

PREFACE FROM THE MANAGING EDITORS

The Perpetual Harm of Imprisonment

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This special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) focuses on the experiences of women prisoners. The collection has been compiled and edited by Jennifer Kilty, who is a *JPP* editorial board member and a professor of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. While the *JPP* has included contributions from current and former women prisoners, our last special collection dedicated to this topic was Volume 5(2), published in 1994.

In their introduction to that issue, Liz Elliot and Gayle Hori (1994) noted that the *JPP* provides a forum and a vehicle through which prisoners can discuss the socio-politics of incarceration and inform those of us beyond the walls about what goes on inside by sharing their experiences. This ideal continues to guide the work of the Journal, and is reflected in the highly informative and engaging articles published here. A number of common threads tie these contributions together. One in particular that stands out for us is the importance of understanding women's experiences of imprisonment in relation to broader experiences of marginalization, abuse, deprivation, sexism and struggle. Many of the contributors to this issue take the time to locate their incarceration within biographical timelines that extend back to childhood and young adulthood. This places socio-economic trends and structural inequalities in the foreground, highlighting the close relationships between inside and outside, prison and community (Nagelsen and Huckelbury, 2007).

In 1994, when our first special issue on women prisoners was published, the particular pains of women's imprisonment were becoming increasingly visible and acknowledged to those outside prison walls, and plans for sweeping 'women-centered' reforms were being created and implemented in a number of countries, including Canada. However, as the contributions to the current issue illustrate, many of the issues faced by women prisoners at that time – including self-harm, suicide, structural inequalities, disproportionate overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in prison, the lack of specialized healthcare and programs, and gendered violence – continue to define the carceral experience and politics today.

Louk Hulsman and Jacqueline Bernat de Celis (1982) argue that the penal system, and prisons in particular, perpetuate and amplify the pains

associated with conflicts and harms that are appropriated by the state through criminalization. Acknowledging this forces us to ask some tough questions about whether carceral apparatuses can be reformed, humanized or made 'just'. The current trajectory of carceral politics appears to be anything but reductionist, unfortunately. As Debbie Kilroy and Kim Pate (this issue) observe, women currently represent the fastest-growing prison population worldwide. No policy that results in increased incarceration should be considered a victory or a move towards enhanced community safety. If the persistent nature of the pains of women's imprisonment represents an inevitable consequence of the use of the deprivation of liberty to address social issues, then the prospects for reform seem limited. Carceral abolition, or at least efforts to drastically reduce the practice of women's imprisonment, are more justifiable solutions.

REFERENCES

- Hulsman, Louk and Jacqueline Bernat de Celis (1982) *Peines perdues: Le système pénal en question*. Paris: Centurion.
- Nagelsen, Susan and Charles Huckelbury (2007) "Abrogation of the Therapeutic Model in Prison Health Care and the Implications for Public Safety", *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* 17(2): 16-27