prison narrative itself (especially those which justify her right-wing connections, as I discuss below). Although she provides superficial answers during the interrogations themselves, it is during the flashback sections of her account that she answers them properly (see, for example, 37-41). These sections provide what appear to be more honest and frank answers to the questions posed during the interrogations: it is the reader, not Graul’s interrogators, who is privy to her real story. The reader is privileged over the interrogators; it seems that they see the ‘real’ Graul.

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[49] Harlow, *Resistance Literature,* p. 144.

It is not only in relation to her interrogators or prison authorities that the reader sees the 'real' Graul, we also seem to be given more insight into Graul's inner self than other prisoners in her surroundings. In her descriptions of her life before prison, Graul writes of a trip to Frankfurt: 'Man zeigt uns die Paulskirche, den Römer und das uns schockierende Frankfurter Nachtleben. Wir sehen Nutten und Zuhalter; unsere Begleiter amüsieren sich köstlich über uns' (59). Here, Graul is open with her companions about her shock at what could be seen as sexually 'deviant' activity. But in the prison space, Graul behaves differently in relation to others than she does in the outside world. In a new cell in Hohenschönhausen, she meets new cellmates:

> Wir erzählen uns alles […] Viel ist von Liebe die Rede und all ihren Spielarten. Ich höre Überraschendes, nie Geahntes und registriere schweigend, lasse mir meine Unkenntnis aber nicht anmerken. Ich ahne, daß es weit mehr Möglichkeiten, sich zu lieben, gibt, als ich bisher kennengelernt habe (67).

Graul has already made it clear to the reader that she herself has no sexual desire in prison – reminiscent of Rinser's claims in her prison diary. Of bedtime she recounts: 'Gesicht und Hände müssen zu sehen sein. Warum eigentlich? Wollen sie verhindern, daß man mit sich selber spielt? Wer aber hat in dieser Situation noch Empfindungen? Ich fühle mich jedenfalls wie abgestorben' (67). But Graul's apparent lack of libido and surprise at hearing about new sexual practices do not prompt her to disagree with her cellmates or to counter their discussion with her own views. Whereas in the non-prison setting of Frankfurt, Graul was open about her shock at sexual 'deviance', in prison she hides both her shock and her lack of knowledge, perhaps in an attempt at disguising her middle-class, university-educated background. Only the reader knows her inner reaction.

Prison is here, as in Rinser's account, a space in which discussion of sexual gratification is the norm, indeed it is a space in which subversive behaviour is common. It is a world in which Graul is surrounded by prisoners she describes as 'ordinär' (122). But in this space, she writes that she cannot be seen to be avoiding such prisoners for fear of appearing arrogant (122). Keeping out of the way of 'common' or 'vulgar' people would be possible outside prison, but not within its walls. This space demands that Graul act in a different way than she would on the outside: disguising her beliefs, her class and her attitudes to sex. The real Graul may be shocked at certain sexual topics, but she makes it clear in her response to the sexual discussions of her cellmates that she is determined to fit in and be initiated into the prison culture by disguising her surprise and naïveté, even absorbing the information and learning from her more experienced cellmates. Prison may be an altered space for Graul but she emphasises that it is one to which she wants, even needs to adapt, in order to be initiated into a group and thus better survive the pains of confinement.[50] There is here an indication that Graul acts in an 'unreal', perhaps even transgressive way in order to survive being in the subversive space of prison. But the reader is also made aware, through Graul's insights into her inner feelings, of the 'real' Graul: she is far less subversive and just wants to survive in this foreign environment.

Graul's representation of her romantic relationship with a fellow prisoner, Rosemarie, further addresses this issue. In 1950s and 1960s East Germany, homophobia was entrenched in public discourse. Indeed, writers of advice books for GDR citizens during

[50] This is along the lines of Peter Paul Zahl's concept of 'Unterleben', in which the prisoner adapts in particular ways in order to survive incarceration – see Keßler, p. 158.

that time continually represented homosexuality as 'a perversion, pathology, or deviance.'[51] Graul would have expected a more tolerant response from her contemporary audience of the 1990s but homosexuality still faced negative judgement as a deviant sexual orientation. Although Graul claims that she is not ashamed of her relationship and has no regrets about it, there is a sense that she is defending it and herself through writing of herself in as ideal a manner as possible in her descriptions of it. In her justification of her relationship, Graul represents homosexuality as essential, natural and normal in prison. For her, lesbian relationships in prison are primarily a way of *surviving* incarceration, through obtaining physical and emotional affection (akin to Margret Bechler's portrayal of her and Irma's friendship): 'Die meisten Freundschaften […] bedeuteten Überlebenshilfe' (123). Indeed Graul represents her own relationship with Rosemarie as an extension of their friendship that blossomed during her period of solitary confinement. This happens after her trial when Graul is transferred from Hohenschönhausen prison to Hoheneck prison in Saxony and is kept in solitary confinement for nine months. It is during what she describes as gruelling months of total isolation that Graul first befriends Rosemarie, with whom she communicates using a type of sign language from the window of her cell (118-9). Graul takes great comfort from these conversations but it is the increasingly affectionate nature of the friendship that she describes as particularly important to her survival during isolation: 'Allmählich werden die Wörter, die wir uns schreiben, immer liebevoller. Meine Fensterfreundschaft wird in meiner Isolierung zur Lebenshilfe' (113). Through receiving warmth and affection, she combats the destructive effects of long-term isolation and indeed of prison

[51] Herzog, p. 197.

itself. When her relationship with Rosemarie becomes physical on her release from solitary confinement, Graul represents it as a natural progression. When they first kiss, she writes: ‘Das ist ganz natürlich und nur eine Folge unserer Übereinstimmung’ (122). The need for love too is: ‘das natürlichste der Welt’ (122). Not only is homosexuality represented as natural to the prison environment, Graul also shows that it is the norm for female prisoners. She remarks: ‘Es gibt viele Pärchen um uns herum’ (122). Since many other prisoners have relationships, Graul is not the exception, rather she conforms to how prisoners in her world operate and cope with incarceration. But Graul makes it clear that this normal, natural and essential relationship is only so within her ‘unreal’ prison world and not in her outer one: the exceptional experience of being in prison seems to alter what Graul deems to be normal and essential to survival. Graul’s rather extensive portrayal of her relationships with men before and after her incarceration serves to prove – intentionally or not – that, in this outside world, she is heterosexual and remains so after her release. Her homosexuality is thus confined to her time in prison: it is not essential to her in the ‘real’ outside world of the published text. Graul does not, however, claim that homosexuality in itself is unnatural, indeed she emphasises her desire to tackle stereotypes of lesbian prisoners, criticising clichés of: ‘kurzhaarige, mit männlichen oder zumindest herben Zügen ausgestattete Typen, die auf der Lauer nach Neuzugängen liegen, jedes ansehnliche weibliche Wesen anmachen, sich ordinär bewegen und die Freundinnen wechseln, wie die Wäsche’ (122). But she does imply that homosexuality outwith prison would be unnatural for her.

If we consider that Graul has represented prison as a separate world that causes her to perform in a manner that is unlike her ‘real’ non-prison self then, in representing her

homosexuality as limited to this particular world, there is an indication that we are not reading the 'real' Graul, rather Graul's reaction to her exceptional, altered microcosm. Homosexuality is thus not essential, natural or normal to the 'real' Graul, and that limits the deviant implications of her relationship with Rosemarie. As a further means of justifying her relationship, Graul shows us that heterosexual binaries are upheld and reflect those found on the outside world through emphasising her passive and stereotypically female role with Rosemarie. Rosemarie is the one who initiates the physical aspect: 'Als sie mich eines Tages küßt, wie mich bisher nur Männer geküßt haben, erschrecke ich zuerst ein wenig, überlasse mich dann ihre Zärtlichkeiten und erwidere sie' (122). It is Rosemarie who kisses Graul – the use of 'überlasse' further substantiates Graul's passive, 'feminine' role. Graul shows that Rosemarie also dominates their relationship, acting as the assertive, wise leader (122) and protector: 'Rosemarie nimmt mich in ihre Arme, und ich fühle mich geborgen' (140). Graul thus keeps her feminine role, attributing the transgressive, predatory 'male' characteristics to her partner.

Self-representation as a child

Graul describes Rosemarie's protective character and in doing so positions herself in a child-like role. This self-representation as a child runs through the first half of Graul's account, including those passages which document her early days in prison. Here Graul shows that she is in need of protection, which she receives from her first cell-mate, Frau

Steeneberg: ‘eine liebe, sehr mütterliche Frau’ (27), who makes it possible for Graul to sleep secretly during the gruelling interrogation process. It is only after Rosemarie is released and their relationship ends that Graul moves out of this role, as I discuss below in relation to her increasingly maternal performance. Identifying as a child is a crucial tool for Graul to explain or justify any of her potentially transgressive activities, because it mitigates the subversive implications of her behaviour. It allows Graul to indicate that she is not culpable of any crime, or in this case of any sexual ‘deviance’. Such a self-representation utilises prominent cultural ideals, reflected in nineteenth-century positivist criminology, which saw women as childlike and incapable of being responsible for committing crime or transgression, because of their less developed, weak minds.[52] This type of female criminal corresponds to widespread beliefs of woman as an innocent, passive victim who, it was believed, received a more lenient punishment from a chivalric judicial system.[53] Graul is therefore less likely to be seen by her imagined audience as subversive and deviant in the descriptions of her homosexual relationship, given the widespread beliefs that certain women and children are not responsible for ‘crime’ and by extension for gender ‘subversions’.

Graul also uses a self-representation as childish and immature to mitigate her involvement with the controversial resistance group. In the initial sections of *Die Farce* which describe her life before prison, Graul depicts her youthful character and reckless behaviour, describing her political group as ‘junger Idealisten’ (12). She also implies that it was her romantic involvement with a young man, Wolfgang, which precipitated

[52] Especially that of nineteenth-century positivist criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, discussed in previous chapters.
[53] Rotter, p. 92.

her involvement with the group (51). Their relationship is unsuccessful and ends just before she ceases her political activity with the group; indeed both the relationship and her political resistance are represented as the mistaken choices of a romantic and naïve young woman (58). These descriptions reduce the potentially critical response that her involvement in a Nazi-affiliated organisation could elicit; her reasons for her involvement were not purely political, indeed they were the actions of an idealistic woman – the type of woman who fits in with widely accepted notions of ideal femininity as childish, emotional and romantically-minded, rather than political or, indeed subversive.

There is a strong sense of temporal distance and retrospection in the sections in which Graul writes of herself as immature and childlike. In her descriptions of her days at university, Graul portrays herself as a young, gifted and ambitious music student, who did not want to use her talents to teach others, rather to further herself (21, 22). But Graul shows that much time has passed between being in prison and writing up her account: 'Heute ist der 5. Juni 1990 […] Ich bin fast 62 Jahre alt. Als man mich verhaftete, war ich 23' (7). She also shows that she has changed significantly as a woman. Like Margret Bechler, Graul became a teacher in the years after she was released. She writes, from her present day perspective ('heute'): '1948 wollte ich keine Klavierlehrerin sein, heute liebe ich den Beruf und meine Schüler, zu denen ich eine enge und schöne Beziehung habe. Fast sind sie wie meine Kinder. Es war ein weiter Weg bis dahin' (156). Graul here once again affirms that before prison she was immature, reinforcing her child-like self in which she is not responsible for any subversive actions. The citation reveals that she was selfish before her incarceration but

that, although it took some time, Graul has, by the time of writing her account, gradually attained a more mature, maternal (and implicitly non-childish) sense of self in becoming a parental figure to her school pupils. As opposed to being selfish, she is now nurturing and caring – an improved woman.

In this position of writing of her past self from her maternal present day perspective, Graul gives the impression that her former youthful self, is not to be taken as the 'real' Elisabeth Graul. The 'real' Elisabeth Graul is the one who is writing this account: she is the non-prison Graul and she is now maternal rather than childlike. Thus she separates herself from her past selves: the Graul involved in the resistance group and the imprisoned Graul who was involved in a homosexual relationship.

Authority and the 'real' maternal self (the real outcome of prison)

It may have been, as Graul describes it, 'ein weiter Weg bis dahin', but her shift from child to better woman is represented as a characteristic that develops within prison. Furthermore, Graul imbues the signifier of the improved woman with a particular set of characteristics in direct response to her experience of incarceration. For instance, it is her activities with the music and theatre groups in prison that instigate her character development as a teacher figure. After Rosemarie's release from Hoheneck prison, Graul is moved to Berlin Barnimstrasse prison and becomes involved in the 'Kulturgruppe' there. She soon becomes the leader of the group (164) and encounters a young prisoner called Marga, who has been left timid and distressed after killing her mother and keeping the body embalmed for a year before turning herself in to the authorities. Marga

is excluded by other prisoners because of her gruesome crime, but Graul shows sympathy for her and insists that she was acting in self-defence against her exploitative and harmful mother, who had forced her into prostitution from a young age. Marga's own biological mother may have been extremely flawed but Graul represents herself as an ideal maternal substitute through recruiting Marga to sing in her music and theatre group: 'Ganz allmählich beginnt Marga aufzuleben und ein wenig Selbstvertrauen wiederzugewinnen. Und sie muß die Augen heben beim Singen, sonst sieht sie nicht, wie ich dirigiere…' (167). Graul here takes care of Marga through teaching her, allowing her to rebuild her confidence through singing with the group and implicitly taking on the nurturing role that she suggests Marga's real mother should have occupied from the start. Graul's interpretation of ideal feminine behaviour comes, as we see from the above citation (from 156), from her position as a teacher, in which her pupils become substitutes for her real children (she did not have children after her release from prison). In her representation of the help she gives to Marga, Graul further equates her role as teacher with that as mother, drawing on the concept of nurture as found both in the mother symbol and in that of the teacher to tie the two roles together. Not only this, Graul shows that she succeeds in her role as a nurturer, establishing that identity as maternal pedagogue, one that continues throughout her time in prison and beyond into her life as a teacher.

Graul's new nurturing role lacks the passivity that characterised her self-representation as a child. In her role as Marga's teacher she is protective of her within the prison environment, defending her against the other prisoners who demonise her for the gruesome murder. In her previous self-representation as a child, before Rosemarie

was released, Graul was the one in need of protection, but now she herself has taken on the active role of protector. Of her dealings with one such prisoner, Graul writes: ‘Eine geht soweit, als sie meine Zuwendung und Freundlichkeit Marga gegenüber bemerkt, mich zu fragen, wie ich mich mit so einer abgeben könnte. Ich frage nur zurück, was ihr denn ihr Kind getan hätte, daß sie es vernachlässigen mußte? Da ist sie still’ (167). In this role she exerts more agency over her own actions, defending her protective attitude towards Marga and exerting authority over others through her successful silencing of her cellmate.

That Graul is educated and cultured provides her with a significant level of authority in her representation of her time in prison, as with Bechler’s self-representation. Such ‘cultural’ authority is demonstrated in Graul’s position as a teacher: she has superior intellect and knowledge to those she teaches and her job is to educate them. She thereby holds an authoritative position over them. She also gains higher status within the prison as a teacher: on her return to Hoheneck prison after her internment in Berlin Barnimstrasse, Graul, at the behest of the prison supervisor, establishes a music and theatre group there. Her activities with the group actually bring her into more contact with those higher up in the prison hierarchy than the prison guards, who are her immediate authority: she complains to ‘Makarenko’, the prison director, about the attitude of some prison guards to her group, and the guards are reprimanded (177). Graul shows the reader that she is able to put her knowledge and talent into action within prison in order to assert a degree of power over her authorities. Of course the guards are able to retaliate through bullying and humiliation, demonstrating that there is a multifaceted conflict between Graul and the prison staff (178). Despite the guards’

revenge tactics there is a real sense that Graul obtains increasing authority over those who oppress her in her role as teacher and as intellectual. She is able to exert power over them within prison, subverting its power structures to a significant degree.

Graul associates her subversive, resistant role with culturally embedded ideas of good womanhood. According to her, the guards have a resentful attitude towards her music group and seem to be threatened by the power she wields through it: 'Ich habe zuviel Freiheit, finden sie, und ich lasse mir nicht alles gefallen, kämpfe für meine Gruppe wie ein Löwe. Das bringt mir Ärger ein; ich werde als aufsässig, undiszipliniert und überheblich bezeichnet' (178). Graul may be paraphrasing the guards and using the male form of the word, but she still evokes the culturally potent archetype of the lioness – a protective and committed mother.[54] In using the strong mother symbol, Graul portrays herself in striking similarity to Margret Bechler (see Chapter Three), with whom she was incarcerated for some time in Hoheneck. The lioness archetype presents a non-threatening, indeed acceptable kind of female aggression and violence because, in acting in such a way, she is protecting her young, and thus performing her role as mother ideally. In the above citation, Graul's rebellious ('aufsässig') reputation amongst the prison guards is linked to her interpretation of ideal femininity within the prison world through the lioness imagery: she acts rebelliously in order to protect others.

With this in mind we see Graul's defiant behaviour increase alongside her representation of her increasingly maternal actions. Graul is well-behaved during the earlier stages of her incarceration, and, although she rebels against her immediate

[54] The use of 'Löwe' is standard when using such an idiom and would only be changed to 'Löwin' if it was in direct reference to the protection of children.

supervisors in the above-cited passage, she still appeals to higher authorities through complaining to 'Makarenko'. However, she rebels against the prison authorities as a whole through staging a controversial Schiller production with her theatre group. The evening involves performing pieces that relate directly to the experiences of the prisoners in Hoheneck. The event opens with the words 'DER MENSCHHEIT WÜRDE IST EUERE HAND GEGEBEN!/BEWAHRET SIE!' (from Schiller's 1789 poem 'Die Künstler' (191)). This receives rapturous applause from the prisoners and the guards realise that the event has rebellious undertones. However, Graul makes it clear that the guards cannot interrupt the production since they approved the piece in advance. Graul shows that she has outwitted the prison authorities into letting her and her group perform an incendiary piece. For her, they are unaware of the 'real' meaning of Schiller's words and would never check up on exactly what she is staging: 'Schiller ist 'klassisches Erbe' und damit legitim' (191). The prison authorities are shown to be ignorant and uneducated in comparison with Graul who is here an authority in the intellectual sense. Yet again, Graul's superior knowledge of culture has allowed her to obtain a level of control over her oppressors. The evening represents a significant victory of the prisoners over their captors: 'Der Feier ist ein voller Erfolg, die Stimmung unter den Zuhörern freudig erhoben, und wir sind ein bißchen stolz, daß uns das gelungen ist […] Die Gefangene ist die Überlegene' (192). Through her superior knowledge and understanding of art, Graul has been able to successfully speak out against those who control her, and not only that, she is able to speak to other prisoners about the common problems they experience during incarceration. Graul represents this kind of 'public' resistance as a momentous achievement within the controlled space of prison and an

extraordinarily successful mode of resistance. Furthermore, although the music group is banned, Graul does not receive any formal punishment due to her intelligent manipulation of the authorities, (i.e. operating under the guise of high culture). The prison authorities are unable to even control her punishment, reflecting the extent to which she uses her cultural knowledge to subvert power.

The resistance that occurs in this extract is, however, limited to a certain type of insubordinate behaviour, which supports Graul's identity both as a woman and a political prisoner. Schiller's words that open the evening stress the importance of preserving humanity. That these words are met with such enthusiasm by other prisoners represents their belief that there is little humanity in the dilapidated, degrading environment of GDR imprisonment – Graul's first few days in incarceration were particularly degrading as she is forced to eat on the ground and empty out the toilet bucket (20, 24). Graul's use of the words represents the prisoners' resistance to this inhumanity as well as her endorsement of culture as a means of increasing humanity. In her representation of the Schiller evening, Graul links the prison's lack of humanity with its lack of culture: the authorities do not pick up on the meaning of Schiller's words in the first place and cannot relate to them as Graul and her fellow prisoners do. Graul again links the concepts of humanity and intellect through the use of the word 'Geist', writing of her and her fellow prisoners: 'Wieder einmal hat der Geist über den Ungeist gesiegt' (192). It seems for Graul, literary insight and intellect are markers of humane behaviour, something the Hoheneck authorities lack. She shows that it is because of her belief in that which 'Geist' represents that she instigates resistance in prison. It is not

rebellion for rebellion's sake: there is a distinct moral and culturally acceptable element to her actions.

Graul makes it clear that the purpose of any rebellious activities on her part comes from her desire for more humanity within prison and this involves improving conditions and the treatment of prisoners there. This is represented as a particularly maternal endeavour. Graul was actually incarcerated in Hoheneck with Margret Bechler for a time and writes about their friendship, although Bechler makes no mention of Graul. Despite her admittance that she finds Bechler's rebellious behaviour reckless, she describes it with much admiration: 'Sie kennt keine Furcht und läßt sich nichts gefallen' (151). According to Graul, Bechler and prisoners like her rebel as a means of attempting to resist what they see as unjust incarceration and treatment, rather than for rebellion's sake. Graul shows that Bechler's rebellious behaviour is strongly linked to her role as a wronged mother, writing of her tragic experience: 'Härter kann man wohl keine Mutter behandeln' (151).

Bechler, in her position as a maternal rebel, becomes a kind of model for Graul's increasingly defiant behaviour. Although she is not particularly rebellious at first, Graul slowly comes to emulate Bechler's rebellious behaviour in standing up for her when she is bullied by staff:

> ich sage der Wachtmeisterin […] so gründlich die Meinung, daß ich […] 21 Tage verschärften Arrest bekomme […] 'Verbrecher, Mistbande!' sage ich laut, aber ich habe auch ein befreites Gefühl ob der bewiesenen Solidarität (152/3).

Graul makes it clear that she is being subversive, aggressive even, as a means of protecting others and of promoting humanity within prison. Not only is it morally sound, Graul's subversion is strongly linked to her developing identity as an improved and

nurturing woman and teacher, who is concerned with upholding and protecting the welfare of others. Like Bechler's, Graul's is a distinctly maternal rebellion, it is an acceptable, indeed ideal type of self-representation for her putative audience.

Incorrigible political prisoner and feminine reformer

Graul sets out not only the criteria for the good woman in prison but also for the good prisoner, with Bechler, amongst others, as her model. These criteria do not seem to rely on labelling as a political prisoner. In being designated a dangerous criminal by the GDR justice system, the political prisoner was often able to identify as a *separate* type of prisoner from her criminal counterparts, thus the label could be empowering because it implied political imprisonment. But, as Graul demonstrates, the term 'political prisoner' does not in itself guarantee an ideal prisoner. Graul may make it clear that Bechler is not a criminal, but she does not designate her a political prisoner either. There are a number of political prisoners of whom she is disapproving. Some former National Socialists (sentenced by Soviet Military Tribunals after 1945) were able to define themselves using such terminology, given that their crimes were often seen as a result of conflict between countries. Graul does not see such women as ideal prisoners, instead separating herself from them in an attempt to avoid any accusations of Nazism (134). But she also voices her suspicions and disapproval of some anti-GDR political prisoners, such as Inge, a political prisoner who is outspoken in the cell but obedient around the guards: 'Sie ist politisch, verhält sich den Bewachern gegenüber ausgesprochen servil und hofft offenbar auf eine frühere Entlassung' (194). Although she is a political prisoner, Inge is two-

faced and not to be trusted. Graul is also disapproving of some political prisoners arrested for similar crimes to herself, describing their snobbery towards other 'criminal' prisoners with some disparagement (205). They too, are not ideal prisoners in Graul's representation because they separate themselves from their criminal cellmates.

It seems the label political prisoner is, on its own, not enough to merit recognition as a good prisoner for Graul, despite its connotations of righteousness, innocence and even victimhood. One of the main criteria for becoming a good prisoner is to *behave* rebelliously, as Bechler does (152). Graul takes this issue of rebellious performance further in her description of Bäumchen, a 'criminal' inmate convicted of infanticide, whom Graul befriends: 'Sie zeichnet sich durch ein ausgeprägtes Gerechtigkeitsgefühl aus und scheut sich nicht, den Kampf mit dem Personal aufzunehmen, wenn sie sich ungerecht behandelt fühlt' (204). Graul shows that not only is Bäumchen a victim of her husband's brutality, but she is concerned with justice and does not obey authority when she disagrees with it. Because of these criteria, Bäumchen takes on a more ideal, implicitly a *less criminal* identity for Graul. She is less deviant in Graul's eyes partly because of her 'good' behaviour. For Graul, some prisoners can be exonerated through their actions in prison, but this certainly does not apply to all criminals she encounters, especially given Graul's prejudice towards the crimes of her fellow inmates: Bäumchen appears to be an exception, perhaps because of her status as victim. Although there are other mitigating factors in Graul's portrayal of Bäumchen as a good prisoner, her representation substantiates that rebellion plays a more crucial role in the construction of an acceptable identity than being labelled as political does. Indeed, as Margret Bechler

demonstrates in *Warten auf Antwort*, rebellious behaviour can make the prisoner appear more political (and therefore non-criminal) than labelling as political can.

In order to fit in with her own criteria for the ideal prisoner, Graul too, has shown her rebellion within prison through defending and imitating Bechler as well as through her resistance within the music and theatre group. She also demonstrates, in a somewhat contradictory way, her good relationship with 'criminal' women. She is judgemental of other prisoners, writing of non-political prisoners' deviant sexuality, lower-class backgrounds, mental illness and mood swings associated with pre-menstrual tension (63, 127, 162). However, she also represents herself as an increasingly compassionate woman in her views towards female criminals, thus creating an important turning point upon her character trajectory. Graul writes of her sympathy towards and understanding for women who have been sentenced for murder: 'Ich begreife hier, daß der Mensch nicht mit seiner Tat gleichzusetzen ist, und werde ganz still vor solchen Schicksalen.' (129). She also defends Marga, despite her macabre crime. Graul here marks herself out as a particularly understanding, compassionate prisoner. Her description of the other prisoners' reaction to Bäumchen shows Graul as the most understanding of them all: '"Kindesmißhandlung mit tödlichen Ausgang," erfahre ich und ein solches Delikt reicht schon aus, daß einige unserer vornehmen A-6er [a type of political prisoner – KR][55] die Nase rümpfen und sich verächtlich benehmen' (204). Graul wishes to find out more about Bäumchen's life and the reasons behind her crime rather than coming to any rash judgements. Her compassionate attitude evokes models of the nurturing maternal

[55] Graul too was sentenced according to 'Artikel 6 der Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', as mentioned on p.10 of her account.

woman, thus suggesting that she is a better woman and prisoner than the other haughty political prisoners in her surroundings.

By the end of her text, Graul portrays herself as being a particularly close friend of prisoners incarcerated for murder. She describes their emotional farewell: ‘die meisten meiner Mörder weinen’ (226-7). She also anticipates any shock that the reader may have regarding her allegiance with such criminal women in a conversation with a guard: ‘’Sie haben sich wohl mit denen verstanden?’ Fragt meine Begleiterin verblüfft. ‘Warum nicht?’ gebe ich zurück’ (227). Graul is proud of her relationship with the murderers. But it is worth noting that throughout the text Graul still shows her prejudice towards female criminals. In her status as a long-term prisoner, she is also particularly critical of short-term criminals; she shows that she is of a separate status from the ‘kleine[n] Krimis’ (130) in Hoheneck, who are women charged with criminal offences and sentenced to less that ten years in prison. Graul appears to look down on these women because of their (albeit unspecified) criminal past and their social status. As Rinser did, Graul describes women who have high sex drives and a tendency towards fits of rage as being ‘aus dem unteren sozialen Bereich’ (123); they are represented as a separate, less respectable category to Graul. Her conflicted attitude is encapsulated in her defence of Marga (discussed above), when she says to one prisoner: ‘Ich frage nur zurück, was ihr denn ihr Kind getan hätte, daß sie es vernachlässigen mußte? Da ist sie still’ (167). Graul here emphasises the woman’s crime, silencing her through highlighting the common belief that being a bad mother is the worst crime and gaining control over her through using that stigma attached to her crime against her. Graul is thus critical of other women’s crimes in order to defend another female criminal, showing both compassion

and prejudice. She is willing to defend deviant women such as Bäumchen and Marga, but only *some* of them and often separates herself from those she deems unsuitable, showing that she has not transformed as much as she would have the reader believe by this concluding section of her account. As we have seen in Rinser's account, there is a conflict between the author's desire to belong with criminals, to have solidarity with them, and her desire to separate herself as a superior kind of prisoner. Graul aligns herself with such prisoners to an even greater degree than Rinser, or, indeed any of the other writers in this thesis. She seems to show herself as an exclusive type of political prisoner: she is superior to and distinct from criminals but also particularly understanding and compassionate towards them.

It may be a sometimes contradictory self-representation, but it is through writing of her increased compassion that Graul further shows how she becomes a better woman through prison. This emphasis on improved femininity may make her seem less transgressive or deviant, but it is problematic because it implies that prison refeminised her or reformed her into a 'proper' woman – that it changed her in the way that it intended. But in her emphasis on her rebellious and incorrigible character, Graul proves that she has resisted prison's enforcement of its own value system upon her: she has improved as a woman because of herself, not because of the prison authority. But her resistance of a new prison self is not only enacted through her rebellious deeds; Graul also writes of herself as an unalterable prisoner, who could not be reformed into an ideal GDR citizen and changed according to how the prison wished. Graul describes her dismissive response to socialist propaganda in prison. Here she emphasises that, rather than convert prisoners, the screening of socialist films only serves to disturb and damage

them: ‘Die Verantwortlichen beweisen immer wieder ein hohes Maß an Geschmacklosigkeit und reißen bei vielen alte Wunden auf’ (193). In Graul’s account, the films do not do what the prison and indeed the regime intends. She is insistent about her and her fellow prisoners’ steadfastly political and incorrigible status in her response to them: ‘Der Versuch, ausgerechnet uns davon überzeugen zu wollen […] ist von vornherein zum Scheitern verurteilt’ (193).

Graul tries to fortify this identity through using others’ words to describe her incorrigible character: she writes that she is known by the Hoheneck authorities as one of the ‘Aufsässigen und Unverbesserlichen’ (221). Such a narrative technique serves to authenticate her own representation of her incorrigible status: Graul uses an external source here, maintaining that she is not the only one who perceives herself in such a way. Graul also includes prison reports written by her guards which she had retrieved from the Stasi archives, opened to the public in 1990. Such an inclusion is interesting because Graul makes it clear that she sees these documents as unreliable in their bias towards defending the GDR regime. She often contests any dubious information through inserting punctuation such as: ‘(!)’ to convey her opinion. But at the same time she uses them as authentic documents to reinforce her incorrigible status, reflecting a more general tendency towards publishing documentary literature in the immediate post-Wende years and a drive towards portraying the experience of the GDR in as authentic a light as possible.[56] In them she is described as ‘ein ausgesprochener Feind dieses Staates’ (200); they say of her: ‘Ihr ständiges Bestreben geht dahin, einen gewissen Kreis von Strafgefangenen für sich zu gewinnen, die gleichen Charakters und wegen des

[56] As discussed above in reference to Leeder and Herhoffer.

gleichen Deliktes bestraft sind' (199) as well as claiming that she committed acts that endangered society (197). Indeed, it seems that they give a rather exaggerated version of Graul's personality when compared with her self-representation using her own words. Graul does not identify herself as a dangerous woman, or as someone whose 'constant' concern it is to instigate rebellion in prison. Graul has the power to contradict anything she deems inaccurate by adding '(!)', as she regularly does, or even excluding inaccuracies, but in these cases she does not. It seems she wants to be seen by the prison authorities as dangerous and writes of her pleasure at seeing how the reports represent her: 'so erheitern sie [the reports] mich doch ungeheuer. Immer wieder bescheinigen sie, daß der gewünschte Erziehungsprozeß bei mir nicht erreichbar war' (196). More than anything Graul wishes to convey that the GDR prison did not successfully reform her into a model East German citizen as it intended. Graul is pleased with the reports – they seem to 'prove' that she has not been ideologically indoctrinated by the prison, indeed that any change of character on her part goes against the prison and the GDR regime in general.

A key element to Graul's insistence on her incorrigible identity lies within her self-representation as an authoritative prisoner who, instead of being changed by the prison structure, actually enforces *her* own changes and beliefs upon *it*. Graul represents herself as far superior to the GDR prison in terms of intellect and knowledge of culture. The reports are used to testify to Graul's intellect in prison: 'Es ist hier bekannt, daß sie ein gutes Wissen besitzt' (199). Graul has proved that her cultural, intellectual ability is far superior to that of the prison authorities through outwitting them during the Schiller performance. After the Schiller evening, and Graul's representation of her desire for

justice in the prison world, her sense of humanity too is shown to be far greater than that of those who run the prison.

Indeed, by the latter stage of the account, Graul shows that she is in more of a position to understand the needs of prisoners and the best ways to reform them into good citizens than the authorities of both Hoheneck and Barnimstrasse prisons themselves. She writes of her insight concerning how *not* to resocialise prisoners, making it clear that she disapproves of the GDR (and the present German) penal system too: 'Niemand wird durch Freiheitsentzug und Isolierung gebessert; zu oft tritt sogar das Gegenteil ein: an kriminellen Praktiken wird durch den entsprechenden Umgang noch dazugelernt' (226). In her friendships with women accused of serious and violent crimes, Graul shocks both the prison authorities and the reader, who would not expect her solidarity with such controversial, 'deviant' women. But in doing this, Graul demonstrates to the prison authorities and the reader that she understands prisoners to a much greater degree than those in positions of authority ever could, whilst at the same time separating herself from them. In her successful teaching of Marga and indeed the music and theatre group as a whole, Graul demonstrates that she can reform certain prisoners, unlike the philistine prison and the GDR regime that it represents. It is Graul's version of culture that is shown to be the most effective mode of reform, rather than that of the GDR, and she is thus represented as the ultimate reformer of those in prison.

There is a further implication, in the final pages of the account, that Graul's enforcement of change stretches not only to her fellow prisoners but to the prison authorities and infrastructure of the institution itself. Although no such thing happens in Hoheneck, Graul writes that she provides music lessons to the head guard at

Barnimstrasse prison (170). Graul instructs not only prisoners then, she instructs those in positions of authority too, improving them through her musical and cultural knowledge. Thus it is Graul who, on this albeit small scale, reforms those in prison, rather than the other way around. On a much larger scale, Graul imposes her own change upon Hoheneck prison as a whole, describing the central role she played in improving the structure of the prison. Firstly, she writes that she instigated the dismissal of the despised prison supervisor 'Makarenko' through telling prison inspectors about his improper behaviour (222-4). He blames her personally for his discharge, demonstrating that she is responsible for this change to prison administration. On her release from Hoheneck, Graul makes a hard-hitting exit speech about conditions in the prison: ' 'Ich habe hier all die Jahre immer von Umerziehung gehört […] aber zu jeder Art von Erziehung gehört mindestens Verständnis […] für den zu Erziehenden […] Ich habe kaum einen Ansatz von wirklichem pädagogischen Bemühen gemerkt' (229). Once again Graul proves that she knows better how to reform prisoners than the authorities in Hoheneck. Most importantly, Graul shows the reader that she is effective because the Hoheneck prison director appears to listen to her words: ' "Ich werde über Ihre Worte nachdenken und danke Ihnen für Ihre Offenheit!"' (230). On returning to Hoheneck to visit in 1991, Graul finds a much improved prison in which the inmates have more freedom, space and a significantly better opportunity to educate themselves. There is also a fully functional music room with some of the instruments that Graul used in the music group that she established (244). Although decades have past since Graul's internment there, suggesting that improvements to the prison would have been inevitable, there is an implication that Graul herself (through her work in the music group and passionate exit

speech) significantly contributed to instigating better conditions in the institution. Graul is represented as a reformer, on the side of a humane penal system which does not punish or indoctrinate, rather endeavours to re-socialise prisoners.

Conclusion: the 'real' Elisabeth Graul

In a 2005 interview Graul was asked: ' "Was hält einen Menschen dann noch im Inneren zusammen?" ' She replied:

> Die Gewissheit, kein Opfer, sondern Täter gewesen zu sein […] Täter in dem Sinn: etwas getan zu haben für die Freiheit, für die Menschenwürde, für die Demokratie. Wir haben gewusst, was uns passieren kann. Aber wir haben auch gewusst, dass wir nicht nur Beobachter sein dürfen.[57]

Graul was here referring to her involvement in the anti-GDR group but this statement accurately sums up her self-representation in *Die Farce.* By the end of the text she has become active rather than passive and in this active role has gained an impressive level of authority. Graul has exerted her authority over the governmental system of the GDR by displaying her intellectual superiority and ability to improve the prison infrastructure and the prisoners themselves. Not only that, as an epilogue to the main text, Graul writes that in August 1991 she received her rehabilitation from the government of the recently reunified Germany – official acknowledgement of injustices against her during the GDR and financial compensation. In articulating this, Graul shows her victorious and authoritative position over both governments, counteracting the authority that they exerted over her in past years.

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[57] *Elisabeth Graul, Gefangene der SED,* (January 2005, accessed May 2008); http://www.mdr.de/damals-in-der-ddr/lexikon/1781096-hintergrund-1777952.html.

Graul takes a superior position not only in relation to already existent judicial systems but to the reader as well. She uses her text to enact her role as a narrative authority, one whose truth is to be taken above others. Furthermore, in her self-appointed role as someone with privileged knowledge and understanding of how the prison system works and of how it should *ideally* work, the implication is that she knows more than the reader and is better able to judge how prisoners should be treated. Graul becomes the *real* judge here, implicitly taking on the role initially held by her reader and further empowering herself.

But Graul has shown herself to be an ideally feminine authority and agent, relying on the symbol of the mother and infusing it with criteria with which she can refute any accusation of criminality, subversion or non-femininity. Her increasingly maternal nature is imbued with authority through her alignment of the maternal with the pedagogical and in her subsequent portrayal of the power she obtains through teaching. This maternal authority links to her rebellious behaviour: Graul makes it clear that she is being subversive, aggressive even, as a means of protecting others; hers is a strong but nurturing and thus maternal rebellion. For Graul the political, the authoritative, and the ideally feminine go hand in hand under the mother symbol, creating a paradigm for the female political prisoner that echoes that set by the other ‘acceptable’ female political prisoners in this project. Graul’s female political prisoner is, however, represented as being of an even higher femininity than the writers in previous chapters because of her sense of compassion and, albeit contradictory, desire to be associated with criminal women.

Graul may grant her experience of prison a central and influential role within her life narrative but it is not portrayed as one which has overwhelmingly damaged her. Indeed it has improved her, and is crucial to that person who she is at the time of writing. Prison has been the catalyst for Graul's growth into a more mature and autonomous subject, revealing the 'real' authoritative but feminine Graul. Prison may be a microcosm in which different, perhaps transgressive behaviour is required for survival, but it is also shown as the reason behind Graul's shedding of that childish, less ideal self seen in the first half of her account. There is the sense that Graul 'finds herself' in prison both as a woman and as a writer: in the years after publishing *Die Farce,* Graul published eight books of prose and poetry, including the successful *Shalom für Magdalena.*[58] It is the act of writing that allows Graul to construct this sense of authority over her past and over her audience. Through articulation, Graul is able to shape events, she is able to retain some aspects of her character and shed others, rather than being subject to the imposing effects of prison. Graul's narrative may be constructed in order to be acceptable to her imagined audience, but writing still functions as a key means of resistance and of gaining agency.

[58] Elisabeth Graul, *Shalom für Magdalena* (Munich: Langen/Müller 2000).

Conclusion

It is not possible quantitatively to evaluate the effect that the act of prison writing has upon the writers in this thesis, but on a qualitative level we are able to see the positive value that can come from such an endeavour.[1] Lore Wolf's prison diary is the most pertinent example of this. More than any other writer in this project, Wolf's diary indicates that writing makes her *feel* better and even liberates her emotionally from her incarceration. My research contributes to a body of evidence that suggests life writing can help the writer come to terms with imprisonment through the catharsis it provides but also through helping her to view the experience of prison as valuable to her sense of self. The act of prison writing specifically can be viewed as not only an assertion of who the self is but, perhaps more importantly given the disempowering environment of prison, as a means of obtaining a sense of agency. Writing has a positive purpose for the other authors too: Rosa Luxemburg is able to maintain her relationships through her letters; Luise Rinser's diary helps her to reject an identity as criminal and speak to future generations about injustice under dictatorships; Margret Bechler's account allows her to reclaim her status as mother and 'good' woman; and Elisabeth Graul's autobiography is a means of showing the world – and herself – that prison, although it robbed her of her youth, was crucial to her sense of autonomous self.

In their different ways, the texts examined in this study suggest that prison brings out its author's 'real' self and that real self is, in different ways, 'feminine'. The authors imbue the negotiable, restrictive concept of 'femininity' with qualities which they use to

[1] Quantitative studies have been undertaken which examine the value that can come from writing in prison, see: Bernd Scheffer, "Schreiben hinter Gittern," in *Schreiben. Schreiben lernen*, ed. D. Boueke and N. Hopster (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1985), pp. 115-141, for example.

resist the effects of imprisonment, often using the symbol of the mother to show themselves as strong women. They attempt to create themselves, in their different ways, as authoritative subjects in conjunction with their self-representations as 'good women'. The posthumous publication of Luxemburg's prison letters brought about widespread appraisals of her as sensitive, humane, artistic and, at times, vulnerable – implying that she was a 'real' woman, as opposed to a transgressive figure. Luxemburg's letters themselves indicate that this exposure of her 'feminine' side is brought about by her positioning within the carceral world. Luxemburg writes that she is ashamed of this 'weak' femininity, as if she does not approve of this side to her character. At the same time, it is a characteristic that she seems to need in her communications with certain addressees: she exposes what we are to believe is her inner, feminine self to them as a means of maintaining or indeed furthering relationships whilst cut off from the outside world. At other times, Luxemburg shows great strength, sometimes crossing into transgressive, masculine territory. She may appear 'masculine', especially in her more public, political letters (such as those to Mathilde Wurm), but these letters are examples of Luxemburg's desire to exert her authority in the outside world. It is important to her to be 'male' in her letters to Wurm because she is demonstrating political, public authority. Luxemburg also uses maternal language to soften her dominant, potentially subversive self-representations; in evoking maternal femininity she is able to exert her agency too.

Luise Rinser goes to great lengths to persuade the reader of her diary that she does not subvert the norms of femininity, persistently writing of herself as non-criminal and non-sexual in comparison to those prisoners – and guards – around her. Her location

within the carceral space seems to bring about this need to highlight her supposedly feminine characteristics. Rinser may insist on an ideal femininity in her self-representation, but it is one that lacks a vital characteristic of 'good' womanhood: warmth. Rinser counteracts this in her second foreword of 1973 by writing that her diary appeared cold and did not accurately represent her time in prison and, by extension, her 'real' self, one whom, we are to assume, is actually warm and therefore womanly. Although Rinser does not create a domineering or subversive self-representation, there is still a sense of authority available in her diary-writing. The diary allows her to be a judge not only of others but also of herself: Rinser shows self-awareness and through this positions herself as an authoritative writer. In her prison diary, Lore Wolf is insistent upon the enriching effect that the experience of prison has had upon her. Wolf writes that she becomes a better person because of prison; she becomes a superwoman, and, in a similar way to Luxemburg, uses the maternal paradigm as a vehicle for safely transmitting her strength and her leadership. Wolf is more vocal about her (albeit fantastical) role as a leader of the people than Luxemburg, using diary-writing to create a more dominant role for herself than the one she actually had while in prison.

Margret Bechler's account has provided much scope to develop the issue of prison as feminising, and the 'good' woman and female prisoner as an amalgamation of transgressive, authoritative and conventional femininities. Bechler's account illustrates that the female prisoner, even if she represents herself as a victim in order to avoid being perceived as deviant, needs to obtain a level of agency during and after imprisonment. Bechler does this by re-writing her femininity: she is a passive feminised victim at the start who gradually, through prison, becomes a strong, rebellious agent with a concern

for justice and humanity, as well as a protective mother figure. This is represented as the 'real' Bechler, a self exposed by the 'authentic' experience of imprisonment. More than any other writer in this project, Bechler represents prison as a retreat, a privileged, domestic setting in which she is able to improve as a woman: she is still a maternal figure but one who has obtained great autonomy within the world of the prison. In publishing her diary she is able to obtain a level of authority in the outside world too, reclaiming her status as a mother and wife through her name, although her attempts at rejoining her children were not successful.

For Elisabeth Graul, the experience of prison is represented as one which turns her from a childlike character into a woman. Using a self-representation as a child allows Graul to mitigate any potentially deviant or transgressive sides of her life by assigning them to her past, childish self. The 'real' Graul is the older, wiser Graul, the one who is writing her autobiography. Graul shows the reader that this real self was created *by* and *during* prison. Graul's representation of her femininity is also tightly bound with those ideas of the strong mother found in the previous texts of this thesis. Like Bechler in her self-representation as victim, Graul has little agency in her role as a child. The construction of a maternal, authoritative self is a means of obtaining not only a sense of the self as a 'good' woman but also as an agent, with a level of authority within a disempowering world. Graul also makes it clear that, although she may change during prison, her development is not a result of GDR indoctrination, rather she changes the GDR prison and wields authority over it.

The prison writing investigated in this thesis represents resistance to the impositions of incarceration. In it, the author is able to write of herself as an agent, an authoritative

prisoner, not an object of the prison system, rather a subject in her own right. With the exception of Rosa Luxemburg, all of the writers considered in this thesis wrote of their incarceration as a worthwhile, life-changing experience. Through writing, they control an idea of how their selves and lives have developed. They can reclaim the experience and the years spent isolated from the outside world. Through narrative, prison becomes more of an autonomous experience and less a place of disempowerment in which the subject is at the mercy of the authorities.

In his references to predominantly male prison writing (although he does mention some women such as Luxemburg and the Irish prison writer Constance Markievicz (1868-1927)), Ioan Davies may state that: 'prison writing is centrally about violence,'[2] but this is not applicable to the accounts I have examined. The authors studied in this thesis construct themselves using acceptable tropes of femininity in response to the criminal label that accompanies incarceration. The above texts are about the narrative act of coping with incarceration through the preservation of self and the creation of a sense of acceptable femininity and agency. The current framework for analysing men's prison narratives cannot be applied to women's narratives of incarceration because it does not give enough attention to issues of gender. Prison is a disempowering, indeed infantilising environment for men too, and their narratives also need to be examined with this in mind.[3]

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[2] Davies, p. 16.
[3] For example a study of: Torsten Heyme and Felix Schumann, *Ich kam mir vor wie'n Tier: Knast in der DDR*, (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1991).

The future of women's prison writing in the German context

As mentioned in the introduction, twentieth-century narratives of incarceration from Germany have been dominated by accounts of the Holocaust, but there is further scope for examining narratives of the prison, rather than just the concentration camp. There exists a growing corpus of first person accounts written by women who define themselves as political prisoners, but are described within cultural discourse as dangerous criminals and terrorists. Some of the most infamous self-designated 'political prisoners' of twentieth-century Germany were members of West Germany's left-wing extremist Red Army Faction (RAF), the majority of whom were female.[4] An extensive examination of the author's self-representations would enrich the field of women's prison narratives in Germany.[5] I have chosen not to use these accounts in my research, partly because the authors come from a different geographical and historical context and were figures of intense public scrutiny – especially Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin. But I am also aware that the authors were involved in violent activity such as kidnapping and murder. They may self-define as political prisoners but it can be quite easily contested that they are dangerous criminals. It is the moral task of the academic researcher to impose a distinction upon the different kinds of political prisoner found in

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[4] Such as: Marianne Herzog, *Nicht den Hunger verlieren* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1980); Inge Viett, *Einsprüche!: Briefe aus dem Gefängnis* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1996), and *Nie war ich furchtloser: Autobiographie* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1997); Margrit Schiller, *Es war ein harter Kampf um meine Errinerung - Ein Lebensbericht aus der RAF* (Munich: Piper, 2001); Oliver Tolmein and Irmgard Möller, *"RAF, das war für uns Befreiung": ein Gespräch mit Irmgard Möller über bewaffneten Kampf, Knast und die Linke*, (Hamburg: Konkret, 2002); Gudrun Ensslin, Christiane Ensslin, and Gottfried Ensslin, *"Zieht den Trennungsstrich, jede Minute": Briefe an ihre Schwester Christiane und ihren Bruder Gottfried aus dem Gefängnis 1972-1973* (Hamburg: Konkret, 2005).

[5] Apart from Sarah Colvin, " 'Chiffre und Symbol für Wut und Widerstand?' *Gudrun Ensslin - Briefe aus der Haft*, herausgegeben von Christiane Ensslin und Gottfried Ensslin" in *Nachbilder der RAF*, ed. Inge Stephan and Alexandra Tacke (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), pp. 88-105.

cultural discourse. All of those texts written by prisoners who identify themselves as political prisoners should be analysed with regard for any violent, dangerous actions that may have led to their incarceration, in order to avoid conflating the illegal activity behind their incarceration with political activism. The label 'political prisoner' may be dependent on its designator and historically variant, but it is a powerful label to use, or, in Margret Bechler's case, to invoke.

Central to the texts discussed in this thesis are the authors' attempts to gain a sense of agency and of self through the act of writing. Such accounts should not be dismissed because of the authors' lack of literary status or the texts' lack of conventional aesthetic sophistication or 'literary truth'. The value of these accounts is that the authors (who, apart from Luxemburg and Rinser, are not well known) are able to speak publicly for themselves. Not only that, they are able to challenge dominant and oppressive narratives (created predominantly by the political systems which imprisoned them) and acquire a voice as autonomous, authoritative subjects. It is important that these writers have been given a public platform; but still there is a dearth of published accounts by women who do not identify as political prisoners.[6] Twentieth-century Germany was characterised by momentous events and authoritarian political systems; there are bound to be many

[6] Although some anthologies are in existence, such as: Luise Rinser, ed., *Lasst mich Leben: Frauen im Knast* (Dortmund: R. Padligur Verlag, 1987). This is a collection written by non-political female prisoners, but no whole texts written by such prisoners have been published, see: Uta Klein, "Texte inhaftierter Frauen," in *Gefangenenliteratur: Sprechen, Schreiben, Lesen in deutschen Gefängnissen*, ed. Uta Klein and Helmut H. Koch (Hagen: R. Padligur, 1988), p. 127. In the twentieth century, the only whole publication written by a 'criminal' woman in prison is that of Emmy Hennings written in 1918: Emmy Hennings, *Gefängnis* (Wetzlar: Büchse der Pandora, 1981), although there have been more prison accounts published by women in the twenty-first century, especially those documenting incarceration for drug smuggling.

former political prisoners wishing to tell their story and they are representative of their political and historical time, which means their accounts are in demand.

But gender, too, is a factor in the lack of published prison narratives written by non-political female criminals. The male criminal has, historically, been a much more celebrated figure than the female criminal. There is more stigma attached to female criminality, whereas with men, criminal activity has, at times, been theorised as an extension of their 'innately' aggressive masculinity.[7] The female *political* prisoner is less stigmatised because of the implication that she does not transgress her gender role to the same degree as the female criminal does. She represents the cultural ideal of middle-class, well-educated femininity, unlike the female criminal, who carries with her connotations of deviant sexuality and poor background.

The readership, too, is different. The female criminal's account would most likely fall into the category of *Frauenliteratur* – a text written by women and for women.[8] In this category it would be considered of special rather than general interest, unlike the female political prisoner's account which, in relating back to significant political and historical events, is part of a more mainstream discourse. Women's prison writing in the twentieth century has been dominated by the voices of political prisoners, the voices of the minority since, generally speaking, criminal prisoners far outnumber political prisoners. It is crucial that we hear the voices of this largely silent majority in order to fully examine the stigma attached to female criminality.

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[7] See: H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially Chapter Four for a discussion of the boastful element to men's narratives of their criminal past. Also see my Introduction.

[8] For an interesting discussion of 'Frauenliteratur' see: Stephan, pp. 625-9.

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