



**Understanding Incarceration and
Spousal/Partner Relationships:
An exploration of female imprisonment and its effects
on family relations in Zimbabwe**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, my mom Maina Mawoneyi Mafume and my dad Isaac Jacob Mafume, for believing in me. You have been pillars of strength in my life and I will always cherish the encouragement and hope you have given me throughout my life and my Master degree program.

As they say in my mother tongue

Nzombe huru yakabva mukurerwa

Thank you.

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I thank God for taking me through this journey; guiding me and giving me life.

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List of Acronyms

BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
PFN	Prison Friends Network
PRFT	Poverty Reduction Forum Trust
WWRN	World Wide Religious News
ZACRO	Zimbabwe Association of Crime and Rehabilitation Organiza- tion
ZPCS	Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services

Abstract

This paper focuses on gendered dynamics of spousal relationships of incarcerated women. It seeks to understand the roles played by gender and sexuality in shaping these relationships. The paper uses gender lenses to critically examine how the penal system, prisons, and family are all gendered institutions that create a specific identity for the imprisoned woman. This identity presumably affects the partner and spousal relationships of imprisoned women. Thus interwoven in the analysis are issues of femininity versus criminality, language and crime. Gendered symbolism and imprisonment are explored in relation to how society creates representations that create the identities of the imprisoned woman. Thus the research informs feminist scholarships and correct male bias in research mainly centred on imprisoned man and marriage. My findings show that social stigma, women's life situations, and children are the most important elements of gendered relationships and institutions affecting the spousal/partner relationships of incarcerated women.

Keywords

female, gender, imprisonment, marriage, spousal, partner, inmates, prison, women, divorce, separation, femininity, masculinity, family, children, kin, incarceration

CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the year 2010, much of my work has been focused on working with prisoners, particularly in the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) institution. The interest in prison work continued to be a fulfilling journey that taught me a lot of valuable lessons. What triggered this research is the response I often get from friends and family when I mention that I work with prisoners. One day my friend asked: “Are you not afraid around criminals?” One of our corporate partners who wanted to sponsor children whose mothers are in prison retorted “Whatever we give you, we want to make sure it goes to the children and not the adults, we don’t want that spill over because we are not sympathetic towards criminals”. Another colleague of mine suggested: “If my wife was to go to prison then our marriage would be over”. This statement became the intriguing point that inspired my research. Why my friend was quick to say he would not continue a relationship if his wife was incarcerated raised my antenna to pursue the deeper meanings of that statement and explore why and how female incarceration affected their spousal/partner relationships.

As I pondered upon all these statements and many others, I realized that there were a lot of assumptions, perceptions, ideologies, fears and uncomfortable feelings that surrounded prisoners. These assumptions and perceptions affected how they are viewed by the society, and thus consequently affected the relations that they had and have with the society, and shaped their identity. Thus ‘the criminal’ was not only stigmatized in the public sphere but also in the private domain where it affected his or her intimate relationships. By saying intimate I mean spousal and partner relationships.

Furthermore my exposure doing gender-based violence training workshops in prison exposed me to interesting dynamics that shaped the relationships of female prisoners with their partners. Some were in prison after committing so-called crimes of passion; for example fighting with the girlfriend of the husband, aborting because the partner refused to take responsibility of the child, assaulting or even committing murder because their relationship with the partner had soured. Exposure to these kinds of issues made me realize that there was a gap in scholarship on prisons that needed to be addressed, especially concerning female prisoners.

It is not surprising then that my interest in prisoners found a good opportunity for exploration at the Institute of Social Studies. I realized that it would be worthwhile to pursue how female incarceration/imprisonment affects spousal relationships.

To pursue this research I took on a gender lenses. Thus, I looked at how gender affected the spousal partner relations. Four areas are discussed: 1) Gendered institutions; i.e. the genderedness of the family, marriage, the state and prison institutions are discussed as a locus of power, especially how patriarchy shapes institutional gendered power relations; 2) Gendered identities in relation to crime and criminality; here I look at how gendered identities are

produced in the society through such mediums as language, especially in relation to ideas about crime and criminality; 3) Gendered symbolism and imprisonment; here I look at how the society uses symbols that create representations of female prisoners in the society; 4) Sexuality is also discussed as a way to understand how are assumptions about female and male sexuality relevant for the lives of imprisoned women.

1.2 INCARCERATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Most of research done on prisons concerns the incarceration of men and how it affects their relations with women. It is not surprising that men have received so much attention considering that the number of imprisoned men outnumbered that of women at a large scale. There are a number of theoretical perspectives in the research on men and prisons that became of interest to my study. One of them is the life course perspective, which indicates that incarceration and marriage are intertwined (Huebner 2007:158). Huebner (2005:286) notes that little attention has been given to the longitudinal studies of incarceration and its effects on spousal relationships and further argues that the stigma associated with incarceration mostly affects women, and that this can destabilize their relationships which would appear firmly established before imprisonment (Heubner, 2007: 159).

Charles and Luoh (2010:614-617) have used the marriage market model by Becker to analyze how the incarceration of men affected women in the marriage market. In this respect, it is interesting to explore Becker's theory of marriage (1973:815- 817), on comparative advantages between two people and the benefits derived from the marriage market. What is interesting about this theory to this particular study is to see whether incarceration removes any comparative advantages of women in the marriage market, as it certainly removes the physical presence of the person from performing the normative marital roles and contributing to the economic wellbeing of the partner, as Becker argues.

Family relations, marriage and partner relationships have also been a focus of interest of sociological studies, though here too the studies have mostly focused on the relations of imprisoned males and their partners (Lopoo and Western 2005, Huebner 2005, Western and McClanahan 2000, Finlay and Neumark 2010). Much research has focused on the "collateral consequences" of marriage and incapacitation due to incarceration (Lopoo and Western 2005: 722, Western and McClanahan 2000:5), which arguably leads to destabilization of relationships as the imprisoned man can no longer be economically productive and cannot perform conjugal roles. Issues such as being removed from the community, not being able to assume and play the parental and spousal role, the undesirability of marrying an ex-offender because of the stigma attached to marriage and the depleted incomes because of imprisonment are seen as having effects on marriage especially after serving time (Lopoo and Western 2005: 721, 722, Huebner 2005:283, Western and McClanahan 2000:6).

Western and McClanahan (2000) studied negative consequences of incarceration of fathers on family formations and concluded that it led to divorce or separation, as fathers could no longer fend for their families. Apel et al (2010:269) and Propper (1989:57) show that incarceration indeed leads to increased levels of divorce especially to those who enter prison while married already. Furthermore studies of partner relationships have also focused on homosexuality, but again with a male bias (Propper 1989). Furthermore, the society has shaped differences in sexuality of men and women, including male and female prisoners, with an assumption that female prisoners are not sexually active as male counterparts, as the societal virtues of women sexuality are often purity and abstinence.

Thus in the marriage and prison discourse, family studies have focused on the male perceptions of partner relations and less on the lens of incarcerated women. This is mainly because having male prisoners has been normalized and female prisoners are seen as deviance in the society. Whereas it is apparent that both partners have potential to miss their partners, focus has been on how males adapt to this kind of phenomena.

This research therefore contributes to development studies by seeking to correct the male bias in research on incarceration and marriage through looking at the gendered dynamics of spousal relationship of incarcerated women. Using a gender lens in this research brings out the gendered systems that inform society as much as the prison regimes. I employ a feminist critique that allows new knowledge and new realities to be explored, and challenge the dominant thinking around marriage and incarceration. Instead of seeing women as waiting for their imprisoned husbands/ spouses or partners and assuming that “women [are] an always-already constituted group”, (Mohanty 1988:65), the study challenges the underlying notions of hegemonic masculinities. By studying incarcerated women, I start from the assumption that not all women are the same.

This study also hopes to contribute significantly to understanding the dynamics of imprisonment of African women, and Zimbabwean women in particular, and contribute significantly to African Feminist Scholarship. No major study, to my knowledge, has so far been written on the relationships of women, marriage and incarceration in Africa and indeed Zimbabwe.

In marriage, in most patriarchal societies, men have dominance. Women have less bargaining power as patriarchal system silences the voice of women. Women are deemed to be altruistic givers in the household. This has led women to bear the brunt of most of the work in the household. These unequal power relations in marriage and in the household put men as the head of the family who can make decision for everyone without being questioned (Agarwal 1997:6, 7). Women in the household further face vulnerabilities because of lack of decision and control power over their own bodies, or over the men’s bodies. Thus, the man also becomes the decision maker in terms of sexuality, how many partners or children he can have and with whom. The marriage institution is, thus, a highly gendered and sexualized arena where unequal power relations are at play (Farmer and Connors 1996: 22).

I explore the concepts of hegemonic masculinities to bring out the dynamics of gendered power relations, and intersectionality, to analyse differences that exist among women, be it related to the crime they committed, or in understanding of the role of poverty, education and religion for the imprisonment. I also focus on their varied experiences of relationships while imprisoned.

Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society where the men is widely viewed as the head of the family and the woman as a subordinate. Thus gender becomes an indispensable tool in analysing the relationship dynamics while women are in prison, and how the prison system becomes gendered.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Research Objectives

My main theoretical objectives are to contribute to the body of knowledge about women, gender and incarceration by analysing how gendered institutions of prison, the state, family and marriage affect spousal/partner relationship of incarcerated females, and what role the prison rehabilitation system plays in the family dynamics of incarcerated women and their partner/spouses. My social objective is to integrate this newly acquired knowledge in my own work with prisoners and the work of the prisoners' support groups and organizations I am associated with.

1.3.2 Research Questions

My main research question is:

How gender shapes the dynamics of spousal/partner and family relationships when the female partner/spouse is imprisoned?

To answer this question, I am aided by sub-questions:

1. What are the women's experiences of spousal and family relations, while incarcerated?
2. What are the societal attitudes and perceptions of incarcerated women, and how they affect the spousal/partner relationships?
3. What other power relationships, next to gender, are important in spousal and family dynamics? Especially, what is the relevance of sexuality?
4. How the state, the prison system, and kin and family, as gendered institutions, support or undermine women's relationships with spouses/partners?

1.4 METHODOLOGY

In doing this research I wanted to understand the everyday lives of the women in prison and their relations with their partners and the meanings their realities have for them. Hence I adopted a qualitative methodology and constructivist approach which allowed me to take into consideration multiple dimensions of the partner/spousal relationship. I was able to explore different lived realities, different truths of life and different personal experiences with their partners or husbands. Writing about qualitative research, O’Leary (2014: 130) states:

Delving into qualitative methodologies therefore means working in a world that accepts and even values: the search for holistic meaning, research conducted in natural settings, emergent methodological design, small numbers, non-random sampling strategies, rich qualitative data, inductive analysis, idiographic interpretation, and even the possibility of negotiated outcomes that recognize the need for the researched to be party to a researcher’s constructed meanings. The goal is to gain an intimate understanding of people, places, cultures and situations through rich engagement and even immersion in the reality being studied.(O’Leary 2014:130)

I chose in-depth interviewing which allowed me to have a set of guiding questions and flexibility in probing in order to get in-depth information (Rubin and Rubin 2011). As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:1) argue “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation”. I particularly chose in-depth interviewing because I was interviewing women within the prison, and because the matter is very sensitive and personal.

Furthermore in-depth interviewing brings out information that I would have otherwise not anticipated. In the case of this research, one unanticipated finding is the relevance of children for the relationship between the partners. I was also more concerned with the quality of the interviews than their quantity. The qualitative research helped me explore different experiences of women as well as the similarities of these experiences (King and Horrocks 2010:27).

I am, however, aware that my sample was very small. Thus my objective is not to generalize the results. I believe nevertheless that small sample and in-depth interviewing were ideal in this instance as they allowed me to dwell on each interview and understand the circumstances of each woman. Had I not adopted the in-depth interviews and the small samples I might not have gathered the intricate details of the lives of these women and this might have distorted my findings. Furthermore I had quality time with the women, respecting their personal zones of comfort. They were able to allow me to enter into their personal boundaries because we had time for each other. With all this said, I believe that this research has theoretical relevance that can be useful for conceptualization of future research in this area.

1.4.1 Sampling

My research question was purposeful and targeted, focusing on understanding the relationship dynamics of women in prison and their partners.

Thus I was allowed to talk to a number of women and explain the topic I wanted to interview them about. I ensured willing participation and discussed issues of confidentiality thus no real names were used in the analysis. The women also signed a consent form. I interviewed 10 women who were comfortable to speak with me. In creating a sample I considered diversity in age, in the type of partnerships (whether it was a formal marriage or a relationship), years of being together, economic status and the type of crime committed by the women. The screening process was necessary for me to get diverse experience that would add value to the analysis. This assisted me in learning about different realities and experiences of the women (King and Horrocks 2010:28). I also interviewed two prison officers (one male and one female) as my key informants, to understand the prison practices, policies of the state and the views of prison officials. (See Appendix 1 for the summary of sample).

1.4.2 Role of Prison Friends Network

Since 2010 I have been working with Prison Friends Network (PFN) an organization working for the rehabilitation and re-integration of prisoners into the society. The PFN runs programs in prisons and as I am the coordinator of some of these projects, I resumed some of the duties while conducting research. This meant that I could go into the Prison under the PFN banner and work with the same women that I would later interview. Hence the women were familiar with me. This was an added advantage as they saw me as a “friend” (just as the name PFN suggests) and they felt comfortable talking to me.

The research will hopefully be useful for PFN as they could later use the results for some of their rehabilitation and reintegration projects. My attachment to PFN was helpful in that I did not meet many gatekeeper challenges. In addition, PFN has a memorandum of understanding with the Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services which made it easy for me to engage in this research alongside other running projects. However, there were limitations of conducting this research under PFN. The women were looking at the PFN as offering a solution for some of their problems or rather as a donor agency.

1.4.3 Setting of the Interviews and Data Generation

I had the interviews with women in the prison, on the prison shade. The prison shade is on open space at the centre of the prison hostels. The shade is the common meeting place for the prisoners if they have visitors. The prison shade was ideal in this instance as it made the women relax and talk comfortable to me.

The prisoners would be engaged in their various activities when I arrive, which was an advantage as I would have a personal talk with each one without anyone listening to our conversation, allowing the women to relax and talk comfortably to me. The Prison Officers also respected the space of the women and did not try to interfere with any interview or the process of my research.

I did not voice-record the interviews. Instead, two of my colleagues from Prison Friends Network joined me every time taking notes, so that I was free

to talk to women. The women accepted note taking and did not seem to be affected by their presence. I sensed that they were comfortable talking to us. The interviews varied by the individual, but they usually took 45 minutes to an hour.

I had face-to-face interviews with each woman. The sensitivity of the issues required that I talk to them personally, to get the maximum information and also to give them maximum attention. I had an interview guide which allowed for flexibility on my part to probe further and also to allow the women to express themselves. I tried to avoid imposing myself on the women as most of them became emotional and cried during the process.

The interviews were conducted in the local language in order to allow the women to express themselves. The women were also cooperative and because this was a very sensitive issue, most of them would speak and pause. This allowed my assistants to capture the conversation. The interviews with two officers were also not recorded, as one of the interviews was done in an informal setting during the Fun Day that Prison Friends Network organized. This unstructured informal interview with the female prison officer was important for the research to draw out beliefs, attitude and opinion through conversation (O'Leary 2014:218). As the Fun Day was going on, I found time to converse with the officer and get some information. The interview with the male officer was in an office setting and semi structured.

1.4.4 Limitations

Even though there was richness of information in interviews, the greatest challenge at Chikurubi Prison was that there was a presidential amnesty in February 2014. This meant that many women were released from prison and I could choose only among women who had only recently been convicted or came in for the second time (recidivism). Thus, my results could have been different have I spoken with women who were incarcerated for long period. I see this limitation as an incentive for a longitudinal research on the women I had conversations with. My interviews with the prison guards, who had observed the women and how they related with their partners over a period of years, were helpful to this research.

Another limitation was that these women were already in vulnerable situation and their stories drew sympathy from me as a researcher. Sometimes I felt a strong urge to wear a hat of a counsellor and also PFN staff instead of a researcher. I tried my best to debrief myself and not get so much engrossed in sympathy so that I would remain level headed.

The fact that we could not use recording devices meant that some information which could not be captured by the assistants was lost. The training we had before starting interviews helped us to catch as much information as we could.

1.5 FEMALE IMPRISONMENT, GLOBAL AND LOCAL

1.5.1 World Context

Figures on female inmates around the world are estimated to be around 660 000 as of early 2013 (Walmsley 2014). Although female inmates constitute a total of 6.5% of world prisoners, the world statistics is indicating a rise of 40% in the number of female prisoners across the globe from 2000 to 2013 (Walmsley 2014).

The causes of female imprisonment across the world tend to indicate that women's crimes have to do with poverty, illiteracy, abusive backgrounds as well as mental health (Mahtan 2013: 248, Social Exclusion Report 2002, Prison Reform Trust 2012:2). Poverty has been seen as a major source of incarceration in most parts of the world (Mahtan 2013: 249). The Social Exclusion Unit Report of the UK (2002) indicates that prisoners have very low levels of vocational skills. For instance, their reading skills are worse than those of teenagers (Social Exclusion Unit Report 2002:6). This is also a result of social exclusion that most prisoners suffer before incarceration. Some did not have access to education or employment and suffered from mental and physical problems (Social Exclusion Unit Report 2002:7, Prison Reform Trust 2012:2). In USA alone the rate of female imprisonment has been growing at an alarming rate. During the decades of 1980-2010 the increase was at 646% compared to increase of 419% for men (The Sentencing Project 2012:1). In England and Wales the population of female inmates rose by 27% as of 17 August 2012 (Prison Reform Trust 2012:1).

1.5.2 Female Prisoners in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe currently has around 17.000 prisoners of which 5% are female, amounting to +/- 500 women (Zimbabwe Prisoners and Correctional services). The number of female prisoners has been gradually rising in recent years in Zimbabwe too. Prisons are often seen as male spaces. Thus the rising number of female inmates caught attention of the general populace. Some of this attention led to formation of support groups, such as PFN.

There are officially three female prisons in Zimbabwe: Mlondolozhi, Chikurubi and Shurugwi. However, female inmates also reside in the other 42 mixed prisons across Zimbabwe. Nursing babies and children below the age of 5 stay with their mothers in prison in case there is no family member to take care of them or if they are breast feeding. Spaces (rooms) have been created that accommodate the female prisoners across the country.

A few studies have been conducted at the three main female prisons in Zimbabwe that provide additional context for this research. A baseline survey by Zimbabwe Association of Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation (ZACRO) (2013) shows that the average age of female offenders is between 21 and 40, while the highest frequency of inmates ranges from 26 to 30 (21%). Though a big number has received some formal education, only 8% have tertiary level, 7% have no formal education at all and 30% have only primary level (ZACRO 2013:4).

The crimes committed by women are varied. According to another baseline survey conducted at Mlondolozhi female prison by Prison Friends Network and Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT, 2012:7) offences range from infanticide, stock theft, car hijacking, armed robbery, fraud, rape to capable homicide and murder. ZACRO's baseline study suggests that fraud and murder are the most common crimes followed by stock theft, (ZACRO 2013:4). Other crimes also mentioned in the study include baby dumping, child abuse, domestic violence, shoplifting, sexual offences and kidnapping. Both studies show that most of the crimes were committed due to poverty and the hardships in Zimbabwe especially for those living in the urban areas that constitute the majority of the female prison population (ZACRO 2013:6).

Though prisoners are allowed to have visitors, 40% of the female prisoners indicated that they do not have family visits while in prison (PFN and PRFT 2012: 14) There are various reasons why families do not visit and these include the long distances that relatives have to travel, and bitterness over the crimes committed (PFN and PRFT: 2012:13). Even though many female inmates are married prior to incarceration (46%), most of them indicated that their spouses don't visit as they take new partners and abandon the incarcerated wife (ZACRO 2013: 4, 10).

1.5.3 Context of Chikurubi Female Prison

Chikurubi female prison is located 15 km east of the capital city of Zimbabwe, Harare. It is the largest prison for female inmates with a holding capacity of +/- 300 female prisoners. Chikurubi prison has cells measuring 9m x 4m holding in some instances 25 inmates in one cell. Inmates are in their rooms from 4pm to 6am. Most of the rooms have toilets inside. In the D section there are no toilets inside the cells, but a shared pit latrine outside. Most of the prisoners who share the rooms are not separated by age or types of the crimes. Only the three inmates on the death row are separated from the others.

Chikurubi Female Prison is not an open prison. Zimbabwe has only one open prison, Khami Prison situated in the Midlands Province. The open prison is for men only. The open prison system allows men to visit their homes, be with their family and access conjugal rights on a monthly basis. The fact that there is no open prison for women already suggest the paternalist thinking of the state and the society where the man has sexual and family privileges over the woman and also carries along the myth that exist in the Shona culture that "a man cannot exist for long without having sex" (*murume murume haaagoni kugara asina mukadzi*). A woman is deemed strong enough to wait and delay sexual relations. Furthermore Chikurubi does not have houses built for access to conjugal rights when partners visit as in other developed countries, e.g. Nova Scotia Female Prison in Canada. This also holds true for all the prisons in the country. Hence even those who have their partners visiting them, cannot talk in private or access conjugal rights. Their conversations are mostly conducted in the presence of officers. That Chikurubi is not an open prison is relevant for this research as I seek to understand how the female inmates are managing their marriage and partnership relations and how they are coping with or without visits of their spouses or partner.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

This chapter presented the research problem and questions, methodological choices and the context of global and local imprisonment. The second chapter is devoted to the theoretical perspectives relevant for this research. The third chapter discusses findings around the intimate relationships of female prisoners and their partners: exploring dynamics on what constitutes a good relationship, economic relevance and hegemonic masculinities around male and female sexual desires. The fourth chapter analyses the significant role played by children that has a bearing on the partner relationship. The fifth chapter is devoted to exploring findings around the family, particularly members of the extended family, and the key role they play in the lives of the women and their partners. The sixth chapter will give a summary of the findings of this research.

CHAPTER 2.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION: WOMEN AND CRIME

The rising population of women in prison (Walmsley 2014) has meant that studies of imprisonment have also started focusing on women. The early studies have concentrated on the area of health, sexuality, penal systems, remand, psychological, biological and socio economic issues. Though these studies are significant for understanding the situation of women in prison, they have by and large not recognized the agency of women but rather portrayed them as passive recipients of the penal system. This brings to mind women as victims of patriarchy and poverty as much as victims of penal institutions.

Feminist criminology studies have contributed a massive body of research during the 1970s (Fili 2013: 2). This brought the visibility of women prisoners and deconstructed the various assumptions about female prisoners. Authors such as Dorie Klein (1973) and Carol Smart (1976), cited in Fili, 2013: 3) brought out a number of important socio economic factors, sexuality and other categories as points of analysis.

This research benefits from those studies, but also departs from them, as I focus specifically on the spousal and partner relationships of the women, and the role gender and sexuality have in those relationships. I approach marriage/partnership and family, as well as prisons, as gendered institutions, and assume that imprisonment plays a role in assigning specific identities to women. Those issues will be the focus of the following theoretical reflections.

2.2 GENDERED INSTITUTIONS

Scott (1986: 1067) defines gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [as] a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. Gender offers a useful analytical perspective in our understanding of men and women, but also, following Scott (1986) genderedness of institutions, ideologies and symbols that shape women’s and men’s lives. It is also important to understand the links between gender and sexuality in order to understand the how society perceives both women and men. The interest in gender as a category of analysis helps to analyze the histories of power dynamics that are inherent in the society (Scott: 1986:104).

Feminists have pointed out how patriarchy shapes the ways prisons operate. (Fili 2013: 1). Women are supposed to act in a certain way governed by the prison authorities in as much as they are to act in the society. Connell (2002: 71) argues that the society is ordered through gender and “everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by bodily structures and processes of human reproduction”. Thus the study of

gender requires focus on the bodies and ideologies around bodies, what they are expected and not expected to do as dictated by cultural, social and symbolic factors that exist in the society.

Prison has been seen as male domain both by the society and the state. But, in a prison, both male and female bodies are to be controlled and governed towards good behaviour and not deviance. Crime as a deviation from the society, the creation of the identity of the ‘criminal’ and the incarceration bring the stigma and shame upon individuals and affects their relationships with partners, families and larger society. Instead of a person being seen as a person, he or she is turned into a criminal subject and given a label that has consequences for his or her life. Combination of those practices of labelling, social assumptions about criminality, and social norms of masculinity and femininity and male and female sexuality also affect prison as an institution. Women prisoners are then dealt with – controlled, paternalized and addressed - following those ideas and practices. My interviews with prison officers and inmates will address some of those ideas and practices.

2.2.1 Marriage and Prison as Gendered Institutions in Zimbabwe

According to Hindin, “Women in Zimbabwe are still seen in their roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers ...decision making is a male prerogative” (2000: 1526). In Zimbabwe, marriage institution is imbedded in a patriarchal society that governs the power relations between men and women (Hindin 2002: 152, 154). The inequalities in the marriage can be traced to the different power relations and roles that are attached to the males and females in the household. As Hindin (2002: 154) points out, Zimbabwean women have been placed under the domination of male hegemony over a long history that dates back to the pre-colonial era, continuing with colonialism when the white man looked upon the Zimbabwean woman with scorn and thus gave room for the Zimbabwean woman to be dominated by men as the inferior being in the society. As Zimbabwean men have had control over the woman in Zimbabwe, they also took control over their assets and began making decisions over the woman and the children and thus defined the roles of women and became symbols of authority (Hindin 2002: 152, 154). Muchenje et al (2013: 514, 515) argue that the division of labor for women in Zimbabwe meant that women became confined in the private domain, with unpaid care work and also became a “reserve for cheap labor”.

Moreover women are met with high expectations to bear children and ‘promote’ the husband’s clan or name. Thus in Zimbabwe women are not only expected to marry but they are also expected to bear children (Hindin 2000: 1526). Nicholson (1997: 27-39) argues that the nuclear family and the myth of ‘traditional family’ has made it possible to make high demands on each partner to fulfil certain obligations towards each other and the family, in order to have a successful relationship. Such needs can be economic, emotional, psychological, sexual and social. Thus if one partner fails to meet these obligations the family is often not functioning. As Roseneil and Budgeon (2004: 136) argue “The idea of the family retains an almost unparalleled ability to move people both emotionally and politically”.

When the women are confined in prison they can no longer ‘perform’ their role in the family and have deviated from the dominant norms of femininity. Women are judged, their behaviour despised and they are rendered incapable of performing their cultural, social and conjugal roles that the man (the head of household and decision maker) presumably needs. Thus the marriage institution in Zimbabwe is gendered and characterized by institutional inequalities.

Those gendered inequalities from the society are often carried into prisons. In Zimbabwe imprisoned women are not allowed to train as men do; they are often offered knitting and sewing programs while their male counterparts are active in carpentry and motor mechanics. This already perpetuates the societal expectations that women have to learn basic domestic skills that do not help them to find jobs after life in prison. Chant (2007: 215) argues that the state has often ignored the labor needs of the women, following gender disparities in the cultural norms and limiting participation of women in the labor market. The state perpetuates the ideas of what constitutes the public and the private and has endorsed a family stereotype that it seeks to promote and implement in its policies (O’Connell 2007: 166). The Zimbabwean state becomes a controlling mechanism, regulating the bodies of people and showing its hegemonic powers to constrain and govern people.

The economic failure in Zimbabwe has meant that women need to be actively involved in bringing food on the table. This has meant that the woman has to be an active agent in the economic cosmos. When women exercise agency through stealing, robbery, fraud and such activities they are often perceived as victims of cultural expectations of what is to be female, hence seen as naïve, stupid or committing acts under manipulation of a man. The notion being that criminal does not equal being a female. When there is recognition that indeed the women were actively committing the crime then the woman is seen as a misfit and deviant in the society and often met with a heavy sentence. The mark of deviance and the stigma often times remains attached to the woman for the rest of her life. This is not often the case for men.

Furthermore, the prison programs for women also tend to see women as victims, and not as active agents. Women are required by society to be treated as fragile, while at the same time, demands of hard work and engagement for the benefit of the family is placed upon them. Thus “female inmates, it is argued, find themselves over determined by program ideologies that seek to perpetuate their oppression and thus they cannot break out of the institutional claims about their deviant selves and tend to adopt the perspective of the institution” (Warral 1990, McCorkel 2003, cited in Fili 2013: 4). Women prisoners are ‘infanticised’ following the belief that is inherent in the society that women are weak and they need someone to rescue them. The genderedness of prisons is further defined through gender binary categories and discourses of power dynamics that exist in the society. These binary gender categories serve to separate females and males thus promoting genderedness of femininity and masculinity in prison that extend beyond the confines of the prison walls (Pemberton 2013: 152).

2.2.2 Marriage and Children

The relationships of women prisoners and their partners entail a discussion of the role of children. As Fincham and Bradbury (1990:172) states “The relationship between children and the marriage is a complex one in which bidirectional relations need to be emphasized”. Children affect spousal relations and at the same time spousal relations affect children. Some of the imprisoned women have children and these children are often looked after by extended family members or by the state (mostly in developed countries). Meredith and Humphrey (2013:358) argue that kinship care is important for maintaining relational networks with members of the same family. Thus it is not surprising that imprisoned women find it easier to have their children looked after by relatives as a way of keeping in touch. For mothers, including imprisoned mothers, child survival and looking after their children means “reproductive success” (Sear and Mace 2008:2). As will be shown later in chapter 5, children played a critical role in the relationship of imprisoned women. For some women children were part of a power play in their relationships to their partners. Attachment literature also recognizes the fact that children can act as reunification agents to parental relationships especially where relations are broken (Meredith and Humphrey 2013:359). The attachment theories are thus relevant in the prison context, where children become mediators of parental contact.

2.2.3 Gender, Prison and the State

The state is a gendered institution. The Zimbabwean state, for example, is often symbolized through familial male figures, fathers or sons. The late vice president Joshua Nkomo is called the Father of the Nation (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007). The other late vice President Muzenda was named Son of the Soil.

Connell (1990: 535) notes “...the state is *historically* patriarchal, patriarchal as a matter of concrete social practices”. Given that the state as an institution plays an important role in organizing people’s lives, including marital relations (through law, for example) it is imperative to analyse the state in relation to imprisonment. Not only has the state organized how people live but it has also dictated the gendered roles through normalizing certain behaviours that put a divide on what is maleness and femaleness. Feminists have been central in analysing the state as an over-bearing nanny who is gendered and controls the lives of the people (Mohanty et al 1991:10).

Addressing the needs of the male gender has a long history in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean state that spans from the colonial era when the woman was considered to be at “the bottom of the ladder” (Schmidt 1991: 738). The colonial era marginalized the Zimbabwean woman and forced her to be under the economic yoke of the man who paid taxes for her to the state and subsequently managed to control her through her high economic dependence. Thus policies that concerned the woman were not on top of the political will of policy makers. Woman became a substitute to policy issues that affected her well-being (Schmidt 1991:739).

The state is also concerned with controlling women's bodies, as expressed in the concern of the prison officer about STD, pregnancy and conjugal rights, for example. As a woman I feel that it is my own right to make a decision over sexuality issues: to be pregnant in prison or not, and to be able to make a choice to sleep with my partner whether I am in prison or not. Connell (1990: 530) argues that the state claims power to 'regulate' and 'create' women's sexuality "and ... thus the state becomes the focus of interest-group formation and the mobilization in sexual politics".

2.2.4 Gendered Identities, Crime and Criminality

Language plays an important role in production of gendered identities (Scott 1986: 1063). The use of the words has marked differences between women and men and hence defines their roles and the way they conduct themselves in the society and how society perceives their differences. Thus it is important in this research to see how women speak about themselves and their experiences, and construct their identities in the process. It is also important to analyse how women exercise their own agency in relation to the prison, their fellow inmates and the families that they have left behind. To see female prisoners as passive recipients or objects of the institutional practice simply imply silencing a voice that could otherwise bring about a new ontology and epistemology. In communication and in dialoguing, as well as through social practice, the gender identities of incarcerated women as docile victims can be deconstructed, without ignoring their structural inequalities and dependencies.

The naming and production of knowledge about the 'other' also produces identities (Berry 2010: 1006). In Zimbabwe 'the criminal' has been branded with discriminatory and dehumanizing names such as misfits (*gororo*) and less human (*bhanditi*) who should be punished (Mafume 2014:3) While in English the word 'bandit' means a type of criminal, the word *bhanditi* in Zimbabwe is used as the lowest level of derogatory term even to those out of prison. These names are also gendered as referring to male.

Women who enter the prison system size to be seen as women in the society. They are given male derogatory names such as *bhanditi* and *gororo*. The absence of female gendered 'derogatory' names already shows the perceived 'absence' of female prisoners. In this way any woman who commits crime, even if does not warrant heavy penalty, is often severely punished by the society which rejects her (Benjamin 2004:4). As Yuval-Davis argues (1999: 130), "People seek assurances in definitions of identities and cultures which are fixed and immutable. Anybody different or external to the boundaries of the community thus defined would be perceived as inherently incompatible and thus any mixing would inevitably end in disaster".

The women in prison tend to internalize the naming and the use of the language. The ways they speak of themselves show active struggle to situate their experiences within gendered norms and notions that are dominant in the society. I will discuss later, for example, how a woman who does not have visitors attributes this to a "spirit of rejection". Use of the word spirit in Zimbabwean culture if not referring to God, often means an evil spirit hovering

around you. This shows the woman saw herself as engulfed by an evil spirit called prison. Some women accept dominant structural understandings of obedience in marriage, including cheating husband or intimate violence, but their language shows active struggles around the dominant societal thinking and notions of masculinity, femininity and criminality.

2.2.5 Gendered Symbols and Imprisonment

Gender is also premised on restructuring social relations which can be defined by the use of symbols in the society. As Scott explains (1986:1067) symbols denote social power relations.

Symbols are important in analysis of gender and imprisonment. They define maleness and femaleness. Hence a point of analysis is in knowing “what symbols are used and in what context” (Scott 1986: 1067). Symbolic representation (Winker and Degele 2011:54) of prisons is wide and varied. The word prison is symbolically used as an institution of control and use of power. It is the state apparatus to show its hegemonic control over its citizens. Thus being in prison symbolically mean that all power has been taken away from you and your agency is stripped away. Prison can also mean different things in one’s life. Those in hardships and poverty can use the word prison to define their lives. Women who are abused often use the word prison to define their homes. Those feeling guilty over any situation can refer to their minds as being a prison. Thus the word prison and its symbolic meanings are often associated with everything that is evil, controlling or uncomfortable.

The symbolic meanings will certainly affect how the world views prisoners and more so female prisoners. Women are often associated with pureness and men with war and evil (Connell 2002: 34). Crime can be seen as “an act that breaks a law that relates to how people behave in society. The harm caused by the act is seen to be against society as a whole, not just a specific person” (Justice BC, 2014), thus has a symbolic dimension. The prison and the crime send signal to the society, making people fear the stigma associated with them that could lead to spousal separation (Apel et al 2010: 272,273,Western and McClanahan 2000:5, Huebner 2005:283).

CHAPTER 3.

HUSBANDS, PARTNERS AND PRISONS

3.1 A 'GOOD RELATIONSHIP'

The answer to the question: "Will you please tell me about your relationship with your husband?" was often met with the answer: "I had a good relationship with my husband/partner before I was imprisoned".

'Good' however is very subjective. What characterises a 'good relationship' became confusing when it turns out that the partner was abusive, not looking after the children and in certain instances engaging in extra marital affairs. For instance, when I asked Natsai¹ about her relationship, she said:

Natsai: We were happy and good together, but then my husband impregnated another woman and this did not go down well with me. The mother of the child then dumped her baby at our house. The child is 2 years old'.

ME: When he cheated how was your relationship?

Natsai: You know the nature of men! It did not go down well with me but we discussed the issue and it was solved.

The second interview:

Jennifer: I had a good relationship with my boyfriend. We are now three years together. I don't have any siblings or parents, so practically am alone. ...I met my boyfriend who stays in Mukuvisi ²River, if you know it. My life was so difficult but I wanted to survive and so I fell in love with him. My life became better because he gave me shelter and we used to be together all the time.

Me: Was your relationship fine?

Jennifer: To tell you the truth, during the first days we were so much in love. But with time, I was in an abusive relationship. He used to beat me and verbally abuse me. But I had nowhere to go. He is the only person I can call my own.

What is interesting in those statements is that, even though the women speak of relationships that I would see as being far from desirable, they continue to talk about them in the present tense. One cannot ignore the internalization of the dominant thinking about masculinity or male sexuality that excuses the behaviour of the men.

¹ Not real name. All names of respondents are pseudonyms

² Informal settlement : this is the place where street children, men and women stay

For instance, in the first interview, the man is described engaging in an extra marital affair. The woman was imprisoned because she had physically abused the child that her partner fathered with another woman. Yet, she understands and excuses the behaviour of the man with a statement: “you know the nature of men.” The other woman explains her acceptance of abuse through the absence of kin, or anybody she can call her own.

The question that rose in my mind is: what then constitutes a ‘good relationship’? There is an interesting paradox here that women actively engage in explaining their choices through naturalization of male sexual drive and normalization of abuse and adjust to the behaviour of their partners.

The other question is, “what is the nature of men?” Feminist scholarship has often argued that women internalize the societal and cultural constructs which condone the abuse of women as a social norm and hence swallow the bitter pill in silence (Edwards etal 2012:515, Langan, etal 2014: 2). But this swallowing is not done without processing and adjusting.

Jennifer, though mentioning that she is in an abusive relationship, is willing to go back to the boyfriend because he is the only person who gave her shelter when her aunt chased her away from home. He was also a source of food and protection, so she estimates it was better to stay with him even though he abused her. Moe (2009:252) argues that “battered women exhibit much agency in their efforts to survive and end victimization and their reasons for remaining in violent relationships are complicated and interconnected”. These reasons, as in the case of Jennifer, include the agency to survive in a world where she has no one else to whom she can turn to. Staying at the Mukuvisi River with other street men, children and women shows her resilience to the pressure of this life. Thus she cannot be seen simply as a helpless individual or a passive recipient of abuse. Her decision to stay in the relationship entails calculative steps and an analysis of other life options (Moe 2009:244, Gharaibeh and Oweis 2009:376). For her going back to her boyfriend is the most ideal situation since he is, in her view, the only person who understands her situation. With the stigma surrounding prisons, he seems to her again the only person who can accept her back into his life. She identifies her life with the life of this street man/partner who lives through the same ordeal as she does.

Gharaibeh and Oweis (2009: 377) argue that women’s lack on economic muscle leading to dependency on the partner may force a woman to stay in an abusive relationship. Indeed, lack of family backup and social support system may make a woman to weigh her options and rationalize her staying in an abusive relationship.

3.2. DOES THE MONEY COUNT?

The role of economic status of the female prisoner had a critical bearing on the relationships with husbands/ partners. Two women in the interviews had

some level of education; one was a teacher and the other one was self-employed. The two stated having good relations with their partners. Maureen, a temporary teacher, said:

Maureen: The story goes like this: I was a temporary teacher at a certain school and then from nowhere a grape vine started and I was being accused of draining blood from school children using a needle. The doctors failed to confirm these phenomena so I was charged with assault instead. I think my husband truly understands that I am innocent.

Draining blood out of people in Zimbabwe has long been associated with witchcraft and of late with Satanism or devil worship. Traditionally such allegations would result in someone being killed or the wife being sent back to her parents resulting in divorce. The case of witchcraft in Zimbabwe is gendered, and traditionally, as in the current society, witchcraft is often times associated with women. Local newspapers carry stories of witchcraft insinuations almost every week, and unfortunately they are almost all about women. (*All Africa* 2013, *Voice of America* 2010, *National Geographic Channel* 2012). During the liberation struggle, most women accused of being witches (especially the old grandmothers) were often killed in public by the guerrilla fighters as a way of punishment. Furthermore, and I remember this when growing up, children would point to wrinkled grandmothers as witches and oftentimes children would be afraid of them.

The Amendment of the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899, in 2006 particularly part IV of Chapter V meant that witchcraft is now considered a crime (WWRN 2006, Nkatanzo 2006, Vickers 2006). During the colonial era witchcraft was not recognized as a crime at all. However the amendments require that evidence beyond reasonable doubt be presented before someone can be incriminated. The Amendment of 2006 has made women more vulnerable to this Act as they are often under suspicion and accused for witchcraft practices. Thus it was easy for the community to point that Maureen was draining blood and therefore would accuse her of witchcraft. Maureen therefore had to prove her case under the new Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act and clear her name in the community. Maureen and her husband consulted medical doctors to prove her case. Cases of witchcraft usually involve all family members and the husband might have been under immense pressure to prove his wife's innocence and avoid further public scrutiny.

Though Maureen was exonerated from 'witchcraft' she was charged with assault and thus it was assumed that she might have abused the school children in one way or the other. This again shows how gendered the courts are and how they are not liberated from the dogma of traditional beliefs in linking women to witchcraft. Thus even though there is no charge for witchcraft, nor proof of needle punctures, still she could be charged with assault. This again shows how often women end up with harsh sentences for crimes that they did not commit and often times it is due to internalized societal beliefs about femininity, which penetrates state apparatus or is simply a reflection of a lack of adequate legal representations, that is often associated with the lack of financial resources for paying lawyers. However Maureen's husband's visits to

prison give her guarantee that her relationship is functioning well. According to her, it is an indication that the husband believed in her innocence and faithfully visits her with the children.

Money plays different role in the relationship between Grace and her husband:

Grace: My husband is supportive but passive (laughs). He is the kind of man to whom you have to tell everything and anything of what needs to be done. I feel like I am managing the household while I am here. Can u imagine, I gave him my bank cards and all but he tells me that the kids have been send away from school? This is why I transferred them to Marondera High School. I had to look for a good school and my parents are taking care of that.

Grace was self-employed and her husband is retired. By the looks of it, she is the one who runs the family business and currently manages her household from the prison. As noted in the interview, she gave her husband the bank cards and she tells him the steps to take for every situation. The husband also faithfully comes to see her and updates her on the household issues. Grace seemed to be happy with her relationship and the fact that, though she was in prison, she could manage this man and the household. She further says that: *I am lucky I have my passive husband (laughs). I think it's a blessing in disguise. I never hear of extramarital affairs (laughs).*

Thus even though she is in prison, her economic muscle is giving her the power to manage her household affairs and to keep her marriage. According to Lopoo and Western (2005:723) once the imprisoned partner (in the case of their research, male partner) is no longer able to financially support the family because of incarceration, the relationship may be terminated. The fact that this woman's business could still financially support the family, even while she is imprisoned, might be among the reasons why the relationship is still sustained. The female prison officer also concurred that money had a role to play in this relationship:

We are surprised because we have one man who is consistent in coming and we think it's because the wife is the one who runs the business and she does it from here. He says: 'My wife is the intelligent and she has to advise me how to run the business'.

The husband in this instance recognizes both the intelligence and the economic relevance of his imprisoned wife and is interested in maintaining the relationship.

The economic relevance of imprisoned partner is not an unusual phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Thus one can suggest that in the complex and unpredictable relationships between prisoners and their partners' money can also play a significant role.

3.3 HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES: FEMALE AND MALE SEXUAL DESIRES

Consummation of a relationship becomes critical to any love, romantic relationship as well as in marriage. I would assume that this would have been a topical issue for the women, being denied the sexual privilege. However I was met with surprise because the women did not seem to be much bothered by it as if it was almost natural not to have access to sex with their partners. Furthermore, though the women did not hesitate to talk about their children and other topics, they seemed to be reserved when talking about conjugal issues. I can safely confess that I was a little disappointed as I had had a very heated argument with my brother and sister about conjugal rights for prisoners. I was fervently arguing that those rights were important and the prisoners themselves should not be denied their right to this important component of the human relationships.

However women had varied responses when I asked them how they cope with sexual desire. Most of the women seemed to draw strength from prayer as a coping strategy. Other women had hopes of accessing conjugal rights after prison. Of particular interest was Grace who said: *‘Well, as for me, really, my husband is old and I do not think of that. If you are in prison you better know your place. You don’t have that option.’* The not having “this option” seemed to be supported by the male prison officer who seemed to agree after I asked him about the possibility of women accessing conjugal rights in Zimbabwean prisons:

(Laughs) That’s a long way coming. We have so much more to worry about at the moment than the conjugal rights in prison. That will be a policy issue and the facilities have to be made. Issues of STIs are important coz you don’t know if the man is being faithful. He can come and sleep with the woman and infect her. Also we have to consider issues of pregnancy again.

The responses suggest an acceptance of the status quo. The conjugal rights were not a priority for the women in prison, at the moment. However, I do agree that I did not probe much into the issue when talking with women. I felt if I probed further I would be putting ideas in their minds. Secondly, culturally, issues of sexuality are not discussed with ‘strangers’ and this was relevant especially at times I was talking to older inmates. However, this passivity and leniency towards the issues of sexuality is not surprising, especially in Zimbabwe where women from a tender age are taught to be reserved in sexual issues and to show subordination to the sexual demands of the men (Kambarami 2006). The issues of sexuality are not openly discussed and when they are discussed this is done to advise younger women on how to please the men (Kambarami 2006). Not surprisingly then that the women could not talk about their sexual desires.

When I spoke to the male prison officer about conjugal rights of women, he also said:

I think the challenge is the societal pressures and also sexual pressures. The man cannot stay long without having sex. Men are not strong enough to wait for the whole year or even if someone is imprisoned for five years. The man wants children as well.

On conjugal rights, the female prison officer said

If you are now in prison you are a criminal [she used the word gororo; comment RM] who would want to remain married to a criminal? However if the man is imprisoned the wife faithfully visits and waits for the husband.

The phrase ‘men cannot stay long without sex’ is a very common phrase that has been imbedded in both women and men. Men are often excused for marrying multiple wives (as allowed by laws of Zimbabwe) and are often cheered for having many extra-marital affairs. In the book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, the authors state that “biological urges” construct “a working definition of what it means to be a man: ‘A man is a male human who fucks’”, (Jensen 1998:99, cited in Muchemwa and Muponde 2007: 18).

Thus the identity of the male as a highly sexualized being is applauded and seen as an issue of pride. In the same vein the woman is supposed to be sexually pure and moral and to wait for her (only) partner/husband to initiate sex. The male body controls the desire of the female body. Thus it is not surprising that the cultural expectations are also carried behind the prison walls, as Grace graciously said: ‘*If you are in prison you better know your place*’. That place is the place where you don’t expect any sexual feeling, any access to sex whatsoever, because it is a place where sex is not being talked about, or practiced.

It is also important here to contrast and compare the female and male prison officers’ views. Both of them seem to have the societal understanding of the supremacy of the man in the household. The female officer says, ‘*who wants to remain married to a criminal?*’ but immediately points out the dichotomy that exists between imprisoned men and their partners compared to females. Furthermore both officers subscribe to the dominant thinking about male and female prisoners and of prisons as a male space.

Answering my question about sexual desires, Prisca said: *I will be out of prison in 2016, that’s when I will be able to meet with my boyfriend.* She expects to meet with her boyfriend in a sexual manner in 2016 when she hopes to leave the prison and reunite with him. She can wait, and it is assumed by society that this is how it should be, for women. The notions and practices of hegemonic masculinities that exist in Zimbabwe are clearly spelt out in these responses. When the officer mentions that a man cannot stay long without sex he means that an incarcerated woman cannot provide for sex or should not bear children behind bars. This hegemonic notion of masculinity is built in the belief of sexual entitlement for the man (Mugweni et al 2012: 582). Thus, when the wife or partner is imprisoned, a man is justified in looking for another woman to satisfy and quench his sexual desire.

These notions of male sexual needs and prowess have been important for teaching the Zimbabwean men and women, what it means to be a man, and a woman. They spell out one of the important positions of the Zimbabwean woman as viewed by the society: that she is there for sex and for bearing children. This is what the man needs a woman for. As already discussed in the theoretical framework, the genderedness of marriage is clearly spelt out in this scenario. The prison is a miniature of what the society is like and hence the same gender roles are loudly spelt out within its walls as well. The woman remains linked to her sexual and reproductive roles.

Even though one of the women I interviewed was the breadwinner and looked after her children even from the prisons, women's overall social significance outside of reproduction is often not recognized in Zimbabwean society, and they are still subordinated to men as the decision makers and heads of the household.

What is also interesting is the use of religion in dealing with sexual desire. Most of the women I talked to answered that they use prayer as the solution to missing their partners sexually. Religion plays an important role in the woman's lives in prison. One woman told that she fasts and prays often. Another mentioned that prayer is the one and only comfort she has when she misses her husband. This is not surprising. Religion and religious institutions have reinforced dominant gendered roles of women and men and encouraged patriarchy. Some feminists have argued that religion becomes a tool of suppression and subordination of women. It is in religion that the chastity and the virtue of a woman are upheld. Women are taught to be silent and the man to be the head of the household. Thus because religion plays a central role in comforting women in prison, the women uphold the religious principles of subordination to their husbands. "Church leaders and members believe, in some cases, that sex is to be endured rather than enjoyed as a gift from God, that it is inappropriate within culture, to speak about sex..." (Marshall and Taylor 2006:366).

Religion may also play a role in desires to maintain marriage and eagerness to preserve a family. Religion and religious institutions encourage the traditional family set up and hence do not encourage divorce or staying apart (Gubernskaya 2010: 183, Yucel 2014, Wilcox and Wolfinger 2007:570, 573). In this particular prison, as in every prison in Zimbabwe, religion and prayers play central role in the lives of the prisoners. The resident Chaplin also makes sure that there are priests and pastors who come in to preach for the prisoners, and many prisoners are baptized in prisons.

CHAPTER 4.

RELEVANCE OF CHILDREN FOR WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

In my work as the Prison Friends Network coordinator, my concern with children of prisoners has been their upkeep and how they live at home. My assumption has always been that it is better for the child to be taken into child care or foster homes in order for them to be catered by the state. This assumption was drawn from my experience in reading about foster care homes and state protection in developing countries in North America and Europe where the child of the prisoner is often taken into foster care. It was even more stamped during my visits to a female prison in Nova Scotia, in Canada. From this visit it seemed to me ideal to put a child into foster care. However, this assumption was heavily challenged during the course of the interviews. While it may be very desirable for developed countries to have the children of prisoners taken into a foster home, this might not be the ideal situation for Zimbabwe. I realized that for the imprisoned women children perform certain functions that aid their psychosocial wellbeing as well as keeps the bond between them and their families, especially their husbands or partners. I suppose if these children were in the state custody these functions I found interesting in this analysis could not have been realized.

Hairston argues that incarcerated parents whose children are in state custody are concerned about the legal implications of staying in contact with their children, and are often wary that the privilege of seeing their child may be terminated for various reasons (Hairston 2003: 269). During the interviews I had with the women about their relations with their partner/spouse I realized children play an important role. I did not think about that before the research, given my own assumptions and my world view as a single person without children. Thus, not being apologetic about my presumptions, my interest here is to refer to the social world view that is born out of cultural and societal influences that have surrounded my life.

During my interviews, I came to see children as critical players or stakeholders in the female prisoners' relationships with their partners.

Feminist have often argued over the notions and experiences of motherhood in the woman's life. Some feminists have argued that mothering has brought with it the ideology of male dominance and suppression (Hartwell et al 2014:104). Not only has it brought the hardships associated with child bearing, but the fact that the authority and autonomy over the children still lies with the male partner (Ribbens 1994: 12). Having children in a partner or marriage relation also leads to subordination of the woman and limits the mobility of the female partner as some feminists have argued (Ribbens 1994:22).

There is an expression in Zimbabwe, '*Mukadzi mutorwa*' meaning a wife is not a blood relative, but a stranger in the household. In a society where the

mother is referred in such a way, the women might be exercising agency while staying with the husband, in order to be close to their children (*Ndogarira vana vangu*³). The culture in Zimbabwe dictates that, if the wife no longer wants the husband, the children remain with the husband as they belong to him and not to the wife. Though the law itself has a provision that the child who is below 18 years of age may stay with the mother, the society has not been groomed to think this way and often times when the wife calls for divorce her children are also taken away. The women I interviewed in these instances were from low income families, yet often they were the sole providers of the income and wellbeing of their children in the home. There was a remarkable show of distress when the women spoke about their children, showing that separation from their children was a major concern for them while they are in prison (*Moyo wekubereka*⁴).

Hairston (2003:269) argues that “The protection, care and nurturance of prisoners’ children are the principal concerns of prisoners and their families”. While it is true that prisoners have little or no control over their children’s visits, I found the right to child visits to be ideal for the women. I was also made aware of the fact that some children were in difficult positions and the state custody could have been ideal for them, for instances where the child has dropped out of school:

ME: So you are the one who used to pay the school fees?

Vongai: Yes am the one, right now he is not going to school because we failed to raise the money.

With all this said, I argue that children play an important role in the spousal relationships. I want to be careful not to make this claim the ultimate truth, but a critical reflection about lives of the women in question.

I will discuss two central claims in this section about children as relationship builders and children as a substitute to love or a curse for women,

4.1 CHILDREN AS RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS

As some of the women I interviewed would cry as they mentioned their children and the concern over their wellbeing, I was thinking that women who did not have children were better off, as they did not have to endure the pain of separation and worry. However it became apparent through the interviews that indeed motherhood could not be seen only as a source of oppression but also as a point of power and active agency.

The extract below from the interview explains:

³ This phrase is commonly used by women who remain in marriages yet wishing for divorce. They use this phrase to say that the only reason she is in the marriage are her children. Without having children, she could have long been divorced.

⁴ Commonly used phrase by women in Zimbabwe to show their love of children. Direct translation would mean “the heart of giving birth”

ME: ... So what are you doing to maintain your relationship?

Maureen: The bond is our children and that he is still coming... Our relationship was very good. Even now am not complaining as he comes to visit with the children.....I think children help us to bond, and also my husband explained to them the circumstances surrounding my arrest.

Thus it is not only important for these women that their children stay at home, but the children become an important aspect in the wellbeing of the relationship. Furthermore the statements from some of the women show that leaving their children with husbands is a great coping strategy and also a blessing in disguise. This is especially so if the husbands bring children to the prison, to spend time with both partners.

Some may argue that I am promoting the traditional thinking that women need marriage and children. However there is a lot that the partners invest in their marriages. The example of Grace, who is married 18 years and is the sole bread winner, shows that there are issues of financial commitment, as well as issues of emotional attachment, and maintaining the bond with children. Those are all interwoven. Children became in a sense the bond that sustains marriage.

The case of Grace shows how intertwined partner relations are with relations to children. As a woman, she has the financial muscle and her husband looks after the children and the household. However, Grace has no ultimate control of her money. Although she gave money for school fees to be paid at the 'prestigious' school, the husband failed to pay the fees and the children were expelled. Thus this led Grace to suggest that her children be transferred to a school where her parents could monitor them. This again brings to mind how the Zimbabwean patriarchal man has control over the assets of the woman and can use them at will and not be accountable for them. Furthermore it shows the necessity of reliance on kinship ties for the woman. Her family becomes almost an undisputed critical element in the wellbeing of her children even though the father is present. Hence she had a financial muscle but like most others, she also had to rely on her extended family for support and overseeing of the wellbeing of her children.

4.2 CHILDREN A SUBSTITUTE TO LOVE, OR A CURSE?

As a single person I believed for a long time that marriage is built on love and nothing else. Ukpokolo agrees. He says: "Love is not only a most fundamental requirement in any genuinely desirable human relationship, it is also a most transcendental condition desired in the very institution of marriage" (Ukpokolo2012:79).

This statement and my belief are challenged by this research. Children become a force behind some of the women holding up in prison to their lives,

and to their partners. Despite the fact that for some women, the man or the partner was economically irrelevant, they are willing to go back to these husbands because they bore children together. What therefore links them to their partners is not necessarily love towards the partner but the result of the marriage: children. It made no sense to me why somebody would go back to a man who had no economic significance, never even tried to visit or helped with the upkeep of the wife or partner. Yet some women had a devotion to go back to their husbands and stay with them for the sake of the children. Ukpokolo (2012: 79-80) also agrees that in most African cultures the man who typically provides for his wife by giving food, shelter, and is performing his marital duties, is regarded as showing love to his wife. In other words, breadwinning is not just seen as man's social/familial responsibility, but also as a symbol of spousal love. Thus, it surprised me that women would want to go back to husband/partner who did not fulfil this social/familial obligation. But they do it for the sake of their children. In trying to understand this, I was wondering are children a substitute for love or a curse for the women to be glued to a loveless relationship for the sake of matrimonial duties and motherhood, for the sake of children.

One respondent whose husband never visited said, responding to my question where she would go after prison as the husband was not visiting her: *I will go to my husband, we have a child together. The child is always with my mother.*

Imbedded in the statements of this woman lies the power of societal pressures to remain married and the stigma associated with divorce, loss of children or single motherhood. Once one is impregnated the expected end result is to stay in marriage, hence to the incarcerated women the desire to go back to their husbands also comes from a double stigma, that of criminality and of divorce. Marriage is thus seen as a vehicle of maintaining their dignity in the society. This is characteristic in a society where no matter how influential in the society one might be as a woman, if you are not married a 'but she is not married' will always relate to how you are defined and what place you hold in the society. Divorce and being single with a child often entail sexual looseness and strips the woman of her dignity in Zimbabwean society. It is therefore not surprising that the women were struggling to save their marriage as their last hope of restoring their dignity in the face of the society. Thus the children became a link for saving their marriages.

During the course of the interviews it seems that what most women now lived for were their children. Not only for the sake of saving marriages or going back and staying with their partners. Children became in themselves a string of life. For some of the women in prison, children became the ones who determined women's desire to live. Had it not been for the children they could have opted out of the marriage, or life.

CHAPTER 5.

THE FAMILY AND THE KIN

“The family is the Primary Site for scripting of gendered identities and it is here that the iconographic investments in body begin.” (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007: xix)

The extended family was a recurring theme as I talked to the women and hence became an interesting point for analysis. The women, one way or another, experienced the influence of family members on their relationships. The families in some instances looked after the children or visited the woman inmate. The family members also carried information back and forth. The inmates have little control of who visits or not. Thus, family members were central as they were the link between the society and the prison. This interwoven relationship meant that family members also affect the spousal relationships. As noted earlier, the female prison officers said:

Women face challenges of stigmatization by their families and their husband's families who never want to accept them back into the society. If you are now in prison you are a criminal. Who wants to get married to a criminal? But if the man is imprisoned women wait for their husbands and visit often.

The stigma of being imprisoned is mostly unacceptable for women, especially in Zimbabwe. Women are stigmatized both by their own families and the families of the in-laws. The issue of genderedness of imprisonment is hard to ignore in the statement of the prison guard. The family of the husband is the most often the one to reject the woman. Marriage in Zimbabwe is often seen as a communal affair. One marries into the extended family. When *lobola* (dowry) negotiations are made for the woman, the family has a say. When there are problems in the relationship, the family will also have a say. As one of my respondents, Caroline, who had fallen out with her parents because she refused to stay with her first husband, said:

I was married to a rich man whom my parents loved. But this man used to abuse me very much and I ran away. My parents accused me that I am a fool. They would shout at me and tell me am the one at fault. (Crying). I told them I won't go back to him. I have attempted to kill myself twice. (Crying).

This shows that family has part to play in whether one should stay married or not and in most cases it is the woman who has to suffer silently. In most cases my respondents were rejected by their families for being criminals. Being a criminal and a woman brings shame to the family and the family might not want to associate with them or to visit them.

Caroline: (crying). My mom came only once for the past 5 months. My dad never visited me. My dad dictates to mom so even if she wants to come she won't come and see me. It pains me.

This again points to the power dynamics that exist in the household. The man often makes decisions that govern the household and dictates the conduct of each household member, regarding family relationships. Some authors have argued that this unequal power nexus in the household has been central to gender stratification and has caused the demise of the African woman as the inferior to the male partner (Schmidt 1991: 734).

Natsai had only her sister coming to visits. Her in-laws never visited her, but would visit the husband who was also in prison. She indicated that the in-laws had already rejected her and did not want her to be part of the family anymore, showing how the institutions of marriage and prison are interwoven, to make some marriages dissolve:

Natsai: No one comes to visit except my sister. My husband did not make an appeal for bail but accepted guilt for the crime and hence he was imprisoned. My relatives are not coming but I hear that my in-laws frequently visit my husband. They never visited me once (crying). Actually I heard they are saying they don't want me as part of the family anymore. (Crying).

Not only does the rejection come from the in-laws, it also comes from the parental family of the woman. The family of the imprisoned woman may actually discourage the man from caring and continuing the relationship with her. There are multiple factors that come to mind. One of them would be that family of the woman may arrange another woman in the family to get married and bear children for the husband of the incarcerated woman, which is a common custom when the wife of the husband dies.

Rosemary experienced a situation where her own relatives showed a negative attitude:

I don't think my relationship with my husband is fine. He was taken for HIV test and his blood is clean. So it gets complicated now because I am in prison and on top of that my blood is positive.⁵ But my husband tried to look for money so he could find someone to help with my case. However, my guardians who took over to look after us when my parents died connived him against me and told him (crying) not to waste money but wait till I am out of prison. (Crying).

The above scenarios show how the woman is rejected as soon as she enters the prison walls. She becomes irrelevant to her own family and her in-laws. The stigma of the 'criminal', and in this case, also of HIV infection, makes her a misfit in the society. The way the imprisoned woman is treated the moment she 'deviates' from society shows the intolerance as well as social constructs of femininity. The women will always be seen as an inferior and irrelevant to the family, the one who can be easily replaced. The prison officer noted this when saying how the woman most often waits for the imprisoned husband but the husband often does not wait for the imprisoned woman. The

⁵ Meaning she is HIV positive

woman in prison therefore continues to symbolize a patriarchal system that esteems the man above the woman.

5.1 IDENTITIES, CRIMES AND FAMILIAL RELATIONS

It was interesting to me how the women viewed themselves as they described their positions in relation to their crime and how it affected their relations with spouses or families. Some of the women viewed their being in prison in a negative way. At the same time others compared their crimes to those of other women. Vongai, who had committed the crime of embezzlement, thought she did not deserve the treatment that she got from the husband who was not visiting her. When I asked her what could be the reason husband is not coming, she quickly compared herself with those who had committed murder:

Vongai: I never heard the reason why my husband is not coming (crying). Those who commit murder actually get visitors. I don't understand why my husband does not come. Maybe it's a spirit of rejection (shrugs) I really don't know.

The female prison officer said:

Men don't continue to love someone who has been imprisoned. Imagine your own brother loving someone who has committed murder, it's a difficult situation.

The prison officer whom I believe has much experience in seeing the dynamics of relationships between imprisoned women and their partners also indicated that men do not want to continue relations with imprisoned women, especially in the case of murder. When she posed the question back to me and my immediate relations, I also imagined how my family would respond if the wife of my brother committed murder. Would my family or I support the idea that my brother waits and supports the wife through and through? As someone working for Prison Friends Network designing programs to reduce stigma and discrimination, this was a moment of introspection. I questioned myself to this practical reality and I realized there was a lot to be done in the area of rehabilitation, fostering relations and bringing awareness not only to the general public but also to the immediate families as well. Our consciousness needs to challenge the process of socialization and culture and resist the dominant thinking that divides the people and create identities that bring oppressive conclusions. Naming one as criminal and naming an institution as a prison already creates an identity for a person that evokes certain feelings in that person and the society at large.

Jennifer confirmed this, talking about her boyfriend who apparently was also imprisoned. Yet she still loved him and longed to see him as she thinks he is the only who understands her: *I really have a desire to see him. I am*

now imprisoned and I don't think anyone wants anything to do with me now. I believe it is only my boyfriend who can understand me.

Jennifer already created her self-identity as 'the rejected one' by the society. This shows how society has created the person who is in prison. But the person who is in prison in turn has created the same identity.

However it was interesting to find one inmate – Grace - who did not perceive herself as a criminal. Although she was in prison, she talked of herself and 'them' – prisoners:

Grace: ***They** need support, all of **them**. Another thing to work on is the programs that boost **their** esteem. **These people** don't have confidence at all, **they** are crushed, just living, you know (laughs). **They** need such programs as positive thinking, confidence, grooming, dress code, health issues you name it, especially to know it's not the end of the world.* (Emphasis by author)

Grace was also creating an identity: that of herself and also identity of the other women prisoners. She seemed to be separating herself from an already existing identity that she was supposed to be part of, yet did not adhere to. The fact that 'they' are seen as hopeless, crushed, and without confidence or grooming is the message that is inherent in the society that separates those in prison and those who are out of prison. Hall (1997:258) argues that stereotyping splits societies into what is acceptable and what is not, normalizing and excluding other people thereby creating power and powerlessness in order to maintain the stereotypes. The messages categorize people in groups of good and bad citizens, good and bad wives, good and bad partners. This classification of people is Othering, according to Hall (1997:237) and creates boundaries that mark difference which "leads us symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture, stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal". Thus assumed identities and their creation affect the relations that exist between families and partners.

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION

The reader is reminded of the main question of this research which seeks to understand how gender shapes the dynamics of spousal/ partner and family relationships when the female partner is imprisoned. The sub questions premised around this topic sought to understand a) women's experiences of spousal/partner and family relationships when the female is imprisoned b) the societal attitudes and perceptions of incarcerated women, and the ways they affect the spousal/partner relationship c) other power relationships, next to gender that are important in spousal and family dynamics, especially sexuality and d) how the state, the prison system, kin and family, as gendered institutions, support or undermine the women's relationships with spouses/partners.

The first sub questions sought to explore women's experiences of spousal and family relations while incarcerated. The women's experiences of spousal/partner and family relations are varied and their narration of the experiences brought out diverse insights. There was almost a recognizable desire and intention from the women to remain attached to their partners even though some had almost none or insignificant contact with their partners. Some of the relationships were far from perfect, yet the women were willing to negotiate and struggle with abuse, extra marital affairs and in some instances financially incompetent partners. Their acceptance of the 'negative' aspects of their relationships shows an internalization of societal and cultural ideologies that normalize hegemonic masculinities that naturalize abuse and mistreatment of women. The attachment to remain married however has varied reasons. I argued that staying in such relationships is also a matter of exercising agency, evident in the ways women explain and justify their choices. There are many complex processes that women have to bargain with before they decide to move. For instance there is a cognitive dissonance around criminality and femininity that women in prison have to battle with. Thus in a patriarchal society ordered around binary categories of maleness and femaleness and what is expected from each gender, being in marriage or in a relationship ascertain their femaleness. Being a criminal and not being married may further stigmatize the woman, especially in a patriarchal society where the woman is dignified and respected through marriage. Financial commitments also affected the relationship. Those who contributed or contribute a lot financially may keep in touch to maintain control of resources. It seemed though that those with financial muscle received more visits from husband. The role of children and how women exercise agency through children cannot be ignored. The partners exercised power through their children to maintain their relations, when the fathers visit mothers with the children in prison. Thus it is important to note that imprisoned women are not just docile recipients of oppressive systems but exercise agency through negotiating around these

gendered dominant structures. Some women chose to remain in these relationships for their own benefit; to have access to shelter, food, for the sake of children and in some cases protection.

To further explore the dynamics of these relations it was important to explore what the societal attitudes and perceptions of incarcerated women are and how this affected their relationships. The society is organized around creation of identities and categorization of people. The created identities also penetrate the prison walls. When imprisoned, woman is defined through stigmatization and faces discrimination. The stigma comes from identities and naming one as a criminal. Once an imprisoned woman is named '*gororo*' her femininity is taken away and indirectly she is ascribed masculine gender. Thus because of her 'deviant' behavior the society marks her unfit to perform her society-scripted feminine roles competently. The virtues of purity and goodness that are mostly attributed to the female gender are also stripped away from the female prisoner and she is seen as a 'sinner'. Thus this differentiation of people borrowed from cultural, social and structural practices create a negative energy around female inmates who supposedly become unfit to marry a 'good man'. Thus it is not surprising that questions such as "*Who wants to remain married to a criminal?*" almost always crop up in relation to a female inmates yet their male counterparts are often accepted in the society and some become religious pastors and leaders of churches. The alienation of the female prisoner extends beyond the prison wall and follow her the rest of her life. This ultimately makes it hard for her to maintain her relationships even where she has the desire to do so.

Female inmates also carry the negative connotations from the society into the prison walls. As one inmate pointed out issues of self-worth, self-esteem and confidence are heavily challenged. They also perceive that they can no longer be accepted by the society hence the desire to cling to current relationship. The negative language that the female inmates use to refer to themselves also reveals their perceived position in the society. While one is in prison, the type of crime may further alienate the person from her relations. Murder and theft are not viewed the same. Thus while there is room to condone a thief, the same room may have its doors shut for the murderess.

Indeed the relevance of sexuality was also discussed as an important power dynamic to consider in the spousal/partner relationship. The dominant thinking around sexual issues for women in prison is premised around cultural and societal expectations of female virtues. The inhibitions to talk about sex depict the ideology that a woman is not supposed to be active sexually or to initiate sex as this may be seen as immorality. Thus in the absence of the male partner, as is the case with the prison women, the woman is supposed to uphold suppression of the sexual desire as an uprightness virtue. It is not surprising then that the women sought divine intervention to quench their desires. Religion plays a critical role in this instance as it also promotes the subordination of the woman to the man. Furthermore the women have accepted the imposed reality that they cannot have access to conjugal rights and therefore they await their release to be reunited sexually with their partners.

However the male partner is not bound by these moral principles as revealed in the interviews with prison officers. He will often not wait for the woman who is in prison as, supposedly, he cannot live long without sex. Thus sexuality is a determinant factor in this relationship as the man is at liberty to look for another woman to satisfy his sexual desires and abandon the imprisoned woman. Furthermore the place of the woman outside of reproduction arena in Zimbabwe is [almost] insignificant. Apart from not fulfilling her conjugal duties, the imprisoned woman can no longer perform her reproductive function i.e. bearing children for her husband and this may affect her relationship.

The state, the prison system, kin and family institutions have a bearing on the spousal/partner relationship. The interconnectedness of these gendered institutions cannot be ignored, especially because they are all gendered institutions. Thus there is a triad of genderedness and power relations that are at play that either support or undermine the spousal/partner relationships. For instance, the marriage in Zimbabwe is communal, with the man playing a leading role in *lobola* negotiations. Thus the extended family critically plays a role in the partner/spousal relationship. Central to this relationship are the in-laws and the parents of the imprisoned woman. The in-laws can refuse to accept a daughter-in-law who is now identified as a criminal and brings shame to the household. The stigma also extends to the parents or guardians where they can seek to organize a new wife for their son-in-law. In a patriarchal society where the child is more important than the wife, the woman can easily be discarded and replaced at any given time. However in-laws can also maintain contact with their son-in-law out of prison and help him with the children thus rendering support for the relationship.

The state, by separating, branding and naming people as ‘criminals’ creates a homogenously constituted group with negative connotations attached to it. The state assumes the father-role thus making decisions over lives of people and their familial relations. By removing the woman from her partner and locking her up, the state affects her everyday contact with her partner. The prison system also promotes naturalized perceptions of male sexuality by creating a male open prison where the male partner can visit home and access family and conjugal rights, yet the same does not apply for women. Furthermore by seeking to control issues of STI, pregnancy and access to conjugal rights the prison system is portraying a woman as child who cannot make decisions for herself. However, the regulated prison visits that are allowed also allow minimum contact of the prison women and their spouses and partners and thus they are able to exercise agency and maintain their relations.

This research explored how gender shapes the dynamics of spousal/partner and family relationships. Prison as noted in this research is commonly appreciated as a male space. Females who occupy this space are often seen as deviants and misfits in the society. This gendered arena means that women are seen as vulnerable and incapacitated. The women thus find themselves faced with negotiations and battles around societal expectations and criminality. The women find that they can no longer perform the gendered binary roles imposed on them by the patriarchal society of being mothers, care givers and

child bearers. Their absence from the normative, socially-scripted gendered roles consequently affects their relationships. It is important to note that the women do exercise agency around these gendered dynamics in order to remain in touch with their partners. Some negotiate with gender based violence, extra marital affairs and internalized gendered social structures, especially that of hegemonic position that the man has in the society. The prison becomes a miniature of a gendered society where the women struggle around masculinity (being in prison) and femininity (expected roles in the society). This is evident in the language used by women which carried negative symbolism towards being in prison, which affects their relationship towards themselves and the others. However, optimism and desire to remain with their partners also replicates societal expectations where a woman is dignified through marriage and her ability to remain married. The triad gendered institutions of prison, state, kin and family have a bearing in the how these relationships eventually shape up.

The dynamics of the relationship of female prisoners with their spouses and partners remains an understudied phenomenon both in criminology and feminist scholarship. Though many studies have been conducted on male prisoners and their families, very little is still known about incarcerated women. The reason for this, I suggest, is because prison is gendered as a male territory. Furthermore the percentage of female prisoners around the world remains relatively small thus rendering them invisible as a minority.

This study has aspired to contribute to the body of knowledge that seeks to understand the social phenomena surrounding imprisoned women and their partner and spousal relationships. Zimbabwean women in prison and their relationships have not been an area explored so far, making this study relevant academically, as well as for the organizations such as Prison Friends Network. Gender was an important tool of my analysis, relevant in order to understand holistically the social dynamics that affect the imprisoned woman. I used in-depth interviews with the women which allowed for a deep exploration into their stories. This allowed me as the researcher to become familiar with different realities and different aspects that come into play and are important in looking at the relations of imprisoned women.

However I feel the need for longitudinal studies that will follow the life of the imprisoned woman from the day that she is imprisoned to the year that she will be out in order to really understand the various dynamics and powers that affect their relationships. Further studies may also follow up on the male partners outside of prison, to understand their realities and enhance the existing data. More studies need to be done also with released women in order to understand how they resume their relationships and their lives, and analyse their coping strategies.

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APPENDIX (1): Table 1. Summary of the sample of women.

Name	Age	Education	Marital Status	Employment	Nature of Crime
Vongai	41	O level	Married	Buying and Selling	embezzlement
Prisca	29	Form 2	In a relationship	Buying and selling	robbery
Rosemary	27	Form 3	Married	House wife	Willfully infecting child with HIV
Maureen	37	A level	Married	Temporary teaching	Assault
Lisa	28	Primary	Married	Housemaid	theft
Natsai	21	Form 2	Married	Buying and selling	Child abuse/assault
Tsitsi	25	Primary	Married	Buying and Selling	Assault
Caroline	20	A level	Divorced	WeddingDecorations	Body mutilation

Grace	40	Tertiary	Married	Business woman	unknown
Jennifer	28	Primary	In a relationship	Buying and selling	robbery

NB: names are not the real names. Grace refused to mention her crime