

MYSTICISM OF THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT AND FAMILY RECONSTRUCTION OF EX-INMATES OF THE CENTRAL PRISON OF YAOUNDÉ: A STUDY OF 3 CASES

BANEN JOHN THIERRY¹, OYONO ADAMS DANIEL² & CHAFFI CYRILLE IVAN³

¹Ph.D., Faculty of Education, University of Yaoundé I, Yaoundé, Cameroon

²Doctor, Teacher-Researcher, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Yaoundé I, Yaoundé, Cameroon

³Associate Professor, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Yaoundé I, Yaoundé, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

A fundamental question in the study of the prison environment in Cameroon is to describe and understand its functioning and structure. The Cameroonian prison system is designed to punish outlaws and keep them out of society. This article aims to demonstrate the impact of women's imprisonment on their social status. Prison conditions, in a context of internal prejudice and representation, weaken the family reconstruction of ex-prisoners. After a period of incarceration, women mothers are forced to renounce their position within the family due to transformational determinants, opacity, fixation and the scarcity of social interactions. The situation of incarcerated mothers remains a cause for concern, particularly in view of the cultural role assigned to them. The results of a clinical study of three ex-women in prison indicate that incarceration, non-gendered conditions of confinement, the opacity of the prison environment and the erosion of family ties are obstacles to the process of family reconstruction, which can lead to failure in the social reintegration of women ex-prisoners. It is recommended to consider readjusting prison policies and structures in order to reorganize the conditions of detention of women prisoners in Cameroon.

Keywords: mysticism of the prison environment, prisoners, fixation, opacity, family reconstruction.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

The prison environment has always been the object of fear and rejection by a large part of society, because it is a biotope that is little or poorly known from the outside. The impressions are generally blurred, and the functioning is not well known. It gives the impression of reading a desire to maintain a kind of opacity of this universe (Ngono Bounoungou, 2014). However, this reality is not likely to facilitate its perception, let alone the life of its occupants. The Kampala Declaration (1996) on prisons in Africa underlines that prison conditions pose a threat to the life, health and social reintegration of the prison population. In this sense, several studies, including those of Hofman (1999, p.88), Morelle and Awondo (2018), Ngono Bounoungou (2012) and Banen and Chaffi (2023), conceptualize the prison environment as one of the institutional structures that is the least permeable to the outside and where interactions are reduced. Hofman (1999, p.88) states that,

Of all the state institutions, the penal detention facility seems the most massive, the most stable, the most impermeable to the outside world, the most immutable in its conditions

and purposes, in short, the most conservative, a kind of monument of austerity next to which the good people pass by, relieved by this virtuous detour Hofman (1999, p.88).

It is therefore generally a universe of deprivation of liberty. These are very often the outlaws who have been ostracized after having committed a reprehensible act by society. These detriments constitute a prison population categorized into remand prisoners and detainees with stratifications relating to age but also gender. In its structural-organizational configuration, the prison is divided into a section for minors, adults, specific convicts but especially a women's section. This distribution is subject to the specificities of each group, where the conditions of detention and supervision differ from one stratum to another.

For women prisoners, the UN Standard Minimum Rules specifically require prison authorities "to use, to the extent possible, options such as temporary absences, open prisons, halfway houses, and community-based women's programmes and services, in order to facilitate the transition from incarceration to release, to reduce stigma and allow these women to reconnect with their families as soon as possible" (Rule, 45). Rule 47 goes further by emphasizing that the prison administration should also provide additional post-release support to women prisoners who require psychological, medical, legal or practical assistance to ensure their successful reintegration into society. This reflects the urgency of specific supervision for women prisoners because not only of their role in society, but also of the fact that they are more stigmatized than men, to the point that they have difficulty reintegrating into their families and being accepted by their community.

In Cameroon, the use of the Code of Criminal Procedure reveals the absence of specific provisions on the detention regime for women. Thus, apart from their social and community specificity, women are subject to the same regulations as their male peers despite rules 45 and 47 issued by the United Nations. This situation considerably weakens the condition of the detained woman/mother in Cameroon. Several of the latter, after detention, are rejected by their families because they have a degraded image, coupled with the prejudices of the prison environment; hence the deconstruction of the family and a difficult social reintegration.

According to the Directorate of Penitentiary Administration of the Ministry of Justice in its summary of prison data for the month of August 2023, women represented a total of 3.02% of the prison population in Cameroon, or about 1039 distributed in the various prisons of the ten regions. A percentage may be small compared to other countries. This under-representation would certainly be at the origin of the low interest given to the issue of women prisoners. According to the National Association for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ANAPRODH), the majority of incarcerated women are mothers, and 80% of them have had at least one child (ANAPRODH, 2021). It is therefore obvious that the situation of imprisoned mothers remains worrying in view of the cultural role attributed to them and the place of the child in their lives.

Given the crucial role that women play in our African societies, in this case that of mother, educator and wife (Hugon, 2020), their conditions of detention should allow for family reintegration and reconstruction of the family fabric after release. However, in a situation of detention, their social roles are put on hold because they are no longer able to help their child(ren) to build themselves because of their detention. They are therefore separated from their spouses, and from their offspring, who can be entrusted to a relative or a third person.

This placement highlights the problem of family reconstruction of women prisoners in Cameroon who are prey to stigmatization of several kinds.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The mission of the prison, beyond its punitive dimension, is also to rehabilitate inmates in order to facilitate their return to society. It may be a straightening of the crooked branches of the social tree (Mbock, 1989). Beyond the punitive dimension, confinement can be seen as a period of openness during which prisoners are led to think about the length of the sentence and the social role they will have to play when they are released. Because it provides a way to get out of solitary confinement and overcome prison immobility (Reynaert, 2004).

2.1 Opaque prison environment and low social interaction

Prison is a social institution as old as humanity, but it is still struggling to be adopted socially. As a closed or closed institution (Goffman, 1968), prison has always been the object of fear and rejection by a large part of society, and this reality is not likely to facilitate its functioning, let alone the lives of its occupants, because prison remains a little-known universe (Lemire and Vacheret, 2007). The context of isolation and confinement, uprooting or confrontation with a socio-cultural environment that is sometimes very different from one's own are all modifications that break with the daily habits of the outside. Thus, all prisoners are forced to live in close proximity to social groups that may be antagonistic in terms of values, opinions or attitudes (Morelle, 2018).

The functioning of the prison environment generally assigns to this mode of organization the rank of a "total" institution (Sykes, 1958). The prisoner lives in a strictly defined space of restriction, in which his movements, what he eats, what he wears, what he buys, are entirely controlled. He lives in a particular cell that he has most often not chosen and is subject to a specific administrative or legal regulation governing his actions and subjects it to the adoption of a particular code of conduct.

The deprivation of liberty of detainees should not deprive other rights, in particular the right to maintain family relations. The maintenance of relations between prisoners and the outside world is important and essential to the process of social reintegration envisaged for persons deprived of their liberty. However, visiting a prisoner often poses problems of space, time and cost for families, and this does not facilitate the regularity of these links, which are often weakened by detention.

Ngono Bounoungou (2014) points out that the links with his or her relatives, however tenuous, are often the only relational support points whose preservation will allow the prisoner to maintain a psychological balance. The texts must formally recognize the maintenance of family ties as an absolute right. However, no such rights are recognized for persons deprived of liberty in Cameroon. Article 37 of Decree No. 92/052 of 27/03/1992 on the penitentiary regime in Cameroon provides that " convicts are authorized to receive visits from members of their families and friends ... ». This authorization is ambiguous, since if the authorization can be interpreted as an agreement made to someone, this same agreement can also be subject to deprivation. And when the prisoner is illegitimately deprived of it, he has no recourse to claim it because it is not a right, but a favor. All the more so since there is no legislative provision

for a condition of motivation in the event of refusal, and no recourse is provided for the benefit of the prisoner confronted with such a situation. From there, the authorizations to visit become a valuable instrument susceptible to blackmail in the hands of the prison administration. However, this situation considerably weakens the process of social reintegration envisaged when we know that maintaining the link between prisoners and their relatives is an essential tool for preparing for release (Morelle, 2018).

2.2 Cameroon's prison space: an anti-world for inmates?

Few studies in the social sciences and humanities have grasped prison as a geographical object (Morelle, 2013). Only Brunet (1981) analyzes the place of the gulag in the industrial functioning of the USSR, Lamarre (2001) the processes of territorialization within the prison space and Valentine (2002) the internal life of the prison. However, the geographer is questioned in more ways than one, starting with the one that the state, in particular the prison administration, hides and hides from the gaze of citizens. The one that is also shown, failing that, by the play of the representations and fantasies that it feeds (Morelle and Milhaud, 2019).

The notion of anti-world refers to a prison space that is not very open, restricted, mysterious and indirectly little known by the outside world. In the words of Morelle and Milhaud, it is a "part of the world that is not well known and that wants to remain so". The deliberate ignorance of the anti-world works on two levels for prison: distancing on the one hand, and invisibility on the other. When Brunet (1990) considers the anti-world of prisons, he reduces its relegation to a simple distancing, which would not in itself be a stigmatization. He even associates it with the space of the beau monde, which is certainly far from the space of the common, because

The production of society has side effects that the powers, in general, seek to hide. Nothing but very natural, but abnormal: on the one hand the grown-ups, and on the other the deviants, all out of the ordinary. You shouldn't show the people too much how you live in the castle. You must not let him see the abnormal. In both cases, he would lose his morale, if not all morality. At both ends of the chain the spaces of aristocrats and reprobates are alienated" (Brunet, 1990, p. 192).

However, Combessie (1996) has clearly pointed out that places of confinement are subject to spatial and social relegation. The location of prisons is, in fact, most often peripheral.

The places of punishment then suffer from a paradoxical invisibility. If, like any anti-world, they constitute "shadow spaces" or "black holes" (Brunet, 1993, p. 35), prisons in fact combine political visibility and social invisibility. Everyone knows that there are prisons. Prison also confirms that it defies Lussault's theory of visibility regimes (1999, p. 245). Space makes societal substances visible and action meaningful. Thus, it helps to build the legitimacy of actors, especially political actors, who use space to give visibility and meaning to their actions: "The need to make legitimate action visible on legitimate space pushes us to constantly instrumentalize material space: the latter, much more than just action on the social, cultural, etc., is immediately significant of the acts undertaken, constitutes a material of election for political power" (Lussault, 2003, p. 997).

2.3 Prisonerization of women and social gaze

Numerous studies have attempted to highlight the weight of prisoner use on prisoners (Clemmer, 1940); on the prospects for the social reintegration of prisoners; the consequences of the length of imprisonment on those in the criminal justice system (Johnson and Grant, 2000). According to Lemire and Vacheret (2007), even if prisonization is not irreversible, it can reduce the chances of reintegration of inmates once they are released from prison because of the socio-cultural improvements experienced by society and families, the first social rehabilitation unit.

Prolonged imprisonment weakens any social return because of the transformation imposed by the prison environment (Lemire and Vacheret, 2007). When they find themselves there, most of these women are abandoned by their spouses because of the reason for their imprisonment, the gaze of others and the shame in front of friends and acquaintances. Often it also affects children because the truth is hidden from them for fear that they will be mocked or pointed at by other children, or even discriminated against. Often the family rejects them to the point of ignoring their situation. And in most cases, their spouses and partners remarry. Many female prisoners do not receive visits. However, visits are crucial for the psychological well-being of detainees and are the main means of obtaining food, medicine or other essential items that are not provided at all by prison authorities (Wogaing, 2021).

2.4 Incarcerated women and the possibility of family reconstruction

The history of women and more of motherhood in Cameroon reveals that a mother is not only a woman who has had to give birth to one or more children, she is through the roles she plays on a daily basis. A mother can be a grandmother, a sister, an aunt who has raised a child, or even a neighbour with whom the child has a loving relationship (Wogaing, 2012, Hugon, 2020). Moreover, for mothers in prison, this situation and function are reversed in favor of incarceration with rigid rules. Insofar as, in a situation of confinement, they live outside the family unit. Their social roles are put on hold (Wogaing, 2012). As their presence is considered fundamental, they are no longer able to help their child(ren) to build themselves up because of their detention. The detained mother is separated from her offspring, who can be entrusted to a relative or a third person. This is not the case in some Western countries where the separation of mother and child depends on the age of the child in question (Schachtel, 2000; Mangin, 2018). For some, their emotional life is limited to simple visits that last barely an hour in unfurnished spaces, for others, to no family contact (Wogaing, 2021). If imprisoned women have been able to give birth, they no longer have the right to sex to speak like one of them, let alone intimacy. This considerably weakens their return to their families, and even more so their acceptability by their loved ones (spouses, children, brothers and sisters).

3.0 MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES

The study was carried out among 03 women ex-inmates of the central prison of Yaoundé in Cameroon, defined according to the saturation threshold. The inclusion criteria were the status of convicted prisoner, woman who had been married or in a union, and who had at least one child. This survey took place in the city of Yaoundé during the year 2023 with the former inmates of district 4 of the central prison of Kondengui reserved for women according to the internal distribution of the prison.

Qualitative in its approach, given the intended objective, the instrument formulated was the interview guide given to ex-inmates women obtained using the snowball sample. In order to collect information on prisonization, the breakdown of family ties, the low level of family interaction during incarceration and their effects on the family reconstruction of the ex-incarcerated woman in view of the low "gender" in the supervision of women in detention at the central prison of Yaoundé.

4.0 VIGNETTE OF EX-INMATES AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

During the interviews, all participants stated that they had been exposed to critical events in their lives after incarceration. They also said that these events had influenced the process of rebuilding their families. These were victimization, stigmatization, family rejection and "conjugal expropriation." The vignettes presented rehash the story of life during and after the incarceration of 3 ex-incarcerated women experiencing difficulties in family reconstruction.

4.1 The Stamped Woman

IF1 was living in a common-law union before his incarceration in Yaoundé Central Prison for complicity in theft with stolen goods. She had a period of incarceration of 2 years living in ward 5 reserved for incarcerated women. At the time of her incarceration, she was the mother of two children aged 3 and 5 years old, placed under the supervision of her mother during her period of incarceration. Except after her release, she was denied the right to see her offspring because of her victimization by her relatives. Emotionally, she says: "The time I spent in prison completely turned my little life upside down. Before the incarceration I was in a relationship with André and we lived with our two children, but now he is forbidden to see his relatives because of my status as a female prisoner." This statement reflects the effect of prison conditions, which are responsible for the erosion of family ties. IF1 had never received a visit from his children during his incarceration, let alone permission to visit given the rigidity of the prison environment and also his victimization by his family. She can be heard saying: "My husband came to see me a few times with a few clothes, often in the company of my younger brother, but he never wanted me to see my children". From then on, the sentimental distance set in between the imprisoned mother and her offspring, which paralyzed family and even social reconstruction. Thus giving rise to his rejection by the members of his family.

4.2 Stigmatized woman

The former prisoner, who was 32 years old at the time of the investigation, had been imprisoned twice for drug use and gang assault for her first and second incarceration respectively. IF2 is a repeat offender, mother of two children in a conjugal union at the time of her second incarceration. During her incarceration, she did not receive any legal assistance from any group of lawyers during her second stay in Yaoundé Central Prison, from the trial phase until her release. In terms of social support, IF2 has not received any clothing, food or health assistance from the prison environment or any other organization. He can be heard saying: "During my incarceration there, the living conditions were difficult, without any help whatsoever or even from my relatives... you had to get out of it on your own." The prison environment in its organization has categorized the prison according to more criteria including gender. This categorization should go beyond the infrastructural distribution to also affect the conditions of

detention, especially those of women. As for the relationship with the outside world, it practically did not exist because of the prison pervasiveness based on the excess of prohibitions.

After a double period of incarceration spent in the central prison, IF2 lost all benevolent view of society in favor of social stigmatization. "When I got out of prison, I no longer had a home or a reference point, everything had changed, my spouse moved with our children without a trace." IF2 found herself homeless after her first release, no reference because her nuclear family lived on the outskirts, and feared her presence in the family given her past as an ex-prisoner. "When I got out, I went to my mother's village, the welcome was repulsive. All the family and friends were informed of my situation; which was difficult for me this type of environment." The family unit is the first level of acceptability of the individual who is part of it. However, ex-prisoners are often rejected by this unit, which further weakens their chances of social reintegration. The rejected individual is often prey to loneliness which, when pushed, leads to the search for peers and peers, which generally leads to recidivism. "I had no more room at home, without work or housing I had to find myself in a group, unfortunately which led me to prison for a second time."

4.3 Labeled woman

Officially married at the time of her incarceration, IF3 went through a period of confinement for repeated breach of trust with an association where she assumed the role of treasurer. She spent nearly 02 years in the central prison of Yaoundé. Given her status as a teacher before the incarceration, she held the position of prisoner teacher, which allowed her to benefit from certain favours from the prison administration, including the authorization to visit once a week with the possibility of going to see her family during the month. Mother of 3 children, IF3 visited her children monthly during the first year of incarceration but gradually lost her skills as a mother, a woman, an older sister in favor of a woman with a criminal record that was not recommended. With the arrival of the new manager, IF3 has regressed in favor often granted, which has led to the withdrawal of monthly visits. He can be heard saying: "But the arrival of the new boss has changed everything. I didn't see my family anymore, I already felt far away from them. My husband visited me but the children didn't. For them, I was a prisoner mother." IF3's entourage had explained his situation to his children who were beginning to suffer from the weight of the mother to the point where the family was forced to leave the neighborhood, except that in the family the same effects recurred.

The post-prison period was the most difficult turning point of my life, going from a stay-at-home mother to a woman without a job or family. Following my release, I noticed that my social status had also changed considerably. My relationship with my family and neighbours has changed, making it more difficult to maintain ties, especially with my former friends from the women's association. Within my family, the bond has weakened and they now perceive me as a person damaged both physically and psychologically by my detention.

These life stories illustrate the prevalence of many challenges that undermine the lives of these ex-convict women. Thus, each of the said women tries to develop other coping mechanisms to cope with these difficult events and maintain a sense of stability. The participants' stories reveal a series of issues that emerge from their experience of victimization and imprisonment that can lead to recidivism.

4.4 The effect of prisonerization on the family reconstruction of ex-convict women

Akoa (2010) noted that most Cameroonian prisons are old, unsanitary and overcrowded: more than 5000 inmates in the Yaoundé Central Prison (PCY). In the same vein, the Programme for the Improvement of Detention Conditions and Respect for Human Rights (PACDET II) in its 2016 provisional report, identified a set of problems facing Cameroonian prisons: dilapidated and dilapidated structures, violence, insecurity, precarious living conditions, idleness, promiscuity, preventive detention. This also means that the conditions of detention in Cameroon are even more worrying for the detainees. However, the conditions of detention at Yaoundé's central prison do not take into account the specificities of women in their images of the social body.

Due to their small but growing numbers, women and girls in detention are more likely than men and boys to be detained in inadequate and often unsafe conditions (United Nations, 2009). To address the specific needs of women and girls, it is essential that prison authorities develop and implement gender-sensitive policies for the classification and placement of prisoners. These policies should include a commitment to detain women in separate facilities from those where men are held, and girls in facilities separate from those where boys are held (Mel, 2022).

To use Mel's (2022) point, the organization of the prison environment in Cameroon does not integrate the "gender" recommended in the categorization of prisons and their conditions of detention, even if a women's section is defined. In many prisons, the system of classifying prisoners applies equally to men and women, without sufficient consideration of the specific problems of women. Women prisoners are often placed in categories of excessive security, without taking into account the real risks they face. This restricts their access to programmes and services designed to meet their needs, which jeopardizes their chances of successful reintegration into society. It is therefore necessary to improve the classification system and to develop adapted programmes to meet the needs of women prisoners and to promote their rehabilitation.

Prolonged imprisonment has a negative effect on women's reintegration into society because of changes imposed by the prison environment. Upon return, these women are often abandoned by their spouses due to their incarceration, resulting in the gaze of others and shame in front of their friends and acquaintances. This situation also affects their children, who are kept in the dark for fear of being ridiculed or discriminated against by other children. In addition, female prisoners often face difficulties in receiving visits, which is essential for their psychological well-being and in obtaining basic necessities such as food and medicine, which are not provided by the prison authorities. Also, it is common for spouses to remarry, which can lead to isolation and family rejection (Wogaing, 2021).

4.5 Opacity of the prison environment and difficulty in rebuilding the family of women ex-prisoners

The results obtained indicate that the Yaoundé Central Prison is considered a "total" institution in the Goffmanian sense because it controls all aspects of the inmates' lives. Their space is strictly limited and their actions are governed by strict administrative or legal rules. Inmates do not have many choices, even in their educational or leisure activities, which are usually dictated by the institution. Life in prison is therefore a mixture of different spheres of life that overlap.

However, it is important to understand that prison is a dynamic system where standards are negotiated between inmates, prison staff and external parties. Inmates must learn to navigate this complex web of formal and informal rules, which are part of a larger system of interpersonal relationships (Morelle, 2018). Prison cannot simply be seen as a simple politically correct concept, but as an environment where the different parties are engaged in a constant exchange aimed at future social reconstruction.

However, such an approach has an impact on the social reconstruction of ex-incarcerated women insofar as the interaction between inmates and the social environment and family is sometimes weak, sometimes plagued by prison resonance (Banen & Chaffi, 2023). Incarcerated mothers face strict living conditions and limited parenting. In many countries, including Cameroon, detained mothers are separated from their children and the children are entrusted to other family members or third parties. Family visits are often short and limited, and in some cases, there is no contact with the family. In addition, women prisoners do not have the freedom to have sex or experience intimacy, which complicates their family reintegration and acceptance by their relatives. The situation of the detained mother is therefore reversed in relation to her usual role within the family unit, and this has consequences for the development of her children and their relationship with her (Wogaing, 2021).

Also, the criminal and/or social record gives rise to rather negative reactions towards people in the criminal justice system and this gives rise to difficulties in several spheres of these individuals' lives. Society's beliefs are influenced by the image presented by the media, and the media tend to highlight cases that are more sensationalist (offenders of a certain category) than representative (Laws & Ward, 2011). The weight of the criminal record, in addition to the obstacle it constitutes for access to employment, it also leads to the erosion of the family network in terms of the stigma generated.

4.6 Breakdown of family ties and failure to rebuild family for women ex-prisoners

It is important to note that it is not always the act of confinement itself that creates stigma. It is also about the discredit, disrepute, contempt and reprehensible effect that accompanies the conduct of the criminal trial, the conviction and the sentencing. In fact, in a judgment rendered by the Supreme Court, judges recognized that the conduct of the criminal trial is often accompanied by stigmatizing effects (Renaud, 2014). Not only does the conduct of the trial create a stigma for the accused, but this stigma becomes even deeper at the time of conviction, even when no sentence has been imposed or alternative measures to imprisonment have been imposed. The convicted individual may be subject to negative consideration by those around him or her because of his or her criminal experiences. In the same vein, Renaud (2014) has shown that the contempt and indifference of relatives, colleagues, relatives and friends that occur following a criminal experience can be experienced as a form of punishment in itself. This stigma is even greater among women, who constitute a different social stratum.

Also, in Cameroonian culture, where incarceration is considered particularly shameful, women generally receive fewer visits than men. Their families may reject them or not know where they are being held. Their husbands can remarry (Mel, 2022). Yet, visits are essential to a prisoner's psychological well-being and are a means of obtaining food, medicine and other basic necessities when resources are limited and the authorities do not provide adequate goods.

In these circumstances, prison officials should be encouraged to facilitate as much contact as possible between prisoners and their families, through prison leave, extended visits (including conjugal visits if permitted), telephone calls, letters or any other appropriate means. Prison authorities should be flexible about the frequency and length of visits, especially when visitors have come from far away, and should take into account normal school and work schedules, to allow children to visit their mothers outside of school hours (Mel, 2022, p 10).

Yaoundé's central prison struggles to provide adequate resources and support to inmates. Visits from family members are important for the well-being of women in detention, as they provide psychological support and necessary items such as food and medicine. To address this problem, prison authorities should be encouraged to facilitate contact between prisoners and their families through various means, such as prison leave, extended visits, telephone calls and letters. Flexibility should be shown in the frequency and duration of visits, especially for visitors who have travelled long distances. In addition to this, normal school and work hours must be taken into account to allow children to visit their mothers outside of school hours. These measures are crucial for the well-being and reintegration of prisoners and should be considered a priority by the prison authorities.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The incarceration of women in Yaoundé's central prison highlights the need to address the practices, conditions and specificities related to this opaque environment. Incarcerated women continue to be part of a social construct that determines the relationship between mothers and their children. Some women experience the prison environment as degrading and therefore choose to keep their experience secret. For this second category of mothers, prison represents a quadruple deprivation that results in a loss of self-esteem, a severance of the bonds that can unite a mother to her child, a life made up of lies maintained both by the incarcerated mother and by those around her, and, finally, an existence without sex. To justify their absence to their children, they make up stories. For these mothers, the primary concern is to protect their children from the social stigma that could potentially compromise their future, given that imprisoned mothers are perceived as unfit mothers. In addition, Cameroon's penal code does not allow mothers to retain custody of their minor children, regardless of their age. This situation contributes to the modification of the gendered division of social roles, since in some cases it is the father who assumes the role of mother during incarceration. From a strictly human point of view, inmates do not have the right to privacy. All spaces are shared (dormitory, bathroom, courtyard). Prison does not provide health protection. Instead, inmates obtain these items informally. In addition, they do not have spaces dedicated to their privacy and sexual intimacy. In the light of these observations, it is clear that public authorities in favour of the incarceration of women need to readjust their surveillance policies and propose living programmes to strengthen the family ties necessary for the reintegration of female prisoners.

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