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Conflict legacies

Understanding youth's post-peace agreement practices in Yumbe, north-western Uganda

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6. 'IT IS PEACE-CREATING': LOCAL REFLECTIONS ON KHAT USE AND DEALING WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Walking down Yumbe's streets in the afternoon, one notices how the sheds along the roadside, the verandas of commercial buildings, large trees or the walls of a video hall all provide shade to groups of young men concentrating on something cherished on their laps or on the papyrus mat in front of them. Coming closer, one sees that these cherished things are green leaves, brought to the mouth and chewed with great vigour together with pieces bitten off a small pink twine of chewing gum that the user has been rolling and reshaping, before partly wrapping it back in its original paper. More of the cherished leaves often lie nearby in a transparent plastic bag. The product keeps its users together, chatting, sitting, sometimes playing around, and sometimes more introverted and withdrawn. A cigarette can be passed around and shared; a soda too. It is not only in Yumbe town that young men gather like this in the afternoons; one finds similar small gatherings everywhere around local trading centres in the sub-counties. The age of the participants varies somewhere between 16 and 35, the group size from two to approximately 12.

INTRODUCTION

The above-described phenomenon is extensive and clearly visible, but difficult to quantify without statistical data. The community complains that *mairungi* (as khat is locally referred to) has drawn in so many youths, and they accuse its users of idleness. A few people are more sympathetic to the young men's plight of having little work at hand—given the district's low economic productivity—and thus having to wait long hours each day to see if an opportunity for work (often manual, heavy, and unskilled labour) comes by. Khat helps to 'kill time' and avoid having negative thoughts. The latter was a recurrent finding in this research, and this chapter dissects the negative emotions that potentially lead to negative behaviour that the young men talked about when they spoke of khat use and what it does for them. Khat was associated by its users, though not necessarily by the wider community, with notions of peacefulness. How should their message be interpreted, and what does it convey about the 'post-peace agreement' environment?

Young men themselves attributed many positive qualities to the fresh green leaves widely known for their stimulating effects.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, they have fully appropriated khat into their reflections on their local environment; despite its relatively recent appearance (khat was introduced in the region only in the mid-1990s). Naturally, young men's own interpretations of khat use in Yumbe, as elsewhere, are easily dismissed by the larger community of adults, including local government officials, civil society, politicians, parents, and their own young wives. They see young men's explanations as rather untrustworthy attempts to defend their 'addiction', among other criticisms. A highly placed local government official in Yumbe judged that young men were chewing *mairungi* because it generated sexual pleasure.²⁵⁹ Others claim that young men chew *mairungi* because they do not want to work.²⁶⁰ In general, both 'drug users' and unemployed 'idle youth' are easily and commonly portrayed as negative cohorts in Uganda (especially in newspapers/media; see also Titeca 2009). In this chapter, instead of following the question of who is right and who is wrong about what khat does for the individual or society,²⁶¹ I argue that it is worthwhile to listen to young men about what they claim khat does for them in their daily lives.

Following initial explorative interviews and observations regarding young men's khat use in Yumbe, there appeared to be more to their consumption of the green leaves than simple boredom and passing the time or the wish to be 'modern', arguments used to explain the uptake of khat use among youths in other parts of East Africa (see for example Carrier 2005; Beckerleg 2009). Rather, they often referred to the need to forget their problems, and in general their reflections on *mairungi* revealed striking insights into their daily life-worlds and perceptions that were difficult to obtain otherwise. They talked about their concerns and attempts at moral positioning in relation to the social fabric that is emerging out of a long period of conflict and which is shaped by the chronic poverty that has ensued. In other words, I argue that young men's discourses about khat, accompanied by observations and other ethnographic data (including life history collection), can serve as an analytical entry point to reveal the social world of young men and their discursive and other positioning in it. To convey this historical and conflict-related entanglement of khat in Yumbe and to address the question of what khat does for

²⁵⁸ Khat's main psychotropic ingredient, cathinone, is generally known to cause mild euphoria, increased levels of alertness, friendliness, contentment, and a positive flow of ideas. The after-effects of khat chewing are reported to include feelings of low mood, lack of concentration, and insomnia. Khat arguably causes less dependency than alcohol or tobacco, yet in many countries it is an illegal drug. In Uganda, khat use is currently legal, yet policymakers would like to see it banned, arguing that it causes idleness, disorder, and criminality (Titeca 2009; Beckerleg 2010c). Often, such problems are reported when khat is mixed with other drugs, though this happens only on a low scale in Yumbe. In some Ugandan sub-counties, by-laws are in place that define khat as an illegal drug, but this was not the case in Yumbe District and its sub-counties during the time of this research.

²⁵⁹ One could write a whole book about the ambiguities surrounding khat and sex, but the present chapter does not focus on this. For more information, see Mains (2012: ch. 2) and Beckerleg (2010a).

²⁶⁰ Other research on khat reports similar societal responses (see for example Gezon 2012; Mains 2012: 44, 55).

²⁶¹ The 'truth' and the 'lies' about khat are something that neither academics nor people in other localities have reached a consensus on. See for example Carrier (2008), who questions whether it is a drug at all, or Gebissa 2010, who asks whether it is more like coffee or cocaine—and this will not be resolved in this chapter. Gezon (2012) shows that the answer to this question is, in any case, very complex.

youth in this environment in the present, the first part of this chapter discusses the history of khat in Yumbe, with a particular focus on the point in young men's biographic narratives at which it was introduced, and the centrality of this to understanding their eager uptake of it.²⁶² Thereafter, I focus on how young men reflect on what khat does for them in the present and how this proves to be an elucidating reflection on the society they live in and on their moral and other concerns.

However, there also emerges doubt about what they say when they sometimes contradict their own statements or when these are challenged by the community. The ambiguities that appear in this material will be addressed partly through a more technical understanding of khat's working as a stimulant and its after- and social effects. The latter point then forms a perfect stepping stone to discuss the perspectives of these young men's spouses,²⁶³ who have quite a different experience of khat and its contribution to peace in society.

I conclude by discussing how we can interpret the information in this chapter with regard to the larger question with which this dissertation is concerned—namely, the engagement of youth in post-peace agreement practices that lead to prospects of peace or conflict in the future. Khat-related discourse sheds an interesting but ambiguous light on this question.

A HISTORY OF KHAT IN YUMBE: A FERTILE GROUND FOR RAPID ABSORPTION

Aggressive/active marketing and early users in Yumbe

Khat was first introduced into Yumbe District from the mid-1990s onwards. Before that, few people there had encountered it, though some had started using it while working in other regions of Uganda as labour migrants. In these cases, its use has been related to specific occupations that required alertness, such as that of watchman—one type of work that West Nilers were commonly drawn into—or when working as a long-distance driver. In addition, older interlocutors had noted its use among Somali truck drivers in the broader region, before people began to take up the habit locally.

In the largest nearby town in the region, Arua, khat had, according to Beckerleg (2010b: 67), already been introduced in the 1960s by a local entrepreneur, targeting the few Somali and Yemeni customers present there at the time.²⁶⁴ A particularly well-known trading centre for khat later developed between Arua and Yumbe, in what is currently

²⁶² Uptake of khat use by young women in Yumbe would have been very difficult, as we shall see later in this chapter.

²⁶³ Indeed, many people in Yumbe marry at a young age, a point made earlier in this dissertation. In a large part of the literature on khat use, one gets the impression that it is predominantly young men's business in areas where its uptake is more recent, but it is often also left open whether or not these men are married (see for example Carrier 2005, 2007; Titeca 2009).

²⁶⁴ For other parts of Uganda, it has been described how foreign Yemeni and Somali traders often transmitted the use of khat to people who worked with them as employees and how its use spread from there onwards (Beckerleg 2010b).

known as Terego County.²⁶⁵ From the life histories of the interlocutors, it seems that in the 1990s rather aggressive marketing strategies played a role in khat's uptake in Yumbe, as for example in Ali's case:

ALI

Ali, 34 years old, explained how, when he was in his late teens, he was approached by traders from Maracha.²⁶⁶ They were on their way to Moyo and passed by the trading centre where he was engaged in a small business to raise his own school fees. Ali had lost both of his parents in the aftermath of his family's return from exile,²⁶⁷ and so he was staying with an aunt and was actively trying to support himself. His business concerned exchanging soap and sugar for cooking oil obtained from Sudanese refugees in the region, which he would then sell to locals. The traders who were on their way to sell khat in Moyo told him that the product they were selling would help him study in the evenings (as his time was taken up by the trading in the afternoons). They offered him khat to chew for free, provided he would try to sell off the other parcels of khat for them. Ali presented himself as being vulnerable to the influence of others in this period. About his having joined the rebellion (UNRF II) a little while after this, he said: 'Some boys approached me because they saw I looked sad [because he was unable to pay for his school fees]. They convinced me to join them in the bush', where they told him he could earn money.²⁶⁸ After this first encounter with the khat traders, Ali thus easily became an active consumer (and later a grower), but he says that in the beginning there were only a few consumers in Yumbe.

Other life histories of local youths provide a similar story of how khat entered their lives, not only through aggressive marketing but also at specific points of difficulty induced by the history of conflict in the region. For example, like Ali, Mansur was one of the first consumers in Yumbe, and he explained his uptake of khat in similar terms, which reveal his exposure to it at a vulnerable moment.

MANSUR

Mansur (37 years old, 2 wives, 5 children) was among the early consumers of khat in Yumbe District in the 1990s. When he came back from exile with his family in the late 1980s after years of displacement, he was in his late teens. He reported feeling disillusioned about his future at the time, particularly with regard to the person of his father and the latter's inability to manage the family and send his sons to school. Mansur's

²⁶⁵ More research on the evolution of this trading hub is necessary.

²⁶⁶ Maracha is now a district, but back then it was, like Yumbe, a sub-county under Arua District (then Aringa County).

²⁶⁷ This period of return was one in which many people died of simple diseases owing to a lack of health care infrastructure; see Chapter 3.

²⁶⁸ By referring to 'the bush' here, Ali means joining the rebellion; see chapters 4 and 5 for more explanation.

father, once a wealthy²⁶⁹ man while serving in the Ugandan army during the time when Idi Amin was in power, returned from exile in Sudan completely bankrupt, only to find the decent house that he had once built destroyed and looted by the UNLA. Mansur could not understand how his father had come to lose all he had just like that, and he seemed to blame his father for it. Indeed, he and his brothers blamed their father and his generation for spending their wealth as if they would be in power forever, as if their fathers were naïve about the money that came to them too easily at the height of Amin's regime. They felt strongly about their father's inability to help them go to school when they were younger.²⁷⁰ Discontentment about the deprivation that marked their childhood and the lack of educational support, combined with their strong awareness of the region's long-term political marginalization, dominated the worldview of Mansur and his brothers.

Frustrated by a lack of prospects and not knowing what to do about it, Mansur came into contact with one of the first groups of khat users in Yumbe in the mid-1990s:

We were young and it was very hard for us to access the basic necessities. By then my father had stopped getting income from the government²⁷¹ and it was very hard. And we were around five in number as children, so all those could not really get support from my father. So there was really [a] need for self-sustenance. How I could do that was very, very hard. So by then I decided to join a group [...] this group was using khat; they could chew mairungi. That was in the early 90s. So I joined and could eat mairungi on [a] daily basis.

Although Mansur was not explicit about the group's exact activities, the group of khat chewers he joined exerted social pressure on him to spend every evening with them. After some time, Mansur realized that the solution to his problems might be to start growing mairungi himself. He started buying the shoots and planting them, without asking his father's consent to use the land, and after a few years started earning money that he would otherwise not have been able to obtain. By the time I met him, he was very pleased with the income it generated for him. He was proud and saw himself as having broken the cycle of deep poverty in their family by being able to send his own children to school.

ABIRIGA

Another case is that of Mansur's half-brother Abiriga (29 years old, 1 wife, 4 children). After feeling unsupported at home,²⁷² he became drawn into the UNRF II rebellion, initially as a spy around 1998 when he was 17 years old. This latter role required him to be active after school time around places where the army would hang out. Engaging in these kinds

²⁶⁹ Mansur's father belonged to the group of people who, while serving in the Ugandan army under Idi Amin, were able to build a modern house with iron sheeting. See Chapter 4 for more about their social-economic positions in the past during Amin's regime. Mansur, in fact, is a brother (same father, different mother) to Abiriga, whose story is told in Chapter 4 and referred to below.

²⁷⁰ Mansur and his brothers had completed primary education and afterwards struggled for a few years to find support to study in secondary school, until money problems eventually forced them to drop out.

²⁷¹ By 'income', he means pensions: former Idi Amin soldiers were not paid a pension, contrary to their sense of entitlement; see Chapter 4.

²⁷² For reasons elaborated in Chapter 4.

of activities right after school, however, meant that in order to pass his exams he had to study in the evenings. It was therefore in this period that he started using khat to enable him to stay awake at night in order to study. He claimed that this really helped him to study well and achieve better results in school. Meanwhile, his spying activities allowed him to generate some income from the rebels and continue paying his school fees.

What these cases together show is that the uptake of khat by these three interlocutors was, beyond local marketing strategies, at least partly explained by what could be labelled as post-exile, conflict, and post-conflict experiences. Chewing *mairungi* became a locally meaningful practice for young people—in the case of Mansur, related to addressing grievances and not knowing what to do for a better future; in the case of Abiriga, studying in the evenings while supporting himself by spying. Ali's narrative also shows how he was lured into chewing khat to help him study during a period in his life when he was much affected by a lack of familial support, after having lost both of his parents and living with his aunt's family, who were economically deprived after a long period of war and displacement.

Additional factors

In the late 1990s, near the end of the last rebellion, when the region slowly began to become safer, local youths started growing khat themselves, as Mansur's and Ali's cases show. It is likely that this drew more local youths into its consumption, as they were now easily exposed to it and it was readily available. Selling khat enabled these young men, in contrast to the generation of their fathers, to earn quite an amount of money in a region that was devastated by war-induced poverty and where other cash crops became less and less attractive to grow.²⁷³ Gezon (2012) similarly describes the growing of khat in a marginal poor region in Madagascar as 'alternative development': the development of growing a cash crop that significantly improved local livelihoods, but which was fully initiated by the people themselves without any official government development scheme.²⁷⁴ More recently, during the time of my fieldwork, some of those early growers of khat in Yumbe were starting to push the khat frontier forward,²⁷⁵ identifying a new

²⁷³ While people referred to cotton grown in the past, this was no longer a common thing in Yumbe during my fieldwork. Tobacco was still grown by many, but yields were frequently disappointing (related to droughts), and growers felt they did not earn enough after repaying the loans on the pesticides that they had to use. Young men in Yumbe often commented that tobacco growing was tedious and did not generate enough money. They were much more positive about khat, with its high yields and potential to generate an income much more frequently—during some seasons, even on a daily basis, whereas tobacco could be harvested only once a year.

²⁷⁴ Many other studies also emphasize the large amount of employment that the khat industry generates for people in regions where employment is scarce and poverty rampant (see for example Hansen 2010). Indeed, Odenwald, Warfa & Bhui (2010: 537), writing about Somalia, state: 'The economic consequences [of khat] have secured the livelihoods of millions in one of the poorest region[s] in the globe.'

²⁷⁵ This observation is very much in line with what I discuss in the next chapter as almost typical entrepreneurial behaviour for youth and people growing up in marginalized borderlands, always on the lookout for cross-border opportunities to better their lives (see Chapter 7).

market just across the border in the Republic of South Sudan, a region that was slowly beginning to open up to Ugandan traders in general since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005.²⁷⁶ Selling khat in Sudan earned higher profits since the market there was less saturated (in fact, its use was forbidden in south Sudan, later the ROSS, according to my Yumbe interlocutors in 2011–2012, while it fetched at least double the price of khat in Yumbe), and khat traders from Yumbe needed only a few litres of petrol to take their khat just across the border once a week with a motorcycle, making the cross-border trade very lucrative.

Aside from these economic factors (khat becoming a popular cash crop among youths who did not see any success in growing ‘traditional’ cash crops), another factor that facilitated the easy uptake of this particular stimulant in Yumbe is likely related to the district’s religious orientation. The Islamic character of Yumbe District probably played a role in khat’s relatively easy uptake and popularity. The use of alcohol is strongly condemned for Muslims (though it is increasingly popular among upcoming ‘middle class’ Muslims and in local youth discos at night, out of sight of the general community). Khat, however, enjoys a more ambiguous status from an Islamic legal perspective and has long been associated with the Arab Islamic world (Anderson et al. 2007; Carrier 2008; Douglas & Hersi 2010).²⁷⁷ Young men in Yumbe claimed that while using alcohol requires 40 days of ‘cleanliness’ before one can enter the mosque, such prohibitions, according to them, do not exist for khat. Indeed, the only ‘danger’ lies in forgetting about the hours of prayer when ‘eating’ it.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, none of the youths that participated in this research were observed to strongly adhere to these prayer hours, with the exception of Fridays at noon (in particular during Ramadan) when they would go to the mosque, and on religious holidays when they would not miss the morning prayers. During Ramadan, most youths were found to abstain from khat during fasting hours, with some claiming that they would start using it after breaking the fast in the evening at *futuru*²⁷⁹.

Despite ‘exploiting’ khat’s more ambiguous religious status, in reality some youths in Yumbe also used alcohol after chewing khat in order to ‘break off’ the effects of the stimulant, in particular that of sleeplessness. This alcohol (strong liquor sold in small plastic sachets) is predominantly used at night-time, in and around video halls that double as discos, while khat is often used openly in broad daylight in shaded spots next to the main streets.

KHAT AND PEACE

When it comes to what khat-chewing does for them, Musa and Abiriga—now long-time users—presented a strongly positive account of the contribution of khat to their lives. This

²⁷⁶ See Chapter 7.

²⁷⁷ However, Carrier (2008: 811), for example, mentions that ‘strict Muslims’ are often highly critical of khat use, and that in Kenya the debates are sharpening.

²⁷⁸ Some adults and religious leaders, however, said that imams preach repeatedly during Friday prayers against the use of khat and idleness.

²⁷⁹ My interlocutors referred to *futuru* as the meal that the fasting was broken with in the evening.

perception was shared by other users. For example, many young men referred to their troubled past and to being able to forget these problems through khat:

It [khat] makes me forget problems and stay freely with friends, so I cannot think of domestic problems or problems of the past. (Survey, Yassin, 35 years old, butcher)

[I chew khat] because I am not happy about the current situation at home. My father is able to pay me in school, but he does not want to give me the money. So because of that pain I chew to not feel it. (Survey, Majid, 18 years old, Senior 3 drop-out, operates the audiovisual installation at a video hall)

[...] after eating [khat], if you have been thinking about some difficult things, problems of the past, it makes you forget, rub off your mind.²⁸⁰ (Survey, Ghadafi, 24 years old, casual labourer)

According to my interlocutors, khat was often used to prevent thinking about difficult things, to prevent thinking too much,²⁸¹ or to forget pain (referring to painful thoughts). This need came about as a result of living in poverty, of not being supported (with schooling), and of dealing with negative memories such as having lost a parent during war. In such recurrent statements, khat serves as a means to achieve peace of mind for the individual. It takes away negative thoughts (helps one to forget) and enables them, in their words, to *stay peaceful* in a group, without *being disturbed* by their problems. Interestingly, while khat use has, in other literature, been associated with the future orientations of young men (trying through khat use to address bleak prospects by stimulating new imaginations for the future),²⁸² in Yumbe khat is mostly appreciated for its ability to address (or rather temporarily suppress) problems associated with the past and their impact on the present. The latter point was also found in research on khat use in Somalia, where people were also found to chew khat to forget traumatic war experiences (Odenwald et al. 2007, 2010; Hansen 2009, 2010).

Mansur took the notion of khat contributing to what we can label 'peace of mind' further when he stated, referring among others to his brother Swali (same father, different mother), who was one of the young men disgruntled about the outcomes of the peace agreement for former child soldiers:

[...] *mairungi*, truly I believe that it [...] it silences, it keeps down people. In such a way that [...] Since the time of [the] UNRF II peace agreement, most of those people have come out [of the

²⁸⁰ See reference to this notion in Chapter 3.

²⁸¹ Mains explains: 'In studies from elsewhere in Africa, "thinking too much" or "too many thoughts", as idioms for mental distress, have been associated with poor mental health' (2013: 113).

²⁸² This future orientation, which plays a central role in the analysis of khat use in Jimma, Ethiopia, by Mains (2012), becomes clear in the following: 'It was not simply thinking that young men sought to avoid, but specifically introspective thought in which one contemplates the bleak future that he faced. Young men consumed khat and international films partially to facilitate the generation of imaginative possibilities for the future' (ibid. 47). While some references by interlocutors in Yumbe were made to the fact that the use of khat stimulates good ideas about how to become rich, more predominant were reflections on what khat enabled with regard to the past (forgetting) and the present (social relations in particular).

bush] and have benefitted much!²⁸³ [...] [But] there are [also] very many who failed to get the benefits. So if [...] if they start thinking about that thing [...] actually most of these youths would have gone back to the bush [joined the rebellion, JB]. But [...] I have realized the advantage of *mairungi* in such a way that [...] once these youth eat the *mairungi*, they don't really think much about those things. That is why you find most of them are still around. Otherwise things would have been worse [...] minus *mairungi* [if *mairungi* were not there]. (FGD, 12 July 2012)

Mansur was a very keen observer of his community,²⁸⁴ someone who had lived closely with some of his brothers who were once part of the UNRF II and were dissatisfied with the aftermath of the peace agreement. He had observed their political and livelihood frustrations from close up, and here he suggests that the khat use by his brother, a former child soldier, and many other youths in Yumbe is actually favourable for society. He suggests that khat silences these youths' post-conflict grievances and keeps them from seeking (possibly violent) confrontation with their former rebel commanders or other parties whom they hold responsible for 'their neglect' (see Both & Reis 2014; and Chapter 4, this dissertation)

In other words, the use of khat was perceived by Mansur as contributing to the maintenance of peace in Yumbe District with regard to a large population of disaffected youths. Beyond individual 'peace of mind', in his explanation *mairungi* helps this generation to forget ('once these youth chew *mairungi*, they don't really think much about those things'), while thinking about grievances was explained as dangerous. He referred to khat as helping to suppress grievances that could lead to social disruption ('otherwise things would have been worse') and potentially even to new rebel groupings ('most of these youths would have gone back to the bush'). Mansur portrays khat as even *silencing* and *keeping people down*, people who might otherwise join rebel groups and cause new problems in Yumbe District. Peace with the past is thus, in this explanation, obtained by silencing an aggrieved group's negative emotions, and this is thereby directly connected to maintaining peace in the present. The silencing of grievances and avoiding of confrontation with matters of the past is, in many ways, the predominant way of dealing with post-conflict grievances in Yumbe, as well as other matters of potential conflict, as has been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.²⁸⁵

From Mansur's reflections, we thus see that a relatively innocent 'self-drugging' through khat by the former UNRF II (child) soldiers silences their grievances and contributes to inner and therefore societal peace and forgetting. In reality, not all former child soldiers use *mairungi*, but a large portion of the disaffected young men in Yumbe do. Other former child soldiers used other means of 'silencing' and avoiding confrontation with their pain, such as moving away from Yumbe—as described in Chapter 4 in the case of Aluma (see also Both & Reis 2014). Khat, therefore, is one of the methods of avoidance that recur in order to deal with post-conflict grievances and social conflict in general in

²⁸³ Mansur is here referring to the compensation money negotiated with the government of Uganda and given to former combatants for denouncing rebellion.

²⁸⁴ This came out in his reflexive remarks during the FGD and in informal contact.

²⁸⁵ See references to practices of avoidance (by running away) in Chapter 7.

Yumbe (see also Chapter 7). It is a method which contributes to peace by at least temporarily suspending confrontative and violent emotions and actions.

Social peace

The concern with peace is thus an important reference for khat users. While the above example is very specific and speaks of khat as a means of preventing new rebellions—referring to peace at the level of the larger community—on a more daily basis, khat is talked of in terms of ‘forgetting pain’ and of ‘not thinking too much’, of allowing for peace of mind for the individual. Between this individual and social-political peace referred to by khat users, we can, however, identify another important level of concern for young men that they also referred to in terms of peace—that is, peace between family members, neighbours, and friends. Achieving and maintaining good relations on this level is associated predominantly with the prevention of *envy*. Envy was a recurrent theme that emerged throughout the research, as will be seen below, and was portrayed as particularly dangerous for social relations.

A: During the past [...] there were very few people [in Yumbe]. There were very few people, but eeh, a lot of work to do.

JB: Uh-huh.

A: But in this region of ours [today], there are very many people, but there is no work. There are very few jobs, few things to do. So, for that matter, somebody can go to the university and come back with a diploma, but due to a scarcity of jobs [...] you cannot start maybe [...] like burning charcoal, because that is not your standard, and you also start thinking about the school fees you spent right from primary school up to university. It is a lot of money. So if you start thinking about those problems, it can create a heart attack. So, for that matter, once you start eating this *mairungi*, you forget about everything [...].

And in an office [...] there is only one person doing the work, but there are very many persons who could do the same work in that office. But for that person to leave the job, it is very hard [...]. Up to retirement age, it takes [a] long time. It is very, very, very hard. Now in most cases, such kinds of people are [your] relatives. So you cannot envy or create grudges with your relatives just because of the position he is holding. Now if you do this thing [chew *mairungi*] [...] everything looks simple. It is peace-creating.

JB: Peace-creating?

A: Yah. You don't really envy someone with his property [...] her property [...] whatever he has got, due to the position he is holding. Otherwise that thing [that work], you would have done it yourself. Now, if you eat this, [you] don't mind, because you don't want to have problems with your relatives. You just want to be peaceful with people around with whom you are staying. (FDG, 12 July 2012)

In the FGD fragment above, Adinan shows how being unemployed, after having invested in education, can make one feel envious of those people who do hold one of the few paid positions in the district (for example, in government offices), and he discusses the problem of how they hold on to these positions up to retirement, not allowing for young people to obtain salaried civil servant jobs. These well-known employment problems in

Uganda, combined with the rapid population growth in Yumbe, generate stiff competition over jobs, even among the relatively few university graduates.

The focus on envy in relation to khat use is new, and I was unable to find such an association in the literature on khat. What appears prominently in this account is that feeling envious of kin should be avoided at all costs in order to preserve peace; this includes envying someone for his or her job, as well as for the related material wealth he/she has been able to acquire through the job. A linkage is made between envy and khat, the latter creating peace among kinship ties. Similar claims were made about relationships among neighbours and friends:

After doing the last survey on khat in Yumbe Town Council, today I probe the last person about my observations: 'Some people say *mairungi* prevents them from stealing: how does that work?' He answers: 'When a friend is selling very many things, when he is successful next to you while you have nothing, stealing could be the last option. But *mairungi* makes you *forget* all those problems. You cannot go and steal; you are in one place and cannot interact with people who might want to involve you in theft.' (informal conversation after survey with Tibo, male, 35 years old, 18 July 2012)

In this account, envy (related to economic disparity among friends/neighbours) is linked to theft. By chewing khat, consumers claim they are prevented from stealing. The latter is achieved because khat allows one to forget one's problems, both financial as well as (and linked to) domestic problems (which we shall see later). Secondly, this effect was often attributed not only to khat itself and the 'forgetting of envy' that it facilitated, but also to the fact that in chewing khat, one 'stays in one place'. The claim of immobility was often made by khat chewers to reject the accusation that they were thieves. *Staying in one place* together with other consumers allowed them to ward off accusations of having been seen roaming around somewhere stealing or engaging in other forms of social disorder (such as rape). Chewing was often conducted in a group, and usually this group stayed together; therefore, if one was accused of something, fellow-chewers could provide an alibi.

The reference to theft will be discussed further below. Here, I want to focus on the meaning of young men referring to or claiming morally correct behaviour (not envying, not stealing, not roaming around), and to how their khat use facilitated this. What are they expressing here? First of all, indirectly there is the preoccupation with social inequality, as observed by young men: those who are (often only slightly) better-off are often people one knows: relatives, neighbours, and friends. One sees and is confronted with their better-off position in everyday encounters. Secondly, the khat users associate immobility with the ability to claim moral behaviour. Being seen, having friends to testify that you were with them, helps to avert accusations of immoral behaviour (in particular, theft) and means that one has not been roaming around suspiciously.

These young men's reference to not stealing and their embrace of the virtue of immobility cannot be understood without connecting these statements to the turmoil of the recent past. Claiming immobility as youths also means opposing the implicit association of youth with socially transgressive behaviour, an issue that was especially at

stake during the times when rebels were active in Yumbe.²⁸⁶ During the periods of insecurity in Yumbe District, looting and theft were common strategies used by the rebels to sustain themselves in the bush. Multiple interviewees testified to the rampant looting and disorder that took place during the periods of rebellion. At the same time, loose criminal groups also used the opportunity that the local turmoil created to loot and steal.²⁸⁷

The following account of Patrick, for example, demonstrates this well. During an informal conversation, I asked him—a teacher in his forties—whether he would be willing to share his experiences of the rebel group UNRF II. The question came about when I realized that he had been living in Yumbe town during the rebellion, a place that was apparently relatively well protected from the rebels during the war because there was an army unit based there. Thus, I became curious to know if the period had passed him by without any personal rebel confrontations. Patrick then started telling me how he himself had been threatened at gunpoint during the UNRF II period. He spoke about the culprits as being boys who were at school during the daytime (even in his class) and with the rebels at night. ‘But we teachers, we always treated them with a lot of respect and pretended we did not know.’ Patrick here refers to fear among the teachers of addressing the boys, and he went further to explain that it happened one night when his eldest son had just been born and was only three days old that students/rebels came asking for money at his home. ‘They looted many things, like our radio, money, and held me at gunpoint. They asked me if I had recognized their voices. I said no, though I recognized them. If I had said yes, they must have killed me.’ I asked Patrick if he thought the boys were really part of the rebels, or if he thought they had used the cover of the rebellion to carry out their own criminal activities. He said that the latter could be true: ‘You know, as youths, you have so many needs, like soap, Colgate, clothes [...]’ Asked whether he still encountered the boys who stole from him in town, he said: ‘Yes, we know each other. [...] Others went to Sudan.’²⁸⁸

Many people’s properties were lost during the war, and those with slightly more wealth than others, such as businesspeople, teachers with a salary, local councillors, and women with small restaurants, according to a large variety of interviews conducted were often explicit targets. It was also often mentioned that these rebels or thieves knew exactly when teachers or other civil servants were paid their salaries and came shortly thereafter to their homes. One way of interpreting the remarks of young men today who refer to the fact that they do not think about the properties of other people or about stealing, but attach value to being immobile, is thus that these young men are trying to distance themselves from the factors that caused insecurity and havoc in the past and are

²⁸⁶ The rebels were often not only youths, but they were, as in other situations, generally classified as such (see also Vigh 2006: ch. 9).

²⁸⁷ See also Uvin (2007: 43), who states about people’s perceptions of war and peace in Burundi: ‘Many people have suffered more over the years from criminality than from direct politically motivated warfare. [...] In other words, the prime face war takes for many ordinary people is criminality and banditry [...]’

²⁸⁸ By mentioning that some of these youths went to Sudan, Patrick emphasizes the predominant avoidance strategies referred to earlier, which will also be addressed Chapter 7.

making a claim to moral behaviour.²⁸⁹ Looting and theft could occur among people who knew each other and who were envious of the others' better economic position. Peace was locally associated, among other things, with an absence of envy, as we see returning in the comments of 31-year-old Hamid:

JB: What does peace mean to you personally? I mean, you have known this period of conflict [...]. Now we have peace in Yumbe [...] what does it mean to you?

Hamid: Peace to me?

JB: Yeah, personally.

H: Personally, peace to me is actually a situation where people stay in harmony without any riot and without seeing anyone with jealousy. (Interview, Yumbe Town Council, 2 August 2010)

When Hamid was still very young, his family homestead was looted after the rebels discovered that they could not find any youths at home who could join the rebellion.²⁹⁰ His experience was similar to that of other interlocutors who witnessed harassment by rebels at their home—for example, the harassment of a mother and of having their food looted—but who were not personally taken by the rebel groups as they were considered too small.

The strong concern of young people with claiming moral behaviour may be indicative of implicit efforts of post-conflict social reconstruction, because behind these claims there lies a whole body of unspoken knowledge about the dangers of envy, the immorality of stealing from people who are close to one, and the social disorder and havoc this creates. Similar observations have been made in other post-conflict regions where envy informed violent acts during war-time, looting was rampant (Dickson-Gómez 2002; Jones 2005), and where people were particularly concerned with social order (Mergelsberg 2010). These authors refer to the importance of envy informing attacks between neighbours under the cover of conflict (Dickson-Gómez 2002), people's preoccupation with controlling the social order in the context of protracted displacement (Mergelsberg 2012), and the concern with restoring morality in the aftermath of conflict (Jones 2009).

Contested claims?

Above, I have shown that a claim to moral behaviour was apparently important for young men in Yumbe. Recurrent reference to the fact that khat helps them not to feel envy and thus not to steal reveals something of the world they live in, which they feel they have to relate to and try to (re-)position themselves in. I have argued that we cannot disentangle their claims from earlier collective experiences of the upheaval caused by rebels/thieves and hence their need to position themselves in the post-conflict social fabric. However,

²⁸⁹ Whereas, in general, 'mobility' is associated with peace time. People in Yumbe said that since there was peace they were 'at least free to move' (see also Uvin 2007).

²⁹⁰ Hamid claimed that the rebels were looking for strong young men, not for children. His father was not at home at the time the rebels came; thus, he suggested that his father could have been a target for abduction.

despite these claims to moral behaviour—and since khat is something taken only for a few hours a day—young men may be involved in a more complicated reality than the one they claim to ‘control’ when using khat.

AMBIGUITY AND KHAT CONSUMPTION

On a Saturday afternoon, I walked a great distance with my elderly interlocutor to visit a sick friend on the outskirts of Yumbe Town Council. It was around three, the sun was burning hot, and women, walking in the opposite direction, were still only arriving in town from the outskirts of the district. According to Faridah, they came from very far and had been walking a long distance to reach the Saturday market, while they would return home the same day. Then a lone elderly woman passed us on the other side of the road, lamenting—talking out loud, almost crying—that her only cow had been stolen the previous night. She was walking in the direction of the police station. Later in the evening, another elderly interlocutor asserted to me that the ‘boy’ who stole the cow had been caught, and that it was a mairungi chewer. I questioned this conclusion that it was a mairungi chewer and that mairungi use could explain it all. But I was not surprised; I knew my interlocutor was not in favour of mairungi and [...] there was a chance he was right. (Based on field notes, 5 October 2013)

Despite the contention of young men that their khat use contributes to peace of mind for the individual, to peaceful social relations and even political calm, some ambiguities arise when these notions are confronted with daily life. These ambiguities can be explained by an understanding of drug use and its social implications in general. One can imagine that peacefulness is achieved through chewing khat, by, for example, enhancing social relations (chewing together at length and chatting while not roaming around), because the leaves are known to stimulate positive thoughts (and thus distract from negative emotions like envy and grievances). But what happens in situations in which the money to buy khat is not easily available and the leaves cannot be chewed? Most likely, there will be a contradiction between the person’s state of being while using khat and while being unable to use it. In the case of youths in Yumbe, this meant that interlocutors, who generally claimed that khat kept them from stealing, nevertheless often also acknowledged that a person might resort to theft if he was, for example, *too addicted*: ‘Eating it daily can also make you become a thief [...] when you don’t get the money.’²⁹¹

Here it becomes clear how young men make a distinction between those who chew khat relatively wisely (‘according to their budget’), chew it together in a group (‘not roaming around’), or have quite easy and cheap access to khat because a brother is growing it, and those who have become *too addicted* and need khat—and all that is needed to consume it with—on a daily basis.²⁹² There is also an important distinction to

²⁹¹ Informal conversation after survey with Tibo, male, 35 years old, 18 July 2012.

²⁹² In Yumbe, khat is always chewed with chewing gum (Big G) and ideally also with soda, juice, or milk. Quite often, khat consumers also smoke cigarettes when they chew. While the amount of khat chewed generally costs

be made between how one feels when chewing khat—at ease and not worried, unconcerned with income inequalities—and how one feels when the chewing is over and daily needs and related worries re-emerge onto the scene. While my interlocutors often earned small amounts of money on a daily basis, this was at least half-consumed by khat use. This fact led to resource scarcity at home. In a small survey (n=50) among khat consumers (average age 27 years), 70% of interlocutors were already married and had on average three children. Scarcity was often expressed as a lack of salt, sugar, and soap at home:

One young man in the group gives an important piece of additional information. He tells us about the relationship that they (*mairungi* users) have with their wives. That they tell their wives in the morning that they will go out to look for money (by finding petty work) and that this is the truth. But every evening they come home, and their children run to them enthusiastically saying: ‘Papa, Papa, welcome!’ but they have nothing to give them. In other words, they fail to return home in the evening with something small [like food/sugar] for the family. Or, in my assistant’s words (who took over here to explain this dynamic further to me): ‘Jonna, you know very well that when a man comes home with a black *cavera* [thin plastic bag used at the market], he will be received warmly. Your wife will always be happy if you come home with something. But when you come home empty-handed, there is suddenly no warm welcome anymore. And if you ask if there is any food in the house, she will just say: “Check the kitchen yourself”.’ (Field notes, 20 July 2012)

According to some interlocutors, it is here, with regard to the family, that theft arises:

When you are too addicted, it can force you to steal a cock or hen to sell for you to show your manhood, as a provider, a father, to steal a goat and sell [it], because you spend all your time eating [meaning you have not earned money the whole day]. (Informal conversation after survey with Tibo, male, 35 years old, 18 July 2012)

Thus, while a direct relationship between khat and theft is not obvious (they do not need to steal in order to have money to buy khat, since they often have a little income, or on other occasions can get khat for free from brothers, or khat and chewing gum are shared by group members who do earn some money), when it comes to family demands, theft is sometimes explained as a last resort. Khat consumption uses up the young men’s meagre resources required to support their families and live up to the masculine ideal of the husband as the main provider. Therefore, after all, and despite their temporary immobility and claims of not feeling envious while chewing khat, some did dare to admit that the daily realities of having to maintain their position as a man, husband, and father in the family might lead some men to steal.

In general, khat chewers tried to distinguish themselves from those who steal. They tended to argue: ‘It is not *mairungi* that makes one a thief’, but rather that ‘to be a thief’ is either in one’s character or it is not. But the youths who claimed this and said they

between UGX 1,000 and 2,000, in a day the total costs of chewing khat can easily amount to UGX 3,000–5,000; often this is a large part of what young men can earn, if they are lucky, in a day as unskilled day labourers.

were unlikely to steal still admitted that other monetary problems they faced could easily lead them to deceive others:

[...] if somebody comes to ask you for money, for some assistance, you say: 'There is no money.' There is no money; and yet you kept some little money and you don't want to give that money for that urgency. You have already kept it aside for what? *Formairungi*. So *mairungi* is number one on the priority list that is the disadvantage. (FGD, 26 May 2011)

Thus, khat chewing contributes perhaps only temporarily—and above all in the minds of its consumers—to social peace, while in reality there is much ambiguity about its use, especially in poor families. In particular, khat use creates insecurity and tensions within the close relationships of users with young spouses and children, for khat often consumes the little resources available. The following section therefore reflects further on the impact of khat on this other domain of social peace, namely, *domestic peace*.

DOMESTIC PEACE?

In this section, I take a closer look at the gendered views on the stimulant. Women in Yumbe are not supposed to chew khat. In a small survey held among male users, their opinions regarding the possibility of their own wives using khat were sought. Practically no one thought that the leaves could be consumed by women; and though the reasons given varied, all related to women's position in Yumbe's clan-based and predominantly Muslim households.

Men claimed, for example, that they used khat in town in order to make the long wait for scarce work more bearable. They therefore argued that there was no need for women to engage in chewing it, as it was their task as men to go out and look for money and bring it home, while women were charged only with domestic responsibilities. Therefore, according to the men, women did not have to bear the brunt of worrying about being able to achieve the difficult breadwinning task. Others expressed the fear that women would become more vocal after using khat²⁹³ and that this would undermine men's authority. Others suggested it would reflect very badly on them as husbands if the clan took note of the fact that they allowed their women to consume *mairungi*. Some feared they would have to provide more money (which was already a struggle) to address women's need for *mairungi*; and yet others felt that women would become sexually aroused and would start roaming around looking for men and neglecting the housework and childcare they were supposed to do. It is striking that while young men associated their own use of khat with the maintenance of social order, women's khat use was always associated with disorder in the family.

Only a few women in Yumbe chewed *mairungi*. These were mainly the women who sold it at Yumbe market on behalf of their husbands, and their own chewing of the

²⁹³ These interlocutors refer to what is known as *handas* or the 'khat high', achieved after 1 to 2 hours of chewing, that makes people either more talkative or silent and contemplative, depending on their mood and character.

leaves was meant to show that the *mairungi* they sold was of good quality and did not contain chemicals.²⁹⁴ Others referred to the fact that there was a small group of girls in discos who chewed *mairungi*, but they were no longer considered marriageable and rather seen as 'girls from the street'. While women in Yumbe were not supposed to chew khat and often did not show any interest in it, they did experience that living with a *mairungi*-using husband brought considerable insecurity to the home:

On a weekday in May 2011, a woman was strolling in the market in Yumbe town with three chickens tied and held upside down in each hand, and on her back was a little baby. She looked unhappy. She explained to Helen, my inquiring friend who knew her, that she had had a quarrel with her husband. He had asked her to sell off all the livestock they had as he needed the money to buy *mairungi*. When she told him she did not agree and said that they needed to keep the chickens for future financial security, he had told her: 'If you don't sell the chickens, you don't have to return to this house.' The woman said that she felt defeated by her husband's short-sightedness, while they had three children at home to look after. (Field notes, May 2011)

While the reflections of young men that khat facilitates peaceful social relations should not be fully dismissed, at the level of nuclear families these claims often did not stand up to scrutiny. In the homes of these young men, the consumption of khat—especially the money it consumed—led to domestic tensions. Women explained that their husband, for example, would come home very late, starving for food and expecting them to wake up and start preparing a meal for them. Women married to husbands who used *mairungi* claimed that the largest problem they faced at home was related to not being able to access medical care or being able to save for unexpected needs. They explained that their husbands (often working as brokers, bakers, *boda-bodas*, or loaders) brought home money to the amount of between UGX 3,000 and 5,000 (the equivalent of EUR 1.00–1.50) daily. This money sufficed to buy food for them and their small children, but quite often references were made to the recurrent lack of salt, sugar, and soap—basic essentials in every household. Women often ran into problems when they or their babies fell ill, and they complained about the problems they faced when receiving visitors at home: the small budgets provided by their husbands did not allow them to cook additional food for guests. Having a *mairungi*-chewing husband also made it extremely difficult to save something—for example, in the form of livestock, so poignantly displayed in the case of the woman we met at the market, as related above—which could be sold off in times of financial hardship. In the honest words of one *mairungi* user: 'If you take *mairungi* with no reason, at times you will be a thief [...] it leads to food shortage at your home, at times it leads to violence [...] on the side of having no salt at home.'²⁹⁵

Mairungi chewers often claimed they budgeted wisely for their khat consumption in order to make sure they were able to bring money home at the end of the

²⁹⁴ *Mairungi* has to be sprayed once a month to avoid pests. According to interlocutors, after such a spraying, the *mairungi* cannot be chewed for a few days until it has rained.

²⁹⁵ While reference to domestic violence was frequent in Yumbe, the link between khat use and domestic violence was beyond the scope of this study.

day. However, a few ex-consumers of khat commented on this. For example, Michael (a secondary school student) stated in the survey: 'Before my father started using *mairungi*, he used to come home every evening with 5,000 Ugandan Shillings. But now he brings home 2,000 Ugandan Shillings.'²⁹⁶ Ali, furthermore, reported that during the time when he still used to chew *mairungi* and his cigarettes were finished at night, he would sometimes use up the fuel in his motorcycle to drive all the way to a place where he could still buy cigarettes, and in the end came home to find that there was no salt for the family.

Despite all these hardships, women married to khat users nevertheless tended to explain that they wanted to stay with their husbands, often expressing the fact that they still loved them. Furthermore, getting divorced could, in their eyes, mean they could end up in a relationship with someone who is 'even worse'. Yet, on the side of reproductive health and support, women definitely pulled the short straw. While almost all young men and women in this research claimed that they wished to have many children, their (unborn) children could be at risk, as became clear in an FGD with the young spouses of *mairungi* users in Yumbe town.

With a lot of laughter, the young women (three of them married with children, one divorced without children) suddenly shared the fact that pregnant women used to tell the health workers at the health centre, where they would go for antenatal care and the related obligatory HIV testing, that 'my husband is in Juba', to explain the fact that they had come alone. At these appointments at the health centre, women were supposed to go with their husbands to be tested and counselled on HIV and to be checked and informed concerning the upcoming delivery. 'My husband is in Juba' was repeated over and over again in the clinics, according to the women, until health workers found out that contrary to these young women's claims, many of these men were simply in Yumbe, but 'behaving irresponsibly': chewing *mairungi*, not looking after their wives, and refusing to have their HIV status checked. The health workers then obliged the women to come with their husbands, or else they would need to come with proof that their husband really was in Juba, through a signed letter from the LC1²⁹⁷ of their neighbourhood. (FGD, Yumbe town, 20 August 2012)

The young women had started to use this excuse because they felt ashamed that their husbands refused to go with them to the health centre. Furthermore, these husbands proved unable to provide for the birth kit they were supposed to buy. Not having a maternity dress or the money for gloves required for childbirth, as demanded by the health centre, was the reason why women started to use this lie. 'Juba' figured as a metaphor for the absence of men in women's task of reproduction.²⁹⁸

Many *mairungi* chewers claimed they wanted to stop using khat once their children became older. They did not want their children to follow their example and feared that their use of money for khat would prevent their children from going to school. It is likely, however, that if the fathers fail to live up to this future ideal, they will reproduce the pattern of 'post-conflict' poverty and lack of support between sons and

²⁹⁶ This amount is slightly more than 50 euro cents.

²⁹⁷ LC1 refers to the chairman of the local council at level 1, the lowest level of elected government staff, at village or neighbourhood level.

²⁹⁸ See also Chapter 7.

fathers that they themselves often claimed had caused them to drop out of school and consequently take up *mairungi*.

By no means, then, is the understanding of drug use in a community straightforward (see also Gezon 2012). I have shown that much complexity surrounds the use of *mairungi* in Yumbe. What this drug does for someone and what one appreciates about the drug, when it is working, may contradict its influence once the chewing (and the money) is over. What I have tried to focus on in this chapter is the fact that the way in which young men speak about khat use is quite enlightening in terms of showing us how they see the post-conflict social fabric in Yumbe and their position therein. While it is evident that their perspectives differ from those of their young wives—as the latter do not use the drug and are not involved in the struggle to uphold a sense of masculinity and a status as a provider in a rather traditional society—young men were at the same time ignorant about the real effects of their use of khat in the domestic sphere. Perhaps because they tended to spend so much time away from home—when they stayed in town all day, chewing khat and sometimes attending night discos—they have lost touch with the daily hardships faced there. The fragment below is illustrative of the difference in interpretation of events by young men and women:

[...] if, for instance, your wife gets you [the husband] at the trading centre eating *mairungi*, and yet she had [already] planned to leave your home [...] she can channel that issue through your failure, through your fault [to provide] for things she desires from home. For instance, if she comes to ask maybe some money to buy salt, to buy soap [...] instead you say there is no money today, you don't have money [...], she will now say: 'For you, you always spend money on what? *Mairungi*. You don't want to look after me. I don't want to live with you here, I am leaving.' So, she can decide to divorce! Because of that simple issue. While in fact she may be having *other* reasons to leave other than *mairungi*, but [she] now channels that through *mairungi*. (FGD, 12 July 2012)

The above FGD fragment, coming from a young man whose young family and whose khat use I had come to know very well, shows that there is a tendency among young men to deny the fact that *mairungi* may be at the root of young couples' break-ups. Calling it a 'simple' issue sounds apologetic, because the absence of soap and salt in a rural home is a core sign of extreme poverty.

Other young men in rural settings did acknowledge that chewing khat creates inequalities within the family and thus does not necessarily contribute to harmony and peaceful relations on all fronts:

It can lead to breakage of families—in a way that if there are those in the family who don't eat [*mairungi*] and there are those who eat, if they look at what they use to eat *mairungi* [...] the sodas, the Big Gs [chewing gum]: that is money. So they would also at the same time feel like maybe [...] not [to take] the *mairungi*, but take the soda. Now if you don't provide for all, then that is another problem at home. [...] That is the negative perception by those who don't eat on those who eat. (FGD, 26 May 2011)

Few men, however, applied such reflexivity in terms of the effect of khat on their nuclear families. Personally, for example, I was quite stunned when I met one of my main

interlocutors on the day before Ramadan was due to begin in 2012. I had arrived late at the trading centre where he was waiting for me, and with upcoming rains we decided not to walk the one hour to the family home but rather to spend the afternoon at the trading centre. I bought him and his brothers a soda and we were chatting. A football match was about to start and I joined my interlocutor at the small local video hall where, to my surprise, he bought not just khat and chewing gum but also another soda for himself and his good friend. He asked me if I wanted something, but I replied that I was fine. Later, he went again for water (it was rather hot inside), cigarettes, and chewing gum. Apparently, he felt that during this last day before Ramadan, khat had to be enjoyed. When I was about to leave and had finally found a taxi that I could squeeze into before it got really dark, in front of his young wife—a mother of four, who had also come to the trading centre and had observed his spending—my interlocutor then asked me what my contribution would be to their first day of Ramadan, suggesting that he did not have enough money to buy rice and sugar (breaking the fast was ideally done with rice, milk, and sugar, which were, however, luxury goods). I was absolutely stunned by his previous spending behaviour and his lack of thought about saving some money to buy food for home.

Overall, the young men and their wives who grew and sold *mairungi* in Yumbe were the ones who were significantly better-off. They were able to send their children to school and be ‘development minded’ (planning ahead), unlike their own fathers, especially when the father himself had stopped chewing, like Ali, but continued to grow it. Almost on a daily basis, sales can be made from their compound; the young wives pick the *mairungi* in turns and get their own share when they sell it. By contrast, for the men who buy it in town, who live in town and do not have access to land to cultivate, their young wives and children born and unborn, draw the shortest straw.

DISCUSSION

Every substance that affects the central nervous system to influence perceptions, emotions, and behaviours is likely to have both costs and benefits. It is the task of concerned citizens, health specialists, and scholars to tease these out in a nonmoralistic, nonjudgmental way to best address problems while acknowledging advantages. (Gezon 2012: 206)

What seemed to be an aggressive marketing strategy of introducing khat to Yumbe by the southern growers of the leaf in West Nile does not solely explain its rapid uptake and appropriation by young men, as I have argued in this chapter.²⁹⁹ I presented khat’s uptake primarily with regard to local and historical dynamics, producing a picture that differs slightly from other regional accounts. For example, while Beckerleg (2010b), in her work on khat in Uganda, twice refers to a khat user speaking about it as a means of forgetting traumatic experiences, this argument is not further investigated. Rather, the focus on an

²⁹⁹ More research is required to understand whether conditions similar to those described in this chapter led to an uptake of khat in the southern part of West Nile before khat reached Yumbe. These regions also have a history of conflict and displacement, but so far this remains unstudied.

increasing *leisure and hedonism* tendency in Uganda as the explanation for increasing khat use is central in her work. The link between conflict experiences and khat use is better explored in the case of people in Somalia, for whom the use of khat is partly (next to more 'traditional' religious and social use) understood as enabling people to address difficult memories and experiences related to the civil war (Odenwald et al. 2007: 1960; Hansen 2009: 15; Hansen 2010: 595).

In this chapter, it has become clear how the uptake of khat in Yumbe District can be understood as being embedded in the historical life trajectories of some local young men. Most interlocutors emphasized a 'functional' use of khat and referred less to a leisure-related discourse, though these two forms of khat use should not be seen as mutually exclusive. One can, for example, be attracted to khat because one wants to forget one's problems, but then be equally drawn into patterns of use that include chewing it in small groups and often attending video halls in the evenings and enjoying this. It nevertheless stands out in the narratives of these interlocutors how much khat use is related to ideas of achieving peacefulness at various levels. For example, khat offers viable ways of dealing with negative emotions, emotions that might otherwise lead to harmful social interactions such as acting out of envy or upon one's post-conflict grievances. It is interesting to observe how the use of khat is associated by young men with the maintenance of social peace in a region where many post-conflict tensions have not been completely resolved.³⁰⁰ Reading the society through young men's expressions about their khat use provides us with a deeper insight into the post-conflict social fabric in Yumbe and the way in which young men attempt (though do not necessarily succeed) to position themselves therein as responsible actors. One could go so far as to state that they ideally seek to avoid problems and confrontations with memories, and thereby to avoid engaging in behaviour, caused by their negative emotions, that could cause societal disorder.

CONCLUSION

It goes much too far to claim that Yumbe District remains peaceful because most of its disaffected, poorly educated, and unemployed youths use khat. But, to a certain extent, we cannot avoid the suggestion that, being so occupied with khat, young men are less inclined to get angry about and address the larger structures and inequalities³⁰¹ that help push their lives into the direction of needing a daily stimulant. Nor does khat use allow them to reflect critically on their own possible role in reproducing certain structures that they themselves complain about in their own pasts, such as becoming the type of father that is unable to send his own children to school. Furthermore, while khat is likely to serve a group of male youths in Yumbe in several ways, it may perform a serious disservice to

³⁰⁰ See Uvin's (2007) analysis on social peace as crucial to 'positive peace' and human security.

³⁰¹ See also Mains (2012: 58): '[...] some of the technical school students argued that this is why the Ethiopian government does not ban khat. It prevents people from thinking too much about the problems in life, and as long as they obtain their daily khat, they are unlikely to disturb the government.'

the young women and children who live in poor urban households with khat-using husbands and experience extensive livelihood insecurity and significant domestic tensions.

In contrast to those youths who claim to be 'immobile' while using khat and therefore supposedly do not contribute to disorder in Yumbe, in the following chapter we follow those who are very mobile and who move away from Yumbe—out of their desire to pursue opportunities, to actively improve their lives, because of problems in their young marriages, or because they transgress local moral codes and need to escape the social fabric in Yumbe (at least for a while).