Against the Rules?
Which Rules?

NAVIGATING REGULATORY DISCOURSES OF PREGNANCY IN MOZAMBIQUE
Overview

• Alzira’s story
• School Rules
• Family Rules
• Meanings and Possibilities
• Agency.
Alzira’s story

Alzira was 16 at the time I met her (2011) and lived in the capital of Mozambique, Maputo.

I was very scared that they might find out and send me to night courses. So I stopped leaving the room during breaks, to avoid teachers having a good look at me and wondering what was going on. While in the classroom I would always remain at my desk, and not go to the blackboard for instance.

I wanted to keep the baby, but I also wanted to go to school at the same time. So we decided that the best solution was for me to keep living with my mother, even if me and my boyfriend were – and are - still together.

When I go to school, I take Ines to my parents-in-law, and they look after her while I am at school.
School Rules: In-school Pregnancy Policy

- Pregnant girls transferred to night courses
- School staff involved suspended

**DESIRED OUTCOMES**
- Pregnant girls are allowed to remain in education
- Transfer signals that pregnancy is not welcome within schools
- Transfer acts as a deterrent for other girls

**LONG TERM GOALS**
- De-normalisation of in-school pregnancy
- Less pregnancies in school → more girls in school
Transfer or Dropout?

Pregnant schoolgirls are identity misfits
Public transport more difficult at night
Night journeys are more dangerous
Quality of night courses is lower
More difficult to leave baby with others at night
Substantial age gap between classmates

Transfer as highway to dropout
Breaking School Rules

How to hide a pregnancy:

• Various layers of clothing
• Avoid standing up (strategy used by Alzira)
• Leaving school and starting afresh at the new school year

Silence and invisibility as empowering
I wanted to keep the baby, but I also wanted to go to school at the same time. So we decided that the best solution was for me to keep living with my mother, even if me and my boyfriend were – and are - still together.
Family Rules

Family of the girl take her to the family of the boy with whom she conceived. They want to make sure the boy and his family are willing to take responsibility for the pregnancy.

APRESENTAÇÃO

It seems like a wedding, but it is not religious. The ‘apresentação’ is just for the families and for the community to be aware that woman and man are together.

LOBOLO

Often translated as bride-price or dowry, refers today to the custom of paying the bride’s family for having her hand in marriage.

WEDDING

This may include a religious or a civil ceremony and shared meals with family members and guests. This last step represents the completion of the wedding.
Shifting Rules

• Although a pregnancy is supposed to trigger the traditional process of marriage, other considerations are also made (financial for example).

• However, the south of Mozambique is traditionally patrilinear (descent is defined within the kin of the father). This means refusing responsibility for a pregnancy is heavily frowned upon, but happens nonetheless.

• As a consequence, the expectation is still that pregnant girls should move to live with the family of the father of their babies

• This would entails responsibility for chores that are not compatible with school attendance

Alzira is resisting traditional gender roles
Binary Oppositions

education
- school, development,
- empowerment, independence,
- future, modernisation,
- modernity, urban, options,
- childhood (becoming)

pregnancy
- home, household, parenthood,
- family, community, tradition,
- backwardness, rural,
- dependence, adulthood
  (realisation)
Itineraries of the Self

The story of Alzira suggests that young people navigate across the boundaries of different binary oppositions.

• Alzira broke school rules by getting pregnant and resisting current policy that would have transferred her to night courses.

• Alzira broke family arrangements by refusing to move in with the family of her partner.

Crossing the boundaries allowed her to maintain her identities alive, albeit separate.
Conclusion

Alzira wears many hats during her day. She lives at home with her parents, but is in a relationship with the father of Ines, her daughter. She looks after her child together with her family, but also includes and relies upon her in-laws by bringing her daughter to theirs every day before going to school.

Alzira used the reference points at her disposal to make her identity ‘work’ in different context, and to render herself intelligible to others who would rely on similar regulatory frameworks.

By so doing, Alzira exerted her agency. She combined elements of childhood with others pertaining to adulthoods in order to make sense of herself. Although relying on binaries, she constructed her identity in the interstices between frameworks.