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WOMANHOOD IN PRISON ISOLATION. RECOVERING FRAGMENTS OF NORMATIVE ORDER

WOMANHOOD IN A FORCE OF MEANINGS

Womanhood is the element (wilderness). The wilderness of woman's nature who as a broken subject becomes an object at the moment of imprisonment. According to the interpretation of this text, a woman is a complex category of meanings. Therefore, we encounter: Culture, Image, Infinity of mystery, Insatiability, Secret, Ambivalence. The womanhood understood in this way presents its potential and double nature. It shall be always understood in the double meaning as indicated by Clarissa Pinkola Estès (2015). The same author highlights in her own book, i.e. „Women who run with the wolves”, how important the care of the innate nature is:

“to achieve the aim, a woman has to plunge into the darkness but simultaneously she cannot let anyone catch her in the trap, capture or kill while being on the way” (Estès, 2015, p. 52).

The inner predator lives in every woman (Estès), the power which must be limited. Clarissa Pinkola Estès claims that to do so a woman has to „use her all instinctive skills” (2015, p. 52) among which the following are mentioned: “insight, intuition, strength, patience in loving, sensitive senses, sharp hearing, singing over the dead, intuitive healing and caring of own creativity” (2015, p. 52). Besides, the acceptance of own inner predator is connected with the fact that there are also other predators. As Estès claims “a woman will not manage to move safely in her own forest and avoid being eaten, without [...] the power” (2015, p. 54). Therefore, how to let woman's wilderness survive in isolation? Is it possible at all?

WOMANHOOD IN THE CONDITIONS OF PRISON ISOLATION. A SHADOW OF A MAN (Jaworska-Witkowska)

Imprisonment in the correction facility and being incarcerated is like a *Shadow* which covers a (whole) man. It is also a representative of „a lost pole of the alive”, which wakes up from the „inner predator” (Estès, 2015). Life in the shadow or life is the existential question asked during the isolation. The isolation constitutes a sort of intermittent life whose fragments are also the shadow of alive people” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 139). It is possible to apply here the imagery used by Maria Janion and Monika Jaworska-Witkowska, which concerns vampirism – meaning that the sentence in the detention ward can wake up a necrophile in every man (Fromm), *Vampire-Shadow* (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009 p. 139). The conditions of imprisonment are specific and trigger specific loneliness:

“the desert is the place of soul awakening” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, following: Jabees, 2005, p. 36),

which is simultaneously the specific place of awakening according to Jabees. However, as Monika Jaworska-Witkowska writes “the metaphor of emptiness is a point, an archetype fulfilling with the message coming from the deep, spiritual change including the transformation of consciousness/unconsciousness [...]”(Jaworska-Witkowska, 2008, p. 49).

WOMANHOOD IN PRISON'S ISOLATION. HETEROTOPIAS OF DEVIATIONS (FOUCAULT)

“We are all filled with a longing for the wild. There are few culturally sanctioned antidotes for this yearning. We were taught to feel shame for such a desire. We grew our hair long and used it to hide our feelings. But the shadow of Wild Woman still lurks behind us during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed.”
(Clarissa Pinkola Estès 2015, p. 12)

What does the space of an imprisoned woman look like? What kind of space is it? Certainly, the detention ward is a place aiming at “imposing limitations on its members” (Goofman, p. 150). I would like to look at the room of the imprisoned women in the symbolic way, following Michel Foucault, who wrote: “we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space,

but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well. The space of our primary perception, the space of our 3 dreams and that of our passions hold within themselves qualities that seem intrinsic: there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, of summits, or on the contrary a space from below of mud; or again a space that can be flowing like sparkling water, or space that is fixed, congealed, like stone or crystal” (Foucault, 2005, p. 119). In accordance with the thought of the space, Foucault talks about heterotopias which can be divided into two categories i.e. heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation (Foucault, 2005). The first one is described by the author in the following way: “there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places (*lieux*), reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.”(Foucault, 2005, p. 121). Foucault highlights that such places can function in our culture. The example given by the author concerns the 19th century boarding houses “as the first manifestations of sexual virility were in fact supposed to take place “elsewhere” than at home.”” (Foucault, 2005, p. 121). Taking into account the fact how sexuality among people is considered now, i.e. it is still being pushed out of home, the prison is certainly a place which is hard to be compared with something else, mostly due to the deprivation of needs and physical barrier (Ciosek, 2007), as well as the time which indicates the period of isolation. In case of the prison, Foucault talks about the so-called deviation heterotopias, i.e. “those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.” (Foucault, 2005, p. 121). The deviation heterotopias are connected also with the matter of time “which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.” (Foucault, 2005, p. 123). In case of the prison it means that all people function in exactly the same way. Dinner, breaks, free time which is generated not by the inmate but by the penitentiary system, – it decides when, what and how. Foucault remarks that the crucial motif of systems opening and closing, which “both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or

else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications” (Foucault, 2005, p. 123). The womanhood crossing the heterotopic space is also obliged to go through rites and purification. But, the imprisoned woman also denotes the imprisoned elements which are inside her. Therefore, they also go through purification. What kinds of elements can we talk about in case of the imprisoned women? Certainly about those which are insatiable. Following the assumptions described by Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski, they are:

“The three things are insatiable
and the fourth one will never say: Enough.
Hell, bosom of a woman and soil that does not imbue with water
and fire never says: Enough”
(Czcibor-Piotrowski, 2010).

The imprisoned elements can be subject of loss, „the abilities of making progress” as it would be called by Estès (2015, p. 369).

The stories of women found in the book by Katarzyna Bonda *Polish Murderesses* (2017) can constitute the cognitive value of this reflection. The book is a collection of fourteen stories of women who were sentenced for imprisonment due to various reasons (Bonda, 2017). It is interesting that approximately 50% of the prisoners were the victims of physical violence, as stated by the manager of the penitentiary for women in Lubliniec (2017).

One of the book’s characters, Monika, says:

“I, all me, consist of emotions – I live when I feel. I experience. But I judge everything without emotions and I always prefer to be positively surprised than disappointed. What to say more – I try to catch a moment. It doesn’t matter if someone wants to torture someone mentally or mock someone. I don’t trust anyone here and I have one rule: either someone is with me or against me. You will always meet a bitch that wants to sell you down the river. It’s not Hollywood.” (Bonda, 2017, p. 42).

“Concerning the sexual life here, I don’t have any unbroken sexual tension because I focus on feelings not on sex. I don’t think about it at all. When I go to bed, I don’t imagine anything... My other half was like an alive volcano while sitting in the prison. Because in general, there is really such a trouble in prison – and most of problems result from it. And sometimes the tension is released. For example, we were together in one cell for some time so we could sleep together. You know, officially it’s forbidden but unofficially everyone turned a blind eye. It was a norm that we were together. Everyone had own problems in the cell, so no

one was interested in us, total ignorance. I mean we didn't do anything ostentatiously. Not to make everyone see or hear but there was no option that we cannot. Luckily, we had people around who accepted that. If anyone wanted to make problems, it would happen immediately and we would be separated. But we found flexible people, not homophobes. Unfortunately emotions of people had also impact on our relationship and they claimed that we were so unpredictable that we created too much danger. They separated us. Then we could be close to each other only during the walk for one hour. We were lying on the bench, she was leaning against me, small kisses, nothing more. Maybe that's why it became so much on-off" (Bonda, 2017).

Here the power of elements and the wild side of woman's nature is noticed. Emotionality. Feeling is a sense (also of life) although it is in the conditions of imprisonment. The transformation of the character is visible as well. From the emotional, troubled, experiencing to aggressive, ruthless as the element of survival's art. How does she describe the sexual relations in the isolation? The sublimation of sexual needs is the condition of survival and functioning „and in this consequence, the simulated actions, projections, introjections, ejection, sublimations can constitute a key mechanism of survival in the conditions of isolation." Monika Jaworska-Witkowska asks a question "what can be removed, erased from the body, reduced by the symbolic wounds, the written scars?"¹

WOMAN'S IMPRISONMENT AS A KIND OF „PRACTISING LIFE"

Can the conditions of isolation constitute a kind of practice for life? The term has been taken from Peter Sloterdijk and although at the beginning it does not have anything in common with the isolation, it shows perfectly well everything that concerns it because according to Sloterdijk "a man is mainly a practising being" (Lindstedt, 2014). Practising but not necessarily connected with the sports (as it is understood at first by Sloterdijk). Although, doing sport can be and sometimes it is the way of surviving in the prison, it presents the matters of being exercised by life. Survival – the key of life in isolation until the end of punishment time. Every day spent

¹ A lecture conducted by M. Jaworska-Witkowska, *Heterotropic ways of thinking about the difference and equality. Interlacing-capturing-afterimages*. Due to the 2nd Scientific Conference Equality Education, April 26–27, 2016.

in the isolation is the exercise for life. How to survive, not to get crazy and try to understand the world inside? Is the isolation a kind of symbolic performance? Play and spectacle which the human participates in (because even in the conditions of isolation, a man has a role), enables that man to survive in the isolation. It is a protection for itself and for own Ego. It is the defence against the existential suicide (Chwin, 2010).

A PURSUING WOMAN

The type of a woman who can use *Others* – entering and becoming the owner of their space and absolute autonomy. It is a form of survival. Lack of strong personality which is subverted after crossing the gates of the detention ware, the attempt of *Shadow's*² entering seems to be simplified. Sometimes the proximity of *Death* becomes the impulse for the existential awakening. Also, the proximity of symbolic Death. It sometimes brings the chances for discovering who you are. The womanhood is imprisoned, therefore, the category of gender is inseparable element. “The ritual of revived alive-dead” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 140). “By death of the old one, the new one is born “ (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 140).

A WOMAN WITH “VULGAR ELEMENTS” (Jaworska-Witkowska)

Spreading the vampirism among others, including the inmates, it is a kind of plague which becomes gradually the owner of man's soul:

“Death does not have to be considered as a single act but as a process of slow soul's degradation but it can have a positive dimension though – positively progressive.” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 93).

What positive features of death are described by Jaworska-Witkowska? How can they be found in the prison? It is definitely possible to “die” for some time, to throw yourself into the inner self. Such a form is separation, marginalization, ritual of switching to other state (funeral reception) with the lethal places. You stand constantly on the crossroad to experience the lifetime travel.

² A metaphore of Jung's archetype.

WOMANHOOD – COMMUNION WITH THE GRAVES

The rituals of transition connected with the symbolic death. Marginalization which is common among the prisoners, lack of regular contact with the family, visits of dead ideas (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 143).

ABOUT WOMEN WHO DIED IN A DIFFERENT WAY... (Jaworska-Witkowska)

A woman and prison constitute cognitive chaos. Isolation is a kind of „Different Death”. The inner death – experienced individually. The most painful. The existential death and inability of experiencing. Sometimes, the womanhood is tangled in the situations in family, marriage, partnership which become overloading, so the isolation becomes „the rescue” for the soul. It allows to order and reconstruct the life once again. **A woman in isolation... Who are you in fact?**³.

The loss of self-confidence, confusion and loss of identity are also the answer to the conditions of isolation and its inseparable element. Constant confrontation with yourself lets you (un)consciously reach to the spheres hidden deeply in our souls. So, who are you exactly? The imprisoned woman’s soul shouts...

Being inspired by the blog written by the women from Warsaw-Grochów Prison called „*eWKratkę*”, I quote the statements of women who answer the basic existential question „Who are you?”. I presented below a few utterances of prisoners which seem to constitute the key in explaining what kind of existence it is all about:

“One of many women in this prison”.
(Daga, <http://ewkratke.blog.pl/o-autorkach/>)

“Who am I?
A human.
What do I want?
I want to have my own place in this world that will be a safe home for me and my family”
(U.A [http://ewkratke.blog.pl/o-autorkach.](http://ewkratke.blog.pl/o-autorkach/))

³ eWKratkę The blog of women in Warsaw-Grochów Penitentiary, <http://ewkratke.blog.pl/>

“I am a soul, which I have inside, damned by own self-criticism. I am like a small child longing for my love and acceptance which I refuse constantly. Finally, I am a person searching for the truth about myself, life and fighting over and over again for keeping the harmony between the heart and mind, where one whispers „yes” and the other screams „no”” (Marita)

“I am alive” (Walentina)

“[...] I am a sentient being, learning by my own mistakes. Currently, I am a inmate in the prison, sentenced for the excesses done in the youth” (Kajzerka)

There is a transsexual person among the imprisoned women who is in the process of sex change from a woman to a man. We are oscillating now between various life poles (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2011, p. 194). Transsexual imprisoned people constitute the space and a kind of invisible environment. Joshua’s utterance is as follows:

“I am a transsexual person doing time in the penitentiary in Warsaw. It means I am a person during the change of sex from a woman to a man. I am after the great specialist therapy and currently I have been taking the male hormones for two years. However, according to the law, I function as a person with female name, so I am bedded in with the girls” (Joshua 27).

REFLECTIONS AS THE CONCLUSION

I leave the contemplation over the womanhood, engulfed in the prison’s isolation, opened for the reader. The purpose of this text was not to remove the spell or the attempt to judge women. It is the divagation over the broad meaning of femininity in the symbolic way, revealing the reluctance to understand womanhood so as to remove it from the paradox of existence. Reference to the womanhood as the communion with graves or the women who died in other way, aimed at presenting the communication integrity between the cultural vision and reality of existing womanhood. It allows to observe the diversity of space where the womanhood is present.

“alive after death, or in other words, they are: alive in spite of being dead”, „zombie in the lethargic dream”, „alive spectre” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 143).

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SUMMARY

The text is an attempt to describe the womanhood as the polyphony of meanings (Bachtin), the inmate womanhood, isolated in a prison facility. The key objective is to discover and present through a variety of cultural texts a deep nature of femininity and its wild side. The starting point of these considerations is the reference to the interviews which have been collected in the book „Polish murderesses” by Katarzyna Bonda, and to the statements found in the blog *eWKratkę* which is written by the inmates incarcerated in Warsaw-Grochów Penitentiary for Women. The interviews have been included in the scientific discourse with the intention of capturing the unsaid, the polyphonic and polymorphic contexts of all these things that are „alive” in isolation, how to be reborn and what maelstroms „the wild woman” is exposed to (Estes, 2015).

Key words: womanhood, prison, prison isolation, normative order.