



## CHAPTER 3

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# The Experience of Prison in Finnish Female Inmates' Letters from the 1880s to the 1900s

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### INTRODUCTION

The experience of prison is a new and emerging topic in history and criminology.<sup>1</sup> As suggested by both British criminologists and Nordic historians, the scholars of past prisons have often overlooked prisoners' experiences and portrayed prison wardens as mere faceless guardians of discipline.<sup>2</sup> Historians of incarceration have been reluctant to open new avenues of research, because the source material is usually scarce and

<sup>1</sup>This chapter was written as a part of my Academy Research Fellow project *Lived, Layered, Locked Up. Rethinking Women's Prisons in Finland in the Long Nineteenth Century*, funded by the Academy of Finland (grant number 341042).

<sup>2</sup>Johnston, Introduction; Johnston, Moral Guardians; Anderson and Pratt, Prisoner Memoirs; Nilsson and Wallström, Inledning; Englund, *Fångsambället*; See also Smith, *Isolation and Mental Illness*; Schaanning, *Menneskelaboratoriet*.

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consists only of records produced for administrative purposes. However, as Swedish historians Roddy Nilsson and Maria Wallström point out, it is possible to circumvent this problem by finding new kinds of sources or re-reading the existing ones with fresh eyes.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I take up the gauntlet by discussing Finnish female prisoners' letters found in the archives of a Helsinki-based private shelter for so-called fallen women. The institution was established by primary school teacher Emma Mäkinen in 1880. She had found her spiritual home with the Free Mission, an originally Anglo-American evangelical revivalist movement, which gained popularity in Helsinki in the late 1870s. After her conversion from Lutheranism to evangelical Christianity, Mäkinen abandoned her career as a teacher to work among women who had deviated from the contemporary (middle-class) ideal of womanhood by committing a crime, selling sex, drinking, keeping bad company, or being out at night. The purpose of Mäkinen's shelter was to turn these "fallen creatures" into God-fearing working-class women by offering them both the Gospel and training in household chores.<sup>4</sup>

The surviving documents of Emma Mäkinen's shelter include a collection of letters from women who either wished to enter the shelter or had resided there previously. The shelter accommodated circa 1200 women during its 35 years of existence, but there are some 30 surviving letters from its former protégées.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it appears that very few women contacted the directress after leaving the institution. It is likely that most women who spent some time in the shelter were only seeking temporary refuge, not a life-long relationship with the directress. Moreover, not all women could write. Most Finnish adults could read superficially because reading skills were a precondition for receiving communion, and

<sup>3</sup> Nilsson and Wallström, Inledning.

<sup>4</sup> For evangelical Christianity and Mäkinen's shelter, see Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Markkola, *Women's Spirituality*; Annola, *The Conflict Between Lived Religion*; Markkola, *Working-Class Women Living Religion*. For middle-class sexual morality, see also Nieminen, *Taistelu sukupuolimoraalista*; Rajainen, *Naisliike ja sukupuolimoraali*; Häggman, *Perheen vuosisata*; Markkola, *Moraalin miehet*; Jansdotter, *Rädda Rosa*, 115; Annola, *Säädättömät*, 70–1, 98, 190–3, 310. For sexual morality among the lower classes, see Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty*, 62; Saarimäki, *Naimisen normit*, 205–6; Miettinen, *Ihanteista irrallaan*; Vainio-Korhonen, *Musta-Maija ja Kirppu-Kaisa*; Annola, *Säädättömät*, 54–5, 71.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion on the letters and on the relationship between Emma Mäkinen and her former protégées, see Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus."

communion was a precondition for marriage. Writing skills were far less common: it has been estimated that 13 percent of the Finnish population could write in 1880.<sup>6</sup>

Prisoners' letters have not previously been singled out from the letter collection to be analyzed together other than by the present author.<sup>7</sup> So far, I have been able to identify eight letters from prisoners, written between 1886 and 1914. While some writers had been in Mäkinen's shelter prior to their prison sentence, others contacted her without any previous acquaintance to ask for help. For this chapter, I have chosen four women who specifically mentioned the shelter in their letters, which were written between 1886 and 1904. Ida Somppi and Amanda Storränk had resided at the shelter, Helena Lindström had placed her daughter in the orphanage that was annexed to it, and Katriina Komi wished to enter the shelter upon her release from prison.<sup>8</sup>

Each writer had a pressing concern or a problem they wished to solve by contacting Emma Mäkinen. Ida and Amanda approached Mäkinen to inform her of their present whereabouts, Helena wrote to enquire after her daughter's health, and Katriina was looking for a roof over her head. On the one hand, the fact that these working-class women contacted one institution while residing in another reveals their vulnerable and marginalized position in the slowly modernizing Finnish society that lacked public sector safety nets. The only form of public sector social security was poor relief, but able-bodied adults were given assistance only in exchange for work, often in a poorhouse.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the four women's attempts at reaching out to Emma Mäkinen show that they were willing to use the limited power they had to gain control over their own lives.<sup>10</sup>

The letters of these four women can also be used to discuss the place of their writing, the prison. As British sociologist Liz Stanley has pointed out, letters can be understood as performances in which the writer

<sup>6</sup>Laitinen and Mikkola, *Johdanto*, 9.

<sup>7</sup>Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*.

<sup>8</sup>It has also been possible to find useful background information on these four women in digitized prisoner rolls, prison parish records, other relevant parish records, digitized newspapers, and in some cases also in other letters found among Emma Mäkinen's correspondence. As I do not wish to perpetuate the marginalized status of the writers, I have chosen to refer to them by their full names (and not by their first names) as much as any other individuals mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup>For Finnish poorhouses, see Annola, *Maternalism and Workhouse Matrons*.

<sup>10</sup>Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*, 42–3.

constructs one version of her/himself in relation to the recipient.<sup>11</sup> The performance is always shaped by the writer's understanding of the recipient, but also by the situation in which the writing takes place. Prison was certainly a specific situation. As Ida, Amanda, Helena, and Katriina sat behind bars, their correspondence was subject to surveillance and censorship by prison officials. Prisoners had to write their letters on a prison letterhead, or if there was no specific letterhead in use, the letter was stamped with a prison stamp. The letterheads included printed instructions according to which replies were not to be addressed directly to the inmate but instead to the governor.

To quote British carceral geographer Dominique Moran, the four female inmates lived and wrote their letters in “the now of carceral TimeSpace.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the carceral set limits on the women's lives in both a spatial and temporal sense. For them, prison was a present institution, a lens through which they examined “both past and future and the passage of time.”<sup>13</sup> Viewed through this lens, the shelter in Helsinki was an absent institution. It was either something that belonged to the writers' past, a remembered institution, or something the writers wished to include in their future, an imagined institution.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the experience of prison was embedded in the four female inmates' letters. I suggest that even though letter performances are unique, they are steered by so-called cultural scripts—shared patterns of social interaction that are characteristic of a particular group of people. Cultural scripts capture the models for thinking, feeling, and communicating in a particular cultural context.<sup>14</sup> My hypothesis is that even though Ida, Amanda, Helena, and Katriina did not offer very detailed accounts of their everyday lives in prison, their experiences of carceral TimeSpace are present in their letter performances in the form of those cultural scripts they chose to follow and perpetuate.

The peculiar existence of the writers in between two institutions also raises a question of the nature and extent of the carceral in these women's

<sup>11</sup> Stanley, *The Epistolarium*. For letters as source material, see Leskelä-Kärki, Lahtinen, and Vainio-Korhonen, *Kirjeet ja historiantutkimus*; Nordlund, *Kirjeet*; Halldörsdottir, *Elämä kirjeissä*; Keravuori, “*Rakkaat poikaiset!*” 25–44.

<sup>12</sup> Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, Introduction, 15–16. For more on cultural scripts, see for example Goddard and Wierzbicka, *Cultural Scripts*; Vanclay, *The Role and Functioning of Cultural Scripts*.

lives. While the shelter was not a prison, it nevertheless meets the characteristics of a quasi-carceral space, because the lives of its residents were controlled and limited in various ways.<sup>15</sup> As Finnish carceral geographer Virve Repo has suggested, the different aspects of carceral spaces and the ways in which these aspects overlap in individuals' lives can be described as carceral layers. If people are transferred *between* institutions, carceral layers may "agglomerate in their bodies and minds through their experiences," producing an "institutional burden" that may impact the lives of individuals even after the actual confinement.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by Repo's thought, I explore the ways in which the interplay between prison and the shelter—albeit absent—may have contributed to the accumulation of carceral layers and the institutional burden in the writers.<sup>17</sup>

The chapter unfolds as follows: in the first section, I discuss the writers' lives as well as the ways in which they communicated their experiences of being labeled as deviant. In the two following sections, I analyze how the women framed their experiences of prison life. The idea of prison as a present institution and the shelter as an absent institution runs through these three sections. As a whole, the chapter yields new information on prison as a lived institution,<sup>18</sup> the use of cultural scripts as carriers of emotions and experiences, and the entanglements between different institutions.

### COMMUNICATING DEVIANCY

In January 1886, Emma Mäkinen received a letter from Katriina Komi, a 26-year-old crofter's daughter from a rural parish in eastern Finland. Katriina was serving a sentence in Hämeenlinna Prison Workhouse and Penitentiary (henceforth Hämeenlinna Penitentiary). The institution was

<sup>15</sup> For a recent overview of the scholarly discussion on the aspects of "carceral," see, for example, Repo, *Confined to Space*, 27–30.

<sup>16</sup> Repo, *Confined to Space*, 46.

<sup>17</sup> For theoretical discussion on the concept of "layer" in the field of the history of experiences, see Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from some master's theses and two research articles by the present author (Annola, *Naisvankien kirjeet*; Annola, *Vankeusmaantieteellinen näkökulma*), there is not much historical research on Finnish female prisoners. For women in other institutions in Finland, see Ahlbeck-Rehn, *Diagnostisering och disciplinering*; Ahlbeck, *Ratkaisuna sterilisaatio*; Tuohela, *Huhtikuun tekstit*; Tuohela et al., *Sielun ja mielen sairaus*; Pukero, *Epämääräisestä elämästä*; Vehkalahti, *Constructing Reformatory Identity*; Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, vartija*; Vainio-Korhonen, *Musta-Maija ja Kirppu-Kaisa*. For a Nordic overview of institutional history, see, for example, Nilsson and Vallström, *Inledning*; Englund, *Fängsambället*.

the only women's prison in the Grand Duchy of Finland, but there were some female prisoners also in county prisons, either in pretrial custody or serving shorter sentences. Katriina's sentence was a relatively long one. "I was sentenced to six years for losing [getting rid of] a child," she explained in her letter and continued: "[B]ut god saw it fit to lessen my earthly punishment so that I will serve three years[.]"<sup>19</sup> As Katriina's sentence was slowly but surely coming to an end, she wished to know whether Emma Mäkinen would welcome her to the shelter upon her release from prison. Katriina's story appears to have been true: according to other sources, in 1883 she had killed her illegitimate newborn.<sup>20</sup>

A couple of weeks later, Emma Mäkinen received another letter from Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. The writer was Helena Lindström, a 39-year-old wallpaper factory worker's wife from Helsinki, who was serving a three-year sentence. On her admission to prison, Helena had left her 13-year-old daughter Wilhelmina at the orphanage that was annexed to Mäkinen's shelter. In her letter, Helena asked how the girl was doing. Unlike Katriina, Helena did not mention the reason for her imprisonment, probably because Emma Mäkinen was already familiar with it. Helena dismissed the topic by admitting that she was "impossible."<sup>21</sup> Other sources reveal that Helena was in prison because of procuring. She had kept a brothel in her home, which she had shared with Wilhelmina and "a step-daughter" after ending up living apart from her husband. Procuring was not Helena's first offense: she had in 1879 been convicted of petty theft.<sup>22</sup>

The third writer, Ida Somppi, was a worker's daughter from Turku, a city on the southwest coast of Finland.<sup>23</sup> A surviving letter from Ida's mother to Emma Mäkinen shows that the 20-something Ida had been

<sup>19</sup>National Archives of Finland (NAF), Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>20</sup>Digital Archives of Finnish Family History Association (FFHA), Archives of Kirvu Parish, communion book 1881–1890, 555; NAF, Archives of the Pastor of Lappeenranta Spinhouse, communion book 1868–1889, 46.

<sup>21</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>22</sup>*Folkvännen* 24 May 1884; *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 24 May 1884; *Nya Pressen* 14 September 1884; NAF, Poll tax records, U:99, Uusimaa Province poll tax records 1884, 248; NAF, Archives of the Pastor of Lappeenranta Spinhouse, communion book 1868–1889, 48.

<sup>23</sup>FFHA, Archives of Turku Cathedral Congregation, additional communion book 1865–1880, 2019; NAF, Poll tax records, T:201, Turku and Pori Province poll tax records 1895, 40.

sent to the shelter in Helsinki so that she would mend her ways.<sup>24</sup> Ida crushed her mother's hopes by leaving the shelter. In the mid-1890s, she sat down in Turku County Prison to write a letter to Emma Mäkinen. Ida described how she had gone out with a girl against Mäkinen's will, been caught by the police, and then sent back to her hometown, Turku. "This time they did not Release me but gave me Six months," Ida explained.<sup>25</sup> Like Helena, she did not specifically name her offense, but the letters as well as the length of the sentence point toward vagrancy and/or fornication.

The 39-year-old Amanda, in turn, was a former maidservant from the city of Vaasa on the western coast of Finland. In 1904, she approached Emma Mäkinen with a letter written in Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. The letter reveals that at some point in her life, Amanda had resided at the shelter but had not enjoyed her stay. "I was never happy but for the smallest setbacks snotty and hard and I thought that I'd rather be in the Spinhouse than here," she confessed, and continued: "I found what I was looking for so that I now have 3 years for theft."<sup>26</sup> Other sources show that Amanda's adult life had involved a series of offenses. She drank, smashed windows, and cast stones. She stole money, teaspoons, food and tobacco, clothes from the local poorhouse, and the blanket of a cabman's horse. Amanda was also familiar with Hämeenlinna Penitentiary: she had been there two times prior to this sentence for grand theft.<sup>27</sup>

This brief overview of the lives and letters of the four women shows that they all chose to lay the blame for their sorry state on themselves. Moreover, Ida and Amanda specifically stated that their punishment was a

<sup>24</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Elisabet Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, undated. Elisabet gave her address in the letter, which is why it is possible to use poll tax records to date the letter to the 1890s.

<sup>25</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>26</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904. Amanda's reference to the *Spinhouse* points to Turku and Lappeenranta Spinhouses, prison workhouses that had preceded Hämeenlinna Penitentiary as women's prisons. Both institutions were closed upon the opening of the penitentiary in 1881.

<sup>27</sup> *Vasabladet* 20 June 1883; *Vasabladet* 13 January 1894; *Vasabladet* 16 January 1894; *Wasa Nyheter* 22 March 1899; *Vasabladet* 24 August 1899; *Vasabladet* 26 October 1899; *Vasabladet* 15 February 1900; *Vasabladet* 10 April 1900; *Vasabladet* 24 August 1901; *Österbottningen* 21 July 1903; *Vaasa* 17 September 1903; FFHA, Archives of Hämeenlinna Penitentiary and Prison Workhouse, prisoner roll 1900, 1903.

well-deserved one.<sup>28</sup> The writers' portrayal of themselves resembles the harsh attitude that various authorities had toward "fallen" women. The police, prison authorities, poor relief officers, healthcare officials, and reformatory school staff all justified their intervention in the lives of the "fallen" by claiming that these individuals deserved to be corrected, because they had intentionally chosen to misbehave.<sup>29</sup>

Private philanthropists often adopted a radically different approach by portraying "fallen" women as victims. Previous research has shown that upper- and middle-class charity workers depicted prostitutes and other wayward women as ignorant country girls who had moved to the city in search for work as domestic servants but ended up selling sex or being seduced by their masters or other men of power. They had fallen because nobody had taken care of them. By stressing the inexperience and insecurity of these women, and by clinging to the image of the seduced and betrayed woman, philanthropists downplayed the agency of the "fallen." At the same time, the helpers justified their own involvement in these women's lives.<sup>30</sup>

The two approaches to deviancy can be seen as two competing cultural scripts. In their letter performances, the four female inmates preferred the authorities' harsher script over the philanthropists' milder and in some ways more understanding one. The women's choice of script implies that prison, as experienced by the writers, encouraged inmates to remember and communicate their past lives as a bad choice.

The prisoners' situation resembles that of reformatory school residents. According to Finnish historian Kaisa Vehkalahti, reformatory school staff expected deviant young girls to admit their faults and show moral improvement as a part of their re-education. Vehkalahti suggests that as the girls knew that their correspondence was closely monitored by reformatory school staff, they probably adjusted their letters to meet the expectations

<sup>28</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year; NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>29</sup> Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta; Häkkinen, *Rabasta—vaan ei rakkaudesta*; Nygård, *Erilaisten historiaa*; Vehkalahti, *Constructing Reformatory Identity*; Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, partija*; Harjula, Annola, and Ekholm, *Etniset ja sosiaaliset vähemmistöt*.

<sup>30</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 212–14; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus," 163; Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*, 65. Also Mahood, *The Magdalenes*; Vammen, *Ambiguous Performances*.



imposed upon them.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it is likely that the four female prisoners were aware of the surveillance. They probably knew that by complying with the officials' script, they could secure themselves better prospects within carceral TimeSpace—after all, good behavior could in some cases result in the reduction of a sentence. As such, surveillance was one of the mechanisms through which the disciplinary power of the prison penetrated prisoners' lives and made them control themselves through self-imposed conformity to a prevailing set of norms.<sup>32</sup>

Emma Mäkinen was clearly influenced by both scripts. On the one hand, she felt that “fallen” women were in most cases nothing but foolish girls who needed her helping hand. On the other hand, she seems to have believed that habitual offenders and elderly women had deliberately chosen a vile way of life. They seldom sought change in earnest.<sup>33</sup> In Mäkinen's opinion, only the transformative power of faith could make these women repent—but as they were usually unwilling to accept Jesus into their hearts or were weak of faith, there was little hope for a profound change in them.<sup>34</sup> Given Mäkinen's skepticism, it may be that elderly prisoners with long criminal records never received a reply to their letter(s) but were instead exposed to experiences of dismissal and silence. In such cases, the shelter as an absent institution influenced the prisoners' experience of being labeled as deviant and hence contributed to the accumulation of the institutional burden in their minds.

### COMMUNICATING LONELINESS

As prison separated deviant individuals from their previous lives, the sentence also meant separation from family and friends. The women discussed in this chapter were not shy to admit in their letters that they felt lonely behind bars. From the prison officials' point of view, this was probably acceptable if not advisable. Prison did not serve only as a place of correction for the deviant but also as a deterrent for people outside prison walls. In other words, the carceral was from time to time deliberately extended outside prison space: a remorseful inmate, who communicated her feelings

<sup>31</sup> Vehkalahti, *Opitut tunteet, kerronnan kaavat*, 233–4.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *Tarkkailla ja rangaista*.

<sup>33</sup> Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus,” 164–8.

<sup>34</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 73–83; Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus,” 157–9; Annola, “Tehe minusta itselles.”

of isolation to the outside world, certainly demonstrated to other people that crime did not pay. The inmates, however, had their own motivations for writing letters that carried their experiences of longing and loneliness.

British criminologist Helen Johnston has studied the nineteenth-century British female prisoners' take on their severed family ties. She suggests that incarcerated women used their limited resources to assert their identity as mothers but often experienced difficulties maintaining contact with their children. Imprisoned mothers found the lack of knowledge about their children deeply distressing.<sup>35</sup> A similar experience is embedded in the letter written to Emma Mäkinen by Helena Lindström, whose daughter Wilhelmina resided at Mäkinen's orphanage. During her prison sentence, Helena lost contact with the orphanage and grew increasingly worried about her daughter.

In her surviving letter to Emma Mäkinen, Helena openly complained that she had approached the directress three months earlier to find out how Wilhelmina was doing but had received no reply at all. Silence had made Helena frustrated and suspicious:

[D]id missus not receive my letter or what is wrong has my dear child died already because I am in the belief that she is dead and that missus does not want to add to my troubles if such is the case then if missus would be so good and let me know[.]<sup>36</sup>

Between these two letters, Helena had tried to figure out other ways to reach her daughter. While in prison, she had befriended the above-mentioned Katriina Komi. As Katriina approached Emma Mäkinen to ask whether the directress would welcome her in the shelter, she also added the following greeting in her letter: "Helena Linströöm [sic] asked me to send her love to her daughter Wilhelmina."<sup>37</sup> Judging by the fact that Helena nevertheless decided to put pen to paper for a second time, it is likely that her greetings had not been answered either.

Helena's attempts at reaching Wilhelmina show that mothering in prison TimeSpace was characterized by weak or non-existent communications and a harrowing realization of the passage of time. It seems that she

<sup>35</sup> Johnston, *Imprisoned Mothers*.

<sup>36</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>37</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

may even have found the gnawing uncertainty and frustration more distressing than the possibility of Wilhelmina being dead “already.” Helena’s opportunities for nurturing her relationship with her daughter were regulated by prison officials, on the one hand, and Emma Mäkinen, on the other. These gatekeepers decided which messages got through and which ones did not, and all that Helena could do was to keep trying while counting the weeks and months that had passed with no news of the child. In this sense, both prison and the shelter contributed to the piling up of the institutional burden in Helena’s mind by adding to her experience of isolation.

Another writer, Ida Somppi, painted a rather claustrophobic picture of the spatial setting in which her writing took place: the prison room “preyed” on her soul, and the “heavy doors” of Turku County Prison separated her from her family and friends.<sup>38</sup> In her letter, written to Emma Mäkinen one Christmas Eve, Ida desperately reached out to the wider world beyond the prison walls:

[I] have to sit here lonely oh if only I was alone but I have family oh how I have again given such a heavy grief to my old mother. [Oh] dear Madam Now it is precious Yuletide oh how you all Rejoice and sing together there, but oh I cannot rejoice as I have been parted from my family and friends and closed up Here Behind the heavy doors[.]<sup>39</sup>

Christmas Eve was celebrated also in prison. For example in 1892, the chaplain of Turku County Prison sketched a celebration for prison officials, their families, and prisoners. There would be a Christmas tree in the middle aisle, surrounded by the officials, their family members, and a choir. The choir would sing a hymn as female prisoners would slowly file past the Christmas tree. The chaplain would hand each prisoner a religious pamphlet, after which the women would return to their wing to give way to male prisoners.<sup>40</sup> Ida may also have participated in such festivities, but

<sup>38</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>39</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>40</sup> Finnish National Museum, The Collection of Prison Museum, chaplain’s plan for Christmas festivities at Turku County Prison, 1892. The religious pamphlet was written by Mathilda Wrede, a noblewoman who was involved in the Free Mission and became famous for her philanthropic work among male prisoners.

it appears that she nevertheless found Christmas Eve in prison a heart-breaking lonely experience.

Compiling a letter in these dire circumstances, Ida expressed her longing for her mother, whom she had let down by running away from Mäkinen's shelter and ending up in prison. However, the main theme in Ida's letter was the shelter and the people she had met there: the directress, other staff members, and the "girls." Ida assured that she remembered Emma Mäkinen's advice and prayers, "although it is too late now," and stated that she missed the directress very much, especially as they had "had to part ways on such bad terms."<sup>41</sup> Similar intimate and remorseful tones can be found in the letter of another former resident of the shelter, Amanda Storränk.<sup>42</sup> The only thing these two women asked in their letters for was Mäkinen's forgiveness—and perhaps a letter in return.

Finnish historian Pirjo Markkola has suggested that Emma Mäkinen's shelter was a prime example of caring power: Women were helped only if they obeyed the directress and complied with her set of norms.<sup>43</sup> As Swedish historian Anna Jansdotter has pointed out, caring power was balanced by the intimacy of the relationship between the rescue worker and the woman she was trying to "save."<sup>44</sup> Emma Mäkinen, who seems to have grown rather fond of her "girls," was not immune to their disobedience, mean words, and indifference toward eternal life in Christ. Thus the protégées could challenge the existing power relations by appealing to Mäkinen's emotions or hurting her feelings.<sup>45</sup>

This appears to have been the case with Ida, who had turned her back on the shelter in anger, and Amanda, who had conducted herself arrogantly and scorned Mäkinen's offers of help. It seems, however, that life in carceral TimeSpace had softened the women so that they were willing to surrender the power they had usurped from Emma Mäkinen. Did Ida and

<sup>41</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

<sup>42</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus"; Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus" Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*. The term "caring power" was first introduced by historians Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan in their analysis of women's philanthropic work in Britain and in the Netherlands. Van Drenth and de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power*.

<sup>44</sup> Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*, 292–3.

<sup>45</sup> Annola, "Minulle eläminen on Kristus," 167–8.

Amanda miss the sense of belonging and togetherness they had experienced in the shelter? Did they try to reconcile with Emma Mäkinen to bring some of that experience into prison TimeSpace? If so, then their letters can be interpreted as an attempt at fighting the isolation of prison life.

At the same time, Ida's and Amanda's surrender can also be seen as their way of adapting to prison life, and as such, a sign of the carceral layers these women carried. While still in the shelter, Ida and Amanda had been offered a specific script, the role of an obedient woman, but they had abandoned it upon their return to vice. Now, in carceral TimeSpace, the script was valid again. Emma Mäkinen's moral guidance and emotional presence were needed: she was to help Ida and Amanda follow the script. Both women begged Mäkinen to reply, as if to find out if she would accept their surrender and re-establish her role as their mentor. Thus, the carceral layers Ida and Amanda had agglomerated during their lives may have had a brighter side: The women were aware of a script that was shared by the shelter and prison, and they could use their familiarity to develop coping methods.

### COMMUNICATING IMPROVEMENT

All four writers used religious or Biblical references in their letters to verbalize their alleged downfall or their hopes for a brighter future. For example, Katriina described herself as "deeply fallen in the eyes of the world" and explained that God had given her "this lovely hope that I will be allowed into the safety at Missus'."<sup>46</sup> Ida rued the day when she had given "sin such a Great power" over herself.<sup>47</sup> Religious vocabulary was available to the writers because of the mandatory confirmation classes they had attended in their home parishes in their youth, and possibly also because of the spiritual guidance given to them by prison chaplains or visiting preachers.

However, only Amanda and Helena associated their hopes for improvement with the actual spiritual awakening that had taken place in prison.

<sup>46</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>47</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Ida Somppi to Emma Mäkinen, 24 December, no year.

Amanda offered Emma Mäkinen an account of the exact moment of conversion:

[T]he first rays of God's light dawned on the first Sunday in advent it was a glorious day and since then I have diligently sought for more light in the word of God [...] and I may also tell missus that I have here the bible I got from missus and it is my only comfort here in prison and if I live I hope it will be [so] all my life[.]<sup>48</sup>

In her letter, Amanda stressed how she now understood her punishment as God's way of teaching her a lesson. Quoting Hebrews and Revelation, Amanda explained that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and that God had seen it fit to chasten her one more time with a "rod of iron" so that she would humble herself "under the almighty hand of God."<sup>49</sup> Helena, in turn, explained how God had opened her eyes to the crushing number of sins for which she had to atone. In Helena's words, borrowed from Revelation and Genesis, her sins were a load "as heavy as a thousand *talents*," and their number was as high as "the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore."<sup>50</sup> Helena asked Emma Mäkinen to pray for her, so that God would always help her forward in her life. The two writers clearly wished to include Emma Mäkinen in their spiritual lives.

Amanda's and Helena's way of describing their awakening resembles the rhetoric used in Emma Mäkinen's evangelical Christian circles. In that community, the story of spiritual conversion was a recurrent narrative, a cultural script that defined how an individual was expected to live religion. Conversion, a decisive moment when a sinner repented and opened her heart to God, marked the beginning of a new life in which religion was to have a tangible role.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that Amanda and Helena were not so much inspired by the religious teachings of the Lutheran prison chaplain

<sup>48</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>49</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Amanda Storränk to Emma Mäkinen, 27 May 1904.

<sup>50</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Helena Lindström to Emma Mäkinen, 31 January 1886.

<sup>51</sup> Jansdotter, *Ansikte mot ansikte*; Markkola, *Women's Spirituality*; Annola, *The Conflict Between Lived Religion*; Annola, "Tehe minusta itselles"; Markkola, *Working-Class Women Living Religion*.

than by the evangelical Christian script they had probably adopted through their acquaintance with Mäkinen and her shelter. The women knew how to “speak religion” in a way that Emma Mäkinen would recognize and that was likely to spark a sympathetic response from her.<sup>52</sup> Especially Amanda compiled a perfect conversion narrative by stressing her sinful life as her own choice, on the one hand, and her discovery of God’s gratuitous mercy, on the other—as if to underline her surrender to Emma Mäkinen’s caring power.

While Amanda and Helena associated their improvement with faith, Katriina was preoccupied with diligence. She wrote to Emma Mäkinen six months prior to her release from Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. Similar to Helena’s attempts at getting hold of her daughter, Katriina’s letter suggests that it was difficult for an inmate to contact people outside the prison walls. For Katriina, getting in touch with Emma Mäkinen had been a tedious process. The difficulties seem to have arisen from Katriina’s own shyness, on the one hand, and from the tardiness of prison authorities, on the other. In her letter to Emma Mäkinen, Katriina described her mixed feelings in detail—her hesitation, her frustration, and her anticipation:

[I] have worried about this and almost did not dare to say anything to anybody but at last I talked to the chaplain to no avail again I thought about this alone for a long time and then I asked Mister Governor’s permission to write to Missus and I will be out of here 23 June and all I am asking is that Missus would send a note to Mister Governor if Missus welcomes me and some information also to me as I am looking forward to it so badly[.]<sup>53</sup>

By letting Emma Mäkinen know how difficult the writing process had been, Katriina was able to show the directress that she was serious about improvement. She tried to demonstrate her worthiness of Mäkinen’s help also by explaining that she had “been in the 4. class for almost a year now,”<sup>54</sup> which meant that Katriina had conducted herself extremely well in prison and that prison authorities had classified her as capable of development. Katriina’s choice of expression indicates that she had internalized

<sup>52</sup> For other examples of a correct way of “speaking religion,” see Markkola, *Working-Class Women Living Religion*.

<sup>53</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>54</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

the classification system that structured the inmates' daily lives in carceral TimeSpace. Moreover, it appears that she expected Emma Mäkinen to be equally aware of it—almost as if the directress should have had accumulated several carceral layers in *her* mind.

It is likely that Katriina had learned of the shelter from Helena Lindström, whom she had befriended “in the workshop.”<sup>55</sup> By this, Katriina probably meant the prison’s knitting workshop, which was one of the places of forced labor in Hämeenlinna Penitentiary. Female inmates span wool, hackled flax, dyed yarn, manufactured clothes for other state-managed institutions, and took care of daily chores in prison, because contemporary penal ideologists believed that hard work would encourage moral improvement in deviant individuals. Emma Mäkinen’s shelter relied on the same principle: women were expected to work for their keep so that they would learn how to lead a decent life and find employment outside the shelter. Their work—making handicrafts, baking, doing laundry, and ironing—was also a source of income for the shelter.<sup>56</sup>

The idea of work as an integral part of decent life was another script that was shared by prison and the shelter. Forced labor was also something that contributed to the accumulation of the institutional burden in the minds and bodies of those women who served several prison sentences or traveled between the prison and the shelter. However, Katriina’s case is another example of the ways in which institutionalized women could use the information embedded in carceral layers to develop survival strategies. Katriina had probably learned from Helena that the women in the shelter were expected to do sewing, quilting, and carpet weaving. Hence, Katriina knew which script to follow to demonstrate to Emma Mäkinen how well she would adapt to the practicalities of everyday life in the shelter. “I sure am used to working,”<sup>57</sup> she assured and went on to emphasize her current specialization in handicrafts, almost as if her time in prison had been a vocational school for her:

[I] have mostly worked [here] in the knitting workshop and on the [knitting] machine and I have to say dear Missus that I sure am used to working

<sup>55</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>56</sup>Annola, “*Minulle eläminen on Kristus*,” 40; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 236–7.

<sup>57</sup>NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.



but I would rather not go back home to the heavy farm work there as I have grown used to handicrafts and my chest has become so weak[.]<sup>58</sup>

The fact that Katriina was able to benefit from Helena's carceral layers points to intercommunication between the prisoners. Moreover, it appears that in return, Helena had confided her worries to Katriina—at least Katriina promised to pass on Helena's greetings to Wilhelmina. All this hints that there existed the inmates' own community within carceral TimeSpace—a community that overlapped the one in the shelter and probably followed its own cultural scripts. Previous research has shown that the contemporaries regarded these communities as mostly harmful: according to their understanding, solidarity between prisoners or “fallen” women in shelters, poorhouses, and hospitals for venereal diseases undermined the impact of disciplinary measures. Older women taught young girls how to be “street smart,” and those who showed any signs of improvement were ruthlessly mocked.<sup>59</sup> However, as Katriina's letter indicates, women may also have exchanged tips on survival strategies or potential ways to live a decent life.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The four female prisoners discussed in this chapter each wrote a letter to the directress of another institution, a shelter for so-called fallen women. These marginalized women fell between two institutions: the prison was their present institution and the shelter was an absent institution—either something the women remembered from their past or something they imagined as a part of their future.

The chapter shows that while the writers did not give long descriptions of their lives in carceral TimeSpace, their experiences of prison are nevertheless embedded in their letter performances. The four women discussed in this chapter wrote to solve pressing issues: to find out if their child was still alive, to apologize for their past wrongdoings, or to prepare for a life outside prison walls. These worries, and the women's plausible reasons for writing, reveal some of their experiences of prison life: loneliness,

<sup>58</sup> NAF, Archives of Emma Mäkinen, I Ha:4, a letter from Katriina Komi to Emma Mäkinen, 17 January 1886.

<sup>59</sup> Häkkinen, *Rabasta—vaan ei rakkaudesta*; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*; Annola, “Minulle eläminen on Kristus”; Harjula, Annola, and Ekholm, *Etniset ja sosiaaliset vähemmistöt*.

isolation, loss, lack of emotional and spiritual support, tardiness of communication, and the severance of family ties. At the same time, their letters show glimpses of developments that can be regarded as more positive from the inmates' perspective, such as new friendships forged behind bars and the acquisition of new professional skills in handicrafts.

However, the question of how the writers expressed themselves provides another way of tracing their experiences of prison. Letter performances do not come into existence from a void but are instead steered by the writers' understanding of the recipient and the situation in which writing takes place—including cultural scripts, models for communicating in a particular cultural context. The four writers used cultural scripts in three different ways. First, in discussing their own deviancy, the writers preferred a script that was supported by prison officials over the one that was favored by philanthropic workers. In other words, the women presented their deviant lifestyle as their deliberate choice, not as an accident or somebody else's fault. Second, in describing their moral improvement, some writers followed a script, a conversion narrative, that was characteristic of the evangelical Christian community of the shelter but still not at odds with the ethos of carceral TimeSpace. Third, some writers followed a script that emphasized obedience or work as an integral part of decent life. These scripts underpinned everyday life in both the prison and the shelter.

Hence, it appears that although the writers expected the directress of an absent institution to alleviate their pressing concerns, they nevertheless kept the present institution foremost in their mind when choosing which cultural script to follow. This points to their experience of constant surveillance and their awareness of what was expected of female inmates—transformation from unwanted norm-breakers into obedient and diligent working-class women. The writers seem to have known that inmates' development was assessed by their correspondence among other things and that letter-writing could be one means of securing better prospects within carceral TimeSpace. The existence of cultural scripts that were shared by the prison and the shelter alike may have contributed to the accumulation of carceral layers in the minds and bodies of those women who traveled between the two institutions. It appears that although these layers probably produced an institutional burden, they also carried information. Women could use this information to develop coping methods and survival strategies.

What, then, became of the writers? So far, I have been unable to find any further information about Ida Somppi and Helena Lindström. It is

also not known whether Katriina Komi stayed in the shelter for a while after being released from prison in June 1886. The following spring, she was back in her home parish Kirvu, where she married a crofter. Judging from newspaper articles, Katriina did not altogether manage to keep on the straight and narrow: in the winter of 1896 she was again sentenced to two years' imprisonment for selling butter she had stolen from a crofter who lived in the same village.<sup>60</sup> Amanda Storrank's sentence was commuted, and she was released from prison in September 1905. Amanda died in her hometown of Vaasa a couple of months later.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> FFHA, Archives of Kirvu Parish, communion book 1881–1890, 555; *Wiipurin* 29 January 1896; *Wiipurin* 15 April 1896.

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