

REGULATING WOMANHOOD AND MATERNITY

UnMothering the Woman Project

Background

Tamale (2013) argues that Colonialists worked hand-in-hand with local leaders to develop inflexible customary laws that evolved into new structures and forms of domination and deployed various legal and policy strategies and discourses in the areas of medical health and hygiene. Traditional customs were reconfigured to introduce new mores, taboos and stigmas. Women's sexuality was medicalized and reduced to reproduction. Through adopting Christianity, Africans were encouraged to reject their previous beliefs and values and to adopt the "civilised ways" of the whites. A new script, steeped in the Victorian moralistic, anti-sexual and body shame edict, was inscribed on the bodies of African women and with it an elaborate system of control. Sexuality, motherhood and marriage then became matters of public policy. African governments were at the forefront in creating prominent areas in the regulation of women, but the idea that the law merely reflected what was normal and natural obscured the extent of this regulation. Regulating Womanhood poses historically and culturally specific questions about the mechanisms that have controlled and restricted women. It shows not merely how laws and policies have set boundaries to the lives of women but also how the category of 'woman' has been constructed as a specific object for legal and social policy, and how women came to be seen as needing 'special' regulation.

This topic around Regulating Womanhood will attempt to explore how children and the organisation of reproduction and sexuality operated to normalise and make acceptable the degree of regulation to which women were subjected. How do we shed light on women's resistance and activity, and on the shift in modes of regulation, to challenge the idea of an unchanging history of the legal oppression of women.

Each year, 6,300 women die during pregnancy or childbirth in Kenya. Unsafe abortion contributes close to 17% of maternal deaths in Kenya. The 2019 reproductive health bill provides a framework governing access to family planning, safe motherhood, termination of pregnancy, reproductive health of adolescents and assisted reproduction. It makes clear that every person has the right to access reproductive health services and that every health care provider is obliged to provide

family planning information and services to women who need them. There is, however, some contention around providing these services and reproductive information to adolescents.

How do we navigate around this conversation?

Reproductive health has been enacted into law in different ways across the continent.

There is also a provision in the bill directing the national and county government to provide free antenatal care, delivery care and postnatal care for women and girls in Kenya. **Has this been done?**

What we're hoping to do

We would like to speak to women whose reproductive choices have been interfered with and/or supported by reproductive health legislation. We would like to gather stories on the effect of this e.g. people who procured unsafe abortions, or an adolescent who did not have access to the required reproductive health information and ended up in a situation they were not happy with due to a lack of this knowledge.

Through these conversations, we hope to shed light on the effects of regulation on the lived experiences and quality of life of women, and further, that these conversations will help drive and influence discourse in policy-making and legislative circles.

How you can help

Interviewees:

We would love to hear your story and share it with the world! We will send a set of questions for your review in advance, and if you have any concerns, we would love to talk about them. We have opened ourselves up to truly empathise with what your experience is. However, you are the expert - this is your life. As such, we invite you to co-create this conversation with us. With this campaign, we hope to be able to do justice to your point of view.