WORKING PAPERS

YOUNG SINGLE MOTHERHOOD:
CONTESTED NOTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD AND SEXUALITY
IN POLICY DISCOURSES/PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

There has been a growing world wide concern about young single motherhood commonly referred in policy discourses as 'teenage pregnancy'. Non-governmental organizations have designed different interventions both for control and inclusion of young mothers in society. Such interventions, though well meaning have been based on specific assumptions about 'teenage pregnancy'. This study recasts the issue by focusing on these women as 'young single mothers/women' and offers a perspective on implicit and tacit assumptions that underlie program interventions by non-governmental organizations working with them. It demonstrates how such interventions have tended to conflate young single mothers as social group living under problematic conditions with teenage pregnancy as a social problem. By drawing out the assumptions that inform the program intervention of a young mother's project in Machakos district Kenya, this study interrogates these from the perspective of their ability to bring about transformation when working with young single mothers. By drawing on alternative constructions by young single mothers, the study highlights the limitations of such a perspective by demonstrating how attention is deflected from key structural issues that are necessary for effectively intervening in the case of young single motherhood. By locating the problematic within the redistribution/recognition paradigm, this study demonstrates that it is not the physical/biological characteristics (age and unmarried/illegitimate motherhood)of young single mothers, but the locales and discourses within which their motherhood is situated that should be problematised.

The study suggests an alternative way of imagining young single mothers as social actors who can organize and form alliances to seek redress to injustices they face in society.

ABBREVIATIONS

BVLF	Bernard van Leer Foundation
CECE	Centre for Early Childhood Education
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
DHS	Demographic Health survey
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GOK	Government of Kenya
KDHS	Kenya Demographic health survey
NCPD	National Council for Population and Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
MMCDC	Mwana Mwende Child Development Centre
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
UN	United Nations
UNIRISID	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
YSM	Young single mother
YSM's	Young single mothers
WCJF	Women Centre for Jamaica Foundation

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Research Issues

Young single Motherhood labelled as 'teenage pregnancy' has been a major policy issue world wide in recent years. Each year, there are about 14 million births among girls under twenty years of age world wide (UN 2005:58). In Britain and US, there is a concern that 'teenage pregnancies' are reaching 'epidemic' levels. It is estimated that there are 90000 conceptions each year among teenagers in Britain with 56000 births of which 90% are among unmarried girls (SEU 1999:12). Such concerns have led to concerted efforts by the government to establish a teenage pregnancy unit to prevent as well as re-integrate the 'teenage mothers' back into the society. In some countries like Denmark, Netherlands Switzerland and Germany, the rates of 'teenage pregnancies' have decreased due to stringent measures like training in adolescent education and provision of contraceptives to the youth (ibid). The situation is similar in developing countries where by there are 15 million births among teenagers each year and 5.4 million of these are in sub-Saharan Africa (Middleber 2003:26). In South Africa, it is estimated that at least 30% of 19 year old girls have at least given birth once (Kaufman et al 2000).

'Teenage pregnancy' is widespread in Kenya too and is an important demographic factor. According to the 1998 Demographic Health Survey (DHS), while 17% of adolescents were already mothers, 4% were pregnant during the survey (NCPD 1999). In 2003 the proportion of teenage mothers rose to 19%. Adolescent fertility is higher in Rift valley, Coast, Nyanza and the Eastern provinces where at least a quarter of women aged 15-19 have begun child bearing. The statistics also show that girls from poorer households are more likely to have begun early childbearing (29%) as compared to those from wealthier households (21%). The DHS also showed that young women aged 15-19 are likely to receive money, gifts or favours in exchange for sex (16, 3, and 5%) respectively (CBS et al 2004:60-61). Though these figures are not disaggregated by marital status, most of these girls give birth when they are unmarried.

Concerns about 'teenage pregnancy' emanate from different and sometimes disparate locations. One of the concerns is fuelled by notions of appropriate motherhood and the view that teenagers are giving birth at the wrong time. The very juxtaposition of a term that signifies youthfulness with 'pregnancy/mother' blurs the

boundaries by collapsing mother and child and implies that these women are immature and yet involved in giving birth (Phoenix 91). 'Teenage motherhood' ruptures the universally held notions of childhood because teenage mothers are children, supposed to be innocent and dependent on parents. On the other hand, mothers are supposed to be adults (Hunt et al 2005:335). These young women are seen as psychologically immature and inadequate as parents. In addition to compromising their chances of being in school, early motherhood is associated with poverty with concerns about inadequacy of teenage mothers in providing material support to their children (SEU 1999). Moral ambiguities about their sexuality also fuel this concern and they often are excluded from their communities because they are seen as 'immoral'.

In attempting to include them into societies, some non-governmental organizations have used different intervention strategies, some of which challenge the dominant notions of appropriate motherhood while simultaneously subscribing to them. In so doing, such interventions by NGOs have tended to conflate *young single mothers (YSM) as a social group living under problematic conditions with 'teenage pregnancy' as a social problem* (Cherrington and Breheny 2005: 90). Thus, rather than addressing the social roots of 'teenage pregnancy', interventions have instead focused on their inadequacies in performing their motherhood role. Such interventions are supported by psychological and health research, which provide an authoritative voice for thinking about them. Such interventions have sometimes ignored their agency in defining their needs.

The objective of this research is therefore to deconstruct the assumptions that underlie policy/program interventions by non- governmental organization for 'Teenage mothers'. It aims to highlight the implicit and tacit norms inherent in such programs from a perspective which focuses on the dynamics between dominant and alternative norms, needs and perceptions about YSM's.

Following Parker, I argue that dominant constructions of 'teenage pregnancy' is an important subject of inquiry because of the power they weld which makes alternative thinking and program interventions about these young mothers difficult (Parker 97 in Cherrington and Breheny 2005: 90). The study offers a deconstruction of such interventions and the way assumptions underlying them oscillate between the dominant and alternative constructs about young single motherhood, and the implication of this oscillation for the active participation of young single mothers in

society. I *argue* that some of those interventions serve to comply with dominant norms about women/girls sexuality, motherhood and selfhood and can exclude them even further.

By analyzing the discourses surrounding 'teenage Pregnancy'/teenage mothers as a category, I demonstrate that it is not only the physical qualities of their age that constrain them but that these discourses and the 'locales' within which their motherhood is situated affect their selfhood, and motherhood and it is these that should be investigated and problematised. Consequently the study shifts the parameters of investigation from 'technical' qualities focusing only on their age and framing in terms of 'deficiencies' to a focus on their agency. I offer an alternative way of thinking about them by demonstrating that these women are not passive victims but are social actors, who employ both discursive and practical strategies to circumvent the exigencies of their everyday lives. By presenting the subtle nuances of YSM's experiences on their selfhood, motherhood and sexuality, and articulation of their needs, the study also brings to the fore the silenced knowledge in definition of their needs and illustrates how such knowledge is needed to bridge the gap between the formal interpretation of needs and the experiences encountered by them.

From the perspective of theory, the study casts the conceptual tools of investigation into a broader framework of redistribution and recognition as precursors of justice and social transformation (Fraser 2003). I demonstrate that YSM's suffer social injustice and they need both recognition and redistribution for redress. It adds to feminist emancipatory theory by challenging and engaging ideological distortions that are built into mainstream interventions for women/young mothers with a view for social transformation.

1.2   'Stepping out of the discourse of 'teenage pregnancy'

As a starting point I step out of the dominant discourse on 'teenage pregnancy' which informs current policies and programs for this social category. I refer to them as *young single mothers* rather than 'teenage mothers' as a conscious attempt to suggest an alternative way of thinking about them. I am inspired by Fraser and Gordon (1997:122) who say that "key words usually carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate- in part by constituting body of *doxa*, or taken- for- granted commonsense belief that escapes scrutiny'. I will endeavour to understand how these young women experience their

sexuality, self- hood and motherhood and seek to deconstruct how they have been represented. Secondly, in my interactions with the community and through the process of data collection, I realized that the term 'teenage mother' was not part of the local linguistic repertoire and instead they were referred to as "girls who have given birth when single"- revealing a distinction between local perceptions which did not see *early childbearing* as a problem per se but the fact of being single/ unmarried as the main problem. This already highlights a difference within dominant policy discourses which combine age/single status and pregnancy to categorize these women. Through out the study the term 'teenage mother/pregnancy' when used will be in quotation marks to represent the term as used by the original authors of the texts reviewed and the term YSM is used when I analyze and interpret their situation.

1.3   Situating the research

To identify and analyze these underlying assumptions by interventions, I will substantiate my argument by examining the subtext that informs the program interventions of a young mother's project in Machakos which is one of the districts in Eastern province of Kenya. The project is situated in Mumbuni Location. The local ethnic community is Akamba and majority of people do subsistence farming on small holdings. Other sources of livelihood in addition to paid employment include running small eating places, village shops or selling vegetables and charcoal. The rate of poverty is relatively high in this region, (80%) with majority of the youth unemployed. There are several self-help groups in the area and different community organizations like relief food and funeral organizations and school committees which draw leadership from all ages (MMCDC 2004; MMCDC 1997).

The project which has been working with young mothers since the year 1996 is implemented by Mwana Mwende Child Development Centre (MMCDC) and undertakes different activities with the mothers like training in confidence building, establishment of social networks and income generation. A baseline survey done by the organization before the inception of the project in 1996 identified that they had reduced self esteem and negative perception by the community. Most of them only had primary education, others had dropped out and a few had secondary school education.

They were also dependent on their families for their support and that for their children. The baseline survey identified some of the causes of early pregnancy as

poverty, lack of self -esteem, inappropriate socialization, inadequate guidance, as well as lack of discipline, respect and responsibility towards girls and women by men (MMCDC 2004:1&2). The main aim of the project was to ensure the growth and development of children by empowering 'teenage mothers'. This was achieved through training in child care, self esteem building, and connecting them back to the community (MMCDC 2000: 2&3).

This study therefore offers a perspective on the different discourses about YSM's sexuality, motherhood and selfhood/identity as articulated by the community and the program. The study also seeks to find out how the YSM's define themselves, their sexuality and motherhood and how they subvert or comply with these constructions as they struggle to legitimate themselves within different community spaces. I apply a discourse analysis to find out how the program framed the needs of YSM's. As Hajer (1993 in Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:2), argues, "Discourses frame certain problems [and tend to] distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others". To draw discursive analogies where possible, the analysis of this program's discourse was compared with similar such programs located elsewhere.

1.4   Organization of the paper

Chapter two offers a discussion of the motivation for this study, methodology and data collection methods and the questions that guide the study. Chapter three pursues explanation of theoretical and conceptual tools adopted in investigating the problem. It is also presents a literature review of the way the problematic of young single motherhood/teenage pregnancy has been conceptualized in colonial and contemporary policy discourses. Chapter four provides a deconstructive analysis of the implicit and explicit norms contained in the program interventions of Mwana Mwende project. Chapter five presents the voices and self perceptions of the YSM's, and perceptions by the community and the young single mother's families. In chapter six, I bring together the threads of the arguments into a conclusion and suggest alternative ways of thinking to bring about transformation in working with YSM's.

2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The intention to do this research was a way of providing answers to both personal and intellectual questions I had in mind. I wanted to reflect on the experiences of YSM's for I had worked with them for over four years and interactions with them and the confidence they exuded belied the common assumptions about YSM's.

In addition, on several occasions when working with young mothers in the field as the only female community worker, I had been taken to task to explain why we were supporting 'single mothers' and 'were we not encouraging immorality?'.[1] I was also driven by the need to get insights into the workings of social policies/programs for YSM's. As earlier argued, this was born from a realization that many of these programs have largely focused on these women as teenage mothers in terms of their fertility, age and their inadequacies as mothers while at the same time constructing them as victims without agency and without focusing on the way the constructions of their sexuality, selfhood and motherhood affects their every day lives and that of their children. In this regard, I was inspired by Merlingen's (2003) rendition of mainstream international governmental organizations as weapons of power geared towards shaping the populations in diverse ways. Escobar's characterization of development planning as a way of normalizing and engineering societies also provided the impetus to delve beneath the surface of programs working with YSM's to discover and engage with the silences and assumptions they operated on.[2] Undertaking the research for me was therefore a search for an alternative perspective which was resistant to dominant constructions, in the Foucauldian sense where the process of uttering knowledge that diverges from dominant discourses is a form of resistance (Foucault 1978).

Armed with this literature, I was operating on one key assumption that that it was the dominant norms of heterosexuality that governed how they worked and the same norms were responsible for the negative attitudes the young mothers received from the community. For this reason I therefore assumed that the young single mothers were resisting heterosexual marital motherhood. Initially therefore, the main

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[1] The most difficult time was in 2004 when one young man walked into our office and bluntly told me that we were actually encouraging sin in the community by supporting these girls when they give birth and for that matter we lacked moral authority to talk about anything in the community.
[2] See Escobar 1993.

question I formulated was; how do these interventions reinforce dominant notions of heterosexual marital motherhood?

I also formulated another question; do young mothers resist these constructions and with what repercussions. The first question was criticized at the proposal stage because I had made conclusions too early that these young mothers were resisting hetero-normative motherhood. Indeed it was true they were not resisting because when I went to the field I discovered that they gave birth by default but not choice and several of them did not rule out marriage. I therefore had to revise that question. Eventually the overarching question that guided the study was *whether the assumptions underlying program interventions for young single mothers resist or reinforce the dominant notions about their selfhood/identity, motherhood and sexuality.* To answer this question I posed several specific questions; what are the program's perceptions of YSM's? Do they challenge or reinforce dominant notions about YSM's selfhood, motherhood and sexuality? How do programs conceptualize issues of recognition and redistribution that constrain young mother's choices? How does the community and the families of YSM's perceive them and lastly; Are the YSM's experiences a possible source of alternative body of knowledge to be used for their own development? In seeking answers to these questions, I utilized both primary and secondary data.

2.1   Primary data

The sample

Identification of the project under study was purposive because I had worked in the project which is located in Machakos district of Kenya for several years and so the respondents were identified through purposive sampling and were known to me. Primary data was collected from YSM's to get the reality from their stand point. These were women who had their first child in the period 1994 till 2004 when they were between 13 and 18 years and were still single. This period coincides with the time the NGO started the project in that area. A total of nine YSM's were interviewed. The mothers of the YSM's were also interviewed to gauge how their subjectivities diverged or converged with those of their daughters. Interviewing them would also provide generational similarities and differences in perception of young single motherhood. To get alternative constructions from the perspective of the community, Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) were also carried out. They consisted of preschool

teachers, young single and married mothers, mothers of YSM's, fathers and community health workers. For a perspective on programs discourses, interviews were done with three project staff and a representative of the program's donors. In total, nine YSM's, five of their mothers, three project staff and one donor were interviewed. Three focus group interviews were also carried out.

2.2   Getting the data and analysis

Data collection for primary research was done using feminist standpoint methodologies. This is premised on the fact that it is the subjects who posses knowledge about their own situation and so they should be the starting point in research. Information from the YSM's and their parents was collected through life stories. This method was preferred to collect as much information as possible and also reduce to minimum the power differences between researcher and the respondents (Harding and Nordberg 2005). The use of narratives also gave them freedom to narrate those bits of their experiences that they felt were important and were comfortable to narrate and also enabled me to capture their experiences as they unfolded. The narratives were largely unstructured, even though I developed some standard questions designed to prompt them to narrate their stories and define the boundaries of the research. For the NGO staff, data was collected thorough in-depth interviews which were recorded. A lot of time the narratives went beyond the research questions and respondents used them as opportunities to clarify and express themselves. Analysis and the identification of the themes emanating from the research was the result of constant interaction. The themes and issues emerging from one interview schedule sometimes informed questions for the subsequent interviews. Respondent's impressions during the interview were recorded and some written down from memory. The data was transcribed and categorized into emergent themes. I then did a discourse and interpretative analysis of the emergent themes**.**

2.3   Secondary data

The major source of secondary data was project progress reports of the young mother's project up to the year 2005. From these reports, the philosophy behind the organization's interventions and experience of YSM's with them were analyzed. The findings of a tracer study done in 2004 on the young mother's project also provided useful data for analysis. I conducted a discourse analysis based on the politics of

needs interpretation of documents on the perspective of the project, the perceptions of the community, development experts and the YSM's about their selfhood, sexuality and motherhood.

2.4   Reflexivity and dilemmas of feminist research

I had to balance my time in the field carefully because the respondents thought I had come back to work with them and faced difficulties in drawing boundaries of my academic and professional work. Even though I had worked in the project for a long time, I constantly interrogated my power and privilege because of the respondent's pervasive assumption of my possibilities of securing a donor for them. Some of the needy respondents asked for gifts and I had to grapple with how to give some respondents gifts and leave out others.

I was also aware that I was entering a highly discursive terrain and had to be reflexive as possible and unlearn any biases to avoid reinscribing the dominant constructions about YSM's. Because of this quest for reflexivity, I developed a tendency of just listening to them as they narrated their stories and sometimes I sensed this made me sound very powerful than they had been used to previously. The tendency to 'listen' led to more quandaries on my part especially when doing FGD's with the community members where some of them articulated the negative discourses about YSM's. I felt the urge to challenge these discourses, but yet, it is the same discourses I was researching on.[3]

Doing an interview on sexuality proved more sensitive than imagined. Even though I had told the YSM's that I would protect their identity, they were still reticent on the discussion about the erotic and did not want to talk in the presence of the male research- assistant. Thus initially the typical expression was "I do not know what to say?" Grenz (2005:2104) says that the reason such people may refuse to disclose details are because of the power that waits to interrogate them and judge them as deviant. "People who are deviant are often denied the opportunity to talk casually about their sexuality without explaining and justifying it". Such reticence could also be a way of protecting themselves. I agree with Lamers (2005:55) who says that marginalized groups are not always powerless subjects who always need protection by

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[3] The same ethical dilemma is discussed by Grenz who sustained the discourse of her male heterosexual clients respondents by just listening to them. She justifies her choice because it enabled her to research these discourses. See Grenz: 2005: 2106.

researchers. "People decide what to tell, how to tell it and what to hide or be quiet about". Moral quandaries of my choice of researching on YSM's were an issue too and many times the community members asked me whether I was advocating 'illegitimate' motherhood' and I constantly felt the urge to be apologetic. I also encountered dilemmas in positioning myself as an outsider to the project since I had been an insider previously. But in all these dilemmas, my position as a cultural and linguistic insider was a resource.

3   CONCEPTUALIZING YOUNG SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

3.1   Introduction

The first section of this chapter is a presentation of three theoretical streams that are relevant to this phenomenon. I discuss the social construction of sexuality as one such stream and how such construction may exclude some categories of people who do not conform and the effects this may have on selfhood. I also explore motherhood as one aspect of this social construction of sexuality. The other theoretical stream discussed in the chapter is Nancy Fraser's theory on redistribution and recognition as a remedy to social injustice, followed by her framework on politics of needs interpretation which demonstrates how needs of some particular actors may be framed, sometimes based on their identity.

In the second section, I demonstrate that needs of mothers/women can be discursively created and therefore policies. This I accomplish by exploring the images of women in colonial Kenya and specifically the discursive shifts in conceptualization of single motherhood. In demonstrating how imperialism was interwoven with regulation of sexuality and motherhood it is possible to see continuities as well as changes in discursive contestations in contemporary policies and programs. The chapter ends by giving a critical exploration how YSM's/teenage mothers are perceived in contemporary social theories and policies and how the category of 'teenage pregnancy' is constructed based on dominant norms of sexuality, selfhood and motherhood. As a normative category 'teenage pregnancy' has been cast as a 'trope' for 'pathology'. I interrogate and deconstruct the assumptions behind this categorization and certain cognitive frame works that feed it, drawing necessary implications for practice.

3.2   Social construction of sexuality

Sexuality has been conceptualized in different ways by different authors. Truong (1990) delineates four conceptual strands about sexuality. One of the strands defines sexuality as a biological urge. In this strand, there is the bio-social view which sees sexual behaviour as outcome of sexual urge and socio-cultural view which sees it as products of interaction of sexual urge and specific cultural systems. The second conceptualizes sexuality as expression of cultural meanings and symbols on biological sex and sexual practices. The third is historical and emphasizes the role of economic relations in shaping sexual norms and relations and the final is also historical but , rejects the idea that sexuality can be defined as something constant but is a multiplicity of discourses (1990:3-5). It is this last conceptualization that will form the focus of this study.

This thinking is propagated among others by Weeks and Foucault. Foucault sees sexuality as saturated with power and produced through interaction of many discursive and institutional practices. He delineates two kinds of deployment of sexual relations in 20th century: deployment of sexuality and deployment of alliance. Through deployment of sexuality sex became a target of interventions into family by medical psychological and government experts whose discourses created the divisions between the normal and the abnormal, legal/criminal/ healthy/ill and were used as means of social control (Sawicki 1988:182).[4] Although he does not focus on the power of the experts he puts emphasis on medicalization and marginalization of marginal behaviour as a tool of social control (ibid). Using this conceptualization, the marginalization of YSM's and their sexuality will be investigated in this study.

Deployment of alliance as espoused by Foucault has some resonance with some of the aspects under investigation in this study too. By deployment of alliance, he meant the "system of marriage, fixation and development of kinship ties, transmission, of names and possessions" (1978:106). This regulates sexuality by drawing the boundaries of the allowed and the forbidden. The system of heterosexual conjugal marriage, transmission of property through the son as well as transmission of names through the father will also be investigated to find out their effects on YSM's as a category.

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[4] Deployment of sexuality according to Foucault involves sensations of the body, quality of pleasure as well as nature of impressions.

Sexuality according to Foucault can also act as a source of resistance. The possibility of YSM's resisting the way they have been constructed and perceiving themselves otherwise is therefore imperative, this is because according to his analysis of power, liberation consists in identifying relations of dominance and classification by dominant discourses.

Feminists have criticized Foucault's conceptualization of power and relativism for being apolitical because of its inability to provide feminism with a strategy for sexual liberation. Fergusson (1989) argues that construction of alternative power would require feminists to draw the line between the politically correct sexuality, but Foucault's relativism leaves a space for different constructions of what is correct. However, I will demonstrate through the study how different spaces like the church, school, community, family and State all exert power on YSM's raising a need to engage this multiplicity of power both in effectively intervening in the case of YSM's. Weeks (1985:4-5) argues that sexuality is both a historical as well as a personal experience and can be both a political and moral battlefield. "Through sex people express their subjectivity, sense of intimate self, and identity". In Foucauldian vein, he sees organization of sex not through a single strategy of control but through multiple practices and apparatuses e.g. education, law and medicine all geared towards ensuring moral uniformity and economic prosperity. He talks not of sexuality but that there exist sexualities which imply norms and prohibitions related to sexual preferences (Weeks 1985:181,238).

Selfhood /identity and Motherhood

Moore (1994:37) posits a relationship between discourses and **self-identity** and asserts that selfhood is not a bounded or fixed essence but is socially and culturally established through both practical and discursive discourses. An individual can take different subject positions depending on the interrelationship with others. She however cautions against the naivety of assuming that these subject positions are always a matter of choice and argues that they are also institutionalized. This not withstanding, individuals can still resist these constructions and construct alternative identity (ibid 40).

Jenkins (1994) argues that external definition by others affects internal definition of self and this process of being categorized by others he says may produce identity. "At an individual level, "the 'I' is that aspect of the self that responds to

others, whereas the 'Me', comprises the attitudes and responses of others.....incorporated in the self" (ibid: 203). YSM's can be defined as both a group and category. As a group they internally define themselves as people whose commonality consists in their having given birth when they were young and single. On the other hand, the community externally defines them as a specific category, who are mothers outside the dominant and so their commonality consist also in the negative discourses they have to contend with.[5] Some particular inequalities can be naturalized within these categorizations and these naturalized differences have sometimes been used as a basis for establishing their needs and rights (Moore 1994: 92- 94). This concept of naturalized inequality as applied in this study can be seen as injustice. Using this concept then it will be possible to find out how the extend to which the category labeled teenage mothers and discourses surrounding it produces or reproduces specific notions of selfhood and different subject positions these discourses generate. It is also possible to find out the YSM's resist these constructions.

Motherhood as an institution is not a natural state and is a social construction. Smart (1996:37) argues that

> Motherhood is an institution that presents itself as a natural outcome of biologically given gender differences [and] as a natural consequence of hetero/sexual activity, and as a natural manifestation of an innate female characteristic, [the] maternal instinct.

Motherhood is also an outcome of some specific social processes, which are historically and culturally located and thrives on sanctioning and at the same time excluding other behaviours (Ibid: 39). In patrolling the boundaries of proper motherhood, (Smart 1996) argues that both legal and public policies can declare some mothers as inadequate because they do not live up to the 'calibrations of ideal motherhood'. The content of these calibrations as she argues are discursively created. Using Foucault's notion of normalizing discourses, she argues that obedience to these rules is attained by use of stigma and impositions to those who deviate (Smart 1996:47). YSM's are such calibers who fall out of the ideal.

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[5] See Jenkins 1994 for distinction between internal and external definition of groups and categories.

3.3   Redistribution and recognition

Nancy Fraser's (2003) theory of social justice which is a juxtaposition of two concepts: redistribution and recognition is important in analyzing the problematic of young single motherhood because its addresses the issues of social exclusion faced by young single mothers.

Social exclusion has been defined as a process in which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from participating fully in the societies in which they live (European Commission 1995 in Laderchi et al 2003:257). The wider scope of social exclusion has also been recognized by (walker and walker, 1997 in salojee) who conceptualizes it as a comprehensive formulation, which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in a society".[6] The exclusion the YSM"s face can be conceptualized as a multi-faceted phenomenon, which cannot be defined using a single criterion. Following Silver, I argue that the disadvantages they face are multiple, fluctuate and sometimes interact with pre-existing disadvantages in diverse ways, sometimes aggravating the pre-existing ones (Silver 1995; 59).

On a higher structural level, Part of this exclusion stems from their identity as women, who are excluded from labour markets or owning property thus closing opportunities for them to have greater bargaining power in diverse areas of their lives, including ability to exercise external locus of control in sexual decision making. These structural inequalities may also be reflected in the unequal gender division of household labour which may effectively lock out girls from accessing education and thus foreclose any opportunities they may have of becoming self sustaining economically.

One can also post that they face marginalization and exclusion due to wider, global social economic inequalities which intersect with gender to lead to both social and economic disadvantages. The disadvantages as young single mothers are aggravated by poor economic conditions in which their mothering takes place. In such conditions they may be seen as depleting the scarce resources. On another level, Institutions too are responsible for this exclusion this is because as Ikäheimo 2003:11) argues, "Institutions are constellations of social norms regulating action". Institutions

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[6] http://www.ccsd.ca/subsites/inclusion/bp/as.htm

like the law, school system, and inability of the government to put in place adequate policies for them are all exclusionary. Their giving birth while young and single predisposes them to negative construction because they are seen as causing breakdown in moral fiber of the society.

Fraser posits that such marginalized groups require both redistribution and recognition to redress the injustices they face. She sees recognition and redistribution not as separate but as synergistic. Consequently, she proposes that the social be viewed as bifocal phenomena. Viewed through one lens, she perceives justice as a matter of fair distribution while through the other; justice is a matter of reciprocal recognition (Fraser 2003, Fraser 1997, Fraser 2001). In the area of redistribution the main injustice is maldistribution which does not only present the income inequalities but also encompasses "exploitation, marginalization, or exclusion from labour Markets". Her conception of misrecognition is that of status subordination, which encompasses diverse injustices like lack of respect, cultural devaluation, non-recognition as well as disrespect (Fraser 2001:5). Fraser (1995 74-80) also terms some of these marginalized groups as 'bivalent collectivities', which she says is a group of people suffering from both socioeconomic injustice and cultural misrecognition but neither is an indirect effect of the other. YSM's would therefore fall under this category of bivalent collectivities because the injustice they face is rooted in both economic and social structure of the society and any approach to redress this as should integrate the both social, cultural, economic and the discursive domains (Robeysn 1995:539). Fraser proposes that the concept of participatory parity should be used as a normative measure for social justice (2001:6).

She says that participation parity occurs when social arrangements permit adult members of society to consider each other as peers. She posits two preconditions that must be met. One, the distribution of resources should allow the participants to have independence and voice. Those social arrangements that lead to exploitation, wealth differences or inequality in leisure therefore lead to injustice. The second condition she sees as inter-subjective in that it requires institutionalized mode of social valuation to ascribe equal respect and equal opportunities to pursue self esteem. Thus those arrangements that disparage some categories of people with their qualities would not ensure parity of participation. Misrecognition as a status injury would consist of failure to recognize the other party as a full member of society capable of equal interaction.

Fraser's concept of participation parity is an excellent gauge for social justice. It has however been criticized because she premises her arguments on the capacity of all people to participate as peers and does not address special groups of people like the young (Robeyns, 2003: 549). This actually raises questions as to whether participation parity can be applied to the case of YSM's. This is because some of the socio-economic and cultural injustice stems from the fact that they are seen as young and incapable. This explains part of the paternalism by organizations working with them. Some of them may not even have legal rights to influence the political processes. In extending Fraser's theory, I will later argue that this category of young women needs building alliances with groups who may affiliate with them to redress the injustices they face.

Fraser also contrasts two kinds of strategies for remedying social injustices: the transformative and affirmative strategies. The former remedies inequality without disturbing the underlying framework which generates them while the latter corrects the inequalities by restructuring the structural issues that generate them (2003:72-74) In this study, programs and policies for YSM's will be analyzed against the backdrop of their transformative potential.

3.4   Politics of need interpretation

Linked to the broader theory, Fraser's (1989) framework about struggle over needs interpretations will be used to investigate how programs and policies frame the needs of YSM's. My approach slightly differs from Fraser's in that she applies her arguments in terms of welfare provision by the state. With minor conceptual modifications, this study extends her framework by adapting it to the study of non-governmental agencies and the way they frame needs of their constituencies.

Her central thesis is that welfare programs harbour specific ideologies about their constituent's and they should be investigated to bring out what she calls "discursive' aspect of them (Fraser 1989:146).[7] She sees definition of needs as a site of struggle where groups having unequal discursive resources compete to establish their interpretations as hegemonic but she posits that the marginalized groups still challenge the dominant needs articulations (ibid: 166).

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[7] Discursive for Fraser means the implicit and tacit norms that constitute welfare practices.

Welfare programs instead of addressing the structural issues generating observed needs, tend to use 'therapeutic' remedies and cast their clients as deficient of agency. This she says has been the way 'teenage mothers' have been constructed as people with emotional problems which should be sorted out to avoid future pregnancies. She contrasts thin and thick descriptions of peoples needs. 'Thin' descriptions fail to problematise the underlying institutions and logics that generate the problem (Fraser 1989:163).

Struggle over needs depends on three analytically different but interrelated moments which are: Struggle to deny or establish the political status of a particular need, dispute over the interpretation of the need and finally, contestation over satisfaction (ibid: 164). The first two moments will be utilized in this study. In the first, Fraser's conceptualization of 'political' as both institutional (involving action by state) and in discourse sense (where needs are contested in diverse discourse publics) will be utilized. The second moment is useful in deconstructing how interventions, relying on research and specific ways of knowing present strong warrants for particular interventions. The next section discusses the discursive positioning of needs of women/ mothers in colonial Kenya and different policies this necessitated.

3.5   Colonial politics of motherhood

The colonial context is useful in understanding conceptualization of motherhood and how specific policies which look benign at the outset may have specific ideologies embedded in them and sometimes serve needs of particular actors. This exploration is relevant for this study since there are many continuities as well as differences in contemporary discourses on motherhood.

Several authors (Sen 1999; Uberoi 1996; Shaw 1997; Whitehead 1996; Chhachhi, 2004) argue that motherhood in colonial states was used as a weapon for domestication of women, imperialism and nationalism.[8] In Kenya, Thomas (2003) using the metaphor 'politics of the womb' elucidates how colonialists in Kenya used women's bodies for imperialism. She explores the discursive shifts in the control of women's sexuality as it pertains to the issue of female circumcision and 'teenage pregnancies' in Kenya and in Meru district in particular. During the interwar period,

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[8] See Sen for an exploration of how concern with welfare of mothers in India served the interests of factory owners and the Dufferin fund was used to create jobs for British women while purporting to help Indian women observe purda norms.

the debate on pre-initiation pregnancies became central because of increased cases of abortions, which were perceived by the colonialists as responsible for population decline which would affect the supply of labour to European farms. Important to note as Thomas argues was that the problems of abortion were not framed in terms of value for human life. The local populations saw abortion as a remedy to moral dangers of pre-initiation pregnancies which was tabooed. Pre-initiation pregnancies were governed by the pregnancy compensation act which ensured that the man responsible would pay compensation to the girls' father (Thomas 2003: 106). The colonialists argued for early initiation so that girls would not abort but would marry the fathers of their children. This was despite the denunciation of the practice of Initiation in England. This policy was challenged by local populations and especially the fathers to the girls who argued that this would reduce the amount of compensation fathers got from men who courted uninitiated girls and instead argued for removal of taboos governing premarital pregnancies so that girls would not resort to abortion (ibid:40).

In late colonial Kenya, the reproduction politics shifted from threat of population decline to threat of population increase and concerns with welfare of 'illegitimate children'. The Affiliation Act was therefore enacted to ensure paternity support for children born out of wedlock. This, as Thomas argues shifted the burden of support from the family to the state (2003: 143). The Act became a site of struggle whereby those who supported it did so as away of protecting the sanctity of marriage and present Kenya as a modern state which ensured status of women while those who opposed it did so as a way of preserving tradition (ibid: 137-8). For the latter, the Act was not only seen as western in orientation but they argued that it flouted Christian principles of forgiveness. Some men argued that it encouraged promiscuity with proposals that it should distinguish between deserving single women and prostitutes. Others argued that beneficiaries spent the money buying 'useless' consumer items like make-ups. The Act which was seen as eroding traditional fathers control over children was eventually abolished.[9]

Shaw's (1997) and Kenyatta's (1985) rendition of Kikuyu sexual morality evinces a similar argument of control of women's sexuality as an entanglement between local and imperial concerns in Kenya. They present examples of how the local populations blamed the colonialists and missionaries for eroding the Kikuyu

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[9] See Chhachhi (2004:78-83) for a similar discussion about maternity benefit Act in India

sense of sexual morality by outlawing some practices like sexual play which as they claimed, had acted as checks to premarital pregnancies.

As evident from the above cases, the discursive positioning of the needs of women/mothers based on assumptions about their identity determined the type of policies implemented a trend which is reflected in contemporary policies.

3.6   Young single motherhood: Conceptualization in social policies

The way young single motherhood/teenage pregnancy is conceptualized in many cases has determined specific policies. In most of the literature, it has been conceptualized as a problem. Wells (1983 in Phoenix 1991:23) refers to the catalogue of ills associated with 'teenage' mothering as ["gloomy adumbrations"]. Phoenix (991) argues that the many ills associated with young mothers in America loose importance if social economic factors are controlled for and the notion of 'teenage pregnancy' as a problem makes alternative conceptualizations difficult. She attributes the concern with 'teenage pregnancy' to do with moral concerns, ambiguity of adolescence as a status as well as their labelling as a group which is problematic (Phoenix 1991: 6-9). Incidence of Young single motherhood/ 'teenage pregnancy' is against the commonly held view that children should be reared in stable marital relationships which makes sexual intercourse within marriage the only legitimate form of sexual relationship. Sylvester (1995) terms the issue of 'teenage pregnancy' in America as a 'calamity' because their children are a cost to society. She emotively casts her argument for preventing this calamity in terms of preventing illegitimacy and sees 'teenage pregnancy' as morally wrong and selfish. Such conceptualization of 'teenage pregnancy' as a threat to moral and social order acts as powerful warrants for many interventions and tend to ignore other structural issues which impinge on young single motherhood/teenage pregnancy. Policies relying on this conceptualization are bound not to be transformative.

Conceptualization of 'teenage pregnancy' and its attendant concerns is also an area of contestation as well as a shifting terrain. Luker (1996) argues that these concerns can shift historically within the same polity and offers an example of how it has shifted through different historical moments in America, necessitating different policies.

Macleod (2001:494; 2002) offers a well evidenced account of how scientific and social science research on young 'teenage motherhood' in South Africa has been

used as weapons of 'governmentality'. She argues that literature always has implicit assumptions about unquestioned qualities of 'good' mothers and treats motherhood as universal construct. Interestingly, though she uses Foucauldian analysis in problematising and politicizing such representations, she does not leave a space for agency by the 'teenage mothers' and constantly conflates expert knowledge with unmediated power.

Others (Macleod and Durrheim 2003; Macleod 2005; Phoenix 1991; Phoenix 1996; Smart 1996) have also identified the increased 'professionalisation' of mothering to systems of control and a way of governing individuals and societies to comply with some normative form of behaviour. In all these constructions, YSM's/teenage mothers who can not parent according to such calibrations are marginalized and held responsible for later deviance of their children. This explains the concern with motherhood skills by most of the interventions.

Young single/teenage motherhood has also been conceptualized in terms of outcomes wherein they are seen as psychologically weak and incapable of good parenting (Macleod 2001:494). This specific casting of the issue in psychological terms leads to policies like training in child care. While such intentions may be noble, they may just be palliative. Concern with the medical, psychological and physical aspects of young single motherhood de-contextualizes the sexuality of YSM's and fails to consider the gender power relations and other socioeconomic factors that have a bearing on how YSM's experience their sexuality, motherhood and selfhood. This study will attempt to identify these conceptual gaps and suggest alternative conceptualizations.

'Teenage pregnancy' has also been conceptualized in terms of racial difference. Macleod and Durreim (2002:779-780) notes that literature from US indicate that 'teenage pregnancies' occur more among black teenagers because of slave heritage and these predispositions are transferred through generations. It is also argued that 'teenage motherhood' provides an alternative life course for teenagers especially where violence and economic hardship among black and Hispanic teenagers are evident (ibid). Utilizing Derida's concept of 'difference', they argue that black as a race always relies on absent white race for it to have a meaning. 'Teenage pregnancy' among the black therefore signify the normalized absence among the whites and essentially the pathologised presence among the black teenagers. Such classification though seemingly neutral, renders silent the racialized images they

invoke. In Britain and US, pregnancy among white teenagers is cast in psychological terms (denaturalized) while that among the black is cast in cultural terms (naturalized) (Phoenix 93 in Macleod and Durreim 2003: 784; Cherrington and Brehemy 2005: 96). This racial conceptualization determines which policies are implemented.[10] For example in New Zealand, teenage Maoris are seen as more likely to get pregnant and more likely to carry pregnancy to term compared to their white counterparts who are presented as likely to procure abortions (Cherrington and Breheny 2005:101). In so doing the Maoris are presented as a backward race, which is averse to European solutions to 'teenage pregnancy' in form of abortion. The policy prescription therefore would be to reduce barriers to accessing abortion by Maoris leaving other issues of resource inequalities intact.

4 CHILDREN HAVING CHILDREN': PROGRAM'S DISCOURSE ON YOUNG SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the perspective and the assumptions underlying program interventions of the young mother's project, Mwana Mwende. Though the project is an early childhood project, the activities carried out with these young mothers offer insights about the perspectives and needs of YSM's, their motherhood, sexuality, and selfhood. The chapter is not an impact assessment of the project and its intervention but is an analysis of the perspectives of the project, to highlight tacit norms about YSM's. I will focus only on those aspects that relate to programs for YSM's. A deconstructive analysis of the project reports and interviews with project staff was carried out to find out, how causes of 'teenage pregnancies' and the, needs of YSM's/characterization of their motherhood, selfhood and sexuality were identified and from this were derived specific kinds of program interventions for YSM's.

4.2 Background: Locating Mwana Mwende Project

This project was started in 1997 by Mwana Mwende Child Development Centre as an early childhood project interested in care of children under three years old especially those of 'teenage mothers' (MMCDC 1999:1). *Mwana Mwende* in the local language

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[10] See phoenix 1996 for different policies for black and white single mother's in Britain.

means a 'treasured child'. Studies done had revealed that there were many 'teenage mothers' in the area, estimating that in a third of the homes, one or more girls get pregnant in their teenage years, most of them aged 15-16 years (MMCDC 1997:85). A baseline survey done in the project area in 1996 titled 'Teenage motherhood: Children raising children' identified the following issues in relation to 'teenage pregnancy'; financial dependence, dropping out of school, stigma and lack of self esteem, failure to use family planning methods, isolation from friends, family and community, inadequate knowledge on puberty, and poor child care skills (ibid:86). The purpose of the program as stated in the program document was to intervene in the lives of these women to improve their self esteem and equip them with skills in child care, health, nutrition, cognitive and social stimulation for their children. In so doing the project anticipated that self-confident mothers and training in providing quality care to their children would make a positive impact on the growth and development of their children (MMCDC 2005:3).

Activities with the young mothers were carried out in areas of self awareness creation, esteem building, communication, leadership and child development. Other areas involved reproductive health and income generating activities. Groups of young mothers were formed for experience sharing, psychological support and income generation support. Community health workers were also trained to offer support to young mothers and their families through home visits (MMCDC 2005:5; MMCDC 1997). As stated above, during the first phase of the project, the focus of the project was on teenage mothers most of whom were single (90%). The rest were young mothers who had given birth when teenagers but were married (MMCDC 1997:28). Eventually some of these young mothers have got married with some retaining membership to young mothers groups. The projects focus has therefore also shifted from referring them as single mothers or 'teenage mothers' but refers them as 'young mothers'. The project offered a comprehensive program dealing with a number of aspects and their emphasis on self esteem was important—however deeper analysis shows contradictory assumptions and implications underlying these well meaning interventions. I will first present what the program's assessment and perspectives on the reasons and solutions for 'teenage pregnancy' and then I will analyze the implicit and explicit assumptions behind these objectives.

4.3   Young single motherhood: project perspectives

The program gave different causes for young single motherhood and these are elaborated below:

Lack of self esteem

One of the major causes of early motherhood was identified as lack of self esteem and self confidence. Lack of self-esteem as argued leads to poor sexual decision making (MMCDC 1997& 2000). The same point was supported by the interviews I did with the staff.

> Girls who lack self esteem are not assertive and are cheated easily by men because they do not have decision making power". During the interviews the girls never used to look up, they had to ask for permission from their parents to grant the interviews.

Getting children when young and unmarried was identified as leading to reduced self-esteem and many girls said they were shy because they felt they has let their parents down (MMCDC 2000:34).

Inappropriate Socialization

Causes of early motherhood were associated with 'inappropriate' socialization given to the girls pertaining to sexuality. According to the results of a baseline survey done in 1996 (MMCDC 1997), the mothers did not prepare their daughters enough for puberty and how to 'handle' the opposite sex. Lack of such knowledge then obviously led to the girls to learn through the hard way by getting pregnant (MMCDC 1997:35). Interviews with the staff reveal this view too as the project coordinator put it;

> The girls are not able to make informed decisions as they have been socialized badly and they need to be woken up. Some of their mothers are also single mothers.

Some of the mothers of the YSM's were deemed the ones responsible for setting the wrong models to the girls by having given birth when they were single and did not have 'moral' authority to question the girls. The interviews with staff indicate that the mothers of YSM's encourage this by failing to 'question' the girls when they get expectant.

> When it happens, nobody asks why it did happen, the girls are just supported and they think it is okay to do it.

Poverty of morals

'Teenage pregnancies' were associated with the young mother's lack of control on their sexuality and due to "loose' morals. Even though initially the studies done revealed that early motherhood was as a result of poverty (MMCDC 2000:1), the project staff emphasized more the *'poverty of morals'* as the following quotations from interviews with staff reveal;

> I do not think it is poverty, morals do not require money.

> I would not say there is much poverty to warrant teenage pregnancies, the girls are loose and greedy. The families have done their best to put food on the table.

> Poverty may not be the issue here; I would say it is poverty of values.

YSM's according to the project reports were keen on keeping away from men.

> Now that she has a baby she has stopped loitering, and making any unnecessary associations with men. She knows they are dangerous.... She is appealing to other girls to take heed and not to engage with the boys (MMCDC 1997:37).

Mothers who themselves had children when they were teenagers were seen as more likely to have daughters who would be pregnant during their teens as staff during interview affirmed:

> Some of their mothers are single and it becomes a cycle.

Given the objective of reducing 'teenage pregnancy', the project documents count as a success the fact that the mothers in the project have not had repeat pregnancies. In the evaluations carried out and mentioned in the documents when one of the YSM's was asked about the benefit of the project she said, "If it were not for the project, I would be having not less than five children" (MMCDC 2001 :14). The causes of young single motherhood were therefore identified as lack of self esteem, inappropriate socialization, loose sexuality, with only a slight emphasis on poverty. From this different needs were identified.

4.4   The identification of needs and program interventions

Motherhood skills

The project formulated programs on the basis that YSM's had specific needs, with the goal of making them better mothers. YSM's were seen as young and incapable of giving quality care to their children. This perspective is explicit in the very title of the baseline survey mentioned earlier 'Teenage motherhood: Children raising children'. Having given birth when they were adolescents; they lacked a sense of identity and

did not understand the changes taking place in their body. They were also deemed too young to and therefore lacking parenting skills (MMCDC 1997:27). The young mothers were lacking in important mother child dyadic relations like how to hold the baby well, interacting with them, giving them toys among others.

> It was very obvious that the younger mothers, particularly those in mid teens, did not have a close interaction with their babies. They did not hold the babies close to them, even when breastfeeding, they rarely talked to them. Few of the mothers provided toys for the babies, and when they did, gave the babies articles that are not safe (MMCDC 2000:2).

The perspective is shared by the project coordinator in the interview who says

> They never used to take their children for growth monitoring and never stimulated for growth and development, skills possessed by good mothers.

The project then embarked on different activities to enable the young single mothers to provide good care for their children. Such activities include cooking demonstrations, training in child growth and development and toy making (MMCDC 2000).

Group formation and livelihoods enhancement

Most of these YSM's faced social isolation when it was discovered that they were expectant and as a consequence, they lost many of their former friends. YSM's were also dependent on their parents for the material upkeep. Most of these parents are also poor because of unemployment which is about 80% in the project area (MMCDC 2005:4).There was therefore a need to start groups of young mothers so as to enable them to share their experiences, access training on child care as well as start income generating projects. The project also gave them given financial grants (MMCDC 2000; MMCDC 1997).

In the groups the young mothers have been able to gain information about income generating projects. They engage in activities like selling vegetables, running small shops and running a merry go round. This has acted to give them more confidence and has reduced dependence on their relatives for material support as interviews with the staff reveal,

> They have done away with the culture of dependency, and they do not borrow bread.

This is contrasted with mothers who did not go through the project who can not provide for their children making them feel bad.

> I feel terrible when my child wants to eat bread which I know he likes very much but I cannot give him because of lack of money. This makes me guilty.
>
> I feel bad when my child wants a shoe or a dress which he sees with another child and I know I cannot buy him (MMCDC 2005:57).

The young mothers too engage in other activities like singing, dancing together and sharing experiences about their situation. In this way they develop creative solutions to the problems they face in their every day situation. By coming together as people who have similar problems they have been able to carve for themselves a distinct identity in the community and challenge norms that depict them as bearing a problematic identity.

Training for community leadership

As a way of connecting these mothers to the community, the project has also trained them as community health workers and as mentors of people affected by HIV/aids. The selection for such trainers is done by the community implying that the community has accepted them and recognized them as worthy individuals (MMCDC 2003). They are also leaders of community organizations, a factor which gives them confidence as one YSM put it.

> Apart from being in young mother's group, I am also a member of funeral association and undergoing a primary health care course, after being selected by my community(ibid:43).

4.5   Deconstructing the program's discourse on young single mothers: The discursive construction of needs

The project has been keen on enabling the YSM's to reintegrate in the society. The training in self esteem building has enabled them to gain confidence while income support has given them relative financial self- independence. Through the groups, YSM's have been able to carve spaces for articulating alternative constructs about their identity and seek recognition in the community. One way of accomplishing this has been through participating in community life by singing songs and performing dances; in this way they are able to contest the dominant norms that do not acknowledge their motherhood and which stigmatize them. Acting as community trainers also enables the YSM's to gain recognition in the community.

However notwithstanding these positive outcomes, the project utilizes some specific assumptions about YSM's in intervening to make them better parents. As

Fraser posits, welfare programs in addition to intervening are also institutionalized forms of needs interpretation (1989:146).

'Psychologising' young single mothers'

By presenting young single motherhood as psychological phenomena, the program's discourse fails to consider institutional factors that impinge on their capacity to provide good care to their children. In this case the reasons for early pregnancy are not traced to the structural characteristics of the context of YSM's but are attributed to individual failure. It is indeed true that in many cases women may lack external locus of control in sexual decision making as Luker (1995:5) affirms,

> The thought of women being self-centered rational actors in the intimate realms of sex, child bearing, family and home is rather a chilling one.

It would also be chilling in relation to men! But for YSM's and women in general, it is not simply a mere lack of self esteem that is at stake here but dominant norms that privilege men's control over sexual and other decision making. The solution would not just be raising self esteem per se, but also dealing with gender *incongruence* that hinder adolescent girls from becoming assertive. The psychological view is shared by the staff of another organization working with YSM's in Jamaica called 'Teenage mothers project, breaking the cycle', where 'teenage mothers' are trained on self-esteem building and told to only work on those aspects that they can change and accept those they cannot change (BVLF/CECE (1994:4).

Tracing their early motherhood to lack of self esteem and inability to make good decisions fails to consider other reasons they may have had for having intimate relations like looking for companionship, or marriage partners. It also implies that if there was no intervention this impaired subjectivity would lead to inability to provide good care for their children. This in a way also occludes the many negotiations, and resistances they make to the dominant constructs about their sexuality, motherhood and selfhood. This resonates with Fraser's assertion that expert needs discourses tend to "screen out aspects of human agency that involve construction and deconstruction of social meanings" (1989:174).

Some of the unassertiveness exhibited by YSM's as discussed later may be pragmatism on their part rather than just a capitulation to the dominant norms. Psychological interventions like raising self-esteem are solutions that just normalize and treat 'teenage pregnancy' as an individual behaviour without focusing on the structural issues (Cherrington and Breheny 2005: 98, 99). In Fraser's vein, such

interventions are therapeutic, aimed at making YSM's understand their deep emotional problems and avoid future pregnancies. (1989:154, 155).[11] Perceiving the ills that YSM's face in society due to their gender as women and their status as young and single as psychological depoliticizes their needs and therefore their fulfilment. Even though there is a recognition that the negative experiences and perceptions on YSM's by the community can lead to their subordination, the solutions suggested are not transformative enough and individual is seen as failure. Rose has said that this 'psychologisation' process is an act of management of the individual and an act of "government' through what she terms as the 'psy-complex' or process of calculating and managing individual behavior through various processes of assessment, diagnosis, and therapy.[12] People so labelled may start experiencing themselves according to psychological characteristics attributed to them (Rose 1992 in Macleod and Durrheim 2005:86-92).

Using scientific knowledge, the interventions effectively justify the use of certain policies. This is in line with (Sending's 2004) concept of policy stories. He argues that scientific knowledge can be used by different actors as recourse to justify certain policies. Using policy stories it becomes possible to convince others that a phenomenon is a problem which should be addressed in a particular way given particular factual evidence. Such facts are linked to particular normative principles to justify the said policy. Such policies eventually gain acceptance discursively and can define the parameters of the debate by de-legitimizing alternative conceptualizations of policy (Sending 2004:57-59).

Controlling promiscuous sexuality

Attributing the cause of young single motherhood to sexual immorality has in it explicit norms about proper kind of sexuality as that by married, mature women. This sexuality by young and single women which is not normative has to be controlled in one way or another as Luker states, "teenage pregnant mothers in general and teenage mothers in particular raise troubling questions ….. For their part, teenagers should not have sex and if they have they should use contraception" (1995: 10).

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[11] According to Fraser therapeutic strategies, see the subject as having character problems and are therefore depoliticised.

[12] Author defines government as the conduct of conduct i.e. the activity aimed at shaping guiding, or affecting the behaviour and actions of people.

Even though there is a recognition that the material conditions of YSM's may be responsible, poverty as a precursor to early pregnancy is down played and cast in terms of the inability of the mother to adjust to the precarious economic conditions. By presenting their sexuality as a moral issue, more political questions of inequalities in the society that make the girls to drop out of school are ignored. It also ignores the unequal gender power relations which make women to have less control in sexual decision making. This amounts to what Fraser (1989:163) terms thin interpretation of peoples needs whereby interpretations fail to problematise the social and institutional logic responsible for the prevailing needs.

The mothers of the YSM's are depicted as the ones who did not fulfill their gender roles well by failing to socialize them well. They are therefore implicitly accomplices in their daughter's immorality. The teenage mother project in Jamaica identified above presents the same view because mothers to YSM's are counselled because they are deemed incapable of counselling their daughters (BVLF 1994: 9). Informing these assertions are dominant notions of women as having a natural predilection towards promiscuity. They either get pregnant outside wedlock, and if not, they connive with their daughters to do it.

Perspective of the mothers of YSM's as to why they do not question the girls is ignored as discussed later. Continuing to support these girls without questioning in this case is depicted as giving legitimacy to what they have done and as responsible for spreading the incidence of 'teenage pregnancies'. This specific denial of accountability to support the YSM's is reminiscent of the contestations over the Affiliation Act in late colonial and immediate post-colonial moment earlier discussed. It is also an example of Fraser's notion of reprivatization discourses in needs articulation which involves struggle by some of the constituents to take back the already problematised needs into their former status (1989:157). The identity of YSM's and women in general as generally 'promiscuous' in this case produces material repercussions.

Unfit mothers
YSM's have been viewed as 'unfit mothers'. Phoenix (1991) argues that the reason for this construction is due to the fact that their youthfulness implies immature women giving birth while motherhood is reserved for adults. Even though the mother is physically able to give birth, according to the experts she is not psychologically,

emotionally, or practically ready to bring up children.[13] She is also deemed lacking in 'normalized' skills of parenting like giving good toys to the children and communicating to the child when breastfeeding. The social service agencies see themselves as having a moral obligation to intervene and make them good mothers. As WCJF puts it; "we cannot be content with a situation in which the young mother is abandoned to the negative consequences of her early experience of motherhood" (1995:2). Research done elsewhere reveal that when other social economic factors are controlled for, the relationship between mothers age and obstetric outcome becomes less important (Breheny & Cherrington 2005; Phoenix 1991).

Though not exercising normalizing power in a strict Focauldian sense, the program is implicitly acting as an agent of control and patrolling the boundaries of proper motherhood, and reserving it to mature married women.[14] While training in child care is itself positive, there is a possibility that these mothering practices are not fitted to the economic and social life world of YSM's most of whom are poor and may not be always available to maintain 'dyadic relations' with their children.[15] Perceiving these mothers as inadequate parents also overlooks their agency and vests the expert with the full ability to determine and produce solutions to children being parented well.

'Rehabilitation' and programs of inclusion: limited and contradictory effects
Though the YSM's have gained in various dimensions through groups and community leadership, it has been done in the framework of seeing them as inadequate mothers and defining their success by their ability to take care of their children. They are seen as having a problematic personality, who should be rehabilitated. "The first step towards rehabilitating young mothers should be to encourage them to form self help groups" (MMCDC 2004:35). The language of rehabilitation is rather problematic because it presents the young mothers as a deviant category who has transgressed the boundaries of proper morality.

YSM's also act as peer counselors in the groups and counsel each other about several things ranging from how to 'behave' in the family to how to avoid repeat

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[13] Pietsch page 7   http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~socsci/sever/journal/1.1/pietsch.pdf
[14] See Foucault 1978 for a discussion on technologies of power and how they act to normalize populations.
[15] See Sen 1999 for a discussion of how poor mothers were blamed for bad 'mothering' in India.

pregnancies. Thus in the groups they are able to find creative solutions to the problems they face in the family and at simultaneously challenge the norms that position them as immoral.

Though the act of recognition by the community because of ability to give something worth while to the community has helped the YSM's to recoup their respect and identity, it is recognition in community's terms. The recognition they are accorded and entitlements to community's leadership are based on their ability to endear themselves as good mothers and good people and not in their own right as individuals. The transformative potential of this recognition may be limited and may change at community's whims. Instead of treating the need for YSM's recognition as issues for consciousness raising, it becomes individuals' effort.

4.6   Conclusion

The norms the project has utilized have been contradictory. In some cases there is recognition of YSM's as a marginalized group which requires both recognition and redistribution. On the other hand, at the symbolic level some of these activities reinforce some specific dominant norms about their identity, motherhood and sexuality. The question I explore in the next chapter is whether the social structure and local constituents are responsible or participate in this oscillation between the dominant and alternative norms and whether the YSM's themselves are always conforming to these constructions.

5   LEGITIMATING THE VOICES OF YOUNG SINGLE MOTHERS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of narratives of YSM's as obtained from interviews and life stories. Issues of concern in the chapter will range from their perceptions about their sexuality to different ways in which they manage their stigmatized identity. For insights on generational differences in needs articulation, perception by their parents and community will also be discussed. The analysis will be supported by verbatim articulations to enable the reader get a glimpse of subtle contradictions of their lives. In so doing I intend to bring to the fore the silenced discourses which may not be accessible through the expert and professional discourses or other dominant ways of

telling. Consequently by drawing on the alternative constructions, I map out the 'disjunctions' and 'continuities' in the dominant discourses. The term 'young mother' as used in the testimonies refers to YSM while 'older mother' refers to their mothers.

5.2   Perceptions by young single mothers

Experience of pregnancy

The experience of pregnancy was shaped by subjective as well as structural issues like reaction to social censure. The YSM's reacted differently on realizing that they were pregnant and used different adjectives to describe their feelings. One of the YSM's described it this way,

> I felt belittled, confused, like committing suicide, unwanted, cheap, bad, useless....
> (MMCDC 2003:40).

Negative self-identity they experienced was because the church members and community in general perceived them as immoral. Some were excommunicated from church and felt remorseful about it, thereby circumscribing to constructions as immoral people, others have refused to go back to church as a resistance to this construction.

> The act I had done was immoral given that I was a strong Christian. I was excommunicated from church for four months during which I could not play an active role in the church (young mother).

> When I became expectant, I dropped out of the church and I have never gone back. They told me church is a holy place. Why should I go back there any way? (young mother).

Some YSM's lost friends because it was imagined that they would influence them negatively.

> When I got pregnant, I lost all the friends because parents saw me as this 'irritant' and wanted to protect their daughters from me (young mother).

The YSM's felt uncomfortable that the society lets the men who made them pregnant go unscathed by these negative attitudes and especially because it is only the girls who are sent away from school. Even though insisting that being sent away from school was bad, they insisted that men responsible should share the blame. Meting unequal standards on men and women is in line with Pietsch's argument that illegitimacy is purely a female transgression and that unwed fathers are never labelled as deviants.

> The illegitimately pregnant body stands as visible ominous proof of extraordinary female sexuality......As parties to sexual system, 'good' women have interest in restraining male sexual impulses, a source of danger to women, as well as their own sexuality.[16]

The experience of pregnancy was also determined by feelings of inadequacy and being young. They wondered how they would bring up children when they themselves were only children, as one 19 year old mother of two put it

> I was too young to conceive at 15. I had just finished class eight and here I was. My sister was scared that I would not make it.

Some other ways of dealing with this stigma was to avoid the every day spaces like attending prenatal clinics or going to stay with relatives or 'hiding' in the home till they gave birth.

> I went to stay with my auntie far from my home. At least there they do not know my history and nobody knows my age (young mother).

The norms that denigrate their motherhood therefore in a specific way are responsible for the negative self-esteem and also acted to discourage them from even seeking proper medical care hence negative construction of YSM's as people who do not bother to seek proper medical care when expectant.

Some of them left school because of the stigma they faced from teachers, other children and feelings that they were not fitted to be in school. For others, it was an exercise of maternal agency.

> I dropped out of school because I felt I was now a big woman. The other pupils would laugh at me and the teachers would encourage them. They laugh because it is the wrong time to associate with boys leave alone getting expectant (young mother).

> For me it was not because anybody told me not to go back to school it was a choice between 'breastfeeding' and the 'pen' and now that I was a woman I chose breastfeeding(young mother).

Surprisingly, even though the education rules in Kenya allow girls to come back to school after giving birth, only one of these girls went back to school even though they did not see their pregnancy and sexuality as a 'disease'. Some YSM's felt like

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[16] Pietsch page 6 http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~socsci/sever/journal/1.1/pietsch.pdf

committing suicide or abortion or used this threat as a strategy for avoiding continued censure.

Route to young single motherhood

The YSM's attributed early pregnancies to the structural characteristics of their contexts and resisted the construction of their sexuality as uncontrollable and promiscuous. To all of them, their pregnancies were not planned but were by default. Poverty was identified as the main cause of their predicament. Some of them had dropped out of school because of lack of school fees and therefore found themselves having to start relationships with men to overcome the stress and get material benefits.

> I did not have anywhere to go after I dropped from school. A man came around and gave me comfort. If we were not poor, I would not have given birth when so young (young mother).

Others said it is because their parents failed to give them consumer items things that an adolescent girl would need that they looked for men to secure them.

> Early pregnancies are caused by lack of those things an adolescent girl needs. If I want to be smart but my parents cannot afford, then I go to men (young mother).

This reveals that increased consumerism is partly to explain for the predicament of teenage girls. In an era where femininity is asserted through fashion and ability to be attractive to men, (Hailonga 2005:172), then poor girls have no choice but to seek favors from men.

For those who had more than one child when they were still teenagers, it was because they were trying to fend for the other child or searching for a husband.

> You have a baby and do not have anything to give to it. You meet a man who says he will marry you and you start going with him. When you get another child, he refuses responsibility (young mother).

It is clear that lack of independent resources played a role in these women's entry into early motherhood. Their identity as women who must depend on men for material benefit played a big role as Tafari- AMa says,

> Poor women often have no recourse but to bargain with their bodies to gain materiality (2002:82).

This culture of dependence was internalized by the YSM's that when some of them were asked in the tracer study about the joys of being women, they said it was because when they get married their husbands would provide for them (MMCDC 2005).

The YSM's blamed the presence of too many idle men in the community for their early motherhood because poverty and unemployment is high in the area and in Kenya as a whole (see human development report 2005). It is therefore possible that the 'idle' men who cannot play their 'breadwinning' role are re-enacting their masculinity by preying on poor adolescent girls.[17] The YSM's are also subscribing to the discourse of the man as the provider by seeking from them what their parents cannot provide.

Perception by family members

Family relationships can act as a haven for coping with early motherhood but can also be a source of pain and a reservoir of discourses to contest. The discourses also shape the identity of YSM's. There was mixed reaction by the family on realization that they were expectant. In most of the cases, there was shock and disbelief but for some, their mothers were supportive. Some were neglected by the family members and treated as slaves.

> Most of the household chores were left to me and I was treated like a slave. When sick nobody comforted me. My brother was especially harsh and rude to me (MMCDC 2000:31).

The narratives of all the mothers interviewed pointed to the fact that their brothers, even though some have been cooperative, are a major issue to contend with at the familial level. The presence of the YSM and her children poses a threat to the guaranteed inheritance by sons hence the use stigma against them to get married so as to avoid competition over property.

> We are seen as a burden because we have nothing of our own. We do not even have a piece of land where we can build for our children.
>
> If I were to stay here, my father will have to give me land to build my house so that I can avoid trouble.
>
> My father would only give me a piece of land if it was apparent that I will never get married. The older single mothers are better than us (young mothers).

It can therefore be seen that though the anxiety about YSM's in Britain and America has been for claims that they are burdens on the public purse, (Smart 1996: 54), a very *specific form of anxiety is being articulated here where it is not welfare but competition for inheritance* which the YSM's are seen as targeting by giving birth. In

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[17] See Hailonga 2005 for a discussion of how poor men borrow money to impress girls.

a culture where land ownership is of paramount importance, denying the girl land can be seen as a way of managing illegitimacy. Illegitimacy was also managed sometimes by name calling and labelling their children as illegitimate especially by the brothers and their wives.

5.3   Perceptions by the mothers of the young single mothers: Discourses of Support, Protection and Transference

Perception on Sexuality, pregnancy and identity

The mothers to YSM's were very supportive of their daughters whilst clarifying that they were not supportive of their daughters getting children before marriage; one mother put it this way.

> I did not quarrel with my daughter because I had been told by my friend how to handle the situation. But my husband was not happy and told me to warn her not to repeat (old mother).

Whilst insisting that their daughters should not be exposed to stigma, they offered different interpretations about the causes of the stigma. Some felt that it is the girls who should bear the blame because they should be in control of the situation.

> I do not think boys or men should be exposed to stigma because the girl should be in control of the situation (old mother).

Tolman (1994 in Roosemallen 2000:219) says that society holds girls responsible in sexual decision making because from the time they are young, girls are taught that men are sexual and girls must be prepared to say no. However the patriarchal context in which sexual decision making is done does not allow girls to exercise that agency. Roosemallen (2000:218) echoes this by arguing that girls are supposed to act as sexual gate keepers.

> It remains largely the girl's responsibility to act as gatekeeper, to provide the moral inertia, or to set the limits on sexual activity [and the] responsibility for avoiding pregnancy.

This gate keeping is enacted in silence because girls may choose to remain quiet because voicing their feelings may jeopardize their relationships. This passivity may be construed to mean acquiescence even when girls/women do not wish to grant to men's sexual favours.

The attitudes of mothers to YSM's towards being sent away from school differed. Some thought the teachers had bad attitudes towards them because they thought they would influence others negatively. Other mothers saw their daughters

and YSM's in general as already having an impaired subjectivity and so could not be contained in school. In addition they very fact that they were mothers was seen as stifling their chances of success in school.

> The girls should not go back to school they will teach other girls bad manners. In addition, they would score nothing because they are confused and thinking about men (old mother).

Mothers to YSM's were very supportive of their daughters even when the other family members discriminated against them. One of the greatest threats to the identity of the YSM's was the brothers to YSM'S whom it was alleged they thought YSM's would compete for inheritance as revealed through the interviews.

> The brothers do not like her because she is seen as competing for the inheritance", I am doing everything to enable my daughter to be to be self sufficient because they might, mistreat her after I die.

> The greatest *night* is when I die. They do not support me because they think oh; we are supporting her daughter's son (voices of older mothers).

Even though the mothers to YSM's protected their daughters from negative constructions of their identity, the discourse of YSM's as bearing a problematic identity was still resilient as articulated in the way they 'pathologized' other YSM's.

> Some of the YSM's are irresponsible and lazy. They don't bother to provide for the needs of their children. My daughter is not like that, do not write that about her (older mother).

By insisting that I don't write negative things about her daughter, the mother can be seen as simultaneously resisting the discourse and subscribing to it by transferring the negative construction to other YSM's.

Mother's perceptions of causes of early single motherhood

Poverty was identified as a cause of early motherhood especially for the YSM's who had more than one child. This they argued was because as their daughters struggled to get support for their children, they ended up falling prey to men. They also attributed early pregnancies to materialism and increased consumerism.

> Our time we never used to have soap and bread bread; we used to eat sweet potatoes. They are just greedy (older mother).

The mothers to YSM's exonerated themselves from blame of having encouraged their daughters to get pregnant and reported how some of the mothers to YSM's were beaten by the husbands on allegations that they were accomplices in their daughter's immorality (sic). The placing of the blame on the mothers can be attributed to the fact

that the mother is recognized as the educator and agent of transmission of values about sexuality (Terry 1992 in Noel 93:53).

Although agreeing to the fact that the girls ought to have been disciplined, the mothers said they did not want to quarrel them because they were afraid that the girls would procure an abortion. In Kenya, abortion is a criminal offence and is only allowed in cases where the health of the mother is at risk. Women who do not want to keep their pregnancies tend to visit 'street doctors' to procure abortion and can sometimes lead to death (Obunga 2003). This puts the poor YSM's who may not want to keep their children in a paradoxical position because *the price of 'refusing' to be a mother* can be death through clandestine abortion and yet when they decide to keep their pregnancy, there is stigma that waits to interrogate them.

5.4   Community perceptions of young single mothers

The community members had diverse attitudes towards YSM's although it was not an entirely negative attitude. This can be attributed to the influence of the project. The community members also said that the attitudes differed from family to family and in some cases the YSM's did not face any problems. They gave general accounts of identity of YSM's and some presented them as immoral and disobedient to their parents as discussions indicate

> The world has changed, the girls do not listen to their parents, they start engaging
> in sex immediately they are born (FGD).

This apparent promiscuity was attributed to increased eroticization through mass media and increased consumerism which made the girls 'greedy'. Mothers to YSM's were held responsible for early motherhood because they did not give them proper guidance. In some instances, poverty was identified as the cause for young single motherhood especially the where grown up children shared sleeping space with parents, therefore learning about sex when young. Discussions revealed that the reason for strict control of YSM's was because giving birth to 'illegitimate' children was against the tradition and culture and it was asserted that 'every child should have a father'.

Even though there was general agreement that the YSM's were not giving good care of their children, this was associated with development of new parenting skills.

> Even though our time we used to give birth when young these days, children are brought up in a different way which they have to be taught. Our time the rules were easy. There was no, do this, or do that (FGD).

The YSM's are therefore being judged on the basis on basis of new motherhood skills.[18]

Accountability towards YSM's as far as material support was also a contested issue with views that young single motherhood was leading to a strain on scarce family resources and especially land. Continued support was seen as encouraging young single motherhood. This contestation is not limited within the community but is re-enacted at the state level In Kenya in the case of children's Act where there is battle over who should have parental responsibility for children born out of wedlock (Children's Act 2001).[19]

While some community members felt that it was good to give YSM's land, it was not seen as the responsibility of the household or the community but they held government responsible for giving them grants for buying land. The community can therefore be seen as absconding from their responsibility of giving these entitlements to YSM's. This is despite the fact that women in Kenya have formal rights to inherit land and property from their parents but application of customary law makes it difficult to implement.[20]

Non recognition of deservedness of YSM's was also extended to leadership positions in the community because discussions revealed that it is only YSM's who have proved worthy who should be made leaders. Making 'unworthy' ones leaders would mean that the community was sanctioning young single motherhood.

5.5   Complicity, resistance and subversion: Discursive and practical strategies by young single mothers

YSM's used different strategies in dealing with the stigma and hardships they faced in their everyday lives some of which are:

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[18] See smart 1996 for a discussion on discursive creation of good and bad mothers in Britain.

19 Section 23 (1) states 'In this Act, "parental responsibility" means all the duties, rights, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation the child and the child's property, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child'. The content of this definition is given a wide extrapolation in subsections (2), (3), (4) and (5) to include the provision of basic needs, education and health, duty to protect the child from neglect discrimination, abuse, give parental guidance, determine the child's name etc,
The act does not give the father of a child born out of wedlock parental responsibility unless it can be proved that the father and mother had been living together for at least 12 months. Or the mother can prove that the father had supported the child.

[20] Personal discussion with Kimuli a lawyer with BMusau and company advocates, Kenya.
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Motherhood as a symbol of femininity

Motherhood, even though outside the dominant and carried out under precarious material conditions has been an empowering phenomenon. YSM's agreed that their fertility may have been unwanted but their children are not unwanted. Bearing children was seen as a way of proving that one was not barren and was used as a way of recouping their identity. This they did within the dominant frame of women as nurturers of life.

> We are happy because we are called mother of so and so. Nobody can say we are barren. There are women craving to be called mum (young mothers).

They were also happy because they had registered their children under their own names and not the names of grandfathers to the children. By so doing they manage at least discursively to fracture the patriarchal ideology of genealogy through the father.

Images of 'good mother' and 'good people'

YSM's said that because of their age, they had not been good mothers and the project had provided them with knowledge about child care. Accepting that they are inadequate mothers may be a way of "[meeting] the administratively defined criteria of entitlement" and may be a way of petitioning for continued support by the project (Fraser 1989:154). Though lacking in good child care skills, their narratives, though not wholly narratives of resistance countered the images of bad mothers and wanted to prove that they were good mothers sometimes within the framework of complicity with the dominant gender norms and constructions about young single motherhood

They have resisted these construction by carving for themselves an identity of the 'good' mother acquired through ability to provide for their children's needs. To avoid being seen as dependent on their parents, they had income generating activities, like selling vegetables or second hand clothes.

> I am a worthy mother, because I take care of my sons needs. I pay his school fees and help him with home work, dress him well and escort him to school, something even the older married mothers do not do. His teacher even comments that I am different from other YSM's (young mother)

'Good mother' identity was also acquired through ability to carry pregnancy to term by refusing to procure an abortion. Thus by presenting themselves as having upheld the sanctity of life, they subverted the norms that denigrate their motherhood and presented themselves as taking an active role in continuation of the lineage. This

however was still a capitulation to the dominant gender norms by drawing the role of women as reproducers of life as Tafari –Ama puts it,

> capitulating to norms that prescribe fertility and fecundity as necessary features of womanhood reifies gender power in patriarchal terms (2002:82, 83).

Though recouping their selfhood through reference to their reproductive sexuality is gendered thus, symbolically it was positive for the YSM's.

Even though undermining the narrative order of being 'inadequate mothers', the discursive formation of YSM's as inadequate was still resilient as articulated by the way they drew boundaries between themselves and other YSM's seen as 'bad' mothers.

> Some YSM's are just lazy, they are beggar, 'I am the one who helps some of them; they also dress their children badly.

For YSM's, the act of telling their stories was itself an act of resistance to their representation as inadequate mothers; proving to the world that they were worthy and capable mothers. This could be seen in the way some of them even went to call their friends to come and have their "stories written down" during the interview. (Kleiber and velten 19994 in Grenz: 2099) have said that sometimes respondents participate in a research project because it has a 'subjective topicality' or some relevance to them. The act of telling was a way of fortifying themselves psychologically against the negative value accorded to their motherhood. It was also a way of seeking social approval.

> I have told my story many times, nevertheless I will tell it more (young mother).

At the family level in endearing themselves to the family members, the YSM's had to enact an identity of 'good people' acquired through what I would call *'strategic politeness',* sometimes leading to distorted subjectivity. This sometimes involved working hard at home to avoid being dubbed a 'burden', while others became 'over generous' to present themselves as of good character.

> I really have to prove in the home that [am] not a bad girl. I do not discriminate against any of the children at home. If they sent me anywhere, I go and never answer back (young mother).

In so doing though they drew on dominant notions of docile female identity which has to be subjugated for it to be acceptable .This resonates with Henerietta Moore's argument on relationship between identities and discourses. She argues that there are no single masculinities and femininities but there exists many possibilities which are

provided by available competing and contradictory discourses, (1994: 63). Using Wendy Holloway's concept of investment (Holloway 1984 in Moore 1994: 64) she argues that when there are such competing discourses, people's degree of investment motivates them to take up one subject position compared to others. Such subject positions may not confer just emotional benefits but also the subjects may gain materially.

Attitudes about marriage

Attitudes towards marriage were a discursive space and were fraught with contradictions. Some felt it that marriage is a good aspiration but others dismissed it outright. Several reasons were responsible for this ambivalence. For most of them, marriage though desirable was not of ultimate importance to them. This is because they had ability to provide for their children and for them, marrying a poor man was a fate worse than young single motherhood.

> For me marriage is not everything, because some of the YSM's when they get married they stop taking care of themselves and are even worse off. I have seen them behave like slaves without money to take care of their children. Some of those husbands are useless. It is you to provide for the family I can not just be married to anything (young mother).

A man who can not provide for his family loses his station as a man and he becomes just 'something'. This momentarily tips the gender power balance to their side and ruptures the neatness of the discourse of man as a provider; it also justifies them to stay single as a way of asserting that men in the community are not responsible. Discursively too they are able to resist constructions that they have not married because they have illegitimate children.

Despite these contestations, the stigma one faces as a single mother due to norms about heterosexual conjugal family as the ideal imposed limits. This echoes Kandiyotis' (1998:143) assertion that 'even within women's acts of open contestation, it is possible to detect limits imposed by naturalization of certain social practices'. Lack of land to bequeath their children and stigma meted on their children accentuated the ambivalence making it difficult to practically disentangle their motherhood from the governance of the father.

> Our children are called children without a father they are exposed to scorn in school. Our children are despised and when others are served on plates ours are served on hands.[21]

> I have to get married for my children to get a father. (young mothers).

Foucault's (1978) concept of deployment of alliance applies in this particular case because the system of inheritance, naming and kinship ties functions to maintain the heterosexual conjugal form of a family as the ideal.

Marriage was seen as a way of acquiring a 'home'. In this culture, a young unmarried girl would never be allowed to stay in a separate house for fear that men would think she is over assertive and loose a potential husband. For this reason getting married would provide exit from trouble with parents and brothers wives.

The radical potential of group membership

Membership into groups of young mothers has also been one of the ways the YSM's have used to circumvent the exigencies of their everyday lives. Even though the project initially started the young mothers groups as avenues where the young mothers could receive training on child care, the groups have acted as avenues for resisting and fortifying themselves against dominant discourses, seeking recognition in the community and fulfilling their material needs. Though the ability of groups and networks to enable the marginalized groups to access resources has been a matter of contestation (Szreter, 2002 in Kidger 2003:13), groups have acted as avenues for increasing social connectedness , conduit for recognition and have helped them come out of their material vicissitudes. Coming together in a group has enabled them to get friends who have similar problems.

For many of them the knowledge that there were others who had 'sinned like them and causing moral breakdown of the social fiber' gave them a resolve to continue with life.

> In the group you realize you are not all alone and others have done the same (young mother).

By constructing their sexuality and identity as deserving to be tamed, they counsel each other on various issues ranging from urging each other 'not to repeat' a metaphor implying that they should not get another child as well as encouraging each other on how to manage stigma at home and in the public spaces.

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[21] An expression denoting an act done to a devalued person

> We learn from each other how to stay well with people at home so that we do not cause trouble (young mother).

They also entertain the community during important occasions like public meetings or national holidays. In so doing, the mothers can be seen as *'singing', albeit a different tune* from the one that the community is used to by using the same public spaces they avoided when expectant as avenues to show that 'they are no longer shy' and have made sense of their situation. In addition to providing for the needs of their children, they have also been able to buy a plot of land and register it in their name. In so doing, they have refused to comply with the functionalist definition of their needs in terms of ability to provide for the needs of their children and extended them to involve right to own land. By discussing the problems they face due to constant disparagement, the YSM's are broadening the scope of their needs and politicizing them.

5.6   Conclusion

Norms against YSM's can be seen as responsible for construction of some specific selfhood on their part. Control on their sexuality has been done by utilizing various mechanisms like labelling their children as illegitimate, refusal to grant inheritance and daily denigration of their selfhood, and motherhood and general lack of accountability to them. Double standards are exercised in because the men responsible are not brought to question. Despite this, they have devised different and sometimes ambivalent strategies to circumvent the unjust distributional and recognition order.

6   IN CONCLUSION: RE-IMAGINING YOUNG SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

6.1   Introduction

The aim of this study was to explicate the assumptions underlying program/policy interventions for YSM's with the perspective of redefining social policies which address their situation in a deeper way. This chapter brings together the main issues emanating from the study. The study does not offer a prescriptive formula for working with YSM's but points to important areas which have implications in envisioning emancipatory alternatives for them. The chapter ends by proposing a new way to look at, understand and design social policies for recognition and redistribution for this vulnerable category of young women.

6.2 Experience of young single motherhood: misrecognition and maldistribution

YSM's experiences are fraught with contradictions due to the specific way in which their motherhood and sexuality is defined. They face both symbolic disadvantages in society emanating from the way the community defines them, norms which are also reinforced by the interventions working with them. This misrecognition is not only fuelled through free standing discourses (Fraser 2003) but is also institutionalized through the law and other social institutions like marriage and systems of naming which subordinate those who do not fit normative standards. The various mechanisms of stigmatization and control have an inherent double standard in that the men who are responsible are not brought into question and it is the YSM's and their own mothers who are made responsible and accused of deviance. This resonates with debates about the affiliation Act earlier discussed where there was general reluctance in holding men responsible for the social effects of their sexual escapades. This misrecognition as elaborated in previous chapters shows the ways in which this has hindered their ability to participate actively in their community. This is seen even in an extreme form amongst some YSM's who discontinue school and shy away from public spaces to protect themselves against negative attitudes. They also face other material disadvantages because most of them are raising children in conditions of poverty.

The negative discourses also affect their children. This study has made references to the effects of these constructions on the identity of their children. This would be an important area for future research to find out the effects of gendered and normalizing nature of global discourses of childhood in relation to children of YSM's.

6.3 Framing of needs of young single mothers

In addressing to this problematic, the study has demonstrated how despite well meaning intentions and programs to Include YSM's in society, these interventions have been based on specific assumptions and the approach tends to shift between dominant and alternative norms. This constant shifting has meant that the attention has sometimes been deflected from the systemic issues concerning young single motherhood. There could be several reasons for this. The operations of these interventions cannot be disentangled from the concerns of the donors who set the terms and therefore the goals and the strategies. Thus as Fraser (1989:181) argues

needs emanate form some specific interested locations and the level playing field for the local organizations in most cases will always be a fallacy. A discussion with donor representative of the program shows their concern is with the children rather than the YSM's themselves as reflected in this statement:

> The reason we work with young mothers is because of their children we do not work with them as YSM's and all the activities should benefit their children.

Current concerns and global discourses of childhood where children should be reared in a particular way can also explain the concerns with 'technical' aspects of the problem like defining the identity of the mother in terms of the ability to provide for the needs of the child or controlling their sexuality. Given the urgency for eradicating 'teenage pregnancy' with some countries setting specific targets, it would also seem difficult for these interventions which run for limited period of time, to get involved with structural issues like gender power inequality which may not offer quick results.[22] In addition, if efficiency is their main goal, reducing rate of 'teenage pregnancies' may be a handy tool for population control and equity issues may be secondary. One would stretch the argument further and ask whether issues of 'gender' would excite the same passion and sympathy from donors the way images of young single motherhood as 'social contagion' or 'pathology' have done.

The study has also revealed that these assumptions also draw from the repertoire of the local social norms about YSM's. These interventions consult local actors using methodology of 'baseline surveys' taking for granted that "socially authorized forms of public discourse for interpreting peoples needs are adequate and fair [and yet they may be] skewed in favor of the self-interpretations of the dominant social groups" (Fraser 1989:164). Some of these interventions may also face quandaries of adopting a universalistic approach which presupposes a universal theory of norms and justice for all individuals, or to avoid antagonism, they may choose a 'hands off approach' of relativism premised on concept of justice being found only in local standpoints (Philips 2001).

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[22] For example Britain has set a target for halving the rate of teenage pregnancy among the under 18's by the year 2010 (SEU, 1999:8)

6.4   Re-thinking young single mothers

By presenting the voices of YSM themselves, this study has offered an alternative way of imagining them. Though not overtly resisting the construction as bearers of a problematic sexuality, motherhood and selfhood, they seem to have adopted a 'do not blame us attitude' by attributing their motherhood to extenuating circumstances. They also articulate a discourse of agency albeit sometimes an ambivalent and fluid one, coalescing at the shifting interstices of their subjectivity, community expectations and the construction by the expert needs discourses. Their stories reveal that to continue thinking about them as promiscuous is to make trivial the effects of their material conditions and broader structure of gender regimes which subordinate women/girls in Kenya, which have a bearing on their sexual decision making and also limits other choices available to them. For example, Okwany (2005:107) has discussed how household gender division of labour in Kenya embedded in the ideology, "a girl's work is never finished" affects girl's performance in school leading to eventual drop out.

6.5   Redistribution and Recognition: Broadening the scope of the needs of young single mothers

Unintended consequences of group formation by program intervention have a radical potential and indeed has served a purpose beyond its current purpose. Groups have acted as new 'discourse publics' (Fraser 1997:81; Fraser 1989) because in the groups, YSM's have articulated contra discourses about themselves, reclaiming their identity and at the same time politicizing their needs.[23] These groups can go further to act as a basis for mobilization by YSM's to translate justified needs claim into social rights Fraser (1989:183) by seeking entitlements from the wider publics which are the community, the interventions and the state.

I briefly revisit the issues raised in chapter two about the ability of YSM's to act as an identity based group and present some paradoxes in such a position. Identity based groups like caste, ethnic or racial groups often seek recognition of group difference or affirmation of group rights. YSM's may act like an identity based groups given the fact that their identity as earlier argued consists in the negative construction

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[23] According to Fraser counter publics are parallel discursive arena where subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their interests, needs and identities.

and labelling by the society. They also define and are defined as women who have given birth when young and single. However, YSM's may not frame their demands in terms of recognition of the distinctiveness of their sexuality or motherhood but recognition would entail removal of structures of subordination in society. One would then ask; would recognition of subordination they face not ultimately lead to eventual dissolution of their identity based on negative experience? And again, would identity politics based on their motherhood gain allies given the moralistic overtones of the perception of their sexuality and motherhood? YSM is also an ephemeral category; would it then act as a political category that can mobilize enough support?

Without attempting to provide answers to these questions, I argue that YSM's are indeed a vulnerable albeit a transient category who can organize and seek redress for the injustices they face. I am influenced by Nussbaum who posits a particular kind of collectivity called 'dispersed groups' which she defines as "communities of interest and aspiration across regional and even national boundaries" (2003:62). Such groups may lack communal power to be recognized as subordinated minorities because of their dispersal across regional and national boundaries and also due to lack of organizational capacity (ibid: 64). These groups may not seek an affirmation of difference or group rights but removal of those structures that subordinate and disadvantage them. Her characterization resonates with Fraser's notion of "*non-identitari*an *politics of recognition*, not based on reaffirming group identities, but that treats misrecognition as status subordination where some groups of people are denied participation in society and misdistribution as when some individuals lack the necessary resources to participate as peers in society (Fraser 2000:116&120; Fraser 2003:87).

Several characteristics as evident from the study would qualify YSM's as such a dispersed, marginalized group who can organize to demand recognition of their specific situation. Even though they may have formal rights as citizens, they have no 'rights' as such as YSM's but only paternalistic programs of inclusion whose deservedness is contested at different levels. The process of translation of their citizenship rights into substantive rights is also belied by the inaccessibility through daily denigration, which has denied them ability to acquire self-esteem like their 'normal' counterparts (Fraser 2003). In policies they face marginalization by having dominant groups define their needs hence their conceptualization as a 'problem'. These discourses have also had material repercussions in that some of them have also

had to discontinue schooling, thus compromising their chances of ever becoming self-sustaining individuals economically. Some of these ills of misrecognition also emanate from their identity as women, who are seen as having a loose sexuality and therefore face constant disparagement. There is also general policy inertia by the government pertaining recognition of YSM' as a vulnerable group which needs material support.

They also suffer from distributional injustices shaped by intersecting axis of gender, class, age and sexuality. As women, they are discriminated against in issues of succession and inheritance and they lack independent resources which determine other choices available to them. However identity as young and single puts them in a more precarious position since they may not access such resources whose access as is the expectation, would be through a husband.

The YSM's in organizing therefore should seek a 'politics beyond identity' Hekman (2000), involving making alliances and linkages with wider networks which include feminists or human rights advocates or other groups that may affiliate with them, for articulation of the politicized interpretation of their needs (Fraser 1989). For example in Kenya, Cradle, an organization which advocates for the rights of children is currently challenging the provisions of children's act on the issue of parental responsibility for children born out of wedlock as earlier discussed in chapter three (CRIN 2005).

In chapter two I raised issues of Foucault's conceptualization of power and its implications on strategies for organizing. The study has however identified that the exclusion of YSM's is due to diverse 'capillaries of power' (Foucault 1980) operational in their lives. This calls for a need for engagement with diverse locations of this power, not only the state, but also the community and the interventions working with YSM's and every day politics (Fraser 1989). For example despite Kenya having developed a youth policy in 2002, it does not explicitly state how the needs of young single/teenage mothers would be catered for but only makes cursory references to the fact that 'they are a vulnerable category (GOK 2002). Also the government made a formal commitment through policy to ensure re-admission of 'teenage mothers' to school during the Machakos symposium for girl education in 1994 (Mpesha 2000). Despite this, societal norms about them have hindered successful implementation of such a policy implying the need to engage also with the norms and dislodge the *doxa* of 'YSM's as a problem' and also the norms that

insubordinate women in general. Earlier discussions revealed how accountability to YSM's is contested and the way they are cast as irresponsible and promiscuous, norms that are articulated at both level of the community and reinforced by the interventions too. Disabled groups have managed to organize and not only challenge, problematise their identity as passive, but also to challenge the very notion of the label 'disabled' (see Lister 2003).

6.6   Concluding reflections

The study has provided significant evidence for a need to shift from common conceptualization of YSM's as a problem, to instead problematise the discourses and derived interventions that constitute their selfhood/identity, motherhood and sexuality. Following Fraser (1997:144), I have argued that, most responses to young single motherhood are premised on its construction as 'pathology' which may not be emancipatory in the end and there is a need to question the conceptualization of the problem itself.

This study recognizes and has identified a set of difficulties faced by YSM's, which cannot be underplayed. However the study has also revealed that the factors explaining their situation are what MacDonald terms "a complicated interplay of individual biographies with structural forces" (MacDonald 19997 in Lloyd &Regan 2000: 51). The key argument reiterated is that transformatory approaches to the issue of young single motherhood should take into consideration such interlocking factors.

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