

# Surviving Zambian Prisons

– Inmate experiences,  
coping strategies and  
sex in prison

By Anne Egelund

PhD dissertation

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***SUMMARY AND POLICY BRIEF***



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**This booklet is a significantly shortened version of the  
PhD written by Dr. Anne Egelund**

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## ABSTRACT

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### ‘Surviving Zambian Prisons - Prisoner experiences, Coping strategies and Sex in prison’

PhD dissertation by Anne Egelund

Prisons in Africa are understudied and poorly understood. Perhaps surprisingly, amongst the research produced, there has been very little focus on prisoner perspectives. Rather, most studies focus on prison staff and other more institutional perspectives. This PhD makes an important contribution to the field of prisons research in Africa, where the dissertation explores how male inmates experience imprisonment, and how they struggle for physical, social and psychological survival.

The thesis is built on a data collection in Zambian male prisons, where 72 inmates, 15 former prisoners and 10 staff members were interviewed in the period from 2011-2013. The interviewing methodology rested in the life story/narrative tradition. Some ethnographic observations were also part of the data.

Every prisoner’s experience is unique and his own, yet common themes also occur. The well-known ‘pains of imprisonment’ from international prisons research, such as the loss of liberty, stigma, isolation from family and loved ones are in the Zambian context exacerbated by the poor conditions of imprisonment, where overcrowding, ill-health, injustice, and social abandonment pose specific challenges and affect inmates’ identities as men. The author



characterises imprisonment in Zambia as chronic crisis, where enormous demands are made on prisoners for them to survive.

The experience of imprisonment may fundamentally affect the individual prisoner's sense of identity to the point of injury or breakdown. Even if inmates do have some capacity to act to improve their situation, they have limited options to do so. The PhD draws on Honneth's theory of recognition and on empirically grounded studies to identify five main categories in relation to how inmates respond to imprisonment. The categories are: not coping at all; morally grounded struggles for rights in groups; individual struggles for maintaining or constructing a pro-social identity; and compensatory struggles for recognition, where the struggle for recognition can be viewed as negative in the sense that these behaviours will further alienate them from conventional society, and because the struggle entails negative behaviour that nevertheless allows them some form of recognition. Finally, the fifth category concerns those who struggle for survival with no direct association with recognition. Here, inmates will simply aim to get by on a day-to-day basis, drawing on instrumentalism and emotional withdrawal to survive.

Some prisoners enter into relationships as a way to survive. Sexual activities in the closed prison environment are influenced by the prison context and conditions, and will play into power structures, hierarchies and social relationships, not to mention to individual's coping strategies. Sexual relationships between men in Zambian prisons can generally be characterized as transactional. A reformulation and interpretation of gendered roles take place, where some so-called 'weak' inmates are constructed as 'women' to be available to dominant inmates, so-called 'men'. The 'men' gain a

sense of masculinity through the sexual relationship, whereas the constructed 'women' experience severe threats to masculine identity. The thesis proposes that the social construction of gender and sexuality is a translation or reinterpretation of general society's gender roles in an environment without biological women.

In this way, the thesis makes a rare but important contribution to understanding prisoner perspectives in an African prison.

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Ubumi's project for the seriously ill was started based on my findings during the fieldwork ([www.ubumi.dk](http://www.ubumi.dk)). One cannot mention Ubumi without mentioning Lena Kresojevic. Lena, initially a MA student I supervised (on a voluntary basis), turned into a friend and project manager for Ubumi. Thank you for everything!

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Anne

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## Brief introduction to the study

Prisons are places of punishment – and they are associated with extreme deprivation, stigma, isolation and lack of social recognition from the surrounding society. In this sense, prisons are places of social abandonment. Prisoners will experience and struggle to cope differently in this challenging environment.

Despite the characterization of these places as abject and stigmatized, incarcerated men continue to seek social recognition, as they struggle to survive physically, socially and psychologically. This study aims to break new ground, as it will explore the complex interplay between social constructions of recognition, prisoner experiences, coping strategies for survival, and sexual risk behaviour.

The purpose of the study is to strengthen the knowledge base of imprisonment in a Sub-Saharan African prison, specifically in relation to prisoner experiences and coping strategies. Further, the aim is to provide research based knowledge to aid the facilitation of increased political and public



awareness and knowledge based interventions to address prison pain and for prevention of HIV/AIDS in prisons.

## **My motivation**

With this PhD I wish to contribute to a much more nuanced understanding of what the experiences of imprisonment are, and how individuals must employ - sometimes radical - survival strategies. Ben Crewe argues that even if social scientists often analyse prisons and prisoners, rarely are the voices of prisoners heard (Crewe 2012). In agreement with his call for prisoners' voices, I as much as possible attempt to allow space for prisoners' narrations in the following chapters.

A cross-cutting theme for this PhD is *what matters* to Zambian prisoners. The question will not be asked outright throughout the dissertation, but it remains an underlying and always-relevant question that I asked myself when I collected and analysed my material. My motivation for this study has always been as much practical as intellectual. I was curious to learn about the inner workings of the prison, and I was curious to understand what individuals went through. I was also curious to find out if I could suggest ways to make tangible improvements in everyday prison life. I am a prison activist (being the managing director of a small prisons NGO providing humanitarian and development aid to prison with a focus on health<sup>1</sup>) as well as a researcher. For me this meant a strong focus on what I would consider to be relevant knowledge for empirically grounded researchers, professionals and activists on the ground. The purpose of this PhD is therefore to communicate prisoner perspectives to the research community, and to inform

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ubumi.dk](http://www.ubumi.dk)

Zambian policy makers and prison practitioners, including the Correctional Services, international partners and NGO's of how prison is experienced and lived by the people placed in them.

### Imprisonment in Sub-Saharan Africa

World prison population levels – continental totals and rates		
Continent (country)	Prison population totals	Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national populations)
AFRICA	1,038,735	94
AMERICAS	3,780,528	387
ASIA	3,897,797	92
EUROPE	1,585,348	192
OCEANIA	54,726	140
WORLD	10,357,134	144
Zambia	19,000+ (2016)	125

Except for Europe (and this mainly because rates of incarceration have decreased in Russia and Eastern Europe) and Africa, incarceration rates around the world are increasing but more in some areas than in others. The Oceania and the Americas take the lead with increases of 59% and 40% since 2000. In the Americas, it is particularly the USA that leads in terms of numbers incarcerated. Africa's incarceration rates are also increasing but less so than the

general population increase. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in prison population totals of 15%<sup>2</sup> since 2000, which puts pressure on the prison systems (Walmsley 2016).

Prisons were imposed by the colonial powers and were solely a place of punishment. Although there were some movements towards a reformist model inspired by developments in the West, racial stereotypes prevailed. Poor sanitation, nutrition, clothing combined with overcrowding and corporal punishment was the rule. Doing time in prison was experienced as degrading, and those who entered prison expected to be stripped of their social and physical integrity as well as of spiritual protection. Whipping sentences generally endured until the 1930s, only to be replaced by cane beating. Physical punishment was imposed as hybrid sentences borrowing from African and Western punitive regimes. Whipping for instance was justified as a modern standardised form of punishment, deemed to replace traditions of bodily mutilation, stoning or death (Bernault in Dikötter and Brown 2007). Today, we see practices of caning being reduced or even disappearing in some countries (Martin 2013).

Dikötter argues that prisons like all institutions were not simply imposed by colonial powers, but were reinvented/transformed locally (Dikötter et al. 2007). Bernault argues, however, that although prisons were certainly adapted and reinvented locally, this was mainly done so by colonisers, making prisons less reformist in nature compared to the European system, and making the prison experience

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<sup>2</sup> It is 25% if Rwanda is included in the numbers, but I have excluded them here because they skew the general picture due to the genocide of 1994 and the mass incarcerations that followed.



extremely harsh (Bernault in Dikötter and Brown 2007). Certainly, we see strong remnants of the colonial legacy in the prisons of Southern Africa today. In many countries, most prisons were built in colonial times, and today they are dilapidated and worn down buildings, yet hold thousands of prisoners. Creation of adequate infrastructure has not followed the significant increase in people incarcerated, which has led to less than optimal conditions of imprisonment. Historically, it has also taken longer to move from the more punitive to the correctional approach in which reform of the prisoner receives a stronger focus (Bernault in Dikötter and Brown 2007).

According to the United Nations Special rapporteur on Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, there is a global crisis of conditions in detention. With only few exceptions, torture is practised globally in detention facilities, and the conditions under which inmates serve their sentences are grotesque. The UN Special Rapporteur writes:

*In many countries of the world, places of detention are constantly overcrowded, and filthy locations, where tuberculosis and other highly contagious diseases are rife (...) (They) lack the minimum facilities necessary to allow for a dignified existence*  
(UN Special Rapporteur, 3 Aug 2009, para. 39)

### **Zambian prisons**

Zambia has 87 prisons, of which 33 are 'open air' or farm prisons and 54 are 'standard' prisons. There are two reformatory institutions for juveniles. Female sections are placed in physical connection with some male prisons, but males and females are separated. The official

capacity of the prisons was 5,500 in 2011. An extra prison has been constructed since then, and plans for more constructions are underway.

In 2016, the prison population reached an all-time high of more than 19,000 inmates. In Zambia, the overcrowding is more than 400% of capacity in some prisons. Hygiene is poor, with soap and detergents rarely distributed by the authorities. The diet is poor; breakfast consists of rice, and lunch/dinner is combined in one meal consisting of beans or dried fish with nshima (a kind of thick maize porridge). The food is of poor quality, the amount of food is insufficient, and many go hungry. Malnutrition and general poor health is common. Prisoners cannot survive in the longer term on the diet provided by Correctional Service alone and relies on family or others to support them. However, many are abandoned by their families and have very few or no social networks, which leaves them vulnerable in the prison system (Human Rights Watch 2010, CARITAS 2007, Todrys 2011, Zambia Prisons Service 2015).

There is evidence of verbal and physical abuse, including beatings by staff and between inmates. As a disciplinary measure, prisoners who have committed an offence inside prison may be locked up in so-called penal blocks, where they are denied food, forced to be naked for hours or days, denied baths, and have no access to toilets. Levels of abuse vary between prisons, often depending on the attitude of those in command. Importantly, many prisoners have suffered torture and inhumane treatment before they reach the prisons, namely in the detention facilities at the police stations (Zambia Human Rights Commission 2013). In the 2010's Zambia Correctional Service claimed to have abandoned the practice of penal blocks

entirely, yet the practise persisted in one of the prisons in this study up to 2016, where it was finally abandoned with the change in leadership in that prison. According to the Zambia Human Rights Commission:

*Respondents, however, revealed that torture in Zambia is rife and takes many forms such as beatings using slaps, caning, hitting using a gun butt, whipping etc. Sometimes, the torture takes the form of detention in inhumane conditions, threat of death and harm to relatives. Some extreme forms of torture have been described as hanging someone upside down by the legs, tying people to trees while threatening to shoot them, verbal attacks, starvation and physical isolation. (Zambia Human Rights Commission 2013, p 32)*

Lengthy periods of incarceration, including long remand times, are the rule in Sub-Saharan prisons. I have spoken to several remand prisoners in Zambia who had waited up to seven years for a trial<sup>3</sup>, and long remand times have been documented (Paralegal Alliance Network February 2008, Human Rights Watch 2010). As seen in the above chart, remand prisoners and pre-trials detainees constitute more than 25% of the prison population. It has not been possible to access recent figures on detainees in police cells. These groups contribute significantly to overcrowding in prisons. Very few organisations provide legal aid or paralegal aid<sup>4</sup> and they are able to

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<sup>3</sup> Focus group Lusaka

<sup>4</sup> Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) and The Zambia Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) provide legal/para-legal aid.

take on only few individual cases (Paralegal Alliance Network, February 2008). Prisoners (and prison staff) consider the long remand times and lack of legal support as extremely unjust. This situation contributes immensely to a chronic feeling of uncertainty and causes extreme tension in individuals and between prisoners (Jefferson 2009).

Overcrowding contributes to poor health. The sleeping conditions, where 120-180 inmates share a space of approximately 40 square metres, provide optimal breeding grounds for opportunistic infections. Fungal infections, scabies and lice are common and contribute to the stress of incarceration. Depending on the space available and the individual prison, prisoners may sit either squatted or lie head to toe. When squatted, one prisoner leans up against another prisoner in the same position, and with a third person between his legs, and so forth, resting against his chest from early evening to the next morning. The poor conditions contribute to severe physical ailments of stiff joints, muscular pain, oedemas and problems with blood circulation. Access to quality health care remains low and arbitrary. Unnecessary suffering due to ill-health is common, as are deaths which could have been avoided. AIDS related disease and tuberculosis is common, as are various forms of diarrhoea which also regularly cause otherwise avoidable deaths (Ubumi Prisons Initiative June 2015).

Boredom and idleness is another factor contributing to the stressful environment. Even if Zambia Correctional Service attempts to provide schooling (with inmates teaching other inmates) and vocational training, only a minority of prisoners can access these

services at any given time.<sup>5</sup> This means that many prisoners go idle, and this together with the conditions of imprisonment and personal circumstances provide a fertile ground for stress, anxiety and depression (Sarkin 2008, Liebling and Maruna 2005).

Mental health is a major issue in prisons globally (Simenda 2013, Mayeya et al 2004, Mwape et al 2010, CARITAS 2007, Sarkin 2008, Liebling and Maruna 2005, Birmingham 2003). Zambia Human Rights Commission noted psychological trauma in almost every case encountered (Zambia Human Rights Commission 2013). A study conducted in Lusaka Central Prison and published in 2011 documented a prevalence of mental health issues in that 63% of prisoners had at least one mental disorder (Nseluke and Siziya 2011). Another study on the same issue conducted in Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre showed a prevalence of 29% (Nseluke and Siziya 2016). This finding is consistent with other studies from the West that show a lower prevalence in higher security institutions. Nseluke and Siziya suggest that the pre-trial status of many prisoners in medium institutions adds on to the stress of incarceration and has an impact on mental health (Nseluke and Siziya 2016).

In May 2014, the overcrowding in Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre hit an all-time high (even if the all-time high was even higher a year later), and here prisoners described to me how some inmates *just died like that for no reason. He just took a deep breath and was dead.*

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<sup>5</sup> Own observations

There is little doubt that Zambia Correctional Service struggles live up to its mission statement:

*To effectively and efficiently provide and maintain humane custodial and correctional services to inmates and to increase industrial and agricultural production in order to contribute to the well-being and reform of inmates and maintenance of internal security (Ministry of Home Affairs and Zambia Prisons Service 2008, p 5)*

Even if human rights reports of various kinds document very real problems found in the prisons and places of detention, it is important not to understand the information they provide as unbiased facts, or as completely representative of what happens in all prisons or to all prisoners. The aim and mandate of human rights reports are to bring wrongs out into the open, which is certainly justified. However, some reports such as the 2015 Human Rights Report by the US government paints with very broad brush strokes, and arguably overlooks the important progress made in the prisons in recent years in terms of a stronger awareness and adherence to human rights amongst staff, and the increase in health staff in prisons (see an example of this: United States Department of State 2015). For example, in 2011, there was only one clinical officer in Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre. Today, there are two, plus a nurse, a pharmaceutical technician and a physiotherapist. In the bigger prisons, at least, progress has been made, but these are rarely reflected in human rights reports.

## **Prisons, health and HIV/AIDS**

Prisoners are one of the most vulnerable yet overlooked risk groups in terms of HIV infection (UNAIDS, UNODC and World Bank UNAIDS 2008). HIV surveillance has been the most common form of HIV research in prisons, but most HIV prevalence studies have been conducted in high-income countries. Globally, however, prisoners constitute individuals with greater risk factors for contracting HIV compared with the general population (Jürgens et al 2011).

HIV prevalence in Southern African prisons has been estimated to be from 2 to 50 times that of the general population. The highest prevalence of HIV is found in South Africa where estimates have placed the national prison population HIV prevalence rate at 41.4% (UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment 2009). Evidence, however, is often fragmented and generally not for national prisons rates but instead rates for selected prisons within a country. Yet there is little doubt the infection rates are high. AIDS related disease and HIV infection behind prison walls constitute a significant health problem in Africa and elsewhere (Singh 2007, Jolofani and deGabriele 1999, UNODC, UNAIDS and World Bank 2008, Onyemocho 2014, Jürgens et al 2011).<sup>6</sup> There are several sources of HIV transmission in prisons, such as tattooing, shaving and drug injection with non-sterile equipment, violence (with exchange of blood). However, at least in most Southern African countries, the main source of infection is through sexual intercourse (Jürgens et al 2011, Simooya 2010).

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<sup>6</sup>Read more on <http://www.avert.org/prisoners-hiv aids.htm>

Most inmates return to their communities after release. Therefore, not only is it highly desirable to prevent HIV in the prison setting, but HIV in prison populations pose a challenge for general public health, as the disease will spread at even higher rates. Often, the people who are in prison have not had access to sufficient information on HIV prior to incarceration, and they constitute a group that is termed hard-to-reach. Preventive programmes in prisons have shown significant effect, even if they could have been even more effective if it had been possible to promote condom use (UNODC, UNAIDS and World Bank 2008, Onyemocho 2014, Jürgens et al 2011). Condoms are mostly forbidden in African prisons for a complexity of cultural, historical, political, religious and legal reasons – apart from in South Africa (and a few other countries) (Epprecht 2004, Epprecht 2008).

The conditions under which human beings are incarcerated play a vital role if one is to understand how incarceration affects people psychologically, socially and physically. The same conditions play a major role if one is to understand the psychological, social and physical dynamics contributing to how and why HIV is spread in prisons.

### **Narrowing in on this study**

Prisons in Africa are understudied and poorly understood. Perhaps surprisingly, amongst the research produced, there has been very little focus on prisoner perspectives. Rather, most studies focus on prison staff and other more institutional perspectives. This PhD aims to make an important contribution to the field of prisons research in Africa by exploring how inmates experience imprisonment, and how they – within the limited options available – struggle for physical,



social and psychological survival. Prisoner perspectives are essential if we are to understand how imprisonment affects human lives during incarceration. If we understand prisoner perspectives, we will be closer to making meaningful change.

Inmates in the Zambian prisons live under circumstances that place them under severe stress. Prison conditions such as overcrowding, lack of food, ill health, as well as loss of liberty, stigma and isolation from family and loved ones all contribute to placing inmates in a situation where they must struggle hard to survive in both psychological, social and physical terms. This research aims to explore how inmates experience this adversity and how they struggle to survive, including how sexual relations for some may be part of this struggle.

As seen in the above, HIV and AIDS remain a significant problem in the Zambian prisons, and calls for urgent attention to understand the process leading to new infections. An in-depth understanding as to why some prisoners may contract HIV inside prison is an important step towards addressing the problem and protecting inmates from infection. Contracting HIV can be said to be more of a process than an event, and therefore it is important to look at HIV transmission in terms that look beyond the sexual act (Krebs 2002).

Interestingly, sex between men occurs despite the considerable stigma against the practise (Epprecht 2004) and even though inmates in the Zambian prisons are more knowledgeable about HIV than the general population outside of prison (Simoooya 2010). Certain factors and practices place certain individuals at risk of contracting HIV, and

psychological and socio-economic vulnerability are some of them.<sup>7</sup> In agreement with Krebs, I believe that:

*Contracting HIV is more of a process than an event, and understanding this process both substantively and theoretically will assist in the effort to make risky events less common and/or less dangerous. Reducing the risk, and ultimately the incidence of infection, will improve not only inmate health but also public health (...)* (Krebs 2002, p 22).

To grasp how inmates experience imprisonment, and how they struggle to survive and to hold on to a sense of self, this dissertation will draw upon two concepts, identity and recognition, in combination with a number of more empirically grounded studies. This study is inspired by Honneth's concept of recognition and identity in the way that it has helped me think about how to analyse prisoner experiences, and how inmates struggle for a sense of recognition in a place where recognition of even fundamental humanity is hard to come by. I use his concepts intuitively, situating them with other more grounded theories based on empirical studies and adapting them to my case.

## **Research questions**

The study posed the following research question:

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/prevention/reduce-your-risk/who-is-at-risk-for-hiv/> and <http://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/exchange/2013/01/comorbidities.aspx>

*How do incarcerated men survive imprisonment psychologically and socially, and how do sexual relations play into this struggle for survival?*

The analysis will shed light on the research question, through an analysis of these working questions:

1. What characterises the experience of imprisonment in a Zambian prison?
2. How do inmates survive incarceration, particularly socially and psychologically?
3. How do sexual relations play into the struggle for psychological, social and physical survival?

The aim of the study is:

- To strengthen the knowledge base of imprisonment in a Sub-Saharan African prison, in particular in relation to prisoner experiences and coping strategies. This area is remarkably understudied and provides the opportunity to shed light on very fundamental features of how individuals are affected by extreme situations, specifically incarceration.
- To provide research-based knowledge to aid the facilitation of increased political and public awareness and knowledge-based interventions for improved conditions and health, in particular prevention of HIV/AIDS.

## 2 ANALYTICAL INSPIRATION:

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### **Identity and the Struggle for Recognition**

*A normative point of departure – for Honneth and for this dissertation*

Honneth's theory of recognition offers one of the most coherent and convincing theories of the link between recognition and identity today (Willig 2007, Zurn 2015). Honneth takes a point of departure in critical theory and social philosophy and builds his normative theory on many influences ranging from psychology, sociology, history and political theory. He is a third-generation scholar of the influential Frankfurt School, where the second-generation Jürgen Habermas has been his mentor and has played an important role for Honneth's theoretical development. The single most influential scholar in Honneth's work is Georg W. F. Hegel with whom Honneth shares the focus on social character of human personality and intersubjectivity (Zurn 2015), a concept which will be explored further on the following pages. However, his influences are broad and include George Herbert Mead, and Honneth's theory is fundamentally interdisciplinary (Honneth 1995, Zurn 2015).

#### *Identity and recognition*

Honneth creates a strong link between recognition and identity, as recognition is seen as fundamental for identity formation, and the lack of it will affect identity and consequently behaviour and the possibility of self-realization. The development of identity is not an individual project independent from the social world in which the

individual navigates. Rather, recognition is an inter-subjective and mutual process between individuals and within a community (Honneth 1995). Zurn sums it up:

*Individuals only become who they are in and through relations of mutual recognition with others. In short, persons gain subjectivity only inter-subjectively. Only, when individuals receive positive acknowledgement from others of their own personal traits, standings and abilities can individuals begin to see themselves as others do and thereby gain an efficacious sense-of-self. Mutual recognition, according to Honneth, characterizes a whole range of intersubjective relations: between parents and children, between lovers and friends, between legal subjects, between participants in labor markets, between commodity consumers and producers between fellow citizens, between men and women, between members of different ethnicities and races, between members of various civil society organizations, between democratic actors and so on.*  
(Zurn 2015, p 6)

To develop a 'good' and full identity, according to Honneth, the individual needs recognition in three spheres: 1) Love (initially parental love, later understood as loved ones) 2) Legally institutionalized relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, and 3) 'Ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*), which entails networks of solidarity and shared values within a community. Love lays the foundation for self-confidence. Rights provide the

foundation for self-respect, and self-esteem can be ensured in the third sphere through mutual solidarity. Each sphere corresponds to the risk of a certain kind of disrespect which will affect self-confidence, self-respect and/or self-esteem. Honneth formulated how disrespect in any or all of the spheres can injure or even destroy to a person's identity (Honneth 1995).

*Because the normative self-image of each and every individual human being – his or her 'me' as Mead put it – is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse. (Honneth 1995, p 131-2)*

In this way, individuals are fundamentally dependent on others' recognition for both construction and maintenance of their identity and sense of self as a person of value.

The most fundamental sphere is love – in the family and close relations. This sphere relates mainly to the parent-child relationship and other close relationships, such as partners and close friends. In particular, in relation the first sphere, Honneth draws on psychoanalytic research. Honneth is inspired by the psychologist Donald Winnicott who developed the term 'good enough mothering' (Honneth 1995). Winnicott argues that the child will develop and mature in the relationship with its caregiver, and that the extent to which the child's needs are met plays a vital role in terms of the child's capacity to express needs without fear of being abandoned. If

the fundamental need for love and care is met, the child will develop self-confidence, which is a condition for self-realization. However, this self-confidence does not constitute an impenetrable shell; and throughout an adult's life, there will still be threats to its integrity in the shape of disrespect (Winnicott 1960, Honneth 1995).

According to Honneth, disrespect relating to this sphere can take on many forms. Some are more serious than others, but the most serious are threats to physical integrity, such as deprivation of the opportunity to freely dispose over his/her own body. Honneth exemplifies this with torture and rape to show which kind of injuries severely affect self-confidence (Honneth 1995).

The second sphere of Honneth's theory is concerned with rights and respect in society. Respect of the individual's basic rights protects his/her autonomy. Rights are connected to identity in the way that rights in society ensure a sense of self-respect for the individual. Rights and respect is concerned with being equal under the law, and all enjoying the same rights. Inclusion in society is central to this sphere of recognition, as well as freedom from discrimination of any kind (Ibid).

According to Honneth, the state should be impartial when delivering these fundamental rights to its citizens. The idea is that self-respect as well as self-realization can be achieved if one learns to recognize others as humans with rights just as oneself. This, however, does not mean that law-breakers shall not be held accountable for their actions, as he argues that most individuals are able and obliged to act morally and rationally. Therefore, they will also have to face justice if they break the law. They should not be stripped of fundamental

rights, but law breakers should face the consequences of their actions through for instance having their liberty limited (Ibid).

Being awarded fundamental rights is therefore a prerequisite for achieving a 'full identity', and subsequently for successful self-realization. It does not mean that a person without rights cannot have self-respect, but Honneth argues that the fullest form of self-respect cannot be realized, if one is not recognized in this sphere. In this sense, respect and rights cannot be separated: rights are a prerequisite for respect, and respect cannot exist without rights. Rights are fundamental, but they vary over time and place, although they are not completely relative. In short, social, civil and political rights are 'rights' in Honneth's terms, and the denial of such rights can result in the injury or collapse of the individual's identity. Disrespect in this sphere is that of being structurally denied certain rights within a society. This leads to a loss of self-respect, because the ability to relate to oneself as an equal partner in society is not possible, and this causes injuries to identity (Ibid).

Honneth's third sphere of recognition is concerned with recognition as esteem. Esteem is different from respect in the way that esteem should be awarded individuals on the basis of their unique characteristics. It is about finding your own place and making your own contributions, whatever they may be. Every society and community has its own value system in which individuals are awarded esteem based on their contributions to the common good. This form of recognition manifests in self-esteem. Solidarity between individuals and shared values are at the core of this sphere. The third sphere is then, as are the other spheres, a prerequisite for developing a full identity, and for self-realization (Ibid).



If one is robbed of group solidarity through not being able to fill one's mode of life with positive significance, this will deny the person the ability to attribute social value to his or her own abilities, and consequently the individual's self-esteem will suffer. Honneth describes how studies have shown that the after-effects of such violations are often described as psychological or social death or as 'scars' or 'injuries'. These violations endanger, damage or destroy the identity of the individuals (Honneth 1995). Trauma psychology similarly claim that trauma affects identity. Often, individuals will tell a negative story about themselves upon experiencing trauma, such as 'I was not strong enough, I am helpless to protect myself' etc., which has severe implications for self-perception and identity (Ibid).

#### *Experience, identity and recognition*

Much in line with Honneth's thinking, narrative psychologists Crossley (Crossley 2000) and Jarvis argue that identity and self is not a static thing but will develop and change over a lifetime. It is a process which is not only an internal psychological development, but rather something which happens as a process of interaction between the individual, other individuals, the community and society as a whole (Jarvis 2006).

Identity is a product of meaning in this way because it is produced by meanings and interpretations. One's 'identity' is heavily influenced by how other people view you, and these views will be reflected internally in some way. The self is seen as an interactional process of dialogue between different images of self, taken from the past, the future, and affected by responses from significant and generalized others. Jarvis argues:

*We are what we think and do, but we are also what we have learned and remember. But what we do affects the way others identify us, and it is this that allows them to identify us which, in its turn affects our self-identity. Our minds are the storehouse of our memories of the complexities of the lives we have led and are leading, so that our identities are a complex interplay of self and social – what I see myself to be, what I do and the person others see me to be. As this process continues, we learn a sense of self identity. However, our identity is not just our store of memories, it is also about the way that people treat us as persons and what we learn about ourselves from this (...). Finally, our identities are affected by the spaces that we occupy (...). Significantly, ourselves and our identities are learned phenomena (Jarvis 2006, p 48).*

So, identities are learned and not given, and culture and identity will form a more or less conscious filter of how to understand the world and one's own position in it – which again shapes the perceived options for agency (Jarvis 2006). According to Illeris, human beings are to a large extent a product of their earlier experiences. Their past will be brought into every new experience and will be used to process new experiences (Illeris 2000).

Lack of recognition can be understood as repressive. If a group is presented with a negative image of themselves, this image can be assimilated or cause a negative self-identity. Alternatively, this group will have to engage in a process of fighting this negative identity.

Honneth gives examples of various groups having fought negative stereotypes and achieved significantly more recognition. Examples would be the colonies fighting for independence, the former slaves fighting for freedom, or groups fighting for LGBTI<sup>8</sup> rights (Honneth 1995).

The risk of downplaying the individual's role follows with Honneth's focus on society and its exclusion mechanisms. With many of the great thinkers – Foucault, Honneth and Goffman, to name a few – there is an important focus on society or social context, and on how the social context shapes the individual's identity. Yet Honneth with his strong focus on identity formation offers a lens through which we can aim to understand more about both the destructiveness of imprisonment as a social structure, but also about how the individual responds. Even if Honneth himself does not focus much on the individual, his concepts of recognition and identity may offer important lessons on how individuals respond to imprisonment more specifically in terms of how they experience imprisonment, and how they are affected, and ultimately cope (or fail to cope). His theory offers a comprehensive approach to how recognition and identity are linked, and in this way, contributes to an analysis of what prisoners face when they struggle to cope with the destructive prison environment.

To me it has been helpful to understand what prisoners experience through Honneth's lens. In my view, his focus on recognition and identity speak strongly to my material, as we shall see in the following chapters. This PhD aims to use Honneth's theory to cast light on the

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<sup>8</sup> LGBTI: Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender/sexual and Intersex

social processes taking place in prison under circumstances that are not only destructive for the individual's identity but certainly also place stress on even the most basic feature of human life – survival. In this way, we are not only looking for a snapshot of prison life but attempt also to look at experiences and social processes. The fundamental basis for the study is that incarcerated men act within and navigate through the social system of the prison in ways that are meaningful to them in their struggles.

Honneth speaks of injuries to identity and even destruction of identity. These are powerful words, but perhaps they fall short of explaining what this structural damage to identity actually entails for the individual both in the short and long term. What is an injury to identity exactly, and how are these injuries experienced? Can injuries be conquered? Can one or does one learn to live with injuries? How do individuals deal with these injuries and how do they cope, if they cope at all? In the coming chapters, we shall explore some of these questions.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

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#### *INTRODUCTION*

A solid methodological foundation is necessary when conducting fieldwork and interviewing vulnerable groups, such as people in prison, about their lives and sensitive subjects such as sexuality. Serious and systematic considerations concerning ethics and interviewing methodology are fundamental to collecting data in a responsible way. This chapter explores and examines the process of and challenges associated with data collection, the principles and practices of interviewing methods, reflections on emotions in field work, and finally the limitations of the study.

#### *Data collection*

The study was from the outset grounded in a wish to understand – people’s stories, their past and present, and their coping strategies in terms of how to survive imprisonment physically, psychologically and socially. This study is based on a combination of interviewing data and ethnographic observations, but with the main emphasis on life story interviews.

The nature of the crime committed was not in focus, unless it carried a particular significance in terms of the informant’s life story. Rather, attention was on understanding values, patterns, ruptures, changes in their lives – and the significance of those in relation to coping strategies and sexual risk behaviour.

To begin this work, I had to gain access to a closed institution. Since the field of research is sensitive and controversial, I will explain how I approached the authorities and how I finally gained access.

### *Gaining access*

Gaining access to prisons is difficult all over the world. Yet I had an advantage in Zambia because before I commenced on the PhD research, I had already worked with Zambia Correctional Service in a different capacity. I had worked as a UN programme officer for UNAIDS, the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, where I was responsible for providing technical support to HIV/AIDS policy and strategy development. I had also started a private initiative, which later developed into the NGO 'Ubumi Prisons Initiative', where I and Zambian partners worked to secure improved nutrition and health for circumstantial children in prison (children aged 0-4 born or brought in prison with their mothers). When I started my work for UNAIDS in 2005, I was received with deep suspicion, but with time a relationship of trust developed. During a recent visit, the Deputy Commissioner with whom I worked closely as a UN Programme Officer said that I now had a free rein to enter prison. A kind exaggeration, yet nevertheless an indication of how the working relationship has developed over the years.

Yet entering prisons to do academic research proved to be a challenge because of the closed nature of prisons, and the sensitivity of the issue of sex in prison.

### *Ethical Clearance*

The first step in terms of official permission to conduct an academic study is gaining clearance from the Bio-Medical Ethics Committee at

the University of Zambia. A proposal was submitted stating what the research was about, including interviewing men about sexuality and sexual risk behaviour. They approved the project after several months of processing the request, contingent on a letter of approval by Ministry of Home Affairs.

Only a few months prior to my proposal, Human Rights Watch had done research in Zambian prisons which was widely publicized. The study was of high quality but was also very direct and pointed to a number of human rights violations, including the use of penal blocks: this is a common form of torture in African prisons, where an inmate is placed in isolation in a small cell, receives only very little food, and perhaps water is poured on the floor up to the ankle or knee, the inmate has to sit naked for days in the cell without access to a toilet. The Zambian government was embarrassed at the public revelations. At the launch of the report, the government quickly announced the abolition of penal blocks and a will to make changes to conditions in general. Behind the scenes, the system was shocked that a study such as this had ever received approval in the first place. The government and particularly the Ministry of Home Affairs was deeply embarrassed.

So, when the application for this study was submitted to the ministry, the decision was – even if it was an academic study – to refuse access. The process was stalled for months, and finally a letter by the Permanent Secretary in Ministry of Home Affairs arrived, referring to the impossibility of conducting the study ‘due to prison being a security institution’. The expression ‘security’ is one often used and misused in the prisons to assert dominance over outsiders as well as prisoners.

After having mobilized contacts in international organisations to no avail, it turned out to be Zambia Correctional Service itself that opened doors. I had previously worked closely with a prisons HQ officer who had since risen in the ranks. After he became involved, the formal permission went through in a matter of days. He expressed that he had enjoyed working with me, and that they trusted me. I am aware that I have to keep earning and honouring that trust – also in terms of disseminating results carefully.

## Site, sample and the research team

### *Site and sample*

The fieldwork took place in January/February 2011, December 2011, January/February 2013, May 2013 and finally in November/December 2013, a total of four months. Over the three years, 15 ex-prisoners, 72 prisoners and 10 staff members in Lusaka Central Prison in Lusaka and Mukobeko Maximum and Medium prisons in Kabwe were interviewed by a research team consisting of myself and four research assistants. After 2013, I have frequently visited the prisons, and I have regularly followed up on issues pertaining to the PhD. The episodic nature of the fieldwork of coming and going





proved an advantage in terms of building relationships with staff and prisoners. Like Tomas Martin (Martin 2013) experienced in his studies of the Ugandan Prisons Service, 'coming back' shows commitment and fosters relationships in the longer term. Every time I returned, staff and inmates' confidence in me increased. I am convinced that the fact that I kept coming back over a couple of years to the same prison and the same people (thankfully, the current command in both HQ and in Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre stayed the same) showed not only commitment, but also served to prove that I was not 'telling on them' to the media or anyone else and revealing anything that would create problems for them.

### *The research team*

Due to the fact that the individuals interviewed in this research are potentially highly vulnerable, because of the nature of their life situation, a lot of care has to be put into how to approach the topic and deal with issues that arise, not to mention how to train research assistant to do the same.

In January 2011 I recruited a team of four Zambian research assistants. They came from very different professional backgrounds, and had varying experience with research and qualitative studies. I hired for instance a former diplomat, a finance student with research assistance experience, and a clinical officer/counsellor. I trained them all thoroughly over three days in social science methodology, narrative and life story interviewing and interviewing trauma victims. Importantly, we spent significant time on the ethics of interviewing, in particular on the importance of approaching all informants from the perspective of fundamental human rights, i.e. human dignity. It was very important to convey to them how judgment of any kind was

not allowed. On the first trip, three men and one woman were selected as assistants, all from different ethnic groups speaking common Zambian languages. One of the men was an ex-prisoner, and performed the role of ice-breaker, but did not conduct interviews, but he still received the training.

‘The ice breaker’ is a former prisoner himself who runs a successful NGO working for human rights of prisoners. He facilitated a lot of the work, and in the beginning when the ‘do’s and the don’ts’ were not yet as clear to me, he was very useful in providing advice and general assistance. He would introduce the informants (the prisoners) to us, the interviewers, and encourage them to open up and feel confident that everything they revealed would stay confidential. This approach worked well. Later, he became too busy to participate, but by then we were known faces in prison so it was no longer necessary to have an icebreaker.

Unfortunately, one assistant turned out to be a poor interviewer. He could not follow the guidelines provided, particularly in terms of ethics, for instance by making judgments and in terms of promising things he did not deliver. I spent significant time trying to correct his technique, but he was unfortunately unable to develop his skills further. I have discarded all his interviews (15) in terms of data analysis. I did not get the impression that informants were traumatized by his behaviour, but his questions were much too leading to be used in a project strict on methodology.

On the last two trips, I used only female assistants simply because they happened to be the best interviewers. Williams and Heikes challenge assumptions of the non-applicability of cross-gender

research and instead propose an awareness of how gender may affect the stories told (Williams and Heikes 1993). My initial concern about whether men would open up to women turned out not to be relevant. We discovered that inmates were likely to open up with any (sensitive and empathetic) interviewer, eager to be able to share their stories.

### *Selection and interviewing*

On the first trip, I was unsure of whether I could make demands on the categories of prisoners I wanted to interview and I was concerned that if I made too strong demands, I would be sanctioned in some way by staff. Additionally, I was not sure if the prisoners actually wanted to speak to me at all. I therefore started carefully by simply asking officers to identify prisoners who were willing to be interviewed, and who were serving varying lengths of time in prison. During the first visit, I had the sense that they largely picked 'nice' guys out with some rank (i.e. prisoners with a level of trust and responsibility). Yet the informants were very different, and they provided me with useful information and, in a sense, the experience served as a gentle introduction to research in prisons.

With time my focus turned increasingly to Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre. Even if it is the most guarded prison in terms of security and cautiousness, with time it became possible to identify informants quite freely. After the first visit, we moved on to what could be described as almost-random selection, where we selected informants reflecting prisoner demographics. Informants were identified from different categories: condemned, lifers, long, medium, and short term convicts, and finally remandees and juveniles. We made sure to speak to members of all age groups, with

the exception of inmates over the age of 56 of which there are very few. According to oral information from an officer in HQ, the average age of inmates is 32. The average age of informants for this study was almost 34 years old.

We did not actively seek out foreign nationals such as prohibited immigrants, other than once when we interviewed five. They were not a specific focus of the research, but nor were they excluded. Interviewing them posed some language barriers because their English and/or Zambian language skills were often poor. We did not make a selection based on ethnic group, but the affiliation of each informant was recorded, and there are no indications of ethnic misrepresentation in the data material, probably also because the Maximum Security facility has inmates from all over the country.

There are no demographic data on education amongst prisoners in Zambian prisons, but attention was given to selecting persons with different levels of education. The average level of education of the informants was schooling up to grade 9, but we interviewed everybody from people with no education to people with academic degrees.



*Carol Chomba (research assistant, Anne Egelund (author) and Namasiku Wakunuma (research assistant)*

A general impression is that education levels are low amongst prisoners, and that inmates generally come from poor backgrounds (a worldwide trend) (Moore et al 2008, Jefferson 2014).<sup>9</sup> The fact that a large number of the informants were from Mukobeko Maximum Security Correctional Centre (which contains inmates serving long sentences) means that many informants had been incarcerated for years. This meant that many inmates had advanced *inside* prison in terms of education up to and including secondary school, and this probably contributes to the relatively high education average amongst our informants. At the time of the interviews, 25 informants had less than seven years of schooling, and three had no schooling at all. 33 inmates had between eight and 12 years of schooling, and 12 informants had education above secondary school, though only one by more than three years.

At times, we would pick out one or two informants in a less random fashion, if this person for one reason or another would be able to provide us with useful information. At other times, we decided to interview inmates who were particularly eager to be interviewed. Prisoners who actively sought us out were often inmates in acute crisis in need of help, but a few times a prisoner came forward with a wish to tell us something specific that he felt we might not know. Over time, we relied more on snowballing than random selection, as we wanted to speak to prisoners who would be able to provide knowledge of specific elements of prison life.

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<sup>9</sup> See also <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/10/incarceration.aspx>, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Many Zambians know some English, and it was often possible to interview people with next to no formal education in English without much difficulty. Those who were not able to speak English were interviewed in local languages (Bemba or Nyanja) by the research assistants. There are about 73 languages spoken in Zambia, but Bemba and Nyanja are the major languages, and most Zambians will know one of those languages. Only once or twice did we give up on interviewing a person, and they were immigrants or refugees.

Upon being selected, prisoners were informed of the purpose of the study and were given the opportunity to opt out. No one opted out, and most were disappointed if they were not selected. The informants signed an informed consent form after it had been read out aloud to them and questions clarified. At this point they were once more given the opportunity of opting out. Again, no one opted out.

We followed four informants closely over the three years to go deeper into their life stories and understand more about their development and coping strategies. These inmates were selected based on their availability, personal and social development, and ability to reflect and express themselves.

Interviews would last between 45 and 180 minutes, the average being 90 minutes. Giving the informants plenty of time meant that we had the opportunity of spending much time on each topic. Narrative interviewing also means asking for 'stories' (examples etc.), and here it was useful to have sufficient time. There were times when it became physically uncomfortable for the interviewers because we could not always eat (we did not eat in front of the prisoners, but

outside prison, which brought logistical challenges) or drink or just rest as much as we needed.

Prior to each visit, I developed a set of themes to be explored in the interviews. I would hand out a page of key words for the interviewers who, based on prior instructions, would be able to delve more deeply into for instance: 1) Everyday practices and routines, 2) Life trajectories, 3) Accounts of major opportunities and challenges of prison life, 4) Coping strategies and accounts of resilience, 5) Social relationships – for instance to staff, inmates and outside prison, 6) Accounts of masculinity ('definitions' about male identity and roles, and how these were affected by imprisonment) and 7) accounts of sexuality. It was not mandatory to get through the list, because that would depend of the willingness of the informant. The themes were deliberately not formulated as questions, because the main idea was that we ask the informant to tell us about his life, and the questions we asked would be using his words to explore further. An example of this:

*Informant: There are so many cruelties in prison*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me about these cruelties?*

*Informant: Yes, there is the sleeping conditions, lack of food, people sick and dying, sodomy...*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me more about the sleeping conditions.... (and so the interview would continue, asking for more and more details and experiences about the cruelties)*

I did not have much opportunity of ‘hanging around informally’ with prisoners without supervision, except on weekends when there were less staff and fewer activities. Then I would sit and chat with prisoners. A guard would linger in the background, but too far away to engage in conversation (because I asked them to stay away, but at other times, I would pay some attention to the staff and chat informally to build trust). During the last two visits in particular, was I able to sit, chat and relax with prisoners outside the chapel. Otherwise the observations took place as part of the daily routines. We took notes and recorded our impressions to the extent possible.

### **Ethics and integrity**

I ascribe to the ethical principles and code of conduct provided by the American Psychological Association.<sup>10</sup> But even if they are very useful and necessary guidelines, they are of course not designed specifically for researching prisons. As Meskell and Pels argue, ethical guidelines are useful but there is a need to engage *practically* with ethics. Ethics must be built into the research design and must guide the process throughout, but ethics are also situational in the sense that research design cannot stand alone, and the researcher will come across unforeseen challenges (Meskell and Pels, Ed. 2005).

Several times I found myself in situations where I had to make choices: of interfering, not interfering, acting or not acting, speaking out or keeping quiet, of addressing the inherent suspicion of outsiders, and of addressing the pressing needs of prisoners. An example would be when staff members would be rude to inmates

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<sup>10</sup> APA <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>



while I was there. I felt I had to avoid taking sides, especially if the staff member was high-ranking, and therefore could have authority over me. Only a few times did I challenge them openly.

Arguments made by Piacentini in her recent publication 'Integrity, always integrity' resonate well with the considerations I had before entering the prisons. She speaks of integrity as being honouring her word and showing integrity in her actions in her prison ethnography. She speaks of integrity being particularly important in prisons because of the very nature of prisons, and because the prison site cannot be anything but *destabilising for the researcher*. The researcher has to be able find ways to cope with the field, according to Piacentini. (Piacentini 2013, p 21)

Further, Piacentini argues for the researcher to be aware of what he or she stands for – in the sense of awareness as being fundamental to who the researcher is and why he or she chooses the particular field of prisons. So then, who am I? What do I stand for? Those are important yet quite challenging questions. In relationship to my research, in the following sections I try to shed some light on my key values in this particular study. These were professionalism, empathy and non-judgement, as well as being activist in terms of working to improve conditions in the correctional facilities (read more on this in the full PhD).

### **Challenges and how I addressed them**

Researching prisons comes with certain challenges in terms of access, in terms of protecting informants, in terms of confidentiality, in terms of upholding a level of ethics, and in terms of making observation, and more (Piacentini 2013, Piacentini 2004, Merotte 2012, Martin

2013, Drake and Harvey 2013, Jefferson, 2003). Below is my personal account of some of the challenges I encountered and the strategies I devised to address them.

### *Gaining access and building relationships in the individual prison*

It is one thing to gain access at HQ level, it is quite another in the actual prison. In the beginning, at least officers did not really know how to deal with this white woman who insisted on conducting confidential interviews alone with prisoners. Junior officers were quite a challenge. They seemed eager to show their power, and afraid of getting into trouble with their superiors – and they gave the impression of having endless curiosity.

Officers in Charge and Deputy Officers were another challenge, but usually only in the beginning. Hours spent conversing with officers is part of the work. They must know you to trust you, and spending time with them is a way of showing respect and building relationships. With time, careful friendships would develop and officers would share information with me based on their trust in me; they would want to contribute to the research while I developed a deeper understanding of the prison.

### *Resistance*

I have had to fight a few times for my right to access, and this is a common feature of prisons research (Martin 2013). I had permission from HQ, and prison staff must grant me access, but they fear the consequences of that access. They are particularly cautious of whites entering prisons, and they feared me reporting abuse or other things to HQ or going to the media.

With time, my ability to deal with officers improved. I would be chatty and friendly to show them that I was not 'against' them, and only if they tried to obstruct my work, would I become insistent. With time, I learnt that the best strategy was to ignore junior officers when they bark their orders. I simply proceeded with my plan. If they were too insistent on wanting to stop me, which was very rare, I would refer them to the Deputy Officer in Charge, Officer in Charge or even higher up the hierarchy. Usually, it would end there. I learned that being too submissive invites bullying. In a very plain language, releasing my frustrations, I write the below section in my notes:

*Sometimes – or actually very often – prison officers drive me mad. They are very different, and I don't know how I'd survive this if it weren't for (XX), who is so very nice and helpful.*

*They try to interfere with Siku's (research assistant) work a lot. Less so with my work, knowing that I am 'the boss'. Even so, they continue to have a thing about the door to the office, where I conduct the interviews, which I insist on keeping closed during the interviews. They want 1) to listen in, 2) to keep it open – 'for my protection', for security reasons – all that.*

*Then they come into the office to 'look for papers' or 'answer phones'. Today, there were no less than four phones, ringing on and off. It's possible that the visits are in part justified, but it's clear that they try to listen in. I stop the interview, not allowing them to hear a thing. Sigh(...). I do my usual thing, where I*

*sternly tell them, that I have permission from the highest place, and I will have no problem calling xx and talk to him about what they are doing to prevent me from conducting my work.*

*Then they come in and tell me, I have to stop my work for the day. I ignore them and continue, which drives them crazy, but frankly, I know they are just trying their luck. The prime example was when one officer on a THURSDAY comes into the office, telling me WEDNESDAY is a half day, and I therefore should stop.*

These interferences were not only disruptive and annoying to me, but obviously entailed consequences for my informants as well. I would therefore have to find ways to protect their boundaries.

As mentioned, some officers might try different things to obstruct the interviews. If they entered the office I was interviewing in, I responded by pausing the interview, and keeping completely quiet (and the informant too) while they were in the office, deliberately attempting to create an uncomfortable atmosphere, thereby signalling that they would learn nothing of the content of the interview. It felt like a battle of wills. After a number of interruptions with phones ringing, I told them that there could not be phones in the office. They made a point of not removing them on the day, but after that, it did not happen again. At other times, they would wait right outside the office used for interviewing, trying to overhear what went on. I would ask them to leave. If they did not, I asked them to go and speak to the Officer in Charge about them disrespecting my

permission to do confidential interviews. They did not return, but it happened repeatedly.

My Zambian assistants had more difficulties asserting their boundaries and protecting their informants. The officers found it easier to disrespect them, and as I was busy interviewing myself, it was not easy to intervene at the appropriate times. Sometimes, junior officers would shout at me and/or a prisoner, claiming I would not be safe with prisoners. The situations were dealt with by referring the officer to his superior.

On other occasions, the officers would insist on my wearing particular clothes (covering my shoulders, or wearing a chitenge, a piece of cloth tied around your waist and reaching the ankles). The requests were somewhat arbitrary, and I could find no other real pattern other than the individual officer's discretion. After some time, I invented my own guidelines which seemed to work quite well. If I entered the prison yard or outside of the reception/office area, I would wear the chitenge. I learnt to smile, and ignore them if they tried to convince me otherwise. At times, I had to enter into discussions, and sometimes I had to be quite steadfast. I am to this day certain these occurrences were a way for some junior officers to try to dominate me to see if I would give in. With a smile, a prisoner and friend said to me: *You're fearless. I even fear you when you become the strict school teacher. You're scary.* I was actually not fearless at all, but being assertive worked well.

Several officers have at several points in the process attempted to hinder the research. I have, however, been able to obtain the Deputy Commissioner's support when necessary. The Prison system is highly

hierarchical and a call from the Deputy Commissioner will generally pave the way in no time. I just had to be careful not to push the limits and make the Deputy Commissioner uncomfortable or annoyed by my calls. A change in command of Mukobeko prisons happened to be an advantage because the new leadership was significantly more open than before. The new management was easy to work with, and I encountered very few problems.

### *The challenge of making observations – the scene change*

There is little doubt that there was a scene change the moment the research team entered the prison. In the beginning there was hostility towards the research team, later openness and friendliness. High level staff were mostly relaxed and joked with inmates when I was around (junior officers' attitudes varied). Yet, repeatedly, inmates (and at times staff) explained that this was a front put up for 'my benefit' to get me to believe that officers were always 'good' to prisoners.

The scene change was less evident when my Zambian assistants would enter without me. They got more of a glimpse of how the atmosphere maybe simply because they were Zambians and cultural insiders. My 'whiteness' was an advantage sometimes in terms of receiving some respect (at least some of the time), but it also served as a disadvantage when staff felt a need to convey a certain picture. Yet I have the sense from observations and from my interviews with both staff and inmates that the prison social environment can be both friendly, with staff at times demonstrating kindness and concern, whilst at other times being very harsh. There is not necessarily a system to it. A prisoner cannot always foresee an

officer's reaction, because this also depends on the mood of the individual. Like an Officer in Charge said:

*If I am annoyed, I can sentence him to the penal block for 30 days! But then after a few days, I see he is not in a good condition, and then my heart softens, I let him out.*

## **Interviewing methodology**

### *Introduction*

The team in this study strived for a high level of integrity and ethics in fieldwork. In terms of interviewing methodology, this meant an approach based on departure in human rights. We used life story/narrative interviewing as a way of showing respect for the integrity of the incarcerated human being, while trauma psychology was used to complement life story interviewing techniques with the aim of protecting inmates from re-activating trauma.

The interviews were unstructured and open-ended and guided only by a list of general themes, but open to change depending on the informant's stories. With time, the interviews became more targeted, but always fundamentally open. As mentioned, we attempted to cover the important points in the informant's life story, including turning points, the experience of imprisonment and coping strategies employed to deal with the challenges that this person faced in prison. The plan was of course also to ask questions in the field of sexuality, but this was done carefully and only if the individual interviewer deemed it appropriate with the individual informant.

In the following, the approach based on human rights, the interviewing methodology used and informant responses are examined.

*Methods of inquiry: Ethnography and life stories*

*Life stories cross the embodied and emotional 'brute being' with the rational and irrational 'knowing self'. They make links across life phases and cohort generations revealing historical shifts in a culture. They help establish collective memories and imagined communities; and they tell of the concerns of their time and place. They bridge cultural history with personal biography. And they become moral constructions, tales of virtues and non-virtue, which may guide us in our ethical lives. Indeed, the stories we construct of our lives, may well become 'the stories we live by'. What matters to people keeps getting told in their stories of their life. Listening carefully to these stories may be one of the cornerstones of ethnographic enquiry. (Plummer 2001, p 395)*

Crewe uses the life story approach because he feels it carries a humanizing role for prisoners who are used to being treated as a lesser form of human being, who cannot be trusted. He finds listening to them in an attentive way in itself is a powerful and humanising act, because imprisonment takes away so much of the individuality of the person (Crewe 2012). When an individual tells his story, a process of 'becoming' yourself happens. The telling of a life story is essentially a



process for the teller of making sense of his life - grappling with his identity. When a person shares his story, the things that matter are told (Thorsen 2008).

*Telling one's life story is not just a summary of our lives. It is a way we tell what is important to us. Where we come from and where we are going. The story told about a person's life is not a summary, but instead the 'telling' of the life history is to provide hope, direction and meaning for the 'teller'; this is where 'I' stand, this is where 'I' am going. The life history of a person also includes 'convenient' rewritings and post-rationalizations, which are always there in order to give the individual hope and direction in life. Analyzing life histories then, is like doing a puzzle without having all the pieces, and without ever really being done. However, if done well, the analysis can point to central themes and turning points in this person's life – something that gives the researcher a chance to show something central about this person's life and / or experiences. (author's translation) (Thorsen 2008, p 21)*

Like Crewe, we asked informants to tell us the story of their lives. We generally opened the interview by explaining that we were interested in hearing this particular person's life story. The informant was asked to start from 'anywhere, in childhood or adulthood', working from the assumption that the informant should have the opportunity to start their story at a time in their lives that was significant in some way or another.

### *Trauma – avoiding re-activating trauma*

One of the things that shape a life story are experiences of and responses to psychological trauma. Trauma can be inflicted after a single event, or a number of events or a prolonged period of serious distress. It constitutes an injury to a person's psyche, and makes the world appear chaotic without meaning and purpose (Hollander-Goldfein et al 2012). Individuals often draw conclusions about the self in response to trauma, and in this way trauma may fundamentally affect identity – to the point of injury or break down of identity, and therefore the perception of self (Denborough 2006). This makes stories of trauma important to this study.

Typically, imprisonment in itself constitutes trauma (Liebling and Maruna 2005, Scraton and McCulloch 2009) and many have suffered trauma prior to incarceration as well. Often, the research team would ask about the experience of the first day. All prisoners remembered every detail of the day, even if it had happened years ago, and would share the shock, disbelief and alienation of the experience. The story of the first day carried a major significance in terms of a harsh introduction to the pains of imprisonment – not helped by the way other prisoners would treat newcomers.

The fundamentals of any research would - in line with the American Psychological Association guidelines and guidelines on 'Do No Harm'<sup>11</sup> in Social Science Research - aim at preventing harm to informants/research participants directly or indirectly in any way. The guidelines prescribe a risk assessment in terms of the safety and

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[https://vlebb.leeds.ac.uk/bbcswbdav/orgs/INTF00001/page%201\\_22.htm](https://vlebb.leeds.ac.uk/bbcswbdav/orgs/INTF00001/page%201_22.htm)

security of informants, assessing the risk of provoking emotional distress, re-activating trauma or ostracism by peers or others. The assessment is relevant to this study.

The fact that trauma could be a part of informants' experience of imprisonment or prior to imprisonment, meant that the research team would have an obligation as far as possible to protect inmates from re-activating traumatic experiences. Part of the responsibility to protect informants was therefore making continuous risk assessments of the informant's psychological state of mind during the interview. Interviewing and getting the answers for the research could never be more important than protecting the informant from harm. We did not interview those known to be mentally ill in order to avoid speaking to prisoners who might be too vulnerable to interview. Yet it was not always possible to identify for instance suicidal prisoners before the interviews. If problems became evident in the interview, we implemented the trauma model's interviewing technique to avoid harming the prisoners, and to try to support them as much as possible. An example would be the below informant who gets very emotional when speaking about his wife leaving him because he landed in prison:

*Informant: It was painful, it was very painful, even when I heard that my wife had gotten married it affected me but due to the word of God I could comfort myself.*

*Anne: What is it about the word of God that comforts you?*

Rather than digging deeper into the pain, I would shift focus to what kept the informant going. In this way, I could support his identification of his own strength and resilience.

As mentioned previously, the practical technique of interviewing the prisoners was heavily inspired by David Denborough's work on documenting the testimonies of torture survivors. The method was adapted a little for this study, and the research assistants were trained in the interviewing technique of the adapted model. The model needed some adaptation because we were not asking about torture as such. Furthermore, while Denborough was interviewing people post-trauma, we could be interviewing prisoners in acute crisis which might become apparent to us only half way through an interview.

Specifically, with regard to the interviews, the aim of preventing harm meant attention to avoiding 'digging too deep' by showing empathy, accommodating the pain and by encouraging them through identifying their potential during and after the interview, if the informants were in distress. Having said this, it was a small minority who showed severe distress during the interview. For those who did, it is my assessment that they did so due to their desperate life situation and not because the research team provoked the distress as such. Some of those who showed severe distress were also individuals who asked to be interviewed rather than having been identified by us. Here we alleviated pain, rather than causing or (re-)activating it.

## **Considerations of validity and limitations of the study**

In this chapter, many of the limitations and challenges faced while conducting this study have been presented, but there are a few more important points to make.

First of all, the results presented in this PhD are not representative of all prisons in Zambia. Rural and smaller prisons were not included in the fieldwork, and therefore there are no claims to relevance for rural prisons, particularly in terms of sexuality. I make no claims to how representative my informants are of the prison population in Africa, or even in Zambia, also because the average age and level of education was higher than the likely average.

This does not mean that there are not important findings which are or could be representative. However, especially since there is so little research on the social and psychological effects of imprisonment and of sexuality in prisons in Africa, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which my findings are generalizable. For a qualitative study, the number of informants was large. For the individual prison, even if there were limitations in terms of random sampling, I was free to interview whom I wished to through the snowballing technique. I did not, however, use the snowballing technique to find a strictly representative group of informants, but to find informants who would be able to share information about sexuality in prisons.

Further, quite a few hundred inmates in Zambian prisons are refugees or illegal immigrants, but due to limitation in terms of language and because of the research purpose of the PhD, the particularities of refugees' problems were not included. The same applies for handicapped and (seriously) mentally ill prisoners, who

even if they too deserve attention in research and practice, could not be included in this study. Since this study focuses on men alone, it does not contribute to the field of women in prison.

Even if comparatively speaking there is a lot of research on prisoners, prisoner-staff relationships, prison subculture and prisoner adaption and coping strategies, there is very little research on this in an African context, and the research that exists on prisons in Africa is often focused on staff. This study focuses little on staff. Even if staff play an important role in terms of the social climate in prison, this study does not examine staff rationales or perspectives in much depth. This means that the study risks conveying staff in unintended stereotypical or perhaps even one-dimensional ways. Here I would like to stress that I as a researcher am aware that the individual staff members must manage, negotiate and interpret the social environment, rules and regulations under very difficult circumstances; even if I am directly or implicitly critical of some staff practices, I do recognize these challenges. It is, however, not part of this study to explore staff perspectives or their role in-depth.

The use of qualitative and open-ended life story interviews meant that the study can provide rich contextualisation and the method allows for in depth understanding and interpretation. The study can therefore provide relevant information on the experience of imprisonment and the effects of imprisonment, and on how inmates aim to survive the hardships. Nevertheless, even if many interviews were conducted, and patterns emerge from the data material, the methodology used does not suit a more quantitatively oriented analysis, simply because inmates were not asked the same questions systematically.

There is very little research similar to this study in Africa, which makes comparisons difficult, and consequently provides a challenge to claims to representativeness. Despite this, other research does point to many of the same issues and patterns presented in this study.

*A word on 'prisoner' and the use of names in the dissertation*

During the process of writing this PhD I have contemplated writing for instance 'incarcerated individual' or 'imprisoned individual' instead of 'prisoner'. Like Goffman (Goffman 1961, Goffman 1963) argues, we tend to construct individuals based on their situation or status, which may lead to stereotypes and stigmatisation. We may call them 'cripples', 'disabled', 'prisoner', 'schizophrenic' and so forth. If we for instance said 'an individual or person with schizophrenia', we draw on a less stigmatising language in the sense that the word *schizophrenic* seems to encompass, stereotype and define a person as only that. A conceptualisation for instance of 'a person with schizophrenia' makes it a little more possible to view the person in broader terms, as more than just a schizophrenic, but as a whole person who happens also to be ill. For most people, 'prisoner' conjures up a number of immediate associations, including those of violent and deviant characteristics, which quickly and un-reflected becomes a characterisation of every person in prison – even when this is far from true in most cases. Yet, in almost all literature on prisons, academics still use the word prisoner.

In Zambia, the word prisoner is possibly considered even more derogatory, because it is often understood as linked to the bemba word *kaili*, which is a negative and stigmatising term for prisoner. Several individuals incarcerated in Zambian prisons preferred the

word inmate, even if some may argue that the word deflects from the fact that the prisoner is indeed in prison, and this is an important awareness. I use the word prisoner and inmate interchangeably in this dissertation, and I am aware of tensions associated with this use. I do this for readability more than anything else, because I too recognise the potential stigma or political tension linked to the use of the words.

As mentioned earlier, I followed a few inmates continuously over three years, where I interviewed them repeatedly. Adam is one of them, and even if this is not his real name, I have chosen to show when he is quoted. Readers will be able to glimpse his particular personality. John – again not his name – was an ex-prisoner, whom I did not get to interview a second time, even if I planned to. He struggled for a long time to get a job, but failed to do so, and was shot dead when he tried to break into a house to steal. Even so, he is a central source, and I have therefore chosen to use a name for him. The other key informants interviewed cannot be identified for their own safety and privacy.



## 4 MAIN CONCLUSIONS – A SUMMARY

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### **The experience of imprisonment**

The prison has received much attention in research in the past 80 years or so. The prison is an obvious site for the study of power and social control. Indeed, prisons are regularly viewed as examples of extremes in social power while imprisonment contrastingly is viewed as extremes of powerlessness.

Even so, prisoners do not only exist at the mercy of staff. Staff and the prison institution are highly reliant on prisoners not only to comply with the rules, but also to contribute to social order and the everyday functioning of the prison. This is the case in Western prisons, but it is even more pronounced in the African prisons where inmates are assigned to or take on various managing and coordinating functions.

Imprisonment is well documented to be harmful. Sykes describes the prison as a closed emotional world. It causes profound psychological, social, behavioural and emotional effects. The prison is characterised by significant amounts of social control over movement and physical representation. It is characterised by deprivation of liberty, privacy, basic necessities, relationships to family and loved ones. It is a place of exclusion, social isolation from the outside society and possibly isolation inside the prison (in cases for instance of solitary confinement).

Imprisonment poses a real risk of harm to the incarcerated person's identity and sense of self. The prisoner must adapt and struggle to

survive imprisonment psychologically, socially and in the case of the African prison also physically. The effect of imprisonment is no doubt harmful. Yet prisoners are not only passive receivers; they experience imprisonment very differently depending for instance on personality, education and social background. Prisoners do have some options or possibilities to react and act in order to adapt, resist and/or survive imprisonment.

The appalling physical conditions play a vital part in how imprisonment is experienced and endured by African prisoners. Environments which are characterised by extremes, such as prisons, give rise to exceptional circumstances, and inmates must devise strategies to survive in an environment where the consequence of not coping may entail death. The prisoners will respond to this environment in different ways. Yet there is remarkably little literature on prisoner experiences, and in particular few in-depth analyses of how prisoners in Africa experience their time in prison and how it affects them.

Every prisoner's experience is unique and his own, yet common themes did occur in the analysis of the interviews. Harsh hierarchies of punishment, lack of food and basic necessities, lack of justice, lack of access to heterosexual relationships and major health issues can result in severe stress, depression and anxiety – and possibly other mental disorders, such as for instance paranoia. It has touched upon how conditions of ill-health, forced intimacy, injustice and lack of recognition, (lack of) social networks, stigma and social abandonment, Christianity, ontological insecurity together with routine, the endlessness of time, guilt and the loss of liberty may affect the individual prisoner's sense of masculinity and identity.

Imprisonment is harmful physically, socially and psychologically, even if there are rays of light in terms of kindness and forming friendships despite the less than conducive environment.

The prisoners in this study expressed how the social and physical violence of incarceration would have severe consequences for how they could perceive themselves as men performing the expected masculine roles, and for the sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. When translated to Honneth's terms, what is at stake is disrespect in the three spheres of love, law and solidarity, which again constitutes threats to the identity of prisoners. A key finding is that prisoners experience a sense of ongoing, chronic crisis in which they must continuously manage their psychological and social stress whilst struggling for basic physical survival.

Prison is a place of chronic crisis, defined by deprivation, social abandonment, and dehumanisation, and it is a place of contradictions and dilemmas. In the following, we shall explore how prisoners attempt to employ various coping strategies to deal with stressors of imprisonment.

### **Coping with imprisonment**

Even if Goffman, Sykes, Cohen and others speak of prisoners having their individuality removed and their sense of identity threatened, it is not the case that all prisoners lose their individuality or are only characterised by what prison has done to them. Prisoners will draw upon personal resources to cope. Prisoners exist in a situation of chronic crisis, where enormous demands are made on them to survive. Even if they do have the capacity to act to improve their situation, they have limited options to do so. In this chapter, I have

identified five main ways prisoners will attempt to survive imprisonment. These of course overlap, but are presented in five separate categories for analytical purposes.

The first category concerns those who simply cannot cope. The threat to their identities means that their self is lost, injured, and they struggle to survive both psychologically, socially and physically. Inmates explain that if you do not accept your situation, you will die.

The second category are the morally grounded struggles for recognition, where individuals see themselves as part of a group that is structurally violated and take collective action. Most prisoners recognise the injustices of imprisonment, and are mortified at both the inadequacies of the justice system and the gross conditions under which they live. Nevertheless, these struggles are rare. Even if inmates do at times successfully struggle actively for their rights, the controlled and suppressive prison environment makes it difficult to succeed. I exemplified this with the demonstration by inmates who refused to enter their cells at night to draw attention to the terrible conditions under which they lived.

The third category are those who those who engage in individual struggles for recognition. In prison, as one prisoner describes, there is a *struggle for identity* and prisoners work actively towards advancing in the prison system in one way or another, gaining for instance status as a 'blue' or 'red' band (see chapter 4 in original and full version of PhD). Prisoners would sometimes describe a strategy of being a so-called '*good boy*', staying out of trouble, trying to be good and completely submissive. Often, they would refer to the widely prevalent discourse of prisoner reform, which has a strong

focus on prisoner 'change' and 'reform'. Inmates typically draw upon Christianity as a resource and inspiration. At other times the individual struggles for identity would take the shape of opposing the negative image and stigma imposed imprisonment. Here, inmates would struggle to hold on to a sense of identity from before imprisonment, and in this way, mobilise resistance to the suppressive prison environment and retain a sense of themselves.

The fourth category refers to those who choose a different path, which is the alternative compensatory struggle for recognition. Compensatory subcultures or acts of resistance may develop among the socially marginalized as a reaction to the exclusion mechanisms of the dominant society. These compensatory acts will be associated with bragging about past and future crimes, and with violence and abuse of others in order to gain recognition as dominant. This way of struggling for recognition is viewed as negative in the sense these behaviours will further alienate them from conventional society, and of course because it entails various forms of abuse of others. Still, it is a way to obtain recognition even linked to violence and abuse.

Finally, the fifth category is about those who struggle for survival in a different way. This is not to say that these inmates will not also use some of the other coping strategies. Yet, looking at these strategies, they do not come across as a struggle for recognition. Rather, they are strongly linked to Vigh's concept of chronicity of crisis. Here we speak of emotional withdrawal into a world of fantasies or a constant attempt to keep busy in the otherwise quite idle prison life. In order to endure, inmates also draw on masculine identities as 'men', who are strong and able to endure pain.

In this struggle, some have more options and possibilities than others. Depending on family support, social circles (chosen or available), and education, roles are taken or assigned. In other words, the physical, social and psychological resources of the individual matter in terms of how they attempt to survive imprisonment.

This also means that there are prisoners with very few options for surviving imprisonment. Some – the so-called weak – become involved in sexual relationships in exchange for food, other necessities or sometimes luxuries, and protection. We shall explore this group and the ones taking advantage of them in the following.

### **Sex in prison**

This PhD has highlighted how researching prison sex is a challenge for several reasons. One pertinent issue has been problems with defining sexual activities in prisons. Definitions have differed or been lacking in both quantitative and qualitative studies where definitions have typically been crude and simplistic; even if there is some recognition of the difficulty of categorizing sex in prisons as either/or consensual or forced, this has not been addressed in research designs.

Therefore, the complicated nature of sexual relations seems to have been ignored. Sex is not an event that occurs in isolation from its social and physical context. Sexual activities in the closed prison environment will be influenced by the prison context and conditions, and will play into power structures, hierarchies and social relationships, not to mention the individual's coping strategies in an environment of restricted options. Sex is the result of a complex interplay of factors, including deprivation of heterosexual relationships, and deprivation of food and other material

possessions. Among other things, sex in the prison setting is institutional currency.

I would argue that simplifying definitions of sex as being either 'voluntary' or 'forced' (rape) carries the risk of seriously hampering understanding of the complexity of prison sex. We must employ an understanding of sex in prison as being at the very least on a continuum from voluntary to forced – and employ an understanding of force which may take on very different forms. To understand more of the social and interpersonal dynamics of prison sex, we need to address the fact that even if sex is 'agreed' between two parties, this does not necessarily make it voluntary.

The awareness of the complexity of sexual relations and practices could provide important knowledge of the psychological, social and physical effects of imprisonment and coping strategies of prisoners – and how to prevent HIV transmission and other sexually transmitted diseases. Contracting HIV is more a process than an event, and it is important to understand what affects the choices made by inmates which place them at risk of contracting HIV inside prison.

This PhD also highlights how studying human sexuality is complex. Sexuality may be flexible and malleable as Fleisher and Krienert argue, but it is not endlessly so; sex will always take place within certain social and societal contexts where the sex will be perceived and responded to in certain ways both by those engaging in sex and those who know about it. One must also be very careful about confusing prison sex with modern gay identities, even if inmates are deemed 'homosexual' by others, when they enter male-male sexual relationships. It is also important to be aware of the risk of

essentialising masculine sexuality as one of power and violence – especially in the prison environment where it so often is assumed that most sex is violent sexual assault, even if this is factually incorrect. This, however, does not mean the sex cannot be coerced and forced in other and effective ways. It is also important to highlight that many men in fact lose libido in prison.

African prisons are vastly understudied, and academic studies of sex in prisons are rare and generally based on little data. However, existing studies conclude that in the South African context, sex in prisons is often linked to gang structures and power structures, but also that they can be transactional. Findings from for instance Ghana and Malawi suggest a strong link between poverty and deprivation on one side, and sexual relationships on the other. The typical sexual relationship documented in the few existing studies shows that sex in prison is mostly transactional, which is also the case in Zambia. Further, studies have established that HIV is a considerable problem in prisons in Africa, and that HIV transmission occurs in prisons.

Scholars such as Cohen, Sykes, Goffman and Honneth speak of incarceration as posing a threat to identity. Masculine identity in particular is under threat. Building on this interpretation and on the basis on my empirical data, I propose a connection between the experience of imprisonment as death - as described by many prisoners - and engaging in sexual relationships. Inmates often refer to those who engage in sex as people who have 'lost hope'. It is death on several levels – a threat of literal death as well as threat of death of the individual's identity, including masculine identity.



There is not a strictly defined 'Zambian', 'African' or 'European' masculinity. It is harboured and interpreted, shaped and constructed differently in different local settings, in groups and by individuals. Yet scholars have shown that in a Zambian context, the ideology of masculinity of 'real men' is as head of the household and in control of women. Another central feature of 'a real man' is potency in the sexual conquest. Masculinity has to be continuously claimed in both public and private spheres. Great insecurity and fragility was, however, also attached to masculine identity – both for the individual as well as within male peer groups. So, even if masculinity is power, it is also fragile, and men continuously have to strive to reinforce it. In the prison setting, masculine identity is threatened because prisoners have no chance to live up to the expected masculine roles of the outside world. In male prisons, where men have no real contact to biological women, men's sense of masculine identity is severely challenged.

Studying sexuality and sexual risk behaviour is much more than studying sexual encounters in isolation. Rather, as scholars such as Epprecht argue, sexuality cannot be studied without considering the societal context. In Zambia, sex is socially constructed to take place between a man and a woman. However, in the absence of women, under extreme conditions and deprivation and in an environment where male identities come under threat, a way out is constructed: the young, inexperienced or weaker inmates are 'turned into' 'women' with the pain, privileges and consequences that follow. The active partner in the sexual act regains a sense of power associated with masculine identity through sex and through the role of provider. The imaginary of the heterosexual relationship is restored.

Through sex, prisoners position themselves in the prison context. Those who perform the 'active' male sexual role are perceived as 'real men' and thus masculine, and those who take on the 'passive' role are emasculated, and often turned into 'wives'. A reformulation and interpretation of gendered roles take place, where 'women' are created, who are to be available to 'men'. Traditional gender perceptions are challenged and reinterpreted through male-to-male sexual relationships, which the vast majority of prisoners would not have practiced when they were on the 'outside'.

Some prison scholars claim that some prison subcultures are oppositional to those of the general society, for instance by providing social recognition (even if sometimes reluctantly so) to a murderer in prison. It could be tempting to interpret male to male sexual relationships in Zambian prisons as oppositional to the general society as well. I would rather, however, argue that male to male sex is a translation of gender roles from the outside, even if the physical practice of sex is oppositional to the values of general society. The male/female dichotomy is maintained by the constructions of 'husbands', 'wives', 'men and women'. Therefore male-to-male sex cannot be understood as oppositional, but rather as a reinterpretation or translation of gender roles and sexuality in an environment without biological women. Even if stigmatised by society, staff and other prisoners, the imaginary heterosexual relationship is maintained. Sexuality in prison, I will argue, is a reflection of the general society's hetero-normativity.

The practice of sex between men in prison is not a morally grounded struggle for recognition, but is rather to be understood as a compensatory struggle, where individuals in contexts of disrespect

and lack of recognition still aim to achieve recognition. The 'man' may have lost his role as the provider of the family and as the man in the sexual relationship with his wife on the outside, but he has created a new sense of masculine identity. By performing the role of a 'man' in the sexual relationship inside prison, he is once again recognised as a man – but then a man with a distinct hyper-masculinity based on being powerful and in control, but also a role in which he can perform the role of the provider who takes care of his wife.

Yet the masculinity which the active partner has within reach has the potential for harm. Even if the active partner constructs a sense of masculine identity, it is one that is produced by the damaging experience of imprisonment. Being involved in a sexual relationship(s) entails dangers of further exclusion, stigma and self-stigmatisation. In this way, it may be considered a harmful version of hyper-masculinity. The so-called weak are turned into women, with obvious consequences in terms of threats to basic features of masculine identity.

We have seen some evidence of care and support between sexual partners. This can be understood as a way to attempt to create some intimacy in a rough and insensitive environment. In an environment where human beings are placed under such extreme stress, transactional sex may be a way to attempt some level of intimacy, and sex then is not *only* an instrument of control and abuse. Transactional sex can be interpreted as a way to maintain the imaginary of a caring intimate (heterosexual) relationship. Sex then is many things. It is a struggle for basic survival, and it is a way to cope with stress and sexual drive. It is a way to survive socially and psychologically, achieved either by obtaining protection, a sense of

intimacy and material comfort, or a way to struggle for a renewed sense of masculine identity of which one felt robbed by virtue of the experience of imprisonment.

## 5 CONCLUSION

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### **The Importance of the Study and Main Conclusions**

The aim of the dissertation was to answer the research question:

***How do incarcerated men survive imprisonment psychologically and socially, and how do sexual relations play into this struggle for survival?***

As previously stated my aim was to strengthen the knowledge base of the experience of imprisonment and of the coping strategies inmates employ in Zambian prisons, including sexual risk behaviour for HIV/AIDS. Equally, I wished to provide research-based knowledge to aid the facilitation of increased political and public awareness and knowledge-based interventions for improved conditions and prevention of HIV/AIDS, and health in general. These areas are remarkably understudied and holds the opportunity to shed light on very fundamental characteristics of how individuals are affected by extreme situations, specifically incarceration. This knowledge in turn may provide opportunity to explore and address/alleviate some of the prison pains.

The research question and its answers are important for a variety of reasons.

Prisoner experiences and coping strategies are remarkably under-researched, even compared with other areas of prison research in Sub-Saharan Africa. In other research, the focus has largely been on

staff or institutional perspectives. Very few researchers have entered the prison for the sole purpose of understanding prisoners' perspectives. Numerous NGO's and human rights institutions enter prisons, and they provide important information. However, when they enter the prison, it is with an agenda of highlighting human rights abuse or drawing attention to the desperate conditions. It is not that I do not wish to draw attention to prison pain, abuse or the horrendous prison conditions. I certainly do, but my goal was to create a solid foundation for understanding *what matters* for prisoners, how they experience and cope with imprisonment, and what characterises prisoners' emotional and social lives. In this way, I hoped to provide not just information or facts on beatings or overcrowding, or statistics of sexual engagements or HIV, where the reader is left to imagine how this affects prisoners. Rather, I wished to provide a foundation for understanding what imprisonment does to people and how they continue to struggle against all odds for survival in the broadest sense of the word. I believe my contribution lies in 'nuancing and documenting prisoners' lives' through specifically an in-depth analysis of prisoner experiences and coping strategies, as well as understandings of sex in prison.

Harsh hierarchies of punishment, lack of food and materials, lack of justice, lack of access to heterosexual relationships and major health issues can result in severe stress, depression and anxiety – and possibly other mental disorders, such as paranoia. Prison is a place of deprivation, social abandonment, and dehumanisation. Conditions of ill-health, forced intimacy, injustice and lack of recognition, lack of social networks, stigma and social abandonment and ontological insecurity, together with routine, the endlessness of time, guilt and

the loss of liberty may fundamentally affect the individual prisoner's sense of masculinity and identity. Translated to Honneth's terms, what is at stake is disrespect in the three spheres of love, law and solidarity, which again constitutes a severe threat to the identity of prisoners. Prisoners are placed in an institution where it can be very difficult to ascribe any positive significance to self.

My analysis also contributes to prisons research with the focus on the possibilities of morally motivated struggles for recognition. I believe my PhD shows the importance human recognition. In this dissertation, I have documented how prisoners – in Honneth's terms – suffer 'disrespect' and how imprisonment severely limits the possibilities of individuals to ascribe positive significance to themselves. They exist in a context of chronic crisis where enormous demands are made on them to survive in physical, social and psychological terms. The effect of imprisonment is no doubt harmful. Yet prisoners are not only passive receivers but cope differently, depending for instance on individual personality, education, skills, background and social networks.

Commonly, prisoners exist in a situation of chronic crisis where enormous demands are made on them to survive. Even if they do have the capacity to act to improve their situation, they have limited options to do so. I identified five categories that describe how inmates respond and or aim to cope with imprisonment. These strategies overlap and prisoners may use all of them at different times, but they were presented in separate categories for analytical purposes. Central for the analysis is how social recognition plays a vital role in terms of how inmates struggle to maintain or construct a sense of identity. Some inmates are not able to ascribe any positive

value to themselves, and succumb in the prison environment. Others struggle hard to construct or maintain morally-grounded pro-social identities, whereas others enter compensatory struggles for recognition. These inmates will attain social recognition, but in negative ways in that the recognition is often based on abuse or dominance over others. Of course, not everything comes down to recognition, and coping with imprisonment is also about getting by on an everyday basis where for instance instrumentalism becomes a central coping mechanism.

One type of compensatory struggle concerns how some men obtain recognition through sexual relationships. The sexual practices are - even if they place prisoners at risk of HIV - meaningful as a means of dealing with issues of deprivation, loneliness, lack of hope, sexual desire and, importantly, as part of power struggles over resources and for recognition. Through sex, (some) prisoners position themselves in the prison context. Those who perform the 'active' male sexual role are perceived as 'real men' and thus masculine, and those who take on the 'passive' role are emasculated, and often turned into 'wives'. A reformulation and interpretation of gendered roles take place, where 'women' are created, who are to be available to 'men'. Traditional gender perceptions are challenged and reinterpreted through male-to-male sexual relationships, which would not be practiced by the majority of prisoners when they were on the 'outside'.

The 'man' may have lost his role as the provider of the family, as well as the role of the man in the sexual relationship with his wife on the outside, but he has created a new sense of masculine identity. By performing the role of a 'man' in the sexual relationship inside prison,



he is once again recognised as a man – but then a man with a distinct hyper-masculinity based on being powerful and in control, but also a role where he can perform the role of provider who takes care of his wife. The man who is turned into ‘woman’ obtains food and other materials, as well as protection, but these come with a price of severe challenges to masculine identity. Even if stigmatised by society, staff and other prisoners, the imaginary of the heterosexual relationship is maintained. Sexuality in prison, I argue, reflects general society’s hetero-normativity.

Honneth’s concept of recognition links easily to human rights standards, because they essentially stipulate not only rights but also a recognition of the individual’s significance. In prisons, human rights standards are useful tools for improvements. But in my experience from working with prisons in various capacities, human rights standards may seem somewhat farfetched and difficult to achieve in practice in prisons, where the targets are somewhat unrealistic within current means. Prisons are inherently damaging, regardless of how they are designed, and regardless of whether they are placed in the West, in Africa or in other parts of the world. Prisons in Africa for years to come will be marked by poverty, lack of resources and stigma. Even so, it is my hope that I have provided a basis for acting to improve prisons in a more informed and systematic way.

If prisoners experience imprisonment as inhumane, then I hope the reader will ask him or herself, how we can make prisons more humane and less damaging. It is my goal that we can start improving prisons with what we have, and what we know. Not to settle for too

little in relation to human rights standards, but to act and to change things now. I see important resources in prisons. There are many staff members who manage to hold on to a sense of purpose and commitment, even under conditions that would arguably render most hopeless or cynical. There are prisoners who despite extreme adversity continue to struggle to contribute positively to their own and others' lives – and many do already. This bears witness to the potential of positive development. I have largely kept my NGO work out of the PhD, but Ubumi's work centres on supporting committed inmates and staff who work hard to improve health in the prisons. Here, we have seen that the potential for change is there, and with little support, it grows. In Section 8.3, I explore possibilities for action, and this section is also part of the Policy Brief in Appendix 1. But first, allow me to turn to perspectives for further research.

### **Perspectives for further research**

This PhD has attempted to provide context to give the reader a sense of imprisonment in Zambia. I wished to give prisoners the opportunity to give voice to their situation. Yet my PhD in many ways can only be a starting point for further research into the experiences of imprisonment and the coping strategies employed by prisoners to survive the diversity of African prisons. I had many theoretical and empirical avenues I could have followed to explore further. At times, I felt that each of the three main themes (experiences, coping and sexuality) of the PhD each deserved a full PhD of their own. At the same time, I felt it was impossible to write about sex in prisons without providing a fair account of prison life in general, and of other

strategies for survival. There are, however, several concepts/themes I could have explored much more, which I would encourage others to take forward.

One is the analysis of power. All through the thesis, power is present and explored through prisoner hierarchies, relationships between inmates, and between inmates and staff. In the struggle for recognition, power plays an important role. So, even if power relations between inmates are analysed, they are not the main focus of the thesis. I believe much is to be learnt from exploring power dimensions in more depth, including addressing the negative consequences of power. I would encourage not just theoretical deliberations, but in depth empirical analysis of hierarchies, agency and relationships. I would particularly encourage an exploration of power relations between inmates, as this has hardly been researched in the African context.

In this thesis, the relationship between staff and inmates is also under-explored. Staff, however, play an important role in terms of how prisoners experience imprisonment. We have learnt that small things matter enormously. In an environment with such deprivation, the kindness of an officer can save the day and can make life a little more bearable. Studies into the role of officers' conduct and how it affects prisoners would be extremely important.

This PhD has shown that prisoners draw on masculine identity and sometimes hyper-masculinity to survive prison. Here it would be exceedingly interesting if research were conducted on how inmates would respond to an opportunity to fulfil some of the positive features of masculine identity – and of the extent to which this may

make a positive impact on prisoner identity and conduct. I have a few preliminary suggestions. It has been documented in a Western context that contact to family, particularly children as well as conjugal visits, reduces stress and violence inside prison. Exploring how education, skills training and earning some income affects inmates in an African context will also allow us to learn more of how masculinity can play a constructive and important role for coping with imprisonment and presumably for life chances after imprisonment. Action research would be an interesting avenue to pursue.

I have explored faith (Christianity) in prisons as a source for coping with pain and for constructing a pro-social identity. The role of faith in prison is an important one that deserves much more attention in terms of the extent to which faith can aid a prisoner reform process, and of how it may not be helpful. I could observe faith as an important feature of imprisonment, but I would encourage an independent critical study of faith to identify the role of religion in reform processes. Studies have been done in the West which implied a positive role, but critics have suggested that it is not faith but instead the social belonging to a group that matters. As a Dane and not particularly religious (but also not anti-religious), I felt the presence – even if it was not directed at me – of religion in prison to be quite heavy. Many inmates claimed they had not been religious before entering prison. I sometimes wondered if there would be any space for exploring prisoner reform or an agenda for change without being religious. The role of faith in prisoner reform would be interesting to explore.

The point of Christianity or religion brings me to my next point, which is the ever-present narrative of prisoner change and prisoner reform. Officers and inmates alike would speak at length of how imprisonment was an opportunity or even sometimes a vehicle for change. Studies into the prisoner reform agenda would be interesting, especially if those studies linked to life chances after imprisonment. Reintegration after prison is an area which is hardly prioritised in research in Africa, if at all. Yet most prisoners do leave prison, and must find a way to live after incarceration. Not only are many damaged by the experience, but many are also rejected by the families and areas of origin. I interviewed a good number of ex-prisoners (15) and gained an understanding of the many challenges they face. This is an important area for further research.

Another area which I have neglected, is the role of witchcraft. In Zambia, witchcraft is often understood as black magic motivated by greed (Taylor 2006). Many prisoners believe that they were cursed and therefore wrongly imprisoned (mostly in the sense that they claim not to have committed the crime, yet they were found guilty). One extreme example of the power of witchcraft is one prisoner who had killed several women. He claimed that he was bewitched and therefore could hardly be made responsible for his actions. To my astonishment many did indeed believe him, and his death sentence was commuted to life in prison by the president. Commutation to life is often a first step to be pardoned for fixed sentences, so this man may in principle be found outside prison in some years from now.

Stories of how witchcraft can be used to kill, harm or affect judicial outcomes are commonplace. Prison Officers, too, may be accused of witchcraft. Some staff members in one of the prisons accused the

deputy and two other officers of using witchcraft to kill the Officer in Charge, who had recently died of long term illness in hospital. Even if the accused denied it profusely and there was no evidence, the Commissioner General transferred the two staff members to other prisons in other parts of the country as punishment. The deputy endured several months of not knowing his fate, as he was placed in the headquarters with no job description. In the end, he was promoted to Officer in Charge in a prison in a different part of the country. Witchcraft has a definite presence and its role in the prison context deserves attention in research.

There is very little research similar to my study in Africa. This makes comparisons difficult and consequently provides a challenge to claims of representativeness. It is my hope that others will take up the challenge of exploring other African prisons and add to the complex picture of imprisonment in Africa. More knowledge is needed to understand the experience and effects of imprisonment as well as gender perceptions and sexual risk behaviour, and more research is also needed to address the latter issue sensitively.

## 6 POLICY BRIEF

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### *PhD Dissertation*

PhD Dissertation: Surviving Zambian Prisons – Inmate experiences, coping strategies and sex in prison

### *Research question*

This thesis set out to explore how inmates experience and survive imprisonment in Zambian prisons, and why some inmates enter into sexual relationships. The study posed the following research question:

How do incarcerated men survive imprisonment psychologically and socially, and how do sexual relations play into this struggle for survival?

### *Methodology*

The thesis is built on an extensive data collection in Zambian prisons over three years, where 72 inmates and 15 former prisoners were interviewed in the period from 2011-2013. The interviewing methodology rested mainly in the life story/narrative tradition. Some ethnographic observations were also part of the data

### *Results and conclusions*

The PhD breaks new ground in the way that it provides in depth insight into the lives of Zambian prisoners and contributes to a deeper understanding of marginalised populations' experiences,

social and sexual practices as they struggle for survival in places of abandonment.

Conditions in the African prisons place inmates under extreme stress. Conditions of overcrowding, lack of food, deaths, poor hygiene and sanitation, as well as human rights abuses. The PhD explores the painful experiences of imprisonment, which include identity crisis, social abandonment, isolation from society, major nutrition and health issues, and the risk of contracting HIV. It then explores the various coping strategies employed by prisoners to survive psychologically, socially and physically. These include struggling to create a new sense of identity or an attempt to hold on to the identity they had before incarceration. For many, incarceration in a Zambian prison entails a basic struggle for survival. For some, the struggle entails entering into sexual relationships.

Commonly prisoners exist in a situation of chronic crisis, where enormous demands are made on them to survive. Even if they do have the capacity to act to improve their situation, they have limited options to do so. The picture is highly complex. Some have more options and possibilities than others. Depending on family support, social circles (chosen or available), education, roles are taken or assigned. In other words the physical, social and psychological resources of the individual matter in terms of how they attempt to survive imprisonment, but the range possibilities to act and change one's situation are very limited.

Some prisoners enter into sexual relationships as way to survive. Sexual activities in the closed prison environment will be influenced by the prison context and conditions, and will play into power



structures, hierarchies and social relationships, not to mention to individual's coping strategies. Sexual relationships between men in Zambian prisons can generally be characterized transactional. A reformulation and interpretation of gendered roles take place, where 'women' are created, who are to be available to 'men'. The 'men' gain a sense of masculinity through the sexual relationship, whereas the constructed 'women' experience severe threats to masculine identity. The thesis proposes that the social construction of gender and sexuality is a translation or reinterpretation of general society's gender roles in an environment without biological women.

### *Recommendations*

This PhD renders important information on the psychological, social and physical effects of imprisonment and coping strategies of prisoners – and of sexual risk behaviour. This knowledge now holds the opportunity of being put to use to address the issues of prison pain and HIV in prisons. There has been a large gap between the political rhetoric and the actual action on the ground to improve prison conditions both in terms of the commitment shown by the Zambian government and by international organisations. Both levels have recognised prisoners as 'vulnerable', 'key-populations' or 'most-at-risk' in terms of health for more than ten years, yet fail to commit the necessary funds for health care and the general conditions of imprisonment.

In terms of addressing HIV/AIDS in prisons, we must draw upon well-known strategies to address HIV/AIDS. I recommend public health interests to take preference over laws prohibiting 'deviant' sexualities, and that condoms therefore be distributed and HIV

education must sensitively, but openly address the practice of male-to-male sex in a non-discriminatory way, whilst keeping an awareness of the unequal power relations that often come into play between sexual partners. Based on this PhD, one cannot call for condom distribution in the hope of controlling HIV without paying attention to the fact that a clear majority of prisoners resist condom distribution, or that even if condoms may solve some problems, they do not solve the problems connected to some of the motivations for entering sexual relationships. This would for instance be the stress of incarceration, poverty, lack of food and lack of avenues for positive social recognition. Any reform agenda or any type of HIV prevention activity must address the stress of incarceration to be effective.

We need to start with the basics. A major feature of imprisonment is the lack of food. This can be addressed, and not necessarily in very costly ways. Large scale vegetable projects and chicken (or other forms of protein) projects can with commitment and strict monitoring succeed. Many correctional facilities have own farmland or have direct access to farmland in the near vicinity of the prisons. Currently, products produced – if produced – are often sold externally. Producing vegetables, eggs and chicken have already been demonstrated successfully, and should be expanded to all prisons with access to land. Feeding the prison population is exceedingly important to prevent illness and unnecessary deaths.

In terms of health and hygiene, there is still a long way to go. I encourage government to source the necessary funding to ensure safe drinking water through government resources or partners. The same goes for sanitation. Again, if funds for large scale projects are not available, then focus should be directed at what can be done

most effectively with few resources. Distributing a bottle chlorine and a few bottles of detergent to each dormitory cell, as well as few pairs of slippers for inmates to use when on the toilet, has proved remarkably effective in reduction of diarrhoeal outbreaks in Mukobeko Maximum Security Centre.

Zambia Correctional Service have taken the challenge of health seriously and works hard to build human resource capacity of the prisons to address health. There is some attention to mental health, but more needs to be done – also at policy level.

Social exclusion and stigma is an area that needs to be addressed actively. It is time to start treating prisoners as human beings with dignity, resources and potential, but also as human beings with vulnerabilities. Many prisoners have skills and commitment to contribute positively to creating change and improvements – for themselves, for others and/or for the functioning of correctional facilities. These resources can be used more effectively to build capacity of inmates and the facilities themselves.

Importantly, in terms of alleviating stress and stigma, it is essential to look at prison officer training. The curriculum is currently being revised – and I am informed that the curriculum will be centered around human rights. Here, I would encourage partners to engage *practically* with human rights. For example, in a Zambian context it is difficult to live up to all the human right standards, for instance the minimum standards for treatment of prisoners in terms of prevention of overcrowding. It is of course important to move in the direction of fulfilling the standards, but it is equally important to train officers to see possibilities for improvements in their everyday work. Another

avenue for creating change is allowing committed staff members more influence on their work so they can create change. Strict hierarchies sometimes hinder progress and efficiency.

Zambia Correctional Service have for a long time worked towards human rights-based approach to prison management. There has been important progress, but more can be done to change the prison social climate, and here staff as well as inmates play a vital role. Policies need to be followed by coordinated efforts to creating an organisational culture, which is centered on human rights and what matters to prisoners (respect, fairness, order, safety and good inmate-staff relationships). Participatory change processes where all levels of staff are involved, and processes, where inmates and staff interact are vital to changing organisational culture. Top management as well middle management active involvement is important to effecting change. Any change process will entail reticence but involving actors at all levels makes a positive difference over time. Effective accountability structures, complaint systems and opening up of closed environments are also central to implementing a human rights-based approach to prison management. It is also of immense importance to include an assessment of officers' adherence to human rights standards and commitment to inmate welfare as an important part of the evaluation process for promotions.

In this PhD we have established that small things take on a major presence in prisoners' lives. 'Small things' can become very big things. This is important to register as a prison officer, and it is worthwhile to see how incarcerated human beings can be recognised and humanised through acts of kindness and respect (see for instance Liebling 2004 for examples of how 'small things' matter in English

prisons as well). Paying attention to human rights carries with it the added benefit of making work easier, as Martin establishes in his 2013 dissertation on appropriation of human rights in Ugandan prisons.

This PhD documents that prisoners can draw upon masculinity to endure imprisonment. By identifying avenues for drawing on positive features of masculinity, such as the role of father and provider, we may allow for prisoners to hold on to that side of themselves. It has been documented that contact to family, in particular children, as well as conjugal visits are effective ways of reducing stress and violence in prison, and therefore ways to connect prisoners with family needs to be explored more in the Zambian context. This includes child-friendly visitation facilities. Further, investing in education and skills-building is another important avenue for incarcerated men to invest in their future as fathers and providers. Of course, a more efficient justice system, parole, alternative sentencing and reducing the use of imprisonment is a relevant and key strategy to decongest prisons.

Meaninglessness is a major feature of imprisonment, but it is possible to address this to a certain extent through volunteering programmes, where inmates work actively to contribute positively to their own and other inmates' lives. 'Listener'-volunteers (inmates who are trained in psycho-social support) may contribute positively to the social climate of the prison through providing a 'listening' ear to inmates with problems. Volunteering to help the chronically ill, act as teachers, caregivers of the ill or cleaners or any other task which in individual may find meaningful and which would contribute positively to other people's lives in any way could be explored actively. If staff

would work to positively recognize the efforts of volunteers, this would be a further advantage.

Another area to be explored – and another political and administrative agenda to push – is the fact that the Prisons Act provides the opportunity for prisoners to earn an income. This has not been implemented for years with the explanation that the kwacha had been devalued to an extent that made the funds available meaningless. Yet, the kwacha has been rebased, and the opportunity to work and save up funds for release would be a major step forward in terms of inmates having the opportunity to at least upon release to have some funds to start anew and perceive themselves less as a burden to their families. Hope is a central feature in terms of surviving imprisonment, and this could be an important step forward.

Again, engaging the practicalities makes a difference. It is clear from the PhD that it is those with privilege and power, who can ‘pay’ for sexual services. This can be addressed through addressing some of the dynamics which enables certain inmates to abuse their powerful position – not only in terms of sex, but also other ways of exercising power negatively. It could specifically be that cell captains cannot be left alone with only one or two inmates on Sunday mass. It can also be addressing the cooks’ ability to motivating other prisoners through paying them with extra food. This could mean that cooks have rotating teams and therefore less access to extra provisions of food, thus destabilising their basis for power and making it less attractive to engage in sexual activities with them.

The Zambian prisons have an HIV prevalence of 22-27% on average and this requires an extraordinary response (even if recent and yet unpublished documentation shows prevalence rates of about the same as the general population, but even if it is at 10-12% it remains an enormous challenge). Yet, commitment and taking personal responsibility for action is too rare. Instead, responsibility is pushed around between and within organisations. This happens in many countries, and also in Zambia, where after having experienced the intensity of the HIV crisis for at least 20 years, Correctional Services still have next to no allocated funding for health.<sup>12</sup> They rely on NGO's and international partners, as well as linkages with the government health system. A coordinating committee was established in 2005 (Prisons AIDS Advisory Committee), which changed its name in 2015 to Prisons Health Advisory Committee (PHAC). Here the idea is that Correctional Services and various partners coordinate efforts. I can only encourage Correctional Services to take on an instrumental and active role in identifying gaps and asking for support. Currently, the PHAC is indeed intensifying the coordination efforts, and it is vital that Correctional Services take strong a lead in proposing activities based on documented needs. Regional or even facility level coordinating bodies preferably led by Correctional Services may supplement national efforts as many organisations are only able to cover regions (and not nationally), and many initiatives are relatively small. Yet, if coordinated effectively, it could make much more of a

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<sup>12</sup> They have funds for World AIDS Day and similar commemorations or events, but they do not have their own funds targeting health systems in prison (as per 2016/17)

difference, and could be used as a point of departure for resource mobilisation.

The Zambian government has declared prisoners as one of the two most under-served groups in Zambia. There are – in terms of treatment – advantages of having patients in prison, and Zambia Correctional Services. Patients are accessible and can quite easily be monitored. Treatment as prevention of HIV is another important way to curb the epidemic. Correctional Services have done well to identify HIV focal points in all Zambian prisons, and due to HIV education, the prison population is better informed of HIV than the general population. Of course, HIV education and testing needs to continue, and quality HIV Counselling Services could be more consistently available in all prisons.

Inmates themselves are part of the solution to many of the issues relating prison pain and to sexual risk behaviour. They know much more about local prison conditions and sexual risk behaviour than any outsider would. There are many avenues to follow to make concrete and meaningful improvements. Zambia Correctional Service is progressive in the sense that they are aware of and open to the fact that they cannot solve all the problems themselves and that other partners need to come in. Over the past 10 years important steps forward have been made, including a much-increased commitment to health in policy and practice. There is recognition and ownership to making a difference and creating change. It does not mean that there are not challenges to overcome, but opportunities are there, and can be explored further.



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