"We Were There" like its title, is a spare, unvarnished account of the reality of life for the women who, through family ties or professional dedication, committed their time and energy to regular visits in the Maze Prison. Their voices, their stories told without ornament or embellishment, recorded in the bleak shell of what was once a formidable jail, show more effectively than the most dramatic account not only the grim, punishing conditions endured by the prisoners, but also the humiliations and privations shared by their families and visitors, and by the families of the prison guards. The film makes no distinction between political affiliations or religious convictions: all involved in the life of the prison are shown to have suffered, to a greater or lesser degree, the constraints of prison life. That the conclusion of those who were there is that it became impossible to consider the prisoners or their guards as anything but fellow-humans trying to survive a situation of extreme difficulty, speaks to the success of this restrained, respectful and, ultimately, deeply moving film.

Inga Leerhoff
Psychotherapy Student, Germany

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to have a look at your work. It is breath-taking and an important contribution to Irish history. In my opinion it is a great enrichment for future generations to help them to understand, what was going on during the Troubles. Interviewing people who lived during that time gives history this important personal note. Giving individuals the possibility to tell history from their own point of view is a very good idea, and I am very happy, that you did this great piece of work.

I think the interview partners are very well chosen. For me it was interesting to see women from different backgrounds, personally and professionally, telling their stories, what they experienced and endured. It is a fascinating mixture, reflecting the situation from all possible angles. In some moments it was so intense, that I almost cried. Especially when the mothers talked about their sons. They have an impressive energy. Unfortunately the prison officer`s wife (sorry, can`t remember her name) stayed a little bit intangible for me. I could understand her suffering, but she appeared a bit isolated to me, compared to the other women. Probably a second woman in a comparable situation would have made it easier.

The arrangement after historical events is very well chosen. And it was clearly helpful, to illustrate how the prison and the prisoners` situation changed over the years. I really liked the combination of interviews and scenes of the prison. “Place without colors” is a very good description. It makes the told stories comprehensible and delivers a burdensome atmosphere. Especially the moments where you can see how it`s demolished leaves a bitter feeling. Although I know, that the public discussion concerning this matter is very complicated, it leaves the mark, that history should be preserved and not destroyed even if it`s painful. In fact, that makes your work even more important.
Caroll Meier-Liehl  
Psychotherapy Student, Germany

First of all I really like the idea of bringing people back to the prison for the first time to memorize and tell their stories. And I am amazed how many people were so brave to allow being filmed while being confronted with the triggering surroundings. Those small anecdotes and details of memory that come up when returning to places give such a precious insight to the various individual meanings of experiences, I feel it told me so much more than compact retrospectives people have formed in their minds over time to remember for themselves and to tell to others.

The film “Some Mother’s Son” had opened my eyes for the impact imprisonment had on people related to prisoners, and that those people hadn’t been given enough attention yet, probably because the suffering and commitment of the prisoners themselves were more obvious, but probably partly also because they were mainly women. Focusing on the women related to prisoners “We were there” has – aside from giving them the necessary attention – underlined the importance of doing so. I am able to understand now that it weren’t “only” side-effects of imprisonment these women had to deal with (like financial problems, being separated from loved ones, worrying over them etc.), but that they also were experiencing their own aspects of life in prison in the visitor's areas. I found it most impressive to hear how it changed their daily life (for incredibly long periods of time), centering the week around the visit day, saving money and energy for just that day, spending that complete day with driving and waiting just to have that short time with their relatives, neglecting other aspects of life by doing so.

“We were there” also reminded me of how present the past can be to individuals. It’s so easy to forget, when subjects disappear from the news and start fading into the past, but of course for people who were directly affected by the events it will always be part of their lives, not only because of their memories, but because it seems to have also changed their future when it happened, made them who they are today, closing some doors, maybe opening others. It made me realize how important it is to give people space to remember and talk about the past years later. That it is not enough to give support while things are happening and pain and need are obvious, but especially important at later times, when the world has moved on and expects them to have done the same.

Thanks to the teachers and artists you included in the film I was amazed to learn that people actually are able to come up with the strength and creativity to lead some sort of normal life in prison. How it is possible to focus on a university degree whilst enduring deprivation and violence of all sorts, exceeds my imagination. But I guess, there lies the answer to my question, how people manage to cope with traumatic events, to integrate them in their lives, to fill them with personal meaning, instead of breaking down under the commonly imposed expectation of “moving on”. 