Reflecting on *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, York Correctional Institution inmate Bonnie Foreshaw, serving 45 years without parole for homicide, says, "What I hope is that people reading this book will realize that we are human beings first, inmates second" (Lamb et al. 209).

I know this much is true; I can't keep it to myself.

Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings 200 to the Present

Second edition, ed. Judith A. Scheffler, foreward by Tracy Huling. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2002. 329 pp., $18.95

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Women's bodies do two things that make women easier to punish than men: menstruate and give birth. That biology controls the destiny of women in prison is obvious in the statistics alone, from the 'positive side' (women's generally less violent offenses and shorter sentences), to the most negative (the frequency with which incarcerated women, unlike men, remain the primary caregivers of families even during their incarceration, a situation often resulting in the break-down of the family and a second generation of incarcerates).

Editor Judith Scheffler's decision to expand the geographical and temporal parameters of *Wall Tappings* in a second edition of this superb anthology makes the point that women's unique vulnerability in prison has been the case always and everywhere. Saint Perpetua, a Christian martyr from Carthage imprisoned in the year 200, wrote

> After a few days we were taken to prison, and I grew frightened, for I had never known such darkness. . .intense heat. . .extortions by soldiers. Above all, I was tormented with anxiety, on account of my child. . . . Arranged by a bribe, they let us out into a better, cooler part of the prison for a few hours. Coming out of the dungeon. . .I breast-fed my child, who was already weak with hunger.

Anyone who has had personal experience with female prisoners' visiting days will feel kinship with the scene, and, since most of us arrive with bags of urgently-needed toiletries, this next scene will resonate, too. The author is Beatrice Saubin, a French émigré to Malaysia, jailed on drug charges:

> In the royal prison of Penang, a woman's period was one more humiliation to bear. Tampons were unheard of, and sanitary pads were banned. Too many women would have thrown them down the three holes that served as our toilets, clogging the pipes. . .Each month the poorest prisoners . . .were doled out two sheets of thick paper similar to the paper used for wrapping packages. They'd rub them together for a long time to soften them. Then they'd tear them into strips and

> make crude diapers. Often the blood ran out and soaked their prison uniforms anyway.

Saubin "couldn't help gazing in disgust at a hideous woman, fat and toothless, with blood running down her legs. She read my thoughts, eyed me scornfully. . . 'White girls bleed too! When your time comes to wad paper between your legs, it's me who'll be laughing!'" Here Saubin touches on a particularly disturbing theme running through *Wall Tappings* and other prison literature by women: the absence of empathy and a powerful undertone of racial mistrust. Part 6, "Solidarity with Other Women," attempts to show an element of sisterhood whose lack is so often noted in female prisoners' writing (noted, in fact, by 100% of the female inmates with whom I myself have worked). Several of the pieces in this section have been added since the first edition, which now covers not only more than 1800 years, but also regions that include South America, Africa, South Africa, the Middle East, Western Europe, and Micronesia as well as the U.S.

There is a certain sameness to prisons, as several of the writers represented in *Wall Tappings* observe. Women's prison writings—whether collected and anthologized, turned in as assignments in prison writing workshops, or sent out as ordinary mail to friends and relations—have a certain sameness, too. When I was selecting female prison authors for a special-topics course I taught some years ago at Towson University, "Literature and Prisons," I initially failed to consider Jean Harris, the headmistress of an exclusive girls' prep school who killed her lover, the famous Dr. Tarnower, and went on to revolutionize the way prisons in her home state of Pennsylvania deal with inmates and their young children. How could the prison experience of a brilliant educator who moved in the most elite social circles have anything to do with the prison lives of the typical female inmate? I reasoned. But the incarcerate's life she described in *They Always Call us Ladies* (excerpted in both editions of Wall Tappings) turned out to be exactly like the lives of several female inmates who worked with me from their cells in Maryland and Texas. Each detailed the irrationality of prison regulations (and their enforcement), the horrors of medical, nutritional and hygienic deprivation, and the brutal hierarchies among inmates that the prison system covertly fosters.

However, unlike other collections of female prison voices with which the new *Wall Tappings* will inevitably be compared, these writings show lively differences in genre, tone, and style. A complaint voiced by a number of readers both in and out of prison concerning Wally Lamb's valuable but perhaps over-edited *I Couldn't Keep It to Myself* is that all the women's words therein sound pretty much alike. Lively and vibrant at first, they tend eventually to blend into a monotone, the kind of drone a reader can too easily blank out like the whine of a machine. In making her selections and by sorting them thematically

("Vindications of Self," "Trancendence Through Causes and Beliefs. . . ," "Prison Conditions and Deprivations," "Psychological Survival Through Communication and Relationships," "Family Relationships and Motherhood. . .," and "Solidarity with Other Women") Scheffler has taken care not to let the wall-tappings fade to gray. The book contains poems, essays, journal entries, letters, a play, and several pieces of fiction that are billed as "highly autobiographical." The diction ranges from 'translationese' to 'high' to regional to urban colloquial. What's most important is that each of the writers appears to have succeeded not only in doing her own time (that wonderful American prison expression for using prison time as an opportunity for personal growth) but in preserving her own voice.

Wall Tappings underscores the common denominators that link women's prison experience and hence their written descriptions of it, whether they have been jailed for drug-dealing or political action. Since, by definition, all 'crimes' are 'against the State,' the frequently-made assertion that all prisoners are political prisoners is proved true by simple deductive logic. This book piles up the inductive proof.

Inner Lives

Voices of African American Women in Prison

Paula C. Johnson. New York: NYU Press, 2004. Paperback $19.00

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The explosive growth in the U.S. prison and jail population over the past two decades, recently exceeding two million, has earned our country the highest imprisonment rate in the world. This increase is due in part to changes made in U.S. sentencing policy in the eighties and nineties during the height of the "War on Drugs," which intensified the crack down on drug-related crimes. Many have argued that these legal revisions discriminate along class and race lines, exacerbating the already disproportionate representation in prisons of the nonwhite and the poor. Often hidden within discussions on this prison boom, however, is the radical increase in the number of women who have entered the system since 1980. Despite the lack of public attention paid to this concern, there is a burgeoning body of literature that dedicates itself to addressing issues pertaining to women in the criminal justice system. Authors such as Beth Richie, Kathryn Watterson, and Ann Stanford have addressed topics that range from the physical and mental health of incarcerated women to the living conditions within prisons, and from the efficacy of rehabilitation programs to the social circumstances that contribute to women's criminality.

Paula C. Johnson, a professor of law at Syracuse University, joins this con-