Young Women's Carceral Geographies

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is written in loving memory of:
Georg Schliehe
1940–2015
for inspiring me and teaching me a deep interest in the world and always
reminding me of the importance of critical thought, emancipation and kindness

and

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1935–2014
for inspiring this project and encouraging me right to the end

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This book is about young women, their experiences of incarceration and the ways in which these carceral 'closed' spaces are constituted. While many different service providers are involved in 'caring' and 'controlling' young women, relatively little is known of the actual social worlds that these young female detainees inhabit and move between. They constitute a minority group within institutions as well as in wider society; and, while they are seen in categories of high risk, high need and extreme behaviour, they also figure in a number of loaded discourses around morality, sexuality and gender norms. Previous Scottish studies have focussed on specific themes such as young women and violence (Batchelor, 2005) or youth and transition (Barry, 2006), while studies on young women and secure care in the Nordic countries (Andersson Vogel, 2018; Henriksen, 2018) and young women and prison in the USA (Chesney-Lind, 2004; Flores, 2016; Lopez, 2017) point towards trends of what is called 'wraparound incarceration', where young women cannot escape surveillance and control even after leaving detention. Building on these, this study aims to shed light on the different social worlds that these young women occupy, ranging from secure care units, prisons and closed psychiatric facilities, to their life on the 'outside'. This book aims to understand their journeys which are situated in a force field between control and care.

When I reflect on this study, one of the images that come to mind is from an encounter during my fieldwork in a secure unit. It is about how 'outsideness' gets created: it is lunchtime and we are in a dining room with a window that opened on to fields and a grey sky. I say 'open up', but in fact this window, like all other windows in the building, does not actually open. I am sitting and eating with two young women (Lisa and Amber) and one staff member (Erin).[1] The atmosphere is a little strained because Amber is a new arrival and does not yet fit in with the other young people in the unit. Erin tries hard to keep a conversation going, but that is not easy. Two other young people are missing from the group because they misbehaved and had just been sent to their room. Eventually a conversation is started by Lisa, who sits with her back to the window:

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[1]Field notes SC 05/14; all names changed – not corresponding with pseudonyms used subsequently.

> Lisa exclaims loudly: 'Staff deprive me of my outsideness.'
> Erin replies: 'I don't know what you're saying. You are talking in your weird voice, your weird accent. You are not separating words, what do you mean?'
> Lisa repeats (getting slightly annoyed): 'Staff deprive me of my outsideness!'
> Erin (unfriendly): 'What?'
> Amber chips in: 'Staff deprive me of my outsideness.'
> Erin (in a mocking voice): 'No wonder I have no clue what you are saying, outsidedness isn't even a word!'
> Lisa (now shouting): 'Outsideness, not outsidedness!'
> Erin: 'I don't know that, that is not a word.'
> Lisa: 'It is in my dictionary!'
> Erin: 'You can go to the courtyard, so you can go outside!'
> Lisa smashes her cutlery on the plate with a bang and points outside the window, shouting: 'Outside there I mean!'

While just a mundane institutional encounter, it is quite remarkable on different levels. First and foremost, it shows how aware the young women are of their geographical location and the nature of their confinement. What is more is how Lisa seemed to have thought through where she was, inventing the word 'outsideness' to express what she cannot have and where she cannot be. While this topic seemed to erupt unexpectedly, the spatiality of confinement, with its added rules and regulations, is a constant undercurrent in the young women's everyday lives. The young women's outsideness, of which they are deprived, could be interpreted simply as 'being outside' or being 'free'; but, having talked to many of them over the course of my fieldwork, I would like to add two alternative possibilities. One is the imaginary 'outside' to high levels of control and care more generally, and another is that many of them long to be able to reach a state of 'outsideness' that they describe as a 'normal' life. The creation of Lisa's 'outsideness' will follow us through the coming chapters.

By looking at institutional spaces as well as beyond them, this book is able to speak to wider societal problems. It draws on feminist criminology and carceral geography while interrogating conceptual ideas around power, punishment and the abandonment of young women – a group which has been neglected even in a lot of feminist scholarship. Understanding institutional journeys with reference to age and gender allows an insight into the highly mobile, often precarious, and unfamiliar lives of these young women. While Scotland provides the backdrop for the book, the study engages with issues around young people and criminal and social justice more generally. It aims to show the value of fine-grained micro-level research in institutional geographies for extending thinking and understanding about society's responses to a group of people who live on the margins of social and legal norms. Essentially, this book merges thorough theoretical analysis and empirical findings to highlight how age and gender matter in discourses on crime and justice and how we have to look beyond institutions to understand confinement in our age of prison crisis, austerity and marginalisation. Burman and

Batchelor (2009) note that 'young women offenders' have been overlooked, marginalised and ignored by policy, practice and research. There is, however, a small but growing number of in-depth studies on certain aspects of young women's detention in Scotland (Burman & Batchelor, 2009; McKellar & Kendrick, 2013; Roesch-Marsh, 2014), the UK (Gelsthorpe & Worrall, 2009; Goldson, 2002; Sharpe, 2012) and in similar settings in other countries (Alder, 2001; Andershed, 2013; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). These studies have inspired this project and provided guidance on working in confined environments and with young women. Due to its focus on youth, this project touches on wider debates about increasing securitisation of childhoods and criminalisation of young people (Barry & McNeill, 2009; Muncie, 2004; Valentine, 1995). While there is a comprehensive literature on the historic and contemporary effects of the securitisation of youth, a lot less is known of the institutional geographies and journeys through locked environments. Within this discourse on young people, extensive debates have been fought over the inherent paradox of 'care versus control' (Goldson, 2002), and these provide an important common thread throughout the following conceptual and empirical materials.

Considering not just the implications of age, but also of gender, these young women seemingly challenge the codes of hegemonic femininity and are often portrayed as being difficult, unmanageable and needy (Burman, 2008; Ellis, 2018). The majority of young women who experience detention are characterised in the literature as *defining* social exclusion (Loucks, 2004). In a wider context of poverty and social injustice, young women's marginalisation is connected to all life spheres, exacerbating underachievement and low self-esteem (Stephenson, 2007). Women, and especially young women, have been presented as a 'particular problem' in Scotland's penal discourse since the late-1980s (Burman & Batchelor, 2009). This view has developed alongside changing perceptions of young women's behaviour, including a rising moral panic over girls' violence. The blurring boundaries between rule-breaking and law-breaking, as well as between public and private spheres, increase the 'disciplinisation' beyond the confines of institutions. Control is no longer just a matter of criminal justice, for discipline and normalisation are increasingly exerted on the 'outside'. This fact is important insofar as it redefines the boundaries of control that might formerly have been associated distinctly with closed institutions.

Delving further into the constitution of closed institutions, this study is positioned within the fields of carceral geography and criminology. While geographical studies of young people and crime are not new, carceral geography has mostly focussed on adult prison populations. The potential of spaces of incarceration for geographical enquiry has been highlighted by carceral geographers like Moran (2015, p. 2), who points out the three main interconnected strands: (1) the nature of carceral spaces and experiences within them; (2) spatial geographies of carceral systems; and (3) the relationship between the carceral and a punitive state. While this study mainly reflects the first point with an in-depth analysis of the constitution of carceral space and specifically gendered and aged experiences within it, it moves beyond the immediate institution towards larger carceral systems. Understanding the young women's journeys as a vignette of the 'carceral'

situates their experiences in a wider context of security geographies (Philo, 2012a) which entails a contemporary global and individual reality shaped by increasing securitisation. At a time of mass incarceration unprecedented in many parts of the English-speaking world and beyond, we see a level of imprisonment which confines not only individuals, but also systematically detains whole groups (Garland, 2001). The penalisation of poverty sits within a 'self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal marginality with devastating personal and social consequences' (Wacquant, 2000, p. 384). While incarceration levels in Scotland do not nearly match their US-American counterparts, individual carceral journeys and notions of systemic entrapment seem to correlate, raising the need for an in-depth understanding of wider penal landscapes.

Conceptually, this study mainly relies on Goffman's micro-analytical approach, followed by Foucault's account of disciplinary power. In order to theorise control and care and uncover the breadth and depth of 'closed space', their more abstract constructs are analysed and later mapped across and applied to the empirical realm. Much of their work is regarded here as complementary – while acknowledging that both theorists come from different research traditions. The exploration of their works is complemented by references to Agamben's concept of 'exception' and the production of *homines sacri*. Further, this study takes an underlying feminist approach which runs through all sections as a golden thread. While the main theorists rarely mention women, for this book they were read with 'young women' in mind. I chose not to base this research only on explicitly feminist theory as I believe it important not to make 'gender' the overriding category of analysis. It is rather an inherent thought intertwining with conceptualisations of institutions, individual experiences and young women's journeys. Finding the right balance, between the distinctiveness of the young women's voices and superimposing gender as the main frame for their experiences, was not without challenge. Re-reading my first two findings chapters, I was surprised to encounter so little material on overtly gendered aspects of confinement, underlining the importance of reading *all* of the young women's experiences as 'gendered'. In this book, a feminist lens is directly applied to Agamben and his adapted figure of *femina sacra* – theorising and shining a light on underlying forms of abandonment. Being confronted with trauma, violence and death, the young women's stories illustrate how the singularity of their situation can be found in the seemingly 'mundane', situated at the fringes of a society, a society which practices abandonment *in* upholding care and control.

Methodological Notes

Writing about the methodology underlying the study means to situate it in a context of co-production. When I set out on this project, carceral-geographic research was still quite rare and being a geographer meant that prisons and other closed institutions were not 'common' research sites. I more or less stumbled across the young women of this study. By chance, I met a forensic psychiatrist who had worked with young people in Scotland's prisons and psychiatric facilities for many years. Speaking to him, and then to other practitioners and policy

makers, sparked my interest in issues around young women and incarceration. They drew my attention to the high levels of mobility, often chaotic lives, low levels of engagement with services, education and jobs, and exposure to trauma, violence and loss. Moreover, they also pointed to the problematic nature of current policy responses and the consequent requirement for repeated stays in 'locked' institutions for many of these young women. Through this, I was also introduced to Up-2-Us. This organisation runs its own project for girls and young women called Time for Change (TfC)[2] – the only project of its kind in Scotland (Arens, 2013; Burman & Imlah, 2012; Schliehe, 2012). TfC has operated since then on year-to-year funding, as a service dedicated to highly vulnerable girls and young women. Now, TfC is still a modest sized service working with local authorities in the West of Scotland, within the women's prison and with secure providers to offer additional support. As a voluntary organisation, Up-2-Us put a lot of time and effort into working with a researcher like me and has provided me with the unique opportunity to not just do research on young women but *with* them. During my time working with Up-2-Us, I learned some of the young women's histories, how they had ended up in custody and how they negotiated their way through institutions and community. These life histories affected me profoundly, motivating me to explore their experiences beyond institutions.

Because of hearing these life stories, I wanted to ensure that I placed the young women's views and experiences of closed institutions within the context of their everyday lives. Following other research on young women and criminal justice (Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Burman, Brown, & Batchelor, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014), I explore the material, social and gendered settings of their lives and how they live and make sense of their lifeworlds, by drawing on their personal accounts – what Burman et al. (2003) call 'a view from the girls'. Using a range of methods including in-depth interviews with young women and staff, ethnographic observation, analysis of file data and mental maps, I have approached the research in a diverse and creative way. There are many difficulties in entering closed settings, as well as when researching with young people. Every field site had its own particular characteristics, set of security rules and access negotiations. No fieldwork day was ever the same – there were new encounters, friendly chats and helpful staff, as much as hostile receptions, refusals and open distrust. I encountered restraints, lock-downs and violent behaviour, but in hindsight found the quieter forms of distress, disclosures of personal tragedies and numbly withdrawn behaviour at least as challenging. Doing fieldwork in locked environments and with young women in the community was as enriching as it was personally tough and at times isolating. My mental picture of these young women is not only

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[2]In 2009, gender informed work started with a small-scale grant funded project. This expanded in 2010 following interest from Scottish Government and Her Majesty's Prison and Young Offender Institution (HMP & YOI) Cornton Vale who acknowledged young women on remand as a neglected group within the prison service and wanted to bolster support. Mid 2010, Up-2-Us formally launched TfC with a one year grant from the Scottish Government as a support service to under 18's in Young Offender (YO) and Secure Accommodation within the Whole System policy.

one of personal tragedy and suffering, though, but also mainly one of lively chats, much shared laughter and kindness.

I would like to extend the conceptual and practical opacities of research in closed conditions to my own position in the field, and to the ethics that were part of this fieldwork. The ethical concerns touched on the issue of value; 'valuing lives and not the "academic data" such lives produce' (Laurie, 2014, p. 232). Other ethical dilemmas included the slipping into 'taking sides'. Stepping away from a form of empirical relativism, I stress that portraying the voices of young female detainees is not an attempt to wave away the very real problems that they create for communities or staff, nor the crimes that they commit which impact many people. In doing research in 'locked' conditions and with deemed 'vulnerable' young women between the ages of 14 and 21 years raises particular ethical issues such as informed consent. Thorough ethical consideration went into designing the research and making it work for young people as well as staff members. It responded to ethical issues involved in qualitative research, including anonymity and potential effects on the participants. The design of the fieldwork worked in three separate steps: (1) interviews with professionals, (2) interviews with young women and (3) mapping institutional journeys including mental map production and access to file data. Throughout the writing, all names of participants are changed (where applicable names were chosen by participants) and professionals have their professional identity (like prison management or secure care residential staff) attached only if this does not breach confidentiality. Each organisation had their own set of information sheets (young women and staff separate) and consent forms, information sheets for parents/carers where applicable and separate consent forms for access to file data in prison.

Initially the research design included three closed institutions – a secure care unit, a prison and a closed psychiatric facility. The group of institutions created to deal with this group of young women is mentioned in Chapter 2 in order to give a general overview. While the secure unit and prison responded positively to my research proposal, my contact with the National Health Service (NHS) through the closed unit, Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (FCAMHS)/ Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams was met with reluctance to engage with a project that involved criminal justice. In the end, I had to abandon the idea of including closed psychiatric units as an 'active' research site, and instead decided to draw on the young women's experiences of those units in interviews conducted in secure care, prison and the community.

I spent quite a long time 'hanging out' in my different field sites before I started to interview, in order to get a sense of the environments and get to know the young women and staff members. In terms of interviewing techniques, I found Liebling's 'appreciative' approach[3] useful in negotiating and bridging staff/

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[3]Here loosely referring to 'appreciative inquiry' (see e.g. Liebling, Price, & Elliott, 1999) in which an 'appreciative stance' is understood to permit emotional space and encourage 'positive as well as negative projections' in an environment that is often perceived as particularly judgmental and contested (Liebling et al., 1999, p. 76).

detainee encounters. Interviewing young women was challenging at times, as I found that it was hard work to engage some of them in any conversation because they were shy, or thought that they did not have to contribute much. In some instances, I attempted to meet with the young women several times to make them more comfortable (as the second time they already knew me a little) and make it less intense to talk about potentially difficult issues (for more information on 'slow' serial interviewing, see Crang & Cook, 2007). Most interviews were recorded (once the recorder failed; a couple of times interviewees did not want me to record) and subsequently transcribed and coded with the help of NVivo software.

Young women and staff were by and large incredibly willing to let me 'in', to have a chat or just sit quietly and 'be there'. I was often met with warmth and hospitality, being offered food, tea and biscuits, being invited to card games, being asked to paint nails innumerable times or help with crafts or play bingo. During the fieldwork phase, I completed a total of 48 interviews with young women between 14 and 21 years of age (see tables in Appendix 1). I interviewed 24 young women in prison, 11 young women in secure care and 15 young women outside in the community (with 2 young women interviewed in two settings). The staff interviews were more structured by comparison, but often more constrained with regard to timing. Staff in the units/blocks had to squeeze in time for me between all of their other tasks and had generally to be vigilant and responsive to potential issues at the same time: it was therefore normal to re-start an interview two or three times or not get the chance to finish it at all. During my fieldwork phase, I completed a total of 43 staff members and other professional interviews (see table in Appendix 1). I interviewed 12 staff members in prison, including residential programme, health and management staff. In secure care, I completed 24 staff interviews, including residential, educational, health, programme and management staff. 'Outside', I interviewed seven TfC staff members. While the young women are identified only by their pseudonym, the staff members have a pseudonym as well as short handle for their work place.

Ethnographic observation – in this case meaning participant and space observation – goes hand in hand with the other methods used in the field. The recording of field notes in these environments varied widely. In some settings it was impossible to carry notebook and pens, while in others I could sit in the corner and scribble away. Generally, I tried to record my observations and thoughts in field diaries that held drawings (my own and copies of young woman's drawings) and at times leaflets or information from the young women's files. I first gained the idea of mental mapping when I came across some of the work that TfC did with young women to recover biographical and identity-related memories. Many young women drew maps of where they had lived. I was struck by the sheer number of moves and became interested in their accounts of biographical and spatial journeys. Mental maps, I hoped, would add to my understanding of the relationships that these young women hold to space and place. While these pictures might not disrupt the mapping of social and criminal justice (see Kindynis, 2014) in a major and overturning way, they maybe challenge underlying assumptions and common representations in quieter, but nonetheless personal,

emotionally charged and critical ways. These maps capture only an incomplete and disturbing snapshot of the young women's extreme levels of mobility and entanglement in a whole number of levels of control and care, while also providing an account of agency, determination and the fact that their experiences are anchored across specific spaces.

Access to file data provided a completely different perspective on the young women's lives and journeys than the previously mentioned methods. In order to look at them, I asked for the young women's separate consent. Most documents that I managed to see were institutionally public (accessed by a wide range of professionals), but with much private information – revealing a totally new sphere of surrounding circumstances, institutional record-keeping and insights into the minutely nature of recording. Due to the very different layout and content of the young women's files, these accounts were pre-selected (according to my own sense of importance) and hand-written, copying sometimes entire pages, sometimes only certain sentences. The data can therefore not be treated as separate documents, analysed in their own right, but rather as part of my field diary. There were two main objectives when collecting this information. The first one was a view on how institutions collect and manage data and the second was to re-map and re-trace the young women's journeys and their difficulties encountered in the wider community. While this data collection provided me with critical and personal testimonies and large number of documents that seemed to 'make up' institutional living, I felt quite troubled by it. These data, despite their complexity, could not adequately reflect or convey 'reality' in their many forms. In essence, I felt that the material was hugely contingent, raising concerns of adequate representation. The result of my struggles with data, concepts and theoretical frameworks is therefore a compromise. What I am trying to convey in the finding (Chapters 4–6) is a positioning of the 'smaller' individual stories (see Lorimer, 2003, 2008) in relation to 'larger' conceptual narratives, and thereby to understand how various material traces and personal recollections fit in with institutional constitutions. In a reflexive and relational process, 'ambiguities, contradictions, and paradoxes emerge alongside relative certainties, congruencies and consistencies' (Moss, 2002, p. 6) – all of which permeate throughout the findings' chapters, acknowledging limits, but at the same time advocating voices and stories that unsettle the status quo.

Book Contents

Throughout the book, I have sought to demonstrate how experiences of 'closed' institutions and inequalities across a wide range of scales come together as a form of abandonment that, in turn, is both embedded in close control and care and embodied in the young women's personal experiences and journeys. The challenge of this book is, therefore, to traverse scales, to move between institutional, individual and more abstract forms of young women's mobility. By listening to the young women's experiences, I aimed to personalise the anonymous and bureaucratic organisational structures of carceral institutions.

Interrogating aspects of care and control within the confinement of closed institutions, I seek to conceptualise institutional regimes and the people within, while