‘*Kupenga Mujeri’* (Prison Chaos): The Experiences of Incarcerated Women in Zimbabwean Prisons

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted in any form for another degree at the University of Leeds or any other universities. I confirm that the work in this thesis is entirely my own, comprising of work undertaken during the period of registration. Appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

At the core of the field of applied theatre is the use of the arts to confront and address issues of marginalisation. Yet, the field marginalises the methods and approaches of Black and Global majorities. This research project addresses this problem by setting up popular participatory theatre (PPT) with incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons as a test case.

There is limited knowledge in research on the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. This in-depth study used indigenous approaches to bring to light those experiences, thereby contributing towards efforts to decolonise applied theatre. The research draws on PPT alongside affect to inform our understanding of the women's experiences of engaging in PPT and Africana womanism to inform our understanding of how incarcerated women make sense of their incarceration experiences.

Rooted in participatory practice, this applied research project contributes to indigenous methodologies by engaging forty-seven incarcerated women in the co-design and implementation of the study. Through collaboration, they partook in indigenous traditional activities such as games, songs, storytelling, and performances. The analysis demonstrates how the incorporation of indigenous games offered a nuanced framework for the participants to explore and articulate the complexities of their experiences within Zimbabwean prisons, particularly concerning motherhood, autonomy, and familial obligations. Utilising these traditional games as a reflective tool, the women delved into the emotional intricacies of navigating societal expectations and gender norms within the prison environment.

The insights garnered from this study deepen our understanding of applied prison theatre, specifically within the framework of indigenous traditional practices and the unique context of carceral institutions. By spotlighting women's embodied sense-making processes, this research aligns with womanist principles, thereby broadening the scope of feminist criminology away from its traditional focus. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable insights for guiding participatory theatre practices in underexplored contexts. Overall, this thesis challenges conventional Western research paradigms by advocating for playful engagement through songs, games, and creative collaboration as a means to address prison chaos, known as *kupenga mujeri.*

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Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. – **Hebrews 13:3.**

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BSAC	British South African Company
APaR	Applied Practice as Research
COVID 19	Coronavirus Disease
CBM	Cognitive Behavioural Model
DCG	Deputy Commissioner General
JML Theatre	Jason Mphepo Little Theatre
MRCZ	Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe
PPT	Popular Participatory Theatre
TO	Theatre of the Oppressed
ZPCS	Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Service

Introduction

Exploring Prison Theatre in Zimbabwe: Unveiling the Experiences of Incarcerated Women

This research study is situated within the field of applied theatre, a form of theatre practice which 'operates beyond the traditional and limiting scope of conventional Western theatre forms' (O'Connor and O'Connor 2009: 471). Applied theatre 'brings together a broad range of dramatic activity carried out by a host of diverse bodies and groups' (Ackroyd, 2000: 2) in a wide range of contexts, including schools, prisons, hospitals, community centres, refugee camps and other social or cultural settings (Nicholson, 2005: 85-101). Theatre in each of these contexts has its own theories and specialised practices. The specific focus of this research is on applied theatre in prison, also referred to as theatre in prisons or prison theatre. For the purposes of this study, the term prison theatre will be used.

This research into prison theatre was motivated by a desire and passion to introduce prison theatre in Zimbabwean prisons and specifically with incarcerated women. In Zimbabwe, drama and theatre have been applied in various contexts such as education (Chivandikwa, 2004; Chivandikwa, Mhako, and Sambo, 2010; Marunda, 2015), disability (Chinhanu, Chivandikwa and Seda, 2021; Chinhanu, 2013; Chivandikwa, 2016) and community development (Mushangwe and Chivandikwa, 2014; Makumbirofa, 2011; Seda, 2004; Yule, 2010), there remains an unaddressed gap in the integration of theatre within the prison system.

In an endeavour to address this research gap, I embarked on a learning journey by enrolling in a Master's programme at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. As part of my Master's research project (see Chinhanu, 2015), I facilitated a theatre making process with male prisoners at Goodwood Prison, Cape Town. I was particularly drawn to the discussions about a turn towards aesthetics within the broader field of applied theatre (see Freebody and Finneran, 2016; Haseman and Winston, 2010; Jackson, 2005; Rasmussen, 2000; White, 2015). These scholars raise some concerns about the overt instrumentalisation of applied theatre at the expense of the 'values of beauty, creative genius and artistic autonomy that are associated with the practice' (White, 2015: 3). Drawing inspiration from James Thompson (2009), who is also known for his theatre work in prisons, I followed his proposition for an affective turn in applied theatre. I focused my research project on exploring the aesthetic dimensions of theatre within the prison environment. My project with the male participants in Goodwood prison did not have any preconceived grand offers for the participants, except an offer for fun and enjoyment in a place that does not always give that. I started practising to see what would emerge. I sought to understand the artistic possibilities within the prison context.

Through participation in techniques from established prison theatre practices, including those

elucidated in *The Geese Theatre Handbook: Drama with Offenders and People at Risk* (Baim and Brookes, 2002) and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal, 2002), the research project provided valuable insights into the causes of the participants' crimes, revealing a tapestry woven with narratives of robbery, theft, murder and drug abuse. One particularly intriguing revelation that emerged from my investigation was an intricate web of blame and responsibility that seemed to intersect with gender dynamics. Astonishingly, many of the male prisoners attributed their offences to their female counterparts. They claimed that their criminal acts were driven by a perceived obligation to fulfil their traditional role as providers within the household. This disconcerting revelation disrupted conventional notions, as it positioned these men as victims rather than the perpetrators of violence and abuse, as often depicted in the existing literature (see Diki, et al., 2022; Moots, et al., 2023). The implications of this finding ignited a fervent curiosity within me to explore the experiences of women who find themselves in prisons. Recognising the contrast between the narratives of male prisoners and the reality of their experiences, I sought to unearth the nuanced narratives of women in prison, uncovering the circumstances that culminated in their unfortunate encounters with the law. Furthermore, upon critical reflection of my project involving male prisoners and an extensive engagement with the existing literature, I discerned a noticeable limitation in attention given to female offenders within the context of prison theatre practice. This realisation reinforced my resolve to further advance my work by directing my focus towards female prisoners in Zimbabwe.

The focus on the Zimbabwean context was because there is currently a dearth of knowledge regarding women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons through the lens of prison theatre (see Dastile and Agozino, 2019; Chivandikwa et al., 2020). Not much is known about who these women are, their experiences of incarceration and how they make sense of their experiences. Acknowledging this substantial research gap, this research contributes to addressing the underrepresentation of female experiences in Zimbabwean prisons within the specific discourse of applied theatre with incarcerated women in sub-Saharan Africa.

Navigating a Paradox in Applied Theatre: The Predominance of Established Techniques and the Oversight of Diverse Approaches

It is noteworthy to emphasise that the methods I integrated into my Master's project were prominent within the literature I engaged during discussions with colleagues in applied theatre seminars. At that time, I believed that acquiring proficiency in these techniques was essential to be recognised as a credible prison theatre practitioner upon my return to Zimbabwe. While my Master's research project did not aim to make grand claims about the efficacy of theatre in prisons, I later discovered that it inadvertently aligned with the prevalent focus on pursuing therapeutic outcomes for individual prisoners, which characterises the existing body of research in the field of prison theatre (see Balfour et al., 2019; Baim, 2020; Heritage, 2011; Pensalfini, 2016). I discuss this in Chapter

One. I felt uneasy about this unexpected outcome because I lacked the necessary therapeutic skills and training to effectively manage the project. This raised ethical concerns regarding the potential harm I may have unknowingly exposed the participants to. I grappled with the unsettling notion that in my pursuit of understanding prison theatre for a Master's degree, I might have unintentionally exploited the participants and subjected them to emotional and psychological risks.

During the course of my academic journey, I began contemplating the ethical considerations in university programme research projects that culminate in the attainment of academic degrees. Specifically, I thought about the pervasive data extraction practices aligned with Western research methodologies, recognising their potential limitations and the potential for cultural insensitivity. This process of reflection and critical analysis prompted me to consider the possibilities of alternative research methodologies in prison theatre, methodologies that would resonate with the unique socio-cultural contexts of different communities. My aim was to facilitate a research approach that would empower the participants to define their own objectives within the project, fostering a mutually beneficial outcome.

This research study aims to offer a located, specific counterpoint to the prevailing dominance of specialised techniques, tools and methods in prison theatre, particularly those disseminated through publication. The historical development of prison theatre across several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Ireland, Lebanon, Canada, Norway, China, Nigeria, and South Africa (see, Balfour, 2004; Biggs, 2016; Heritage, 1998; Hurst, 2012; McAvinchey, 2001; Pensalfini, 2016; Sutherland, 2013; Thompson, 1998), has primarily been influenced by methodologies such as the theatre of the oppressed, playback theatre, process drama, Shakespeare in prison, and techniques from the Geese Theatre Company (see Baim and Brookes, 2002; Balfour, 2004; Pensalfini, 2016; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998). These dominant approaches reveal a paradox within the field of applied theatre. Despite applied theatre's intention to utilise the arts as a means of addressing marginalisation, it has often overlooked the methods and approaches derived from Black and Global Majorities.

This study acknowledges that the hegemonic approaches in prison theatre are rooted in the geographical location in which prison theatre takes place. According to Rob Pensalfini:

> prison theatre programmes generally have a precarious existence and are often obliged to turn to justifications and analyses of their work that support the stated goals of the prison system in which they are housed (Pensalfini, 2016: 5).

Thus, the claims and arguments in literature have been angled directly at the agenda of the prison system, which are often linked to seeking prisoners' behavioural change. In addition, Paul Heritage

(cited in Pensalfini, 2016) sheds light on prison theatre criticism:

> Dramatherapists made a number of direct or veiled attacks on Prison Theatre practitioners, particularly around their 'qualification' to work in the system, being artists and not therapists. Many prison theatre practitioners and commentators felt obligated to justify their work in terms of therapeutic outcomes and there was a narrowing transformative agenda, often gave way to a focus on an individual and personal notion of change (Heritage in Pensalfini, 2016: 4-5).

By emphasising specific theoretical frameworks and methodologies, diverse approaches and voices within the field are overshadowed. Considering the potential cultural and contextual variations in different prison settings, it is important to explore approaches that resonate with the unique socio-cultural backgrounds of the incarcerated populations. This diversity of approaches not only ensures that prison theatre remains relevant but also encourages inclusivity and responsiveness to the specific needs of the individuals involved.

This research study extends the existing contributions by Lisa Biggs (2022), Ashley Lucas (2021), Caoimhe McAvinchey (2020), and Aylwyn Walsh (2019) whose works present diverse methodological approaches to prison theatre, particularly with incarcerated women. These approaches encompass participatory radio drama, PPT, devised theatre, testimony theatre, and collaborations with theatre organisations and community-based companies. Notably, Miranda Young-Jahangeer's (2014; 2020) work with women in South African prisons using PPT grounded in Zulu culture and indigenous knowledge, holds particular significance for this research because it offers a context-specific, culturally sensitive and alternative perspective on the application of prison theatre, which can enhance the understanding of the field and its potential impact in various cultural contexts.

Exploring Alternative Methodologies in Prison Theatre Research: Aims, Objectives, and Methodological Approach

This research study examines the use of PPT as an approach with forty-seven incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons who participated in this study. The aims of this research study were two-fold:

1. To provide a platform for incarcerated women to express themselves, share their stories, and explore their identities within an otherwise restrictive environment, thus generating new perspectives about the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons.
2. To decolonise[1] prison theatre through a PPT process that I carried out in two of Zimbabwe's

[1] In this research study, the term 'decolonise' is employed to signify a deliberate effort to interrogate and contest the approaches and methodologies utilised in applied theatre practices. It necessitates the amplification of marginalised voices and perspectives and centring indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. By embracing a

female prisons.

The central research questions are:

1. What new perspectives opened up through analysis of my PPT project regarding the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons?
2. How might the utilisation of PPT empower incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons to express themselves, share their stories, explore their identities and build connections within the confines of the prison environment?
3. In what ways does a PPT rooted in local cultural forms challenge the dominant approaches of prison theatre and provide a space for advancing the field of prison theatre?

More specifically, the specific objectives of this research study are:

1. To contribute to decolonising the field of applied theatre by incorporating indigenous practices in PPT with incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons.
2. To generate specific knowledge of Zimbabwean contexts of prison theatre research.
3. To contribute to addressing the limitations in literature and research about the experiences of incarceration of women in Zimbabwean prisons by providing a platform for them to express themselves, explore their identities and share their stories.
4. To explore the applicability and appropriateness of using PPT as a platform to foster reflective thought among female prisoners regarding their experiences of incarceration.
5. To generate insights for leading participatory-led theatre practice in under-researched contexts

As the name suggests, PPT is an amalgamation of popular theatre and participatory methods. According to Penina Muhando Mlama,

> popular theatre refers to the employment of a variety of theatrical expressions at grassroot level to research and analyse development problems and to create a critical awareness and potential for action to solve problems (Mlama, 1991: 65-66).

It is a theatre that utilises forms of artistic expression that a community identifies with and finds most comfortable to express themselves in (Levert and Mumma, 1997), and more significantly, as ‘a tool for improving life in its totality’ (Mlama, 1991: 66). It aims to establish an environment where individuals at the grassroots level are conscious of the forces influencing their living conditions. Its objective is to not only raise awareness but also engage people actively in the process of

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decolonial approach, this research aims to contribute to broadening the approaches within the field of applied theatre.

development, allowing them to voice their perspectives and take action to improve their circumstances.

PPT distinguishes itself from past manifestations of theatre for development by placing participation at the forefront of the theatrical process, not partially but entirely. Ross Kidd best articulates this participation when he defines PPT as

> a means of bringing people together, building confidence and solidarity, stimulating discussion, exploring alternative options for action, and building a collective commitment to change; starting with people's urgent concerns and issues, it encourages reflections on these issues and possible strategies for change (Kidd 1984: 264).

By emphasising participation in this comprehensive manner, PPT aims to empower individuals and communities, amplifying their voices, and fostering a sense of ownership and agency. It seeks to break away from traditional hierarchical power structures and create a space where everyone's contributions are valued and respected. Through the process of engaging with urgent concerns and collectively envisioning alternative paths, PPT nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and a shared commitment to addressing social issues (Mda, 1990; 1993; Mdoe, 2002; Sibanda, 2015).

While the historical context of popular theatre has traditionally emphasised driving social change, my research project's primary objective did not centre around instigating societal shifts with women in Zimbabwean prisons. Instead, I positioned popular theatre as a methodology that transcends the limitations of conventional behavioural change approaches in prison settings. Similarly, the possibility of addressing broader issues within the prison establishment would have exceeded the reasonable scope of a PhD study. Rather, my aim was to provide these incarcerated women with a platform to freely express themselves, share their narratives, and delve into their identities through engagement with popular theatre methods tailored to their contextual realities. The ultimate goal was to contribute to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to prison theatre practice.

Central to this approach was the fundamental recognition of the participants as active agents in the research process, valuing their approaches, knowledge and perspectives. PPT created opportunities for the women to amplify their voices, cultivate a sense of ownership, and nurture agency, leading to addressing the historical neglect of research and practice with incarcerated women in prison theatre. Furthermore, my focus was centred on the experiences of women's participation in PPT, aiming to illuminate new perspectives on their experiences of incarceration. Therefore, my PPT project drew inspiration from proposition towards affect in applied theatre, ushering in a shift towards an affective approach within popular theatre.

I align with Thompson's (2009) proposition to prioritise affect over simple or singular effect in

applied theatre practices. Instead of solely evaluating the impact of theatre through tangible and quantifiable results, such as changes in behaviour or attitudes, an affective approach acknowledges the significance of the more nuanced aspects of human experience. Affect, in this context, encompassed the profound and often subtle ways in which participants' emotions and perceptions were shaped by their engagement in methods that they culturally identified with. I do not perceive of popular theatre and affect as opposing ideas but as complementary approaches. By recognising and valuing these subtleties, we gain a deeper understanding of how theatre can impact individuals on a personal and emotional level, enriching their lives in ways that may not be immediately visible or quantifiable. In this research study, popular theatre served as a framework for understanding socio-cultural and political contexts within prisons, while the turn towards affect provided a lens to explore the emotional and experiential aspects of theatre engagement.

Locating Popular Participatory Theatre (PPT) Within Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Challenge to Dominant Ideologies in Prison Theatre

I locate PPT within the indigenous research paradigm to challenge the dominant influence of Western ideologies, methodologies, and aesthetics in prison theatre. While it may be unrealistic for one short-term prison theatre project to completely dismantle hegemony, the intention is to contribute to a shift towards a more equitable and culturally diverse practice of prison theatre.

In developing an argument about indigenous methodologies in relation to prison theatre, I am drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) work on decolonising research methodologies, which emphasises the importance of using indigenous methodologies in research more generally to enable us to begin to decolonise prison theatre work. Smith (2012) critiques traditional research methods as being Eurocentric and colonial in nature and argues for the need to develop new approaches that centre indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems. Her perspective is useful for describing the locally found methods rooted in a community's socio- cultural context that I used in this research.

Smith (2012) emphasises that decolonising research is not anti-research, but rather entails approaching research in alternative ways and exploring different possibilities for knowledge production. This approach opens up new methodologies that uncover new kinds of knowing. She further contends that when we think of research as creating knowledge, then indigenous communities have many diverse ways of knowing and multiple sources of knowledge, including ways of life, spirituality, and relationships with the environment and other living beings (see also Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2018; Smith, 2012). These different epistemologies should be respected and valued (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020). In the same way, there are many approaches that value the cultural contexts of a community which should make up the basis of a project in applied theatre.

Indigenous methodologies seek to break away from the hegemony of the dominant Western research paradigms into a place where indigenous ways of knowing and understanding are prioritised and incorporated (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012). This means that indigenous research places a significant emphasis on utilising culturally appropriate methods for knowledge acquisition that respect the traditions and values of indigenous communities (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020). For example, in Western research approaches, the researcher is often seen as the expert who determines the research agenda and questions, with the participants serving mainly as sources of data. Indigenous methodologies aim to challenge this notion by prioritising participants' relationships and interconnectedness of knowledge across various domains, including sensory, experiential, and metaphysical dimensions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations and complexities within indigenous communities themselves. Many methodologies in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, demonstrate hierarchical structures where the contributions of marginalised groups, such as poorer individuals or women, are traditionally sidelined. In this light, while indigenous methodologies aim to promote inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives, the reality may present significant challenges in dismantling deeply ingrained power dynamics and ensuring genuine equity in knowledge production and dissemination. Thus, a critical examination is essential to understand the complexities and nuances involved in the application of indigenous methodologies within cultural contexts.

The impetus to challenge Western approaches in prison theatre is also shaped by my experience in South Africa towards the end of my Master's programme in 2015. During that time, South Africa witnessed the emergence of the #MustFall movements. These movements gained momentum through the #RhodesMustFall protests, which were initiated by students at the University of Cape Town in March 2015. The target of their protests was the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a British imperialist who held power in the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. The call for the removal of Rhodes' statue was a response to the ideological dominance of white- centred narratives within South African higher education, as embodied by the statue (Holmes and Loehwing, 2016). On April 9, 2015, the statue was dismantled, marking a significant symbolic step towards the decolonisation process and the creation of a new intellectual space for healing the post-apartheid university (Luescher, 2015). The impact of the #RhodesMustFall movement reverberated across the country, inspiring students at different universities to question symbols and structures that required examination within their own contexts.

For example, the movement sparked the #OpenStellies movement at the University of Stellenbosch, reigniting a language debate that exposed significant divisions on campus between predominantly White Afrikaans-speaking students and Black students who predominantly received education in Afrikaans (Dlamini, 2020), a language primarily spoken by White Afrikaners. The reason why

Black students did not want to continue with the predominant use of Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction likely stems from historical and cultural factors. Afrikaans, as a language, has historical ties to the apartheid era, during which it was associated with racial segregation and discrimination (Dlamini, 2020; Maylam, 2001).

According to Paul Maylam (2001), Afrikaans gained official language status alongside English in 1948, enforced by the government. This led to many Black students being compelled to receive education in Afrikaans, creating significant barriers to learning and educational attainment. Following the end of apartheid, South Africa underwent a process of transformation and reconciliation. However, the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in institutions like the University of Stellenbosch remained contentious. The #OpenStellies movement emerged in response, with Black students advocating for greater inclusivity and recognition of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Dlamini, 2020). They felt marginalised and excluded within the predominantly White Afrikaans-speaking environment of the university, arguing that prioritising Afrikaans perpetuated inequality and hindered academic success and social integration. Their efforts aimed to foster an inclusive and equitable educational environment, striving for greater equity within the university's community.

The discourse surrounding language at Stellenbosch University stands as a notable issue that serves as a powerful reminder of the institutional dominance deeply rooted in the historical context of colonialism. This linguistic debate is a microcosm of broader power dynamics that extend far beyond the confines of the language issue and permeate multiple facets of society. Within the context of my current research study, it underscores the need to challenge and address the deeply entrenched systems of privilege and inequality that persist within prison theatre practice and research.

Positionality Statement

As a researcher examining the lives of women in Zimbabwean prisons through the practice of PPT, it is imperative to critically reflect on my positionality and the various dimensions of my identity that inform and shape my research study. My socio-economic status, ethnicity and educational experiences significantly influence my perspective, particularly in the context of decoloniality and the power dynamics inherent within the prison system.

I am a 32-year-old Zimbabwean woman of Shona ethnicity, born and raised in Zimbabwe. The Shona constitute the dominant ethnic group in Zimbabwe, with the Ndebele being the other main ethnic group. My affiliation with the Shona group has profoundly influenced various aspects of my research. This positionality places me as an ‘insider’ within the Shona cultural context (see Ganga & Scott, 2006), yet simultaneously as an ‘outsider’ among the Ndebele, potentially introducing

inherent biases into my work (see Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2019). It is crucial to acknowledge this outsider status, recognising the risk of viewing the experiences of my research participants through a lens shaped by my own Shona cultural background. The use of Shona as the primary language of facilitation within the research context inherently privileged Shona-speaking participants, potentially marginalising Ndebele-speaking inmates and foreign nationals. This linguistic dominance likely influenced the types of cultural practices and narratives documented, as they were gathered predominantly from a Shona perspective. I elaborate on these issues in Chapter Three of my thesis. As a result, the research reflects Shona cultural norms and values more prominently, thereby reinforcing existing power dynamics within both the prison environment and the broader Zimbabwean societal structure.

In an attempt to mitigate these biases and ensure a more inclusive and representative study of the diverse experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons, I initially sought to include Ndebele-speaking University of Zimbabwe Theatre Arts students in the research. However, this approach proved unsustainable, a challenge which I discuss further in Chapter Three. Thus, I acknowledge that my Shona ethnicity, while providing cultural insights, also risked perpetuating the narratives of the dominant group, thereby limiting the study's potential to fully address the marginalisation that underpins my research focus.

In addition, I come from a middle-class background, which affords me certain privileges such as access to quality education, healthcare, and other resources. My educational journey, steeped in Western epistemologies, has systematically marginalised African indigenous knowledge systems (see Smith, 1999). This realisation compelled me to pursue 'the development of new methodologies and alternative ways of knowing or epistemologies' (Smith, 1999:166). The work of scholars like Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Chilisa (2012), Kovach (2018), Wilson (2020) has deeply influenced my research approach. These scholars emphasise the importance of respecting and valuing diverse epistemological frameworks, including spiritual, relational, and environmental dimensions. Grounded in these principles, my research project was conceived with a commitment to methodologies that honour the cultural context and lived experiences of the women in Zimbabwean prisons. By embracing alternative epistemologies, I sought to uncover new dimensions of knowledge that traditional paradigms may overlook. This pursuit led me to a profound curiosity about the knowledge systems of my ancestors, prompting a deliberate shift towards centring culturally sensitive approaches such as indigenous traditional games in my research on prison theatre. However, it is essential to acknowledge that my socio-economic background, while providing certain privileges, also introduced complexities and challenges to the research process, which I discuss further in Chapter Three.

My socio-economic status also provides a buffer against many of the hardships faced by incarcerated

women, who often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. To an extent, this disparity hindered my ability to fully understand their experiences, potentially leading to biased interpretations. To address this, I intentionally positioned Africana womanism as a theoretical framework, enabling the women to interpret their own experiences from their unique perspectives.

Given my privileged background, it was crucial to engage in reflexive practice throughout the research process. This involved maintaining a critical awareness of how colonial legacies and power imbalances influence my research approach and interactions with the incarcerated women. Conducting research within the prison system necessitated a conscientious approach, recognising the hierarchical and coercive nature of such institutions. The prison system, as a manifestation of state power and control, often perpetuates systemic injustices. My position as a researcher, which granted me access and authority not afforded to the women, required a careful and ethical approach to mitigate the reinforcement of these power disparities.

In conclusion, my socio-economic class, ethnicity, and educational background are integral to shaping my research perspective. These factors necessitate a conscientious and reflexive approach, particularly in the context of decoloniality and the recognition of inherent power dynamics within the prison system. Through this research, I aim to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the advocacy for the dignity of women in Zimbabwean prisons.

Theoretical Scope

The research draws on ideas of Africana womanism as explicated by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) and selected womanist theorists such as Catherine Acholonu (1995) and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) to illuminate the intersectional aspects of incarcerated women's experiences and prioritise their voices and perspectives within the analysis. Chapter Two will provide a full consideration of the theoretical lens. However, to set expectations clearly, I highlight here some key concepts for this approach before further elaboration.

Africana womanism is a feminist theory that emerged as a response to the marginalisation of African American women within mainstream feminist discourse (Hudson-Weems, 2004). It is a framework rooted in the experiences and struggles of women of African descent and encompasses a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, culture, spirituality, and community (Hudson-Weems, 2004). By incorporating Africana womanism into the analysis, the study acknowledges the experiences of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons within the specific cultural context.

Africana womanism, as a paradigm, has eighteen basic tenets that underpin it. These characteristics are as follows: self-naming, self-definition, role flexibility, family-centeredness, struggling with males against oppression, adaptability, genuine sisterhood, wholeness, authenticity, strength, male

compatibility, respect, recognition, respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 55-73). Within this framework, this study categorises these eighteen principles into four significant themes:

- Intersectionality and Identity,
- Motherhood and Family-centredness,
- Power, Resistance and Agency,
- Prison Relationality

I give explanation of how the eighteen tenets are resolved into the above four pivotal themes within the research context in Chapter Two. These themes provide a guiding frame for understanding incarcerated women's experiences of incarceration. By employing the principles of Africana womanism, this research study provides a unique perspective to the analysis of incarcerated women, while also acknowledging the significance of decolonisation and intersectionality in research methodologies.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis is divided into three sections. Section 1 is made up of the introduction which has introduced the research and Chapter One which examines the research contexts that inform this research study. Chapter One is divided into three parts. The first part offers a comprehensive overview of the historical backdrop of prisons in Zimbabwe. Drawing on the invaluable work of notable historians, the section casts a spotlight on the colonial vestiges embedded within the fabric of Zimbabwean prisons. This historical context serves a pivotal role in reshaping prevailing notions of power and punishment, offering a nuanced perspective that stands in stark contrast to the dominant Western theoretical paradigms that have significantly shaped the discourse in criminology. The primary objective is to emphasise the importance of context specificity. Part two addresses the underrepresentation of women in scholarship on crime and punishment especially in the Global South by providing a detailed examination of the context of women in prisons in sub-Saharan Africa and more specifically, in Zimbabwe. It highlights the urgent need for a more inclusive lens to the study of women in prisons. Part three examines the use of applied theatre with women in prison and discusses different methodological approaches in the practice of prison theatre with incarcerated women. It emphasises the gradual, growing practice of applied theatre in prison that focuses on incarcerated women through a systematic analysis of academic publications in applied theatre in prison. It highlights the epistemic whiteness of prison theatre practice and theory and the underdevelopment of prison theatre in Zimbabwe.

Section Two: is made up of Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two comprises three interconnected parts that establish the theoretical framework for the research study. Part one discusses PPT and the affective turn in applied theatre, emphasising the emotional aspect of women's participation in theatre in Zimbabwean prisons. Part two centres on an indigenous research paradigm challenging

traditional approaches in prison theatre to explore culturally relevant methods. Part three employs Africana womanism as framework to analyse the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe. These parts collectively lay the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of women's experiences in Zimbabwean prisons.

Chapter Three tells the story of research set up and approach. The chapter differs from the preceding chapters in that it is mainly descriptive. By describing the research process, the chapter justifies the methodological choices made during the study to enable the reader to evaluate the rigor and validity of the research and understand the potential biases and shortcomings that arose from the chosen approach. The descriptive nature of the chapter also helps set the stage for the subsequent analysis chapters. By providing a detailed account of the research approach, it offers the necessary context for the reader to understand the analyses and interpretations that will follow. The chapter also introduces the research participants.

Section Three delves into the issues in practice. Comprising Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven, this section examines the experiences of incarcerated women within the context of incarceration and PPT. Additionally, Chapter Seven provides the concluding remarks for the study. Chapter Four analyses the use of costumes with the research participants as a practice that serves as a lens for understanding prison clothing and its influence on the experiences of incarcerated women concerning gender, identity and agency within the prison environment. This analysis offers insights into the complex dynamics within the prison system, highlighting the intersecting oppressions shaped by colonial legacies that impact the experiences of female prisoners in post-colonial[2] Zimbabwe.

Chapter Five undertakes a critical analysis of the significance of indigenous traditional games within prison and prison theatre. The chapter unveils and explores the relational power dynamics inherent in the criminal justice system and examines the role these games play in offering research participants a temporary escape from the prison chaos through playful engagement. This chapter contributes to the process of decolonising theatre games in prison theatre by incorporating traditional indigenous games.

Chapter Six shifts its focus from the workshop setting to public performance by examining the storytelling form with research participants. A significant aspect of interest lies in how participants in the research study storied their experiences in relation to the complex layering of audiencing, involving the mutual witnessing among incarcerated women, the insights gained by officers and

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[2]The term 'post-colonialism' is understood in this research as a marker signifying a direct transition after independence. The intentional hyphenation between 'post' and 'colonial' serves to specifically denote the period following a colony's attainment of independence.

prison officials, and the perspectives offered by families and supporters. These multifaceted interactions contribute to understanding storytelling within carceral spaces. The emphasis on transitioning from workshop processes to performance marks a pivotal departure in prison theatre studies, diverging from conventional approaches prevalent in applied theatre scholarship (see Balfour, 2004; McAvinchey, 2020; Pensalfini, 2016; Shailor, 2011; Thompson,1998).

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research study, which aims to explore the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons through the use of PPT. It has provided the background and motivation for the study, as well as the research questions, objectives, and methodological approach. Additionally, it has highlighted the research gaps and limitations that this study seeks to address, such as the underrepresentation of women's experiences and voices in prison theatre scholarship, the dominance of Western approaches and methodologies in prison theatre, and the absence of prison theatre practice and research in Zimbabwe.

The chapter has also outlined the theoretical underpinning the analysis of the study, incorporating PPT, affect, indigenous research paradigm, and Africana womanism. These theoretical perspectives provide a nuanced and contextualised understanding of the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons, as well as a decolonial and culturally sensitive approach to prison theatre practice and research.

The thesis refrains from oversimplifying the complexities of issues faced by women in Zimbabwean prisons, acknowledging the socially constructed and culturally influenced nature of crime and justice. It recognises the limitations of the study in effecting prison reform but instead focuses on using PPT both as a methodological approach and a subject of analysis. Through this lens, the study examines and questions both how women respond to being incarcerated and the applicability and appropriateness of using PPT as a means for decolonising applied prison theatre. The study reveals how PPT involves women in prison in redefining their own experiences, disrupting spaces, challenging assumptions, and broadening our understanding of the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons. The thesis now turns to the research contexts and gaps to which this study responds.

Chapter One: The Research Contexts

1.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to address one of the research objectives, which is to generate specific knowledge of Zimbabwean contexts of prison theatre research. It presents an exploration of the contexts that inform this research study; namely, prisons in Zimbabwe, incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons, and applied theatre with women in prison. The first section provides an analysis of the historical foundations of prisons in Zimbabwe, drawing upon the insights of relevant historians whose scholarship has shed light on the colonial origins of the country's prison system. By delineating a chronological narrative, this section identifies key constraints and practices stemming from the past that continue to shape the experiences of incarcerated women in present-day Zimbabwean prisons.

The subsequent section of this chapter addresses the underrepresentation of women in scholarly discourse surrounding crime and punishment, by focusing on the context of women in prisons within Zimbabwe. Through a comparative approach, this section juxtaposes research findings from other sub-Saharan African contexts with empirical insights gleaned from my own fieldwork. This examination serves as a first step towards contributing more widely to scholarship on women in prisons. Furthermore, the section emphasises the importance of adopting a culturally specific lens to the study of women in prisons by pointing out the limitations of feminist theories.

The final part introduces a practical dimension to the study by examining applied theatre in prisons. This section explores different methodological approaches in the practice of prison theatre and identifies two problems in the field: the concentration on male prisoners and hegemony of approaches that have undermined other methods and approaches of Black and Global majorities. The section contributes to research on prison theatre with incarcerated women and makes claims for decolonising applied prison theatre through PPT, thus broadening the scope of the practice.

The movement across these contexts facilitates a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons. These three contexts recognise the interconnectedness of themes such as neocolonialism, gender and cultural specificity to the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons. These themes intersect and influence each other, supporting my assertion of the need to decolonise the field of applied theatre through indigenous approaches.

Part One: Contextualising Prisons and Punishment in Zimbabwe

Caiomhe McAvinchey asserts in her PhD thesis that ‘prisons are not the same’ (2006:78). Yet when it comes to the theorisation of prison within the context of prison theatre, several applied theatre

scholars present Michel Foucault’s (1977) work as the accepted wisdom for understanding the history of prisons worldwide (see Balfour, 2004; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998; Walsh, 2019; Young-Jahangeer, 2015). This approach has significant problems. Firstly, Foucault's (1977) study was focused on the penal system in France and Europe in the early 19th century when capital punishment and torture were being abolished and replaced by the medical rehabilitation model. Conversely, in sub-Saharan Africa, European colonisers were reviving the ancient, horrific forms of punishment that they were abandoning as a means of punishment at home (see Bernault, 2003; 2007; Dikötter and Brown, 2007; Killingray, 2003; Morelle, Marcis and Hornberger, 2021; Sarkin, 2008).

Secondly, Foucault's (1977) analysis, while valuable, does not address or include the specific context of African prisoners or the role of imperialism in shaping the criminal justice system of Africa. According to Nigerian criminologist, Biko Agozino (2003), this omission perpetuates the idea that the current criminal justice system everywhere in the world is neutral and objective, enabling the continuation of neo-colonial power. This issue is compounded by the fact that in most universities beyond South Africa, only a few departments in sub-Saharan Africa offer a degree in criminology or criminal justice. Most courses in non-Western criminology programmes analyse African criminology using theories imported from Western countries which can be problematic (see Aas, 2012; Carrington et al, 2018). Agozino (2003) contends that this approach has stifled criminological imagination in ‘third world’ countries. Similarly, Katja Aas (2012) concurs with Agozino (2003), highlighting the unequal criminological knowledge production:

> If we were to create criminology’s wall map and literally pin down the discipline’s knowledge production, the image would probably reveal the centre of gravity situated in the core western, particularly Anglophone countries, and the more or less ‘bare’ peripheries of the Global South (Aas 2012: 6).

There is a need for greater inclusivity and recognition of diverse perspectives within the field of criminology. Biko Agozino and Nontyatyambo Dastile have argued that ‘criminology in Africa must move towards a decolonisation turn’ (2023: 408). They emphasise that ‘this implies rehumanising the dehumanised and problematising the hegemonic’ (Agozino and Dastile, 2023: 419). Several criminologists have responded to the decolonisation call, challenging the prevailing blindness of mainstream criminology to colonialism. They have introduced and developed alternative criminologies such as Asian, counter-colonial, indigenous, criminology of liberation, marginal realism, post-colonial, transnational, southern, and Africana criminology (see Aas, 2012; Agozino, 2003; 2004; Blagg and Anthony, 2019; Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo, 2016; Carrington et al., 2018; Cunneen, 2011; Fraser, 2013; Kitossa, 2012). These alternative criminologies critique Eurocentric bias which tends to focus on Western criminal justice systems and often neglects the unique

historical, cultural and social contexts of formerly colonised states. They propose a more nuanced understanding of crime and justice by contextualising them within the historical and cultural realities of formerly colonised nations. This study goes 'beyond the pathological perspective of looking at what is wrong with Africa' (Agozino and Dastile, 2023:419), an approach that has predominantly characterised the discourse surrounding the criminal justice systems of sub-Saharan African nations, wherein scholarly attention has gravitated towards portraying prisons in the region as sites of abuse and violation of human rights (see Alenika et al., 2009; Anderson, 2006; Artz, 2008; Cameron, 2020; Van Hout and Wessels, 2021; Zimudzi, 2004). It traces the historical development of prisons in Zimbabwe across pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, illuminating the intricate interplay of cultural dynamics, historical injustices and systemic prejudices that converge to shape the contemporary circumstances experienced by incarcerated women. Such an analysis is crucial for the development of nuanced and context-specific approaches that resonate with the unique histories and experiences of those within the penal system.

1.2 Pre-colonial Zimbabwean Justice System

The historical context of pre-colonial Zimbabwean justice system is paramount as it lays the foundation for understanding the socio-cultural and political landscape that shaped pre-colonial Zimbabwean society. This historical backdrop highlights various aspects that continue to influence gender dynamics and women's roles within the social fabric. The discussion elucidates the intersectionality of gender, age, socio-economic status and reproductive capabilities, which collectively subject them to heightened levels of societal marginalisation, prejudice, and criminalisation. Furthermore, the discourse points towards the entrenched patriarchal structures within colonial Zimbabwean societies that systematically marginalised women and excluded them from active participation in the justice system, perpetuating inequalities and hindering their socio-political agency. By delving deeper into these historical underpinnings, we can gain valuable insights into the complex dynamics that inform women's roles and experiences in the present-day context.

Zimbabwean history in the pre-colonial period has been subject to reinterpretation. White anthropologists created many inaccurate representations of pre-colonial Zimbabwean societies which were used to justify colonisation (see Mlambo, 2014; Raftopoulous and Mlambo, 2009). In recent years, Zimbabwean scholars and researchers have worked to correct these misinterpretations (see Duri and Mapara, 2007; Mashingaidze, 2016; Nyota and Mapara, 2008; Rukuni et al., 2015). Zimbabwean historian, Gerald Mazarire (2008) has argued that the pre- colonial period is an essential starting point for understanding the country's history. Therefore, this section, covering covers the period between c.850 – 1880s, explores the structured mechanisms for resolving conflicts within pre-colonial Zimbabwean communities and the positions of women therein.

Gerald Mazarire (2008) has argued that although the pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe has been fascinatingly portrayed in terms of the rise and collapse of empires such as the Great Zimbabwe, the Mutapa, the Torwa, the Rozvi, and Ndebele nations, it is false to believe that nothing noteworthy occurred before or after, or outside their borders. Before the British colonial occupation, Zimbabwe and other Southern African communities used traditional mechanisms embedded in their culture, practices and beliefs to manage disputes and conflicts (Clifford in Milner, 1969; Makahamadze et al., 2009; Omale, 2006). These traditions of justice have been described using labels such as community, traditional, non-formal, informal, customary, indigenous and non-state justice systems (Kariuki, 2014). The traditional justice systems were based on a religious framework in which the supernatural was the explanation for misconduct and power (Gwaravanda, 2011). Deviance was thought to be caused by demonic possession. Therefore, deviants had to be exorcised or destroyed for their 'salvation' in the afterlife (Agozino, 2003). In many cases, the decisions made by religious authorities were seen as final and binding. Therefore, in such systems, religious principles guided and regulated human behaviour.

The issue of witchcraft emerged as a prominent and contentious aspect within pre-colonial Zimbabwean society. Within both the Shona and the Ndebele communities, the concept of witchcraft held multifaceted interpretations, encapsulating notions of treachery and malevolence (Kugara, 2017). Per Zachrisson (2007: 42) notes that accusations of witchcraft in pre-colonial Zimbabwe primarily targeted women. Gordon Chavunduka's (1980) study of three women guilty of witchcraft in Zimbabwe illustrates that the accused were predominantly elderly, impoverished, widowed, or infertile women. Chavunduka's (1980) case study sheds light on the entrenched patriarchal structures within Shona and Ndebele societies, where women occupying marginalised positions within the social hierarchy were disproportionately targeted and scapegoated for perceived malevolent actions. The intersectionality of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and reproductive capabilities exacerbated the vulnerability of these women to accusations of witchcraft, perpetuating cycles of marginalisation and oppression. Subsequent analysis in the section on women in prisons will further emphasise how the intersectionality of gender, age, socioeconomic status and reproductive capabilities exacerbates the vulnerability of women in Zimbabwean prisons, subjecting them to heightened levels of societal marginalisation, prejudice, and criminalisation. This alignment highlights the continuity of systemic injustices faced by marginalised women across various social contexts, illustrating the enduring legacy of patriarchal structures and their impact on gender relations within Zimbabwean society.

The judicial process in the 1800s was characterised by banishment from society, the earliest known punishment method employed by Zimbabwe's traditional society (Karimunda, 2014a). For the Shona and the Ndebele, radical exile from the community as punishment led to the social or physical death of the convicted offender. The place called *'Gandavaroyi'* which literally means 'the dumping

place of witches' was reserved for convicted offenders (Dodo et al., 2017). A place with that name still survives up to this day in Gokwe but the place ceased to be used perhaps in the 19th century with the coming of the whites. The discontinuation of such practices with the arrival of colonial powers prompts critical reflection on the intersections between traditional justice systems and colonial imposition.

During the pre-colonial period in Zimbabwe, there was no distinction between civil and criminal law (Roberts in Parker and Reid, 2013), but the fundamental conceptions tended to follow the lines of division between public and private juries (Clifford in Milner, 1969: 243). Jairos Gombe (1998, cited in Gwaravanda 2011) notes that the Shona traditional justice system had three types of courts: the family court, the local court, and the higher court presided over by chiefs and sub-chiefs. *Dare repamusha* (the family court) involved the settling of disputes without involving members of the public. *Dare remunana* (the local court) handled smaller conflicts between two families. Disputes and conflicts included the loss of crops by livestock, theft, and even murder among others. *Dare repamusoro* (the higher court) was the foundation of law among the Shona. The right to punish belonged, for the most part, to heads of families (see Gwaravanda 2011: 148).

Nevertheless, the entire society, including ancestors and the invisible world, worked to solve the disturbances brought about by the crime (Rupande and Ndoro, 2014). The justice system focused on restoring relationships and social harmony rather than depriving people of their freedom (Gombe, 1998). The impact of the traditional justice system had a significant effect on gender roles and women's position in pre-colonial Zimbabwean society. The chiefs, who were the supreme judges and highest religious figures, were mostly men; but Tompson Makahamadze, Nesbeth Grand and Baxter Tavuyanago (2009) note that female traditional authorities used to have influence in the Shona society. However, when the British arrived, they excluded women from participating in the justice system and other areas of society (see Schmidt, 1990). This exclusion significantly impacted women's societal standing, generating enduring consequences evident in contemporary society through entrenched gender disparities, inadequate representation, socio-economic marginalisation, and the perpetuation of traditional gender norms and roles.

1.2.1 The Impact of Colonialism on Justice Systems, Gender Roles, and Incarceration in Zimbabwe

When the European colonial powers arrived, they deemed the Black people's justice systems as 'nothing but manifestations of barbarism, autocracy and a long night of savagery' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: 43), justifying colonisation as a civilising mission in Africa. Missionaries were among the earliest representatives of the imperial world in Zimbabwe, introducing Christianity to prepare the ground for colonisation. Mashonaland was exposed to Christianity by the Portuguese in the 16th century, and the London Missionary Society was the earliest representative of the imperial

worlds in the Matebeleland in 1859 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). By doing things such as abolishing the death penalty for witchcraft accusations, the missionaries challenged the arbitrary power that religious authorities held and began to establish their own ideas of what was just and right.

Zimbabwe was colonised by the British, with Cecil John Rhodes playing a pivotal role in the acquisition of colonies in Africa. Rhodes, an ardent imperialist, signed a treaty, the Rudd Concession, with the Ndebele king, Lobengula in 1888, which opened the way for the occupation of Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2014). With this agreement, Rhodes established the British South African Company (BSAC), a commercial-political organisation with the goal of utilising political influence to open the way for British financial capital and the exploitation of economic resources like gold and diamonds (Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009). The BSAC officially adopted the name Rhodesia (after Cecil John Rhodes) in May 1895 for the occupation of Mashonaland and Matebeleland (Mlambo, 2014). The BSAC administration constructed a settler colony with significant characteristics such as land seizures, segregated internal colonial governance, and political and economic privileges for the white community (Mlambo, 2014).

The colonial Legislative Council imposed more restrictions on Black people, including rules governing inter-racial sex relationships. Extra-marital intercourse between a Black man and a white woman was made illegal by the Immorality Suppression Ordinance of 1903 (Ndlovu- Gatsheni, 2009:63). If found in breach of the law, the Black man was punished with hard labour for five years and two years for the white woman. There was no corresponding penalty for the White man found guilty of having sexual relations with a Black woman or 'pronouncing on attempted rape of Black women by white men' (Mlambo, 2019: 6). As pointed out by Alois Mlambo, 'the black peril legislation was a diversionary tactic' (2019:6) designed by white men to divert attention from their violent sexual relations with Black women. More legislations, such as the Southern Rhodesia Native Regulations of 1910, the Native Affairs Act (1927), the Masters and Servants Act (1901) and The Native Marriages Ordinance of 1901, were introduced 'to enable colonial officials to police civility and to protect the racial boundaries and settler prestige that was assumed to be threatened by 'insolent Africans' (Ndlovu- Gatsheni, 2009: 64).

Despite the imposition of marginalising and oppressive legislation by the colonial administration, Elizabeth Schmidt (1990) observes the agency exhibited by women during the colonial era. She notes that during this period of early occupation, 'women took advantage of the openings created by legislation' (Schmidt, 1990: 639). For example, the Native Marriages Ordinance of 1901 stipulated that all marriages involving Black people had to be recorded by a government official called a registering officer. Before the enactment of this ordinance, marriage practices among the Shona and Ndebele did not necessarily involve formalised legal procedures that required explicit consent from women. This ordinance potentially gave women more agency in marriage, as it

mandated obtaining a woman's consent before registering the marriage (Schmidt, 1990). However, it is important to recognise that this law was mainly made to make sure the colonial government had control over the lives of Black people, rather than prioritising the advancement of women's interests. The British colonial rulers used this law to make traditional African customs and traditions illegal, thus perpetuating a framework of oppression and inequity.

In colonial Zimbabwe, British colonisers experimented with various methods of confinement and discipline, including asylums, hospital wards, workers' camps, and corrective facilities, but these proved limited in medical scope and disciplinary ambition (Bernault, 2003; Dikötter and Brown, 2007). The establishment of the first prison in Zimbabwe is disputed, with some claiming it was at Fort Tuli by the Pioneer Column in 1890 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009), while others cite references to a prison built in 1892 by Starr Leander Jameson (Samkange, 1986). Despite the lack of consensus on the establishment date, several scholars agree that prisons were a foreign imposition by the settlers (see Bernault, 2003; Dikötter and Brown, 2007; Jefferson and Martin, 2016; Killingray, 2003; Morelle, Marcis and Hornberger, 2021; Roberts, 2013; Sarkin, 2008). This recognition of prisons as foreign impositions by colonial settlers serves as a critical starting point for understanding the complexities of power dynamics, cultural dissonance, gender dynamics, resistance and the broader socio-political implications of colonial rule. Furthermore, recognising prisons as foreign impositions highlights the necessity of providing incarcerated women with a platform to share their experiences and contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the intersecting forces of oppression and resistance within post-colonial contexts.

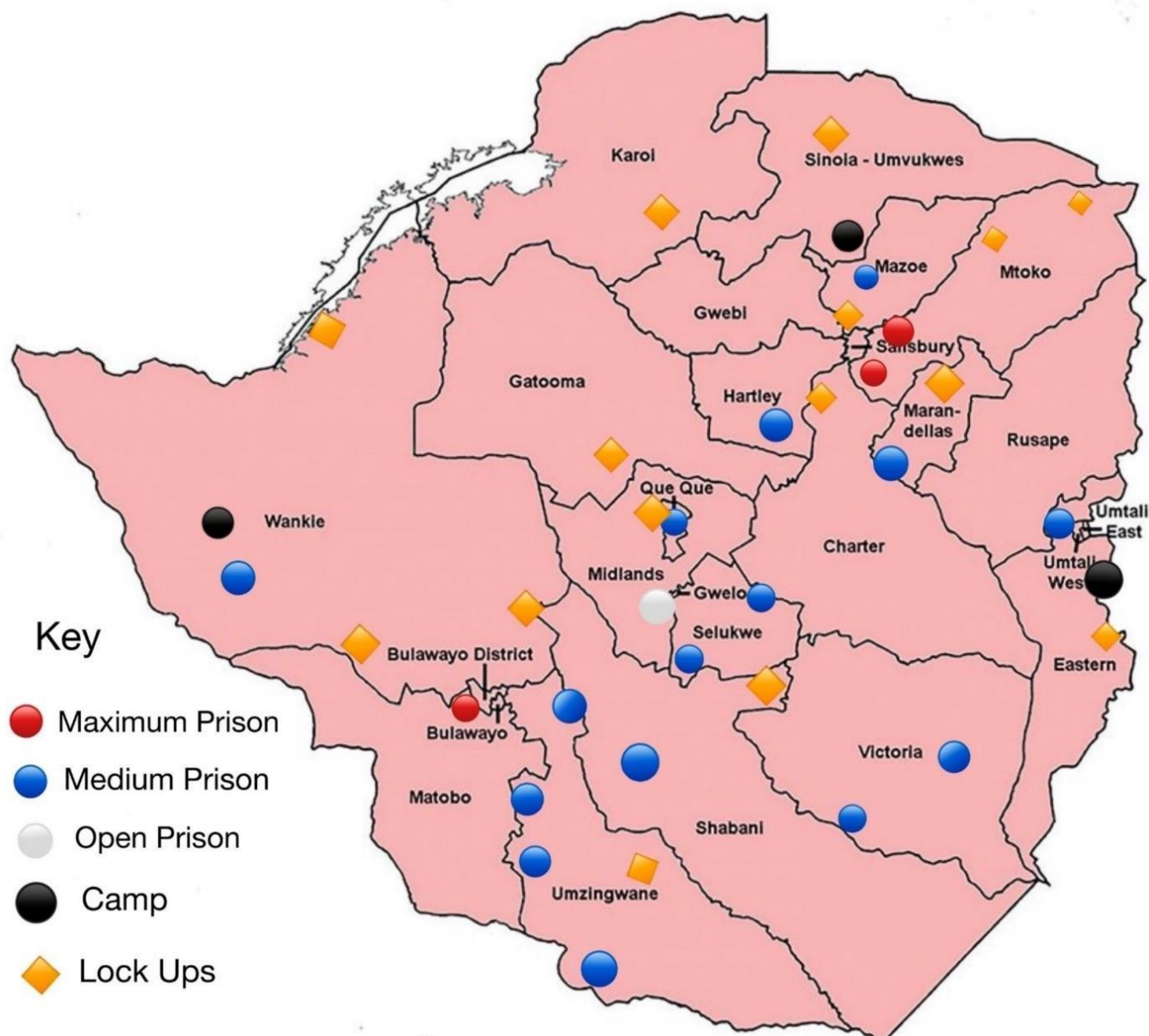
1.3 Prison Boom in Southern Rhodesia

This section turns to a discussion on the expansion of prisons in Southern Rhodesia in the 19th century. Understanding the boom of prison construction provides insights into broader colonial policies and practices, including the marginalisation and oppression of women.

As colonial rule was established, more prisons were built to contain the Black people who continued to rebel against the settler government. Between 1898 and 1923, thirty-two prisons were built in Southern Rhodesia, categorised into lock-ups and district prisons. District prisons were further divided into maximum, medium, and open categories for security reasons. Salisbury Maximum Prison, Chikurubi, and Khami Maximum Prison at Bulawayo were the largest, but political prisoners were also held at Gwelo, Que Que, Goromonzi, Gwanda, Fort Victoria, Selukwe and Umtali prisons (Munochiveyi, 2014). They had a large holding capacity since they housed difficult categories of prisoners. Lock-ups held less than fifteen prisoners and were used to deal with potential uprisings and provide labour for mines and farms (Munochiveyi, 2014). Munyaradzi Munochiveyi (2014) notes that most of the lockups were closed around the 1920s as the colonial government gradually felt safe from the threat of uprising. The remainder shifted base and got established as fully-fledged

prisons away from police stations. Those which remained are now called satellite prisons, like Victoria Falls Prison, a satellite of Hwange Prison. Below is a map showing the distribution of prisons and lockups during the colonial period between 1898 and 1923.

***Image 1**: Map of Prisons in Southern Rhodesia (adapted from Elijah Doro and Sandra Swart, 2019)*



By 1923, prisons had been established in all major Rhodesian towns and smaller institutions set up and created in the colony's rural districts. However, during this period, there were no clearly identifiable female prisons. This stark absence of identified female prisons during the colonial era demonstrates the historical roots of women's marginalisation within the criminal justice system. According to Archivist Mhoze Chikowore (1994), female prisoners were taken to the House of Correction in Gwelo. The concept of a House of Correction reflected prevailing societal attitudes toward women and crime during the colonial era. It operated on the premise that female offenders deviated from expected gender norms and required specialised interventions for behavioural correction. In essence, the House of Correction served as a mechanism to reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, seeking to rehabilitate women deemed to have transgressed societal

boundaries. By recognising the existence of institutions like the House of Correction, we gain insight into the gendered nature of punishment and societal perceptions of female criminality during this period. Moreover, it highlights the importance of examining gender as a critical dimension of historical and contemporary approaches to imprisonment and criminal justice.

When a sense of African nationhood began to take hold among the Shona and Ndebele, the settler government responded to the formation of two liberation movements, the Zimbabwe People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), with extreme measures. They set up restriction camps in distant and hard-to-reach areas like Whawha and Gonakudzingwa in 1964, and in 1965, they did the same in Sikombela (Munochiveyi, 2014). These camps were meant to isolate and weaken the movement. This tactic of banishment was similar to the idea of British banishment in the 19th century where the troublesome people were sent to far away penal colonies like Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, the West Indies and America (see Maxwell-Stewart, 2010). To stifle Black resistance, Khami Maximum, Medium and Mlondolozi Prisons were erected in 1955. When the ZAPU leadership split in 1963, this caused additional problems for the colonial authority, to which it responded by introducing the Law and Order Maintenance Act in 1964 (Sibanda, 2005). The introduction of the Act led to a significant increase in the prison population. However, existing records fail to differentiate between political prisoners and those imprisoned for non-political offences. The colonial government responded to the problem of overpopulation by opening more prisons, including Beitbridge in 1968, Chikurubi Female in 1970, Mlondolozi in 1977 and Chikurubi Maximum in 1979 (Munochiveyi, 2014).

Notably, Chikurubi female prison became the inaugural female prison establishment, indicative of the presence of female liberation fighters during that period. However, despite Munochiveyi's (2014) comprehensive examination of political prisoners, scant attention is paid to women. This oversight highlights the existence of gender bias and marginalisation with historical discourse surrounding crime and punishment.

Another imprisonment measure implemented by the colonial administration in response to the liberation war was the establishment of 'keeps'. The colonial authority converted entire Mashonaland communities into 'keeps', a system where the whole villages were fenced off and curfews and pass laws introduced to restrict the movement of the people so that they could not support the freedom fighters with food and other requirements (Barnes, 1997; Makahamadze, Grand and Tavuyanago, 2009). The pass laws were used to enforce segregation and disenfranchise Black people (Barnes, 1997). The police could demand a pass from anyone and arrest them if they did not comply, causing rebellion against colonial law because such rules and laws were not widely shared and embedded in the people's discourse of social and political authority (Roberts in Parker and Reid, 2013). The rebellion against the colonial law echoes the analysis of colonialism as a criminal

enterprise, as argued by Agozino (2003). By 1975, the country was under police rule, characterised by oppression and extreme aggression towards the Ndebele and the Shona. Black people who resisted the imposition of pass laws, forced labour and colonial extractions were demonised as bearers of the violent criminal identity. This makes me consider Agozino's (2003) assertion that dealing with serious crimes caused by social structures requires looking beyond the law and the rule of law because what is lawful is not always just.

Teresa Barnes' (1997) examination of women's exemption from having a pass until later in 1975 provides insights into women's involvement in non-political crimes during the colonial era. Barnes (1997) argues that the Rhodesian administration confined women to the rural areas and initially excluded them from having passes because it perceived their economic contributions as insignificant within a gendered political economy, thus constraining their financial opportunities. Barnes (1997) further highlights that despite the absence of passes, women still travelled to urban areas for sex work to sustain themselves economically. In response, the state introduced laws targeting these women, derogatorily labelled as 'travelling native prostitutes' (Barnes, 1997: 71). By serving the passes only to men, the colonial administration used the pass law as a mechanism for the construction of gender. Barnes (1997) notes that there is evidence suggesting that the passes became instrumental in the construction of identity. Acquiring a pass at the age of 15 was a rite of passage from childhood to manhood. This means that excluding women from acquiring one reduced their status to that of a child.

1.4 Imperialism and State Criminality in Post-Independent Zimbabwe: The Legacy of Colonialism and the Challenges of Nation-Building

Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the newly-formed government of ZANU PF faced numerous challenges, including the difficult task of nation-building, restructuring the inherited colonial political economy (Muzondidya, 2009). As pointed out by Agozino, 'The major democratic crisis in Africa today is a crisis of hegemony or a situation where the ruling ethnic-gender classes have failed consistently to win the ideological struggle in the continent' (2003: 113). In post-independent Zimbabwe, the government's efforts to impose its political ideals on the nation were met with resistance throughout the 1980s. In its rush to create a new national identity, the government paid little attention to the ethnic, racial, gendered, and class configurations of the inherited state, leading to the continued marginalisation of and hostility towards minority groups such as Coloured, Ndebele, and descendants of immigrants from Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique. The period between the late 1980s and early 1990s was marked by a series of horrific events that occurred primarily between the Ndebele and Shona ethnic groups. These events are commonly referred to as Gukurahundi (Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007). The conflict arose between the ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition ZAPU party, mainly supported by the

Ndebele ethnic group. President Robert Mugabe deployed the brutal Fifth Brigade, resulting in mass killings, torture, and displacement of the Ndebele population. The true extent of the atrocities remains unknown, but thousands lost their lives. The ZANU PF killed and arrested several ZAPU leaders. Feelings of marginalisation also fuelled resistance and opposition in the Eastern and South-Eastern districts of Chipinge, Chiredzi and Chikombedzi. The wounds from this period still affect Zimbabwean society, necessitating justice and reconciliation efforts.

After colonial rule ended, there were still strong instances of regionalism and political loyalty to specific ethnic groups in different parts of the country. In these areas, certain leaders attempted to rally people around their own identities to challenge what they saw as an excessive dominance of power and resources by the Zezuru (one of the largest ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, belonging to the Shona ethnic group) (Muzondidya, 2009). In independent Zimbabwe, only those who were on Zimbabwean land prior to the advent of colonial control were recognised as Zimbabweans by the government, as noted by Muzondidya (2009). The dominant party demonised anyone who disagreed with its narrow definition of patriotic history. This binary vision of the new nation, divided only along racial and ethnic lines, was the legacy of the country's painful colonial history and continued to plague independent Zimbabwe. Those who were formerly labelled as criminals and terrorists by the colonial government were redefined as heroes and political leaders. The bravery and sacrifice of women who fought for Zimbabwe's freedom were celebrated. As a result, the stigma attached to their previous labels as criminals and terrorists was lifted, highlighting the role of social construction of deviance, as put across by Agozino,

> Behaviours are never weird, bad, sick, deviant, sinful or criminal in themselves. They are simply censured or criminalised by the collective conscience (dominant conscience, a la Garland), according to Durkheim. The labelling perspective, or the perspective of societal reaction, agrees that deviance is socially constructed (2003:41).

Furthermore, the labelling of an act as deviant is contingent upon the specific context in which it takes place and the perspectives of those assigning the label.

As divisions continued to surface between the two nationalist parties - ZANU PF and ZAPU over issues of regionalism and political tribalism, the government opened new prisons, including Mutimurefu in 1980, Whawha Medium in 1982 and Mt. Darwin in 1996 (Muzondidya, 2009). Notably, it is discernible that the post-independence government emulated the practice of responding to opposition through the construction of new prison facilities, a precedent set during the colonial era. This observation underscores the presence of certain parallels between the colonial and post-colonial administrations, thereby reinforcing the argument advanced by Agozino (2003) that the enduring influence of imperialism has left an indelible imprint on the administrative practices

of post-colonial regimes, fostering continuities between the two epochs.
From the late 1990s, Zimbabwe underwent a period known as the 'crisis in Zimbabwe' (Raftopoulos, 2009: 201), characterised by a significant economic decline that led to the establishment of the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. The state, particularly the ruling party, ZANU PF, responded with violence towards the MDC and its supporters during the 2000 general and 2002 presidential elections. The ruling party saw elections as 'battles' to be won by any means necessary and relied on intimidating tactics developed during the liberation struggle.

Furthermore, cruel government-led initiatives such as Operation Murambatsvina, which forcibly removed people from urban areas as a punishment for their support of the MDC were introduced. The operation functioned in similar ways to the ‘keeps’ during colonialism. The state also imposed harsh penalties on businesses and trade unions that supported strikes or other forms of collective action. The state's use of force subjugated the working class, and legal institutions legitimised the crimes of the ruling class. President Mugabe state-sanctioned plots to murder opposition parties, exemplifying organised crime. In this context, Agozino's (2003) redefinition of 'crime' as encompassing acts of state criminality is particularly relevant. The violation of democracy and justice in post-independent Zimbabwe, evident in the state's deliberate and cruel laws and tactics used to maintain power, had its roots in the country's history of popular struggles.

According to Jocelyn Alexander (2013), the prison system became militarised between 2000 and 2002. This militarisation was emblematic of the broader political context in the country, characterised by the ruling party's endeavours to consolidate its authority and stifle dissent through the appointment of liberation war veterans to key positions within the prison system. The ramifications of this militarisation were substantial, resulting in a prison environment marked by increased authoritarianism and the potential for oppression in the treatment and conditions of inmates. In line with a comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing state control, new correctional facilities were commissioned during the same period, including Connemara Open Prison in 2000, Hurungwe in 2004 and Mutare Farm in 2004. The plight of prisoners worsened because of famine during this period. Diseases such as pellagra became significant causes of death due to malnutrition. Hunger also led to multiple deaths in Harare Central Prison, with prisoners reportedly preparing graves for their fellow inmates (Alexander, 2013).

Prison reform has been slow in post-colonial Zimbabwe. This inertia is closely tied to the persistence of neo-colonial thinking in the country's prison system, marked by the retention of structural and operational elements from the colonial era. The enduring influence of colonial practices and attitudes has posed a barrier to the government's attempts to depart from deeply entrenched systems. Additionally, resource constraints and the prioritisation of political agendas have presented obstacles to prison system reform. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that post-colonial

Zimbabwe did witness some efforts to reform its prison system.

1.4.1 Prison System Reform and Impact on Women in Zimbabwean Prisons

The end of colonial rule in 1980 saw the deflation of mass incarceration in Zimbabwe. Seventeen thousand prisoners, including political prisoners, were released in April 1980 under the presidential amnesty (Rupande and Ndoro, 2014). Initially, prisons were controlled and administered under The Convict Stations and Prisons Management Act, 1888 (Cape Colony). However, in 1995, the Prison Act 7:11 was introduced, which appointed a commissioner to lead the Zimbabwe Prison Service (ZPCS) and placed it under the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. The implication was that the prison was removed from the supervision of police and magistrates' powers. Over the years, various amendments to the Prison Act have been introduced, resulting in changes to the Zimbabwean prison system’s structure and approach. Some of the changes include a change of name from Rhodesia Prison Service to Zimbabwe Prison Service in 1980, followed by a subsequent name change to the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) in 2013, to reflect the system’s rehabilitation goal. The ZPCS has embraced rehabilitation through initiatives such as the establishment of a rehabilitation section, farms managed by prisoners, and the introduction of community service (Rupande and Ndoro, 2014). Notably, the ZPCS took significant steps towards humane treatment by abolishing corporal punishment in 2013 and eliminating other forms of inhumane treatment. Additionally, according to an article by Amnesty International (2024), the Zimbabwean cabinet decided to abolish the death penalty after extensive deliberations in parliament, opting instead to impose lengthy prison terms for the most serious offences.

Despite these efforts, the marginalisation of women in Zimbabwean prisons remains a prevalent issue. In total, there are forty-four prisons in Zimbabwe, of which only four are exclusively for women: Chikurubi Female, Shurugwi, Mlondolozi and Marondera Open Prison. However, Mlondolozi is designated primarily for both male and female prisoners with mental health issues, while Chikurubi Female also has a psychiatric ward. The architecture of Zimbabwean prisons is designed in a way that prioritises men and disregards women. This is exemplified by the fact that only eighteen prisons are exclusively for men while twenty-six prisons designed for men have cell space allocated for women, which suggests that the criminal justice system views women as an afterthought, thus necessitating research to address this issue. Therefore, the following section aims to fill this gap by focusing on women in Zimbabwean prisons.

Part Two: The Context of Women in Prisons

This section provides a foreground understanding of the realities of many women in Zimbabwean prisons. The exploration encompasses several crucial elements, including the patterns and pathways of their offending, the nature of offences leading to imprisonment, and the conditions of

imprisonment. The insights into incarcerated women's experiences stem from data collected through my research practice, employing various methods as detailed in Chapters Two and Three.

Taking a comparative approach, I juxtapose the circumstances of women in Zimbabwean prisons with those in other sub-Saharan African contexts. This deliberate approach enables the contextualisation of Zimbabwean women's experiences and the identification of unique challenges specific to Zimbabwe. The consideration of comparison is a first step towards contributing more widely to scholarship on women in prisons, thereby addressing existing gaps and limitations in literature and research on the subject. Before delving into these comparative examinations, it is imperative to outline the contributions of feminism in enhancing our understanding of women and crime.

1.5.1 Feminist Contributions to Understanding Women and Crime

Before the late 1970s, women and girls were virtually invisible in the study of crime and incarceration worldwide (Artz et al, 2012; Barberet, 2014; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2012). The dominant thinking presented the history of criminology as a history of men. In theory and research, women as offenders and victims were invisible (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006). Female offending was considered unimportant as a social phenomenon and irrelevant to the development of theories about crime. This is because research was being done largely by men (see Smart, 1977), and female offenders were and are in the minority compared to men. This treatment of offending women has reflected their position within wider society (Smart, 2013; Zedner, 1995).

The primary points of analysis for female involvement in crime were initially focused on women's sexuality and mental stability, as suggested by early theorists, including Freud (1933), Lombroso (1911), Lombroso and Fererro (1895), and Pollack (1950). They focused on biological and physiological determinants of criminality, describing women offenders as unstable. This did little to shift 'the fundamental parameters of masculinity and criminology' (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1988:229). Changes in criminological research began to emerge in the 1970s when the women's liberation movement prompted the development of new theories explicitly focused on female offending (see Heidensohn, 1985; Smart, 1977). Feminist criminologists such as Carol Smart (1977) challenged the biologically orientated studies by Lombrosso and Ferrero (1895) and Pollack (1950), arguing that they were outdated and no longer relevant to the contemporary understanding of female offending. Smart's (1977) work
marked a significant shift in the field of criminology, highlighting the importance of gender in understanding crime and justice.

Other feminist criminologists, such as Pat Carlen (1983) and Kathleen Daly (1992) also contributed to the development of new theories on female offending. In 1992, Daly developed a model of

women's pathways to offending that considers the complex social, economic, and psychological factors contributing to women's involvement in crime. According to Daly (1992), women's pathways to offending are often influenced by four key factors: childhood experiences of abuse and trauma, poverty and social marginalisation, substance abuse and addiction and coercive and abusive relationships. These factors can result in a loss of social support networks and opportunities, leading to increased vulnerability to criminal activity. Women's involvement in crime may also be linked to their roles as caregivers, with some women turning to crime as a means of supporting their families. Following her published results, pathways research studies in several countries, including Portugal (Matos, 2008), Sierra Leone (Mahtani, 2013), Peru (Boutron and Constant, 2013), Kenya (Yenjela, 2015), Botswana (Modie-Moroka, 2003) and South Africa (Ackermann, 2014; Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer and Moult, 2012; Haffejee et al., 2006; Parry, 2022), have continued to build and grow the pathways framework. Pathways research has expanded to include women's identities and lived circumstances (Parry, 2021). Mary Bosworth (1999) has argued and concluded that because the regulation of female prisoners takes a gendered form which relies on the acceptance of traditional ideology about feminine behaviour, femininity is thus the goal of women's punishment. This viewpoint resonates with the experiences of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons, where the imposition of punitive measures, such as the prison dress, is significantly influenced by societal expectations regarding gender roles. Within this context, female offenders find themselves subjected to interventions intended to 'correct' or compel their conformity to established gender norms.

Daly's (1992) framework highlights the importance of addressing these underlying social and economic factors to develop more effective, gender-sensitive interventions for women involved in the criminal justice system. In the Corston Report, commissioned by the United Kingdom Government in 2006, one of the report's key recommendations was the establishment of a network of women's centres across the United Kingdom, which would provide holistic, gender- sensitive support to women involved in the criminal justice system (Corston, 2017). The report also called for an end to imprisoning women for non-violent offences and suggested that community sentences and other alternatives to custody should be used instead.

Furthermore, the report emphasised the importance of involving women with lived experience of the criminal justice system in developing and implementing policy and practice. Despite the publication of the Corston Report and its recommendations, progress towards improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system in the United Kingdom has been slow. As noted in the Barrow Cadbury Trust's report, 'What's Happened Since Corston?' (2017), many of the report's recommendations have yet to be fully implemented, and according to the report, the number of women in prison in the United Kingdom has remained high. This has led to ongoing calls for more radical reform of the criminal justice system to address the gendered harms of imprisonment and develop more effective

alternatives for women who offend.

From the discussion above, it is evident that feminism has made significant advancements in confronting gender bias within the criminology discipline. These advancements manifest in various research domains, methods, and knowledge production processes. However, while feminism has made notable progress, its influence on prison practices may not be as pronounced. Additionally, one can critique feminist criminology for assuming women's homogeneity, thereby universalising their experiences and overlooking the diversity of challenges they face. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), there exists a 'power- knowledge nexus of feminist cross-cultural scholarship expressed through Eurocentrism, that falsely universalises methodologies that serve the narrow self-interest of Western feminism (2003:501). She argues that this tendency is problematic because it erases the experiences and struggles of women in the Third World, portraying them as passive victims in need of rescue by Western feminists.

Women in the Global South embody a complex interplay of identities that should not be oversimplified by the 'shared oppression' narrative commonly found in mainstream feminist criminology analysis. For instance, women in the Global South confront not only gender- related issues but also grapple with resisting neo-colonial power, assuming the role of both historically colonised subjects and women. Ritu Tyagi (2014) writes that within this oppression, their formerly colonised counterparts, once perceived as allies, may become oppressors, exploiting them by misrepresenting them in nationalist discourses. Not only that,

> she also suffers at the hands of Western feminists from the coloniser countries who misrepresent their colonised counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their 'sisters'. (Tyagi, 2014:45)

Considering the multiple facets of women's identity, such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age among others, which often intersect, it is both unjust and dehumanising to promote a singular narrative about women's existence. To address these limitations, the current study adopts the framework of Africana womanism, which emphasises the historical, cultural, and contextual dimensions of women's roles and identities. An exploration of this framework is provided in Chapter Two. I now turn to a discussion on the research site and women in prisons more broadly before focusing specifically on women within this research study.

1.5.2 The Research Site

The primary location for this study was Chikurubi female prison, situated in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. I selected Chikurubi female prison as the central site for the project due to its status as

the largest correctional facility for women in the country. This facility accommodates a diverse range of inmates, including foreign nationals and individuals with mental health concerns transferred from Mlondolozi prison in Bulawayo, a city predominantly inhabited by the Ndebele-speaking tribe. Harare, formerly known as Salisbury during the colonial era, was established by the British Empire as an urban centre. Its strategic positioning and thriving economy have attracted job seekers from rural regions, resulting in a population of 1,542,527 people from various parts of Zimbabwe and beyond (Worldometer, 2023). Chikurubi female prison serves as a microcosm reflecting broader societal issues, particularly the intersection of crime, gender, and socioeconomic marginalisation. By selecting Chikurubi female prison as the primary focus of my research, I aimed to capture a diverse range of experiences among incarcerated women in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, my research extended to Shurugwi Female Prison, located within the rural Shurugwi district of the Midlands province. Shurugwi is situated upon a mineral-rich Archean Greenstone belt, abundant with valuable minerals such as chrome and gold. This has made it a significant hub for mining activities in Zimbabwe. Historically occupied by the Karanga ethnic group, Shurugwi has experienced demographic shifts in recent years. The influx of minority populations such as the Ndebele speakers, and migrant from neighbouring countries such as Malawi and South Africa has transformed the social fabric of the town. Most women at Shurugwi female prison were incarcerated for offences related to poverty, such as theft or illegal mining. Shurugwi Female Prison, within this context, emerges as a focal point for understanding the intersection of poverty, undocumented individuals, and crimes of necessity.

1.5.3 Female Imprisonment in Zimbabwe

Below is a table drawn from World Prison Brief (2021) showing the statistics of female imprisonment in African countries.

***Table 1:** Statistics of female imprisonment in African countries (World Prison Brief, 2021).*

Female prisoners as a percentage of the total prison population	Countries
<2.0%	Nigeria (1.8%), Sierra Leone (1.5%), Algeria (1.5%), Ghana (1.2%), Malawi (1,1%)
2.0% - 2.9 %	Mozambique (2.9%), Swaziland (2.9%), Cape Verde (2.9%), Namibia (2.9%), Lesotho (2.9%), Sudan (2.0%), Liberia (2.8%), Mali (2.8%), Angola (2.7%), Senegal (2.7%), Chad (2.4%), Zimbabwe (2.4%), Gabon (2.2%), Togo (2.6%), Cote d'ivoire (2.5%), Gambia (2.5%), South Africa (2.4%)

3.0 % - 3.9 %	Egypt (3.7%), Niger (3.7%), Congo (3.7%), Benin (3.5%), Tanzania (3.4%), Zambia (3.0%), Libya (3.3%), Tunisia (3.3%), Guinea (3.0%)
4.0 % - 4.9%	Botswana (4.7%), Uganda (4.6%), Ethiopia (4.2%)
>5.0%	Burundi (6.8%), South Sudan (10.9%), Seychelles (6.5%), Mauritius (6.3%), Madagascar (5.5%), Rwanda (5.4%), Kenya (5.1%), Central African Republic (5.0%), Equatorial Guinea (5.0%), Djibouti (5.0%)

It is estimated that women in Africa account for between 2 and 10% of the total prison population, with variations depending on the specific country in question (World Prison Brief, 2021). The exact number of women incarcerated in Zimbabwe's prisons is not publicly available, and the ZCPS may have internal records of the total count. At the time of the research study, the number of female prisoners at Chikurubi female prison was 159, Shurugwi had 21 and Mlondolozi was overpopulated with 135. These numbers fluctuated every day based on court cases. Below is a table that shows the statistics of women in Zimbabwean prisons obtained from the Chikurubi female prison administration as of January 2020.

***Table 2:** Number of female prisoners in the 3 main female prisons in Zimbabwe as of January 2020 (Chikurubi Female Prison Administration, 2020)*

Name of Female Prison	Classification	No. of sentenced prisoners	No. of prisoners on remand	No. of cells	Holding Capacity
Chikurubi	Maximum Security	110	49	16	287
Mlondolozi	Psychiatry	76	59	13	102
Shurugwi	Medium Security	16	5	4	65

It is noteworthy that some women, whether serving sentences or on remand, are accommodated in separate wings within male prisons throughout the country, with female correctional officers

attending to their needs. However, it's important to acknowledge that the population of female prisoners is significantly lower than that of males. Small numbers of female offenders facilitate invisibility and neglect in writing and thinking about female imprisonment. For instance, research examining the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons remains scarce, with notable studies conducted over two decades ago by Chiedza Musengezi and Irene Staunton (2003). Since then, the recent limited research that has examined women in Zimbabwean prisons has primarily focused on health (see Chivandikwa et al, 2020; Pillay, Chimbga and Van Hout, 2021), leaving other aspects of their experiences largely unexplored. This ignorance leads to inappropriate and ineffective information on corrective procedures specifically intended for women.

In addition, the small number of female offenders in the Zimbabwean criminal justice system means that they are often neglected in terms of proper housing and access to rehabilitative programmes. As I highlighted in the previous section, women in Zimbabwean prisons are housed in prisons that were initially built for men. These prisons do not accommodate the specific needs of women, such as mothers who might be incarcerated with their children below the age of two. The children sleep with their mothers in the cells. There are no cot beds for the small babies.

The limited availability of prisons specifically designated for women in Zimbabwe results in their incarceration at facilities located far from their families, consequently reducing the frequency and feasibility of visits from loved ones. The separation from their children, as reported by the women, notably impacts their mental well-being. Comparatively, studies conducted in South Africa (Ackermann, 2015; Haffejee et al., 2006), Uganda (Tibatemwa- Ekirikubinza, 1999) and Botswana (Modie-Moroko, 2003) indicate that women in prison settings are more prone to self-harm and suicide than their male counterparts. However, accounts from prison officials at Chikurubi female prison in Zimbabwe indicated an absence of documented suicidal cases among female inmates. This absence is attributed to the vigilant monitoring protocols employed by prison staff and their systematic confiscation of items potentially utilised for self-harm. This interpretation highlights the prevailing approach focused primarily on surveillance and control rather than on proactive interventions aimed at addressing the underlying mental health needs of incarcerated women. However, not all incarcerated mothers experience prison the same way (Rowe, 2011). As I will show later in this study, some have contact with their families during incarceration. Individual experiences have relevance in the lived experiences of the women in prison.

1.6 Incarcerated Women in this Research Study

This research study involved the participation of forty-seven women from prisons in Chikurubi female, Shurugwi female and transfers from Mlondolozi prisons all at different levels. I decided on involving women from the three prisons to get a diverse comprehensive understanding of women from a different ethnic group and geographical location. Fourteen women participated from

Chikurubi female prison, twenty-one from Shurugwi prison and six transferred from Mlondolozi female prison in Bulawayo. The research also involved the participation of six foreign nationals in Chikurubi female prison. I present the participants in the tables below. There is an emphasis on presenting the participants in indigenous research as it acknowledges their contributions and honours their voices and experiences. This is especially critical because indigenous communities have historically been subjected to erasure in research (Wilson, 2020). The presentation of participants in the research study gives visibility to their involvement. I introduce the participants according to how they identified, chose to be known, and knew each other, that includes their nicknames and characteristics (see below table 3). By providing descriptive accounts, the study demonstrates acknowledgement and respect for the individual stories and circumstances of each person involved in the study. Additionally, it highlights the diverse backgrounds, identities and challenged faced by the participants. Moreover, the presentation humanises the participants. This holistic approach facilitates a contextualised understanding of findings and interpretations within the multifaceted experiences and backgrounds of those involved in the study. Consequently, it enriches the analysis and contributes to a deeper understanding of the research topic.

Many incarcerated women made deliberate choices regarding how they identified themselves within the prison context, opting to emphasise particular aspects of their identity over others. The decision to foreground their roles as mothers, the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment, and the details of their sentences reflected a multifaceted attempt to assert their individuality and shape their own narratives amidst the confines of incarceration.

For numerous women, accentuating their maternal roles served as a means of maintaining a vital connection to their families and highlighting their ongoing responsibilities despite being separated by prison walls. It was a way of preserving their sense of motherhood, which provided them with purpose and significance amid the hardships of prison life. Similarly, foreign nationals often chose to be identified by their nationality, a decision rooted in a desire to uphold their cultural identity and distance themselves from the stigma associated with being labelled as prisoners. Conversely, individuals grappling with mental health issues opted to define themselves by their afflictions rather than their criminal backgrounds or sentences. This choice stemmed from a need for acknowledgment and understanding of their unique challenges within the prison environment. By emphasising their mental health conditions, they advocated for more compassionate treatment and support, advocating for their specific needs to be recognised and addressed. These diverse choices highlighted the intricate nature of individual identity and the various strategies employed by incarcerated individuals to navigate and make sense of their experiences behind bars. Each decision reflected a conscious effort to assert agency and autonomy in shaping personal narratives within the restrictive confines of the prison environment.

Table 3: The Research Participants

	Name	Brief Description
Chikurubi Female Prison	Lodza	25, mother of three, separated from partner. She was imprisoned during a time when she was still nursing her newborn whom she has seen only once since her imprisonment 16 months ago.
	Flo-flo	22, newly married. Husband has not been to visit which leaves her worried that her imprisonment might be the end of her marriage.
	Holier than Thou	50, a devout Christian, and grandmother of two. She is a mother figure inside prison.
	Magirazi	45. She is the face of the ZPCS because of her level of education. Others suspect her to be a secret agent because of her history of being incarcerated in all female prisons in the country.
	Magaro	26. There is a consensus among the prisoners that she is the most beautiful of all prisoners and has a perfect body shape. She is the go-to person for all beauty tips in prison.
	Musalad	19, Communicates mostly in English.
	Rue	31, mother of two. She is serving the longest sentence of fifty years.
	Bad Sector	23, tomboyish. She is a favourite among prisoners because of her sense of humour and ability to mock officers.
	Gaga	27, she is also the face of the ZPCS and works in the officers' quarters because they trust her.
	Madhuwe	28, Rue's best friend. Also serving fifty years. She is cheeky and constantly in fights.
	Sexy Blacka	26, she is also into beauty therapy and 'cleansing' in preparation for life outside prison. She has not told anyone where she is and plans on telling them she was in South Africa for work.
	Queen V	28, a bit of a diva.
	Tindo	37, The best hairstylist and teacher of the prison.
	Gogo Rapi	55. Grandmother of three. Her sentence is almost coming to an end.
Transfers from Mlondolozi Prison (with mental health issues)	Kuku	34, mother of four.
	Popo	28, she should have been released from prison but has nowhere to go because her family has abandoned her and do not want anything to do with her.
	Essy	26, mother of two.
	Chihera	47, mother of six. She says she was wrongfully diagnosed with mental illness during the time when she was in shock of her baby who had fallen off her back into the well while she was fetching some water.
	Manjenjenje	21, university student with a drug addiction.
	Marve	25, mother of two.

Foreign Nationals	Dania	32 years old From Pakistan. Caught trying to cross the border illegally. She speaks little English and misses her family back home.
	Ameerah	36 years old From Pakistan. Caught trying to cross the border illegally. She speaks little English and is awaiting trial in prison with her 6 year old daughter.
	Chifundo	21 years old From Malawi
	Yetunde	39 From Nigeria
	Buhle	34 From South Africa
	Miremba	27 From Uganda
Shurugwi Female Prison	Kadoko	17, a minor who should have been in juvenile detention but there is none for females.
	Lolo	33, convicted of driving under the influence.
	Mundeere	27, speaks Ndebele and learning Shona from others.
	Mucha	37, a traditionalist
	Madzimai	26, very religious, goes to a celestial church.
	Sheila	35, convicted of carrying out an abortion.
	Jane	39, convicted of manslaughter after defending herself and her children from an abusive partner. She is struggling with trauma and anxiety from the past abuse and the current incarceration.
	Mampofu	25, serving time with her little boy in prison who is still breastfeeding.
	Madyiwayo	32, mother of four boys.
	Sibanda	51, refuses to speak to anyone, but does women’s hair.
	Mamoyo	25, works at the prison kitchen and liked by the customers because she is a good cook.
	Sharingo	26, pregnant with her second child.
	Sibindi	27 wrongly accused of a crime she didn't commit. She is determined to clear her name and is drafting appeals.
	Chihera 1	47, a farmer.
	Chihera 2	22, pregnant with her first child.
	Masibanda	22, related to one of the prison officers.
	Mandlovu	44, Knows Magirazi’s who is now incarcerated in Chikurubi female.
	Mhlanga	24, college student who was arrested for drug possession. She is scared and overwhelmed by her new surroundings and struggles to keep up with her studies.
	Jojola	54, grandmother who is serving time for stealing food to feed her grandchildren. She is beloved by her fellow inmates for her kindness and wisdom.

	Mhofu	44, a housewife who was arrested for shoplifting to feed her family during a financial crisis.
	Masibanda Madhau	36, victim of gender-based violence. She was arrested for assaulting her partner and is struggling to come to terms with her actions.

Based on the self-descriptions provided by the participants, I inferred certain demographic characteristics, which are summarised in Table 4 below. My discussion of female offending in Zimbabwe is drawn from this table.

Table 4: Research participants demographics

	Chikurubi Female (14)	Shurugwi Female (20)	Mlondolozi Female (4)	Foreign Nationals (6)
1st time Offenders	12	20	3	6
Mothers	10	20	3	6
Single Mothers	9	19	2	4
Waged labour	2	none	None	2
History of Abuse	12	17	2	2
Remand	none	7	4	6
Finished High School	7	none	1	3
Did not finish High school	7	20	3	1
Students	1	none	1	none
Self-employed	3			
Unemployed	2	9	3	1

Out of the forty-seven women, forty-one were first-time offenders, and three were repeat offenders. Research in South Africa, a nation argued to imprison the most significant number of people, both male and female (see Parry, 2021; World Prison Brief, 2021), also indicates that the majority of incarcerated women are first-time offenders (see also Artz and Rotmann, 2015; Fasanmi, 2015). The reasons why most incarcerated women are first-time offenders are complex and multifaceted, often involving a combination of individual circumstances, socioeconomic factors, and systemic issues within the criminal justice system. Notably, a significant portion of these women is incarcerated for

minor offences.

Thirty women in my study were convicted for minor crimes, including theft, hawking without a license, loitering with the intent to engage in prostitution and receiving stolen goods. Despite the gravity of these offences being relatively low in terms of public risk, a significant number of these women came from impoverished backgrounds. Among them, twelve were unemployed, while twenty-eight were underemployed, engaging in occupations such as farm labour, domestic work, small-scale retail, vending, and sex work. Notably, only four had previous experience in waged labour before their incarceration. In a 2002 commissioned study on access to justice in Uganda, it was highlighted that offences such as being idle and disorderly and rogue and vagabond were anti-poor and made the poor more vulnerable (Campaign to Decriminalise Poverty and Status, 2021). Similarly, the Kenyan criminal justice system audit of 2016 revealed that more poorer than rich people were arrested and sent to prison for economically driven offences relating to lack of business licenses (Campaign to Decriminalise Poverty and Status, 2021). Despite this, there has been a trend of punitive populism towards women in prison, where stricter punishments for minor offences have been implemented due to widespread concerns over perceived leniency towards dangerous criminal behaviour (see Gottschalk, 2006; Gruber, 2007; Grzyb, 2019). As a result, female offenders have been disproportionately affected, as harsher punishments are often applied to them as well, even for minor offences. This has resulted in the victimisation of female offenders, who, despite committing relatively minor crimes, find themselves subjected to severe punishments due to broader societal anxieties regarding crime and punishment.

Many of the women incarcerated for minor offences in the study were unable to pay fines, secure bail, or access legal representation, further exacerbating their plight. This is particularly problematic in Zimbabwe, where the amount of bail is determined without regard to a person's financial situation. The lack of consideration for a person's financial situation means that more and more low-income individuals are required to post bail or use a bail bond agent, which places a disproportionate burden on women. Marilize Ackermann (2015) found that women in Zimbabwe face additional barriers to being released on bail, as they are required to present title deeds as proof of property ownership in the same city as the court. This requirement is particularly challenging for women, as many of them do not own land or property and may have lost male acquaintances who are landowners. These challenges are reflected in a study conducted in South Africa in 2004, which found that 33% of female remand detainees who were granted bail could not afford it, compared to only 7% of male convicts (Ackermann, 2015). A census in Kenya showed that 86% of all remand prisoners qualified for bail but could not afford it (Muntingh and Petersen, 2015). This suggests that the bail system in many sub- Saharan countries, and indeed in Zimbabwe, is failing to address the unique needs and circumstances of women, particularly those who are economically marginalised.

This study identified nine women convicted for crimes predominately enacted through male-dominated social networks, including selling drugs, kidnapping, accomplice to rape, and fraud. These women, because of poverty, were forced to enter into relationships that expand their criminal opportunities and engage in activities typically dominated by male social networks. These findings are supported by research conducted in Worcester and Pollsmoor prisons in South Africa, which suggests that some women from low-income families lived in communities that increased their social vulnerabilities and encouraged a life of crime through engagement in gang-related activities (Ackermann, 2014).

As primary caregivers, these women feel immense pressure to provide for their children, and involvement in criminal networks may seem like the only option for some (see Ackermann, 2014; Artz et al., 2012; Haffejee et al, 2006; Parry, 2022). In fact, this study found that out of the forty-seven women, thirty-four were single mothers and the primary breadwinners for their families. Five reported that they were widowed and twenty-one had been abandoned by their partners. With the decline of national and local economies in many sub-Saharan African countries, men have been unable to contribute their share of household expenses, placing the responsibility of care solely on women.

Unlike in some countries like South Africa, where single parents receive grants from the government, although not nearly enough (Hall, 2010), single mothers in Zimbabwe do not receive any financial aid from the government. This places an immense burden on women struggling to make ends meet, and it is no wonder that they may turn to criminal activities to provide for their families. This trend of single parenting being critical to women's vulnerability to crime is consistent with studies conducted in Botswana (Modie-Moroka, 2003), South Africa (Ackermann, 2014; Artz et al, 2012; Parry, 2021), and Uganda (Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999), as well as overseas literature (Arnull and Stewart, 2021; Barnes and Stinger, 2014; DeCoster and Heimer, 2022).

The experiences of thirty-five women in my study revealed a common thread - they had come from broken homes or single-parent households, which had caused distress and disrupted bonds with their parents. As a result, many of these women had feelings of not belonging and were vulnerable to negative influences such as substance abuse. Furthermore, thirty-three women disclosed that they had experienced some form of abuse in their childhood, with fourteen being victims of sexual abuse. These findings are consistent with research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the link between prior sexual abuse and female offending (Ackerman, 2014; 2015; Artz et al., 2012; McCartan and Gunnison, 2010; Modie-Moroka, 2003). This victimisation has a long-lasting impact on decision-making, as some participants in my study revealed that abuse from a male figure in their lives led them to seek love in the wrong places.

The study identified fourteen instances of women convicted for violent crimes, encompassing

murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide, rape, intentional transmission of HIV, and robbery with aggravating circumstances. Emerging research in sub-Saharan Africa shows the increasing trend of female incarceration for violent offences (Kinonco, 2020; Tibatemwa- Ekirikubinza, 1999). Women perpetrators of violent crimes frequently encounter stigmatisation, as evidenced by the participants in this investigation. The complexities surrounding the examination of female violence are rooted in various factors, including societal preconceptions, inadequate research funding, ethical considerations, and the overarching obscurity of female violence within the wider framework of societal norms and expectations. Pathologising and demonising 'violent women' obscures their pathways of violence and perpetuates stereotyped ideas about femininity (Parry, 2021). Consequently, these multifaceted challenges make it a complex and often under-researched area within criminology and related fields.

In the Zimbabwean context, this tension assumes particular significance. This is because, Zimbabwe, like many other countries, exhibits a pattern of gendered violence, where men overwhelmingly constitute the primary perpetrators of violent acts (Fidan and Bui, 2016). The pronounced gender disparity in the prevalence of violence emphasises the critical necessity of understanding female violent behaviour. Such an inquiry not only contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors underpinning violence but also aligns with feminist initiatives that contend that the study of female violent acts serves as a means of deconstructing established gender constructs (Gilbert, 2002; Kelly, 1996).

Five women in my study explained that murder was a response to the physical and emotional abuse they endured in their relationships. In Zimbabwe, domestic violence is said to have affected twice as many women as males over the course of their lifetimes. Additionally, it has been reported that six in ten women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetimes (Nyamayemombe et al., 2010). Research studies in Uganda (see Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999; Kiconco, 2020), Malawi (see Chepuka, 2013) and South Africa (Haffejee et al., 2006) also observed violent crimes by women as a response to abuse in intimate relationships. A survey of 569 women in three prisons in Gauteng Province, South Africa, revealed that the most significant proportion of women was imprisoned for murder or attempted murder (Haffejee et al, 2006). A survey conducted in three of Malawian's prison revealed that 34 cases out of 69 were for the murder of an intimate partner (Chepuka, 2013). Kiconco concluded that women in Uganda 'commit murder as the last option to put to an end to abusive relationships' (2020: 49). Some of women in this study asserted that they had not sought help from abuse for fear of breaking their families. Others sought help from family members and the police but received little support. In Zimbabwe, women often have no access to legal services for assistance and may therefore resort to violence as their only means of survival (Konyana, 2016). For these women, killing their abusive partners becomes a strategy for self-preservation and gaining control over a threatening environment. This reality challenges the established notions of gender, crime, and

punishment, as it confronts the stereotype that women are inherently nonviolent and disrupts societal expectations of femininity and nurturing roles.

Seven women in this research study disclosed that their crimes were a response to experiences of infidelity and betrayal in their relationships, prompting them to retaliate against their partners for their unfaithfulness. Motivated by a desire to salvage their relationships, these women predominantly directed their aggression towards their husbands' extramarital partners. Furthermore, most abused women in the study highlighted how polygamous arrangements undermined their social standing and influenced their conduct. Within such relationships, women face heightened competition for their husband's attention and resources, leading to strained relationships and inadequate support systems. Gender norms within polygamous settings further curtail women's autonomy and decision-making capabilities, intensifying their susceptibility to abuse. Additionally, social stigma and isolation exacerbate the challenges faced by abused women, deterring them from seeking assistance due to fear of condemnation and disgrace. Moreover, the unequal power dynamics inherent in polygamous unions foster dependency among women, impeding their ability to extricate themselves from abusive situations. These cultural dynamics significantly shape women's involvement in violent crimes, highlighting the imperative to acknowledge the complexity of their circumstances and foster a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving their resort to violence.

1.6.1 Injustice and Inequality: The Treatment of Women in Zimbabwe's Criminal Justice System

This study found that the duration of sentences is a critical factor that significantly impacts incarcerated mothers. Fourteen women served sentences under two years. Shorter sentences, often perceived as leniency, often lead to job loss and homelessness. Such outcomes not only perpetuate the cycle of poverty and violence but also exacerbate the injustice faced by these women. In addition, shorter sentences lead to the loss of custody of their children (Ackermann, 2014; Parry, 2021). While both male and female offenders may suffer negative effects from the prison system, women are often more severely impacted due to their vulnerability and primary caregiving roles for their children. This can result in a greater burden on their families and a heightened difficulty in caring for their children, placing them at a disadvantage compared to male offenders.

Five women were serving sentences between ten and fifty years. These women asserted that they were serving long sentences because of lack of proper representation in the court of law. Thirty-one women in my study did not finish high school. Lack of access to formal education and training is a crucial barrier to women’s development in Zimbabwe. The lack of education makes women ignorant about their rights in detention. Many of the participants, especially those originating from rural areas, were unaware of their right to representation. As a result of this, they faced immense

difficulties when accessing mechanisms of justice. In addition, their right to justice was also systematically undermined by the gender-biased attitudes and views of the judicial officers, police, jails, and probate offices. A few women admitted that the police had intimidated them into confessing to crimes they had not committed. Others disclosed that the police had not taken their cases seriously. In a baseline study on women's property and inheritance rights conducted by the International Commission of Jurists Kenya, 47% of the judicial officers interviewed felt that the legal system did not treat men and women equally. According to 40% of these judicial officers, inequities result from cultural prejudices (Omamo, 2002).

The lack of legal aid also results in women spending more time in pre-trial detention. Unlike Uganda, which has laws limiting the time an individual can remain on remand (Sarkin, 2019), Zimbabwe does not have such laws. During the time of this research, I met a woman who had been on remand for more than ten years. All foreign prisoners from countries including Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, Malawi and Uganda were on remand. How Zimbabwe deals with immigrants who enter the country through intrinsically porous borders has colonial roots. The government throws undocumented foreign nationals into prison not because it intends to prosecute them, but because the country has no migrant detention centres to place foreigners while they await deportation and no money to deport them. Migrants are supposed to be held temporarily by the government until they can be deported back to their home country, but because Zimbabwe lacks the policies and resources to handle illegal immigration, many undocumented individuals wind up spending years in local prisons without being charged or deported (Mujuru and Chenjerai, 2020). The Zimbabwean police and Department of Home Affairs officials illegally detain immigrants for longer than they should, thus contributing to the criminalisation of foreign nationals. The problem of immigration detention serves as an example of how the police and the home office fail to discriminate between criminals and illegal immigrants.

All the women with mental health concerns transferred from Mlondolozi prison were on remand. People with mental health issues often suffer human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. The prison system doesn't give enough importance to mental health, as shown by the ZPCS's insufficient staffing, medication, and facilities to address mental health issues among female inmates. At Chikurubi female prison, one psychologist serves all the offenders, including sentenced and remanded and is only available once a month. Social workers are also few. My study found out that the absence of medication and support leaves some women vulnerable to mental health issues. Due to the problem of funding, lack of consistent and timely mental health support, religious groups step in to provide some support.

The conditions of women in the criminal justice system in sub-Saharan Africa show that the conditions of remand or waiting trial prisoners are often worse than those of convicted prisoners

(Vetten in Sarkin, 2008). In Namibia, conditions for women held at police stations were very poor, with no ventilation or sleeping facilities. Overcrowding in women's prisons is reported in South Africa, Uganda and Central African Republic, although not to the same extent as in men's prisons (see Vetten, 2008; Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999). For example, in the Kirikiri women's prison in Nigeria, overcrowding was calculated at 130.47% (Agozino, 2005:195). The Special Rapporteur on women in prison reported other adverse conditions such as insufficient bedding, poor sanitation facilities and ventilations, which flow from overcrowding (Coomaraswamy, 2002). These create an environment conducive to ill health and widespread infectious diseases.

This section on women in prisons in Zimbabwe has endeavoured to respond to the gap in research about the nature of women found in Zimbabwean prisons and has highlighted the need for research with incarcerated women to understand their nuanced experiences. The following section discusses prison theatre as a practice through which to engage incarcerated women in understanding their experiences.

Part Three: Applied Theatre with Women in the Criminal Justice System

This section provides the context of applied theatre practice with women in the criminal justice system. Applied theatre is a term that began to be used in the 1990s to describe a discursive practice created for a specific need, taking place in non-theatre spaces (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009). There are several definitions of applied theatre, and according to Helen Nicholson (2011), all accounts of the term's origin and definition are often ambiguous, indicating that the term did not rise deliberately and was not invented by one person to express a very specific set of practices or concept. Nicholson argues that 'the term emerged haphazardly and spread like a rhizome' to fill a lexical gap (Nicholson, 2011:241). She further contends that finding the uses of the term consequently involves recognising its pliability and porousness rather than looking for applied theatre's fundamental meaning.

However, and inevitably, there are ways of thinking in this field that I find more compelling than others, but my position is an effort to reflect some of the various perspectives on the term rather than to insist on a certain derivation or singular meaning. I have an appreciation for Peter O'Connor and Briar O'Connor's (2009) definition because it captures the fundamentals of the field of practice without overstating its significance. They define applied theatre as 'an umbrella term that defines theatre which operates beyond the traditional and limiting scope of conventional Western theatre forms' (2009:471). The definition aligns with the argument I aim to promote in this study, which focuses on countering the prevailing methodologies in applied theatre in prison, which have been predominantly shaped by Western paradigms.

Applied theatre 'brings together a broad range of dramatic activity carried out by a host of diverse

bodies and groups' (Ackroyd, 2000:2). According to Judith Ackroyd (2002) what the various groups have in common is intentionality:

> They share a belief in the power of the theatre form to address something beyond the form itself. So one group use theatre in order to promote positive social processes within a particular community, whilst others employ it in order to promote an understanding of human resource issues among corporate employees. The range is huge, including such as theatre for education, for community development, and for health promotion, and dramatherapy and psychodrama. An intentionality is presupposed in all these examples. The intentions of course vary (Ackroyd, 2002:2).

Within this framework, prison theatre constitutes a subset, encompassing a range of artistic practices within the criminal justice system. It has been identified by various terms, including 'theatre in prisons,' 'theatre in prison and probation services,' and 'arts behind bars.' These encompass various activities, such as drama-based correctional programmes, theatre productions involving or by prisoners, and interactive performances facilitated by specialised theatre companies within prison settings.

Much of the historical development of theatre in prison remains undocumented (Thompson, 1999b). Phillip Taylor (2003) concurs with this perspective, noting the challenges in tracing the evolution of prison theatre due to differing interpretations by various companies regarding their work's nature. However, Michael Balfour (2004) suggests that the earliest recorded instance of theatre involving prisoners dates back to 1789, with the staging of George Farquhar's *Restoration Comedy The Recruiting Officers* by prisoners who contributed to the establishment of the British Colony of New South Wales. Since this initial observation, numerous publications have emerged, contributing to the evolution and enrichment of the field of prison theatre (see Balfour, 2004; Fraden, 2001; Lucas, 2021; McAvinchey, 2011; 2020; Shailor, 2010; Thompson, 1998; Walsh, 2019).

The majority of contributors to the broader understanding of the benefits of the arts within the justice system come from the USA and the UK. Pensalfini (2016) has noted over thirty theatre companies in the UK alone that provide training and do productions for incarcerated people. The work has also developed in various other countries such Australia, Brazil, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Canada, Norway, China, Nigeria and South Africa (see Biggs, 2016; Hurst, 2012; McAvinchey, 2001; Sutherland, 2013; Young-Jahangeer, 2005; 2011). Amidst all this growth, development and appraisal, this research study identifies two significant shortcomings in prison theatre.

Firstly, the field of prison theatre is characterised by the prevalence of dominant methodologies and theories, encompassing practices like Shakespeare in Prison, Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), and methods grounded in the cognitive behavioural model. Regrettably, these predominant approaches

tend to sideline alternative methods, consequently restricting the exploration of diverse avenues in applied theatre within the criminal justice system. Several factors contribute to the prevalence of these dominant practices, such as the necessity for applied theatre to validate its presence in correctional facilities, considerations of funding, academic research and publishing opportunities, as well as the accessibility to prison institutions. I delve deeper into these factors below.

Secondly, prison theatre exhibits a notable gender bias, with a significant emphasis on men, who constitute the majority within the broader global corrections context. Academic literature focusing on theatre involving women in prison remains limited. Most existing resources take the form of edited collections, and even within these, only one chapter typically addresses performance involving incarcerated women. For example, a foundational collection *Prison Theatre: Practices and Perspectives* edited by James Thompson (1998) describing applied theatre practice in prison across thirteen chapters, dedicates just one chapter to theatre work with women in United Kingdom prisons. Similarly, the subsequent edited collection by Balfour (2004) similarly dedicates a single chapter to women in Melbourne's Australian prisons.

It is only in recent years that applied theatre publications exclusively concentrating on women have started to emerge, with the contributions of Biggs (2020), Walsh (2019), McAvinchey (2020) and Lucas (2021). Therefore, the discussion in this section contributes to the conversation about the value of different approaches and forms of performance-making with women in prison. In addition, it aims to contribute to the growing practice on theatre with women in the criminal justice system through my research study with women in Zimbabwean prisons.

1.7.1 Dominant Approaches and Theories in Prison Theatre

I acknowledge that it is almost impossible to undertake a comprehensive survey of international practice because prison theatre operates beyond commercial theatre and theatre for general public audiences (Balfour, 2004; McAvinchey, 2020). It is not the scope of this sub-section to analyse every prison art project or prison theatre company in order to advance my argument for an indigenous approach in applied theatre practice with women in prison. Nonetheless, I consider some of the most important examples, particularly those that have gained much attention in published literature, to attend to the aims and aesthetics of the dominant forms in order to later introduce the contribution of my own approach.

It is crucial to recognise that the claims around dominant approaches, such as Shakespeare in Prison, Theatre of the Oppressed and Cognitive Behavioural Model, which this section will highlight, do not encompass the full spectrum of methodologies and practices within this field. While certain practices may be more prominent in discussions and analysis, this does not diminish the diversity and richness of other approaches that are equally significant. Also of importance to note is that these

dominant approaches undoubtedly have noteworthy impacts and contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on prison theatre even though they do not capture the entirety of prison theatre's scope.

Shakespeare in Prison

The popularisation of William Shakespeare's works in prisons has drawn significant scholarly and public attention, primarily due to the extensive body of literature addressing this phenomenon. Beginning with Cecily Berry's educational workshops in Her Majesty's Prisons Long Lartin and Dartmoor during the 1980s (Pensalfini, 2016), the presence of Shakespeare in prisons has expanded and evolved. Pensalfini (2016) notes a consistent increase in prisoner engagement with and performance of Shakespeare across diverse contexts in the UK, USA, Australia, and Canada.

Shakespeare in Prison has demonstrated significant positive impacts, fostering personal development, communication skills, and moral introspection among incarcerated individuals. The sustained engagement with Shakespeare's works in prisons has emerged as a powerful pedagogical and rehabilitative tool, shaping the personal and social transformation of prisoners, predominantly male, as documented in scholarly works such as those by Laura Bates, Jonathan Shailor, Rob Pensalfini, and others (Heritage, 2002; Herold, 2014; Pensalfini, 2016; Scott-Douglass, 2007; Trounstine, 2004). Prison Shakespeare has been grounded in psychotherapeutic theories, offering incarcerated individuals opportunities to explore and articulate their inner emotional landscapes through the embodiment of Shakespearean characters. Agnes Wilcox, through her work with Prison Performing Arts, found that women prisoners connected deeply with the emotional experiences of Shakespeare's characters, using these performances as conduits to express their own life experiences and moral reflections (Ward & Connolly, 2018). As Pensalfini (2016) notes, Shakespeare's language becomes a liberating tool for prisoners, many of whom may struggle to articulate their thoughts or actions in conventional ways. Through the use of prompts and scenarios from Shakespeare, as Charlotte Scott's (2019) project exemplifies, inmates are encouraged to narrate their own stories, promoting self-reflection and identity formation.

The social and moral benefits of Prison Shakespeare are particularly well-documented. Programmes like *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, and the Marin Shakespeare Company incorporate structured drama therapy-inspired curricula aimed at rehabilitating prisoners through the study and performance of Shakespeare. These initiatives have yielded significant results: enhancing critical thinking, empathy, literacy, and communication skills, as well as fostering a sense of self-awareness and personal responsibility among participants (Shailor, 2011). For example, the London Shakespeare Workshop, founded by Bruce Wall, reported increased confidence among prisoners, while the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble observed marked improvements in communication and collaborative skills (Pensalfini, 2016).

However, the practice of Prison Shakespeare is not without its critiques. Firstly, the foundational theoretical framework supporting the use of Shakespeare in prisons raises concerns. Prison Shakespeare aligns with psychotherapeutic traditions, suggesting that offenders possess a heightened ability to identify with Shakespeare's characters (Ward and Connolly, 2018: 133). This belief centres on the potential of Shakespeare's work to reform inmates. Building upon this premise, organisations like The Shakespeare Project have developed structured programmes tailored to prisoners, involving the study, rehearsal, and performance of Shakespearean plays, along with the creation of autobiographical performances inspired by their engagement with Shakespeare (Shailor, 2011). These programmes emphasise individual introspection, challenging prisoners to examine their experiences through Shakespeare's lens and to discern causes and effects. The approach is aimed at altering prisoners' behaviours.

This approach presents a challenge as it prioritises offences as the central focus. This is notably problematic for incarcerated women as emphasising behavioural change excessively overlooks other significant factors contributing to their criminal involvement, such as political motivations, economic hardships, and limited access to education. The emphasis on rehabilitating prisoners through behavioural modification deflects attention from broader social injustices (Shailor, 2011). Additionally, this approach often perpetuates the disciplinary role of prisons, particularly in narratives concerning women's resilience, strength, and future achievements (Walsh, 2020).

Moreover, an approach aimed at altering prisoners' behaviour may compromise the essence of the practice. Sally Stamp (1998) argues that the therapeutic and positive applications of applied theatre could obscure the political underpinnings of the art form, diluting its political potential. She further suggests the need for a clear demarcation between drama and therapy to prevent complications, both in terms of comprehension within the prison system and the potential risks of raising false hope in those aspiring to change their behaviour. Stamp (1998) emphasises the importance of evaluating and disseminating the outcomes of this work so that the field gains recognition akin to other professions like nursing and prison staff.

Secondly, language plays a crucial role in the use of Shakespeare in prison as it is believed to help prisoners shape their identities notable in carceral contexts where stagnation is prevalent (Pensalfini, 2016). For instance, Agnes Wilcox of Prison Performing Arts and Charlotte Scott's *Let's Change the Story: Shakespeare in Prison* project recognise the power of language in facilitating inmates' exploration of their actions and experiences through the rich tapestry of Shakespearean language. However, it's important to acknowledge that Shakespeare's work, with its intricate language and cultural references, may not resonate as deeply outside of English-speaking environments. In contexts where English is not the primary language, inmates may face additional barriers in fully

comprehending and connecting with the nuances of Shakespearean language and themes. So popularising prison Shakespeare as a universal approach to working with prisoners is problematic as it does not consider the cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds of incarcerated individuals. This limitation highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

Within the framework of prison Shakespeare, participants often lack creative agency; they are compelled to study the text and interpretations in service of the facilitator's vision. As a tool of word instruction in prison, the text is used to tell prisoners what sort of citizens they should be. In addition, prison Shakespeare risks making the literature of a white male as the only essential author to read in the pursuit of human knowledge and emotional growth (see Pensalfini, 2016; Ward and Connolly, 2018). This tendency can marginalise and silence the voices of authors from diverse cultural backgrounds, perpetuating the notion that the Western canon is the only legitimate or valuable repository of knowledge, while other cultural traditions are relegated to insignificance. Positioning prison Shakespeare as a timeless and universal process of cultural unfolding that speaks to the current liberal condition, prison Shakespeare further oppresses marginalised cultures. Given these considerations, prison Shakespeare might not be a suitable endeavour within the context of Zimbabwean prisons.

The Theatre of the Oppressed in Prison

The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was devised by Brazilian artist, activist, Augusto Boal in the early 1970s during his time in prison (Boal, 2001). Boal himself notes in his autobiography, *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics* (2001), that 'metaphorically, the Theatre of the Oppressed was born in prison' (2001:298). It was within his prison cell that Boal began contemplating alternative ways of existence both within and outside the confines of incarceration. He developed techniques that could be acquired and adapted during periods of physical confinement, aiming to retrain and transform the mind. Over more than two decades, the methodologies of TO have been extended to correctional facilities in diverse nations across the globe.

The application of TO in prisons, particularly with incarcerated women, has shown considerable positive impact in facilitating personal empowerment, collective awareness, and social transformation. TO techniques have been used globally in prison settings as tools for fostering critical reflection, resilience, and community solidarity among prisoners (Boal, 2001). The adaptability and accessibility of TO methods have allowed prisoners to engage with and challenge their own oppressive realities, making it a valuable tool for addressing the personal and systemic issues they face.

One of the most significant projects employing TO in prisons is the *Staging Human Rights* initiative, which utilised Forum and Legislative Theatre to address human rights issues in 34 prisons in São

Paulo, Brazil, in 2001 (Heritage, 2004; McAvinchey, 2006). This large-scale intervention helped prisoners develop a critical consciousness of their rights, a cornerstone of Boal's methodology, which aims to empower individuals to resist and reshape oppressive conditions (Boal, 2001). By using theatre as a form of dialogue, prisoners were able to enact and explore solutions to issues of injustice, violence, and their own lived experiences in confinement, creating a powerful medium for both individual and collective healing.

TO's flexibility allows for integration with other artistic and therapeutic techniques, broadening its impact in diverse prison contexts. For instance, Mbongiseni Buthelezi's incorporation of Zulu performance traditions, such as songs and dances, into Forum Theatre in South African prisons exemplifies how TO can be adapted to local cultural contexts, thus enhancing its relevance and efficacy (Buthelezi & Hurst, 2005). Similarly, *TheaterDialog* in Germany incorporates masks and puppets in TO exercises, using these artistic elements to help prisoners externalize and confront complex emotional issues (TheaterDialog, 2022).

Key TO techniques such as Image Theatre and Forum Theatre are particularly effective in addressing the psychological and social challenges faced by incarcerated women. These methods allow participants to represent their struggles and aspirations in a non-verbal, embodied way, which can lead to deeper emotional exploration and collective problem-solving. In the case of the TO project in Chichiri Women's Prison in Malawi, the facilitators used TO to address prison health and women's rights, providing an empowering platform for the inmates to 'claime their full rights to health and adequate standards of care and environmental conditions in prison' (Chivandikwa, et al, 2020: 4). The TO methodology, by enabling participants to explore possible solutions to their oppression, helps incarcerated women assert agency in a system that often denies them their rights and dignity.

Moreover, TO promotes community building and solidarity among prisoners by fostering dialogue and collective action. By performing scenes that depict oppression and injustice, prisoners are able to share their experiences and collaborate on finding ways to overcome shared struggles. This process not only helps to alleviate feelings of isolation and powerlessness but also builds a sense of mutual support and resilience within the prison community.

Despite these positive outcomes, TO projects in prisons face significant challenges. TO has at times been excessively adopted into other contexts without much criticality such that it has become a hegemony. For example, in the project in Chichiri female prison in Blantyre, Malawi, the methodology was employed superficially without a comprehensive examination of additional factors such as the historical, political, and social backdrop of Malawi.

Although Kennedy Chinyowa's critique of TO was not specifically directed at prison contexts, it can be relevantly applied to the Malawian case. He argues that Theatre of the Oppressed tends to 'leave

behind the world in which the oppressor remains in perpetual dominance' (Chinyowa, 2014:7). In the case of the forum play in Chichiri, Malawi, the identified oppressor, which in this context is the state responsible for perpetuating dehumanising systems affecting female prisoners, is not depicted as sharing equal responsibility in addressing the prisoners' conditions. The oppressed and the oppressor are not portrayed as engaging in strategic efforts to dismantle or alter the state's oppressive tendencies within the forum, leaving the oppressed (women) feeling just as vulnerable as before. Chinyowa advocates for a 'theatre of the oppressor' 'where agents of oppression (oppressors) can also be turned into allies in the act of liberation' (Chinyowa, 2014:2). Furthermore, he asserts that 'those who are part of the problem are part of the solution' (Chinyowa, 2014:2) and that responsibility should be placed on the oppressor.

While Chinyowa's (2014) suggestion for a 'theatre of the oppressor' offers a thought-provoking perspective on strategies for social change, its practical implementation and effectiveness in challenging oppressive systems, particularly within prison contexts, require careful consideration of power dynamics, systemic constraints, and the agency of marginalised individuals. Firstly, the concept of a 'theatre of the oppressor' assumes that individuals or entities perpetuating oppression can readily become allies in the struggle for liberation. However, within the prison context, those in positions of power may be resistant to relinquishing their dominance or may not recognise the need for change.

Furthermore, placing the responsibility for change solely on the oppressor may inadvertently absolve other actors, including individuals within marginalised communities, of their agency and capacity for resistance. In the context of prison, the feasibility and effectiveness of engaging all parties, including prison authorities and policymakers, in the pursuit of social change may vary depending on the context and existing power dynamics. Additionally, the implementation of a 'theatre of the oppressor' approach within prison settings may face practical challenges, such as restrictions on freedom of expression, limited resources, and institutional resistance to change.

Cognitive Behavioural Model (CBM)

The most popular theoretical models adopted by many applied theatre practitioners and companies working in prisons such as Geese Theatre Company, TiPP and Clean Break is the cognitive behavioural model. It is an approach with origins in several theories of social psychology and personality (Sheldon, 2011). Its foundation is that behaviour can be corrected and changed through training that emphasises good rather than bad behaviour (Sheldon, 2011). It has three components: the cognitive part that deals with thinking skills, the emotional component that looks at self-awareness, self-expression and self-control, and the behavioural component that promotes the learning of pro-social behaviours for achieving goals. This is particularly crucial for incarcerated women, as it helps them break cycles of negative thinking that contribute to their criminal behaviour.

The emotional component encourages self-awareness, self-expression, and emotional regulation, which are often underdeveloped or compromised due to the traumas many incarcerated women have faced, such as abuse or addiction.

The use of the CMB in prison theatre has resulted in positive outcomes by promoting self-reflection, emotional resilience, and personal agency (McPhee, 2020). Clean Break's work, for instance, has been successful in helping women develop greater self-awareness and emotional control, which are crucial in reducing recidivism. Moreover, theatre projects grounded in CBM enable participants to rehearse new behaviours in a safe, controlled environment, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate life outside of prison (Biggs, 2016). These rehearsals of new behaviours are not simply abstract exercises but are tied to real-life applications, such as improving interpersonal relationships and decision-making, which are essential for successful reintegration into society.

A significant strength of the CMB is its ability to bridge the gap between therapeutic intervention and creative expression. As Clean Break and Geese Theatre Company demonstrate, this approach allows incarcerated women to engage in self-exploration and healing while also participating in a structured process of behavioural change. For example, theatre exercises informed by CBM can challenge participants to confront their past actions, reconsider their emotional responses, and explore alternative ways of being that promote healthy relationships and community engagement.

Despite these positive outcomes, scholars like Jonathan Neelands (2004) and Ahmed (2007) have raised important concerns about the tendency to overinflate claims regarding the transformative power of prison theatre. Neelands (2004) has raised concerns about project evaluations adopting 'hero narratives'. Neelands argues that it is crucial to make a distinction between anecdotal and localised 'miracles', as well as how these instances are 'generalised and theorised or proved in the textual discourses of the field' (Neelands, 2004:47). Writing in the context of theatre for development, Ahmed (2007) contends that applied theatre needs to redefine how and what claims are made. Walsh (2019) similarly challenges claims made by prison theatre practitioners, proposing a more comprehensive examination of the practice's contextual framework. The inflation of claims can lead practitioners to embrace these claims as the 'best' methods, eventually leading to the establishment of hegemonic practices.

I positioned my practice at the fringes of what could be articulated regarding indigenous methodologies, deliberately avoiding intentions of rehabilitation or therapy. I deliberately veered away from overtly instrumentalising applied theatre, aiming instead to explore what prevalent participatory theatre reveals about the incarceration experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons and the practice of applied theatre with incarcerated women.

1.7.2 Understanding the Dominance: Factors Shaping Prison Theatre

The prevalence of particular approaches within prison theatre can be traced back to the origin of the term applied theatre. While community-based drama and theatre efforts were already underway prior to the formalisation of the phrase, Nicholson (2011) notes that the term itself emerged within the United Kingdom universities rather than being developed by practitioners. This top-down influence on the field influenced the impact of academic publication, which aimed to expand the academic market and attract students to degree programmes by shaping the theoretical foundation of applied theatre. Consequently, the locus of knowledge production raises important questions about how it is characterised by centre-periphery dynamics and the potential to universalise specific approaches, knowledge, and epistemology.

The geographical location in which prison theatre takes place has also influenced its form. According to Pensalfini,

> prison theatre programmes generally have a precarious existence and are often obliged to turn to justifications and analyses of their work that support the stated goals of the prison system in which they are housed (Pensalfini, 2016:5).

As a prerequisite for entering prisons, applied theatre must demonstrate its outcomes to the prison system through the rhetoric of change. Conflict may arise when a project's results diverge from the goals of the prison institution (Snyder-Young, 2013). Often, projects are compelled to align with institutional agendas for survival. Thus, the discourse and content within the literature have been moulded to align directly with the prison system's objectives, often centred around the pursuit of altering prisoner behaviour.

Pensalfini (2016) highlights the historical perspective on the drama-therapeutic focus of prison theatre criticism given by Paul Heritage. He notes:

> Dramatherapists made a number of direct or veiled attacks on Prison Theatre practitioners, particularly around their ‘qualification’ to work in the system, being artists and not therapists. Many prison theatre practitioners and commentators felt obligated to justify their work in terms of therapeutic outcomes and there was a narrowing transformative agenda often gave way to a focus on an individual and personal notion of change (Pensalfini, 2016:4-5).

By elevating specific theoretical frameworks and methodologies, diverse approaches and voices within the field are overshadowed. This standardisation stifles the evolution of alternative perspectives and marginalises voices stemming from varied cultural traditions. The concept of transformative practice, which is linked to funding prospects, inadvertently weakens the field as funding is provided with the expectation of behavioural change in prisoners. The ambiguously

defined notions of change in the applied theatre field create opportunities for donor or funder agendas to dominate the definition (Nicholson, 2015). These conceptions of change become prerequisites for securing funding. Consequently, it's the funder, not the practitioner, who determines the character and impact of change. According to Ahmed, the ‘donor agenda’ can lead to ‘a subtle form of manipulation’ (2007:209). Due to the economy's reliance on outside funders and agencies, theatre professionals are under pressure to meet organisational demands for targets and results, and discussions about art and aesthetics might appear somewhat meaningless (Jackson, 2007). Consequently, ‘in the process of accommodating, adapting to, and being funded by external agencies the risk is that applied theatre can become too close to the powers it may want to question’ (Balfour, 2009:352). This implies that the pursuit of funding and the pressure to meet organisational demands can potentially compromise the integrity and transformative potential of the practice.

I had no ties to funding sources for my project. As a result, I designed it in consultation with my research participants in the way we desired. Nevertheless, the framework of the project was shaped by the constraints imposed by institutional structures within the prisons. In following chapters, I delve deeper into the constraints I encountered. This prompts the question of how applied theatre within prison settings can coexist with broader criminological dialogues and the intricate web of power dynamics within correctional facilities. As put forward by Balfour, ‘the prison is in the business of containment, observation, punishment, categorisation, registration, separation, and on occasion rehabilitation’ (Balfour, 2004:3). Interestingly, while one of the primary objectives of many applied practitioners in the prison context is to create avenues for radical freedom and agency, it's evident that the prison system itself is not fundamentally oriented toward such endeavours (Snyder-Young, 2013). This complex issue is encapsulated in a pivotal question posed by Bez Kershaw, ‘how do the practices of drama and theatre best engage with systems of formalised power to create a space of radical freedom?’ (Kershaw, 2004:36). It is through this critical question that new questions about the practice are raised. Through the reading of this collection, one begins to see how the use of certain approaches, such as Shakespeare in prison serve to illustrate how ‘theatre methodology, education and psychology can become entwined in the pursuit of a criminological goal’ (Balfour, 2004:17).

1.8 Towards Alternative Approaches

Lucas insists that ‘theatre can promote free thinking and empathy, but it is not, in fact, liberation’ (2021:39); because after the theatre, the prisoners still remain in the four walls of the prison. In light of this, I find Walsh’s (2019) argument about prison theatre insights rising from representations in popular culture particularly useful. She considers what cultural events and artefacts such as theatre, television shows, movies, installations and graphic novels reveal about prison and the experiences of female prisoners. Walsh (2019) is concerned about how female prisoners are portrayed and how

that affects how the public perceives incarcerated women's lives. She argues that intersectional oppressions affect how women feel and shape the women's experiences of criminalisation which follow them in prison. Walsh's (2019) analysis facilitates a shift from the conventional debates about effect and efficacy, redirecting our attention toward how various performance cultures depict prisons and offenders in them. This shift in focus holds particular relevance within the context of my research, shedding light on the significance of PPT and its capacity to unveil insights into the lived experiences of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons.

Young-Jahangeer's (2014; 2015; 2020) research resonates deeply with my own investigation, particularly in the context of my approach with women in Zimbabwean prisons. Drawing from her extensive experience spanning over two decades, Young-Jahangeer has adeptly employed PPT rooted in Zulu culture and indigenous knowledge within South African correctional facilities. Notably, she distinguishes this approach from other forms of theatre entangled in issues of funding and grand goal orientation. She articulates, 'PPT is a form that aims to distinguish itself from these exhortatory examples... In that respect, the work in the prison is perceived as neither rehabilitation nor therapy' (2020:39).

While previous programmes utilising PPT have demonstrated numerous pro-social impacts, Young-Jahangeer's (2020) emphasis lies primarily on fostering collective and communal accountability among participants. Her work is underpinned by the Zulu proverb *'umunthu umunthu ngabanthu'* (a person is a person because of people), highlighting the interconnectedness and mutual responsibility within community contexts (Young-Jahangeer, 2020:39).

In one of her analyses of PPT, Young-Jahangeer (2020) presents a compelling argument regarding the significant role of language. She elucidates how, within her specific context, language utilisation reshaped the cultural dynamics of the prison environment;

> during apartheid, the national culture of the prison system, as reflective of the dominant culture in the country, was Afrikaans. As a closed system, it had developed its own codes and practices, which all DCS members and inmates – irrespective of ethnic origin – were absorbed into. The prison theatre plays at WFCC, which embrace African popular forms, became central in shifting the culture of the prison from Afrikaans to the majority culture – Zulu (Young-Jahangeer, 2020:44-45).

She further observes that 'as the prison theatre became more entrenched into the life of the Female Centre, its ability to exorcise the old demons became apparent' (2020:45). She contends that theatre forms rooted in the culture of the context can create a space for the women to debate aspects of the culture they want to interrogate (Young-Jahangeer, 2020:45).

Young-Jahangeer (2015) further argues contends that

> If we accept then that prisons operate today as an extension of capitalist machinery, following its principles and operational models, then it seems appropriate to apply theories of popular culture in capitalist societies (Fiske 1989) when investigating how “the people” (the prisoners) engage with power (2015:223).

The emphasis on PPT highlights the importance of cultural context in shaping forms of expression and resistance among incarcerated individuals. In my own research within Zimbabwean prisons, I adopted a similar ethos, prioritising the cultivation of voice among incarcerated women. By employing theatre forms rooted in this cultural backdrop, the study provided a familiar and relatable platform for women prisoners to explore and challenge institutional, cultural and political constructs that influenced their experiences within the prison system. The space created by these theatre forms served as a catalyst for critical reflection and dialogue. Through the process of debating and deconstructing cultural norms and expectations, participants collectively explored alternative narratives, which enhanced the understanding of the complexities of women's experiences in Zimbabwean prisons. Moreover, the participatory nature of the theatre forms fostered a sense of empowerment and agency among the participants. By actively engaging in the theatrical process, women prisoners had the opportunity to voice their perspectives and share their stories. Detailed elaboration on these aspects is presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

While Young-Jahangeer’s work (2013; 2020; 2023) is a prominent reference in this study due to its explicit focus on PPT with incarcerated women and its Southern African context, it is important to acknowledge that there are other significant examples of prison theatre practices from Latin America and Asia that enrich our understanding of this field. These alternative practices have not received the same level of academic scrutiny as Young-Jahangeer’s work, and thus, their methodologies and impacts are less documented in scholarly literature. Despite this, these practices highlight the ongoing experimentation with diverse approaches in prison theatre, emphasising the need for further exploration and development within the field to enhance its richness and diversity.

One notable example is the Argentine feminist and anti-prison artistic collective *Yo No Fui*, which supports and advocates for women and LGBTQ+ individuals both inside and outside penitentiary complexes in Buenos Aires (Mortimer, 2024). The name *Yo No Fui*, meaning "It Was Not Me," reflects the collective’s ethos of resistance and empowerment. Initially founded by poet María Medrano as a small group conducting writing workshops at the Ezeiza prison, the collective has since expanded its operations to three penitentiary units in Buenos Aires—two in Ezeiza and one in José León Suárez.

The work of *Yo No Fui* provides a compelling example of grassroots, community-based approaches

that diverge from institutionalised or top-down models. For over two decades, the collective has offered poetry workshops to groups of 15 to 20 women at a time, facilitating creative expression and providing a critical outlet for incarcerated individuals. Since its inception 22 years ago, the collective, comprising of formerly incarcerated women alongside a diverse array of local community activists, artists, therapists, and academics, has supported hundreds of women and non-binary individuals, fostering both artistic and personal development within a carceral context (Mortimer, 2024). Rather than focusing solely on rehabilitative goals or state-sponsored frameworks of correction, *Yo No Fui's* work emphasises collective creativity, self-expression, and the empowerment of marginalised voices, particularly those of women and LGBTQ+ individuals within the carceral system.

The collective's emphasis on poetry workshops, alongside their trans-feminist and community-oriented pedagogies, reflects a growing trend in prison theatre practices that privilege lived experience, mutual support, and social transformation from within. Their approach can be seen as an act of resistance against the dehumanising conditions of incarceration, fostering spaces of solidarity and artistic expression that challenge both patriarchal and punitive structures. The launch of the Escuela, a school offering workshops and classes in arts, administrative skills, and trans-feminist politics, further exemplifies this alternative model by offering practical skills and education designed to empower participants to navigate life both within and beyond prison walls. Thus, *Yo No Fui's* practices can be framed as an alternative to dominant carceral approaches, shifting the focus from individual correction to collective liberation, and positioning creative arts as a tool not just for personal growth but for broader societal change. This aligns with critical frameworks in prison theatre that explore how marginalised communities in the Global South craft localised, context-sensitive responses to oppression through cultural and artistic means.

In various regions, numerous theatre projects are initiated in collaboration with universities and organisations, though their sustainability often hinges on continued funding, which is not always guaranteed. A notable example from South Africa is the *Second Chance Theatre Project*, a collaborative arts and social justice initiative. This project builds on the success of *The Making of a Criminal Part 1 and Part 2*, which received critical acclaim when it was staged in 2016 and 2017. These productions were devised and directed by me, Veronica Baxter and the cast, highlighting the transformative potential of theatre in challenging societal perceptions of criminality.

First, the collaborative nature of the project, involving the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), the Department of Correctional Services, and the University of Cape Town's Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies (CTDPS), exemplifies how partnerships between academic institutions, non-governmental organisations, and state bodies can facilitate innovative approaches to prison theatre. Second, the project directly

engages with the public’s perception of criminality by providing a platform for incarcerated individuals to narrate their own stories through performance. This focus on narrative agency is crucial in shifting societal views of prisoners from passive subjects to active participants in their own rehabilitation. The productions, such as *The Making of a Criminal*, explore the complexities of criminal identity and challenge reductive stereotypes, offering a space for incarcerated individuals to humanise their experiences through theatre. This is a powerful intervention within the South African context, where historical and systemic inequalities, particularly rooted in race and class, shape the criminal justice system (Vivier, 2018).

Finally, the project’s staging in collaboration with the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) highlights a model of corporate social responsibility that supports the sustainability of prison theatre. While many prison theatre initiatives globally face challenges due to fluctuating funding, the involvement of local corporate entities and sponsorships in South Africa points to an alternative model for ensuring the continuity of such projects. Thus, the Second Chance Theatre Project serves as a powerful example of alternative prison theatre practices in the Global South. It foregrounds local collaboration, narrative agency, and a community-based approach to sustainability, while also addressing broader social justice issues within the South African carceral system.

Additionally, PhD research conducted by Zhang Xiaoye (2017; 2021) offers valuable insights into the practice of prison theatre in a non-Western context. Zhang's research on prison theatre in a Chinese male prison (2015–2018) reveals that theatre in the carceral context in China functions as an institutional mechanism deeply integrated into the fabric of the prison community. Through an ethnographic study and active participation in the Drama Club project, Zhang observed that these theatre workshops were participatory and democratic in nature. They involved a wide range of participants from within the prison system, including not only the incarcerated individuals but also prison staff and administrators.

Zhang’s findings challenge the notion that prison theatre is solely a Western invention, showing instead that it has organically developed within China's prison system as a tool for engagement and social cohesion. The theatre activities were structured in ways that promoted collective participation and dialogue, fostering relationships across hierarchical boundaries within the prison. Rather than merely being imposed from the outside, these practices were shaped by the specific cultural and institutional dynamics of China, reflecting broader social values and norms regarding rehabilitation, discipline, and community involvement. Thus, prison theatre in this context served not only as an artistic outlet but as a mechanism for maintaining order and fostering a sense of community within the prison, highlighting its localised significance.

Zhang’s work exemplifies how prison theatre in the Global South, specifically in non-Western

contexts like China, can serve both rehabilitative and institutional functions, blending participatory arts with broader societal and institutional aims. This insight broadens the understanding of prison theatre as a global phenomenon with diverse manifestations depending on local traditions, power structures, and cultural practices.

These examples from Latin America, Africa, and Asia illustrate a broader spectrum of prison theatre practices that extend beyond the conventional frameworks often discussed. Each approach highlights the importance of adapting theatre practices to local contexts and cultural traditions, demonstrating that innovative and contextually relevant methods can have profound impacts on incarcerated individuals. By broadening our understanding of prison theatre to include these varied practices, we gain a more comprehensive view of its potential to effect meaningful change. It is through embracing this diversity that we can truly appreciate the transformative power of theatre in correctional environments and support the continued exploration and development of innovative practices worldwide.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented a nuanced and complex analysis of the contextual underpinnings that informed the research study. This encompasses prisons in Zimbabwe, women in Zimbabwean prisons and applied theatre in prisons. The chapter has emphasised alternative criminological perspectives that are grounded in the specific historical, cultural and social contexts of post- colonial Zimbabwe to make a case for the need for context-specific approaches in prison theatre. Furthermore, the chapter has taken the first steps towards addressing the underrepresentation of women within Zimbabwean prisons through an exploration of the characteristics and circumstances of the female participants in this research study. It has also contextualised these findings within the broader scholarship on women in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby enhancing the overall understanding in this field of research. Simultaneously, it highlighted the need to decolonise the field of applied theatre through the adoption of PPT approaches to expand the scope of this practice. In sum, the chapter affords insights into the complexities of studying incarcerated women in the Zimbabwean prison system, the importance of context, and the various interdisciplinary and culturally sensitive approaches required to better understand and address their experiences. The next chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks.

Chapter Two: Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises of interrelated segments that collectively lay the foundation for the methodological and theoretical framework shaping the exploration of the experiences of incarcerated women within Zimbabwean prisons through PPT. Each of these segments plays a crucial role in shaping the study's structure and approach by addressing various aspects essential for understanding the research project and its significance.

The chapter commences with the contextualisation of this research within qualitative research. Following this is an examination of PPT and the affective turn within applied theatre discourse. Subsequently, I delve into my methodological orientation, firmly grounded within an indigenous research paradigm. By situating the study within this paradigm, I am dedicated to exploring alternative and culturally relevant methodologies for prison theatre. This approach challenges the prevailing methodologies that have historically marginalised indigenous approaches within prison theatre.

I further delve into the conceptual framework that functions as the analytical lens for interpreting the experiences of the research participants in this study. This framework draws from the theoretical underpinnings of Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), Molara Ogundipe- Leslie (1994), and Catherine Acholonu (1995). It provides insights into the intricate interplay of factors such as race, gender, culture, post-colonialism and power that influence the lives of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons.

Collectively, this chapter offers a multi-dimensional approach to examining the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. It considers both their emotional engagement in PPT and the broader socio-cultural context in which they are situated.

2.2 A Qualitative Design

The research was guided by three primary research questions, previously introduced in the introduction and reiterated below:

1. What new perspectives opened up through analysis of my PPT project regarding the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons?
2. How might the utilisation of PPT empower incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons to express themselves, share their stories, explore their identities and build connections within the confines of the prison environment?
3. In what ways does a PPT rooted in local cultural forms challenge the dominant approaches of prison theatre and provide a space for advancing the field of prison theatre?

I gravitated towards a qualitative research design because of its specific relevance to my study. The decision to employ a qualitative research design in this research study stems from its unique ability to deeply explore the complex experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research provides a robust framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of participants' lives within their cultural contexts. This study aligns itself with the Applied Practice as Research (APaR) paradigm, a methodology that positions practice as a legitimate form of inquiry, capable of producing valuable knowledge through creative processes (Allegue, et al., 2004; Barrett & Bolt, 2010; Bayliss et al., 2009; Freeman, 2010 Nelson, 2002). In examining the lived experiences of incarcerated women, APaR offered a holistic and creative platform that allowed for an in-depth exploration of their voices and stories. This section outlines the various choices and considerations involved in employing APaR to investigate the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prison, where cultural, ethical, and gendered nuances significantly influence both the research process and outcomes. These considerations encompass methodological choices, ethical frameworks, storytelling approaches and participant collaboration.

APaR emphasises creative practice – whether through performance, visual arts or other mediums – as a legitimate form of inquiry capable of generating knowledge. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2010) argue that this approach positions 'praxical knowledge' as a form of understanding where 'ideas and theory are ultimately the result of practice rather than vice versa' (2010: 6). This framework allows the practice itself to drive research outcomes, highlighting the generative role of creative processes in knowledge production. These processes often uncover insights and solutions that may elude more traditional academic methodologies. Similarly, Robin Nelson (2002) highlights that APaR values 'knowing-in-action,' emphasising practical, hands-on knowledge. In the context of this research study, the choice of artistic medium was crucial. Performance-based research emerged as the most appropriate approach, given my focus on exploring the personal stories of incarcerated women. This method ensures that the participants' voices remain central to the research process (Nicholson, 2014). To support this approach, I employed PPT to create a platform where the women could share and embody their personal experiences. Performance based research allows for an exploration of the unique perspectives and narratives of participants through integration of practical engagement and critical reflection (Barrett and Bolt, 2010; Leavy, 2015; Nelson, 2002) . It seeks to understand individuals' experiences, motives, attitudes, feelings and behaviours as they move through situations, as well as the subtleties within them (Nelson, 2002). By focusing on the whole human experience, performance delves into the intricacies and dynamics of individuals' interpretations and sense-making processes (MacDonald, 2012; Patton, 2015). This depth of understanding is particularly valuable, as it uncovers important themes and patterns that would not be visible through questionnaires or interviews for example. A more detailed discussion of PPT and

its application follows in the next section.

Moreover, in the context of prisons, APaR fosters an interactive, participatory methodology that is more inclined to ‘engage with the lived experiences of participants, as opposed to merely representing them through external interpretations' (Leavy, 2015: 44). This participatory nature of the methodology positions it as a tool for empowerment and agency (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), particularly critical for incarcerated women, whose narratives are often distorted or overlooked in conventional research approaches. APaR, therefore, serves as a transformative mechanism that not only captures but also reclaims the voices of those marginalised within society.

In addition to selecting the artistic medium, my preference for APaR was driven by its ability to integrate creative practices such as storytelling, indigenous traditional games, and performance — practices that provide powerful avenues for expression and transformation. Incarcerated women often struggle to articulate their experiences through conventional methods like interviews or questionnaires. However, approaches grounded in familiar, local cultural forms provide alternative avenues for emotional and psychological expression (Leavy, 2018). By incorporating these culturally embedded practices, the study not only sought to acknowledge and respect the participants' cultural context but also to enhance the depth, authenticity, and relevance of the findings.

Furthermore, this methodology aimed to increase participation by actively involving incarcerated women in the research process, thereby empowering them to express themselves, share their stories, and explore their identities both within and beyond the confines of the prison environment. The integration of these creative and culturally resonant methods facilitated a more holistic understanding of the research topic, situating it firmly within its specific cultural context, and allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the participants' lived experiences.

Researching incarcerated women presents inherent ethical challenges, particularly when employing creative methodologies. Issues surrounding consent, representation, and power dynamics require careful consideration. In APaR, ensuring informed consent is especially critical due to the unpredictable and evolving nature of creative practice (Allegue et al., 2004; Freeman, 2010). Participants must fully understand the scope of their involvement, the potential uses of their personal narratives, and the possible public exposure that performance or visual art might entail (Banks & Banks, 2021). Within the prison context, APaR also raises concerns about the risks of retraumatisation or emotional distress, as participants may be asked to recall painful experiences.

To address these concerns, the research adopted a flexible and ethically responsive approach to participation. Participants were given the option to opt out of certain activities or to select which aspects of their stories they felt comfortable sharing, ensuring that their agency remained central throughout the process (Fitzpatrick, 2017). This flexibility was integral to promoting an ethically

nuanced and compassionate engagement with their experiences.

The broader ethical framework of qualitative research emphasises the importance of building rapport with participants and maintaining their well-being (Patton, 2015; Payne and Payne, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2014). In line with this, the study prioritized creating a respectful and sensitive platform for incarcerated women to share their voices. This approach facilitated the establishment of trust between the researcher and participants, ensuring their emotional comfort and safety throughout the research process. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aimed to foster a respectful and empowering environment that honoured the lived experiences of the women involved.

APaR's inherent flexibility in adapting research design proved crucial in navigating the unpredictable and often restrictive prison environment. This adaptability allowed me to remain responsive to emergent themes and explore unexpected avenues of inquiry that surfaced during the research process. Flexibility is especially vital when working with marginalised populations, as it enables the research to focus on topics and issues that are relevant and meaningful to the participants.

The ability to adjust research methods based on emergent themes and the evolving needs of participants ensures that the study remains both responsive and ethically grounded. This approach aligns with the core objectives of the research: to conduct an ethically sound, culturally sensitive investigation that prioritizes the well-being, autonomy, and agency of participants. By allowing for adaptation, the research was better positioned to honour the lived experiences of incarcerated women while maintaining the ethical standards required for sensitive research contexts.

2.3 Exploring Popular Participatory Theatre and the Affective Turn

This section discusses PPT – its characteristics, relationship to the study’s objectives and its correlation with the affective turn to emphasise the emotional dimension of women's involvement in theatre within this research study. First, I explore PPT. As the name suggests, PPT is an amalgamation of popular theatre and participatory methods. I conceive of the ‘popular aspect’ within Karin Barber’s (1987) purview of African popular performance and the participatory element from Paulo Freire’s (1970) educational pedagogy. First, I will unpack African popular theatre.

2.3.1 African Popular Theatre

Popular theatre extends beyond geographical boundaries, also holding significance in Western contexts where it is closely linked to class and race dynamics, shaping a multifaceted understanding of societal structures and power dynamics (see Hays, 1995; Price, 2016). However, my primary research focus centres on popular theatre in sub-Saharan African settings, particularly Zimbabwe. This focus aims to uncover distinct narratives, challenges, and potentials arising from the intersection of popular theatre with Zimbabwean culture and history.

In sub-Saharan Africa, popular theatre emerged as a socialist movement during the 1960s (Mlama, 1991). This development can be comprehensively understood by examining various pivotal factors, including the enduring impact of colonial legacies, the presence of pervasive social injustices, the mobilisation and empowerment of ordinary citizens, educational and mobilisation objectives, the vital role of cultural expression and identity, the facilitation of dialogue and debate, the shifting dynamics of neo-colonialism and the ideological battle between socialism and capitalism at the time (see Mlama, 1991; Kerr, 1989).

Many sub-Saharan African countries experienced the adverse effects of colonisation, including economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and political oppression. After gaining independence, these countries faced the challenge of rectifying these historical injustices and building a more equitable society. According to Mlama (1991), theatre artists from the elite sought to contribute to addressing these issues by promoting social change and advocating for the rights of marginalised communities by researching African theatre traditions and reviving indigenous theatrical forms through various experiments. The incorporation of African music, dances, poetry, costumes, scenery, myths, and legends in university theatre productions during the 1960s exemplified this response. Mlama notes the active roles of universities such as Ibadan (Nigeria), Legon (Ghana), Makerere (Uganda), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), and Lusaka (Zambia) in this movement (Mlama, 1991: 36-38). Popular theatre emerged as a means to develop a relevant theatrical language that reflected the struggles of local communities in the post-independence era (Mlama, 1991). Moreover, it aimed to revive suppressed local artistic expressions that had been denigrated by colonialists as ‘pagan’ and ‘uncivilised’ activities. Thus, for Mlama (1991), the concept of ‘popular’ emerged as a counter-discourse to Western theatrical expressions and ideals that had conditioned locals to believe they lacked talent and creativity. In this sense, popular theatre within prison theatre can be viewed as a counter approach that challenges dominant Western paradigms.

In the 1970s, the popular theatre movement in Africa adopted various approaches with differing degrees of success (Mlama, 1991). One such approach, which Mlama (1991) argues has often inaccurately been referred to as popular theatre, is a populist form of theatre which follows a ‘developmentalist’ perspective.

> For example, a populist form of theatre, often incorrectly referred to as popular theatre has existed in many parts of Africa. It is based on a ‘developmentalist’ approach, whereby popular theatre forms are used to carry development messages to an audience which is expected to translate those messages into action. This type of theatre is a carry- over of the practices of the British colonial government which used this approach in countries like Ghana or Malawi (Mlama, 1991:68).

Mlama (1991) notes that even after independence, certain governments continued this approach, employing theatre as a development tool. For instance, Christopher Kamlongera describes the use of puppetry in Malawi for agricultural extension work, aiming to promote the adoption of recommended agricultural practices for increased production (see Kerr, 1989). Such theatre represents a top-down approach, treating the local people as passive recipients of propaganda and disregarding their own viewpoints.

According to Mlama ‘the shortcomings of this approach became apparent and in the mid 1970s a search for a popular theatre approach that would involve the participation of target audiences was initiated’ (1991:70). The Laedza Batanani popular theatre programme in Botswana was born out of this argument (see Kidd and Byram, 1982). Laedza Batanani model introduced a two-way communication process important in development communication. People were made aware of their situation, encouraged to look at their problems and take action to solve them instead of merely accepting messages from government employees. It also made use of the communities’ local languages. According to A.R Mdoe (2002), a theatre considered popular must use language and idioms familiar to the audience, while addressing issues directly relevant to their situation. However, Ross Kidd and Martin Byram (1982) argue that the mere utilisation of the community's communication medium, exemplified by the Laedza Batanani project, does not make theatre authentically popular. Kidd and Byram further point out that in the Laedza Batanani project,

The villagers are not involved in the process of analysing the information, scripting the drama, and performing the plays, the extension workers collect the villager’s information and then retreat to analyse the data and work out a performance on their own. This lack of participation severely reduces the commitment of the villagers by disengaging them from the crucial aspects of the process. Without the villagers’ involvement in the analysis and drama making process, the extension workers are forced to fall back on their own stereotyped thinking and analysis, which often reduces complex social problems to a matter of villagers’ ignorance, apathy, or bad habits. While the day of research is meant to open up field workers’ eyes to challenge their assumptions, to force them to listen to the villagers, it often serves to reinforce their prejudices, and without a continuing encounter with the villagers and the village reality there is little room for challenging these prejudices. The discussion at the end of the performance is too brief to achieve anything more than a superficial analysis of the problems, let alone strategies for action. After passively watching the play, the villagers are suddenly expected to discuss the problems and take action (Kidd and Byram, 1982 cited in Mlama, 1991: 76-77).

This critique emphasises the significance of real participation and dialogue within popular theatre initiatives targeting community development. It highlights the need for extension workers and researchers to acknowledge and mitigate power differentials, biases, and structural inequities that

hinder meaningful engagement with the communities they endeavour to support. Mlama (1991) highlights the significant contribution of the Murewa Theatre for Development workshop in Zimbabwe in 1983 to the popular theatre movement in Africa. She writes, 'the Murewa workshop most obvious contribution was the proof that the use of people's own art forms produces the most effective participation from the members of the community' (Mlama, 1991:86). Such an approach is particularly pertinent in research involving marginalised groups, like women in prison, where language, tradition, culture, and local artistic expressions serve as powerful tools for expression, fostering a sense of community and connection with participants. It is what Zakes Mda (1990b) calls 'a truly popular theatre' and Mdoe (2002) describes as a 'people's theatre' in that it goes beyond just language to involve active participation through inviting local artistic expression, tradition, and culture.

Furthermore, Mda (199b) highlights the idea that a popular theatre should not just be a one-way communication of artistic expression from the practitioner to the participants. Rather, it should be a collaborative process where the participants actively engage with the issues being explored and contribute to the development of the theatrical exploration. As put forward by Mlama, 'participation in PT is not only a question of having theatre skills. It is a commitment to a process through which a people can be animated to better their conditions' (1991:90). This collaborative process can lead to a deeper understanding of the issues being explored and can empower the participants to develop the knowledge and skills needed to address the challenges they face in their daily lives. For women in prisons, a 'truly' popular theatre can provide a space for them to explore their experiences and develop their own understanding and forms of resistance to the challenges they face, thus gaining a sense of agency and empowerment.

The standard popular expressions identified by most popular theatre scholars include indigenous games, dance, storytelling, language and folklore (Chifunyise, 1990, Mda, 1993b, Mlama, 1991). These cultural expressions have been recognised as important tools for promoting social change, as they are rooted in local cultures and provide a means of engaging with local communities. However, popular theatre expands the notion of 'popular' beyond traditional markers and contexts, encompassing a multitude of expressions that a community identifies with and finds most comfortable to express themselves in (Levert and Mumma, 1997). These popular cultural expressions are often a fusion of elements drawn from both people's traditional culture and popular culture. Scholars such as Mary Jo Arnoldi (1987) have argued that the tendency to identify African popular art with one specific period and setting risks overlooking the rich history of popular culture in post-colonial and non-urban contexts. Barber (1987) has gone as far as to argue for the syncretism of local African and Western forms as a defining feature of African popular art, regardless of whether it is practiced in urban or rural settings. Today, popular theatre draws on this notion of African

popular performance to incorporate both people's and popular culture. To support my argument, I find Nuñez's (cited in Kidd, 1980) conceptualisation of people's culture particularly insightful. Nuñez delineates people's culture as encompassing autonomous expressions, values, and customs of a community. Through this lens, popular culture informs our understanding of how cultural expressions emerge and transform over time, as it integrates traditional and contemporary elements to generate something new and unique.

As an example, in my PPT project with women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons, traditional games, music, dance, poetry and storytelling were the participants' popular forms of expression. They sang and danced to modern songs. They primarily embraced gospel music and incorporating everyday prison routines into dance within their aesthetic code. In matters related to language, participants expressed themselves in Shona, slang and English. This revealed just how popular indigenous expressions are not a static construct. However, it is worth noting that 'the dependency relations of the society in which it functions' (Kidd, 1980:292) and are not necessarily autonomous. For example, while doing this research, I found out that the female prisoners' popular artistic expressions such as music and dance are often appropriated by the prison system to promote the institution's interests. The prisoners perform these songs and dances at functions held by the prison system to present the image of an institution doing a good job of rehabilitating the offender. Therefore, popular theatre in this research was not only a space where marginalised voices found expression but a site of contestation between the prisoners and the prison system.

2.3.2 Exploring the 'Participation' in Popular Participatory Theatre

Chinyowa (2015) notes that participation has been abused. He writes,

> participation has tended to act as a strategy of legitimising the interests of those with resources, privilege and power. Instead of involving participants in their own learning and development, practitioners or educators tend to put themselves first and participants last (Chinyowa, 2015:21).

PPT distinguishes itself from past manifestations of theatre for development by placing participation at the forefront of the theatrical process, not partially but entirely. Ross Kidd best articulates this participation when he defines PPT as a

> means of bringing people together, building confidence and solidarity, stimulating discussion, exploring alternative options for action, and building a collective commitment to change; starting with people's urgent concerns and issues, it encourages reflections on these issues and possible strategies for change (Kidd 1984: 264).

By emphasising participation in this comprehensive manner, PPT seeks to break away from

traditional hierarchical power structures and create a space where everyone's contributions are valued and respected. Through the process of engaging with urgent concerns and collectively envisioning alternative paths, PPT nurtures a shared commitment to creativity and addressing social issues. In the specific context of prison theatre, PPT was vital for addressing the historical neglect of participation for women in prisons. By placing participation at the forefront of the research process, incarcerated women were given the opportunity to actively engage in critical thinking about their experiences.

My role as the facilitator was essentially to guide the process to ensure that the project's focus remained on placing the voices and experiences of the incarcerated women at the forefront. Mda (1993) highlights the importance of a facilitator's input in achieving critical awareness and optimal participation. The facilitator plays a crucial role in guiding the process of critical awareness. At the same time, the facilitator's input should not be too peripheral nor intrusive but optimal. The facilitator does not assume the role of the knower but rather co- creates from the beginning to the end with the participants. This approach, referred to as praxis by Freire (1970), fosters a reciprocal learning environment where participants and facilitators learn from each other, engaging in a process of co-investigation of the world. In line with this perspective, Young-Jahangeer (2020) emphasises the significance of placing the participants' needs at the centre of the project in participatory popular theatre. The focus should be on addressing their concerns and struggles, ensuring that the project resonates with the experiences and aspirations of the participants involved. This participant-centric approach is a fundamental characteristic of PPT, emphasising the importance of creating work that speaks directly to the lives and realities of those who both create and consume it (Barber, 1987).

2.3.3 The Role of Critical Pedagogy in Popular Participatory Theatre (PPT) and Decolonisation

Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Paulo Freire, constitutes a foundational theoretical framework for PPT. Central to Freire’s pedagogical approach is the concept of education as a tool for empowering individuals to critically engage with their socio-political environment, challenge oppressive structures, and actively participate in societal transformation (Freire, 1970). Freire’s (1970) notion of ‘conscientisation,’ or the development of critical consciousness, is a core tenet of critical pedagogy. This process involves learners becoming acutely aware of the social, political, and economic contradictions that shape their lived experiences, thereby enabling them to take informed action against the forces of oppression.

The core principles of critical pedagogy including dialogical learning, problem-posing education and emancipatory education are the foundation for PPT. Critical pedagogy fundamentally advocates for a dialogical approach to education, wherein knowledge is co-constructed through an ongoing dialogue between educator and learner. Within the context of PPT, this principle is operationalised through collaborative exploration, where participants are not passive recipients of pre-determined

knowledge but active contributors to the learning process. Their experiences and insights are integral to the collective construction of understanding, thereby enriching the exploration of shared experiences. Critical pedagogy promotes a problem-posing approach, in contrast to the traditional ‘banking’ model of education, wherein learners are viewed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970). This pedagogical strategy encourages learners to critically interrogate their reality, identifying and addressing tangible issues through an engaged and reflective process. PPT embodies this principle by fostering an environment where participants are encouraged to confront real-life challenges, developing understanding to their experiences which offers liberatory potential (Mlama, 1991).

Lastly, a primary objective of critical pedagogy is to empower marginalised groups by addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social justice (see Freire, 1970). In the context of PPT, this emancipatory aim is realised through the implementation of inclusive and participatory research methods that recognise and value the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all participants. The participatory nature of PPT thus serves as a tool for liberation, ensuring that the process is not merely reflective of existing power dynamics but actively seeks to dismantle them.

The influence of critical pedagogy extends beyond the classroom, playing a pivotal role in the broader processes of decolonisation, particularly within post-colonial contexts (Cruz and Dorsch, 2022). Critical pedagogy challenges the entrenched Eurocentric narratives and practices that have historically dominated educational systems, advocating instead for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks. Innocent Sanga (2016) notes that African scholars and educators, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Julius Nyerere, have adapted Freire’s (1970) pedagogical principles to address the specific challenges of decolonisation within their own contexts. For instance, Nyerere’s concept of ‘education for self-reliance,’ as implemented in Tanzania, draws heavily on critical pedagogy to promote an educational model that is not only relevant to the needs and realities of the local population but also instrumental in fostering community-driven development as discussed in Sanga (2016).

In the realm of PPT, these decolonial approaches are of paramount importance. They inform the design and execution of participatory techniques that are both culturally responsive and deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the participants. By synthesising the principles of critical pedagogy with decolonial practices, PPT serves not only as a vehicle for critical reflection and active participation but also as a means of advancing a participatory experience that is equitable, inclusive, and authentically reflective of diverse cultural narratives.

PPT is thus a people-centred participatory paradigm (Chinyowa, 2009) ‘that combines African popular performance with Freirean problem-posing methodology to create a space to generate debate around socio-political issues’ (Young-Jahangeer, 2013:1). Freire’s path resonates with PPT

pedagogically and theoretically in many ways. First, PPT is a problem-posing methodology. To this end, Young-Jahangeer (2013) has even called it a problem-posing theatre. Be that as it may, in my research I did not seek to solve a specific problem in the traditional sense but rather aimed to provide incarcerated women with a platform for emotional and self- expression. It was from engaging in affective theatre and exploring their emotions and experiences that participants had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue that raised their critical awareness and agency. As I will later demonstrate, the affective experience allowed the incarcerated women to continually negotiate their identity and position within the broader Zimbabwean socio-political and cultural contexts through the creative process. In this way, the research aligned with the principles of problem-posing pedagogy while primarily focusing on affective engagement and empowerment.

2.3.4 The Affective Turn

Popular theatre operates with a clear intent of fostering concrete action within marginalised communities to drive social transformation. In the context of my research project, my focus was oriented towards probing the affective dimensions embedded within participants' engagement with popular theatre. This emphasis was a deliberate departure from the prevailing discourse which predominantly fixates on the quantifiable 'effects' of theatre within correctional settings. I was cognisant of the fact that 'change' in prison setting is a difficult thing to attain for a short-term project. My aim was to illuminate the personal shifts, self- discoveries, and emotional connections that occur when individuals interact with this artistic medium. This endeavour sought both to enhance current very limited understandings of women's lives in Zimbabwean prisons and to support the women to engaging with and reflecting on their lives in relation to the criminal justice experience.

In his book *Performance Affects: Applied theatre and the end of effect*, Thompson (2009) puts forth the proposition of prioritising affect in applied theatre. He contends that 'applied theatre practice needs to do away with simple or singular effect and look toward a broader model for applied theatre through the affective turn, or turn to affect' (2009: 46). Thompson, states that 'by failing to recognise affect – bodily responses, sensations and aesthetic pleasure – much of the power of performance can be missed' (2009: 7). Furthermore, he argues that focusing on affect broadens the political potential of applied theatre as a 'generator of its radical intent' (Thompson, 2009: 118). He claims that the radical nature of the work is due to how affective practices can create an ethical demand on a person that is both specific and general (see Thompson, 2009: 118-119), a process that is neglected in work focused on effect such as popular theatre.

By turning to affect, popular theatre goes beyond the conventional understanding of popular theatre's impact as merely quantifiable outcomes or observable social changes. Instead, it is able to capture the nuances of how the participants' feelings, emotions, and perceptions are influenced, altered, or

enriched through their participation. A popular theatre that focuses on affect compels the participants to scrutinise their emotions, beliefs, and values, catalysing a re- evaluation of their perspectives and confronting uncomfortable truths concerning themselves and society. Moreover, on a broader societal scale, affective practices extend a generalised ethical summons by highlighting the intricate interplay between personal experiences and broader socio-political dynamics. Through engagement with affective practices, participants are prompted to contemplate their positions within overarching social frameworks and power structures, which can foster a collective sense of accountability and solidarity. This engagement prompts individuals to reassess their roles and responsibilities within the societal fabric, thereby endowing applied theatre with its radical transformative potential.

I do not perceive affect and effect as binary opposites. Instead, I view affect as a more expansive concept that can enhance our understanding of the role of popular theatre methods with women in prisons. In this work, this pivot towards affect does not negate the significance of effect, rather it prompts a critical examination of the roles of effect and affect, their intersections, and their intricate interweaving dynamics. I use popular theatre as a framework for understanding the socio-cultural and political contexts in the prison context and affect theory as a lens to delve into the emotional and experiential dimensions of theatre engagement.

2.4 Indigenous Methodologies

I position PPT within the framework of indigenous methodologies to construct an argument regarding the role of indigenous methodologies in the context of prison theatre. This endeavour is substantially innovative. For my inspiration, I am drawing on Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's (1999) work on decolonising research methodologies, which emphasises the importance of using indigenous methodologies in research more generally to enable us to begin to decolonise our work. In her book, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith (1999) critiques traditional research methods as being Eurocentric and colonial in nature and argues for the need to develop new approaches that centre indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems. She highlights the power imbalances that exist in research relationships between indigenous peoples and researchers. She writes

> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own cultures and own nations (Smith, 1999: 1).

The above critique extends beyond Western scholars to encompass non-Western researchers and

intellectuals who, as I am, are educated in Western epistemologies. Such positionality is 'inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism' (Smith, 1999:1), resulting in what Smith terms 'one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' (1991:1). Research, in this context, becomes a mechanism through which the power dynamics of imperialism and colonialism are perpetuated and legitimised.

The historical dominance of Western perspectives in shaping and legitimising research methodologies poses a significant challenge to the pursuit of inclusive and equitable knowledge production. This hegemony extends into various domains, including the field of prison theatre practice, where prevailing methodologies often reflect and reinforce entrenched biases and power dynamics, some of which I discussed in the previous chapter. Within this context, it becomes evident that the methodologies deemed legitimate and authoritative by mainstream academia are deeply rooted in larger systems of imperialism and neo-colonial thought. Consequently, there arises a critical imperative to interrogate and reassess the underlying conceptual frameworks and methodological paradigms that govern research in the field of prison theatre. In the pursuit of such a critical re-evaluation, my background as a born and bred Zimbabwean played a pivotal role. Having been raised and educated in a country where African indigenous knowledge was systematically marginalised, I became intrigued by my ancestors' knowledge systems. This curiosity prompted a deliberate shift towards centring alternative, culturally sensitive approaches to prison theatre research and practice. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this background also introduced complexities and challenges to the research process which I reflect on below.

I went into this research fully aware of my positionality and how it stood to shape my worldview and predisposed me to certain biases or perspectives. Because of this awareness, I was absolute in seeking 'the development of new methodologies and alternative ways of knowing or epistemologies' (Smith, 1999:166). By embracing alternative epistemologies, I sought to uncover new dimensions of knowledge that traditional paradigms may overlook. Smith's (1991) assertion that indigenous communities possess rich and multifaceted ways of knowing resonated with me, as did the works of scholars like Bagele Chilisa (2012), Margaret Kovach (2018), and Shawn Wilson (2020). These scholars emphasise the importance of respecting and valuing diverse epistemological frameworks, encompassing spiritual, relational, and environmental dimensions. Guided by these principles, the foundation of my research project was rooted in approaches that honoured the cultural context and lived experiences of my research community.

Incorporating indigenous ways of knowing and understanding, indigenous methodologies aim to create a research process that is both inclusive and culturally sensitive, producing knowledge and results that are relevant, meaningful, and useful to indigenous peoples and communities (Smith, 2012). Central to indigenous methodologies is the active involvement of research participants in all

aspects of the research process, from setting the agenda to data collection, analysis, and dissemination (Wilson, 2020). For example, in this research study, even though I had collected traditional indigenous games to create a sense of familiarity to allow the participants in this research to engage more fully in the process and share their experiences, values, and perspectives more authentically, I was open to the community proposing their own games. By prioritising the agency of research participants in shaping the research methods, popular participatory research departs from the dominant systems in prison theatre. In conventional approaches, researchers or practitioners often enter prisons armed with a predefined set of methods and exercises, as exemplified by the approach in Prison Shakespeare (Pensalfini, 2016). These methods are typically employed to elicit biographical narratives, which then serve as the primary material for creative work. Indigenous research creates a space for underrepresented methods and approaches to be valued and incorporated into wider practices. This can result in a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of indigenous communities and can lead to more culturally sensitive data.

Despite my efforts to centre culturally sensitive approaches, my Zimbabwean heritage influenced my research. While sharing a cultural background with most of the women under study afforded opportunities for rapport building, it also presented challenges in maintaining objectivity. This shared identity unwittingly fostered assumptions and beliefs that were previously unacknowledged. For instance, during the initial design phase of the research project, I had preconceived notions and biases regarding the demographic makeup of individuals incarcerated in Zimbabwean female prisons, overlooking the presence of foreign nationals and consequently neglecting approaches to involving them. Moreover, this shared identity gave rise to assumptions of solidarity or shared experiences. During group discussions with incarcerated women, topics related to traditional cultural practices arose, leading to conversations about rituals associated with marriage and family dynamics within our Zimbabwean culture. As the dialogue deepened, participants shared personal stories and reflections on how these cultural practices had shaped their lives. In these instances, the women sought validation and understanding from me, presuming that I could understand and empathise with their experiences, even though some aspects were unfamiliar to me. My experience highlights the importance of reflexivity. I remained open to critically examining my own positionality and its potential impact on the research process.

2.4.1 Methods of Popular Participatory Theatre

In this section, I briefly discuss the methods that I used in my work with women in this research study and expand on them in further chapters.

1. Indigenous Traditional Games

Traditional games have been identified as one of PPT’s core activities (Malibo, 2008; Sibanda, 2015; Young-Jahangeer, 2013). In sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous traditional games are a way of knowing

and understanding cultural traditions (Wanderi, 2011). Despite their cultural significance, many traditional games are at risk of being lost due to various factors such as cultural assimilation, urbanisation, and globalisation (Smith-Cavros, 2017). There is currently a bias in the applied theatre field towards theatre games from North America, South America and Western Europe (Chivandikwa et al., 2019). This bias can be attributed to the dominance of Western culture in the field of theatre. In instances where traditional games have been utilised in some African contexts, practitioners have employed them as a means to cultivate trust and establish a secure, supportive environment for participants to explore and share their experiences. Such an approach can be critiqued as reflective of colonial paradigms in research practices.

Applying traditional African games in a colonial manner implies appropriating and repurposing the indigenous traditional games, without engaging in meaningful collaboration or dialogue with the communities that hold the cultural knowledge. This approach reduces these games to mere instruments for achieving predetermined goals, disregarding their intrinsic value within the specific cultural context. Consequently, this perpetuates power imbalances and reinforces a top-down bias within the realm of prison theatre. In this research study, traditional Zimbabwean games were employed with women in prison to foster an understanding and appreciation for their cultural significance within the Zimbabwean context and to recognise and appreciate them as valuable forms of knowledge and as a method of data collection.

Indigenous traditional games resonate with the history, culture, values and philosophies of the Zimbabwean context. Zimbabwean traditional games are an archive of knowledge about the cultures, beliefs, and ways of being of the Shona and Ndebele speaking people of Zimbabwe (Mapara, 2009). Therefore, using indigenous games with women in prison was an opportunity to tap into this cultural repository of knowledge and bring it into the context of institutions and the experiences of incarceration. These games provided a means of exploring and expressing the unique perspectives and challenges faced by incarcerated women, shedding light on the impact of the criminal justice system on their lives.

As a methodological approach for data collection, the utilisation of indigenous traditional games with incarcerated women served to explore the multifaceted knowledge that playfulness encompasses. This encompassed various dimensions such as social connection and community building, reflection and transformation, as well as emotional and psychological well-being, and empowerment and agency. By engaging women in prison in these games, I was able to gain deeper insights into their self-perceptions, and their perspectives on body politics and prison politics. Playfulness, in this sense, was a powerful tool for exploration, self-expression, and the transformation of individuals and institutions. The nature, findings and analysis of these games and their impact will be further discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

2. *Storytelling*

I also employed storytelling as a method of practice in prison theatre. Storytelling is a multifaceted practice that encompasses either real-life stories or fiction or both. Real-life stories provide valuable insights into actual experiences and events, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities of human existence (Presser, 2016). Conversely, fiction serves as a realm for imaginative exploration and artistic expression (Chikowero, 2015). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the discourse surrounding storytelling has traditionally been theorised within the framework of African oral literature, characterised by narrative proverbs, song-tales, myths, folktales, fairy tales, animal fables, anecdotes, and ballads (see Achebe, 1996; Afigo, 1981; Awoonor, 1983; Egudu, 1981), emphasising the cultural richness and oral traditions that shape narratives. However, this research diverges from this conventional perspective by examining the aesthetics of real-life storytelling among incarcerated women. By scrutinising the aesthetic dimensions inherent in the storytelling of incarcerated women, this chapter attempts to contribute to an understanding of a distinct form of storytelling that emerges within the unique context of imprisonment.

In my endeavour to engage in real-life storytelling with women in Zimbabwean prisons, I capitalised on the conventional understanding of women as storytellers within Southern African oral literacy studies (Mutasa, Magocha and Madadzhe, 2018; Hofmeyr, 1992). Davie Mutasa, Medicine Magocha and Richard N. Madadzhe (2018) highlight the active involvement of women in pre- and post-colonial Zimbabwean society in storytelling, which served as the cornerstone of communal revitalisation, entrusting women with a pivotal role in ensuring the well-being of their communities.

However, Isobel Hofmeyr (1992) highlights a significant aspect of sub-Saharan African women's storytelling, noting its characterisation by subordination, a consequence of entrenched gendered divisions of labour and societal norms. According to Hofmeyr,

> women's stories were often regarded as a rather frivolous pastime that dealt with the imaginary and fictional. Male storytelling, on the other hand, was seen as more important, partly because of its content which dealt with the "real" world, partly because of its more sober performance, but also because it was enacted in a prestigious, public, male space and concerned itself with the socialisation of men (Hofmeyr, 1992:44).

This observation highlights the gendered dynamics that historically shaped the perception and value assigned to storytelling within sub-Saharan African societies. This study endeavoured to extend the established understanding of women as storytellers within Southern African oral literary studies, by emphasising the significance of storytelling among incarcerated women. Through this deliberate approach, the emphasise on storytelling was to centre the narratives of women within Zimbabwean

prisons, utilising it as a political tool to unveil suppressed knowledge about their intricate realities that frequently remain concealed and unspoken.

I also drew inspiration from criminologist Lois Presser's insightful observation that prisoners are 'creatures of story' and 'soaked to the bone in story' (2016:18). With a deep-seated conviction, I embarked on storytelling initiatives within the prison environment, firmly believing that the women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons are inherently drawn to the innate human desire to share and exchange stories. Presser (2016) further contends that prisoners' lives hang on the stories they tell, how those stories impart the sense of self, the relationship built around those stories and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose. This perspective carried significant implications for my study of incarcerated women's storytelling in Zimbabwean prisons and for understanding the broader context. It prompted me to consider storytelling not merely as a form of expression for prisoners, but a fundamental part of their identity, shaping their self-perception and influencing interpersonal dynamics, alliances, and conflicts among incarcerated individuals.

I perceived of storytelling with women in prisons as both an epistemology and a method that facilitates the understanding of the complexities embedded in incarcerated women's experiences. I regarded the production and dissemination of stories as a form of affective labour which involves emotional and relational work that goes beyond the mere creation of a narrative to the purpose and function of stories. By recognising the inseparable relationship between stories and knowing/meaning, this research study enhanced appreciation for the importance of storytelling with women in Zimbabwean prisons and the capacity of stories to shape our understanding of their experiences. Thus, storytelling emerged not merely as a passive activity but an active and intentional process of collecting data and transmitting knowledge and wisdom.

Because storytelling aligns with relationality (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2020), the incarcerated women's recounting of their personal stories, sought to understand how women in Zimbabwean prisons define their very existence and the meaning of it. Sharing their experiences through stories constituted an essential aspect of knowledge construction. The incarcerated women's identities and experiences became integral components of the conceptual framework they contributed to the research, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the interplay between how the women desired to identify and gender and cultural dynamics. I discuss further in Chapter Six.

3. *Immersive Ethnography*

Based on my experience and observations, PPT necessitates ethnography. The premise of the indigenous research paradigm of PPT is based on its values of 'being' that is about relations and connections beyond just humans to the environment, the spiritual world and diversity and difference. Therefore, the research was not only linked to what happens during and in the workshops, rehearsals and performances, but also to the engaged experiences surrounding the entire process of carrying

out this research. In other words, I understood the method of interactions in the prison environment with the incarcerated women and prison officers as ethnographical research. In addition, I stayed at Shurugwi female prison for a duration of one week. Staying at the prison facilitated an immersive experience into the culture of the female prisoners, allowing me to gain deeper insights into their daily lives, thoughts, opinions and attitudes. Engaging in the immersive ethnographic method granted me full access to the prison environment, enabling me to employ a blend of methods including, observation, conversation, and active participation in the women's daily chores. I documented my interactions in my research diary within the nighttime setting of my room. This immersion proved invaluable in eliciting candid narratives. I gained firsthand insights into the challenges faced by the women in accessing healthcare, education, and legal support. Witnessing their resilience and fortitude in navigating adversity left an impression on me, deepening my sense of empathy and enriching my understanding of their lived experiences.

Furthermore, I conducted a series of workshops with all twenty-one female prisoners over a period of three days. These sessions, which ran for an hour and a half each, involved playing indigenous traditional games and engaging in reflective talking circles. Notably, the prison officers also voluntarily participated in the workshops, revealing a dynamic between the two groups that blurred the lines of a strictly professional relationship – a dynamic less pronounced at Chikurubi female prison. Through these activities, I identified several themes that emerged from the discussions, including the challenges faced by incarcerated mothers, the fear of their victims upon release, and the suspension of their reproductive rights during imprisonment. These themes provide important insights into the lived experiences of female prisoners at Shurugwi prison.

Becoming a part of the prison community evoked a wide range of emotions and significant realisations within me. The moment I stepped inside the prison, I was overwhelmed by a sense of shock and disorientation. The stark contrast between my own life experiences and the regulated, confined atmosphere of the prison environment was palpable. The unpredictable nature of prison activities stirred in me a range of intense emotions, including wrath, as well as a general yearning for the comforts of home. I found myself yearning for the cultural comforts that were absent within the prison walls. My time spent as a guest in the prison prompted deep reflection on the privileges I enjoy in my daily life – freedoms, choices, and access to resources – which starkly contrasted with the constrained existence of the incarcerated women. This introspection further fortified my commitment to conducting research aimed at amplifying the voices and experiences of the women incarcerated. To mark the conclusion of my visit, I organised a farewell party for the participants. This event served as an opportunity to express my appreciation and to bid farewell to the individuals with whom I had formed unexpected connections over the course of my ethnographic stay at the prison.

Despite the privilege of experiencing a week in prison and gaining insight into the incarcerated women's lives, I remained conscious of the distinctions between my experience and that of the incarcerated women. These differences included having my own room to sleep in at night, different meals, the choice to participate in their daily routines and the freedom to leave the prison at any time. These distinctions emphasised the fact that my engagement, while immersive, did not fully equate to the experiences of the incarcerated women.

2.4.2 The Hybridity of Popular Participatory Theatre

In my research design, I had made a deliberate effort to incorporate indigenous frameworks, but the active participation of the women in this study, coupled with influences of popular culture, resulted in a hybrid approach to the methods used. The participatory element of PPT, which invites the participants to become part of the creation process, played a significant role in this hybridity. During the research study, the women brought some of their ideas of femininity, which were imposed by clothing, to the project, and this facilitated the use of costumes as a method of practice. I discuss this further in Chapter Four.

Given that PPT is often used to empower marginalised communities by allowing them to tell their own stories and engage in dialogue with others, the result is often a mode of performance that incorporates other techniques such as forum theatre. In this case, the women in the study decided to include interactive techniques in their performance which further facilitated engagement with the audience. The active participation of the participants created a unique and constantly evolving and changing creative process that was shaped by their input.

The research project also made use of contemporary theatre practices of scripting and journaling as methods of gathering data. Participants and I kept journals to document our thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a tangible format. This facilitated the immediate documentation of valuable insights and reflections, preventing them from being lost to memory. Occasionally revisiting these entries and sharing them in the talking circle allowed for deeper insights into our perspectives and the dynamics of the research interactions. Through their journal entries, participants crafted narratives of their lives, identifying conflicts and obstacles they encountered, which in turn shaped their personal narratives and offered insights into their characters and values. The use of journaling as a method of data collection posed challenges for individuals who lacked literacy skills. However, it's important to recognise that despite limitations in reading and writing abilities, illiteracy did not necessarily hinder participants' capacity to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, as highlighted in Chapter Three. Through oral communication, participants effectively articulated their perspectives, sharing valuable insights and reflections on pertinent research topics. This highlights the significance of accommodating diverse communication abilities.

The use of scripting was integral to the final performance aspect of the project, which is discussed in Chapter Six. It served as a method of breaking down complex ideas, stories and characters as well as collecting data and understanding the motivations and aspirations of the participants.

The concept of hybridity, as manifested in my research practice, challenged the established boundaries typically observed within academic inquiry. It illustrated the idea that the rigid distinctions separating indigenous and contemporary research approaches can be transcended, allowing for a more nuanced and inclusive framework. This approach promoted an inclusive research environment where multiple voices and perspectives were recognised and valued, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive exploration of the subject matter under investigation. By embracing hybridity, researchers can foster greater collaboration, understanding, and respect for diverse ways of knowing and conducting research.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Womanism in Africa

This section provides an exploration of the theoretical perspectives that support me in the exploration of the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons.

The term womanist was coined by author and poet Alice Walker in 1979 to refer to 'Black feminism or feminism of colour [which is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female' (Walker 1983, xi). Walker (1983) implies that a womanist is concerned with overcoming not only gender discrimination but also discrimination based on race or socioeconomic status. Womanist theory has evolved, with diverse definitions, but at its core is the argument that both femininity and race are equally important to the woman's existence (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Borrowing from Walker (1983) and Molefi Asante's (1987) influential work Afrocentricism, Hudson-Weems (1993) created and designed a theory within the United States which she called Africana Womanism. The theory emerged as a response to the marginalisation of African American women within mainstream feminism but extended to encompass women of African descent worldwide. She argues that the theory is not black feminism, African feminism or Walker's womanism, but an ideology grounded in African culture and solely for women of African descent. The focus is on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women.

I approach the term 'feminism' cautiously, but not with the intention of rejecting it on the grounds of it being perceived as exclusively white or Western, as such a stance can foster division. I firmly assert that feminism constitutes a global philosophy that transcends geographical boundaries, expressing itself in diverse forms across different cultures and societies. In alignment with Buchi Emecheta, who aptly stated, 'I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism' (Emecheta in Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997:7), I recognise the existence of varied forms of feminism, each shaped by its unique cultural and historical context.

I firmly support the concept of examining the significance of names and their underlying politics, as well as the practice of (re)naming in asserting existence, re-centring voices, and claiming space. As Kimberle Crenshaw's aptly stated, ‘there is some degree of agency that people can and do exert in the politics of naming’ (1989:12). In light of this perspective, I have chosen to embrace the term ‘Africana womanism’. This choice reflects my belief in the need for terminology that resonates with the experiences and struggles of women in Zimbabwean prisons and acknowledges their unique position in the discourse of feminism.

For Hudson-Weems (1993) the term 'Africana' specifically focuses on the history, culture, and experiences of people of African descent worldwide, including those in Africa and the African diaspora. It distinguishes itself from the broader term 'African,' which refers to anyone or anything from the continent of Africa. Africana is a means of centring Black people's experiences and contributions to global history and culture rather than relegating them to a mere footnote in the larger narrative of world history. The primary goal of Africana womanism is to provide a frame for Africana women to define, assess and reconstruct their stories, lives, experiences and concerns outside Eurocentric paradigms. She argues; ‘the Africana womanist is, indeed, a self-definer, even if her definitions do not reach the broader global public arena’ (Hudson-Weems, 2020:48). It is evident that in naming and refining their identities and strategies for addressing everyday challenges, Africana womanism serves as a pertinent theoretical framework for women in Zimbabwean prisons. This holds particular significance considering the fact that the women's process of redefining and renaming may not reach a broader global audience due to their incarceration. By adopting this approach, my research study establishes a distinct perspective, that analyses the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons through a lens that encapsulates their unique histories, cultures, and narratives. This contributes to a contextual understanding of their experiences while upholding the integrity of the research's significance and originality.

Africana womanism, as a paradigm, encompasses eighteen fundamental principles that form its foundation. These principles include self-naming, self-definition, role flexibility, family-centeredness, solidarity in the struggle against male oppression, adaptability, fostering genuine sisterhood, pursuit of wholeness, authenticity, strength, harmonious relationships with men, respect, recognition, reverence for elders, ambition, nurturing, and spirituality (Hudson-Weems (1993:55-73). I discuss them below.

A crucial aspect of Africana womanism, as articulated by Hudson-Weems (2020), revolves around the cherished ideal of motherhood.

> the Africana womanist is committed to the art of mothering and nurturing, her own children in particular and humankind in general. This collective role is supreme in

> Africana culture, for the Africana woman comes from a legacy of fulfilling the role of supreme Mother Nature—nurturer, provider and protector (Hudson-Weems, 2020:83).

The Africana woman places profound significance on her role as a mother, fully embracing the responsibilities and duties that come with nurturing and raising children. Acholonu (1995) expounds on the concept of 'Motherism,' which forms the very foundation of Africana womanism. Acholonu (1995) delves into the intricate cultural and societal value attributed to motherhood, describing it as a position of great cultural elaboration and esteem in African society. She highlights how motherhood not only shapes women's sense of self but also profoundly influences their perception of the world within sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, many African women predominantly identify themselves as mothers above all else.

Acholonu (1995) emphasises that women who assume the role of mothers hold significant cultural and social sway within their communities. The central role of women as mothers bestows upon them a measure of authority in family-related decision-making processes. Moreover, the role of mothers is seen as an active and socially impactful endeavour, with mothers playing a crucial role in instigating social change through the upbringing of their children. Acholonu (1995) contends that adopting the identity of a mother tends to foster greater gender equality. This is not a form of domestic dominance; rather, it represents a form of cultural prestige (Acholonu, 1995). Thus, for Acholonu (1995), Motherism emerges as an African alternative to the Western feminist model.

Another fundamental pillar of Africana womanism is the centrality of the family. According to Hudson-Weems (1993), the Africana woman is concerned with her entire family, including her male counterpart and her children, the future generations, rather than with just herself and her sisters. She deeply acknowledges the interdependence and interconnectedness inherent in family relationships, shaping her belief that decisions and actions should be guided by the collective well-being and unity of the family. Actively, she endeavours to nurture and fortify family bonds, prioritising values such as love, support, and collective responsibility. The centrality of family within Africana womanism also highlights the significance of communalism and the communal nature of Africana societies. The Africana woman sees herself as part of a larger network of relatives who provide social support, guidance, and a sense of belonging. This approach recognises that individuals thrive within a supportive community and that the well-being of one individual is intricately linked to the well-being of the entire family.

Africana Womanism places significant emphasis on resistance against oppressive systems and structures. It encourages Africana women to challenge and dismantle these oppressive systems, advocate for social justice, and strive for liberation both personally and communally. An influential contributor to this discourse is Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), whose work brings a vital, often overlooked

perspective to the intersection of culture and gender within Africana contexts. In her writings, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) explores the complex dynamics of African societies in the aftermath of colonialism, shedding light on the persistent patriarchal structures that continue to oppress women. Her primary focus lies in the urgent need for Africana women and African societies as a whole to critically assess their roles in perpetuating these patriarchal systems. This calls for a re-evaluation of cultural practices, norms, and traditions that reinforce gender inequality, coupled with an exploration of alternative, more inclusive models of societal organisation.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) emphasises the imperative nature of a paradigm shift in the perceptions and roles of both Africana women and African societies. This shift is necessitated by the deeply entrenched gender oppression and cultural stigmatisation that have endured for an extended period. These forms of discrimination have stifled the potential and agency of women in African societies. By advocating for the dismantling of these oppressive structures, she champions a transformative journey towards gender equality, enabling women to participate fully in social, economic, and political spheres.

Moreover, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) acknowledges that cultural norms and traditions have often been complicit in perpetuating the marginalisation and devaluation of women. In challenging these norms and encouraging societies to reassess their treatment of women, she actively promotes a more inclusive and equitable cultural landscape. Her work, therefore, serves as a beacon guiding Africana women and African societies towards a future where gender-based oppression is replaced by genuine equality and inclusivity.

Other key tenets of Africana womanism are self-definition and self-identity. Self-naming refers to the practice of Africana women choosing their own names, rather than having them assigned by others (Hudson-Weems, 1993:57). Self-naming within Africana womanism is a profound practice that goes beyond the mere selection of names. It represents a multifaceted process of reclaiming identity, challenging stereotypes, empowering individuals and communities, preserving cultural memory, and expressing the complex intersections of identity. It is a practice deeply rooted in cultural heritage and carries significant sociocultural and psychological implications for Africana women and their communities.

Having established the framework of Africana womanism, it is imperative to explore its relevance to the objectives of this study. However, before delving into the interplay between Africana Womanism and incarcerated women, this study will briefly examine certain elements of Africana Womanist theory that provoke inquiries. Addressing these queries helps elucidate how these intersections manifest within the prison environment and influence the lives of incarcerated women.

2.6 Critiquing the African womanist theory

My initial unease with African womanism arises from its consistent emphasis on Western feminism as bad. I want to emphasise this discomfort while fully acknowledging that the inception of African womanism is rooted in responding to Western feminists who presented a monolithic conception of womanhood. However, an excessive focus on Western feminists has the potential to hinder the progress of African womanism and blind it to its own accomplishments. As Amina Mama argues:

> To put it bluntly, white feminism has never been strong enough to be 'the enemy' – in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy. The constant tirades against 'white feminists' do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had 20 years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. Since then, many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called Third World feminists - they have also come up with more complex theories. (2001:61)

Oyeronke Oyewumi further points out that 'western feminists have reconsidered their earlier simplistic paradigms and have formulated more complex theories taking into account the importance of race, class, culture, context and history in configuring gender relations (2017:7). Consequently, maintaining a trajectory of viewing 'Western feminists as the enemy', as a central focus of Africana womanism (see Hudson-Weems, 1993), becomes counterproductive. Such a trajectory entangles us in binary oppositions and dichotomies that we aim to challenge. It also compels us to fixate on the issue of race while overlooking the issue of gender, particularly how it manifests in our own contexts.

My second area of discomfort revolves around the excessive assertion that, in contrast to Western feminists, women in the Global South are in alignment with their male counterparts. This perspective, extended by Hudson-Weems (1993) and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), contends that women and men in the Global South were collectively 'victims' of the colonial experience and continue to endure racism together, thus positioning them as allies in the struggle for emancipation.

While it holds true that in the Global South, both women and men experienced the horrors of imperial exploitation, the persistent emphasis on brother/sister solidarity tends to overshadow the gender disparities that persist within the Global South context. Similarly, ascribing the patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny displayed by men in the Global South to the oppression they endured at the hands of 'white men' during the colonial era, can inadvertently absolve men in the 'post-colony' of accountability for their actions. In my study of incarcerated women, it became evident that these women had endured histories of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of their male counterparts.

Another one of the notable limitations of Africana womanism is its tendency to present Africa as a homogenous continent. By presenting Africa as a homogenous entity, Africana womanism runs the risk of oversimplifying and generalising the experiences and challenges faced by women across

the continent. To mitigate the risk of oversimplifying and generalising the experiences and challenges encountered by women, this research actively engages with the voices of marginalised and underrepresented groups, ensuring their voices are heard. Similarly, a critical lens is applied to interrogate power dynamics, colonial legacies, structural inequalities, and cultural identities. The research adopts a nuanced approach, where women's experiences are critically examined within broader social, political and cultural contexts.

Among its various attributes, an Africana Womanist is characterised as being family-centred, in solidarity with males in the struggle, compatible with men, respectful of elders, adaptable, motherly, and nurturing (Hudson-Weems, 1993:55-73). However, this characterisation can be problematic as it confines women of colour to a heteronormative framework, assuming exclusive attraction to men, fulfilment in motherhood, and inherent nurturing qualities, thus excluding those who do not fit this mould. This portrayal aligns with Catherine Acholonu's concept of Motherism (1995), which idealises African women as rural, agrarian, spiritual figures who serve as the ‘economic, agricultural, political, commercial, and labour base of every nation’ (1995:118).

Ghanaian feminist Ama Ata Aidoo (2015) critiques this exclusive focus on motherhood within African womanism. The exclusive focus on motherhood within African womanism poses challenges not only for women who are unable to conceive or are considered barren but also for those seeking to engage in other public roles and endeavours. Aidoo (2015) argues that while motherhood is significant, fixating on it can limit women's aspirations beyond traditional gender roles. This emphasis disregards the potential contributions of women in fields like politics, education, and leadership, and reinforces gender roles, hindering women's agency and self-fulfilment. Aidoo (2015) advocates for a broader understanding of gender and identity that recognises and affirms women's diverse talents and contributions to society. Within the context of women who come to attention due to their involvement in criminal activities rather than their talents and contributions, Aidoo's argument prompts a broader examination of the incarcerated women's identities beyond the scope of criminality. Despite their past actions, these women possess multifaceted identities that encompass various aspects of their lives, including potential talents, aspirations, and capacities. Implementing creative projects, as demonstrated in this research study, is a step towards uncovering their potential beyond the limitations of their previous behaviours. Thus, Aidoo's call for a broader understanding of gender and identity remains relevant in acknowledging the full spectrum of women's experiences and potentials, regardless of their involvement in offending behaviours.

While I acknowledge the criticisms levelled against this theory by scholars, however, for the purpose of this research study and its objectives, African womanism theory offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of women within the specific context of my research. I now turn to discuss the nexus between Africana womanism and incarcerated women.

2.7 Utilising Africana Womanism as a Framework for Incarcerated Women's Experiences

2.7.1 Intersectionality and Identity

The concept of intersectionality and its influence on incarcerated women's experiences is crucial for the analysis of women in Zimbabwean prisons. Intersectionality acknowledges that the challenges faced by incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons cannot be understood in isolation but are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including race, gender, class, culture, spirituality, community, and the historical context of colonisation. Intersectionality guides the data analysis process, which involves identifying patterns, themes and connections across different dimensions of identities and experiences.

Hudson-Weems (1993) primarily discusses Africana women affected by colonisation. Zimbabwe, like many other sub-Saharan African countries, has a history of colonisation, particularly by the British. The colonial period in Zimbabwe, characterised by the imposition of foreign cultural norms, economic exploitation, and the marginalisation of indigenous populations, has had profound effects on gender dynamics, cultural practices, and societal structures, which continue to shape the lives of women in the country today. Within the Zimbabwean context, Africana womanism provides a valuable lens to examine the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of women who are situated within the legacy of colonisation. Adopting an Africana womanist perspective in this study, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the specific challenges faced by Zimbabwean women, such as the impact of their access to resources, social status, and agency. Furthermore, Africana Womanism lens helps us to better understand how Zimbabwean women navigate the context of colonial history.

2.7.2 Motherhood and Family-Centredness Among Incarcerated Women

Motherhood holds immense value in Zimbabwean culture, as it symbolises the continuation of family lineage, the passing down of traditions, and the nurturing of future generations. It is a symbol of cultural pride and carries social and spiritual significance. Incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons place profound importance on their roles as mothers. This perspective reflects the cultural values and norms that have been historically and culturally significant within Zimbabwean communities, offering a unique lens through which to understand their experiences. Acholonu's (1995) emphasis of the cultural and societal value attributed to motherhood in sub-Saharan Africa holds true for women in prison who draw strength from this cultural ethos, reinforcing their roles as mothers and shaping their identities as they navigate the challenges of confinement. This emphasis on motherhood as the apex of a woman's identity and value is, to a significant extent, a response to the historical marginalisation and limited access that women have faced in their pursuit of alternative avenues for power and recognition.

Many incarcerated women in my research study faced the challenging task of balancing caregiving duties with work and other responsibilities prior to imprisonment. The experience of imprisonment further disrupts their caregiving roles and negatively affects their children's well-being and development. While in prison, these women cannot fulfil their caregiver role and are disconnected from their families. Interestingly, the older women assume the identity of a mother within the prison setting, which bestows a measure of authority on them. They find themselves wielding influence in decision-making processes among fellow inmates. This phenomenon mirrors the cultural prestige associated with motherhood, where women feel recognised as worth something.

Leveraging the principle of family-centredness within Africana womanism to analyse the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons offers a lens through which to comprehend the intricate and conflicting circumstances these women find themselves in. The primary concern of women in Zimbabwean prisons revolves around the holistic well-being of their families. This emphasis on family unity and collective responsibility forms the foundation of their identity and values. However, the complex and challenging circumstances these women face become evident when we consider the conflicts that arise due to their criminality. Engaging in criminal activities, often driven by the desperate need to provide for their families, places them in a precarious position. On one hand, they are attempting to fulfil their role as caregivers, aligning with the Africana womanist ideals of supporting and nurturing their families. On the other hand, their criminal actions can lead to their separation from their families, eroding the trust and stability that are integral to the family unit.

The consequences of incarceration further exacerbate these conflicts. Women in prison often find themselves physically distanced from their families, a situation that runs counter to the Africana womanist emphasis on the interconnectedness and interdependence of family relationships. This separation can strain the family bonds they worked so hard to maintain, potentially resulting in fractured relationships and emotional distress for both the incarcerated women and their families. Understanding these conflicts is crucial for comprehending the experiences of these women.

The Africana Womanism perspective, with its emphasis on resistance against oppressive systems and the critical examination of cultural norms, serves as a valuable lens for examining and comprehending the unique experiences and challenges faced by incarcerated women, especially in the context of gender-based violence and discrimination perpetuated by male counterparts. Africana Womanism encourages a holistic view that doesn't merely prioritise resistance against external oppressors but also calls for introspection within the culture itself. As aptly argued by Mekgwe (2006), solidarity with men against oppression should not translate into an uncritical acceptance of cultural flaws. Therefore, applying Africana Womanism as a guiding framework for this study underscores the importance of centring the perspectives of incarcerated women regarding their

relationships with their male counterparts.

2.7.3 Power, Resistance and Agency

This study further explores how power is distributed, resisted and subverted within the context of the prison environment, shedding light on how incarcerated women actively engage with their social world. It demonstrates that these women are not passive victims, but rather, they proactively navigate their circumstances in what seems to them 'the most effective' way possible. By examining power within social relationships where individuals simultaneously experience and exercise power, the concepts of resistance and agency provide an understanding of the relationship between gender and power.

This concept holds particular significance for women in Zimbabwean prisons, who have often faced negative stereotypes and assumptions, with their experiences ignored or dismissed by mainstream society. Through this lens, we can grasp how incarcerated women assert the validity of their experiences and perspectives, challenging the dominant narrative constructed about them. Together, self-naming and self-defining represent a powerful form of resistance against oppression and marginalisation.

Additional characteristics such as adaptability, strength, and spirituality are relevant for comprehending the agency of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. Adaptability refers to the ability to adjust to changing circumstances, which becomes critical for survival within the prison environment. Women in prison face various unexpected and challenging situations, such as transfers to different facilities, encounters with abusive officers or fellow inmates, and coping with limited access to basic necessities like food, water, and medical care. Understanding how women in prison adapt to these changing circumstances and maintain their mental and emotional well-being becomes vital.

According to Hudson-Weems (1993), the tenet of strength is an essential factor in comprehending the experiences of Africana women. She asserts that strength is deeply rooted in the history and struggles of Africana women who have endured centuries of oppression and exploitation. In addition, she has witnessed the powerlessness of her male companion and his inability to fulfil the traditional role of the man as protector, resulting in his feeling of emasculation. Despite these challenges, Africana women have persevered and resisted, often serving as the backbone of their families and communities. They have made significant contributions to various fields and have been leaders in social justice movements in African and abroad. Hudson-Weems (1993:67) describes Africana women's strength as multifaceted, encompassing physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual components. Africana women have developed a range of coping mechanisms and survival strategies to navigate various challenges, such as slavery, colonialism,

racism, and sexism. However, Hudson-Weems (1993) also acknowledges that Africana women's strength should not be idealised or romanticised. Africana women are not invincible, and they face unique challenges that require support and solidarity. Recognising and celebrating their strength is a crucial step towards building a more equitable and just society. In the context of this research study, strength encompasses physical, emotional, and psychological resilience. Women in prison encounter various challenges, including harsh living conditions, trauma, and loss. Nevertheless, some possess resilience, which should be acknowledged and celebrated. How they draw on their inner strength and resilience to cope with these challenges forms part of their experiences.

Hudson-Weems (1993) argues that spirituality is an integral part of the Africana woman's experience, and that it is deeply intertwined with her cultural heritage and identity. For Africana women, spirituality can take many forms, including religious practices, ancestral veneration, and connection to nature. At the same time, Hudson-Weems (1993) is careful to emphasise that Africana women's spirituality should not be reduced to a stereotype or caricature. She recognises that Africana women come from various cultural backgrounds and have different beliefs and practices and that their spirituality should be respected and honoured in all its diversity. For Hudson-Weems (1993), the spirituality of Africana women is an important source of strength, resilience, and resistance. It provides a sense of connection to something greater than oneself and can help Africana women navigate life's challenges with a sense of purpose and meaning. It can also provide a sense of community and support, particularly in the face of systemic oppression and marginalisation. Within the prison context, spirituality can be a powerful source of comfort and resilience for incarcerated women. It may involve religious practices or beliefs, or a general sense of connection to something larger than oneself. Recognising the significance of spirituality in the lives of incarcerated women can foster a sense of community and support, which becomes particularly important for those separated from their families and other support networks. Moreover, the concept of spirituality provides a framework for understanding how spirituality offers a sense of meaning and purpose in a challenging and often dehumanising environment.

2.7.4 Prison Relationality

The exploration of sisterhood and solidarity provides insights into the complexities of relationships among incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. Hudson-Weems defines sisterhood as:

> …a reciprocal bond in which each gives and receives equally. In this community of women, all reach out in support of each other, demonstrating a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other by looking out for one another. They are joined emotionally as they embody empathic understanding of each other's shared experiences… (Hudson-Weems, 2007: 86)

As demonstrated later in this study, there are mutual sisterly bonds that allow women in

Zimbabwean prisons to talk to, give and receive valuable advice from each other and navigate the challenges of incarceration. These bonds are rooted in a sense of either shared ethnicity, nationality, history, culture, and struggle. Hudson-Weems (2012) argues that embracing sisterhood is essential for Africana women, as it recognises that facing challenges alone is impossible, and unity and support from other women are crucial for overcoming these obstacles. This solidarity enables Africana women to regroup in the spirit of togetherness and respect for each other. Hudson-Weems (2012) is careful to emphasise that sisterhood should not be limited to women of African descent and that Africana women should also work in solidarity with other women of colour and with allies from other communities. However, she raises concerns about the scarcity of genuine sisterhood in contemporary society, highlighting instances of gossip, conspiring, and exclusion among women that undermine the true essence of sisterhood. She states:

> No matter the age, the race or the class level, too many of today's women treat each other in ways that insult the true idea of sisterhood, oftentimes gossiping about, conspiring against and even callously excluding each other by alienation … (Hudson- Weems, 2012:3).

The absence of genuine sisterhood is a reality among incarcerated women in Zimbabwe, and is influenced by several factors, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, nationality, and the nature of their crimes. These factors shape the dynamics within the prison environment, impacting the relationships formed among female prisoners. Socio-economic status significantly shapes interactions among incarcerated women. Similar to many other African countries, Zimbabwe often experiences a stark divide between the wealthy and the economically disadvantaged. This divide is further magnified within the prison system, where women from lower socio-economic backgrounds face additional challenges, such as limited access to resources and support networks. Consequently, this economic disparity creates tensions and divisions among incarcerated women, impeding the development of a genuine sisterhood.

Ethnicity and nationality also contribute to the lack of sisterhood in Zimbabwean prisons. The country has two main ethnic groups, Shona and Ndebele, and a mix of foreign nationals. Cultural differences, language barriers, and pre-existing prejudices create barriers to understanding and unity among incarcerated women from different backgrounds. These divisions hinder the establishment of genuine connections and the formation of a cohesive support system within the prison environment. Additionally, the nature of an individual's crime further fragments the relationships among incarcerated women. The diverse range of offences committed by women in Zimbabwean prisons, including non-violent crimes, drug-related offences, and more serious offences, often leads to stigmatisation, judgement, and mistrust. The varying criminal backgrounds make it challenging to establish sisterhood based on shared experiences and mutual support.

Moreover, the overall conditions within the prison system also impacts the development of

sisterhood. Overcrowding, limited resources, inadequate healthcare, and harsh disciplinary measures create an environment characterised by high levels of stress and hostility. In such circumstances, where survival and self-preservation become paramount concerns, building genuine connections and fostering sisterhood may take a backseat to individual survival strategies. These power dynamics and survival strategies need to be examined within the framework of Africana Womanism to understand the extent to which women oppress each other and the consequences for genuine sisterhood.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter elucidated the methodological and theoretical considerations underpinning the research design and approach for analysing the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. It began by outlining the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design, emphasising its suitability for exploring the unique perspectives and narratives of incarcerated women that emerged from the PPT approach. Furthermore, it contextualised the study within an indigenous research paradigm, advocating for the adoption of culturally appropriate and relevant methodologies that challenge dominant Western paradigms in prison theatre. Several key concepts were identified as crucial analytical tools for examining women's experiences of incarceration and their participation in PPT.

The chapter proceeded to detail the specific methods employed in the study, including indigenous traditional games, storytelling, ethnography and costumes. Subsequent section delves into the process of PPT, providing further insights into the methodological framework that guided the research endeavour.

Chapter Three: The Research Process and Outcome

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to unpack the research process undertaken, highlighting its significance within the broader context of the study. It begins by discussing the complex process of obtaining access and necessary permissions for conducting research within Zimbabwean prisons, outlining both the challenges encountered and the opportunities uncovered. Subsequently, collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders, including the ZPCS, University of Zimbabwe theatre students, and prison personnel, are examined. These collaborations are explored in terms of how the expectations and objectives of the stakeholders influenced the direction and goals of the research endeavour. Additionally, ethical considerations are addressed, with a focus on an African-centric ethical framework and a performative approach to consent.

Following this, the chapter provides the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the rationale and considerations guiding the choices pertaining to the research sample, selection of the research site, research methods and tools, thereby understanding the complexity of the study from inception to implementation and analysis.

3.2 Access and Permission

The process of conducting research in prisons can be a challenging and time-consuming one that requires convincing various gatekeepers of the research validity and the legitimacy of the researcher (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010; Megargee, 1995; Patenaude, 2004; Fox, Zambrana and Lane, 2011). These gatekeepers may include prison administrators and security personnel. Additionally, researchers must adhere to various regulations and guidelines put in place to protect the safety and confidentiality of the prisoners, which can add additional layers of complexity to the process. However, my experience conducting research in Zimbabwean prisons was surprisingly easy and seamless due to the facilitating role of the then Deputy Commissioner General (DCG) of the ZPCS. Despite my initial struggle to locate relevant contacts on the ZPCS website, I managed to establish contact with the DCG through Facebook. As highlighted by Wilson (cited in Chilisa, 2012: 112), an important indigenous research practice involves utilising family, relations, or friends as intermediaries to establish contact with participants. The DCG was one such acquaintance. This method is a culturally appropriate way of approaching potential participants and has practical uses in establishing rapport with research participants (Wilson, 2008 cited in Chilisa, 2012: 112).

Surprisingly, on the very same day of my meeting with the DCG, I was cleared and approved for research in all prisons in the country. Considering these circumstances, it is plausible that my affiliation with a UK university served as a form of social capital that facilitated the process of obtaining permission and navigating bureaucratic processes. It is important to acknowledge that

other researchers, who may lack similar connections, may encounter limitations in accessing alternative channels for seeking permission. This raises important questions about the potential disparities in research opportunities and the ability to navigate bureaucratic processes through backchanneling.

The ease of access made me reflect on ethical questions regarding the extent to which prisoners can provide meaningful consent to take part in programmes offered by the ZPCS. The power dynamics at play within the Zimbabwean prison system makes it difficult for prisoners to speak out or refuse to participate in activities that they are uncomfortable with. This is because, upon incarceration, women in Zimbabwe become the state's property and are subject to the will of the prison as a totalitarian institution. This power relation creates an environment where prisoners may feel obligated to comply with the wishes of those in authority, rather than make decisions based on their own best interests.

Additionally, prisoners may not fully comprehend their rights or the implications of their participation in research or other activities, particularly in under-resourced prisons where access to educational materials or legal resources is restricted, impeding prisoners' ability to be informed about their rights. Coercion or manipulation of prisoners is a primary concern, with some prisoners feeling compelled to participate in research or other activities to receive better treatment or other benefits. As a result, it raises ethical questions about the extent to which prisoners can provide informed consent and whether their participation is voluntary. The ethical implications raised by the ease of gaining access to Zimbabwean prisons were crucial in the development of a more nuanced and context-specific set of ethical guidelines that go beyond the minimum requirements of ethical processes for the research study. I discuss this later in this chapter.

Upon further reflection on my easy access to the prison, I realised that the lack of a clearly defined prison research agenda by ZPCS contributed towards my conducting this research study without encountering any biases or restrictions. In contrast, other countries have predetermined research agendas for prisons, which are often influenced by political or social factors, and prioritise certain types of research over others. For instance, a government may prioritise studies investigating the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes or the prevalence of health conditions or behaviours among prisoners. The absence of a prison research agenda by the Zimbabwean government is indicative of broader issues within the criminal justice system in Zimbabwe. This includes the government's failure to prioritise research in the criminal justice system as a whole and the barriers to conducting research faced by external researchers due to political or administrative factors among others. Additionally, the failure to prioritise research within the prison system is indicative of wider societal attitudes towards prisoners and the criminal justice system. There is often a stigma attached to being a prisoner, and many people tend to view public financing of anything related to prisoners

as unworthy of investment or attention.

The absence of a research agenda can create a situation where ethical concerns are more likely to arise due to a lack of clear guidance and direction for researchers. Without a research agenda, researchers may not have clear guidance on important ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the potential risks and benefits of the research. This can create an environment where research with incarcerated individuals is conducted in a haphazard or exploitative manner, potentially leading to harm to the research subjects. In addition, the absence of a research agenda may make it more difficult to ensure that research with incarcerated individuals is conducted in an equitable and fair manner. For example, research may only be conducted with certain types of incarcerated individuals or in certain facilities, because of risk factors, which can lead to a biased or limited understanding of the experiences of incarcerated individuals as a whole. Further research and analysis would be necessary to determine the underlying causes of the lack of a prison research agenda and to identify potential solutions to address this issue.

3.3 Navigating Collaboration and Expectations with Research Stakeholders and its Challenges

In the initial stage of the research project, I dedicated effort to establish a strong collaboration with local research partners, aiming to ensure the project's sustainability. Drawing on my previous experience of working and teaching at the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Creative Media and Communication, I engaged the Applied Theatre course convener, who was eager and enthusiastic to participate in the research project. The convener selected three of his best second-year students based on a keen interest in prison theatre and fluency in Ndebele, the second official local language. The students were expected to support in facilitating the workshops. My expectations of the students were that they would provide support to the research in collecting and analysing data. The primary objective of this partnership was to impart skills to the students, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the project beyond my involvement.

The university lecturer's perspective on the project was multifaceted and held significant potential for both his personal growth and academic advancement. Recognising the opportunity to broaden his horizons, he viewed the project as a doorway to delve into the uncharted territory of prison theatre, an area that intersected his existing research interests with a new and socially impactful domain. This chance to explore a novel field excited him, promising fresh insights and a chance to contribute to a relatively unexplored niche within academia.

Moreover, the prospect of collaboration in academic publications added another layer of allure to the project. Collaborative work not only enriches research endeavours by integrating diverse perspectives and expertise, but it also facilitates the exchange of ideas and fosters a vibrant academic community. The lecturer saw this as a chance to synergize his insights with those of his colleagues,

creating a tapestry of knowledge that would not have been possible through solitary efforts alone. Joint publications also hold the promise of reaching a wider audience and enhancing the impact of their collective findings, elevating their work to a broader scholarly discourse.

Beneath the surface, there exists a latent pressure stemming from institutional expectations for publication. In the contemporary academic milieu, a pronounced emphasis is placed on research productivity as a metric of achievement and institutional standing. Universities and academic departments routinely assess faculty members based on their publication records, acquisition of funding, and research output. The consistent imperative to produce research of exceptional quality can serve as both a motivational force and a daunting challenge, as scholars strive to harmonize rigorous scholarly investigation with the necessity of generating quantifiable outcomes.

The confluence of these factors painted a complex picture for the project. On one hand, the project offered an intellectually stimulating avenue for research expansion and collaboration, aligning with his scholarly ambitions. On the other hand, the implicit demand to publish added a layer of urgency and expectations that could potentially impact the nature and pace of his research process. Navigating this landscape required careful consideration in the project.

I organised a meeting with the DCG of the ZPCS and several other ZPCS officials to discuss expectations and timelines. The meeting proved to be an essential step as each stakeholder had different goals and objectives for the project, and it was crucial to clarify and manage these expectations to ensure success.

The DCG desired to replicate a high-quality prisoner theatre production which he had seen on his official visit to China. However, the implementation of a similar programme presented significant challenges. Firstly, applied theatre projects do not always culminate in a performance. Ultimately, it is the decision of the participants whether they choose to perform or not, and it would have been presumptuous to assume that this would be the case in this study. Secondly, achieving a high-quality performance often necessitates extensive planning, preparation, and funding, which were not readily available.

The prison officials were driven by a desire to improve not only the reputation of correctional officers but also the broader public perception of the prison system as a whole. By shifting negative perceptions of correctional officers, the officials hoped to demonstrate that the prison system is capable of promoting professionalism and ethical conduct among staff members, which could in turn improve public trust and support for the system. However, I felt uneasy about this approach as my project did not aim to convey specific messages about the prison system but rather to provide a platform for women to express themselves freely. I feared sanitising and idealising prison life to promote a specific viewpoint could undermine the project's authenticity.

To address the officials’ concerns and build a productive working relationship, I openly communicated my interest in understanding the experiences of female prisoners. The officials voiced their concerns regarding the possibility that the project might uncover certain unfavourable aspects of the prison system and the conduct of staff members, which could reflect poorly on them and their work. It is not uncommon for prison staff or inmates to view outsiders, particularly researchers, with wariness, perceiving their presence as a potential threat to privacy and security. Furthermore, they may lack a fundamental understanding of the purpose and value of the research, failing to recognise its relevance to their day-to-day experiences. Moreover, given the hierarchical nature of prisons, some staff may feel uncomfortable with the power dynamics during interactions with a researcher, impeding their ability to be forthright and candid. Additionally, resistance to change could pose an obstacle, as the research may reveal entrenched issues or problems within the prison system that some staff may resist addressing. Nonetheless, I remained resolute in my commitment to surmount these challenges and to contribute to a better understanding of this complex and challenging environment.

In order to progress with my research project, it became necessary for me to reach a compromise. Accordingly, I opted to establish a close collaboration with the personnel at the prison, with a view towards cultivating trust and rapport. This process entailed involving the officers in the project through a workshop with them, which I examine in the section below.

To prepare for the project, I spearheaded a research initiative with university students to identify and collect a diverse range of Shona and Ndebele indigenous traditional games that we planned to facilitate in the prisons. We needed to contextualise our efforts within the rich socio- cultural landscape of Zimbabwe. To achieve this, we proactively engaged with a wide array of community members, including students, parents, lecturers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and children. We intentionally sought out games from various periods, reflecting the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge in Zimbabwean culture. This approach to gathering information reinforced the importance of traditional repositories of knowledge, emphasising the value of personal connections and dialogue in accessing the richness of indigenous traditions.

The students from the university of Zimbabwe dropped out of the project very early on in the project. Despite the time and effort I had spent forging this partnership, the students’ schedules and academic commitment, which the convener had not taken into account when planning the collaboration, led to the partnership ending prematurely. As a PhD researcher, I recognised the substantial benefits that could have arisen from the students' active participation in the project. However, since their involvement was positioned as a non-credit-bearing opportunity without any monetary compensation, their motivation to sustain engagement was limited. Had their participation been linked to a specific module or course, the students would have been more likely to perceive the

project as a valuable and purposeful undertaking. In such a context, their commitment and dedication might have been more substantial, leading to a more fruitful and enduring partnership. This experience demonstrates the challenges involved in maintaining cross-institutional collaborations, especially when the partners have other priorities and lack a clear understanding of the demands of the research project. Prison theatre research presents unique challenges due to the complexities and sensitivities of working within the prison system. To successfully carry out prison theatre research, there needs to be a level of dedication to the process and willingness to invest time and effort.

3.3.1 Negotiating with Gatekeepers: Exploring Power Dynamics, Language, and Humanisation in Correctional Settings

Prison officers were an important part of the research community to which I owed accountability. To establish transparency and clarity regarding the aims and intentions of the research project, I organised a two-hour workshop as taster at Chikurubi female prison specifically for the prison officers. The purpose of this workshop was to address any suspicions or concerns they might have had and cultivate rapport between the researcher and the prison officers. Through this proactive approach, the workshop served as a platform for providing the officers with a clear understanding of my research approach and objectives to ensure a conducive atmosphere the research project. Additionally, the workshop sought to foster a collaborative research environment where the prison officers were aware of the significance of their role in the research process and its success. By highlighting the importance of their involvement and contributions, the workshop sought to instil a sense of value and purpose among the officers, motivating them to actively participate and collaborate. The intermediary activities undertaken in this regard bore a resemblance to those described in the Staging Human Rights project led by Paul Heritage (Heritage, 2006).

Eleven prison officers from different departments, including rehabilitation, social work, clinic, reception, psyche, cash, projects, security, stores, discipline, and chapel, signed up for the workshop. Since the officers were not the primary research participants, I sought verbal consent from them before conducting the workshop. This was done to respect their autonomy and ensure their voluntary participation.

I arrived early at the open shed, the designated space for our workshop, and observed as the officers come in with their office chairs. The shed is the central place where prisoners and officers assemble for announcements, meetings, events and where prisoners spend their days. The officers chose to sit on chairs in order to maintain their status and power in the face of the prisoners who were watching. To start the workshop, we played some traditional games. Afterwards, I gave the officers name tags and asked them to fill them out with either their nicknames or any other names they felt comfortable with. I noticed that most of them chose to put down their family names. It is a common practice in many correctional facilities for officers to be addressed by their surnames as a way to

establish a sense of authority and maintain order and discipline. Being addressed by their surnames signifies a formal and professional relationship between the officer and the inmates. It is possible that by using their formal mode of address in the workshop, the officers wanted to remind me of the power dynamic that existed within the prison environment, where the officers had a position of authority over the prisoners and possibly over me as well. By choosing to retain their professionalism, they may have intended to make me feel that this was not a personal or informal relationship.

For the main activity of the workshop, I chose a role-play exercise which I facilitated with a warrant of committal to prison. The role-playing involved the officers taking on the roles of different prisoners in different scenarios that they were familiar with from their expertise and experiences as officers. I told them that they would take on the identity of a specific prisoner for the duration of the workshop and had to respond and act in that role. To start the exercise, I asked the officers to introduce themselves to the group as the prisoner they were portraying. The officers-in-role used their knowledge from the record keeping to narrate stories of the circumstances that led them to offend and what they left behind. As they continued to share and interview each other in role, they started revealing some of the judgemental comments they pass to the female prisoners. For example, some of the officers would call repeated offenders' *mudzoki,'* which is a degrading name for repeated offenders, even though they knew their names. Other judgemental remarks were towards foreign prisoners. During the workshop, the university students and I gained an understanding of the power dynamics at play between the officers and foreign prisoners. We learned that the officers categorise and call the prisoners by their crimes and nationality, which perpetuates a system of dehumanisation through the use of labels.

During the role-playing activity, one of the officers in role made a telling remark that the inmates refer to the officers as 'jail guards' instead of 'correctional officers'. The officers view this term as a highly demeaning and disrespectful expression that reduces their role to that of mere 'guards', who are solely responsible for keeping inmates confined. The use of such language has a powerful impact on how both parties perceive and treat each other. It reinforces negative stereotypes and making it more challenging for them to relate to each other amicably.

The workshop provided a safe space for the officers to reflect on their practices and assumptions, and to consider the potential implications of their language and behaviours on the lives of the prisoners they work with. Through the workshop's reflections, the officers admitted that they had never previously considered the implications of naming and labelling on the inmates, highlighting a gap in their understanding of the impact of language on power dynamics. The officers grappled with the realisation that their use of dehumanising language could reinforce the dominant narrative of prisoners as less than human and further justify their status as powerless and undeserving of

empathy or compassion. The officers commented on how the workshop made them gain a deeper understanding of marginalised groups' challenges and the potential for change through collective action.

Furthermore, the officers discussed the complex tension between acknowledging the incarcerated women's humanity and maintaining their own position of authority. The officers explained that they have a duty to maintain order and discipline in a volatile environment, and to protect themselves and other staff members, as well as the offenders in their care. This requires a certain degree of control and authority. At the same time, they also have a responsibility to acknowledge the humanity of offenders. This means treating them with respect and dignity and recognising that they are individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. However, there are times when the need for control and authority can come into conflict with the need to acknowledge the humanity of offenders. This difficult tension which I discuss later in this thesis, was further explored in a workshop with both prisoners and officers.

The workshop was of potential value to the research project in several ways. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for the officers to engage in participation and discussion. Their openness to engage suggests that the officers were interested in the project and willing to learn more about it. By doing so, they felt like part of the research and were willing to give their support to the researcher and the study. Additionally, the workshop provided an opportunity for the officers to see the research project as a collaborative effort rather than a threat to their authority or position. By seeing the project as a collaborative effort, the officers were more willing to share their expertise and knowledge. Finally, the workshop provided the officers with insights about my approach to working with the incarcerated women and all they subsequently requested was anonymisation in the writing of the study.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

An emphasis on ethics was essential to this research for several reasons including the history of research involving prisoners, the underfunded Zimbabwean ethics boards and institutional review boards and the lack of an agreed ethical board for applied theatre. I was very deliberate about my choices and decisions in order to maintain a high ethical standard. Wilson (2020) points to the value of relationality and one's accountability to one's relations. The first step was to identify the communities I was to be accountable to and how I would give back to each one. These questions are paramount in indigenous research (Kovach, 2018). My communities consisted of the ZPCS, my university, the officers in charge of the women and the women in prison.

3.4.1 Ethics Approval from the University

The initial phase of ethical research involved obtaining ethics approval from the University of Leeds. This process entailed an in-depth outline of the research in line with the principles and guidelines for conducting research in an ethically appropriate manner. The ethics application was assessed

against the university's ethical framework and the evaluation adhered to the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research.

During the process of obtaining ethical approval for my research project, I encountered some challenges with the university research ethics committee, particularly with regards to the consent form. While I proposed an inclusive and participatory approach to obtaining consent, given that many women in prison have low literacy levels, the Committee insisted on a need for the participant-facing documentation. This experience raises important questions about the nature of institutional ethical clearance, which often prioritises a Western concept of informed consent that places excessive emphasis on a contractual agreement between researcher and participant while overlooking the nuanced relationships that can develop between them. In doing so, the university's policies and regulations may take precedence over the researcher's ethical guidelines, creating future conflicts and ethical dilemmas.

The institutional requirement of ethical clearance can be perceived as a mere bureaucratic formality, which fails to adequately account for the complex and nuanced experiences and cultural contexts of research participants. Regrettably, as researchers, we often become complicit in perpetuating such culturally insensitive practices, as we are compelled to obtain ethical clearance to proceed with our research endeavours. This unwittingly reinforces a narrow and homogenous approach to ethical research, which ignores alternative perspectives and ultimately fails to consider the diverse needs and concerns of our research participants. It is therefore imperative that we as researchers become more reflective and critical in our approach to ethical clearance, actively challenging and disrupting institutional norms that perpetuate cultural insensitivity and promoting more inclusive and culturally responsive ethical practices.

3.4.2 African Centred Ethics

The ethical framework for this study was informed by Chilisa's (2007) African-centred ethical conceptualisation. An African-centred ethical framework is one that is grounded in the values and principles of African cultures and traditions. There is a great deal of diversity across the continent, therefore, I drew from the values and principles of the specific context of Zimbabwean society. The language of morality in many sub-Saharan African societies gives insight into the moral or ethical thinking of the society. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, there is no direct word for ethics. The word *hunhu* means morality or ethics. A person would say *'Haana hunhu'* directly translated as 'she has no humanity' meaning 'she has no character, 'she is immoral', 'she is unethical'. Character, humanity and moral personhood are central notions of ethics. From these principles, an ethical framework emerged that emphasised my accountability as the researcher and respectful relationships with the researched.

An intriguing facet of this ethical framework is the inherent tension that emerges when endeavouring to apply it to a demographic, such as prisoners, whose actions may be deemed wrongful or morally objectionable within their own cultural context, thereby transgressing the ethical principles the framework espouses. This dilemma poses a complex challenge as we seek to establish guidelines for moral conduct. In the context of my research involving women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons, the concept of accountability emerged prominently. Introducing the ethical framework of accountability during sessions provided the women with an opportunity to engage with these issues in practice.

In addition, conducting this research in a '*hunhu*' way was important also because of the societal judgement and stigmatisation that women in prison face for their perceived transgressions of established moral norms through their involvement in crime and criminality. By adopting an ethical framework rooted in '*hunhu,'* the research aimed to challenge prevailing stereotypes and biases that tend to cast female prisoners solely as perpetrators of immorality. It recognised that individuals' actions should be understood within their unique socio-cultural contexts and not solely defined by the criminal label assigned to them. '*Hunhu*' encompasses ideals of compassion, empathy, and respect for others. It emphasises the importance of recognising the shared humanity of all individuals, regardless of their past actions or circumstances.

Despite the strengths of the framework, its application presents certain limitations that warrant critical examination. One notable concern is the framework's reliance on culturally specific values, such as *hunhu*. While this cultural grounding ensures that the research study is conducted in a manner that is both relevant and respectful within the Shona context, it also risks marginalising perspectives that do not align with this particular worldview. The Shona concept of *hunhu* emphasises morality, character, and shared humanity, deeply rooted in communal ethics (Magosvongwe, 2016; Samkange and Samkange, 1980). However, when applied to a heterogeneous group, such as women in prison who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and hold differing personal experiences and ethical values, the framework struggles to fully capture the complexity of their perspectives.

Ruby Magosvongwe highlights that 'land/ *Ivhu*/soil is very much at the centre of the Shona philosophy of *unhu* and its onomastics, including what being *munhu* entails' (2016: 160). Magosvongwe's (2016) observation highlights a cultural connection between identity and the land. In Shona cosmology, to be *munhu* (a person) is intimately tied to the land—specifically, Zimbabwean soil—symbolising a deep relationship between individuals and their ancestral heritage. This philosophy positions the land as not only a physical resource but also a spiritual anchor that defines belonging, morality, and community. She further contends that 'to belong then is divine, and destinies are intertwined with the land/soil/*ivhu'*(2016:160). However, this culturally specific emphasis on land and its ties to personal and collective identity potentially marginalises people from other nations, particularly in contexts

where diverse cultural groups, such as prisons, are involved. For female prisoners who do not share this connection to Zimbabwean soil, or for those from diasporic or displaced communities, the emphasis on *ivhu* as central to being *munhu* may create a sense of exclusion. It risks sidelining their identities and ethical perspectives, which may be grounded in different cultural or spiritual understandings. Thus, while the Shona philosophy of *hunhu* fosters a deep sense of belonging and community among those connected to Zimbabwean land, it may struggle to fully accommodate or resonate with individuals whose identities are shaped by different geographical or cultural experiences.

The application of *hunhu* within the context of prison research reveals a fundamental tension between its ethical principles and prevailing societal perceptions of incarcerated individuals. At its core, *hunhu* emphasises compassion, empathy, and respect for all people (Magosvongwe, 2016). According to Magosvongwe (2016) a virtuous person, or *munhu chaiye*, is one who fulfils their social duties and upholds values such as peace, justice, freedom, and stability for the collective well-being. In contrast, those who fail to meet these responsibilities are often viewed as *munhu pasina* (a person of no worth) or *munhu asina musoro* (a senseless or irresponsible person), reinforcing a dichotomy between those considered morally good and those deemed to lack social value.

This dichotomy becomes particularly salient in the context of incarcerated individuals, who are often stigmatised and perceived as embodying moral failure. While *hunhu* advocates for non-violence and denounces visible acts of violence perpetrated by individuals, repressive systems, or radicalised groups (Magosvongwe, 2016; Samkange and Samkange, 1980), it also faces challenges in reconciling its inclusive ethos with the exclusionary moral judgements society frequently places on prisoners. The philosophy urges society to move beyond overt violence and recognise the more insidious, structural forms of violence that shape social and legal responses to crime (Magosvongwe, 2016). Yet, within the prison setting, where individuals are often seen through the lens of their transgressions, the compassionate and restorative aspects of *hunhu* risk being overshadowed by punitive moral narratives that frame prisoners as inherently deviant or irredeemable. This tension raises critical questions about how *hunhu* can be applied in ways that remain true to its ethical foundations while engaging meaningfully with the complexities of moral perception in the prison context.

Additionally, while the framework's emphasis on accountability is crucial for maintaining ethical integrity in research, it also introduces complexities in its practical application, particularly in the context of prison research. In the *hunhu* framework, accountability places a significant responsibility on the researcher to prioritise the well-being of participants and to ensure that their narratives are treated with dignity and respect. However, in the prison setting—where power imbalances are pronounced—this emphasis on accountability intensifies the researcher’s obligation to navigate these dynamics with greater sensitivity and care. While transparency is a key element of accountability,

involving clear communication about the research process, it may inadvertently complicate interactions with participants. Given their vulnerable position, some participants might perceive this level of transparency as intrusive or overwhelming, adding to their sense of surveillance and powerlessness. These tensions between ethical accountability and participant comfort demand careful negotiation, a challenge I explore in detail in Chapter Six through the lens of my own research practice.

3.4.3 Doing Ethics: Rethinking Approaches in Prison Theatre Research

The history of research involving prisoners is plagued with illustrations of exploitation and abuse (see Gostin, Vanchieri and Pope, 2007; Murphy, 2005; Pont, 2008). Upon arrival to prison, prisoners face restrictions on liberty and autonomy, and limited privacy, which can be barriers to the prerequisites of ethical research such as the acquisition of voluntary informed consent and protection of privacy. Within the Zimbabwean context more specifically, female prisoners are vulnerable to signing up to 'new' prison programmes which may be harmful to them because of the limited programmes in female prisons.

Secondly, the Zimbabwean situation with regards to research ethics boards and institutional review boards is a troubling and worrying one. The Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ) which is responsible for ethics review was set up in 1974 by the then Rhodesian government (Mielke and Ndebele, 2004). After independence, the parliament of Zimbabwe set up Institutional Ethical Review Boards in major institutions to work independently but reporting to MRCZ. Despite the protective intention of the boards, the codes, guidelines and regulations are not sufficient to prevent the abuse and exploitation of prisoners. Because membership to these boards is voluntary, unpaid and unrecognised as legitimate professional activity by management in the institutions (Mielke and Ndebele, 2004), the boards are critically underequipped. Ethics review is viewed as a nuisance. There is no effective monitoring of research and no support from the government financially and administratively. Furthermore, the MRCZ has not undergone significant reviews or updates since its establishment by the Rhodesian government. As a result, the guidelines, policies, and regulations remain outdated and fail to address the current context effectively.

Finally, there is currently no agreed ethical board for applied theatre to guide practitioners (Nicholson, 2005a). An attempt at creating an Ethics Charter for Applied Theatre and theatre practitioners was once made in November of 2008 at Witwatersrand University, South Africa (see Barnes, 2011). The outcome of the workshop was that ethics are slippery, culture and context specific and, therefore, should not become a straight-jacket or an instrument for policing fieldwork. Even if an Ethics Charter were to exist, Jenny Hughes contends that 'conformity to a code of ethics does not guarantee ethical practice' (cited in Nicholson, 2005a: 121). Additionally, challenges arise regarding the board's jurisdiction and representation. Therefore, doing ethics is something that I had to negotiate throughout the research process.

The pilot programme was advertised to the Chikurubi female prisoners by a correctional officer in the social work department by word of mouth. I arrived to know that thirty-three women had signed up for the project. I divided the participants into two groups for management purposes and met with each group for two hours over two days, for two weeks. The correctional officer had screened them according to their 'class', a classification system constructed by the prison system. The class system allows for prisoners' individualised treatment, which came with reformatory agendas. The prison officers selected the participants based on having received their sentences, their good behaviour and that they did not pose a threat to security and were physically, emotionally and mentally healthy to participate in the research. However, as an external researcher, I was not directly involved in the selection process, leaving me uncertain whether the selected participants had willingly and fully understood the research's purpose and requirements before agreeing to participate. Additionally, I was unaware of the interest and willingness of the prisoners on remand, who may have been marginalised by the prison officers, to participate in the research project. To address these concerns and ensure that the participants were making informed decisions regarding their involvement, I recognised the need to establish a separate recruitment and selection process that would uphold ethical principles. This process, which I referred to as 'performing ethical consent,' which I discuss below, aimed to ensure that participants had a comprehensive understanding of the research project and its implications before providing their consent to participate.

Performing Ethical Consent

The process of performing ethical consent involved providing detailed information about the research study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits through participation. This method was intended to create an inclusive and participatory approach, giving all potential participants an equal opportunity to freely ask questions, express any concerns, and make an informed choice about their involvement. Furthermore, this approach aimed to uphold principles of transparency, autonomy, and informed decision-making among potential participants. It encompassed various activities such as engagement in indigenous traditional games, participation in talking circles, communal sharing of meals, and engaging in prayer and devotion, all of which are elaborated upon subsequently.

Indigenous Traditional Games and Embodied Consent

Given the above, my understanding of consent transcended the conventional notion of a verbal agreement or written signature on a form. Instead, I embraced a holistic perspective that viewed consent as an embodied experience, acknowledging that the body serves as a vessel for expressing and comprehending consent. In light of this understanding, the utilisation of indigenous traditional games became an invaluable tool for female prisoners to fully embody the concept of consent. The games, characterised by their physical nature and interactivity, provided an immersive platform that facilitated the embodiment of consent among the female prisoners. The significance of this approach

was particularly pronounced within the context of female prisons, as it offered an opportunity for the incarcerated women to establish personal space and boundaries within an environment that often lacks such privileges. For example, in one of the games that involved physical touching, some participants would playfully run away to avoid being touched. By engaging in this game, these women were able to reclaim a sense of agency and control over their bodies, even within the confines of the prison space. This empowering experience allowed them to assert their boundaries, preferences and consent in a manner that transcended verbal communication. This nonverbal approach to consent was particularly empowering for the prisoners, as it granted them a means of expression that was independent of the limitations imposed upon them within the prison context.

One intriguing observation that emerged from the incorporation of traditional games was that the engagement extended beyond the initially selected participants identified by the correctional officers. Notably, I observed that even prisoners, including foreign nationals, who were not initially chosen, were fascinated by the traditional games and demonstrated interest by observing and participating in the games from the sidelines of the open shed. This dynamic highlighted the power of the games in capturing the interests of individuals who were not officially included in the research process. Understanding the importance of inclusivity and the potential insights that could be gained from the participation of a diverse group of prisoners, I approached the correctional officers to discuss the possibility of involving the interested foreign prisoners in the research project.

The indigenous traditional games were a powerful method for deepening the participants' understanding of what participation truly meant, emphasising cooperation and collaboration. Many of the traditional games which we played required participants to work together, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of the significance of collaborative work. Through the interactive experience of engaging in gameplay, individuals had the opportunity to develop their ability to interpret nonverbal cues and demonstrate respect for each other's boundaries. Furthermore, these games served as a platform for the participants to spend quality time together, fostering a sense of familiarity and enabling the establishment of relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

The incorporation of traditional games into the consent process was motivated by a commitment to cultivate cultural relevance, respect, and engagement among the community members involved in the research study. Notably, some of the participants expressed surprise upon realising my familiarity with some of the traditional games, despite my age and Western educational background. The shared experience of engaging in these traditional games was important for building trust between myself and the participants. It was instrumental in shaping the participants' perception of me not as an outsider imposing my own research objectives, but as one of them who genuinely appreciated and understood the depth of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. Additionally, it was instrumental in acknowledging that their cultural heritage was not only honoured but also

incorporated into the research process. This culturally sensitive approach allowed for the incorporation of their perspectives and ensured that the consent process was meaningful and relevant to their lived experiences. A comprehensive exploration of the role of indigenous traditional games in the research study will be further examined in Chapter Five.

The Talking Circle

The talking circle was a crucial aspect of the performing consent process. According to Margaret Kovach (2009), an indigenous scholar from Saskatchewan, Canada, the talking circle is a traditional practice found in various indigenous cultures worldwide. It involves sitting in a circle, often around a sacred object, and engaging in respectful and intentional dialogue. Within this circle, individuals are encouraged to speak and listen from the heart, sharing their perspectives, stories, and experiences. The talking circle emphasises equality, active listening, and maintaining a non-judgemental and confidential space.

The method of a talking circle held significant potential in relation to the consent process within the research project. By adopting this method, participants were given the opportunity to fully understand the project's objectives, specifically the disclosure of personal information and sharing of lived experiences, within a safe, supportive, and respectful environment, as this information constituted the data for the research. The circle format employed in the talking circle served as a powerful symbol of collective exploration, signifying a shared inquiry into the research project.

The talking circle enabled me as the researcher to provide participants with comprehensive information about the study's purpose, along with a thorough examination of potential risks and benefits. In this setting, participants actively engaged by asking questions and seeking clarifications about the direct benefits of participation and the level of confidentiality they could expect. I made sure to provide the women with honest and transparent answers to their questions, assuring them that there was not going to be financial benefits to participation and the information they shared would be kept confidential and not used against them. The women also acknowledged their ability to establish boundaries concerning the disclosure of their life stories. These boundaries encompassed considerations such as legal implications, safety concerns, fear of stigma and judgement, trauma and emotional triggers, as well as social dynamics, especially when directly prompted by either me or other participants. Each individual's reasons for setting these boundaries varied based on their personal experiences, values, and circumstances. By facilitating these discussions, the talking circle ensured that participants' consent was fully informed and reflected their agency and autonomy.

The utilisation of the circle format within the talking circle also highlighted the significance of agreement and consensus, promoting a sense of collaborative decision-making within the group. It

is worth noting that in some research, consensus has been scrutinised as potentially coercive, leading individuals to act in ways that conflict with their values (see Jancovich and Stevenson, 2019: 176). While the overall tendency leaned towards consensus approaches, it's crucial to note that women retained the agency to opt out, signifying their ability to withdraw consent at any point. This nuanced approach recognised the cultural context while upholding the ethical principles of individual autonomy and respect for participants' rights.

Furthermore, the utilisation of a circle as a fundamental element in the talking circle held significant significance in this process. Drawing upon the ritual symbolism of a circle, which is associated with continuity and empowerment (Turner, 1955), the talking circle served as a representation of consent as an ongoing process throughout the research process. Anjum Halai (2006) notes how the process of negotiating consent is not an event, but a process. The circle's symbolism of continuity highlighted the importance of periodically revisiting the consent agreement. This practice facilitated ongoing dialogue and reaffirmed consent, actively acknowledging and respecting the participants' agency and autonomy at all stages of the research.

Lastly, the circle was powerful in its potential to create a ritual practice for the research process that subverted the prison space. In Chikurubi and Shurugwi female prisons, women are required to stand, sit and walk in straight lines. It is a part of prison management but also a punitive measure. The women form lines for nearly all activities including assemblies, getting food, going outside for their chores, roll call, searches, entering cells and so forth. Asking the women to walk in a line is asking them to 'walk in line' with the prison systems' rules and regulations. In contrast, the circle format employed within the research context allowed for a departure from the rigid linear structure imposed by the prison system. By working in a circle, the participants were provided with an alternative spatial arrangement that challenged the prison's prescribed order. This departure from the norm created by the circle format aligned with Victor Turner's concept of a 'ritual of rebellion' (1955: 54), which describes a temporal structure that subverts and challenges the official social order.

Prayer and Devotion

The process of spiritual guidance through song and prayer was an integral part of our consent process. The opening prayer invoked *Musikavanhu*, the Creator of life, to provide love, care, understanding, and respect for one another. The prayer instilled a sense of oneness, emphasising that we (participants and I) all come from the same source of life. We closed with a prayer for me at the end of each session. The participants prayed for guidance in my research, protection on my journey back home, and success in my future endeavours. The prayer was an act of kindness and generosity, and I felt grateful for their support and encouragement. I carried the participants' prayers with me, and they continue to hold great meaning in my work.

I interpreted the participants' prayer for me as a form of consent. In this context, the prayer symbolised their willingness and agreement to participate in what they perceived as the purpose and objectives of the research project. When the women prayed for me to succeed, they were performing their feeling of approval and willingness to participate. It was an act of will. The position that I articulate and defend here is that there is always an expressive dimension to consent - that consent is performative. Through spiritual rituals like prayer, participants not only consented to the research but also indicated their desire to establish a relationship with me based on mutual respect and trust. However, it's important to recognise that in societies where collective prayer holds significant cultural or religious importance, opting out may carry social consequences. This raises concerns about the potential coercive nature of such rituals, where participation might not always be entirely voluntary despite outward expressions of willingness. Therefore, while prayer may signal consent, it is essential to consider the broader socio-cultural context and the nuances of individual agency within collective practices.

Overall, performing ethical consent asked participants to consent on four levels offered by Chilisa (2012), including at the level of individual, prison community, participating group, and collective. By granting their consent to participate, the women were not only agreeing to their individual involvement but also assuming responsibility for representing their group and the wider prison community. This highlighted the importance of understanding consent as a collective act in sub-Saharan societies rather than solely an individual one. The significance of collective consent in this research study was that I gained more understanding of the study’s implications and potential consequences while also ensuring that participants fully understood and agreed to the terms of their involvement.

Performing ethical consent explored the risks of participation and level of commitment. The process was significant since many of the participants had poor reading skills. Moreover, the consent process involved explaining key aspects of the study, including the duration of the project, the incentives offered, anonymity and confidentiality, and the intended use and access of the data collected.

Signing the Consent Form

The final part of completing the formal institutionalised component of ‘doing was signing the consent form. I left each participant with an informed consent form and research information sheet which I had explained during the workshop sessions. Despite the fact that the women were already familiar with the research through their experience and practice in performing consent, I still went to great lengths to ensure that the participants signed the consent forms to fully comply with the ethical guidelines of the university research ethics committee. This was institutional pressure that the women understood. I was committed to ethical research practices and the importance of transparency in all stages of the research process. My approach not only strengthened the ethical

integrity of the study but also reflected my deep commitment to respecting the rights and dignity of all participants involved in the research.

The process of performing ethical consent with the research participants proved powerful when several women freely decided to withdraw from the research study in order to attend their prison chores. This voluntary withdrawal highlighted the participants' ability to exercise their agency and make autonomous choices, a potential outcome of engaging in the process of ethical consent.

3.5 Main Project with Participants at Chikurubi Female Prisons (The Creative Process)

The main research project consisted of a group comprising thirteen women as participants. In choosing these participants, I carefully considered several important demographic variables, such as age and level of education. However, the most critical factor in my selection process was identifying those who were fully committed to the project for five months and willing to delve deeply into their personal experiences. I specifically sought out participants who expressed a strong desire to engage in thoughtful and reflective conversations about themselves. Although I initially hesitated to consider the nature of the crimes for which the women were convicted, it became clear that these factors had a significant impact on the group dynamics. The crimes among women in Zimbabwean prisons create a hierarchy based on the severity of crimes which influence power dynamics and social interactions in prison. Individuals found guilty of rape are met with less acceptance by others. The nature and seriousness of the crime committed by each participant played a role in determining the individual's standing within the group. Those who have committed less severe offences held a higher level of acceptance and influence within the group. This dynamic impacted decision- making, leadership roles, and other aspects of the group's interactions. Ultimately, I chose the final thirteen participants based on the constraints of the available working space. The only available area was an open shed, which had limited capacity and could accommodate only a few individuals while still enabling them to move around freely during workshops.

When I asked the participants about their motivations for taking part, they provided a variety of responses that reflected their individual reasons. Some said they were motivated by personal growth and a desire for positive change, which suggests that they may have seen the project as an opportunity to challenge themselves. Others said they were motivated by the chance to develop their acting skills, which suggests that they had a specific interest in the artistic aspects of the project. The fact that some participants were attracted to the project as a way to break free from routine and explore new avenues suggests that they were seeking to escape from the monotony of everyday life for something excitement. Finally, some participants were motivated simply by the chance to have fun, suggesting that they may have seen the project as a low-pressure, enjoyable activity that they could engage in with others, which reflects a desire for social interaction. Overall, the diversity of

motivations suggests that the project had a broad appeal for the participants. I then used these motivations as a basis of decision making about how to structure the next bits of the project in order to provide a dynamic and rewarding experience for all involved. However, while understanding the motivations of participants is crucial, it can be difficult to balance the needs and interests of participants who may have very different goals or expectations for the project. Moreover, there is a risk of overemphasising the needs of certain participants over others, which can lead to feelings of exclusion or frustration.

We engaged mostly in games in our initial workshop with the chosen participants. After the first session, the women expressed their discontent with the restrictive nature of their dress uniforms and sought something more comfortable to rehearse in. We ultimately settled on black t-shirts and bottoms that provided comfort and effectively concealed dirt. I sought permission from the officer in charge of the Chikurubi female prison to bring in rehearsal costumes. However, to expedite the process, the officer suggested that I donate the costumes to the prison instead. In typical circumstances, donors are required to sign donation forms for accountability purposes. Yet, this procedure was waived in my case, with the officer deeming it unnecessary due to the small quantity of items involved. This level of trust is not easily given, especially in other countries such as the UK, where costumes are highly monitored and regulated due to their potential use as escape tools. The fact that the officer felt secure in my bringing clothes possibly speaks to the fact that trust had been established between us. This was a crucial milestone in our collaborative effort to create a safe and nurturing environment for the participants. I expand on the practice of costuming in Chapter Four.

3.6 How I ran the workshops

I visited Chikurubi prison three times a week, spending two hours per session from November to December 2019. Subsequently, in January 2020, I went in every day to spend more time rehearsing and refining the final production. Over the course of these visits, I conducted a total of 60 workshops. In the diagram below, I show how a workshop with the main research participants ran. The workshops consisted of main activities that were regular in every workshop (highlighted in green) and activities which we introduced at a later stage (highlighted in blue).

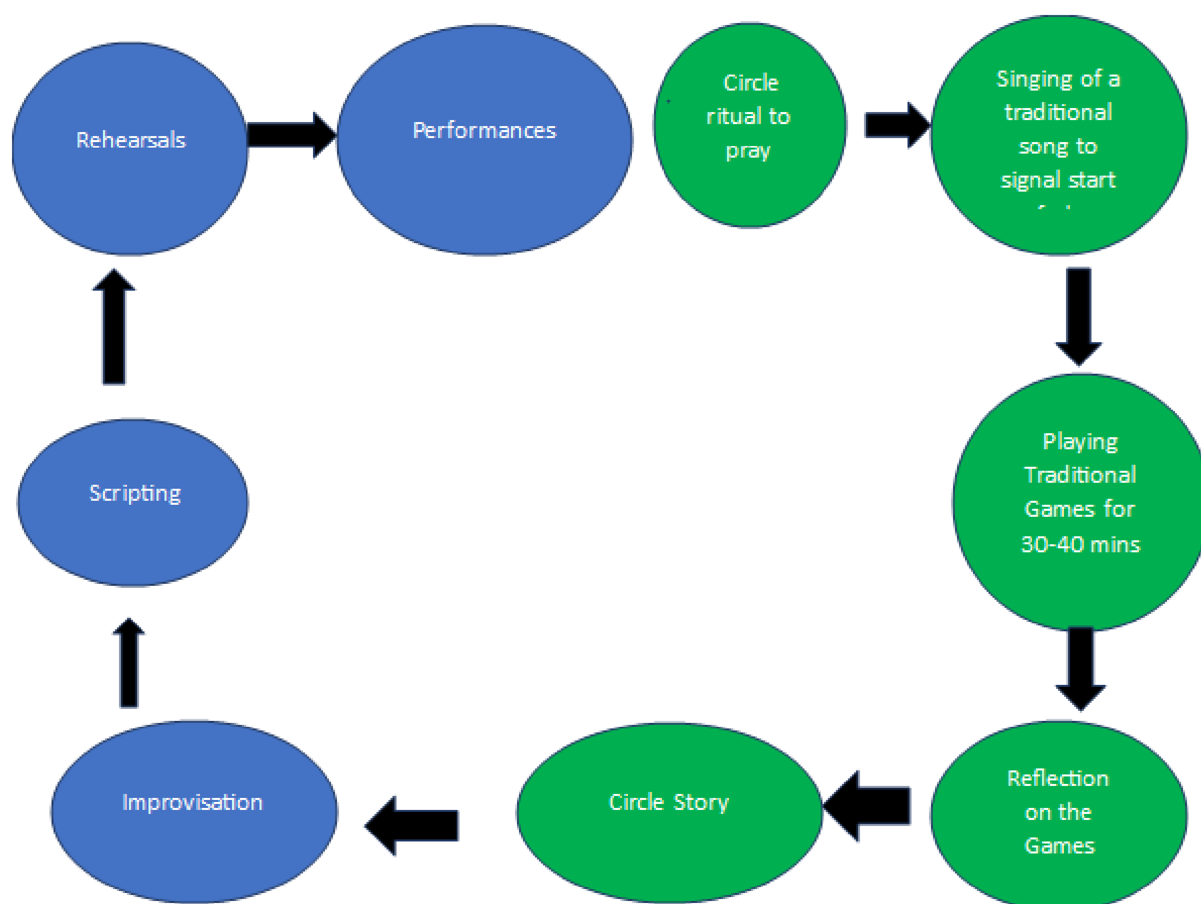


Image 2: How a workshop with the main research participants ran

Each session began and ended with a soulful song and prayer for guidance, setting the tone for our time together. Initially, the tradition was introduced by a participant, Holier-than-thou, who felt it would be beneficial to start and conclude sessions with a spiritual tone. Over time, as the group continued to meet and collaborate, the practice gained significance and became an integral part of the sessions. Following prayer, we engaged in playing games which dominated our sessions at the outset of the project. The games offered some insights into the group's dynamics. While most games were easily recognisable, slight variations emerged among the participants. Although I had prepared my own set of games, I encouraged the participants to introduce, facilitate, and play their own games. The participants, particularly those aged 36-55, related more to traditional childhood games, while those aged 17-35 gravitated towards contemporary Zimbabwean games. Their involvement in the process, from introducing their own games to steering the research project's direction, bestowed ownership of the process onto the participants. *Sarura Wako, Tinotsvaga Maonde,* and *Tauuya Kuzoona Mary* emerged as the participants' favourite games, with their lively energy and immersive nature captivating the participants. I provide more details on these games in Chapter Five.

After each game, I led the participants in a reflective exercise about the games to provide an

opportunity for them to connect with others who may have had similar experiences in playing. John Dewey's (1910) conceptualisation of reflection, though initially framed within the context of learning, maintains relevance in the domain of applied theatre. Dewey (1910:33) defined reflection as a process of making meaning that fosters deeper understanding by connecting experiences, a systematic and rigorous mode of thinking, an interactive activity occurring in the presence of others, and a means of valuing personal and intellectual growth. In the context of my research project, reflection emphasised the thoughtful exploration and critical analysis of experiences and actions within theatrical processes.

I posed reflective questions – a key component of facilitation in applied drama, regarding the participants' involvement in the games. These questions aimed to guide the participants towards a state of critical reflection on the games and their lived experiences. The practice of posing questions finds ample illustration in the research of Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton (2006), who extensively delve into the art of questioning across diverse educational settings. Their investigation categorises questions into a taxonomy of personal engagement, and through concrete examples, they illustrate how such questions can effectively stimulate both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of students.

As we progressed, the games became more directed, centring on themes that emerged from the reflections. The women began to weave autobiographical stories, drawing from their personal experiences to make sense of their narratives. To delve deeper into the narratives surrounding the women's relationships and experiences of incarceration, two methods were employed: the research-sharing circle and conversational methods. The research-sharing circle method is an open-structured narrative style that respects story-sharing within a community's cultural context and establishes meaningful connections among the participants as they relate to each other's stories (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2020). The method allows for a deeper meaning-making of the topics as it provides a holistic perspective on the issue at hand and draws from the group's collective experiences.

The utilisation of the research-sharing circle method highlighted a compelling dynamic rooted in the community's specific protocols, which I had to carefully navigate to ensure the smooth operation of the research process. As Wilson, 2008 aptly notes, 'cultural practices include the proper protocol for building of healthy relationships' (cited in Chilisa 2012:121). Simply put, protocols are rules for ensuring an honourable relationship between two parties. Within the context of my research, adherence to certain protocols, many of which constitute an intricate web of unwritten rules governing relationships, was paramount. For example, among the Shona and Ndebele communities, it is customary for younger individuals to address adults who are roughly the same age as their parents as *Amai* (Mother) or *Baba* (Father). This cultural practice dictates interactions characterised by reverence and respect akin to those with one's parents. Consequently, my interactions with certain

prison officers and older participants were shaped by this dynamic, influencing my interaction with them.

Within this context, two distinct dynamics emerged. Firstly, the obligation to demonstrate respect to prison officers reflected a familiar power dynamic within the prison environment, which was essential for maintaining access and facilitating research activities. Secondly, assuming a posture of respect towards prison officers subtly subverted traditional power dynamics that typically privilege to external practitioners.

With the older participants, assuming a role akin to that of a parent in the absence of my own parents created a sense of care and responsibility towards me. My engagement with the participants was primarily guided by ethical research practices, respect for their perspectives and experiences, and a commitment to producing rigorous academic work. Ultimately, the participants' support contributed to a positive research environment.

Therefore, while both dynamics necessitate the demonstration of respect, their implications and underlying power dynamics differ significantly, underscoring the nuanced interplay between cultural norms, power relations, and research methodologies within the prison environment. This intricate interplay not only shapes the researcher's interactions but also influences the broader research process and outcomes.

Conversational storytelling further enriched the narrative landscape, offering informal yet meaningful interactions with female prisoners and officers. Unlike traditional interviews, these conversations unfolded organically in various settings, including the communal kitchen, at the main entrance gate, in the cells, corridors and in workshops, allowing for reflective dialogue and relational engagement. The participants in this research study shared with me and with each other numerous stories about their lives. The stories were a synthesis of the self that is intricately entangled within a complex web of relationships other people including children, partners, families, prison officers and fellow incarcerated individuals.

As the participants delved into their personal narratives, a natural inclination arose within them to embody those stories. One striking instance occurred when Magaro stood up and vividly portrayed the chaos of prison life, exclaiming, *'Unongomuka wototanga kupenga mujeri sezvizvi; hona Chichi'* (You just wake up one morning and start acting like this; look Chichi) (Magaro, in Chinhanu personal diary, 2019-2020). It was from this moment that the title of the thesis *'Kupenga Mujeri'* emerged. Soon, others joined in, and we began improvising various themes drawn from their own experiences. This improvisational process significantly expanded the spectrum of meaning-making.

With the spontaneous creation of numerous short scenes, a desire emerged among the participants to craft a full play. Interestingly, they sought to script it, aiming to maintain coherence and direction

in conveying their intended themes and messages. The process of writing not only provided a means of documentation but also facilitated the crafting of a collective story that resonated with the participants' experiences and aspirations. While this journaling process fostered a sense of collective storytelling, it's important to acknowledge that each participant's narrative was unique and may not necessarily contribute to a singular collective story. Instead, the journaling process represented a moment in time where individual voices converged and intersected, enriching the broader narrative landscape.

With a growing interest in sharing their stories with a wider audience, the participants embarked on scriptwriting their collective narrative for performance. Having a scripted story allowed the group to maintain a clear direction and consistency in their narrative, ensuring that the themes and messages they wished to convey remained intact. Scripting offered the participants a tangible framework, providing them with a reference point and a sense of security in the storytelling process. It empowered them to shape the storyline, characters, and themes, while also allowing for the flexibility to make changes and revisions that reflected their evolving perspectives and experiences. Fundamentally, the process of writing a script was a deliberate act of self-representation, driven by the desire to project a favourable image they wished others to perceive, which was intended to serve as a strategic tool for navigating social dynamics. This phenomenon highlighted the nuanced dynamics of storytelling within the context of imprisonment. It demonstrated the power of narrative in shaping perceptions, constructing identities, and negotiating relationships within carceral environments.

The act of writing itself was a form of resistance. Scripting allowed the participants to create their own narratives resonating with the theory of African womanism, particularly the tenets of self-naming and self-definition (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Through writing, the participants endeavoured to assert their right to define themselves on their own terms, reclaiming agency over their narratives and challenging external narratives that may seek to marginalise or stigmatise them. Furthermore, the act of scripting their collective narrative also embodied the communal spirit inherent in African womanism, as it involved collaboration, solidarity, and mutual support among participants. By coming together to craft their narratives, the participants not only affirmed their individual identities but also celebrated their collective resilience, strength and solidarity as Africana women navigating the complexities of incarceration. Ultimately, the storytelling process culminated into a performance, where the participants shared their stories with a wider audience, transcending the confines of imprisonment. I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

Rehearsals for the written play took place three days a week throughout January 2020. In this phase, my role shifted from facilitator to director. While facilitation involved offering general guidance, directing brought a more structured and instructional approach. Our ritual of beginning rehearsals

with games continued, albeit with heightened intensity. I assisted the participants in developing their characters, enhancing the quality of their performances. Physical theatre techniques were integrated, staying faithful to the essence of the stories while reflecting the participants' unique interpretations. Collaboratively, we decided to incorporate dance and music, with participants contributing ideas for songs and choreography. Throughout the workshop process, I provided guidance to refine their concepts.

Although my work ethic and experimental methods occasionally challenged the participants, I remained dedicated to delivering a transformative theatrical experience. Their reactions varied, sometimes expressing awe at my unconventional methods and other times struggling to adapt to my rigorous expectations. We addressed their concerns during the end-of-day feedback sessions, where everyone had an opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the day's progress.

3.7 Lights On!

An unexpected outcome of the research project was the showcasing of the production to three different audience members including male prisoners at Chikurubi Maximum prison, prison officers and officials at Chikurubi female prison and their family and friends at JML Theatre. My primary objective did not encompass the intention to present a performance to various audiences. The sole exception was the ZPCS community, to whom I aimed to showcase our collective work. This presentation to the key gatekeepers was orchestrated with the full consent of the participants, ensuring that their agency and autonomy were upheld. Nevertheless, I found myself deviating from this original plan due to reasons that stemmed from the participants' engagement in the research process. The participants desired to exhibit and present their work beyond the confines of the prison walls – a desire that held profound importance for them. I delve into this more extensively in Chapter Six.

The 35-minute-long play was based on the lived experiences of incarcerated women in the Chikurubi female prison. Agreeing on a theatrical language for our production proved to be a challenging and significant decision. While some participants advocated for language that accurately represented the prison community, others deemed it too crude and inappropriate. The central disagreement centred around whether to include everyday prison diction or adopt more neutral terms. Some felt a responsibility to uphold the unique prisoner aesthetic, while others feared it would be too offensive for the audiences. As we aimed to portray an authentic representation of the prisoner culture in Zimbabwe, I believed it was crucial to embrace and include the 'vulgar' language. If being a female prisoner itself was already considered indecent, then honesty and truthfulness required us to speak the language of the community. However, several participants were determined to reclaim their moral standing and represent themselves in a more dignified manner. This posed a critical question for us all: for whom and for what purpose was this play intended?

This question is answered in Chapter Six. As it was both a research project and a participatory event, determining who gets to tell which stories was complex. After much contemplation, we eventually reached a compromise. The participants agreed to blend neutral language with provocative dances. This decision required us to acknowledge and balance the competing perspectives, leading to a stronger and more inclusive final product.

The first performance was at the adjacent Chikurubi male prison, a walking distance of fifteen minutes from the female facility. We had security from two officers from Chikurubi female and three from Chikurubi male prisons. The participants did not have a say on who would make up the audience members at the male prison. The prison administration selected the audience. They were prisoners in the D class, which comprised of prisoners serving longer sentences. The decision to stage the production at Chikurubi male prison was a deliberate choice by the participants, who intended to ensure that their voices were heard since they had assumed responsibility for representing the incarcerated community through their performance. However, the participants made the decision to exclude some scenes from the performance in order to perform a certain kind of embodied presence for the men. Further details and analysis follow in Chapter Six.

The second performance took place at Chikurubi female prison, where the audience consisted of an important group of individuals, including female prisoners, officers, and high-ranking ZPCS officials, such as the provincial rehabilitation coordinator, the legal directorate, public relations, deputy commanding research officer, and the DCG. This performance was a more accessible method of conveying knowledge than traditional forms of dissemination, including scientific articles.

For the final performance, we decided to take the show outside the prison, where prison shows usually happen, to the grand stage at JML Theatre in Harare. This decision marked a significant milestone for the participants and for this research study since most applied theatre work does not result in a performance. Performing for the outside audience was crucial for the participants as it had the potential to inspire hope for possibilities. The participants invited their families and friends to be part of the audience, who were contacted by the prison authorities. The show was accessible and open to the public who were encouraged to pay in cash or kind. All proceedings were donated to the participants through the prison officers who accompanied the participants.

I took on the responsibility of organising transportation for the participants to the venue, as the ZPCS could not afford it. However, obtaining clearance from the ZPCS for the participants to leave the prison premises proved to be a daunting task, as two participants were classified as Class D prisoners, considered high-risk, and not permitted to leave the prison. The officials and officers raised concerns about whether the performance could proceed without the two participants. While it was technically possible, the participants chose to stand in solidarity, refusing to proceed with the play

without them. Their actions were driven by the desire to protect their fellow participants from the stigmatisation of serving long sentences perpetuated by the prison's class system. The above scenario highlights the potential unintended consequences of interventions in correctional settings and the potential for unexpected solidarity and collective action among prisoners that might stand to disrupt prison rules (see Grant and Crossan, 2012).

Their unwavering solidarity paid off, and the two participants were eventually allowed to attend the performance. Four officers were assigned to security duties, with strict instructions not to carry any weapons or wear their prison uniforms. The participants were elated by the decision, which they saw as an indication of the DCG's true rehabilitative mindset. On the other hand, it is also possible that the decision was made as a reassessment of risk, in order to minimise the potential for any negative incidents or confrontations that could reflect poorly on the institution. On the day of the performance at the JML theatre, we left the prison early in the morning to allow for one final rehearsal on stage. The participants were ecstatic to be out of prison and to have the opportunity to wear different clothes other than their prison uniforms. Typically, incarcerated women at Chikurubi prison have limited access to opportunities for creative expression or engagement with the outside community. Therefore, they relished the chance to spend quality time with their loved ones, including their children, families, and friends, before and after the show.

The play was followed by a thought-provoking post-performance discussion facilitated by the participants, which provided a space for the audience to engage with incarcerated women's experiences and perspectives. The theatre provided an invaluable platform for the women to reconnect with their families and loved ones, something that was all too rare within the confines of the prison. The performance was an opportunity for them to showcase their talents and express themselves creatively, all while building meaningful connections and fostering a sense of community with the people who matter most to them.

3.7.1 Member-check and Farewell

In the final stage of the fieldwork phase, I returned to Chikurubi female prison to engage in a post-performance discussion with the participants about what they had observed during the performance and how they interpreted it to validate and corroborate my findings. With careful attention to detail, I had noted down the audience's reactions to the play and recorded their feedback on a post-it chart. We delved deep into these responses, engaging in a thoughtful and comprehensive discussion that illuminated new insights and perspectives that potentially enrich and expand our understanding of PPT in prison. Additionally, I shared my initial thoughts with the participants, encouraging them to review, validate, and correct any inaccuracies or discrepancies with their own experiences. As a fitting conclusion to our collaborative efforts, we celebrated with a farewell party where the women

were each given a token of appreciation from my own resources and a certificate of participation as a testament to their invaluable contributions. As a poignant reminder of our shared experiences, the women also gifted me with some cherished keepsakes.

3.8 The Write-up

Returning from the fieldwork to my desk was a bittersweet experience. On the one hand, I had gathered a wealth of fascinating and valuable information about the lives of the women I had studied. On the other hand, I faced the daunting task of deciding what to include and exclude from my research write-up. Although my approach had allowed me to collect a vast amount of data, I struggled with the thought of doing justice to the women's stories in my PhD thesis. It felt as if I was dishonouring them by relegating their experiences to just a few pages.

As I grappled with this dilemma, the Coronavirus pandemic led to me being locked down in Leeds, United Kingdom. I had to adapt to working from home, which presented challenges in maintaining focus and motivation. This was especially difficult during the write-up phase, because of isolation. I later realised that the write-up was also my story through my reflective interpretive labour.

Soyini Madison posits that 'something lingers behind after the project, something that matters' (Madison, 2011: 138). As I thought about the process of PPT with women in Zimbabwean prisons, discussed it with my supervisors, and continued reading and writing, I could feel a deeper understanding developing in my analysis of reflective practice. As a researcher, my reflection focused on understanding and expressing my thoughts about PPT in prisons. Following the conclusion of the fieldwork, I raised the question of the 'so what' regarding PPT in prisons. This deliberate inquiry sought to scrutinise a practice that had already ended, with the goal of enriching the analysis and elucidating the practice's significance. I saw my reflection as work that contributes to what remains of the enduring impact and significance of the participatory theatre project with women in Zimbabwean prisons.

Madison's (2011) concept of interpretive reflexivity as labour helped me further analyse and interpret my PPT with women in prison. By labour, she means mental or physical designated effort and its resonance, that is, 'emotional affect, material context, and shared belonging that gives it form and makes it integral to what it means to be human' (2011: 131). She further describes the labour of reflexivity as widening the space for others to enter and ride (Madison, 2011:139). To me, this space allowed me to frame the practice in a way that helps readers understand PPT in prison as an alternative way for challenging the dominant Euro-centric approaches and perspectives in prison theatre.

It may seem contradictory to transition from analysing dialogue to analysing alone, especially in research that claims to involve research participants at every step of the analysis process, as

emphasised by indigenous knowledge systems (see Smith, 2012). Nevertheless, as Madison (2011) argues, both dialogue and solitary analysis contribute to the overall process of understanding and interpretation. They can complement each other and lead to a deeper understanding of the research subject. Therefore, the analysis of the upcoming chapters integrates both the participants' interpretations and analysis, as well as my individual analysis, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter endeavoured to provide a detailed account of the research project from its beginning to its end. I discussed the creative process, the decision-making, and the emotions and thoughts that influenced the process of the project. I also discussed the challenges I faced during the research and the strategies I used to overcome them. In summary, describing a PPT process is difficult because it has many complex parts. The section that follows delves into the analysis of issues in practice.

Chapter Four: '*Munhu Wepanze*' (One from Outside Prison): Self-Identity and Self-Definition

4.1 Introduction

This chapter engages with the complexities of prison uniforms and costumes through the analytical lens of Africana womanism (see Hudson-Weems, 1993;1997; Mangena, 2013), a framework that is distinctly grounded in the lived realities, collective struggles, needs and desire of Africana women. The Africana womanist framework as employed in this chapter borrows heavily from Hudson-Weems's (1993; 1997) Africana womanism. Africana womanism offers a critical perspective that challenges the universalised narratives of mainstream feminism by centring Africana women's experiences within the context of colonial history, cultural identity, and social structures that continue to impact them today (Ntiri, 2001). By employing this lens, the chapter situates prison uniforms as more than just garments; they become symbolic of broader societal forces, such as patriarchy, racial oppression, and neocolonial power dynamics that influence the lives of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe.

Africana womanism recognises that African women's oppression is multidimensional, intersecting race, class, and gender while being profoundly shaped by colonial history and the continuing effects of neocolonialism (Hudson-Weems, 1993). This chapter critically engages with the concept of intersectionality, underscoring how the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons are influenced by the interplay of various factors, including race, gender, class, culture and the historical legacy of colonisation. Hudson-Weems' (1993) work focuses on Africana women affected by colonialism, making Africana womanism an especially pertinent framework for analysing Zimbabwe, a country with a colonial history marked by British imperial rule. Within the Zimbabwean context, Africana womanism provides a valuable lens to examine prison uniforms, not only as instruments of control and dehumanisation but also as artifacts of a system that mirrors larger structures of domination. These uniforms are embedded in a history of colonial violence and patriarchy, where the regulation of African bodies, particularly African women's bodies, has been a central mechanism of power. Thus, the chapter foregrounds how the prison environment is a microcosm of the neocolonial and gendered hierarchies that persist in Zimbabwean society.

Employing Africana womanism in the analysis of costumes allows for a deeper understanding of incarcerated women's agency within a system shaped by colonial history. Africana womanism places a strong emphasis on resistance to oppressive systems and structures, encouraging Africana women to dismantle these systems while advocating for social justice and striving for personal and communal liberation. An influential contributor to this discourse is Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), whose work brings a vital, often overlooked perspective to the intersection of culture and gender within Africana contexts. In her writings, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) explores the complex dynamics of African societies in the aftermath of colonialism, shedding light on the persistent patriarchal

structures that continue to oppress women. Her primary focus lies in the urgent need for Africana women and African societies as a whole to critically assess their roles in perpetuating these patriarchal systems. This calls for a re-evaluation of cultural practices, norms, and traditions that reinforce gender inequality, coupled with an exploration of alternative, more inclusive models of societal organisation. Through the lens of Africana womanism, these women are not merely viewed as passive victims of oppression but as active agents who navigate and resist the patriarchal conditions imposed upon them through the prison uniform.

At the core of Africana womanism are the concepts of self-definition and self-identity, particularly the practice of self-naming. This process involves Africana women actively choosing their own identities rather than accepting those imposed upon them by external forces (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ntiri, 2001). Ntiri (2001), writing within the framework of identity formation and Black consciousness, highlights that the debate around self-naming can be traced back to the 1970s. During this period, Black women in academia began to reshape definitions and paradigms aimed at self-empowerment. She contends that 'naming cannot be delegated to the oppressor, whose abuse of power has placed Blacks in various predicaments within Western contexts' (Ntiri, 2001: 165). Hudson-Weems similarly emphasises the need for Africana women to establish 'their own set of criteria for assessing their realities in both thought and action (1993:50). In a later work, she further asserts that 'the Africana womanist is indeed a self-definer, even if her definitions do not reach the broader global public arena' (Hudson-Weems, 2020: 48).

This practice of self-naming represents a powerful act of reclaiming identity, challenging stereotypes, and preserving cultural memory. It also serves as an important means of asserting agency for incarcerated women in Zimbabwe. It is evident that in naming and refining their identities and strategies for addressing everyday challenges, Africana womanism serves as a pertinent theoretical framework for women in Zimbabwean prisons. This holds particular significance considering the fact that the women's process of redefining and renaming may not reach a broader global audience due to their incarceration. the chapter explores the significance of costumes within the PPT project, investigating how they enabled women to envision and rehearse identities beyond the constraints of the prison environment. The exploration in this chapter carries significant implications for the broader discourse surrounding the lived experiences of incarcerated women. It further sheds light on the potential usefulness of costumes as a platform through which female prisoners can navigate and comprehend their incarceration experiences.

Other key elements of Africana womanism, such as adaptability and strength (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Makgato, Chaka and Mandende, 2018) are crucial for understanding how these women navigate their experiences of the prison uniform. Africana womanism frames adaptability not simply as passive acquiescence to oppressive conditions but as an active, strategic response to survive and

resist these conditions (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Makgato, Chaka and Mandende, 2018). For incarcerated women, adaptability is demonstrated in their ability to find ways to assert their individuality and maintain their sense of self within these rigid systems. This could include subtle acts of defiance, such as altering their uniforms or engaging in creative expressions of identity through costumes in performance spaces. Adaptability, in this sense, also highlights how incarcerated women can find moments of agency even within oppressive systems.

By situating prison uniforms within this broader discourse on power, identity, and resistance, this analysis deepens the understanding of incarcerated women's experiences. the examination of costumes as practice enriches the broader discourse on African women's resilience and their ongoing struggle for liberation from oppressive systems. It further sheds light on the potential usefulness of costumes as a platform through which female prisoners can navigate and comprehend their incarceration experiences.

4.2 Costumes as a Form of Engagement

On the day I arrived with the rehearsal costumes at Chikurubi female prison, the participants, including other female prisoners and officers, gathered around our working space to see them with joy and excitement. As I distributed to each participant, they proceeded to the kitchen's open space to try them on. I observed the participants strip naked, displaying their bodies bare for all to see. Surprisingly, they exhibited no hint of shame or discomfort, a testament to their familiarity with the subjectivity of surveillance and observance they endure daily. The women's bodies were laid bare not only physically but also metaphorically, highlighting the lack of agency and privacy they experience within the confines of their incarceration. It was an unsettling display of vulnerability, as I saw their bodies bear the marks of life's trials. As I continued to watch, I suddenly became aware that I, too, had unwittingly become a part of this cycle of surveillance and observation. I then looked away.

After the participants finished changing into their new costumes, the prison yard erupted with a contagious energy, and the air was filled with excitement and cheering. The new clothing accentuated the participants' body figures and features, making them walk more confidently. They strutted around the yard, shouting with pride and joy, *'ndatova munhu wepanze'* (I am now a person from outside the prison) and '*hona kastep kemunhu wepanze'* (look at me, this is how someone from outside prison walks). Their newfound confidence was contagious, and even some of the correctional officers and other prisoners could not resist commenting on their transformation, saying, '*zvautori munhu wepanze nhai'* (you really are someone from outside prison). This powerful moment was indicative of the extreme abjection that the women feel through the prison clothes and highlighted their desire to reclaim their identity as unique individuals rather than solely being viewed as prisoners. The moment also sparked my curiosity about the prison clothing itself and how it impacts the female prisoners' experiences. I sought to understand more about the role of prison

clothing and its effects on the women, prompting me to delve deeper into this topic.

4.3 Prison Uniforms as State Practice

In one of our storytelling sessions, participant Flo-flo shared her experience of entering Chikurubi female prison and the events surrounding the assignment of her prison uniform.

> *Patakasvika paprison, takapfugamiswa paline, kuadmin office. Yasvika nguva yangu, ndakatorerwa zvinhu zvangu zvese zvandanga ndinazvo. Ndakapihwa number yandanzi ndinofanirwa kuziva nemusoro pese pandaizodaidzwa. Ndakabva ndapihwa two mayellow uniform, juzi, blanket nemapata-pata. 'Mbuya' vakabva vandiendesa kwa 'mambo', officer in charge. Vakandibvunza mibvinzo yakawanda, ndokubva vanditaurira mitemo yemujeri. Kubva ipapo, ndakaendeswa kuclinic kwandabvunzwazve mimwe mibvunzo nanurse. Ndakapihwa mapads ndokubva ndaendeswa kucell kunosechwa. Ndakabvisiswa hembe zvainyadzisa because ndanga ndiri kumaperiod. Vapedza, ndakanzi ndipfeke uniform. Yanga yakabvaruka-bvaruka ende ichinhuhwa zvawaisatomboda. Yechitwo yacho yanga iri worse. Dzanga dzakafamba mwiri uniform idzodzo. Ndakadzokera kuadmin kunosiya hembe dzangu.*
>
> (Once off the prison truck at the prison, we got lined up at the administration office kneeling down. When it was my turn, I surrendered all my belongings in hand to the officer. I was issued a prison number, which I was told I had to remember, and shout out as reply when my name was called upon. To wear, I was given two yellow uniforms, a striped red and white knitted jersey, a blanket, and a pair of flip flop sandals. I was taken to the officer-in charge's office for an interview. She asked me some personal information and told some rules and regulations of the prison. From there, I was taken to the clinic where I also had an interview with the nurse. She asked for my medical record and gave me a pack of sanitary pads. I was then accompanied to the cell where an officer asked me to strip naked. She searched me everywhere. I remember feeling so embarrassed and uncomfortable with the process because I was on my period. After the search, she told me to wear my uniform. The uniform was tattered and had a stench that suggested that it had not been washed. I tried the second one, but it was worse. I remember thinking how many bodies these uniforms passed through. After putting on the uniform, I was accompanied back to the admissions office to surrender my clothes) (Flo-flo in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

Below is an image of the Zimbabwean prison clothing for women, which was prevalent during the time of this research.

Image 3: ***Incarcerated women in their prison uniforms. Photo credit: Chiedza Chinhanu (2020)***

Until January 2021 when the prison system changed the colour of the prison uniform for women, little attention had been given to the issue of what prisoners should wear, despite prison reform efforts initiated in 1997 (Zimbabwean Prisons and Correctional Service's Act, 2023). This discussion will focus on the present tense description of the prison dress, as limited research has been conducted on the new pink prison dress. At the time of this research, women incarcerated in Zimbabwe wore either the green or yellow dress, depending on whether they had been sentenced or awaiting trial. These dresses were initially introduced by the British colonial administration when they established the prison system. The clothing served as one of the many mechanisms employed by the British to enforce a clear distinction between prisoners and the general population. Even after the end of colonial rule, post-colonial Zimbabwe inherited and continued to utilise the symbolic power of prison attire as a tool of control and social separation in various forms. The use of prison uniforms in this context serves as an example of the complex ways in which the historical legacies and practices have endured and shaped the dynamics of the nation even after its colonial history has formally ended.

4.3.1 The Multifaceted Significance of Prison Uniforms: Identity, Stigmatisation, and Socio-Economic Dynamics

Both uniform dresses are loose fitting designs to fit all sizes, have few seams and are made of cheap cotton. They are made by prisoners with limited training in dressmaking, predominantly within the prison workshop located at Harare Central Prison. On entry to prison, every sentenced prisoner is given two yellow dress uniforms – a fairly old and a very old one. The choice of green and yellow for the uniform dresses holds significance, not only due to their association with the national colours on the flag but also due to the distinctive hue of these colours. The brightness of the colour serves for easy and instant identification of inmates, thereby thwarting any potential escape endeavours.

This deliberate employment of conspicuous colour serves as a means to reinforce the extensive utilisation of embodied surveillance practices within the prison system. The implementation of such mechanisms extended beyond a single colonial context, as evidenced by Clare Anderson's research (2001) on the British utilisation of clothing for surveillance purposes within India's penal settlements. The prevalence of these prison dresses across various British colonies highlights their significance as a tool of social discipline and control within the broader colonial penitentiary apparatus.

The prison system implements an ideological distinction among various prisoner categories by utilising the practice of assigning distinct coloured clothing. Specifically, the green uniform is designated for prisoners who have mental health issues, as well as for foreign prisoners and individuals awaiting trial. This ideological distinction refers to the symbolic differentiation of prisoners based on specific traits or characteristics, as indicated by the colour of their clothing. This practice functions as a visual cue that represents various aspects of their status, needs, and circumstances within the prison environment. Thus, the use of coloured uniforms becomes a mechanism through which the prison system categorises and distinguishes individuals based on predefined categories or conditions.

The Zimbabwean Prisons and Correctional Service’s Act (2023) grants individuals in pretrial detention the right to wear their personal clothes as a recognition of their legal status until proven guilty in a court of law. However, the convergence of diverse prisoner categories under the same attire prompts inquiries into the underlying motivations and implications of this practice. The decision to assign the same green uniform to prisoners with mental health issues, foreign prisoners, and individuals awaiting trial implies a degree of uniformity and standardisation in the treatment of different prisoner groups. The apparent deviation from the stipulated rules stem from various factors.

According to a personal communication with the officer in charge of Chikurubi female prison, she revealed that the reason why they require prisoners awaiting trial and foreign prisoners in Chikurubi prison to wear uniforms is due to prolonged waiting periods before their court appearances (Officer in charge, 2020, personal communication). This decision is driven by concerns over security risks posed by detaining individuals in their civilian attire. By utilising a single dress uniform for multiple prisoner categories, authorities can streamline administrative processes such as identification, inventory management, and maintenance. Functioning within a resource-constrained environment, the authorities find this consolidated approach advantageous from a logistical standpoint. It mitigates the need to grapple with the complexities and challenges associated with handling a diverse array of clothing requirements for different prisoner groups.

Nevertheless, it is paramount to extend scrutiny beyond the pragmatic advantages and delve into the

potential implications of this practice for the women incarcerated within Zimbabwean prisons. The convergence of diverse prisoner categories under the umbrella of the same dress uniform raises concerns about the potential for stigmatisation. A participant from Cameroon, for instance, expressed a sentiment that resonated with other foreign prisoners, stating, ‘By giving us the same uniform as their 'crazy people,' they are implying that we are crazy too’ (Participant from Cameroon in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020). This uniformity inadvertently blurs the distinctions between prisoners, running the risk of erasing their nuanced narratives, unique stories and experiences. As the uniform acts as a visual marker, it reinforces societal labels and preconceptions, contributing to a sense of collective identity as prisoners.

This convergence intensifies the challenges faced by these women, compounding feelings of marginalisation and reinforcing a negative stereotype, suggesting that foreign prisoners are inherently mentally unstable and deviant. The unintended consequence of this uniformity should be weighed against the convenience it affords the administrative apparatus and the sheer illegality of the practice.

The uniform, as a visual marker presents the bodies of these foreign women as criminal in the eyes of prison officers and the public imagination. By removing their individual clothing and forcing them to wear a uniform that signifies their imprisonment, the state perpetuates a narrative that foreign prisoners are inherently criminal or pose a great risk to society. This portrayal contributes to the marginalisation and dehumanisation of foreign prisoners, intensifying the challenges they face within the prison environment.

Furthermore, the uniform policy can be interpreted as a manifestation of xenophobia by the state. By treating foreign prisoners as part of a homogeneous group through the uniformity of dress, their distinct cultural identities and backgrounds are disregarded. This erasure of individuality contributes to a broader narrative of exclusion and discrimination, reinforcing the notion that foreign prisoners are outsiders who do not deserve the same rights and considerations as their local counterparts.

Individuals who are awaiting trial hold a distinct legal position, being presumed innocent until proven guilty. This differentiation sets them apart from sentenced prisoners and necessitates careful consideration of their rights and treatment within the criminal justice system. However, assigning them the prison uniform raises concerns regarding the preservation of their presumption of innocence and their entitlement to fair treatment throughout the legal process. By denying awaiting trial prisoners the privilege of wearing their own clothes, these individuals are subjected to full identification as prisoners. This erodes the distinction between accused individuals awaiting trial and those who have been convicted, potentially prejudicing public perception and impinging upon their presumption of innocence. Moreover, denying awaiting trial prisoners the option to wear their

own clothes exposes them to the challenges and rigours of prison life. It further undermines their right to be treated fairly and with due process. The denial of this seemingly simple autonomy contributes to the dehumanisation of awaiting trial prisoners, who may face prolonged periods of detention prior to their court appearances. In this vulnerable state, the denial of their right to wear personal clothing compounds their loss of agency and amplifies the potential negative impact on their mental well-being.

Noteworthy is the fact that the distinction between awaiting trial prisoners as to who can or cannot wear their own clothing is intricately connected to their socio-economic standing outside prison. This distinction became evident during my research project, where I encountered a compelling case involving a prominent political prisoner who was detained in Chikurubi prison. Because of her social and economic status outside prison, she wore her own garments while in custody. Economic disparities persist much like they do in the external world inside the prison despite its controlled environment. The lack of financial resources directly translates into a lack of access to the outside realm. The attire worn by prisoners awaiting trial serves as a visual symbol, representing the interplay between financial status, power dynamics, and social hierarchies. Those individuals who possess the means to maintain their own clothing within the prison walls are subtly distinguished from their less fortunate counterparts. For those lacking financial means, the uniform becomes a constant reminder of their limited access to resources, opportunities, and social connections. It reinforces the stark divide between the imprisoned and the world beyond, underscoring the perpetuation of systemic inequalities within and beyond the prison walls. It is in this context that the significance of the prison uniform becomes apparent, shedding light on how the prison system is intricately interwoven with broader social realities.

The ritual of assigning a prison uniform serves as a deliberate mechanism employed by the prison system to not only strip prisoners of their clothes but also to eradicate their previous identities and personal expression. The act of confiscating their clothes signifies a symbolic severance from their past lives and serves as a powerful visual representation of their transition into the prison environment. The uniform becomes a mechanism of discipline and conformity, reinforcing the hierarchical power dynamics within the prison environment. Alongside this, the female prisoners are assigned a prisoner number, a construct of identity specific to the prison environment. By replacing the individual's name with a numerical designation, the prison system establishes a distinct construct of identity specific to the prison context, inhibiting the prisoner from recognising her own history of the self. This prisoner number becomes the primary identifier, reducing the individual to a mere statistic within the system. This depersonalisation and dehumanisation contribute to the erosion of the prisoner's sense of self and reinforce their subjugation to the institutional authority. Through the combined effects of confiscating personal clothing and assigning a prisoner number, the prison system seeks to establish a new narrative for the incarcerated individual. The uniform becomes a

tangible manifestation of her status as an offender, reinforcing societal perceptions of her as separate and different. Writing about her study of dress in colonial Australia, Margaret Maynard (1998) notes how clothing functioned to fashion individual's identities. By erasing their previous identities and replacing them with impersonal markers, the prison system effectively establishes a new framework through which prisoners are viewed and treated.

Furthermore, the tattered prison clothing, stemming from resource constraints, is utilised to degrade and humiliate the incarcerated individual. Notably, the participants in this study disclosed that the worst uniforms are predominantly assigned to women convicted of offences such as rape. These uniforms through the ripped underarm seams, expose the women's braless breasts. This visual demonstration of punishment is rooted in gendered sartorial norms, strategically designed to shame by exposing the individual's wrongdoings. The clothing assumes a significant role in the regulation and materialisation of her penal sentence. Through the act of donning the uniform, the prisoner is transformed into a walking reminder of her wrongs and thus made to 'wear' her punishment.

The treatment of prisoners, particularly the utilisation of clothing that is degrading and humiliating, warrants crucial attention due to its infringement upon the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. These rules, stemming from international standards and guidelines established by the United Nations, are commonly referred to as the Nelson Mandela Rules, having been amended in 2015. They outline specific requirements and standards for the treatment of prisoners, emphasising the need for dignified and humane treatment in carceral settings. They emphasise the importance of safeguarding human dignity and prohibiting practices that subject individuals to degradation or humiliation. The Nelson Mandela Rules clearly state that every prisoner who is not permitted to wear their own clothing must be provided with an outfit suitable for the climate and conducive to maintaining good health. Furthermore, these clothing provisions must in no way be degrading or humiliating to the individual (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015). The rules further emphasise the need for cleanliness and proper maintenance of all clothing, ensuring that undergarments are changed and washed as frequently as necessary to uphold hygiene standards. In addition, the Nelson Mandela Rules recognise the importance of preserving the dignity of prisoners during authorised external movements. In exceptional circumstances, when a prisoner is taken outside the prison for an approved purpose, they should be allowed to wear their own clothing or inconspicuous attire. By specifically addressing the issue of clothing, the Nelson Mandela Rules highlight the importance of respecting the autonomy and dignity of prisoners, irrespective of their offences.

As a member state of the United Nations, Zimbabwe is expected to adhere to international standards and norms, including those related to the treatment of prisoners. However, based on the accounts of incarcerated women, it appears that compliance with these regulations is not consistently upheld

within the ZPCS, raising concerns about the treatment of prisoners and potential violations of human rights. The women in my study raised concerns about poor hygiene, inadequate medical care, and instances of degrading and humiliating treatment. Specifically, in relation to clothing and hygiene, they have alleged inadequate provision of suitable clothing, lack of access to clean and hygienic undergarments, and poor maintenance of clothing and sanitation facilities.

4.3.2 Symbolic Significance and Power Dynamics of Prison Uniforms

The distinction between the attire worn by prisoners and that of the prison officers reveals a complex network of power relations that is manifested through the medium of dress. Below is a picture of the prison official's uniforms.

Image 4: Female Officers in their prison uniforms. Photo credit: Chiedza Chinhanu (2020)

The officers wear military-style dark green shirts and trousers made of nylon and cotton, a cap and boots. The colour and design of the prison officers' uniform can be traced back to the colonial era. The persistence of these identical hues and patterns in post-independent Zimbabwe alludes to the perpetuation of power dynamics and authoritative control embedded within the prison system. The uniform has become a symbol of the government's administrative power, carrying with it connotations of suppression and forceful authority associated with its former wearer. The historical significance attached to the uniform adds depth to the observations of how officers interact with prisoners, revealing the enduring legacy of colonial control and its influence on present-day prison practices.

An interesting observation is the manner in which some officers refer to and address prisoners based on the colour of their uniform. For example, they call upon or summon a group of prisoners as *'mayellow ese uyai pano'* (all 'yellow prisoners' to come here). This is to refer to prisoners in yellow uniforms. The officers' use of such categorisations demonstrates how the symbolism of the uniform extends beyond its visual representation, shaping the language and social dynamics shaped by the prison dress within the prison environment. Such categorisation of prisoners based on their attire represents a re-enactment of the past, reflecting the ways in which historical influences are deeply embedded in the dress. The language and interactions influenced by these practices illustrate the interconnectedness of past and present realities within the prison environment.

The prison staff uniform is intentionally designed to differentiate the officers from the prisoners. It conveys a standardised message that the wearer represents the authority of the state within the prison setting. It operates as a visual representation of power and dominance. By donning this distinct uniform, the prison officers visually communicate their role as enforcers of rules and custodians of order. The choice of a green-coloured uniform holds particular significance, as it closely resembles military attire. This association with militarism imbues the uniform with connotations of power, authority, and masculinity. By adopting the visual markers of military-style clothing, the uniform becomes emblematic of hierarchical structures and hierarchical relations within the prison system. It establishes a clear visual distinction between those who wield power and those who are subjected to it.

Interestingly, the female officers' uniform is identical to that of male prison officers, reflecting a sense of equality in their roles and compensation. This perception of parity was highlighted by a statement from one of the female officers:

> *Hapana musiyano pabasa. Ibasa rimwechete, rinobhadhara zvakafanana* (there are no differences in the workplace. It is the same job which pays the same salary) (Female officer at Shurugwi prison, 2019 Chinhanu personal communication).

This assertion emphasises the perceived gender equality among prison officers, regardless of their gender. However, the acceptance of female officers as equals by their male colleagues, and capable individuals remains a complex issue. Some scholars argue that when women wear uniforms traditionally associated with men, it can lead to their masculinisation (see Craik, 2005; Hertz, 2007). Jennifer Craik (2005) and Carrie Hertz (2007) elucidate that uniforms frequently align with the conventional masculine ideals engrained in societal norms. Consequently, this congruence between uniforms and masculine symbolism can impinge upon the female officers' sartorial comfort.

The concern raised by these scholars is not primarily about the intrinsic characteristics of the uniform itself but about unconventional portrayal of women in uniforms and the 'intrusion' of

women into historically male-dominated professions. It revolves around negotiating gender boundaries and symbolic markers. It is noteworthy to consider the perceptions of female prisoners regarding officers in their uniforms. Participant Sexy Blacka expressed a link between the uniform worn by female officers and the aggression and severity often associated with their male counterparts. She suggested that because female officers dress similarly to male officers, they adopted masculine traits and behaviours:

> *Nekuti vanopfeka sevarume, vanofunga kuti vatova varume, vanobva vaactar sevarume. Vamwe vanotibanha nezvimaboots zvavo.* (Because they dress in the same uniform as male officers, they start to think that they are men. They kick us with their big boots (Sexy Blacka in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

Sexy Blacka's experience highlights the perception that the uniform influences behaviour, leading some female officers to emulate the assertiveness and dominance traditionally associated with male officers, which may manifest in their interactions with prisoners. These experiences illustrate how the adoption of expanded gender roles is symbolically marked by a conventionally masculine group through clothing.

4.3.3 Gendered Uniform Discrepancies: A Reflection of Systemic Bias and Control

Male prisoners at Chikurubi Maximum Prison are provided with practical workwear dungarees, affording them the comfort and functionality necessary to carry out their assigned duties. In contrast, female prisoners are not provided alternate attire for work and sleeping. They find themselves confined to a single dress uniform that must cater to the demands of their daily life. The implications of this disparity are manifold. Not only does the lack of work-specific clothing for female prisoners lead to discomfort, it also highlights a systemic bias and unequal treatment rooted in gender. Moreover, it reinforces existing broader societal attitudes and biases regarding gender roles and expectations and exacerbates the already challenging circumstances faced by women within the prison system. By imposing the continuous wearing of uniforms on female prisoners, the prison system locks them into a perpetual state of shame, in which they are constantly reminded of their status as prisoners.

Furthermore, the prison uniform serves as a tool employed by the prison system to normalise and regulate the behaviours of female prisoners. The uniform itself is intentionally shapeless, with a length almost reaching the ankles, thereby restricting movement and impeding the freedom to stretch or engage in physical exercises. This deliberate choice of design conceals certain parts of the body, which is emblematic of the broader societal emphasis on the concealing of feminine form and adherence to norms of modest presentation. In everyday life, women are subjected to scrutiny and

surveillance by society, which monitors and dictates how they dress, walk, and sit. Evident within the design of the prison dress, the prison system aimed at instilling a code of behaviour in female prisoners instructing them on how to behave in ways that conform to societal expectations. Thus, the uniform encapsulates the cultural narrative that dictates women's comportment in the public sphere, underscoring the age-old notions of how a 'respectable' woman should appear. This cultural messaging, imprinted within the very fabric of the uniform, serves as a mechanism for the perpetuation of traditional gender norms, leaving an indelible imprint on the female prisoners' experience. This feminised notion of the female prisoner that approximates to the normalisation in the eyes of the public is often associated with the prison system's purported goals of rehabilitation.

In addition to the limitations imposed on the overall dress code, female prisoners face further restrictions regarding their appearance. They are prohibited from wearing jewellery, make-up, grooming accessories, and even hair extensions. These regulations extend beyond mere clothing and aim to control and regulate the personal expression and presentation of female prisoners. The justification provided by the authorities for these restrictions revolves around maintaining security, discipline, and uniformity within the prison.

The ZPCS also prohibits the wearing of bras as a measure to minimise risks associated with concealed objects and prevent suicidal attempts using the bra. However, beneath this veneer of care and security lies a deeper motive of control and domination. The prohibition of bras has significant implications for the physical comfort of female prisoners, particularly those with larger breasts as expressed by one of the participants:

> *Kuswera usina bra kunorwadza, especially panguva yekuenda kuma 'gang'* (Spending the day without a bra causes discomfort, pain, and even physical strain, especially during daily activities) (Flocy in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

By forbidding these adornments and modifications, the prison system functions to infantilise the women, treating them as passive subjects who require constant supervision and control. The act of denying female prisoners the freedom to wear their bras serves to strip them of their ability to express their gender identities.

4.4 Changes to the Prison Uniform as Practice of Subversion

So far, the above discussion has emphasised the punishment of women through the prison uniform. Given the line of argument above, one might assume that the prison uniform automatically negates the room for expression and identity. However, in even the strictest code of uniform, there are some aspects of identity, such as race, sexuality and even social class that cannot be easily masked through regulations of the clothing. Through the use of costumes in my research project, I became aware of how some female prisoners in Zimbabwe find creative ways to assert their sense of self and maintain

a sense of identity beyond the confines of the prescribed clothing. This section delves into these findings, shedding light on the ways in which these women navigate the prison environment to express their individuality and establish a sense of identity.

An intriguing finding from the research is that some women refuse to wash their assigned prison uniforms. By refusing to engage in the routine task of washing their uniforms, these women retain a semblance of control over their lives, even in the face of their confinement. The women resist the forced conformity and assert their right to maintain their sense of self and dignity. It becomes a way for them to retain a semblance of personal identity within an environment that actively seeks to erase it. The significance of this act of resistance is further magnified when considering the specific gendered dynamics at play. Across many societies, women are subjected to heightened scrutiny and judgement based on their physical appearance. Societal expectations impose a burdensome pressure on women to conform to certain beauty standards, including regimes of hygiene that enact a disciplining function. However, by refusing to comply with the expected norms of cleanliness and grooming, some of the female prisoners challenge the prevailing notion that their worth and identity are defined largely by their physical appearance. In a carceral environment that severely restricts personal autonomy, such acts of defiance become profound assertions of agency and self-determination.

In addition, refusing to wash the prison clothing could also be interpreted as a form of resistance within the care-control binary. This interpretation stems from the fact that instances of 'dirty protests' frequently serve as manifestations of the state's deficient ability to provide proper care for incarcerated individuals. The deliberate rejection of the responsibility to maintain their own uniforms serves to accentuate this concern and functions as a method of protest against unfavourable conditions, inadequate hygiene provisions, and insufficient availability of clean apparel and amenities. Prison authorities notice these instances of uniform neglect and counteract with punitive actions, exemplified by the withholding of privileges to engage in activities that happen outside the prison walls.

In relation to foreign prisoners, the act of declining to wash their prison clothing takes on heightened complexity and significance in comparison to their local counterparts. Two women from Pakistan revealed that when approached with the request to wash their clothing, they would feign a lack of understanding as a strategy to evade the task of washing their clothes. This refusal encompasses multifaceted dimensions, notably intertwined with issues of nationality and identity within the prison system. Through their refusal to cleanse the prison uniform, foreign prisoners manifest a form of resistance against assimilation into the prison environment. This deliberate act becomes a means to assert their individuality and distinctiveness, highlighting their nonconformity to the standard prison identity.

A noteworthy dynamic I observed among some female prisoners is that those who have access to financial resources outside of the prison occasionally engage in transactions with officers. These transactions involve the exchange of money for access to clothing items, like bras, which are otherwise prohibited or restricted within the prison. In its conventional function, a bra serves the purpose of covering, supporting, and enhancing the breasts. However, within the prison context, it merges as a politicised garment that takes on additional layers of meaning. Firstly, the bra becomes a vehicle for the expression of femininity. The ability to wear a bra in prison becomes intertwined with broader issues of individuality, self-expression, and control over one's body. By acquiring and wearing a bra, prisoners challenge the standardised and uniform nature of prison attire, asserting their femininity and personal preferences. This act of defiance allows them to resist the homogenising effects of the prison system and affirm their autonomy within the constrained environment.

Secondly, the bra emerges as a politicised garment within the prison environment, playing a significant role in the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies in prisons. The women who are granted permission to wear bras within the prison environment possess a certain degree of power that can be utilised to facilitate acts of rebellion among other prisoners. These women employ the bra as a covert means of concealing and passing prohibited items, such as razor blades for grooming and letters from their lovers at Chikurubi Maximum prison. I discuss the significance of these letters in Chapter Six. Wearing a bra further reinforces the existing power dynamics among prisoners.

There is a unique form of self-knowledge and resistance that emerges among the female inmates through attention to detail in their prison attire. Despite the sweltering summer conditions, they wear their striped red and white jerseys along with extended socks. This deliberate choice serves a dual purpose: safeguarding their skin from sun exposure to maintain a ‘fair and bright’ complexion in relation to those who engage in manual labour and concurrently engaging in a practice akin to body detoxing. They call this ‘cleansing’, which suggests the cleansing off of prisoner identity to an identity that is acceptable by society upon release. They also use natural remedies found within the prison walls, such as aloe vera as makeshift makeup, which signifies the prisoners' conscious efforts to maintain a sense of self- worth and beauty amidst their captivity. Though some may view this as a superficial agency, it plays a pivotal role in shaping their narratives for the future, once they step beyond the prison walls. Participant, Musalad eagerly shared her plan, envisioning a life beyond bars, where she could convincingly claim to have been outside in the country due to her noticeably fair and radiant complexion: ‘When I finally leave the prison, I will tell everyone that I was in South Africa and no one will doubt me because my skin will be so fair and bright’ (Musalad in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020). Such aspirations illustrate how the symbolic communication of uniforms resonates differently with various stakeholders, including officers, officials, and society, and may even be intentionally manipulated by the inmates themselves.

By altering their prison uniforms and investing in their physical beauty, these women attempt to turn the prison environment into an unconventional beauty therapy. In doing so, they redefine their experience of serving time, taking control of their own narrative and agency within the confines of an oppressive system. The prison administration, responsible for issuing uniforms, and the officers who distribute them, have little exclusive control over the messages transmitted through clothing. The female prisoners' actions represent a small yet meaningful way of retaining individuality and challenging the system's attempts to mould them into a homogenous mass. Amidst the oppressive environment of a prison, these women find ways to carve out their own narratives, sparking hope for a future beyond the confines of captivity.

4.5 Costumes as 'Outside Prison' Practice

Image 5: Participants dancing in their rehearsal costumes at Jason Mphepo Little Theatre. Photo credit: Chiedza Chinhanu, 2020)

Through engagement with the costumes, the participants in this study discovered a unique form of self-expression which held great significance for them. Upon donning their costumes, they became intentionally performative. During these fleeting moments, the harsh realities of their daily lives behind bars seemed to fade away, replaced by a new sense of freedom of expression.

The expression *'munhu wepanze*,' meaning 'one from outside prison,' exemplified a desire to transcend their current circumstances and envision a future where they could reclaim their place in the outside world. The costumes were not mere garments; rather, they symbolised a declaration of their determination to reclaim their identities and rewrite their narratives in the face of adversity.

Throughout the rehearsal process, putting on costumes became a cherished ritual that wielded

transformative power for the participants in the project. The costumes enabled them to temporarily detach themselves from the dehumanising stigma attached to the prison uniform. It offered them a unique opportunity to rehearse and express their 'outside selves'. By strutting in the costumes, they engaged in a form of rehearsing the identities they envisioned for themselves beyond prison. Furthermore, the notion of 'rehearsing' their 'outside self' served to emphasise the transitory nature of their imprisonment. It underscored the understanding that imprisonment constitutes a specific phase within their life trajectory rather than an overarching definition of their complete identity. The use of costumes, in this regard, functioned as a symbolic conduit, consistently prompting incarcerated individuals to recognise the impermanence of their present circumstances. Moreover, costumes stood as a constant reminder of incarcerated individuals' potential to reshape their lives once they regain their freedom.

Nevertheless, their newfound expression through costumes wasn't universally embraced within the prison environment. Some prison officers perceived the sight of these women wearing their costumes as a threat to the prison facility's security and order. Concerns were raised about potential disruptions and unauthorised movements during workshops. Consequently, as the facilitator, I was asked to discourage the women from venturing too far from the designated working space during workshop time. Despite these challenges, the participants' determination to embrace their creative freedom remained unwavering. In the face of resistance, they continued to express themselves. In their costumes, the participants sat with their legs apart in a more relaxed stance. Although they may have adopted this posture to alleviate physical discomfort, it also represented a subtle act of rebellion against the system's normalisation of women and patriarchal definitions of a 'proper' woman. The act of sitting with their legs apart became a symbol of personal space and resistance for these women.

The significance of costumes extended beyond the confines of the prison walls when the participants went to perform their work outside prison. The participants attested that the costumes gave them the opportunity to be seen in a different light by their family and friends who are accustomed to seeing them dressed in prison uniforms during visitation hours. By presenting themselves in different clothes, they transcended their prison identities and returned to a more authentic self-expression of identity. This connection to their families and friends through costumes was of significance to the participants. The costumes held the potential to influence perceptions and challenge stereotypes surrounding incarcerated individuals. As spectators, we were offered a glimpse of their humanity, reminding us that behind the bars and uniforms were individuals with hopes, dreams, and a desire for redemption.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has critically engaged with the complexities of prison uniforms and costumes through the lens of Africana womanism, examining how these elements shape the relationship between incarcerated women, their clothing, and self-identity within the context of imprisonment in

Zimbabwe. By grounding the analysis in Africana womanism, this chapter has uncovered how prison uniforms function as an extension of state control, reflecting broader systems of racialised and gendered oppression rooted in colonial histories and perpetuated by neocolonial structures. These uniforms symbolise the state's attempt to strip incarcerated women of their individuality and autonomy, reinforcing a colonial legacy of subjugation and erasure of African women's identities.

However, Africana womanism also emphasises African women's agency, resilience, and capacity for resistance. The chapter has highlighted how incarcerated women subvert the oppressive nature of prison uniforms by altering them, thus transforming these symbols of state control into acts of defiance and expressions of personal and collective identity. This act of subversion aligns with the Africana womanist commitment to celebrating African women's ability to resist even in the most oppressive conditions. By reclaiming their bodies and their clothing, these women challenge the gendered and racialised power structures that seek to confine them, asserting their presence and humanity in spaces designed to diminish them.

The discussion further explored the use of costumes as an 'outside prison' practice, particularly within the context of PPT, which allows incarcerated women to envision and rehearse identities beyond the constraints of the prison environment. Through this performative practice, women can momentarily step outside the rigid confines of prison life and engage in self-expression that is often denied to them within institutional settings. Africana womanism's emphasis on the communal and collective nature of African women's experiences is reflected in these moments of performance, where costumes become tools for collective resistance and empowerment, allowing these women to redefine themselves on their own terms.

These layers of engagement, from state-imposed prison uniforms to subversive alterations and the use of costumes, collectively contribute to a broader argument about the power of popular methods, such as altering uniforms and performing in costumes, in understanding the complex experiences of incarcerated women. Africana womanism foregrounds the importance of giving voice to African women's experiences and acknowledging their capacity for agency, even within the confines of the prison system. This chapter demonstrated that these popular methods provide incarcerated women with a platform for self-expression and resistance, offering them a sense of agency in a context where autonomy is severely restricted.

Moreover, the discussions in this chapter highlighted the nuanced interplay between conformity and resistance, autonomy and restriction. The use of costumes, facilitated the exploration of self-identity in a confined setting, allowing women to reimagine themselves beyond the limitations imposed by the prison environment. The argument I make in this chapter is that costumes, as a form of PPT, offer a valuable lens through which to gain insights into the complexities of prison chaos *(kupenga mujeri).* The prison uniforms, as state-mandated attire, serve as a tangible representation of the ways

in which incarcerated women's experiences are intricately intertwined with the broader forces of neocolonialism. Yet, the creative modifications of these uniforms and the use of costumes encapsulate forms of resistance and self-assertion, thereby disrupting the structured norms within the prison environment.

Through the lens of Africana womanism, prison chaos is not merely a state of disorder but a dynamic negotiation between institutional control and individual agency. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics that shape the lived experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe, recognising their ability to resist, reimagine, and redefine themselves even within the confines of the prison system. The chapter that follows continues this exploration of prison chaos through the lens of indigenous traditional games, further expanding on how incarcerated women navigate and resist the oppressive structures that seek to confine them.

Chapter Five: *'Zvamunongoita Kutamba Ma game'* (All you do is just play games): Prison Relationality, Power Dynamics and Resistance in Zimbabwean Female Prisons

5.1 Introduction

This chapter undertakes a critical examination of the role of indigenous traditional games within the context of prisons, with a particular focus on their impact on incarcerated women in this project. Through the analytical lens of affect theory as articulated by Thompson (2009) within the field of applied theatre, this exploration delves into the affective dimensions of these games, highlighting how they resonate emotionally and culturally with the participants and thereby enriching our understanding of the women's prison experience.

Affect theory, which emphasises the emotional and embodied experiences that shape human behaviour, provides a crucial framework for understanding the significance of indigenous traditional games in the context of prison theatre. Drawing from the works of theorists such Ahmed (2004), who writes, 'emotions are not just 'within' or 'on' the body, but are effects of the contact we have with objects and others, shaping our orientations towards them' (Ahmed, 2004: 5). Affect here is understood here as the pre-conscious, embodied intensities that flow between and within bodies, often escaping direct articulation. These affective experiences become visible through their manifestation in physical reactions, expressions, and relational dynamics, as bodies respond to each other and to their environment. In this chapter, indigenous traditional games are viewed not simply as moments of play but as dynamic processes through which emotions and sensations circulate, creating opportunities for connection, resistance, and transformation within the prison setting.

In understanding emotions in and through play, applied theatre practitioner, James Thompson (2009) argues that emotions are experienced not just cognitively but as embodied, felt responses that can reshape interactions and spaces. The games, by encouraging physical movement, touch, and shared laughter, open up new affective possibilities, allowing participants to feel and express emotions that might otherwise be suppressed in the prison's harsh environment. Through this lens, the games foster a communal sense of joy, resilience, and emotional release, creating affective shifts that have the potential to alter both individual and collective experiences.

This chapter interrogates the power of play and its impact on bodily responses, sensations and prison environment. As Elliott (2019) posits, the focus on 'simply having fun' can help bring about significant changes to participants and to the prison environment through an emphasis on emotional engagement. Therefore, this chapter investigates how the intensities of emotion and sensation that circulate within and between bodies, influence actions and interactions in ways that are often beyond conscious awareness. This analysis positions indigenous traditional games operate not merely as cultural artifacts, but as affective practices that generate insights into the modes of being and relational dynamics among incarcerated women, challenging the oppressive structures of the prison

environment and enabling new forms of emotional and social engagement.

The chapter highlights how the integration of indigenous games exposes the intricate power dynamics that these women navigate daily. These dynamics extend beyond interactions with correctional officers to encompass the complex interpersonal relationships among the women themselves. The games, with their cultural significance, theatrical elements, and spiritual ties, serve as a medium through which these dynamics are both expressed and negotiated. Affect theory helps us to see how these dynamics are not just intellectual or verbal negotiations but are deeply felt and embodied experiences. The games, with their rich cultural and spiritual significance, engage the women on an emotional level, enabling them to express and negotiate power in ways that are subtle and powerful.

Furthermore, through the lens of affect theory, this chapter elucidates how the affective charge of these games—the joy, nostalgia, and camaraderie they evoke—serves to temporarily disrupt the chaos and rigidity of prison life. Their cultural significance, emotional resonance, and ability to foster social cohesion position them as powerful tools for challenging the oppressive structures of the prison system. They confront the societal norms and expectations that govern the lives of the incarcerated women, offering a temporary reprieve from the dehumanising conditions of imprisonment. By creating moments of emotional connection, these games create a space where the incarcerated women can reclaim a sense of self and community, even within the confines of the prison. Framing this analysis within the theoretical framework of affect theory, emphasises the games' significance not only as expressions of cultural identity but also as mechanisms through which incarcerated people can reconnect with their own cultural and emotional histories in ways that are both empowering and liberating. This affective disruption is crucial to the process of decolonising theatre within prisons, as it challenges the dominant narratives and power dynamics that have historically marginalised indigenous cultural practices.

5.2 Indigenous Traditional Games in Prison

'Zvamunongoita kutamba ma game' (All you do is just play games). This dismissive phrase was reported by the participants who were engaged in the research project. According to their accounts, prison officers made this comment in reference to the time spent playing games during the project. In the early stage of the project, we spent much time playing games which the university students and I had gathered prior to the project and some which the participants introduced. We played games for two hours on the three days that I visited Chikurubi prison each week. As the project progressed, game-playing reduced to approximately 30 – 45 mins during each workshop, with some workshops being entirely dedicated to games due to interruptions like prison visits or meetings.

Several potential interpretations can be discerned for the dismissive attitudes exhibited by the officers towards women participating in games within the project. One conceivable explanation is that

the officers may have perceived the women involved in the project as dedicating too much time to playing instead of engaging in prison work. Since all prisoners, except those participating in the research project, were required to fulfil work obligations, the officers might have perceived the emphasis on traditional games as a diversion from their duties. Another plausible inference is that the officers lacked a comprehensive understanding of the rationale behind my incorporation of indigenous traditional games with the participants, thereby trivialising the game-playing process.

The use of theatre games stands as a vital component within the field of applied theatre, particularly when engaging with marginalised communities. Boal (1992) played a pivotal role in popularising the utilisation of theatre games. His structured exercises and game frameworks have achieved widespread adoption on a global scale. Boal (2006) asserts that theatre games serve a dual purpose: they enable individuals to express themselves and explore their physicality in new ways, while also holding potential for social and political impact. In the context of this research study, my analysis examines the integration of indigenous traditional games in prison theatre, drawing inspiration from two noteworthy research initiatives, one by Matthew Elliott (2019) and the other by Chivandikwa et al (2019). These two significant research endeavours intersect, providing valuable insights into the importance of incorporating indigenous traditional games into prison theatre.

Elliott's study (2019) examines the utilisation of games with young people at Centro de Internación Provisoria (CIP) San Joaquin, a juvenile detention centre based in Santiago, Chile. The games were utilised as a way of letting the young people 'simply have fun' fostering collective participation that ultimately led to a dialogical educational process focused on children's rights and political participation (Elliott, 2021). In his analysis of play in prison, Elliott (2021) explored the benefits and problems of 'play' and interrogated the relationship of effect and affect. Drawing inspiration from Thompson's (2009) proposal for a turn to affect in applied theatre, Elliott (2019) discusses how paying attention to affect can help bring about significant changes to participants and to the prison environment through an emphasis on emotional engagement. He highlights how the educators and the young people recognised the power of play and its impact on bodily responses and sensations. Elliott argues that the playing of drama games within the affective register can act as 'a form of resistance by disrupting the narrative of oppression in the prison environment' (Elliott, 2021:246).

Elliott (2019) directed his focus toward Boal's games rather than traditional games, which he observed the participants adapting to their specific context. Chivandikwa et al (2019) observe that many applied theatre projects often gravitate towards Boal's games as a default and predominant approach, alongside other Eurocentric ones often at the expense of indigenous African games. This raises a compelling question about why some African theatre projects that identify as applied theatre do not more extensively draw from their own African traditions. In their study conducted at the

University of Zimbabwe, Chivandikwa et al. (2019) delved into the role of traditional children's games within applied theatre projects that encompassed university students living with disabilities. Their research explored how these traditional games contributed to fostering critical engagement and body affirmation through their familiarity, cultural significance and reinvention to suit diverse bodies among the participants. These games provided a multifaceted platform that encouraged participants to explore, reflect upon, and question various aspects of their experiences, ultimately contributing to a more enriched and insightful engagement within the applied theatre framework. The authors argue that the effectiveness of applied theatre is enhanced when it integrates popular cultural forms. By turning to indigenous traditional games, this study seeks to expand the utilisation of culturally relevant forms that hold significance and utility within the Zimbabwean context.

Furthermore, Chivandikwa et al's. (2019) research emphasised the significance of challenging the dominant influences of Boal and Western games to empower disabled individuals as agents of their own lives. Expanding on their premise, this chapter extends the discourse on confronting the hegemonies of theatre games within the context of prison theatre, exploring the utilisation of indigenous traditional games with women in Zimbabwean prisons. The chapter asserts that although traditional games are currently underutilised in prison theatre, a significant opportunity exists to appropriate and contextualise these games as a potent tool for critical engagement with prison power dynamics. Additionally, these games have the potential to facilitate the cultivation of social bonding, collaboration, healthy competition, silliness, enjoyment, and laughter. This potential is derived from the inherent qualities of traditional games, including their familiarity, inclusivity, theatricality, embodiment, narrative exploration, playfulness and connection to cultural context.

Furthermore, the contention put forth by Chivandikwa et al. (2019), which advocates for the recognition and celebration of diverse body types, holds significant relevance in the context of my study involving women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons. This is particularly pertinent when considering the viewpoint presented by Foucault (1977) regarding the manner in which the incarcerated individual's body becomes subjected to systems of control within such institutional settings. Foucault (1977) elucidates that the reach of disciplinary power extends beyond mere physicality, exerting influence over individuals' mental processes and behaviours. This influence shapes their subjectivities, resulting in the internalisation of the prison system's norms and power dynamics, consequently producing compliant subjects. Given the complex interplay between bodies and control mechanisms in prisons, the use of indigenous traditional games takes on a crucial role. Since these games are interwoven with distinct cultural values and societal norms, their application within prison contexts serves as a means of grappling with specific and contextually embedded prison dynamics. As a result, employing these games becomes a strategy for engaging with the intricacies of prison politics and the different ways that the games can potentially subvert the pervasive disciplinary power.

5.3 Rationale Behind Chosen Games of Analysis

My analysis in this chapter does not encompass the entirety of games played over the course of the research project, and I have opted not to follow a chronological order of their implementation within the workshop sessions. Instead, I have chosen to emphasise three specific games: *Tauya Kuzoona Mary, Sarura Wako and Tinotsvaga Maonde.* These games have been selected for several reasons, including their popularity among participants, which I will elaborate on later. Moreover, I have chosen to emphasise these three specific games because they serve as exemplars of the potential to advance the core research objectives, namely the generation of new perspectives concerning the experiences of women within Zimbabwean prisons and the endeavour to decolonise prison theatre approaches.

The selection of these games holds value in illuminating the interactions, dynamics, and outcomes that emerged throughout the workshop sessions. While approximately 15-20 games were incorporated during the project's duration, the chosen three bear significance in manifesting the range of concepts and ideas underpinning this chapter's discourse. My focus extends to the theatricality, playfulness, and rule structures inherent within these games. Moreover, I specifically reference dialogues when necessary, aiming to provide a comprehensive and intricate analysis of these games' implications for social cohesion, self- expression, collaboration, healthy competition, and critical engagement within the prison setting.

The arrangement of the game presentations is intentionally curated, with each game's sequence serving a well-defined purpose within this organisational framework. Starting with the game *Tauya Kuzoona Mary* is a deliberate selection, grounded in the accessibility and sense of control it offers. This game stands as an entry point, marked by its thematic invitation to play. The dynamics of this first game foster an environment that empowers participants to initiate their engagement with a sense of confidence.

Subsequently, *Sarura Wako* assumes the role of the second game in the analytical sequence, guided by its capacity to illuminate significant insights into social interactions, inclusivity, and the process of acquainting oneself with fellow participants. The game allows the narrative of engagement to unfold naturally, allowing participants to not only establish connections but also to appreciate the richness of diverse perspectives within the group. *Sarura Wako* sets the stage for fostering a communal bond and establishing a supportive network that lays the groundwork for deeper explorations of deeper complexities inherent within the prison context.

Concluding the analytical sequence is *Tinotsvaga Maonde.* The game's inherent competitiveness and emphasis on teamwork and collaboration render it an apt culmination of the series. The progression to *Tinotsvaga Maonde* is purposeful, reflecting a crescendo that mirrors a gradual

exploration of more intricate dynamics. The competitive aspect of this game introduces an extra dimension of involvement, nurturing participation in a healthy competition between both prison officers and prisoners. The sequence of these games can be conceptualised as a structured build-up, progressively delving into more complex themes. Starting with accessible empowerment, transitioning to social bonding, and culminating with cooperative competition, this order fosters a progression of engagement.

5.3.1 Tauuya Kuzoona Mary (We have come to see Mary)

Tauuya Kuzoona Mary is an engaging and participatory children's dramatic game that centres around the key characters of Mary and her mother. The game unfolds with Mary and her mother positioned at the centre, where Mary is veiled by a cloth, and her mother stands beside her. The dynamics of the game set Mary's friends in motion, encircling her as they call out to entice her into play. However, Mary's mother weaves a plot by offering varying pretexts on each occasion, asserting that Mary is asleep, bathing, dining, or feeling unwell and the remaining participants, embodying Mary's friends, respond emotively to these justifications.

The pace of gameplay during the initial stages gradually draws participants into the unfolding narrative. As the gameplay progresses, the complexity of the excuses grows, quickening the tempo of the game and mirroring the increasing complexity of the excuses provided by Mary's mother. This mounting tempo leads to a crescendo that eventually reaches a striking climax: the supposed death of Mary. This accelerating rhythm steers participants toward this dramatic climax, a poignant moment when Mary's transformation into a ghost is revealed. At this climactic moment, Mary's ghost rises and takes on a life of its own, chasing the children who flee in a mixture of excitement and playful terror. The combination of theatricality, rhythm, and pacing collaborates to create fun, silliness and a memorable experience. The auditory dimension also plays a role, with the interplay of voices and sounds enhancing the evolving drama, intensifying participants' emotional investment as they are guided through this theatrical journey.

The game's structure and inherent narrative became a multi-dimensional tool for incarcerated women to explore and express their experiences of control, access, and the complexities of friendship within the prison context. Its engagement with these themes not only made the game relatable and impactful for participants but also offered a unique lens through which they could share their own feelings about the themes.

The game's initial setup, with Mary veiled by a cloth provided a context for incarcerated women to engage with the challenges and intricacies of establishing connection and companionship within the prison environment. An illustration of this dynamic was shared by some foreign prisoners in the project:

> When I first came in here, I didn’t know my way around and would miss important things

like time for bathing, eating and seeing the doctor (Miremba in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

The unfamiliarity of the game to Miremba mirrored her unfamiliarity with Zimbabwean prison culture. Miremba's responses to Mary's mother's excuses in the gameplay resonated with the feelings she grappled with during her initial days in prison. She reflected on the genuine challenges she faced in attempting to forge connections that would ease her adaptation process. The challenges faced by foreign prisoners, like Miremba, in navigating interpersonal dynamics within the prison context reflect broader societal dynamics and power structures that shape cross-cultural interactions.

The concept of 'seeing' and 'not seeing' a person within the game reflected the regulated visitations and communication protocols in the prison setting. The game provided a symbolic space for participants to explore the concept of visitation. An intriguing insight that emerged from the game centred on the exploration of some incarcerated mothers' experiences declining the right to be visited by their children. The participants found resonance in the parallels drawn between the game's depiction of Mary's absence from her friends and their candid reflections on their own lives. Just as the game featured Mary's mother conjuring reasons for Mary's unavailability, a number of participants unveiled the complexities of their own narratives, wherein they, too, resort to fabricating excuses regarding their whereabouts when it comes to their children.

This revelation shed light on the intricate web of motivations that underlie such actions, offering a window into the multifaceted dimensions of motherhood within the Zimbabwean social context. The game opened avenues for contemplation on societal expectations and gender roles, as well as the intricate negotiation between personal autonomy and familial responsibilities. As participants elaborated on their own 'missing from' experiences, the discourse extended beyond the realm of the game into a dialogue on the intricate emotional tapestries woven by mothers who navigate the delicate balance between self-fulfilment and maternal duty.

The incorporation of ghostly encounters within the game introduced a dimension of playful escapism while simultaneously delving into realms of terror and abjection. This intriguing juxtaposition carried significant value in the context of women's experiences, offering a space to access and express inner fears and anxieties about the future. One example that highlights the depth of this exploration is participant Gaga's account:

> *Ndakakumbira amai vangu kuti vaudze vana vangu kuti ndiri kuSouth Africa, ndiri kushanda. Ndinonzwa kurwadziwa nekunyepa, plus ndinotyawo kuti rimwe zuva vachazviziva chokwadi vobva vandivenga* (I asked my mother to tell my children that I am in South Africa, working. I feel bad about the lie and fear that one day they will know the truth and resent me) (Gaga in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

Beneath Gaga’s facade of deception, lied a haunting sense of shame and guilt. She grappled with the weight of her deceit, coupled with the anguish of being unable to physically embrace her children and the looming dread of them discovering the truth about her incarceration. Gaga's narrative epitomises the multifaceted emotional landscape experienced by incarcerated mothers, wherein the desire for escapism intertwines with the relentless grip of guilt and regret. Gaga further reflected on how the act of 'running away' within the game served as a symbolic manifestation of her desperate yearning to escape the burdens of her personal reality.

The game was introduced by the participants and it became a favourite among them for a rather unexpected reason. It happened during a period when a prominent political figure named Mary was arrested and remanded in Chikurubi female prison. This real-life event caught the attention of the participants who started to draw parallels between Mary’s situation and the game. The participants saw the game as an opportunity to make a playful, yet poignant commentary on the powerful political leaders who could once soar high, only to find themselves in dire circumstances. The participants found humour in the irony of the game mirroring Mary’s real- life events. As the game unfolded, the participants would enact scenarios, exaggerating the excuses and consequences that befell the real-life Mary. In doing so, the game became a subtle form of social commentary, allowing the participants to explore and process themes such as justice, accountability and the consequences of abuse of power.

The deliberate inclusion of death, loss, and the spectral within the game highlighted its capacity to facilitate multifaceted layers of exploration for the participants. It offered a space where the participants could discuss existential dilemmas and navigate their own fears within a controlled and playful framework. The interplay of these elements testifies to the game's potential as a conduit for personal and collective engagement with complex facets of the human experience.

5.3.2 Sarura Wako (Choose yourself a partner): Relationality, Community bonds and Body Affirmation

Sarura Wako is a traditional childhood game that falls under the love and courtship category (Mawere, 2012). Anthropologist Munyaradzi Mawere (2012), who categorises Zimbabwean Shona children's games, explains that courtship games like *Sarura Wako* were designed to introduce young individuals to the world of adulthood and prepare them for their future, which typically involved marriage, in a joyful and enjoyable manner. These courtship games played a significant role in the socialisation and cultural education of young people, fostering an understanding of courtship and marriage practices within the Shona community.

In playing the game, children would stand in a circle while boys and girls took turns to pick partners of their choice. However, certain rules were observed to maintain cultural norms and taboos.

Participants were not allowed to select partners of the same sex, and brothers were prohibited from choosing their sisters if they were both participating in the game. This practice aligns with the Shona culture, where it is considered taboo for siblings to marry.

Introducing the game *Sarura Wako* within the context of women in prison was an attempt to encourage positive interaction, social bonding and cooperation among the participants. During this game, the participants formed a large circle, and the first participant stood in the centre, initiating the activity by singing *Sarura Wako* (Make your choice). The group responded with *Kadeyadeya nendoro chena* (Take your time, the one with a patch of white). In the game's context, this phrase was part of the response that the group sang in reply to the person in the centre. It indicated that the participants are encouraging the person in the centre to take their time in making their choice. The use of the chant *'Sarura Wako*' and the response *'Kadeyadeya nendoro chena'* created a call-and-response dynamic. This rhythmic interaction set the tone for the game, infusing it with a sense of rhythm and cooperation. The singing of these specific lines in a repetitive manner contributed to the ritualistic nature of the game. The chant created an engaging and lively atmosphere.

The participant continued by describing the characteristics and qualities of her chosen partner, praising her body features, structure, and beauty in various ways. Additionally, positive behaviour traits and other personal attributes, such as faith, number of children, totems, place of origin, and strengths were mentioned by some participants. As the game progressed, every participant had their chance to stand in the centre of the circle. With each call and response, they gradually revealed the real characteristics, qualities, and attributes of their chosen partners, building a growing sense of anticipation among the other participants. Their descriptions, which included praising physical features and personal attributes, added a performative aspect to the game.

The selection process was carried out with various expressions, including performing a little dance in front of the chosen partner or inviting them into the circle with a gentle pull of their hand. These physical gestures not only showcased creativity but also elevated the theatricality of the game, making it visually captivating. The game continued until all participants had the opportunity to select their partners.

Incorporating these theatrical elements enhanced the cultural significance and emotional engagement of the game. The combination of music, movement, symbolism, and personal expression created a multidimensional experience that connected participants with their cultural heritage and fostered a joyful and interactive atmosphere. The familiarity of the game brought nostalgia and joy for most of the participants. Several participants expressed that playing the game, *Sarura Wako* brought about a sense of reliving their childhood, which was abruptly taken away from them. Participant Lolo shared her experience:

> *Handina kumbobvira ndaita hudiki kwandaibvumirwa kutamba mahumbwe. Vamwe vana vezera rangu vaitamba mahumbwe nema games kuchikoro, asi inini ndakagumura chikoro panzira. Ndakakurumidza kukura kupfuura vezera rangu uye pandakakura, pakanga pasina nguva yekutamba.* (I never had a childhood where I was allowed to play games. I know most children played these games at school, but I dropped out early. I was forced to grow up faster and there was no time for games) (Lolo in Chinhanu personal diary, 2019-2020).

Therefore, the game created a social experience that served as a powerful means for Lolo and others like her to reconnect with their playful and childlike selves. This playfulness held great significance for the women given the plethora of challenges, including isolation, stress, and trauma that imprisonment often brings. Playfulness allowed them the unique opportunity to momentarily escape the harsh reality of the prison environment and find solace in the simplicity and joy of play. Ultimately, the act of embracing playfulness became an act of resistance and resilience that reaffirmed incarcerated women's right to experience joy despite their circumstances.

Another added value provided by the game for the participants was the opportunity it afforded them to connect with and celebrate their bodies by openly acknowledging the attributes they admired in each other. The game offered a vital outlet, especially within the demanding prison environment where concerns related to body image and perception could arise. Chivandikwa et al.'s (2019) research aligns closely with these findings, emphasising how the game transcends its playful exterior to address complex issues of body acceptance and inclusivity. Within a prison context, where individuals grapple with self-esteem challenges and societal judgements, the game became a powerful tool for promoting self-love and dispelling harmful stereotypes.

The game, initially designed for connection and companionship, unexpectedly revealed the intricate dynamics of alliances and allegiances among women in the prison context. As participants engaged in the partner selection process during the game, they named attributes associated with prison 'gangs'. While the game itself did not explicitly emphasise the existence of these gangs, the participants' natural gravitation toward members of their respective groups highlighted the subtle and pervasive impact of these affiliations.

The term 'gangs' in this context differs from its conventional criminal connotation, serving instead as a classification for groups of prisoners engaged in various daily tasks that wield significant implications for power, control, and order within the prison community. These gangs include the information network, the in-house operatives, the face and voice of the prison, the culinary controllers and the outliers who did hard labour. The information network consists of prisoners working in the salon near the main gate. They gather external information from visitors and clients, becoming a vital connection between the incarcerated community and the outside world. The in-

house operatives comprise inmates serving staff and cleaning offices. They gain insights into prison management and politics, sharing information about events like searches. They also relay updates from the prison headquarters. The face and voice of the prison community includes choir members who represent prisoners to visitors. They speak on behalf of inmates, perform, and facilitate communication between the female and male prisons. They enjoy certain privileges and even collaborate with male prisoners for outside performances. The culinary controllers operate in the prison kitchen, controlling food distribution. They regulate meals, prepare special dishes, and hold influence due to their role in cooking for both inmates and staff. The outliers consist of prisoners doing physically demanding tasks like gardening and cleaning. Often given as punishment, they have limited influence and exist outside the power dynamics of the other gangs.

The alliances in the game served as symbolic representations of a deeper undercurrents of power distribution and influence governing the daily lives of the incarcerated women. The game unexpectedly reinforced and perpetuated existing power relations among the prisoners, highlighting the deeply entrenched power dynamics within the prison community.

5.3.3 Cultural Exchange and Inclusivity: Totems, Language, and Cross-Cultural Connections in the Game

It is worth mentioning that the game provided an opportunity to dissolve some of the social hierarchies and foster social relations among the participants through their identification with other information outside of the ‘gangs’. For example, when seeking to identify a partner of choice, some participants highlighted the totems of their partner. This led to participants who also identified with the same totem seeking association outside of the game. Totemism is a system of belief in which people have a kinship relationship with a spirit animal. In Zimbabwean society, totems hold significant importance in relationships. They are typically associated with a particular clan or family and they are often seen as a way to identify and connect with other human beings who share the same totem and the natural world.

Through the act of sharing their respective totems, the participants not only expressed their individual identities but also fostered a sense of collective identity and camaraderie essential for group cohesion and building. Identifying with the same totem led the participants to address and relate to each other differently. For example, when participants Madhuwe and Magirazi found out that Magaro’s mother’s totem was *Mbizi* (Zebra), they started calling her ‘daughter’. According to the *Mbizi* totem, they are her mother’s sisters, therefore her aunties. The participants found a culturally relevant way to establish connections that extended beyond the confines of the 'gang' relationships.

However, the totemism did not resonate with participants from other countries due to their differences in cultural backgrounds and worldviews. Nonetheless, the beauty of the game lay in its adaptability and inclusivity. Despite not universally sharing the core belief system, the foreign

participants embraced the opportunity to share their own versions of the game, creating a space of cross-cultural exchange. For example, when a participant from Malawi led the game using Chichewa language, it served as a bridge that allowed others to experience and appreciate a different linguistic and cultural aspect. This act of sharing opened up a window of cross- cultural exchange, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's heritage and identities. In the context of the prison, where social hierarchies based on nationality too can lead to division and conflicts among inmates, the sharing of various versions of the game became a means to bring women together to learn from one another. Through these shared experiences and cultural exchanges, the participants in the project began to see each other as individuals with unique backgrounds rather than merely representatives of specific nationalities or social groups. The game allowed them to break down barriers and build connections, creating a more inclusive and harmonious environment within the workshops. By embracing each other's cultures and traditions, the game fostered an atmosphere where diversity was celebrated rather than a source of division.

5.3.4 *Tinotsvaga Maonde* (We seek for Grapefruits): Breaking Down Barriers and Challenging Power Dynamics within the Prison Community

Tinotsvaga Maonde is a traditional Shona game from Zimbabwe, often enjoyed by children and sometimes adults for its engaging and physical nature. The game requires no special equipment. It is played in an open space with a relatively flat surface. The primary goal of *Tinotsvaga Maonde* is to showcase physical strength and outmanoeuvre opponents in a playful competition. Players are divided into two teams, roughly equal in number. The game begins with the two teams standing opposite each other, with a clear line or boundary drawn between them. The game revolves around two members from the opposite team, designated as the *'maonde'*, engaging in a spirited tug-of-war-like contest at a time. There is no leader; each team works as a united group in making decisions about who will engage in the tug. The two players from both teams attempt to pull over the other back to their side of the boundary while the opposing team tries to prevent her. The game typically has no set time limit. It continues until one team successfully brings the *'maonde'* to their side of the boundary. The team that successfully accomplishes this goal is declared the winner.

Tinotsvaga Maonde was a favourite among female prison officers and prisoners because of the unique opportunity it presented for prisoners and officers to interact with each other in ways not commonly experienced in their daily prison life. To initiate the game, opposing teams, consisting of both female prison officers and prisoners, formed lines separated by a marked boundary. The prisoners' team (PT) took the lead, advancing towards the officers' team (OT) in a synchronised movement while singing the game's song but refraining from crossing the line. The officers' team responded by advancing forward to the line in their own coordinated movement.

> ***PT:*** *Tinotsvaga maonde, maonde, maonde. Tinotsvaga maonde nemasikati ano* (We search for grapefruit this afternoon)

***OT**: Wamunotsvaga ndiani, ndiani, ndiani. Wamutsvaga ndiani nemasikati ano* (Who do you seek this afternoon?)

***PT:** Watinotsvaga ndiNhema nemasikati ano* (We seek Nhema this afternoon)

***OT:** Achamutora ndiani, ndiani, ndiani. Achamutora ndiani nemasikati ano* (Who will take her this afternoon?)

***PT:** Achamutora ndi Ruth nemasikati ano* (Ruth will take her this afternoon)

Following the singing and movement, two selected participants from opposing teams stood close to the line, joining hands in a tug-of-war. However, each participant received no assistance from their teammates. The one who crossed over the line towards the other team became the 'conquest' of that team. The game continued, repeating the singing and movements until everyone had a chance to participate.

Within the prison setting, the game *Tinotsvaga Maonde* was not only a source of entertainment but also a way for the participants to showcase their physical strength, develop teamwork, engage in friendly competition and camaraderie among players in a light-hearted and engaging manner. Even though the competition was not solely about brute strength, it was not necessarily an equal show of strength because of the control and dominance that prison officers hold.

The game exposed the question of the power dynamics in Zimbabwean female prisons. In the game when requesting a tug mate, prisoners addressed the officers by their real names a departure from the usual practice of using titles such as *'mbuya'* and *'tete'* to refer to them. In Zimbabwean society, *mbuya* is a title given to an elderly woman who is respected for her age- old wisdom and for disciplining the younger generation, while *tete* is equally respected as a female advisor, mediator and role model in the Shona family structure. Within a prison environment, these titles are meant to establish respectful relations between the officers and the prisoners. However, they endow the officers with cultural authoritative power in addition to the legal authority vested on them by the state.

This cultural authority can sometimes lead officers to cross the line of their professional responsibilities, as evidenced by the use of corporal punishment, which was abolished by the Prison Act of 2016 (Zimbabwean Prison Act, 2016). Officers wield considerable discretionary power in determining what they consider 'appropriate' punishment. In light of this, the cultural value attached to their titles holds more sway than the law. This insight sheds light on how the experiences of women in prison can be deeply entrenched in oppressive cultural practices.

Some female prisoners internalise this punishment, perceiving it as necessary for discipline, as

exemplified by participant Madzimai who remarked,

> *Kana tikasarohwa, hatizomborangwi* (If we are not beaten, we will never be disciplined) (Madzimai in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

The prison environment operates on what Gramsci (1971) describes as a cultural hegemony, imposing norms that dictate what is deemed acceptable and normal. These cultural norms and expectations set by the prison authorities, including the normalisation of punishment as a disciplinary tool and the imposition of a cultural hegemony that shapes prisoners' beliefs and behaviours, can lead to a reduction in the women's sense of selfhood which implicates their social position in a social hierarchy.

While the officers are called *'mbuya'*, the prisoners are addressed as *'muzukuru'* which translates to 'young girl'. The title *muzukuru* infantilises the women, stripping them of their adulthood and womanhood status. This use of language serves as a subtle means of exerting control and reinforcing power imbalances within the prison environment.

In contrast, the game *Tinotsvaga Maonde* offered a unique opportunity for officers to address prisoners by their first names. By discarding the formal titles and using first names, the game provided a platform for officers and prisoners to interact in a way that challenged the usual hierarchical structure of the prison system. This transformation in language use during the game allowed for a brief moment of shared humanity and connection. It exemplified the potential of indigenous games and activities as a means to transform cultural oppressive language practices and foster a more respectful and equitable environment.

The physicality of the game added a performative aspect as players used their bodies to interact with each other. The interaction of female prisoners' bodies and the officers' bodies momentarily altered the power relationship between the two groups. Prison officers are discouraged from touching prisoners to protect prisoners from abuse and to protect the institution from allegations of misconduct. However, the officers upturn the policies through remarks that create feelings of stigmatisation for prisoners. Participant, Sexy Blacka, revealed how officers would discourage close interactions with prisoners, using offensive comments such as accusing them of having a bad smell or bad breath. These kinds of derogatory remarks from officers to avoid physical touch are reflective of how those in positions of power remain 'untouched' in the play of power.

The climax of the game which occurred when one team successfully pulled over a player from the opposite team to their side, was often met with dramatic reactions from both the winning and losing teams. The game's temporary victories over officers brought a remarkable sense of joy and accomplishment to the prisoners. While the primary participants were the players, there was often an

audience, including spectators and supporters from both teams. Their reactions and responses, such as cheering or shouting encouragement, contributed to the theatrical atmosphere and enhanced the theatricality of the game. When a participant from the prisoners' team successfully pulled an officer over to their side during the tug-of-war, the prison would resonate with jubilant celebration and victory. The game's unique setup, with the 'them' vs. 'us' binary, allowed the prisoners to feel a sense of solidarity and camaraderie, breaking down barriers that often separate them based on nationality or ethnicity.

In the harsh reality of everyday prison life, this binary would not be conducive to building positive relations between officers and prisoners. However, within the context of the game, it proved essential for the female prisoners' sense of esteem and unity. The frame of the game gave the prisoners a momentary win against the power of the institution as it was represented by the officers. In this moment of victory, there were no distinctions between foreign prisoners, Ndebele prisoners and Shona prisoners. They were all one, sharing and enjoying together in the win. Thus, the division of players into teams created a sense of belonging.

In addition, the game was affirming to the participants on a personal level. The individual chosen to face an officer in the tug-of-war assumed the role of a 'hero' for her team, and her victory was celebrated by the entire group with hugs and praises for demonstrating physical strength against an officer. By actively enacting the role within the framework of the game, the chosen individual assumed responsibility to her community. This was a much-needed experience in a place that punishes people under severe measures as a form of taking responsibility for their actions. The liminal experience was important for reinforcing a communal bond that is filled with the spirit of care and concern for each other.

However, not all encounters with officers resulted in victories for the prisoners. Just like in the game, becoming a 'conquest' of the officers can be critically read against the post-colonial brutality within the criminal justice system. In everyday life, incarcerated women attempt to navigate power dynamics by meeting officers' physical needs, such as cleaning the officers' quarters, fetching their water and giving up some of their food items to stay on the 'good side' of the officers. Prisoners find this kind of relationship with staff particularly useful for them because it provides direct access to resources such as phone calls to family and friends which alleviates the source of emotional stress and exemption from hard labour. It becomes ironic that officers answer to the titles of *'tete'* and *'mbuya'* – individuals who respected for their perceived role as custodians of societal values, when they engage in unrespectable practices.

Surprisingly, some officers did not interpret prisoners' victories as a challenge to their authority. Instead, they encouraged the game, recognising it as a means of building healthy relationships within the prison;

> *Game iyi inonakidza. Plus, yakanakira pakugadzira ukama hwakanaka pakati pemaofficer nevasungwa* (The game is fun, engaging, and equally important as a means of building relationship between officers and prisoners' (Officer in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

This response contrasts with more stringent codes of conduct in other prison systems, such as the United Kingdom, where prison officers are discouraged from engaging in activities that may alter power dynamics (see the National Offender Management Service Conduct and Discipline, 2013). Be that as it may, encouraging play between prisoners and officers in Zimbabwe's prisons can be argued as the institution's form of appeasement through distraction from focusing on the women's grievances about the prison conditions. This highlights the dual nature of games within a serious context, where they can simultaneously serve as a source of empowerment and diversion from pressing issues.

In summary, the game *Tinotsvaga Maonde* played a significant role in temporarily disrupting the entrenched power dynamics within the prison community. Through moments of victory and solidarity, the game provided prisoners with a reprieve from the oppressive prison environment, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-worth. However, the game's impact should not be divorced from the larger social context and the structural issues that continue to affect the lives of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe.

5.4 Critical Engagement with Indigenous Traditional Games in Prisons

Due to their deep ties to the local culture and traditions of the participants, the use of indigenous traditional games in prison can provide a sense of familiarity and nostalgia, which can promote a sense of identity, connection, and hope within the challenging prison environment. Traditional games often involve physicality and performance, making them visually captivating and emotionally engaging, which can trigger feelings of joy, happiness and fun. Furthermore, these games often incorporate intricate narratives and storytelling elements, engaging participants on multiple levels and encouraging critical reflection on their experiences and broader societal issues.

Indigenous games also offer a culturally sensitive space for emotional expression. For example, as in the game *Tauuya Kuzoona Mary*, where Mary's supposed death and transformation into a ghost are featured, participants can explore themes of loss and the unknown in a playful yet meaningful way. Additionally, indigenous traditional games frequently emphasise community and connection, which allows for understanding of how affiliations, bonds of trust, competition and the operation of power relations work in prison.

However, it is essential to critically examine the use of indigenous traditional games within the

broader ethical context of the prison environment. While they may offer temporary relief from the harsh realities of the prison life and foster moments of empowerment and community, their positive effects are limited to the temporality of the gameplay. For example, the game *Tinotsvaga Maonde* provided a momentary reprieve but did not address the systemic issues within the prison environment, such as overcrowding, lack of access to healthcare, or inadequate rehabilitation programmes. Ethical concerns arise when temporary distractions are used to divert attention from pressing issues. While the game may have temporarily disrupted power dynamics, it did not fundamentally challenge or change the inherent power imbalances between prisoners and officers. Prison officers still held significant control and authority over prisoners' lives outside of the game. Thus, encouraging games and interactions between prisoners and officers might become a form of distraction from addressing the grievances and concerns of incarcerated women. It might normalise oppressive practices within the prison system by offering short-lived moments of relief without addressing the structural issues that lead to human rights violations.

Moreover, while the narrative complexity of indigenous games encourages critical thinking about personal experiences and broader societal matters, it can potentially open risky discussions that expose participants to harm. For example, the game *Sarura Wako* unexpectedly brought to light same-sex relationships in Zimbabwean female prisons, as some participants chose their girlfriends as partners. Given that same-sex relationships face stigmatisation and criminalisation in Zimbabwe, participating in the game within a prison setting could expose individuals to additional risks and challenges from other inmates or prison staff. Therefore, the use of such games should be approached with caution, prioritising the safety and well-being of all participants and considering the potential consequences of addressing sensitive issues within the prison environment.

5.5 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I return to the dismissive assertion that ‘all you do is just play games,’ emphasising that such a perspective overlooks the profound depth and significance inherent in traditional games, particularly within the unique context of a prison environment. This chapter has highlighted the rich understanding and insights that can be gleaned from these games, which go far beyond mere entertainment. They illuminate the complex power relations that shape prison life, revealing how incarcerated women navigate, resist, and reimagine their circumstances.

Drawing on Elliott's (2019, 2021) argument that attending to affect can lead to significant changes both for participants and within the prison environment, this chapter has demonstrated how indigenous traditional games engage participants on an emotional and affective level, catalysing meaningful shifts in perception and behaviour. Elliott suggests that the playing of drama games within the affective register acts as ‘a form of resistance by disrupting the narrative of oppression in the prison environment’ (Elliott, 2021: 246). This disruption occurs because affective practices, like

those found in traditional games, allow participants to explore and express emotions, beliefs, and values in ways that challenge the dominant power structures within prisons.

The games analysed in this chapter—*Tauya Kuzoona Mary*, *Sarura Wako*, and *Tinotsvaga Maonde*—exemplify how these affective practices offer various affordances to participants, including opportunities for self-expression, social bonding, cultural connection, emotional release, and playful resistance. These affordances are deeply intertwined with the games' cultural significance, theatrical elements, and spiritual ties, making them powerful tools for advancing resilience and agency among incarcerated individuals. To dismiss these games as trivial is to overlook their capacity to engage participants in profound emotional and psychological work, which can have lasting effects on their sense of identity and community.

I do not perceive affect and effect as binary opposites. Instead, I view affect as a more expansive concept that can deepen our understanding of the role of popular theatre methods with women in prisons. In this work, the pivot towards affect does not negate the importance of effect; rather, it encourages a critical examination of how these two concepts intersect and interact. The interplay between affect and effect reveals how emotional and experiential dimensions of theatre can contribute to both personal transformation and broader social change within the prison context (See Elliott, 2021; Thompson, 1999).

By integrating the analytical lens of affect with the framework of popular theatre, this chapter underscores the radical transformative potential of theatre in prisons. It shows that the impact of theatre is not solely measured by tangible outcomes or observable social changes but is also deeply rooted in the emotional and affective experiences of participants. Through these experiences, incarcerated women can re-evaluate their perspectives, confront uncomfortable truths, and develop a collective sense of accountability and solidarity.

As I move to the next chapter, which will examine the role of storytelling in prison, the insights gained here will continue to resonate. Storytelling, like traditional games, is another form of affective engagement that allows participants to navigate and challenge the socio-political dynamics of prison life. Together, these chapters build a comprehensive understanding of how affective practices within popular theatre can serve as powerful catalysts for personal and social transformation in even the most restrictive environments.

Chapter Six: '*Kupera Kwezheti iboma*' (The End of a Shady Deal is Imprisonment): Storytelling in the Context of Imprisonment

6.1 Introduction

This chapter shifts focus from the workshop setting to public performance, specifically examining how African ethical principles shape the storytelling process. The analysis is anchored in an African-centred ethical framework, with particular reference to Zimbabwean society. Such a framework is grounded in the values and principles of African cultures and traditions, with the concept of *hunhu* serving as a key indicator of ethical practice. *Hunhu*, prevalent among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, is defined by key principles such as morality, character, accountability, respect, and shared humanity (Magosvongwe, 2016; Samkange and Samkange, 1980). These principles form the foundation for understanding how ethics guided the storytelling process for public performances.

The principle of morality within *hunhu* is based on the belief that individuals are defined by their moral actions, which reflect their character. Morality, in this context, refers to the ethical duty to act in ways that promote communal harmony and well-being. According to Gyekye (1997), morality in African cultures is often tied to a person's responsibility to the community, as the moral worth of an individual is seen in terms of their positive contributions to others' lives. Magosvongwe asserts that '*Unhu's* aversion to violence is undeniable' (2016: 159). She further references Nhemachena (2016) who argues that the philosophy

> insists on the need to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of directly visible violence performed by clearly identifiable agents such as 'evil individuals', 'disciplined repressive apparatuses' and 'fanatical crowds' who are just the most visible of the multiple forms of violence (Magosvongwe, 2016: 150 citing Nhemachena, 2016:1).

For the Shona, this means avoiding behaviours that bring shame or harm to others, including dishonesty, theft, or maliciousness. According to Samkange and Samkange (1980), those who adhere to *hunhu* must accept responsibility for their actions and be prepared to face the consequences if they deviate from social norms. Accountability within the *hunhu* framework, is not only personal but extends to the wider community. In Zimbabwean society, and other African societies, individuals' actions are viewed as having a direct impact on others. In the context of storytelling, this principle suggests that storytellers must be mindful of how their narratives reflect remorse and shape the moral and emotional fabric of the community. The storyteller is entrusted with the responsibility to use their platform ethically and thoughtfully, considering the impact their stories may have.

Hunhu also emphasises the cultivation of good character. Samkange and Samkange (1980) argue that a person with *hunhu* embodies integrity, trustworthiness, and self-discipline. This is not an inherent quality but one developed through socialisation and education. Within the storytelling

context, this implies that the narratives shared should reflect and promote values such as honesty, resilience, and kindness. As custodians of cultural values, storytellers are expected to embody these virtues both within and beyond the performance space.

Respect is another foundational element of *hunhu*, encompassing both interpersonal respect and respect for the broader social order. This respect is demonstrated through actions such as politeness, humility, and deference to elders and authority figures. As Magosvongwe (2016) highlights, in Zimbabwean society, respect is essential for maintaining social harmony. In storytelling, respect manifests in the careful consideration of whose stories are told, how they are framed, and the preservation of the dignity of individuals, particularly those from vulnerable groups.

One of the most prominent aspects of *hunhu* is the concept that "I am because we are," underscoring the interconnectedness of all people. Shared humanity posits that one's identity is intrinsically tied to the community, and that the well-being of an individual is inseparable from the well-being of the group. In the context of storytelling, this principle encourages the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences, fostering empathy and understanding across different sectors of society. As Gade (2012) notes, the principle of shared humanity demands the recognition of each person's intrinsic worth and prioritises commonalities over differences.

This chapter delves into how incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons utilised various artistic elements and techniques to convey their experiences, embodying these principles in practice. This is particularly significant given the societal judgment and stigmatisation they face due to their perceived transgressions of moral norms. By adopting an ethical framework grounded in *hunhu*, this chapter investigates how storytelling and performance challenge dominant stereotypes that portray female prisoners solely as immoral perpetrators. Instead, it acknowledges their actions within the complexities of their socio-cultural contexts. Through this lens, the chapter explores the intricate dynamics of storytelling in the prison environment, including societal expectations, self-censorship, and moral judgments. It underscores the vital role of narrative in moral discourse and the communal pursuit of redemption and reconciliation, offering a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of incarcerated women.

6.2 'Kupera Kwezheti iboma' (The End of a Shady Deal is Imprisonment): The Play

The play '*Kupera Kwezhet iboma,*' which translates to 'The end of a shady deal is imprisonment,' was a play by the participants in my research study which was about storying their lives in front of a wider audience. The play opened with the symbolic sound of the beating drum, mimicking the prison siren for roll call. The actors engaged in a dance, portraying the monotonous routines of prison life. With the cessation of the drum, they collapsed to the ground, embodying the exhaustion wrought by a gruelling day of hard labour. Amidst their weariness, they conversed, their dialogue interwoven with various dramatic actions emblematic of incarcerated women's experiences: peering

through narrow windows, utilising the cell's facilities, navigating conflicts over stolen water, seeking solace in prayer, finding joy in dance, cherishing letters from distant lovers confined in Chikurubi maximum male prison.

Collectively, these dramatic actions and interactions within the scene painted a vivid portrait of the chaos of life within the prison system. At the same time, they reflected the resilience, resourcefulness, and humanity of the incarcerated women, as they navigated the challenges and forged connections amidst the chaos and confinement of their environment.

The play took a dramatic turn when Gaga, acting as a prison officer, interrupted all the commotion with a threat to strip away the 'C' that stands for 'correction' in ZPCS, prompting Bad Sector to mimic the officer, eliciting uproarious laughter. The scene was a satirical commentary on the state of the correctional system. By stripping away the 'C', the scene implied a stripping away of the notion of correction that humanises the incarcerated women, highlighting potential flaws or inefficiencies within the prison system. The laughter indicated a collective recognition of the absurdity or hypocrisy of the threat, as well as a means of coping with the challenges and injustices inherent in the prison environment.

Yet the mood shifted dramatically as Magirazi shared a gripping anecdote of a woman who was caught attempting to pass off a stolen goat as her own child, culminating in her arrest when the goat betrayed her with a bleat. This story catalysed a significant dialogue in the performance about the pathways of the incarcerated women's offending.

The play delved deeper with a stark depiction of the woman's arrest, marked by verbal and physical abuse that was chillingly explicit. As emotions surged, the characters reflected on their mothers, reciting lines form the heartfelt poem '*Amai Vangu'* (My Mother) in turns. A haunting flashback transported the audience to a courtroom, unveiling Holier-than-thou's harrowing experience with the criminal justice system, underscoring the systemic injustices faced by incarcerated women in Zimbabwe.

Returning to the cell, tensions escalated as Madhuwe and Gaga clashed over the arrival of a new prisoner, a political prisoner known as 'Hotcatch'. Their conflict erupted into a frenzied dance-off, which was abruptly stopped by the ringing bell summoning them to welcome some visitors with donations to the women. Despite their apathy towards the church organisation's offerings, the characters eagerly seized donations, while the officers laid claim to the substantial contributions. As the donors departed, the women grappled with the event, exploring the dynamics of how they had to present themselves.

6.3 Exploring Aesthetic Elements in Incarcerated Women's Storytelling

Upon reading and analysing the participants' performance, several prominent aesthetic elements

surface, each offering insights into the intricate storytelling experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. I turn towards a discussion of these aesthetic elements, which include flashback, poetry, representing everyday life, and music, shedding light on their role in shaping and enriching the narrative tapestry of the women's experiences. Within this discussion, I also delve into the intricate dynamics involved in storytelling within the context of incarceration.

6.3.1 The Role of Flashback as a Storytelling Device

Flashback emerged as a potent storytelling device within the performance that allowed participants to traverse significant moments in their lives. In one of the play's scenes, character Lolo is depicted walking down the road, grappling with the thought of procuring the next meal for her children. As she spots a young goat wandering alone, a desperate thought comes to her mind. She quickly grabs the kid, dresses it in a hat and straps it on her back, masquerading it as a baby and walks off home. However, her scheme is short-lived as the goat bleats, attracting the attention of a passer-by who immediately apprehends her for theft.

Through this artful manipulation of time, the performers sought to immerse the audience in the emotional and psychological struggles of the characters.

> *'Vanhu vanofunga kuti tirimuno nekuti tine unhubu'* (Most people think that we are in here because we are predisposed to a life of criminal behaviour' (Holier-than-thou in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

By offering a retrospective view of past experiences that shaped the characters' actions and decisions, the participants sought to offer contextual richness to their preset situations and evoke empathy from the audience. Of particular interest in the woman's theft of the goat, was how it was executed in a manner reflective of her identity as a mother, cognisant of the cultural context where motherhood is unquestioned. The group's decision to incorporate this narrative into the performance was driven by a desire to grapple with the themes of motherhood, responsibility, and the stark constraints of limited resources. Despite the unorthodox method employed, the woman's actions reflected a primal urge to provide for her family amidst economic hardship and social marginalisation. This portrayal sought to invite a deeper examination of the systemic inequalities and structural barriers that push some women towards criminality as a means of survival. The lack of viable alternatives in impoverished communities exacerbates the cycle of poverty and desperation, compelling these women to resort to illicit activities out of necessity rather than choice.

The juxtaposition of the desire to uphold familial responsibilities with the societal stigma and moral ambiguities surrounding criminal behaviour prompts questions about the ethics of survival strategies in contexts of extreme deprivation. It challenges conventional notions of morality and highlights the

complex realities faced by marginalised communities struggling to navigate the intersecting forces of poverty, cultural expectations, and systemic injustices. Ultimately, this narrative serves as a poignant commentary on the human condition, illuminating the resilience, ingenuity, and moral ambiguity inherent in the pursuit of survival and dignity amidst adversity.

However, in the efforts of eliciting empathy and promoting comprehension about the lives of incarcerated women among the audience, the participants inadvertently opened themselves up to the risk of oversimplifying the complex web of factors that contribute to their offending. This oversimplification potentially compromises the recognition of their agency and individual accountability in the commission of these acts. Moreover, an excessive emphasis on victimhood may perpetuate the notion that recidivism is an inevitability, particularly given the presumption that most of the women's socio-economic status will remain unchanged post- incarceration. Therefore, the oversimplification of their narratives emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of the complexities faced by incarcerated women, acknowledging both their victimisation and their agency in navigating challenging circumstances. Thus, while flashback offers a powerful means of storytelling, its usage requires careful consideration to ensure a balanced representation of the women's experiences and realities.

Similarly, the participants found themselves subject to critique from some members of the audience at the JML Theatre:

> 'aren't we tempted to romanticise the experiences of female prisoners?' (Audience member at JML Theatre, 2020)

This audience member recognised the common inclination to glamorise the lives of incarcerated individuals in popular prison performances. The romanticisation of prisoners' experiences can perpetuate stereotypes or trivialise the harsh realities of incarceration. As put forward by Walsh (2019), showing the same ideas about prison over and over in plays might make people outside of prison think that prisons are always the same, and that could be problematic.

This observation strikes at the heart of a crucial tension that prison theatre, and indeed any artistic endeavour involving marginalised or incarcerated populations, must navigate. On one hand, such performances provide a much-needed platform for humanising and fostering empathy for incarcerated women, shedding light on their experiences and struggles. However, on the other hand, they also raise ethical questions about how these experiences are portrayed and represented. Striking the right balance between creating powerful narratives that promote understanding and avoiding the perpetuation of victimhood narratives is a challenge that artists and creators must navigate with care.

Noteworthy, creating a single group flashback scene was not without its challenges given the variation in cultural backgrounds, lengths of incarceration and types of offences within the cohort.

Some participants, especially those who had been in prison longer were more vocal and assertive in expressing their stories, while the newest prisoners felt hesitant or intimidated in a larger group setting. This dynamic created an uneven participation, leaving some stories unheard or undervalued. For example, Bad Sector, candidly articulated her aversion toward representing women convicted of rape:

> *'Mukadzi ruudzii anozviti mai iye achibata mwana weumwe mai chibharo. Vakadzi vakadaro vanoda rubatsiro'.* What sort of a woman call yourself a mother and rapes another woman's child. Those kinds of women need divine intervention' (Bad Sector in Chinhanu, research diary, 2019-2020).

Bad Sector's statement provides a pertinent illustration of the moral judgements and condemnations that permeated storytelling in the context of this prison theatre project. Within this context, a discernible hierarchy of moral worth materialised, with certain inmates deeming themselves as 'better' mothers in comparison to their peers, thereby exacerbating the stigma already faced by this marginalised group.

When analysing this scenario through the lens of womanism theory, particularly the tenet of sisterhood, several critical insights come to the fore. Womanism emphasises solidarity and collective empowerment among women, advocating for the recognition and celebration of diverse experiences and identities within the female community. However, the emergence of moral judgements and hierarchical distinctions among incarcerated women challenges the principle of sisterhood inherent in womanism. My observations were that the notion of 'better' mothers leads to divisive dynamics among women in Zimbabwean prisons, resulting in the formation of cliques or subgroups based on shared perceptions of motherhood quality. This fragmentation hinders the development of affective solidarity, fostering competition and judgement instead of empathy and mutual support.

Moreover, such judgements often stem from internalised patriarchal norms and societal expectations regarding motherhood and womanhood. Women in marginalised and constrained environments like prisons internalise these societal standards, leading to the perpetuation of hierarchies and divisions within their own community. Noteworthy, these dynamics impacted the storytelling process, as some individuals hesitated to share sensitive experiences or opinions due to fear of judgement or backlash. Moreover, managing group dynamics became challenging, as differences in comfort levels with self-disclosure and communication styles affected the overall cohesiveness of the storytelling experience.

6.3.2 Narrative through Poetry

An impactful element that played a significant role in attempting to address the challenge of voice

and representation was poetry. Below is an example of the participants' poetry:

> **Rue:** *... Amai vangu: Save! Mugari wemumvura! Muridzi wesirivheri nendarama….* (*Save*! The rain farmer! The possessor of silver and gold!)
>
> **Queen V and Lodza***:* *Vangu iShumba Muridzi wesango. Vanotonga nekudzvova. Chibanda mapfupa. Havadyi huswa*. (Lioness! The queen of the jungle. She leads with strength)
>
> **Magaro, Magirazi, and Madhuwe:** *Vangu isoko*. *Makwira miti. Vanozadza masango* (Monkey! The planter of seeds).
>
> **HTT and Flocy:** *Vangu VaMaMoyo. Varozvi. Vakapera nenda* (The heart of Life. The *Rozvi.* She perseveres to the end).
>
> **Gaga:** *Vangu mbeva. Muridzi wevhu. Vanoronda dzinza. Varipedyo navadzimu* (Possessor of the soil. She is close to the spirits).
>
> **Lodza:** *Vangu iMbizi. Mhuka yakanaka. Chimama mabhanzi. Jekera mudondo. Manjenjenje. Ganda ravasikana.* (Zebra. A beautiful beast. The mother of stripes. A wanderer of the grasslands. A dancer. A girl's dream).
>
> **Bad Sector and Musalad:** *Hungwe! Chasura Chatibwege. Vanofambira mudenga*. (The Eagle! The hunter of the sky. She soars high).

In this poetic composition, every participant was afforded the opportunity to contribute a line, resulting in a blend of voices that encapsulated a rhythmic and harmonious expression of a shared experience and aspirations. Through the melodic flow of verse, each participant shared an aspect of their identity, highlighting their connection to ancestral heritage and familial lineage through the practice of totemism.

Totemism emerged as a powerful mechanism for fostering a unique sense of solidarity grounded in mutual respect among the women in the group which they could come to in times of conflict and judgement. The deliberate incorporation of totems into the poetic storytelling demonstrated the participants' deep-rooted desire to establish a connection with their audiences and evoke a sense of familiarity and shared cultural identity. By sharing their mothers' totems and expressing a yearning for maternal figures, the performers sought to assert their presence within the broader social fabric and bridge the gap between their incarcerated reality and the outside world. They represented an expression of yearning for familial bonds that transcended physical barriers.

The responses from select audience members at JML Theatre served as heartening validations of the participants' endeavours:

> 'We will keep fighting for you ladies'

‘Well done mummy (Magirazi). We love you and we’ve got you through it all’.

These audience responses indicated a willingness to engage with the participants' experiences, empathise with their struggles and to acknowledge their humanity, expressing a desire to stand in solidarity with them in their journey. The feedback directed specifically towards Magirazi embodied a sense of emotional connection and affection. It illustrated her children’s acknowledgement of their mother as deserving of love, respect and support despite her circumstances. This response not only aimed to validate her efforts in sharing her story, but also worked to reinforce her sense of belonging and worth within the broader community. Thus, some of the audience responses became an integral part of the storytelling process, affirming the participants' humanity.

6.3.3 Storytelling Through Music and Embodied Punishment: Religious Narratives in Carceral Settings

In furthering their narratives of connection, religious music emerged as a pivotal element in the participants' storytelling. They utilised a popular gospel song titled *‘Munoziva Kusasimba Kwangu’* (You Know How Weak I Am):

Munoziva kusasimba kwangu (You know how weak I am)

Ndotya kurasika. (I fear losing my way)

Asi imi murisimba rangu (But you are my strength)

Munondipa simba (You strengthen me)

Storytelling through music has been an integral aspect of sub-Saharan African societies since precolonial times. For example, Mutasa, Magocha and Madadzhe (2018) elucidate how Zimbabwean women from the Masvingo province incorporated songs and music in some of their folklore to disseminate information crucial for the well-being of their communities. Tatek Abebe (2021) conceptualises storytelling through music as a practice wherein musicians, including singers, lyricists and performers, construct and convey narratives encompassing intimate or personal, societal, and historical experiences. This practice hinges not only on experiences considered collective but also generates versions of social reality that are shared, contested, embraced, and sometimes rejected.

In the participants’ performance of the song, the tempo of the music was slow, allowing for a more contemplative and expressive delivery. The vocals played a crucial role in conveying the emotions expressed in the lyrics. The performers employed a heartfelt and soulful delivery, utilising dynamic variations to emphasise the emotional highs and lows of the lyrics. This intentional use of dynamics was intended to enhance the overall impact of the performance, drawing the listeners into the poignant narrative of the hymn. The combination of slow tempo, soulful vocals, and expressive

dynamics was to create a powerful and moving musical experience that resonated with the emotional and spiritual themes of the song.

Through this act of emotional vulnerability, the participants undertook the task of conveying a spectrum of themes including fear, rupture, pain, connection, hope, forgiveness, and redemption. They integrated metaphors such as 'born again' and 'saved' into their narratives to depict their new lives. Embedded within Christian theology, the concept of being 'born again' signifies a profound reorientation of personal religious beliefs, behaviours, and social affiliations. Those who identify as 'born again' assert experiencing a renewed faith accompanied by substantial changes in various aspects of their lives. This framework of spiritual renewal also serves as a catalyst for seeking forgiveness from both families and society, leveraging Christianity's strong foundation for reconciliation within the Zimbabwean context.

Despite the fraught history of Christianity in Zimbabwe, characterised by instances of violence and control, incarcerated women employed subversive storytelling techniques to construct narratives of personal growth and transformation that hold significant meaning in their lives. Thus, the medium of music was a platform for participants to navigate intricate social dynamics shaping their narratives.

However, the utilisation of religious music within the context of the performance reveals underlying tensions and contradictions within religious discourse, particularly concerning the balance between themes of forgiveness and judgement. While the notion of being 'born again' promises hope and redemption, it also carries undertones of judgement or the implication of being 'saved' from inherent sinfulness, potentially diminishing a sense of agency. This dichotomy adds layers of complexity to the narratives presented by the incarcerated women and the broader societal perceptions of their experiences.

It is intriguing to observe how the performers endeavoured to reclaim their agency through the embodiment of stories of punishment within satirical mimicry of religious charitable organisations. A striking example of this dynamic unfolded in a scene where Bad Sector assumed the role of a religious leader representing an organisation that had visited the prison with charitable donations.

In this scene, Bad Sector adeptly mimicked the pastor’s demeanour, portraying his incoherent preaching and misguided belief in the spiritual possession of the incarcerated women. The scene humorously yet incisively exposed the patronising attitude of the religious leader, who offered salvation in exchange for worn-out shoes, previously worn undergarments, and stale *‘maputi’* (hard popped corn). Moreover, the presence of the religious organisation highlighted the different stories of punishment that the women endured at the hands of the visitors of the prison. By satirising the religious leader's misguided attempts at salvation, the performers illuminated the absurdity and indignity inherent in the punitive measures imposed upon them. They drew attention to the ways in

which religious rhetoric and symbolism are often wielded to maintain control and reinforce existing power structures, rather than promoting genuine empathy and understanding.

Through satire the performers intended to offer insights into the entrenched perceptions they hold regarding their relationship with the prison visitors:

> *Vanouya muno nemabhaibheri nemharidzo because vanofunga kuti imba yemadhimoni.* (They come in here with their bibles and sermons because they think that the prison is a house of demons) (Bad Sector in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

The narratives presented by the performers challenged the stereotype of Africana women being solely spiritual, opting instead to use satire to portray aspects of spirituality they disagree with. Through their satirical acts, they confronted the contradictions and hypocrisies of charitable efforts that fail to acknowledge the complexity of their lives and perpetuate systems of oppression and dehumanisation. This resistance against controlling narratives empowered the performers to assert their agency and question the existing norms in the prison system and society at large.

However, the participants did not receive the anticipated feedback from the prison officers regarding the scene and similar scenes depicting prison life:

> *I did not know there are such intelligent people in prison. You did such a great job of showing real prison life. An outsider can tell the story of how prison is like* (DCG in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).
>
> *Focus ngaive pareform. Muritsamba yedu kunze uko* (The focus should be on reform. You are our letter to the outside world. (Officer from Chikurubi female in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).
>
> *Mamwe manzwi ngaasataurike kunze uko even though ariwo mataurire emuno* (Some words should not be spoken outside prison even though it is how we speak inside here) (Officer from Chikurubi female in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

The comment made by the prison official regarding the acting abilities of the participants diverts attention from the actual challenges faced by female prisoners. By focusing on the women's ability to act, the official may have been unintentionally downplaying the gravity of the issues raised by the performance. The observation that women are adept at acting could inadvertently imply that the system is less concerned with understanding and addressing the unique needs of female inmates and more focused on maintaining stereotypes.

Similarly, the reactions and attitudes of prison staff members indicated a concern for the portrayal of the prison system to the public perhaps out of fear of public scrutiny or misinterpretation. The

officers highlighted a desire to maintain a level of discretion or confidentiality regarding the institution and its operations. From an alternative perspective, the prison system can be interpreted as imposing institutional narratives on its community members. Through an emphasis on rehabilitation, prison staff can be seen as exerting pressure to shape narratives that align with the system's purpose and functions. The perpetuation of 'good stories' serves to reinforce norms and controls within the criminal justice system. There is a risk of tokenism within this framework, where the participation of incarcerated women is superficially utilised to promote rehabilitation without addressing the underlying systemic issues. Thus, these responses highlight the complex dynamics and power struggles within the prison environment, where the desire for self-expression among incarcerated people may clash with the prison system because of its need to maintain control and order.

The participants' inclination to frame narratives of reform through religion, despite their critique of religious organisations, likely stems from the limited avenues available within the prison environment for women to articulate their desires for personal growth and change. The absence of comprehensive rehabilitation programs may constrain their options, prompting them to turn to religion as a pathway toward transformation. Additionally, the pervasive influence of religion in Zimbabwean society likely shapes the participants' decision to embrace religious narratives. By aligning with religious themes, they may seek to adhere to societal norms and expectations while finding solace and guidance within familiar spiritual frameworks. Thus, the adoption of religious narratives unveils the intricate layers of complexity inherent in storytelling among incarcerated individuals. These complexities highlight the intersections of power, personal agency, societal expectations, and the pursuit of redemption within carceral spaces.

6.3.4 Love Letters and the Societal Perceptions of Incarcerated Women

Another aspect of the women's storytelling was writing and sharing of love letters from their lovers in Chikurubi Maximum prison with the audience. I delved into the logistics of transporting these love letters in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis. Below is an extract from the play script in which they shared the contents and nature of these letter:

> **Magaro:** Right! Nhasi ndareceiver kachikoka hope kubva kune shiri chena yangu *(I received a 'bedtime love letter' from my 'white bird' today)* (opens letter and everyone circles around her as she reads the letter)
>
> > 'mambokadzi! (My queen)
> >
> > Uriseiko chidokohori changu? Muridzi wemoyo wangu. *(How are you my peanut relish. The possessor of my heart)*
> >
> > Gaya paya pandakatanga kukuona uri mugarden; eish! Ndakabva ndadhakwa.

(Remember the first time I met you in the garden. You intoxicated me.) You are my non-alcoholic beer. My pork pie. Ndiwe unondiitira.*(You are the one for me)* I want you to be my wi… (struggles to read)

Magirazi: Hunza tione kuti pakanzi kudii *(Let me see what it says)* (leans in) Aaaah pakanzi WIFI. *(It reads WiFi)*

Everyone laughs

The contents and sharing of letters from their lovers constitute an intimate method of storytelling in prison. These letters are from male prisoners endearingly referred to as '*shiri chena'* (White birds) because of their white prison uniforms. The women share these letters among themselves, forming a circle around the reader and fostering a shared moment of intimacy among them. The act of sharing love letters within the prison environment unveils an intriguing aspect of role-playing assumed by the women when writing these letters. Temporarily setting aside the roles and identities typically imposed upon them as inmates and mothers, these women adopt the personae of a romantic partners or lovers in their written correspondence.

The letters are characterised by a blend of humour, intimacy and cultural references, providing the women who participate in them with emotional experiences often absent from their day-to- day lives as inmates. The use of vernacular language and colloquial expressions add to the aesthetics of the letters. Despite the women's casual dismissal of them as '*ndezvemuno mujeri,*' (something we do in prison to pass the time), the love letters bear a far deeper significance, serving as a form of emotional resilience amidst isolation. They explore fantasies and scenarios that may be considered taboo or unattainable within the prison setting and which temporarily transport them from the concrete walls and barbed wires. Some letters even contain promises of a future relationship post-incarceration. Thus, the act of composing and exchanging these love letters goes beyond a simple expression of affectionate words.

When deliberating whether to include the love letters in the performance, older women within the prison community expressed disapproval towards the idea:

> *Ngezvepwere izvi. Hazvina chekuita neupenyu hwedu muno* (It is all frivolous child's play that is beneath the seriousness and gravitas of our experiences) (Holier-than-thou in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

However, despite initial reluctance, those who participated in the love letters managed to persuade their peers, including the sceptical 'Holier-than-thou,' to include them in the performance. Their justification centred around countering public rumours of same-sex relationships among female prisoners, highlighting the strategic and pragmatic considerations underlying their decision-making

process. Holier-than-thou ultimately agreed to this justification because she was keen to present an image of herself she deemed positive and acceptable to share to the public.

Yet, as the participants endeavoured to confront public perceptions of incarcerated women's sexuality, they encountered limitations in determining what to incorporate and what to omit. They noted instances such as being approached by male inmates at Chikurubi Maximum, referencing a practice colloquially known as 'bluetooth' suggesting the sharing of desire over airwaves rather than in real space and time.

> *Tinoitwa ne 'bluetooth' neboys rekuChikurubi.* (The men at Chikurubi Maximum will have sex with us via 'bluetooth' (Gaga in Chinhanu research diary, 2019-2020).

The participants decided to exclude a dance sequence depicting bathing time in prison, fearing potential misinterpretation of its sexual connotations. This deliberate process of selection and omission did not go unnoticed by one audience member:

> *This was a lovely platform, although I feel there was a level of moral policing in terms of the experiences* (Audience member at JML Theatre, 2019)

This observation highlights the prevalence of self-censorship that perpetuates a culture of silence and invisibility within the narratives of incarcerated women. Such self-censorship is deeply entrenched in societal norms that prioritise notions of modesty and privacy, thereby shaping the behaviours and perceptions of incarcerated women. Moreover, these deeply embedded societal expectations have the capacity to reinforce stereotypes that misrepresent the complex and multifaceted experiences of incarcerated women. The act of omission inadvertently sustains the narrative that certain aspects of incarcerated women's lives should remain hidden, their daily lives cloaked in secrecy, even as it might be far from the truth. Essentially, the exclusion of such narratives not only highlights the subjugation of female inmates but also contributes to the broader issue of the erasure of women's voices and experiences within the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, the decision made by the participants resonates with broader insights into Zimbabwean society marked by intensified tensions, wherein traditional notions of masculinity are upheld, granting male inmates' greater power and control. Female prisoners, recognising these power imbalances, felt compelled to adhere to cultural expectations meticulously to avoid stigmatisation or further victimisation at the hands of male counterparts. While this conformity serves as a survival strategy, it perpetuates gender-based power imbalances.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the storytelling practices of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons, revealing how they navigate the delicate balance between self-representation and societal

expectations. Through various artistic expressions, such as flashbacks, poetry, embodiment, and music, the participants crafted narratives that encapsulate their experiences, aspirations, and identities. These stories, rooted in the tradition of precolonial women's storytelling, have evolved into more public, real-life narratives that confront pressing societal issues faced by women offenders in Zimbabwe.

However, the process of storytelling was not without its challenges. For instance, the inclusion of a collective flashback scene revealed some of the difficulties in applying an African-centred ethic of *hunhu* in a diverse group. The varying cultural backgrounds, lengths of incarceration, and types of offenses among the participants led to uneven levels of participation. However, this was not solely due to the limitations of the *hunhu* framework. Time constraints, logistical issues, and the existing power dynamics within the group also played a role in determining whose voices were heard or left unheard. These factors contributed to a discernible hierarchy, with certain inmates perceiving themselves as 'better' mothers, further exacerbating the stigma faced by this marginalised group. While *hunhu* encourages unity and collective responsibility, the practical challenges of facilitating such diverse experiences within a limited timeframe complicated its application in practice.

Moreover, the inclusion of a story about the theft of a goat, which was debated among participants, further highlighted the complexities of *hunhu.* While the act violated societal laws, it was framed by some as an expression of *hunhu*—an effort to provide for one's family amidst deprivation. This juxtaposition of familial responsibility with the societal stigma of criminal behaviour raises ethical questions about survival strategies in contexts of extreme poverty. The narrative thus becomes a poignant commentary on the human condition, highlighting the resilience, ingenuity, and moral ambiguity inherent in the pursuit of survival and dignity in the face of adversity.

The negotiation surrounding which stories to include in the performance revealed a significant degree of self-censorship among the participants, largely influenced by societal norms that prioritise modesty and privacy, particularly for women. One participant, initially cautious about how she would be perceived, expressed a desire to present an image that aligned with public expectations of respectability. Eventually, she consented to sharing her story about goat theft, as it provided a counter-narrative to the prevailing negative stereotypes surrounding prisoners' relationships. This decision illustrates the intricate ways in which self-censorship operates among incarcerated women, not only to protect their reputations but also to navigate societal judgements. In this context, self-censorship reinforces a culture of silence and invisibility, as these women feel compelled to selectively disclose their experiences in a manner that aligns with the principles of communal harmony and healing central to *hunhu* ethics. This ethical framework, which emphasises moral accountability, respect, and shared humanity, subtly encourages individuals to suppress certain aspects of their narratives in the pursuit of collective well-being. However, this process also limits the visibility of more complex, often uncomfortable truths about the lived experiences of

incarcerated women.

Furthermore, the layering of audiences—prison officers, families, and other inmates—complicated the storytelling process. Each audience brought its own expectations, which often conflicted with the women's desires for connection, redemption, and empathy. Prison officers, for example, prioritised narratives that emphasised orderliness and compliance, potentially stifling the women's freedom of expression. Meanwhile, the women’s families, influenced by societal norms and cultural values, shaped the nature and content of the stories shared, as the women sought acceptance and understanding. The presence of male inmates added another layer of complexity, as gender norms and power dynamics led some women to conform to male expectations.

Ultimately, the storytelling practices that emerged within the context of imprisonment reflect the complexities, contradictions, and moral ambiguities of the incarcerated women’s lived experiences. These narratives not only challenge societal perceptions of women offenders but also illuminate the intricate ways in which these women navigate their identities within a carceral setting. The next chapter will build on these findings, discussing the implications and recommendations for applied theatre practice and research within such environments.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This qualitative research study has presented an in-depth investigation into the experiences of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons. The motivation behind this study stemmed from the noticeable lack of attention on female offenders in the Zimbabwean context, coupled with a pronounced gender bias in prison theatre, which predominantly spotlights male prisoners (see Balfour, 2004; Pensalfini, 2016; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998). The scant representation of female offenders exacerbates their obscurity and neglect in both scholarly literature and broader discourse concerning female imprisonment (Belknap, 2020). Therefore, the study endeavoured to shed light on the unique challenges, narratives, and potential for empowerment among women in Zimbabwean prisons through the utilisation of PPT as a methodological approach. Furthermore, it sought to contribute to the growing practice on theatre with women in the criminal justice system (see Lucas, 2021; McAvinchey, 2020; Walsh, 2019).

While the historical underpinnings of PPT research study did not seek to advance the idea that a participatory project, revolving around the experiences of incarcerated women will inherently dismantle prevailing power structures and entrenched hegemonic positions, such as the tension between the state and incarcerated women. I acknowledge that no single participatory theatre performance can adequately subvert the institutional apparatus and no theatrical performance can genuinely reveal its inner workings. This assertion aligns with McAvinchey's (2020) observations. Instead, this research reoriented its focus towards an affective approach within popular theatre. Presently, PPT is constrained by its emphasis on measurable social change (Chinyowa, 2007; Kerr and Plastow, 2011; Plastow 2015). The shift offered in this study towards an affective practice offered insights into the potential of a culturally sensitive approach to prison theatre practice, which, at an emotional and community level, enriched the lives of incarcerated women in ways that may not be immediately visible or quantifiable.

The focus on PPT as methodology responded to the need for developing new critical methodologies that address the nuanced dimensions of cultural perspectives on the engagement with women in prisons. Prevailing methodologies and approaches in prison theatre, as practiced across several countries, have predominantly been shaped by established frameworks like Theatre of the Oppressed, playback theatre, process drama, Shakespeare in prison, and techniques derived from the Geese Theatre Company (see Baim and Brookes, 2002; Balfour, 2004; Pensalfini, 2016; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998). These dominant approaches have consequently marginalised methods and approaches that emanate from Black and Global Majorities, thereby restricting the exploration of a broad spectrum of approaches in applied theatre within the criminal justice system. In this context, the present study provided a context- specific, culturally sensitive and alternative

perspective on the application of prison theatre to contribute towards enhancing the understanding of the field and its potential impact in various cultural contexts.

The aim in this chapter, therefore, is to reconcile the findings about the experiences of women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons drawn from their participation in PPT. It subsequently revisits the research questions, which are:

1. What new perspectives opened up through analysis of my PPT project regarding the experiences of incarceration of women in Zimbabwean prisons?
2. How does the utilisation of PPT empower incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons to express themselves, share their stories, explore their identities and build connections within the confines of the prison environment?
3. In what ways does a PPT rooted in local cultural forms challenge the dominant approaches of prison theatre and provide a space for advancing the field of prison theatre?

The chapter further emphasises the contributions made by the study to the existing body of knowledge, to the discipline and delves into the implications of these findings for practice. Furthermore, it sets out the inherent constraints of the study and suggests prospective directions for future research.

A disclaimer I make in this study is that a four-month interaction with twelve women, a one- day workshop with eleven women in Harare and a one-week interaction in Shurugwi with twenty one women cannot represent the entirety of the incarcerated female population in Zimbabwe. Attempting to do so would oversimplify this multifaceted subject and the intricate array of realities that incarcerated women in Zimbabwe confront. Each woman possessed her unique narrative, yet their experiences converged, revealing shared elements, which were unearthed during the collaborative creative process.

7.2 A Synopsis

Before I sum up the research, I thought it prudent to provide an overview of how I have explored the experiences of incarcerated women. This narrative unfolds across six chapters. While recognising the inherent limitations in encapsulating the multifaceted, intricate experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe comprehensively, this approach serves as a reasonably thorough exploration, particularly considering the dearth of knowledge regarding women in Zimbabwean prisons prior to this research.

I introduced the study with the aim of unpacking the research problem and providing a rationale for the significance of the inquiry. The chapter assumed critical importance as it served as a fundamental entry point into the research endeavour by highlighting several research gaps. These include:

- The marginalisation of approaches from the Global South in applied prison theatre,
- The limited research and knowledge regarding the experiences of women in Zimbabwean prisons
- The unaddressed gap in the integration of theatre within the Zimbabwean prison system and
- The limited attention given to female offenders within the context of prison theatre practice

As a result, the chapter facilitated comprehension of the study's purpose, context and significance laying a solid foundation for subsequent chapters and findings.

Chapter One, which is predominantly context-driven, served as the platform for introducing the key research contexts, encompassing Zimbabwean prisons, women in prisons, and applied theatre in prisons. The context on prisons in Zimbabwe emphasised the influence of colonialism on the country's justice system, revealing the lasting legacy that continues to shape contemporary constraints within the Zimbabwean criminal justice system. The section dedicated to women in prisons addressed the critical issue of underrepresentation within the broader discourse on crime and punishment, by shedding light on the characteristics and identities of female inmates recruited for this study. This examination contributed to the existing literature and research concerning women in prisons in sub-Saharan Africa (Ackermann, 2015; Artz et al., 2012; Dastile and Agozino, 2019; Kinonco, 2020; Modie-Moroka, 2003) by providing a nuanced exploration within the specific context of Zimbabwe. By doing so, it expanded the geographical scope of existing literature on this topic. The final portion of the chapter delved into diverse methodological approaches employed in the realm of applied theatre with incarcerated women, culminating in a discourse that advocates for the decolonisation of applied prison theatre through the application of PPT. The key learnings from this chapter highlighted the need for adopting indigenous methods and culturally attuned lenses to gain a better understanding of the experiences of incarcerated women.

Chapter Two integrated methodological and theoretical frameworks for analysing the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe, as well as the experiences of the research participants in popular participatory theatre, all within the context of their cultural situatedness. Specifically, it elucidated the integration of PPT within the framework of an indigenous research paradigm, the incorporation of affect, and the application of Africana womanism (Acholonu, 1995; Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ogundipe-Leslie,1994). This chapter also critically examined the strengths and limitations inherent in these theoretical frameworks.

Chapter Three was a sequel, highlighting the fieldwork practice with a particular emphasis on one of the central tenets of applied theatre: the process. This chapter unpacked the actual PPT process, expounding upon the rationale and considerations guiding my choices pertaining to the research sample, selection of the research site, research methods, and tools. Additionally, the emotional and affective dimensions that accompanied both me and the participants as co- investigators were central

to this chapter.

Chapters Four, Five and Six endeavoured to respond to the research questions by closely engaging the forms of PPT for this study including, costumes, indigenous traditional games and storytelling. Chapter Four undertook an analysis of the utilisation of costumes with the research participants. While I did not initially intend to use costumes as a practice, costumes emerged as a significant practice for both the research study and the participants. This practice provided an understanding of the interplay of identity, embodiment and agency among women incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons. Through the lens of costumes, the research gained insights into the complexities surrounding prison uniforms within Zimbabwean prisons.

Chapter Five critically examined the significance of indigenous traditional games within the contexts of prison and prison theatre. In the context of this research study, the incorporation of indigenous games unveiled the complex power dynamics inherent to the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons.

Chapter Six centred on the form of storytelling among incarcerated women. Through an exploration of the aesthetic dimensions of the storytelling practice among the research participants, the chapter shed light on the nuanced and multifaceted nature of incarcerated women's narratives. These narratives were carefully crafted to resonate with specific audience groups, revealing the complexity of incarcerated women's storytelling, which involves navigating and reconciling multiple social identities and expectations.

The pivotal question at this juncture centres on the newer perspectives unearthed by this study, especially as it is acknowledged from the onset that women in Zimbabwean prisons are among the most under-researched subjects. In addition, I also consider potential to applied theatre practice in prison, which is the primary discipline within which this study is situated.

7.3 Key Findings from this Research Study

Insights into Incarcerated Women's Lives

The findings of this research study significantly contribute to the understanding of the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. Through a comprehensive exploration of indigenous traditional games, costumes, and storytelling within the context of PPT, several profound insights emerged, providing valuable perspectives into the 'prison chaos' that profoundly affects the lived experiences of incarcerated women.

In my research study, the integration of indigenous traditional games provided a rich symbolic framework for the participants to delve into and express the intricate layers of their experiences within Zimbabwean prisons. Central to the exploration was the profound reflection on the complicated

dimensions of motherhood, autonomy, and familial responsibilities within the confines of the prison environment. Through the lens of these traditional games, women engaged in introspection, shedding light on the emotional intricacies that defined their interactions with societal expectations and gender norms.

Of particular significance was the exploration of the women's experiences regarding their right to be visited by others, notably their children, and the subsequent crafting of excuses regarding their absence. This aspect unveiled deeper layers of emotional negotiation and coping mechanisms within the prison setting, highlighting the delicate balance between personal autonomy and familial obligations. Through the exploration of these traditional games, the study unearthed fresh insights into the complexities of women's incarceration experiences in Zimbabwean prisons. It illuminated the nuanced dynamics at play and offered a deeper understanding of the intricate emotional landscapes that define the negotiation of identity and agency within the confines of incarceration.

Furthermore, the incorporation of indigenous traditional games served as a catalyst for incarcerated women to unravel the intricacies of power dynamics and alliances within the prison community. Through their active participation in the selection process and the subsequent formation of alliances during these games, the participants unearthed the subtle yet pervasive impact of social structures and affiliations that govern their daily lives behind bars. Of notable significance was the revelation of a distinct system of 'gangs' that exists in Zimbabwean female prisons through the classification of groups of prisoners based on their assigned daily prison chores and responsibilities. The identification and exploration of these 'gangs' shed light on the intricate dynamics at play, offering insights into the mechanisms through which power is wielded and negotiated among incarcerated women. These alliances transcended mere practicality and chore assignments; they represented a complex web of relationships and affiliations that underscored the daily interactions and social structures within the prison community.

The study delved into the symbolic significance of clothing within the prison community, particularly the practice of assigning distinct coloured uniforms to denote specific traits or conditions among inmates. Through an analysis of these costume dynamics, my research study uncovered the systemic biases and unequal treatment entrenched within the prison system, particularly concerning gender and nationality. The imposition of uniformity through the prison clothing emerged as a mechanism through which individual narratives were erased, contributing to feelings of marginalisation and exclusion particularly among foreign prisoners and those labelled with specific offences. By delving into the complexities of prison dress codes, the study illuminated the intricate interplay between identity construction and power dynamics within the prison environment. The examination of these costume dynamics provided insights into the ways in which institutional norms and practices intersect with broader societal norms, shaping the lived experiences of incarcerated

individuals.

It is worth mentioning that in my research study, storytelling emerged as a profound mechanism through which the participants navigated and articulated their personal narratives within the complex landscape of societal expectations and institutional constraints. This aspect of the research uncovered a rich tapestry of experiences, shedding light on the complex interplay between personal agency and the coercive influence of external agencies, such as religious organisations and the prison system itself.

One of the central findings of the study was the revelation of how the prison system, in collaboration with external entities like religious organisations, imposes specific institutional narratives upon incarcerated women. These narratives compel women to construct and perform societal norms and expectations, often in ways that reflect favourably upon the prison system and its associated institutions. Through the act of storytelling, participants wove metaphors such as 'born again' and 'saved' into their narratives to describe their experiences of transformation and redemption within the prison environment.

This example highlights the layers of complexity inherent in the construction of personal narratives among incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. It underscores the ways in which storytelling serves as both a mechanism for self-expression and a site of negotiation between individual agency and institutional constraints. Moreover, the study illuminated the broader implications of these narratives, revealing how they contribute to the perpetuation of a culture of silencing and invisibility within the prison system.

In sum, the findings of this research study elucidate the multifaceted dimension of ‘prison chaos’ through the lens of indigenous traditional games, costumes, and storytelling. It highlights the complex interplay of power dynamics, social structure and individual agency, deepening our understanding of the experienced of women in Zimbabwean prisons.

Participatory Practices in Prison Theatre

The form of PPT occupies a significant role within this study as a subject of inquiry in and by itself. In employing PPT as a method, I undertook an exploration into its relevance, applicability, and efficacy as a medium through which incarcerated women could articulate their personal narratives from their unique perspectives. This theatrical form resonated with the incarcerated women, largely due to the established connection between the performance of prison and theatrical performance.

The use of costumes emerged as a powerful practice, empowering the research participants to embody identities that transcended the confines of prison walls. In an environment where opportunities for self-expression are limited, costumes provided a unique avenue for the participants

to explore aspects of their identities beyond their incarcerated roles. Additionally, costumes served as a form of resistance against the constraints imposed by the prison system. By embracing creativity and imagination through costume, the participants asserted their individuality and refused to be defined solely by their status as prisoners. Costumes became symbolic of the participants' resilience, creativity, and capacity for self-determination.

The indigenous traditional games offered a brief escape from the chaos synonymous with prison life, providing incarcerated women with an opportunity to engage in play, establish connections, share ideas, cultivate friendships and make meaning of their experiences. Despite the rigid and oppressive atmosphere of the prison, these games temporarily disrupted established power dynamics, promoted social unity, and created unique bonds among the women due to their cultural significance, theatrical elements, spiritual connections, and distinct gameplay. The initial atmosphere of unfamiliarity, which pervaded the outset of our interactions, gradually gave way to a sense of *'ukama'* (familial relationships). This transformation emerged as a critical element of totemism, that surfaced through playing indigenous traditional games. Within this context, the participants developed the ability to perceive one another beyond their differences, forging connections that transcended the constraints of their confinement.

Storytelling, manifested in two dimensions: within the prison environment and through performance, served as a channel for the participants to articulate their experiences to the prison community and to their families, friends, and society at large. Through narratives rich in metaphor and satire, participants navigated moral judgements and were able to convey their aspirations for reform and successful reintegration into society.

Rooted in the exploration of individual realities and the utilisation of diverse knowledge systems and popular modes of expression, PPT assumed a role focused on fostering empathy. In contexts where preconceived notions prevailed, the collaborative exchange of personal narratives served to dismantle biases. Ultimately, PPT aimed to counter the marginalisation experienced by female prisoners and promote the development of social networks and cohesion within the prison community.

7.4 Implications of Research Findings

At this point in the research project, it is customary to consider the potential trajectories for the study. However, classifying a study of this nature into a singular discipline proves to be challenging. In fact, the study illuminates the notion that as one delves deeper into any inquiry, ideas tend to converge and overlap, rendering conventional disciplinary boundaries less relevant. This research sits at the intersection of applied theatre studies, indigenous research, and womanism, leaving discernible imprints in all of these realms, both conceptually and methodologically. Its most notable achievement lies in its capacity to harmoniously amalgamate these three dimensions, consequently

redefining the contours of how applied theatre within correctional facilities is perceived and understood.

Applied Theatre in Prison

A participatory theatre research initiative conducted within Zimbabwean prisons stands as a pioneering contribution to the theatrical landscape of Zimbabwe. The field of applied theatre, renowned for its well-documented political influence (Chinhanu, Chivandikwa, and Seda, 2021; Chinhanu, 2013; Chivandikwa, 2016; Mushangwe and Chivandikwa, 2014; Makumbirofa, 2011; Seda, 2004; Yule, 2010), has, however, consistently omitted the experiences of incarcerated women. Consequently, the introduction of theatre within the prison context serves to significantly broaden the horizons of applied theatre, providing a unique platform for the expression and exploration of these marginalised experiences.

This thesis presents a significant methodological contribution through the integration of indigenous research methodology and affect, aimed at advancing the decolonisation of applied prison theatre practices. By incorporating indigenous traditional games into PPT, the study actively contributes to the process of decolonising theatre games within prison theatre settings, thereby challenging the predominance of Boal and Western game structures. The focal point on transitioning from workshop processes to performance marks a pivotal shift in prison theatre studies, diverging from conventional approaches prevalent in applied theatre scholarship (see Balfour, 2004; McAvinchey, 2020; Pensalfini, 2016; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998). Traditionally, such scholarship tends to concentrate solely on either the process or the product. This emphasis on performance provides a fresh and dynamic perspective, offering new avenues for exploration within the realm of prison theatre studies. Moreover, the insights gained from the adaptation of costume into a practice offer considerations for practitioners of prison theatre.

Particularly noteworthy is the recognition of the potential of costume design and performance in effectively engaging with incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, the emphasis on ongoing self-reflection and the exploration of new approaches stresses the importance of aligning methodologies with the cultural contexts of the individuals involved in collaborative endeavours.

The study's contributions to the field of prison theatre extend beyond academic inquiry, offering practical implications for advocacy, policy reform, and community engagement initiatives aimed at amplifying the voices and agency of incarcerated women. As such, the findings of this research have the potential to inform broader conversations surrounding gender, justice, and human rights within Zimbabwean society and beyond.

Women in Prison

The scholarly examination of incarcerated women in sub-Saharan Africa has been generating

attention in recent years (see Ackermann, 2015; Artz and Rotmann, 2015; Chepkemoi, 2011; Fasanmi, 2015; Kinonco, 2020; Modie-Moroka, 2003; Van Hout and Mhlanga-Gunda, 2018; Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1999), reflecting a growing willingness for reform within the prison system. This study contributes to the expanding body of research on women in prisons by shedding light on the identity, motivations, and experiences of these women. Additionally, it addresses a notable gap in the existing literature concerning incarcerated women in Zimbabwe, thereby enriching the limited scholarly discourse on this topic. What sets this research apart is its unique disciplinary approach, departing from the conventional realms of sociology, medicine, or law. By utilising theatre as a means to explore the multifaceted realities of incarcerated women, this study offers a new and refreshing perspective that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this marginalised demographic.

Womanism

Theoretically, the research addressed the limitations of feminism, particularly in its tendency to overlook the diversity among women (see Mohanty, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 1994). To address this limitation and comprehensively analyse the experiences of women in prisons, this study embraced womanism as a critical theoretical framework, that encapsulated their distinctive histories, cultures, and narratives, thus offering a unique lens through which to engage with the context of women in Zimbabwean prisons. The foundational principles of womanism harmonise with the roles, positions, and experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that some concepts within womanism, such as motherhood, sisterhood and solidarity with men, raise problems within the context of incarcerated women. This study endeavoured to extend the boundaries of womanism to challenge the entwining influences of culture, patriarchy, and misogyny. By grounding this research in womanism, I present an argument that scrutinises the underlying functions of contemporary Zimbabwean society and the prison system, both of which contribute to a systemic moral separation of certain categories of women. I posit that this unique lens offers a fresh and distinctive perspective, allowing for a deeper understanding of how incarcerated women define, assess, and reconstruct their stories, lives, and experiences—a theme central to Africana womanism (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

This research offers significant contributions to womanism as a discipline by centring the voices and experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons. Womanism, as a theoretical framework, emphasises the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and other social identities, with a particular focus on the experiences and perspectives of women of colour. By examining the experiences of incarcerated women through the lenses of indigenous traditional games, costumes, and storytelling within popular participatory theatre, this research contributes to the broader discourse within womanism regarding the intersections of gender, culture, and incarceration.

Additionally, by highlighting the ways in which indigenous cultural practices and storytelling serve as forms of resilience and resistance for incarcerated women, this research adds depth to womanist analyses of agency, empowerment, and community-building within oppressive contexts.

7.5 Study Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

As I bring this final chapter to a close, I shift my focus to documenting the limitations encountered during my research journey. Throughout this discussion, the theme of 'prison chaos' emerges prominently, offering insights into the inherent challenges associated with conducting research in prison settings. The goal of this discussion is to engage in a meaningful and critical reflective process that not only informs my future work but also serves as a valuable resource for others embarking on similar qualitative research endeavours.

One significant limitation of this study pertains to the sample size. Involving 44 female prisoners at different levels of participation, highlights the constraints of the sample size. This limitation restricts the depth of insights that can be gleaned from the study and may not adequately capture the diverse experiences and backgrounds of female inmates across different regions, socio-economic statuses, and cultural contexts within Zimbabwe. For example, foreign prisoners who often face additional challenges and complexities within the prison system, were few in number and interacted with for a limited duration. Consequently, this research provides only a portion of the narratives encapsulating the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwean prisons, highlighting the need for further exploration and understanding.

I mentioned in Chapter Three that gaining access to the research site does not automatically mean access to research participants, especially in sensitive and restricted environments such as a prison. While getting access to Zimbabwean prisons was relatively easy, I did not always have easy access to the participants. Institutional regulations, security concerns, and logistical challenges occasionally restricted my access to them. We never started the workshop on time and with all participants throughout the process. Either a person or two would be missing because they were needed elsewhere, or under punishment, or the workshop was cancelled for that day because of an impromptu event. I would always end up frustrated and discouraged because of the lack of communication from the prison authorities about events. Limited participation not only compromised the depth of understanding into the lived experiences, viewpoints, and obstacles encountered by female prisoners but also risked overlooking significant subtleties and diversities within the cohort, thus undermining the comprehensiveness and richness of the research findings. Therefore, while acknowledging the constraints imposed by logistical and temporal factors, it is imperative to remain cognisant of the potential implications on the validity and inclusivity of the research outcomes.

Moreover, conducting research in a struggling economy like Zimbabwe was prohibitively expensive. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe introduced 'Bond notes' as a local surrogate currency in late 2016, which were hyper-inflating at an alarming rate during the research study. In addition, there was a severe shortage of fuel, causing me to miss several workshops while searching for fuel. Even before completing the project, my budget was completely depleted, making it impossible to visit the Mlondolozi female prison in Bulawayo.

Additionally, the necessity to return to England as COVID-19 pandemic lockdown hit further compounded the constraints on time. Subsequent follow-up fieldwork became unfeasible due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow-up fieldwork serves as a vital tool for researchers to delve deeper into the dynamics and experiences of participants, enabling exploration of evolving narratives, perspectives, and circumstances (Irgil et al., 2021). Additionally, it facilitates the validation and triangulation of findings obtained during initial data collection phases. By revisiting participants and corroborating previous observations, researchers can enhance the credibility and reliability of their findings, thereby mitigating the risk of bias or misinterpretation inherent in cross-sectional studies. Moreover, follow-up fieldwork allows researchers to assess the efficacy of interventions (Irgil et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the absence of follow-up fieldwork in this study precluded the opportunity to delve deeper into participants' experiences of participating in PPT and to explore their responses to feedback and comments from audiences. Consequently, the study offers only a snapshot of the experiences and realities of female prisoners. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn regarding PPT as a method for decolonising prison theatre are limited to serving as a pilot.

Another challenge encountered in this research study pertained to the process of data analysis. Engaging with qualitative data, which encompassed a myriad of collected information and observations (including fieldwork notes, post-it notes from performances, my research diary, and participants' journals), proved to be a complex undertaking. The sheer volume of the data intensified the complexity of the task, demanding careful attention and methodical scrutiny. In anticipation of streamlining the analysis, I had devised a strategy to facilitate the exchange of notes and reflections with students from the University of Zimbabwe. The intention was to foster a collaborative environment where insights could be shared and perspectives could be broadened through meaningful reflections during fieldwork. Regrettably, the implementation of this plan encountered obstacles due to the many commitments and obligations the students had elsewhere. The intricate nature of engaging with the data not only significantly consumed time and resources but also resulted in a missed opportunity for diverse perspectives, insights and knowledge exchange individuals well-versed in the contextual nuances. Looking ahead, it becomes evident that incentivising collaborative networks may prove instrumental in sustaining engagement among stakeholders.

Similarly, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, my ability to engage in physical or face- to-

face seminars and conferences following my return from fieldwork in January 2020 was severely constrained. In a post-fieldwork context, conferences and seminars serve as invaluable platforms for sharing perspectives, exchanging ideas, and envisioning alternative futures for the field of prison theatre. By convening with a diverse array of stakeholders including artists, activists, scholars, and community members, these gatherings facilitate meaningful dialogue and collective problem-solving. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these vital channels of communication and collaboration, leaving me isolated amidst the heartbreaking narratives of the incarcerated women in my study. The solitary endeavour of making sense of these narratives proved to be mentally taxing. As I immersed myself in the analysis, I began to discern parallels between the experiences of incarcerated women and the confinement imposed by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic, this introspective journey highlighted the importance of nuanced understanding and empathy in confronting the multilayered challenges faced by marginalised populations within carceral settings

While the findings of the study provide valuable insights, it is essential to interpret them within the context of the above study's limitations. Be that as it may, I am hoping that the insights I have presented will stimulate the curiosity of other researchers, encouraging them to embark on a more comprehensive exploration of all incarcerated women in Zimbabwe. There is substantial space for further research characterised by a multi-intersectional approach. For instance, delving into the experiences of those who identify as queer in a society dominated by a pervasive homophobic discourse would be a worthy avenue of inquiry. With this, the study concludes. However, it is my sincere hope that it marks the start of a new chapter in understanding the experiences of incarcerated women in Zimbabwe.

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Appendix A: Clearance and Authority to Conduct Research in Zimbabwean Prisons

ZIMBABWE PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICE

Telephone : 706501/2/3/4, 777384
754197,710095

Telegrams : "PENAL", HARARE
Fax : 754157
Email : zps@gta.gov.zw

Reference: G/24/17

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER - GENERAL
Private Bag 7718, Causeway
Harare
ZIMBABWE

06 February 2017

Chiedza Chinhanu
No. 1105 Chikanga 1.
MUTARE

APPLICATION FOR CLEARANCE AND AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PRISON

1. The above subject refers.
2. You are hereby informed that your application for clearance and authority to conduct an academic research entitled, ***"Prison Theatre,Civic engagement and prisoner-citizenshp: A Zimbabwean Practice as research project."*** was approved.
3. You can now make arrangements at your convenient time during working hours and at your expense for data collection.
4. On completion of your project you are required to submit a soft and hard copy of your findings to the Research and Development office for the Commissioner General's information. During your data collection exercise you are required to observe all the necessary rules and regulations including ethics appertaining to your study and you shall not be allowed to divulge to any unauthorised person/s information regarding the operations of the ZPCS.

5. By copy of this letter, the O/C- Harare Metro Province and OICs – Harare Central and Remand Prisons, Chikurubi Maximum, Farm and Female Prisons are advised of this approval.

....
D. Garauzive (SUPERINTENDENT)
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

Action
SO- Security
Info
O/C – Harare Metro Province
OICs – Harare Central and Remand Prisons and Chikurubi Maximum,Farm and Female Prisons
SO – Admin
File

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet for Participants in Chikurubi Female Prison

This form gives you important information about the doctoral research project. It describes the purpose of the study and the risks and possible benefits in participating in the study. Please take time to review this information carefully. You have the right to seek clarity from the researcher or register any queries or questions before you agree to take part.

The title of the research project

Prison Theatre in Zimbabwe

What is the purpose of the project?

The major objective of the study is to use Participatory Theatre as a platform for female prisoners to share their experiences through performance making process.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected because you have expressed interest in sharing your experiences for the purpose of this PhD study.

What am I being asked to do?

During this study you will be asked to participant in theatre making process. You will attend workshops and rehearsals where you will share your personal stories, feelings, thoughts and perceptions. You will keep a journal which the researcher can request at any point during the project.

Will I be remunerated for my participation?

There is no renumeration for participating in this research study. However, you be presented a certificate of participation at the end of the project.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have the opportunity to share your stories and experiences with other women in a fun and engaging way. This can boost your selfhood and help you become more expressive. Participating in this project can help temporarily free you from the stress of prison life.

Are there any risks to participation?

Talking about your life experience can be dense and overwhelming. If our interaction becomes too sensitive, you as a participant reserves the right to step out of the rehearsal space and where needed access counselling services will be readily available at the venue.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? / What will happen to the results of the research project?

You will keep a journal in which you will write anything you wish as it relates to the theatre making process. What you write will be used for the writing of the PhD thesis and can be reused for other things like conference presentations and journals. The journals will not be as private as in the sense of diaries are, but will be accessible to the prison officials should they require to see them at any point. The researcher will also request the journals a few times during the process for data collection. Therefore, you are asked to divulge only the information you are comfortable sharing.

Your participation in the write-up of the final thesis will be kept confidential unless you request specifically that your name be mentioned during the post-performance discussion. I will follow the Data Protection and Confidentiality guidelines that are set by the University of Leeds.

The theatre making process and post-performance discussions will be facilitated by myself and I will make notes and/or record them accordingly. Your name or any detail that could identify you will remain anonymous. Data used for publications, conferences speeches, seminars, as well as data that could be shared with the other partners in this research will be also kept anonymised.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

As far as this research is concerned you will not be video recorded. If there is any video or audio recordings it will be done by the ZPCS and in accordance with institution's guidelines.

Who is organising/ funding the research?

The project is entirely organised by the researcher. The project is fieldwork for my PhD studies at the University of Leeds, which are funded by the University's Interdisciplinary Faculty Research Scholarship. The funding does not cover fieldwork.

Contact for further information

Chiedza Adelaide Chinhanu
pccac@leeds.ac.uk
+263772602116

You can keep a copy of this information sheet and, if you consent to participating in this research, you will substantiate that with a signature in a consent form which you will be given by the researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the information.

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet for Participants at Shurugwi Prison

This form gives you important information about the doctoral research project. It describes the purpose of the study and the risks and possible benefits in participating in the study. Please take time to review this information carefully. You have the right to seek clarity from the researcher or register any queries or questions before you agree to take part.

The title of the research project

Prison Theatre in Zimbabwe

What is the purpose of the project?

The major objective of the study is to use Participatory Theatre as a platform for female prisoners to share their experiences through performance making process.

Why have I been chosen?

The workshop session that you are being asked to take part in is a part of the bigger project that is happening in Chikurubi Prison. Your selection process was by the prison officials and the researcher has not had any influence in it.

What am I being asked to do?

During this workshop you will be asked to share your personal stories, feelings, thoughts and perceptions which is will be used in the research study.

Will I be remunerated for my participation?

You will not be remunerated for your participation

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have the opportunity to share your story and experiences with other women in a fun and engaging way freeing you from the stress of prison life for the day.

Are there any risks to participation?

Talking about your life experience can be dense and overwhelming. If our interaction becomes too sensitive, you as a participant reserves the right to step out of the rehearsal space and where needed access counselling services will be readily available at the venue.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? / What will happen to the results of the research project?

Your name or any detail that could identify you will remain anonymous in the writing of the thesis. Data used for publications, conferences speeches, seminars, as well as data that could be shared with the other partners in this research will be also kept anonymised.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

As far as this research is concerned you will not be video recorded. If there is any video or audio recordings it will be done by the ZPCS and in accordance with institution's guidelines.

Who is organising/ funding the research?

The project is entirely organised by the researcher. The project is fieldwork for my PhD studies at the University of Leeds, which are funded by the University's Interdisciplinary Faculty Research Scholarship. The funding does not cover fieldwork.

Contact for further information

Chiedza Adelaide Chinhanu

pccac@leeds.ac.uk

+263772602116

You can keep a copy of this information sheet and, if you consent to participating in this research, you will substantiate that with a signature in a consent form which you will be given by the researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the information.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form: Consent to take part in a Participatory Theatre project

*This consent form will be discussed with participants verbally before signing and will be translated into at least one other language.

	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up till 1 month of the project starting without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Please contact the lead researcher: Chiedza Chinhanu on site (in person/ via letter) should you have any questions about this research or wish to withdraw from the project.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research unless you request to be identified by organisation name for your own promotional or educational use.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.	
I understand that my journal will be requested by the researcher for copying and can be requested at any time by the prison officials	
I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	

I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	

Name of participant	
Signature of participant	
Date	

Appendix E: Participant Performance Consent Form

ZIMBABWE PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICE

Telephone : 706501/2/3/4, 777384/5
7541G7,7100G5
GENERAL
Telegrams : "PENAL", HARARE
Fax : 754157

Reference:

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER GENERAL

Private Bag 7718, Causeway
Harare

CONSENT FORM

1. I .... voluntarily agree to perform in the
drama '**Kupera kwezheti iboma**' facilitated by Chiedza Adelaide Chinhanu.
2. I will act in the performance without holding neither ZPCS nor any other
Parties liable for any personal benefit from the drama. No other Obligations shall arise from the production of the drama.
3. I have fully understood the aspect of the role to be played in the production of the drama and shall therefore contribute without prejudicing the ZPCS organisation and Chiedza Adelaide Chinhanu.
4. I received a total amount of USD$15 for partaking in the theatre production.

FULL NAME...
SIGNATURE..
DATE...