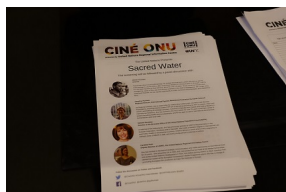


Thursday 12 July 19.00 (Cinéma Galeries)

On July 12th 2018, Ciné-ONU screened Sacred Water, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at Cinéma Galeries in Brussels. The film takes the audience to modern Rwanda where it confronts the topics of cultural heritage, marital relations, and girlhood through the intimate subject of female sexual pleasure. At its core, Sacred Water demonstrates with both humour and tenderness the importance of having a satisfying and safe sex life. The screening was organised to mark World Population Day - July 11th – and to celebrate this year’s theme: Family Planning is a Human Right. For the United Nations, this means that women should have the freedom and capacity to decide whether to reproduce, and – if so desired – how and when to do so safely. Essential to realising this right is the improvement of sexual and reproductive health education, gender equality, and women’s empowerment.



The screening was followed by a panel discussion with: Olivier Jourdain, Director of Sacred Water; Nadine Krysostan, Programme Co-ordination and Liaison Specialist at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Brussels Office and Caroline Hickson, Regional Director, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) European Network. The discussion was moderated by Caroline Petit, the Deputy Director of the United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC).



Caroline Petit began by asking Olivier Jourdain: "Why did you make a documentary about such an intimate topic and how does a western man make a documentary in Rwanda?" Olivier Jourdain explained his curiosity with the Rwandan 'origin myth' about 'Sacred Water' and the role it plays in their culture and ideas about gender relations. He stressed that the film was about offering "another, more positive view of sexuality in Africa". As a white, western man, he reflected that it was initially difficult "to get to know people and gain their confidence". However, meeting and working with Vestine, the film's protagonist and well-known radio star, made having difficult conversations easier because of her infectious humour and frankness about sexuality. He added that nothing was staged or scripted in the film, instead the focus was on people telling their stories and capturing the reality.

Vestine acts as a role model for many women in the film and the panel discussed the importance of this in sexual health education. Caroline Hickson noted, "young persons need to have role models with the right facts, especially when they perhaps know more about the biological but less about the emotional aspects". Nadine Krysostan agreed that fact-based information is the foundation to improving sexual health and family planning because it helps people make informed choices. On an optimistic note, Caroline Petit observed how initiatives such as those have improved family planning in Rwanda: in 1980, women in Rwanda had on average 8 children but by 2018 it was reduced to on average 3 children.



Audience members commented how they enjoyed the fresh perspective of the film. One audience member asked: "what role they thought such innovative and creative films play in the education of women's rights?" Caroline Hickson responded: "When we talk about reproductive rights we sometimes speak a language that isolates people. When we look at the recent referendum in Ireland on abortion rights, it was won by people's personal stories about real life". She added that it is essential to be creating spaces to have these personal conversations and film plays an important role in creating them.

The conversation turned back to the practical matters of family planning. Nadine Krysostan pointed out how 'the personal' is important in the whole development process: "successful approaches should be from bottom up, not only top down". She concluded by pushing for the issues to be kept centre stage and part of the bigger picture of gender equality: "respect for women and girls across the world is central to positive and sustainable development".

The discussion ended with a call to action from Caroline Hickson: “We are at a pivotal moment in the world right now. Reproductive rights are under attack. We have to fight for what we believe in. Whether it is a conversation or a protest, we cannot be complacent!”



- To watch the trailer, [click here](#)
- To see pictures from the evening, [click here](#) .
- For more information about the film, [click here](#)
- To download the handout, [click here](#) .
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