

# Abortion Chronicles



The hypocrisy of our society never ceases to astound me. If a woman is being abused by her husband, boyfriend or sperm donor, we are told not to interfere because it's a "domestic issue" and should be sorted out privately. We are told that it's not possible for a husband to rape his wife. Because well, she's his wife, having sex is part of her "duties" and activists shouldn't interfere with private matter. What the so-called African "culture" basically tells us is that we shouldn't interfere in people's private issues. I can almost hear some old aunty say "what are you doing in other people's bedrooms? It's none of your business what happens there." Yet, should a woman fall pregnant as a result of these very private affairs, what she does with the pregnancy is suddenly everybody's business, including the government's.

It's sad how - no matter how much information we have at our disposal- we still choose to blindly cling to what we've been told or what we've culturally been taught is right and wrong. Most of us come from backgrounds where abortion is a taboo issue and I personally am guilty of having made religious and moral arguments against abortion. Two of the biggest arguments I hear (often from scholars, no less) against abortion are that it's murder and it's "unAfrican". As a Christian, I've been on the "abortion is murder" bandwagon for quite a long time, of late however, I've had to critically ask myself if life truly begins at conception... An infant, no matter how weak, can survive without its mother, if on the other hand a pregnant woman's heart stops beat-

ing, that of the foetus does too. The "life" of a foetus depends completely on the life of the woman, meaning it's not truly alive and you cannot murder "anyone" who does not exist.

As an African who struggles to understand what "Africanism" is I've realised that we tend to brand anything we do not like or that takes us out of our comfort zones as "unAfrican" or "colonial," and the same has been done with abortion.

I recently attended a workshop on the effects of unsafe abortions in Africa and here's what I learned: There are approximately 22 million unsafe abortions globally and 6.2 million of those are in Africa. Now, I'm not a numbers person, but even I have to agree that this affects too many women. It alarms me to think that whilst having only 10% of global population, Africa has 48% of maternal deaths and I think it's a clear indication that the problem is most certainly not "unAfrican". My mindset towards abortion changed as soon as I realised that just because you tell people not to do something, it does not mean they won't.

Wouldn't the world be perfect if that were the case? We could just tell men to stop killing and raping women and that would be the end of that, women could tell men they are not interested in having relationships with them and not be insulted for it. Okay, I'm going on a bit of a tangent now. The point I'm trying to make is that restrictive laws will not stop abortion- women who want to have abortions will do so regardless of legal restrictions, even if it means risking their lives to do so. Another really silly anti-abortion argument is that making abortion legal, safe and accessible will lead to more people having abortions. I honestly do not think that any woman wakes up and decides to go and have unsafe or risky sex with the intent of having an abortion. We come from a society where sexual coercion and violence is rife, we are not doing ourselves any favours by turning a blind eye to the results thereof. Also, statistics show that countries with favourable abortion laws actually have lower abortion rates. I think it's about time we took cognizance of the fact that safe abortions save lives and being "pro-life" should be about saving the lives of women.

By Mimi Mwiya