

Judith Pallot and Elena Katz, *Waiting at the Prison Gate: Women, Identity and the Russian Penal System*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017. xi, 246 pp. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. ISBN: 9781784536602. \$110, cloth.

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Starting with the familiar Russian trope of the Decembrist's wife sacrificing her comfort and position in society to follow her imprisoned husband into the wilds of Siberia, Judith Pallot and Elena Katz explore contemporary narratives about and by Russian women whose loved ones are serving time in a harsh penal system. Although Western perceptions of Russian prisons may be dominated by Stalin's GULag system, these authors remind us that Russia remains to this day a "high imprisonment society" with total numbers of prisoners trailing only China and the United States. Per capita rates also place Russia in the top ten among states. (xv) Hence, the authors observe, "The shadow of prison squats in the corners of nearly every family's life in the Russian Federation." (xvi) *Waiting at the Prison Gate* delivers on its promise to delve into the lives of women whose lives are transformed by their spouse, child, or father's incarceration. Pallot and Katz introduce useful terms from Western literature on the fallout of the criminal justice system — most notably "courtesy stigma" and "secondary prisonization" — to illustrate the negative impact of a sentence on a prisoner's closest relatives. However, the authors go beyond a simple "damage assessment" approach in investigating the consequences of men's imprisonment on the women close to them. While the stories and scenarios they introduce do illustrate a myriad of harms wrought on the lives of wives, mothers, and children, the authors deliberately draw attention to the strategies and discursive narratives constructed by their interlocutors to support their own visions of themselves.

Pallot and Katz pack fascinating details and astute insight into their highly accessible and multifaceted analysis of women's lives. They catalog the multiple obstacles to retaining close relations with prisoners as well as detailing the modern technology — Skype and smuggled cell phones — that in some cases help overcome geographical and institutional restrictions. They use long quotations from in-depth interviews to help readers understand how women might fall in love with prisoners "with their ears" as imprisonment forces men to assiduously court potential partners from afar. (98) They also analyze differences in narrative strategies for mothers and daughters.

The book is organized primarily by the nature of the relationship between subject and prisoner. For instance, Pallot and Katz devote separate chapters to wives of different standing — those married to ordinary prisoners vs. those wed to criminals with authoritative status within the prison subculture vs. those who formed relationships after incarceration — as well as to mothers, daughters, and more distant female relatives. The structure lends itself to some repetitive aspects as each person must negotiate similar obstacles in visiting or sending parcels. However, the breakdown by relationship to the prisoner does reveal occasional competition between relatives for standing as the person most responsible in a given case. The authors also draw attention to the resentment from long-standing partners toward women who met their spouses through jailhouse correspondence.

The final chapter takes up the stories of families of political prisoners in post-Soviet Russia. Focusing on the cases of arms control researcher Igor Sutyagin and businessman Aleksei Kozlov, Pallot and Katz map out the different sorts of tasks that potentially arise for family members of those whose charges contain elements of political persecution. They observe, “In the twenty-first century supporting a political prisoner is as much about the costs and benefits of media involvement and whether to appeal to the European Court, as about whether to ‘follow’ or walk away.” (174) Sutyagin’s family follows a traditional path of looking for support among intelligentsia circles, while Kozlov’s wife, Olga Romanova, becomes a vigorous advocate not just for her own husband but for imprisoned entrepreneurs in general. The organization that she founded, *Rus’ sidyashchaya*, has become a loud and persistent voice against corruption in the investigation and trial periods as well as for more humane prison conditions.

By ending with the story of the spirited journalist turned activist, Olga Romanova, Pallot and Katz provide an antidote to the stereotype of the acquiescent, sacrificial wife. Their book succeeds in its feminist goals not only by giving voice to women marginalized by their social positions, but by showing that prisoners’ wives, mothers, and even teenage daughters retain the agency necessary to make decisions to shape their personal relations, to help others, and even to forge solidarity with their peers. In this regard, the appendix of websites created by and for prisoners’ relatives provides an important resource for those interested in the results of grassroots activism.