

The perception of prisons in the writings of women political prisoners*

The main aim of the paper is to provide a historical overview of some of the most important women imprisoned for political reasons, whose writings were published and popular; while seeking to extract from them the main tone of perception surrounding their experience of incarceration. For an overview, the political writing of imprisoned women is divided into two main historical periods: pre- and post-Second World War, followed by the contemporary examples of the genre. The rise of writings of imprisoned women in the first period happened as a part of the emergence of the modern world, where the focus is on England and France. Later it appears as a part of the political uprising of socialism and new social movements marked by classics of the genre such as prison writings by Rosa Luxembourg and Angela Davis that were not much elaborated on in criminology and penology in Serbia. In the final paragraph, I open the question of why the genre is massively present in former and current conflict areas, while it was not so present in the region, and I offer some of the initial directions for interpretation. In conclusion, I demonstrate the reasons why prison writings produced by the women imprisoned for political reasons are a useful source for understanding the short-term and long-term impact that incarceration has on the lives of the current and former inmates.

Keywords: women political prisoners, prison writings, inmate perceptions, penological approach, historical overview

Introduction

Since the condition of imprisonment is in many ways challenging for the incarcerated individual, the only available sources of shortening the days of isolation and sensational deprivation might be intellectual activities or physical exercises. Writing in this context could appear to be essential to sustain capacities and survive social and intellectual deprivation, since it can provide the imprisoned persons with "a sense of agency and voice". Therefore, intellectual activities could be important for keeping the incarcerated individuals active and alive while placed in prison cells, which helps them maintain their mental health stabile (Schwan, 2014: 1). These kinds of activities might be particularly important for the category of prisoners imprisoned for political reasons as one of the most problematic categories of crimes since the individuals proclaimed guilty for these crimes are those who practice these activities a lot and would consider reading and writing to be available for them also inside the prison cells as a basic human right. However, during turbulent historical times particularly, these activities are what is to be limited and controlled because the spread of opinions and facts might increase radicalisation among prisoners and the general population.

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So, the reason to stop them from influencing others with their opposite opinions is why they are put in the cells in the first place, rather than something illegal they have done.

The writings of different kinds produced under the circumstances of imprisonment have intrigued the public for a while. The significant amount of literature written on the topic testifies literature coming from prison cells has become a widely accepted research subject in criminology, penology, and literacy studies (Bonzom, 2022: 57). Among the first prison writings were the philosophical texts from the period of classic antiquity and ancient Rome, but prison writing as a literal genre faced expansion starting with the modern period. During the 16th century, for example, this rise was particularly sharp (Ahnert, 2017). Incarceration is often portrayed as providing time and space for reflection. Therefore, many people who were put in prison used the time to analyse and reflect on their personal or social circumstances in the written form or to undertake some form of educational activities that provide them with a sense of freedom and spiritual perseverance (Knežić, 2017). "From escapism to protest, from moral elevation to fellowship, written words, authorised or clandestine, were (and still are) a 'bright light' in prisoners' lives" (Bonzom, 2021: 6). At the same time, writings produced in prisons are potentially beneficial research material from which a lot of information about how imprisoned individuals process the experience of incarceration and the prisons themselves, both fictional and non-fictional, could be retrieved, given in the form of memoirs, letters and personal correspondence, diaries etc. Those writings are sometimes made in prison cells and sometimes are reflection notes assembled afterwards in the form of memoirs. What is important to notice here is that prison writings produced by women, however, were for various reasons ignored for quite a while, most of which are associated with the stigma surrounding the women who were breaking the rules and stepping out of the traditions (Gelfand, 1980: 57). Correspondingly, other reasons might be responsible for the avoidance to use writings of imprisoned women to get the better insight into the phenomenology of crime, punishment, and the later ways in which those are affecting life and social reintegration of the former convicts.

However, being imprisoned for ideological or political reasons often is one of the most common features of imprisoned writers, thinkers and scholars who tend to change the way society functions or challenge the established rules. The building of the modern world implied many disagreements and attempts to restrain and control the developments and ideas. Therefore, the structures of power did not gladly and readily accept those and often the response was the suppression of novel ideas and practices. Intellectuals and innovators in previous historical periods often ended up imprisoned and making notes while imprisoned. Here I can name more than just a few well known cases such as Thomas More, Antonio Gramsci, Mahatma Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, Oscar Wilde etc. It took some time for imprisoned women to look for recognition and raise their voices compared to the already established writings in the same category produced by men until the gendered dimension of incarceration was implemented into the research (Lawston & Lucas, 2011). The main differentiation to be made is between the writings made from the prison cell in comparison to writings made about the time of imprisonment after the sentence has been served. Furthermore, another level of women in prison literature is secondary literature about the literature on imprisonment and or writings from prison. In addition, it is useful to recognise the primary fieldwork research collected by utilizing the feminist research methodology

from imprisoned women to provide them with a voice of their own, which represents a form of mediated expression of themselves, because of the specificities of the approach and the importance of the attempt to collect the authentic stories. However, it is not less important since it can reach to those imprisoned who are illiterate or with less power to express themselves in the way that educated intellectuals do.

This article is focused on providing an overview of the prison writings produced by women in prison incarcerated for political reasons. After describing the topic, I set up the methodological approach to the problem and continue with the central part of the article which begins with the key terms and concepts needed for the article. It continues with the classics of this genre such as writings of women imprisoned in the period of Victorian Britain and as a part of the global rise of socialism, followed by the interwar period and with the 70s, when this genre was trendy because of the social and political uprisings across the world. In the final part, I open the problem of specificities of the gender dimension of prison writings of contemporary times and the topic of the right to write and get education during imprisonment time that particular has been tackled by Angela Davis.

Aims, structure of the paragraphs and methodology

The approach to be utilised in analysing the imprisoned women's writings will be a criminological and penological perspective, rather than the one grounded in literacy studies focused on the writing style. In other words, I will mainly be interested in how the experience of imprisonment has affected the intellectual and mental capabilities of the incarcerated women, what actions the writing women were charged for and how they portray their experience, rather than style and other features more relevant for literacy studies. This approach however excludes fictional writings and is exclusively oriented towards non-fiction (March, 2020: 20).

One of the basic criteria for choosing the sample of writings to be examined has been the type of crime for which women were incarcerated - political acting which, in practice, might refer to a very broad type of crime. I should specify that on the other hand, the focus is on women because their writings have traditionally attracted much less attention than prison writings from men did (Whitecross, 2023; Scheffler, 1984, 2002; Aday & Krabill, 2011; March, 2020: 15). These topics were completely overlooked in the penological research in Serbia because of lack of qualitative epistemologies and methodologies in criminological and penological research. However, another reason is slow progress in the advanced scholarship of social sciences oriented towards novel approaches. Furthermore, the focus is on the historical overview of the key figures important for the genre, and this is the key criterion for the selection of the represented cases - the cases are historically distinguished women who were famous and imprisoned for political reasons whose prison writings became classics of a genre but still have not been put together and represented in this manner. This approach is valuable because it contributes to countering the trends of fetishization and commercialization of prisons to which the term for a genre contributed to a certain extent and its wide usage, since historically distant examples bear much more complexity than modern cases do (Mena Prison Forum, 2021). However, still, prison writings normally represent valuable alternative voices in the system of penalty and

sentencing and to a certain extent also reflect the social and political context and crises of the time and place, especially if coming from political prisoners. Therefore, they are a valuable source for research and understanding the penological system and the experience of imprisonment.

The key question this chapter aims to answer is what is the characteristic of imprisonment for women when the reason for imprisonment includes the political attitudes or activities and what are the perceptions of prison given first hand by this type of inmates, in their own words? Furthermore, the question this paper aims to answer is what are the differences surrounding the prison writings of prominent women in different historical periods? Therefore, the article aims to answer in the first place the question of what prison writing is and how the writings of women political prisoners stand within the genre. Since choosing the historical overview of the well-known cases, the structure of the article first recognizes at least two historical periods in which the emergence of the genre took certain characteristics through the selected cases: the period before the Second World War (WWII) and the period after WWII. The third aim of the article is to situate the analysis into the special constellations and examine the problem of the existence of a genre in the region, followed by the conclusions that prison writings of the women political prisoners do offer valuable insights into the phenomenon of incarceration and to a certain extent represent the experience of imprisonment as a chance for reflection and creativity as a response.

The methodology to be implied in the analysis is thematic discourse analysis combined with literature review and secondary literature analysis (Rodríguez Gallardo, Ángel, 2010). This means that following the research question about how women prominent political prisoners have perceived the prisons given in their prison writings, we seek to identify the dominant themes present in the narratives they have produced about this experience.

Prison writings as a literary genre

Despite the familiarity with the term prison writings and its establishment as a genre, some conceptual differences and doubts should be addressed and answered to define the subject of my analysis. What unifies these writings under the same banner is a certain number of similarities despite the fact that they are rather functionally than formally similar (March, 2020: 17). One of the first dilemmas is if something is just written while the author of the text was imprisoned, but the content of the writings has nothing to do with prisons, should this be considered prison writing (Mena Prison Forum 2021)? Another issue is that naming the genre prison writings is problematic and it seems to be far more adequate to call it "prisoner art", in order to remove the accent from prison as an institution to the prisoner as a subject (March, 2020: 21). Writing in prison might be challenging for prisoners in many instances, starting with the control of the mail going outside the prison and lack of tools needed to manage the writings in prison cells without additional help and support from the staff or outside people. Under certain circumstances of massive revolt, these writings might be controlled to stop the more massive uprisings, but this control of the writings of the imprisoned did not always exist nor was everywhere practised in the same way, especially in historically distant times.

Speaking of the types of prison writing, following the previous criteria, I have included all three of the main types of prison writings previously identified: writings produced during the period of incarceration, writings produced after incarceration dealing with the experience of imprisonment, and writings coming from the women imprisoned at certain points of their lives or interested in the subject that aim to influence the penalty system and/or contribute to the providing methodology and space to give voice to other imprisoned women to make sense of their experiences and share them with the public. Speaking about the content of the writings, to answer how the imprisoned women perceive the prison environment, I include prison writings made in prison cells even though they have no prison for their subjects. The reason for this is simple, the content imprisoned women deal with while in a prison cell is a valuable insight into how they perceive and comprehend the experience of imprisonment - by concentrating on their closest environment or by rather avoiding and concentrating on something else unrelated to their current surroundings. Even though research conducted with imprisoned women by researchers or civil organisations (Alexander, 2017) is highly relevant to this topic, it will not be included in this analysis since it goes beyond this paper's scope and only research done by individual former prisoners is mainly in my focus.

For methodological reasons, it is also convenient to classify types of texts included in the prison writings and notice those typical for political inmates. Besides autobiographical writings, authors imprisoned for political reasons often reflect on the social and political circumstances that surrounded the crime they were charged with, but often, imprisoned women also write letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, pamphlets, etc. The political imprisonment could happen because the political or ideological writings themselves are the reason for imprisonment. There are various ways to classify imprisoned women's literary production, and also to understand the crimes that are not usually understood as political as such. Following the feminist approach and tendency to understand personal as political, also the examples of women who were imprisoned for prostitution, homosexuality, or some other gender-specific crime might be understood as political prisoners, especially if their criminalisation has been related to the public advocacy of these practices and their recognition as labour implying the labour rights. Another quite specific crime for which women were also imprisoned during the early modern times was suspicious religious practices and sectarian activities. These are listed here and will not be examined separately later. Furthermore, writings of women in prison could be observed by considering the specific topics that are related to their femininity, such as pregnancy, menopause, periods, parenthood while imprisoned, etc. here not of great relevance.

The other way to distinguish between approaches to women in prison writings is to delineate between female inmates who are the same time also feminists, in comparison to those who are not and do not advocate women-specific emancipation and liberation. In some cases, the feminist struggle has been the cause of imprisonment, including the struggle for basic political, social, economic or health rights. Women incarcerated for political reasons often are not members of the marginalised parts of society, but rather belong to the intellectuals, highly educated, richer strata of advantaged segments of society. This makes their imprisonment specific and different in comparison to all the others. Reading and writing in prisons are special issues that could also be related to the domain of education in prisons, and the history of making these activities available to inmates is indicative. The

broader rights to reading, writing and education in the situation of imprisonment as a topic related to the given subject goes beyond the scope of this paper and will be elaborated on in future papers. Above all, in the modern period despite the presence of imprisoned intellectuals, the number of educated inmates was quite low. It took a while since some of the prison's governance structures permitted the tools needed for writing and reading inside the prison cells, which in the previous times, as we see from the case of Rosa Luxembourg, were mostly freely available. The first noted permission to use notebooks in prison was given by female inspector Dr Marry Gordon in the female Holloway Prison in 1908 (Cheney, 2010: 132 in Bozon, 2021: 31).

It is useful to mention that there is an ongoing debate about the reliability and credibility of prisoner memoirs, both in literary studies and criminology, which is of crucial importance for criminology and penology (Davies, 1990, p.106; Broadhead, 2006, p.152; Morgan, 1999, p.328; Crewe & Bennett, 2012, p. xxi in Morgan 2020: 20). Therefore, is always useful, when possible, to triangulate methodology and data given in prison writings with the other available resources and to take them not for granted.

The two main periods of Imprisoned Women Literary Production

As mentioned previously, I will classify the writings of imprisoned women into the two main historical periods characterised by the political engagement and activism of the incarcerated women I select to represent. In the following paragraphs, the main figures and features of the imprisoned women's writings will be represented. Furthermore, the focus will be on detecting the topics of importance for my analysis in the writings of these two periods, which are their perspectives of prison on the one hand, while on the other hand I am looking for the perceptions of this imprisonment, especially in terms of how the imprisonment itself affected their consequent wellbeing and political career and engagement. The line of separation between the two is the Second World War, which represents for the genre the separate phase, which is not in the focus of this analysis.

Period before the WWII

Under the most convenient criteria for classifying the imprisoned women's writings - chronological, we start with the period before WWII. This is the provisional delineation convenient for separating the two historical periods in which the political patterns of engagements considerably have changed, particularly regarding the engaged women and how they were perceived and treated in society since by time women were more and more accepted as politically active and leaders. With the empowerment of the ideas born in the period of Enlightenment, and later with the progression of social reformists and utopistic movements, numerous firm supporters of the radical causes were imprisoned, many of whom have been women. In the Victorian Era prison writings became very popular at one point, while among the most popular imprisoned women who also produced some writings about their experiences in this broad pre-WWII period were Rosa Luxembourg and Emma Goldman. WWII and the transitional period during the war also have some inputs to be considered, such as witnesses from the gulags given from the side of women. Still, this topic also is not the focus of this paper since no exemplary case has been brought out of this direction of prison writings. Therefore, it will remain only mentioned without going into

details and specificities of this period and writings of the imprisoned women. So, after explaining the rise of a genre in the period of Enlightenment in the European centres of development of the genre, I will proceed by describing three cases of the most prominent and exemplary women imprisoned for political reasons whose writings became highly popular and influential in this period.

The Age of Enlightenment

Women's prison writings became a recognized activity during the period of Enlightenment. Since in this period, the struggle for recognition of political rights of women began, this situation contributed to the massive imprisonment of women who were fighting for political causes passionate and motivated to advocate certain beliefs, for which writing while imprisoned appeared to be one direction. In some cases, even attempts to reach the audience from behind the bars occurred. Two exemplary cases of the imprisoned women's writings are cases from England and France that broke social taboos associated with politically engaged women who publicly demonstrated some forms of disobedience.

In France in the 18th century, there were examples of aristocratic women who were imprisoned and guillotined because of their attitudes, writings or alleged political accusations. One such example is Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland, the wife of former Girondist Minister of the Interior, Jean-Marie Roland de la Platiere (Szymanek, 1996). She has been accused of anti-revolutionary propaganda in patriotic educational programs together with her husband. At that time, public engagement was prohibited for women, and she denied the political character of her activities. Indeed, sources claim she never wrote a political pamphlet or spoke publicly. Still, on the other hand, the letters, and memoirs she wrote during the three months of imprisonment before the execution tell a different story and obvious political advocacy (Szymanek, 1996: 99, 100). In these memoirs, she witnessed writing speeches and letters to her husband while he was in ministerial charge. On the other hand, she was criticized by feminist scholars for having no courage to challenge the dominant conception of femininity and refusing to stand for women's cause (Szymanek, 1996: 100). Imprisonment made Roland's writings different, and she started to demonstrate bitterness and disappointment. At the same time, she also started to reveal her role in her husband's writings and include some personal elements in the texts, clearly indicating the prison environment led her to self-questioning and reflection (Szymanek, 1996: 110).

The second chosen case, England, is also quite specific for the topic and prison writings produced by women in the Victorian period. From a historical point of view, these women's prison writings are among the most popular within the genre. Prison writings have become "a typical cultural form of early modern England" (Freeman, 2009: 133). In this period the rise of women in prison writings was significant for the first time and the reasons behind this phenomenon are the growth of printed books in combination with the rise of literacy and education. The first anthology of prison writing in the English language was Henry Bull's *Certain Most Godly, Fruitful, and Comfortable Letters of Such True Saintes and Holy Martyrs of God*. In the early modern period, religious and political prisoners often had organized support, and sometimes supporters smuggled and disseminated their writings. The prisons were mostly places for lower social groups, while portrayed also as places for mad

and bad sites full of dangerous people. At that time, prisons were not systematically organized as they are today, therefore in most cases, it was possible to write there and disseminate the writings outside of the prison. The conditions in prisons were variable and not unified, and in early modern times, prisons were also sometimes the sites of vivid cultural production (Freeman, 2009: 145). All religious groups suffered incarceration in the early modern period in England and writings of the imprisonment played an important role in the public acting of the religious groups. The prison writings were popular in public and for decades dominated the public sphere in Britain producing two main outcomes one of which was documentation of the prison conditions, and the second one was that those writings represented some of the most important literary works of the period (Alber and Lauterbach, 2009: 3). These writings played an important role in Victorian public.

Another group of women whose imprisonment was noticeable and massive in the Victorian era were suffragettes. The activities of suffragettes who struggled for women's right to vote started in 1850. For public protesting around 1000 of them spent days or weeks in prison between 1905 and 1914 (Bonzom 2021: 39). Suffragettes were especially active in using the power of writing to make an impact and appeal to the public from the prison cells. Suffragettes and other political prisoners were held in Holloway Prison, one of the largest prisons in Western Europe. For protesting to demand the right to vote, suffragettes were fined. After refusing to pay the fine, they would get a stronger sentence and imprisonment. Since suffragettes were educated women, the documentation they made about their stay in prison is among the most popular and analysed women's prison writings (see for example: (Davies, 2018; Wiley and Rose, 2021). The political heritage of this struggle is recognized and respected in Britain so today we can find some of the original diary notes written by Emily Wilding Davison in 1912.¹

WWI and Interwar Period

The two most important classics of politically imprisoned women's writings in the interwar period are *Letters from Prison: with a Portrait and a Facsimile* (1921) by Rosa Luxemburg and *A Fragment of the Prison Experiences of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* addressing the period from February 1918 to October 1919. The imprisonment of women in this period has been related to the rise of socialism and ideologies of radical social transformations that often came in conflict with official politics. Because of the turbulent character of this period and the rise of educated women ready to engage in political acting, both imprisonment and writings by troubled engaged women were on the increase. Here I will concentrate only on one of the two mentioned texts and their significance in terms of contributing to the history of criminology and penology with a better understanding of how prisons in that period looked like and how the circumstances of political imprisonment functioned in the context of certain social and political circumstances, and that is the book by Rosa Luxembourg which is the one that served as the inspiration for this paper.

¹ The diary notes can be retrieved here: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/unesco/ewd/>, accessed on: 27.5.2024.

The Letters from Prison by Rosa Luxemburg is probably the most well-known book of the genre of women in prison writings, particularly because of the more human than political content of her considerations during the imprisonment and the effort invested into seeing the imprisonment from the positive side. Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was a prominent socialist thinker of German and Polish socialist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries and the first woman in Europe who received a doctorate in political economy. She was advocating socialist revolution and opposed imperialism and war. These letters from prison were written from 1916 to 1918 and remained unpublished until 1923. After providing a brief description of the biographical information about the author and the historical circumstances surrounding her life and political activities, I will progress further by focusing on her description and perception of life in prison, including how she thematized the effect imprisonment has had on her health and life. This final stay behind the prison walls has been just one in a long line of imprisonment for Rosa Luxemburg. In total, she spent three years and four months in prison before she was assassinated.

Letters from Prison by Rosa Luxemburg, paradoxically, teach us much more about the transformation of the negative effects into positive ones than they do about the negative consequences of imprisonment. Her letters from prison demonstrate "an aesthetics of redemption" rather than desperation or depression of imprisonment (Murphet, 2023: 58). Her stay in prison has been strictly regulated and all her communication with the outside world has been censored. However, all these measures did not break her spirit, and she continued her intellectual and academic work even in prison. Most of the content discussed in Rosa's letters is about the books. Since Rosa Luxemburg has not been involved nor associated with any concrete criminal acts like some other women whose cases were presented in this article, but rather the main causes of her imprisonment were her beliefs, therefore she can be considered a political prisoner in real terms.

From the content of the letters Rosa Luxemburg wrote in prison, we can see that her major occupations were not prison-related at all, but rather they demonstrate healthy thinking and a caring person having good relations to others, mostly focused on books, reading and learning, in this case during imprisonment, not revolutionary material but rather natural sciences. It can be seen that she enjoys the atmosphere of non-standardized prisons different from prisons today where her friends and family are sending her the books she asked for and, in some cases, she even had spent time in the park regularly where she planted some plants. When she moved from Wrohki to Breslau, she lost the previously available freedom to move inside the prison, as well as the small pleasures she enjoyed and described in her letters previously (Luxemburg 1921: 44). Her perception of incarceration changed when she moved into sharing the space with other prisoners when their poor condition and state of wellbeing has made a negative impact on her probably because it reminded her of the real circumstances she has been surrounded with (Luxemburg 1921: 45). However, the described incarceration experience is predominately positive and did not have an effect of desperation on Rosa Luxemburg. I do not see the negative side of incarceration on her mental health and mostly she did not complain nor criticize the fact of her imprisonment at all but rather created the life she would live as concentrated on strong reasoning and maintaining creative and productive habits. These letters are one of the defining for the genre, but also it might be a case that she censored herself or that she also

made some political writings in prison that later were destroyed while only those non-problematics remained and were published later.

The period after the WWII

The global rise of social movements elevated the writings of imprisoned women to a completely new level during the 70s, changing both the nature of the political imprisonment of women and the way they were dealing with imprisonment. Because of the massiveness of political rebels of the time, the incarceration of women, people of colour and other groups protesting in demand of their rights rose dramatically on a global level. The attempts to raise awareness about the imprisonment conditions often occurred through some form of writing from the prison cells or even providing autobiographical and/or ethnographic documentation for other imprisoned women or themselves to others which later were published. Compared to the writings of the imprisoned women to the classical modern epoch, in this period the prison system has undergone significant modifications too, so imprisonment for political reasons represented different kinds of phenomena than had been the case before, for which for numerous reasons the case of Angela Davis is exemplary and important to represent. The transformations and growth of the imprisonment system in the US were one of the most striking phenomena characteristics for the second part of the twentieth century, which also became important globally because of its exposure in media and public discourse of the most powerful cultural industry which later became global. The documenting of the struggle for racial equality in the US has been placed in the context of a prison system which, as Angela Davis formulates it, has become a prison industrial complex in many instances not only reflecting the inequalities and other oppressive characteristics of the society but also retaining some of the features of slavery (Davis, 2003: 7, 22). Prisons have become one of the most pictured places in movies and literature, so present in our consciousness and everyday life, and considered inevitable to the extent that it is almost impossible to imagine life without them (Davis, 2003: 9).

For the historical period of the end of the XX century, I chose the case of Angela Davis because it is an exemplary and well-known case which teaches us a lot about how women perceive prison and how prison affects not only their literal production but their agency in general. Also, this case offers a chance to see an activist and a scholar who successfully managed to continue an academic career despite being incarcerated, which is rare to find. If we can distinguish at least two categories of imprisoned writers - those who were captured because of political activism and those who became politically active during and/or after imprisonment, the case of Angela Davis gives us a different example, which is the politically engaged women whose activism has been levelled up after the experience of imprisonment and who later on became academically interested in thinking about prisons and their role in society. Her writings were almost completely engaged with analysing the prison system and how Black, Latino, and other minorities are positioned in it and the happenings surrounding the Black liberation movement, thus we see not much of any other prison-related content present in the writings. While in previous cases the reception of the women in prison's writings was much slower, in this case, we have the writings and activism mutually affecting the situation in prisons and society's reform at the same time. What is different about Angela Davis as a political prisoner is her much more concrete and direct association with the forms

of political violence. She is a much more controversial figure in comparison to classical modern women whose involvement with this has been more or less reduced to the generalised struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the actual regime rather than individualised acts of violence in forms of smaller, much more concrete strategic goals connected to rebellious acts.

However, since the focus in this overview is not on the type of crime the imprisoned woman allegedly or had committed, nor any type of judgment on their ideological and political views, I will be focused on how she described and perceived her imprisonment experience and how it, later, shaped her penological scholarly works. One of the most striking differences in comparison to most of the figures mentioned before is the fact that Angela Davis is still alive and that in her case imprisonments have contributed greatly to her popularity, rather than costed her career and life like it was the case with others. In 2020 she was listed by the magazine *Time* as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. Furthermore, she helped a lot in the development of the fieldwork autobiographical research aimed at collecting stories from other imprisoned women of colour who do not practice writing themselves, therefore her engagement becomes more like a doctrine and alternative understanding of the penalty system in the contemporary world and appeal for the need to transform the system of penalty function in order to achieve better goals which are always related to the providing the good chances for a decent life in society even for the former convicts and providing better opportunities for survival while doing decent jobs.

I will examine the case of Angela Davis in the following steps. Firstly, I will explain her own experiences with imprisonment and the writings done during this period and about it. Afterwards, I will deal with the engagement of Angela Davis related to the prison system and her efforts to give voice and pursue research of the cases of other incarcerated women that often also included information about their educational and writing efforts both from the prison and afterwards but related to the experience of confinement.

Angela Davis, like most of the Afro-American activists close to the Black Panther Party and other radical anti-racist and communist organisations, became of interest to the FBI and police, until in 1971 she experienced imprisonment for something she did not do and later a trial for murder and kidnapping for which she supported the people who committed it as an act of rebellion against an unjust system. In her case, she received the huge support of people all around the world and several hundreds of letters daily, which also was a distinguishing moment since no other imprisoned woman ever attracted so much support and attention before. The engagement of Angela Davis born a mark of a struggle for freedom and equality for Afro-Americans in the US that represented one of the most striking features of the social uprising in the second half of the XX century and is one of the most important events in the history of the XX century. As a critically engaged and radical scholar, Davis spent considerable time in Germany and got involved with the crucial critical thinkers of the post-war time. Her doctoral thesis has been confiscated by the FBI and as a member of the radical political party Black Panthers and Communist Party USA, her academic engagement has been constantly under scrutiny of the state apparatuses. In comparison to the other politically radical imprisoned women mentioned before, Davis succeeded in her struggle and continued her academic career despite imprisonment and all the other attempts to be silenced.

However, public support for radical politics in the USA was huge at that time because of racial segregation and accumulated dissatisfaction with the situation following 1968, and this makes the position of Angela Davis also quite different than was the case with many other political prisoners whose views were quite less popular and less widely known.

However, since my goal in this paper is quite specific, I will not go into the details of the political approaches and biography of Angela Davis, but rather after providing a brief contextualization needed for a better understanding of the case, I will focus on describing how Angela Davis perceived the prison environment through her writings both from prison and her afterwards considerations related to prison experience. The perception of the prison experience of Angela Davis is mostly given in the book *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (1971). From the beginning of the book, one can see that the difference in the position of Davis has been the strong support she has been receiving from other activists and her writings related to her imprisonment from 1971 are opened by one such letter of support sent by James Arthur Baldwin who was an American writer and civil rights activist. Like many other political prisoners, Davis has been kept in solitary confinement and struggled to get out of the segregated area, which is the most highlighted motive of her prison experience. She used her imprisonment to systematise information about the position of Afro-American people in prisons and to maintain correspondence with other scholars and activists. The main purpose of the massive opposition of Black people has been to finally come to terms with the remaining features of slavery in American society in the processes considered for a part of the civil rights struggle of the global social movements mostly advocating peace, improvement of the environment and social equality. The civil rights struggle from the end of the century has been grounded in disobedience and a call to oppose all the laws that are discriminatory to black people (Davis, 1971: 29). Furthermore, the political prisoner has not been a defined type of crime in the US and people charged with that type of offence had to be charged with some other type of criminal offence, therefore Angela Davis has seen these tendencies in the context of the broader attempt to criminalize radical social movements at any price and frame them as criminals in advance. In this publication, we do not see much of how Angela Davis perceived the experience of her imprisonment, she does not reflect on this extensively. Due to the mentioned support, she probably never experienced prison in the real sense of the term like the other imprisoned Afro-American women did.

What we see is that her imprisonment has been a part of a broader engagement against racial segregation and imprisonment that served her as a tool for expressing the revolt against the structural inequality of black people. Her prison writings address the problems of racial segregation that cause a much higher rate of criminal offences among the Afro-American population in comparison to the others, many strict offences and even crimes reserved only for Black people and is a program for fighting these injustices. Imprisonment has not been seen as something demotivating, nor did it scare her or make her dubious about the future career path. The event of her arrest happened in the context of massive protests in the prisons requiring better conditions part of which also have been *The Folsom Prisoner Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Oppression Platform* (Davis, 1971: 68). Many of the cases were provenly fabricated and without any subsequent verdict for a crime, since the goal of the government has been to deradicalize Black people. The right to read political literature,

books, newspapers and other media has been particularly sensitive since that is how prisoners at the same time became informed about the events at other places (Davis, 1971: 70). Furthermore, her prison-related writings and engagements, starting from her own experience of imprisonment, were influential for increasing the attention devoted to gender and race-related problems in prison, which up to then have not been sufficiently visible. Support from the outside while in prison appeared crucial (Davis, 1971: 126). Speaking of the form of writings given in this book, those are not diary notes, but rather letters and interviews given while she was imprisoned. Poverty and poor opportunities were listed as key causes of the tendency of Black people to engage in criminal activities, and the moment has been seen as critical to fight for change.

The second moment related to Angela Davis and her prison-related writings is the book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003) where she developed her theory of prisons and went through the arguments for considering alternatives to prisons to solve problems with criminality and criminal acts. The events from the 70s and her experience inspired her to think about whether prisons were the effective and necessary mechanisms of punishment for the future. However, as she concludes, prisons have become an "industrial complex" and an inseparable part of social relations to the level it is hard to imagine life without them. Racial and intersectional problematics however are undeniable aspects of prisons, and they serve for the placement of non-desirable groups and to solve social problems (Petkovska 2023). But are they fulfilling the goal they have been founded for? Despite all the facts presented and the claim that restorative mechanisms are better than punitive ones, Angela Davis also mentioned the transformative potential of incarceration as it has been in the case of Malcolm X (Davis, 2003: 56). Isolation as a chance for free space for contemplation and change of usual ways also has been pointed to in cases of other women political prisoners. Many novel forms of writing and the reliance on writing as a means of communicating social problems and struggles have their origin in prison or otherwise stopped channels of communication.

A much more important influence on the penological views developed by Angela Davis and others is a methodology used to give voice to imprisoned women and their efforts to perceive the experience of imprisonment in productive, transformative, and educational terms. Such an example is the book *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison* (Johnson et al., 2004). In this book mostly incarceration as a transformative experience is portrayed through the life of Black women by using a life narrative and oral history approach. The represented cases consisted of former and current inmates, but also criminal justice officials, for women imprisoned for drugs, prostitution, or violent criminal acts, many of whom claimed innocence. More than transformative potential, the represented women even claim imprisonment as an opportunity for self-discovery (Johnson et al., 2004: 53). In many of the cases women continued with educational interests developed in prison, obtaining a diploma, or finding some other purpose in the community. Many of them mention writing letters to their friends and family, which accentuates letters from imprisoned women as a precious source of a genre of prison writings beyond the popular cases of political prisoners that could be a potentially productive source in future research. Furthermore, it accentuates the continual communication with the outside world as crucial for maintaining the well-being and health of the imprisoned women.

Contemporary encounters: writings from specific cultures and societies in former, continuing, or frozen conflicts

A completely specific subgenre of the genre of women political prisoners' writings is contemporary publications considering parts of the world which are in permanent conflict state or in a state of continuous political instability caused by unsolved, past or frozen conflicts, including Muslim and traditional societies where women who practice civic equalities and liberties are often subjected to punishment for not fitting into the traditional roles. Among these countries for the genre of writings of women political prisoners the best known are Irish activists and in the literature, there are plenty of resources examining writings of Irish republican women prisoners (See for example McCann, 2015). Since here I do not have enough space to go into the details of those specific groups of these conflict or post-conflict areas, I will just mention some of them such as Third World and Muslim Countries, Gaza, Ireland, Cyprus, Kurdish people in Turkey, Chiapas in Mexico, etc. Political struggles for independence in these countries created conditions in which activists for independence were constantly under threat and often imprisoned, many of whom were women. Therefore, those authors' writings constitute separate genres which can be examined as separate topics. The overview of the genre of writings of women political prisoners would not be completed if we did not mention our region, the Balkans, or South-eastern Europe. This type of publication commenced by women is almost completely absent. Neither the dissidents included some of the women's writings made by women themselves. We cannot find any similar examples in our region despite the turbulent political times and many intellectual women who took part in political events and were imprisoned for political reasons. This fact is interesting and should be the subject of future analyses when the topic becomes more elaborated in the local context. Some of the reasons were the possible negative stereotypes flowing through the political and intellectual engagement of women in the traditional and patriarchal society. Illiteracy might be another problem since not all the politically active women were intellectuals, educated and literate. Particularly this was not the case with women engaged in socialism and partisan struggle during the WWII. The third direction of interpretation might be that these writings do exist, but they were not given the attention, or they have not been preserved as was the case with their male counterparts. Although most of the writings may have been destroyed, there is a chance that future archival research may uncover some surprises. It cannot be ruled out that similar writings may exist in this region as well.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have applied the thematic discourse analysis to the writings of the imprisoned women to provide a brief historical overview of the most well-known cases and notice some of the differences surrounding this phenomenon in different historical circumstances. Starting from the early modern times and period of Enlightenment when the writings of imprisoned women started to gain significant attention, I am continuing through the interwar and post-WWII period. My interest has been directed to the most famous cases and changes surrounding the writings of imprisoned women throughout history. The largest space of the article has been devoted to the cases of Rosa Luxemburg and Angela Davis as

two probably the most famous cases or publications of incarceration writings of political prisoners. My main task has been directed towards the features of the perception of the prisons as given in the writings, but considerable attention has been given to the social and political context of the given periods as well as to the biographical information related to the life and career of the incarcerated women. The main findings tell that women political prisoners were not dominantly focused on the situation of imprisonment and its negative aspects, they were not affected that much by the aura of stigmatisation and shame, but far much more they were using the experience to empower themselves related to the tasks of the political struggle they aimed to contribute to and in the future transformative purposes.

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