

Masculinity, Resilience and Acts of Resistance in Zambian Prisons

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Imprisonment in an African prison (and elsewhere) is an extremely harsh experience in terms of lack of food, space, rights, as well as loss of liberty, and security. In this way, imprisonment can be a severely traumatizing experience. It is not uncommon to hear prisoners refer to themselves as being 'like slaves' in connection with prison conditions. Cell captains (high ranking prisoners with certain privileges and authority) are similarly regularly referred to as 'masters'. The prison 'masters' have significant power over the 'slaves'. This brings to the fore the master-slave dyad, which can be found in the relationship between the colonial masters and the 'colonized' Africans.

Despite or because of the harsh prison conditions, studies have shown that persons being victims of traumatic experiences, torture, cruel or inhumane treatment will not just accept what happens to them, and will – even if they have no choice but to be subjected to the treatment – show acts of resistance and resilience for physical, social and/or psychological survival. My paper explores how the history of slavery / colonialism is inscribed in the bodies and minds of prisoners in a context of trauma, torture, cruel and/or inhumane treatment, and how the coping strategies employed by prisoners to deal with trauma affect their identity, sense of masculinity and social practices in prison.