Aspirations and sex: Coming of age in western Kenya in a context of HIV
Blommaert, E.

Citation for published version (APA):
Aspirations and Sex:
Coming of age in western Kenya in a context of HIV

Ellen Blommaert
ASPIRATIONS AND SEX:

COMING OF AGE IN WESTERN KENYA IN A CONTEXT OF HIV

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op woensdag 2 juli 2014, te 10:00 uur

door

Ellen Blommaert

geboren te Oudenaarde, België
Promotiecommissie

Promotoren: Prof. dr. A.P. Hardon
Prof. dr. M.E. de Bruijn

Co-promotor: Prof. dr. A. Buvé

Overige Leden: Prof. dr. A. Desclaux
Prof. dr. R. Reis
Prof. dr. J.D.M. van der Geest
Prof. dr. R. van Dijk
Dr. E.M. Moyer

Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragswetenschappen

The title of this dissertation is inspired by Margaret Mead’s (1928) early anthropological work: *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation.*
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ i  
Prologue ......................................................................................................................... 1

## Part I  Contexts ............................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 1  Introduction Tactical agency—Living a good life today? ................................. 8
1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 8  
1.1. Livelihoods, opportunities, networks .................................................................... 10  
1.2. Gender inequality, sexual relations, and the quest for security ............................ 13  
1.3. HIV-prevention projects and ‘interdisciplinary’ research ....................................... 14

2. HIV/AIDS in Kenya and Nyanza Province ................................................................ 16

3. AIDS control strategies in Africa and Kenya ............................................................. 19

4. Young people and HIV/AIDS research: A generation ‘in need of change’? .................. 21  
4.1. Historical and social constructions of the concept of ‘youth’: From ‘vandals’ to ‘intergenerational’ change agents ................................................................. 22
4.3. Conceptualizing ‘young people’ and ‘out-of-school-youth’ ...................................... 27
4.4. Young people as ‘tactical agents’ ........................................................................... 28
4.5. The research population ....................................................................................... 31

5. Outline of the chapters ............................................................................................ 34

Chapter 2  Methodological concerns: "What makes a useful contribution to the fight against HIV?" 39
1. Introduction: Arriving .............................................................................................. 39

2. Methodological approach ......................................................................................... 41  
2.1. Distance and independence .................................................................................. 42
2.2. Entering village life ............................................................................................... 43
2.3. Building trust ........................................................................................................ 45
2.4. Dealing with suffering and death .......................................................................... 48

3. Contributing to HIV/AIDS research and interventions ........................................... 50

4. The uneasy marriage between anthropology and epidemiology ............................... 51
4.1. The origins of an integrative anthropological-epidemiological approach ............... 52
4.2. Anthropology and AIDS research ....................................................................... 53

5. The ‘black sheep’: An anthropologist in a medical team ........................................... 56  
5.1. Anthropology: A discipline or a ‘toolbox’? ............................................................. 57
5.2. Ethical regulations on anthropological research .................................................... 58
5.3. Prejudices against and misunderstandings about ‘participant observation’ .......... 61
5.4. Colleagues and subjects ...................................................................................... 63
5.5. Research or intervention? ................................................................................... 64
5.6. Conclusion: An alternative contribution under the hegemony of epidemiology? ....... 67

6. On researching sexual relationships .......................................................................... 67
6.1. Data collection ...................................................................................................... 69
6.2. Data analysis ....................................................................................................... 75

7. Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 76
Chapter 3  Winam: A place of structural violence ............................................................ 80

1. Winam piny maber? (Is Winam a good land?) .......................................................... 80

2. The nobodies: Victims of structural violence in times of enduring uncertainty ......... 82

3. The history of Nyanza Province and Winam ................................................................ 87
   3.1. Nyanza Province and Winam before Uhuru (1900–1963) .................. 88
   3.3. Gender relations in Nyanza Province after Uhuru ................................ 104
   3.4. Dhonam as an important trading centre and port after Uhuru .......... 110

4. Medical research in Winam ....................................................................................... 115
   4.1. The Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) and other medical research projects in Winam ........................................................... 116
   4.2. JoWinam’s perceptions of medical research ............................................. 118

5. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 124

PART II – Young People ................................................................................................. 128

Chapter 4  Wabayo abayo: “Moving around” and young people’s livelihood tactics ......... 129

1. Introduction: Life and livelihood on Dhonam’s shore .............................................. 129

2. Theoretical concepts: ‘Livelihood’ and ‘social capital’ ........................................... 133
   2.1. ‘Livelihood’: Strategies, practices, and tactics ...................................... 133
   2.2. ‘Social capital’: Social and sexual networks ......................................... 135
   2.3. Limitations of the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’ .......... 136

3. Livelihood opportunities for young people in Winam ............................................. 138
   3.1. Young people and the household economy ........................................... 140
   3.2. Gender discrepancy in livelihood options ............................................ 141
   3.3. Livelihood options for young people in an HIV/AIDS-affected area .... 143
   3.4. Conclusion ................................................................................................. 157

4. Young people’s aspirations towards urban mobility ............................................... 157
   4.1. Defining a Luo home (dala) and the importance of chike Luo .......... 158
   4.2. Changes in the ‘shared social support’ system: Splintered social networks 161
   4.3. Akinyi’s story ......................................................................................... 164
   4.4. The world of the “dot.coms” .................................................................. 172
   4.5. Young women and sexual networks ..................................................... 176
   4.6. Pragmatic choices ..................................................................................... 178

5. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 178

Chapter 5  “Playing sex”: Disease and risk .................................................................... 182

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................ 182

2. Sexual socialization before the 1930s–1940s ......................................................... 184

3. Piny okethore (the land is spoiled): Chira and AIDS ........................................... 189

4. “Playing sex” ............................................................................................................ 192
   4.1. The importance of “playing sex” for young men ................................. 193
   4.2. The importance of “playing sex” for young women ............................ 195

5. Young people’s tactics for avoiding the ‘health risks’ caused by sex .................... 198
   5.1. Avoiding premarital pregnancy and its consequences ....................... 199
5.2. Avoiding HIV infection by “doing research” on sexual partners .............................................. 207
6. Living with uncertainty .................................................................................................................. 217
  6.1. “Why should we use condoms and go for VCT?” ................................................................. 217
  6.2. Certainty or uncertainty in regard to AIDS ........................................................................... 221
7. Conclusion: Young people’s pragmatic actions ........................................................................ 223

Chapter 6  Sex, love, and money .................................................................................................. 227
1. Introduction: Okoth and Akinyi ................................................................................................. 227
2. ‘Transactional sex’: A critical analysis of the concept ............................................................. 232
3. Sex, love, and money through an intergenerational lens ......................................................... 236
4. The art of seduction .................................................................................................................... 237
  4.1. The ‘rules’ of the seduction game in Winam ....................................................................... 239
  4.2 “Sweet-talking” ..................................................................................................................... 244
  4.3 Delaying marriage .................................................................................................................. 248
5. The ‘money/gift–sex exchange’ debate ...................................................................................... 251
  5.1. Demonstrating appreciation and respect ............................................................................. 252
  5.2. Negotiating the terms and boundaries of exchange ............................................................ 254
6. ‘What’s ‘love’ got to do with it?’ ................................................................................................ 257
  6.1. Emotional attachment and modernity ................................................................................. 257
  6.2. Ideals of romantic love ......................................................................................................... 259
7. Conclusion: The ambiguity of ‘sex, love and money’ ............................................................... 263

Chapter 7  City life in the village: Youth speak about Yeshica .................................................... 266
1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 266
2. Theoretical framework: The tension between policy and practice ........................................ 269
3. The implementation process of the Youth Intervention Program (YIP) .................................. 272
  3.1. How are young people’s problems and needs identified? .................................................. 273
  3.2. The need for institutional and financial support ................................................................. 274
  3.3. Making it all happen: The structure of the YIP on the ground ......................................... 279
4. Yeshica: A one-stop shopping centre ....................................................................................... 281
  4.1. Jobs, trainings, and loans ..................................................................................................... 282
  4.2. Transportation money as micro-income ............................................................................. 283
  4.3. Other material benefits ........................................................................................................ 284
  4.4. Nonmaterial benefits: A larger social network ................................................................. 285
  4.5. Unintended benefits: Extending the sexual network ......................................................... 285
  4.6. To participate or not to participate: That’s the question! ................................................... 287
5. Ochien’g’s story: The Post-Test Club from an actor-oriented perspective ............................... 288
  5.1. PTC and its members ........................................................................................................... 288
  5.2. Participation: Selective benefits and barriers ..................................................................... 290
  5.3. The downside of participation: Opportunity costs ............................................................. 291
  5.4. Expectations, discontent, and fading away ........................................................................ 293
6. Youth perspectives on Yeshica .................................................................................................. 295
  6.1. Discrepancy between policy and practice ......................................................................... 295
  6.2. High expectations ................................................................................................................ 296
  6.3. A tipping point ..................................................................................................................... 297
List of Figures

Figure 1. Kenya ......................................................................................................................... 11
Figure 2. Nyanza Province and Bondo District ................................................................. 12
Figure 3. The structure of a local sexual network ............................................................. 215
Figure 4. Yeshica field staff ................................................................................................. 280
Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to express my great appreciation to a number of people who have supported me throughout this ‘painful delivery’ of my doctoral dissertation. Without their help, I would not have been able to give birth naturally. I am indebted to them all.

Doctoral students often say, about working on their dissertation, that it is as if they are pregnant and carrying a ‘growing creature’. The same holds for me: It has been as if I could not go anywhere or do anything without having to think about my research and writing. Throughout this time, I was never alone: I always carried that load in my belly. It was a heavy freight, and it was at times very lonely, as I had no immediate colleagues from the field of anthropology with whom I could chat with on a daily basis, to share thoughts and get advice on which road to take next.

My husband, Sven, however, was my daily companion and best friend, and I am deeply grateful for his continuous support and patience. Without his comfort, love, and empathy, I would have given up this PhD long ago! Although as my partner he might have been biased, he always tried to critically reflect upon my work. We shared many fruitful conversations, as he made time to uncover my assumptions and brainstorm with me about my conclusions. He is a political scientist, and his opinions and suggestions always stimulated and clarified my thinking. While I taught him about ethnographic research, he taught me about being diplomatic: I am sure that together we would make a great professional team in the future! I am most grateful to Sven, however, for our daughter Layra, who gives me the joy of living. She was delivered naturally, at home, and the delivery went much more smoothly than the birthing of this dissertation. When Layra was born, I had the privilege of six months’ maternity leave, but, still, the guilt of not working on my research remained in my belly. Being a mother is a tremendous experience, as Layra’s happiness and innocence teaches me what life is really about. When I am feeling insecure, she proudly tells me that I do not have to worry because, according to her, I am writing the best book in the world!

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of the many youngsters of Winam who let me enter into their world. With fondness for my time in Kenya, I am deeply grateful to the numerous youngsters who shared their stories with me. I will forever be thankful to my research assistant, Petronella, and I am sorry she cannot get
the credit she deserves as I have had to assign her a pseudonym to protect the identities of others. She proved a talented and capable assistant and I have missed her company ever since I left Kenya to do the analysis and writing of this dissertation. I enjoyed her honesty, humour, and modesty. Although our fieldwork was very tough, I would love to rewind time and experience it all over again, as we had a lot of fun together! Thank you, Petronella, for being such a wonderful “sister” to me!

My thanks also goes out to the Yeshica team for their friendship, especially Opiyo (an anthropologist who formerly worked with Yeshica), the late Brenda (who sadly enough will not be able to read this work), and Godfrey. I also want to thank Simuyu Wanddiba, Colletta Sudda, and Washington Onyango-Ouma for their time and their good advice. I also wish to acknowledge the help of Mr. Masinde, Senior Administrator of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nairobi, in arranging interviews. Other researchers whom I would like to thank for their insights and useful comments are Susan Reynolds Whyte, Wenzel Geissler, Nancy Luke, Erick Nyaumbedha, and Catherine Campbell.

I thank my both parents for raising me in such a way that I became ‘a fighter’ in life. Throughout my life, I have learned to work hard and to fight for what I want. Coming from a working-class family taught me about inequality at an early age. When I graduated with a degree in social work from Ghent, Belgium, specializing in refugee work, my parents’ opinion was that as a young woman of 21 years of age, I was ready for the labour market. However, I wanted to continue my studies and learn more about the other side of the globe where all these refugees were coming from. Why was it that I could easily travel from one country to the other and they were refused entrance into Belgium?

I owe a lot of my drive and motivation to the refugees and the Belgian homeless people whom I assisted as a social worker in a social centre in Belgium. They opened my eyes to what living in poverty meant in my own country, and anywhere else in Fortress Europe. That experience also helped me realize that, as a social worker, I could only comfort those who were suffering, but to understand the deeper power relations at stake in development work and policy, I felt the need to study further. Therefore, I went on to study anthropology, and I am proud that I found the strength to pay for my studies myself entirely through part-time work.
My genuine appreciation goes to those who taught me how to fall in love with anthropology. Special thanks go to Kees Koonings and Gerdien Steenbeek from the Anthropology Department at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, who helped me to believe in my strengths. Kees Koonings, who advised me during my Master's thesis and approved my departure to a conflict-striken region in Bolivia, taught me not to lose myself in the details. Gerdien Steenbeek demonstrated a strong belief that I would become a ‘good anthropologist’. I hope she is still proud of me after reading my dissertation, as I have always wished to follow in her footsteps.

My deepest gratitude goes to my promotors Anita Hardon, Mirjam De Bruijn, and Anne Buvé. Anita encouraged me and patiently listened to my frustrations in the field. She was the perfect intermediator between the medical and the anthropological fields of work. Her advice and comments were inspiring and to the point. Her trust in my work gave me the strength not to give up and to believe in myself. I am also very grateful to Mirjam De Bruijn who travelled to Winam to witness my fieldwork. She got to know the lives of some of the youngsters I was working with, which resulted in insightful discussions and suggestions. I thank her for her patience while I explored many avenues of research and discussion in my dissertation.

Special thanks goes also to Anne Buvé, the third promotor of this dissertation from the STD/HIV Research and Intervention Unit at the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM). Thanks to her interest in anthropological research I was able to become part of their medical team. Whenever I came back from the field, I always could count on her availability and her listening ear. With her many years of experience, she taught me a great deal on HIV prevention work in sub-Saharan Africa. I have a great deal of respect both for her and for her work.

The Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam provided me with an academic home and, whenever I needed, a place to work. They not only gave me institutional support but also funded my PhD coursework. Thanks to Hans Sonneveld, Jose Komen, Teun Bijvoet, Miriam May, Anneke Dammers, Janus Oomen, Erna de Boer, and Muriel Kiesel for helping me navigate the rules and procedures at AISSR.

Thanks to Sjaak van der Geest and the late Gerd Bauman at AISSR for their plain old good advice. Thanks to my involvement at the AISSR, I was fortunate to encounter inspiring post-doctoral students who provided me with great theoretical insights. A special mention goes to Rene Gerrets for all the assistance he offered. His
valuable and constructive (mostly theoretical) suggestions during the development of this research were an enormous help. His willingness to give his time so generously, and to empathize with me when I felt down, is very much appreciated.

A very special person I must thank is Eileen Moyer, who accompanied me throughout this PhD process. Her humour, dedication to anthropological fieldwork, and genuine hospitality have helped me feel part of the academic world even though I mostly been living some distance from the university. I am grateful to her for her continuing friendship. Thanks also to Rachel Spronk for spending time with me in the early phases of my project, which helped me narrow down and deepen my research questions.

Heartfelt thanks go to my other colleagues of the many writing and reading clubs that I attended at the AISSR. Without their support, intellectual input, and critical suggestions, the ‘delivery’ of this study would have been very lonely and impossible: Ward Berendschot, Jonna Both, Christine Dedding, Josien de Klerk, Trudie Gerrits, John Kinsman, Benson Mulemi, Janus Oomen, Sasha Ramdas, Getnet Tadele, Georges Tiendrebeogo, Erica van der Sijpt, Marieke van Eijk, and Miranda van Reeuwijk. Special thanks goes to Janneke Verheijen, who shared with me the challenges of being a full-time mother while finishing a PhD.

Assistance provided by the African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden was greatly appreciated. In particularly, I want to thank Rijk van Dijk for his inspiring suggestions. As a student associated with the ASC, I was able to make use of their extensive library facilities, and I owe many thanks to Ella Verkaik, without whom I would have not been able to do such a thorough literature study.

This project would not have been possible without the funding of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), through the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I thank the Kenyan Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) for their support and the ITM for employing me and allowing me to work principally on this dissertation. I also thank the Directie-Generaal Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Humanitaire Hulp (DGD) from Belgium for their financial support.

Whenever I was not in Kenya, I worked at ITM, and there I met a group of interesting researchers. I am grateful to my colleague Hilde Vandenhoude for helping me make my way through the Kenyan and American bureaucracies. I also want to thank her for her constructive comments on the early version of my chapters. Assistance offered by Pierre Lefèvre from the Public Health Department at ITM was also very much
appreciated. Thanks to Marie Laga for taking an interest in my work and challenging me to formulate policy recommendations regarding HIV prevention.

One might believe that it is impossible to have a life while writing a PhD dissertation. At times I did believe this very thing, preferring to lock myself up, isolate myself from social obligations, and narrow my world down to just me, my family, and my PhD in the belly. But during long stretches, particularly when we moved to Peru (September 2010 to March 2013) and later Senegal (from October 2013 onwards), I was charged with the majority of our domestic work—taking care of Layra and other household duties—which meant that I had to scramble during those few hours I could find to work on my research.

Our arrival in Peru did not start smoothly, and it was as if the heavy load of the PhD in my belly came into being in physical form: in medical terms it is called an ‘intestinal obstruction’. The recovery was long (more than eight months), and accompanied by anaemia. I am indebted to Maritza Alvarado from Peru, who assisted me during and after my recovery, and, most importantly, who became Layra’s big sister.

At other moments, there were situations or people who helped me to remember to be thankful that I was alive, and that life should be enjoyed. I thank my friends for remaining patient and never losing faith in me: Veerle Van Mechelen, Jan Meulemeester, Annelies Bonne, An Verbeke, Lobke D’Hespeel, Dieter Rosseeuw, Hanelore Vronman, Caroline Berendsen, and Laurens Braakman. Caroline, an anthropologist, inspired me to study anthropology in the Netherlands. I thank Paul Morris, my former promotor in Manchester, for the time he invested in improving my English in some of the chapters. I greatly respect the work he carries out for refugees, and wish every lawyer could be as dedicated to his work as he! Special thanks go to Hans Gruyaert who reminded me that I cannot include everything in my dissertation and urged me to finish it, and Sara Verbeeren whose comments on two of my chapters were very much appreciated. Sara Verbeeren, Sylvie Fosselle, Liesbeth Lutjeharms, and Cornelis Blommaert—to whose houses I escaped when I could find no quiet place to work—played an invaluable role. Thanks to Steffi Vandriessche and Veerle Cuyx for translating my summary into Dutch and my brother Steven Blommaert for helping me with the lay out of the front and cover page. Thanks, last but not least, to Erin Martineau, who edited this entire manuscript. She was not only a great editor but also my coach, standing by my side until this ‘child’ was finally delivered.
One warm night in August 2005, in a small Kenyan fishing village called Dhonam (mouth of the lake), a village of Winam (head of the lake), loud music was being played outside. New to the village, my boyfriend Sven, my research assistant Petronella, and I sat in our room, wondering if the music was from a *disco matanga* (funeral disco or party), curious why no one had told us about it. A *disco matanga* is usual organized by the family of the deceased, and held the nights before and after the burial. The musical entertainment is meant to give comfort to the bereaved left behind, because at night it is cold and people feel sad.

We were already in bed, around 10 p.m., when two male youngsters, Onyango (17 years old) and his best friend and stepbrother Joel (18 years old), came by to take us to the *disco matanga*. We dressed, and Onyango informed us that there were actually three *disco matangas* happening that night: the one we were going to was for the mother of one of the local fishermen. When we arrived at the large homestead (a typical Luo compound, where the lineage members of the husband of the deceased wife lived in a number of huts), we recognized many of the people from the local fishing beach. We also met some of the young people who played a significant role in my research. While observing the *disco matanga*, I paid special attention to how young men and women interacted, what their concerns were, what they talked about, the kind of clothes they were wearing, and their age. My intention was to observe the behaviour of young people and to understand why public health workers active in the field described these funeral discos as ‘risk situations’ for young people to become infected with HIV. Some parents warned their children, especially their daughters, not to go to these events. According to Adhis, a 20-year-old young woman, those young women who go to *disco matangas* want to “sell their bodies”. Nevertheless, many young women of Winam, along with many young men, attended *disco matangas*.

When we entered the compound of the deceased person’s husband’s family, we greeted the middle-aged women who were cooking behind one of the many huts. There was a lot of laughter among them, and many appeared drunk. As we ventured further into the homestead, we noticed some young people standing and sitting under a mango tree. Opposite them was a big tent, with chairs and tables and lit petroleum lamps. We chose a spot in the back, under the trees and close to the huts, where we could observe everything. There was a lot to take in: a group of girls, 10 to 12 years old, sitting silently...
by a hut opposite us; a drunken man talking to some children; the smell of bhang (marijuana) wafting out from the back of a hut; drunken young men dancing in the tent; other youth standing outside, talking in groups. More and more people came, mostly young men, who were followed by some older women who joined in the dancing. More young women arrived soon after: they stood in the dark corner, in groups of three or four, dressed in close-fitting trousers and tops, attracting attention with the clear lines of their bodies.

Some of the young women, who appeared to be between 15 and 18 years old, were serving tea and mandazi (East African fried bread) in the tent to the visitors. The visitors were friends and relatives of the deceased person who travelled in from outside Winam to attend the funeral. A group of men brought containers of chang’aa (a locally brewed, illegal, strong spirit) into the tent for the local guests. A bit later, the visitors were served ugali (boiled maize flour) and other food.

The presence of our young guide, Onyango, who had identified the disco matanga guests for us, telling us who was who and which girls were from which schools, helped us meet many people that night. He first introduced us to a very tall young man named Rambo, a 23-year-old teacher. Another tall young man of 19, Otieno, visited with us; he, his almost 17-year-old sister Atieno, and his 16-year-old brother Enoka were already good friends of ours. The three of them had studied in town, close to Nairobi, but due to financial necessity Otieno—supported his mother and siblings—had become a fisherman.

Onyango then called out to a young woman standing behind us, wearing jeans and a sweatshirt, and talking sheng (slang) with three young men. She was talking loudly, and had been dancing a lot. When she came to greet us, Onyango introduced her as Awuor; Joel ignored her, continuing to talk with a schoolmate instead. Onyango later informed us that she used to be Joel’s girlfriend, and that he had broken up with her the week before, when he found her dancing with another young man at another disco matanga. Awuor had finished primary school but like Otieno and his siblings, did not have the means to continue her education. Onyango then pointed out Ariet, who was parading around the grounds with another young woman, seeking the attention of the young men. Ariet had dated both Rambo and Steve, one of Onyango’s younger nephews, but Onyango was hesitant to talk with her; she had so many boyfriends, he said, that he was afraid of getting beaten up for talking to her.

A bit later, we were surprised to run into our friend Lucy, who we knew from our visits to Yeshica, an HIV/AIDS prevention project for youth in Winam; there she was at
the *disco matanga*, dancing with three young men. She was wearing a Yeshica t-shirt, still proud of the affiliation. Lucy told us her news: she would no longer be working at the hotel in Dhonam. She had new plans to move to the nearby town of Bondo and take a course in tailoring, while staying at her aunt’s place. Lucy seemed to be very happy, as she did not want to stay in Winam and preferred living in town. After finishing secondary school, she had been engaged to her mathematics teacher (who was known for having many girlfriends), who also served as the church leader for the Youth Group at the Anglican Church at Dhonam, but her uncle, her caretaker after the deaths of her parents, had discouraged the marriage. She had hoped marrying a teacher would be a way of moving out of the village to town but it had not worked out as she had wished. The tailoring course in Bondo town, she hoped, could give her new opportunities to find work or a boyfriend in town.

Themes were rapidly emerging: thwarted schooling, crisscrossed lines of dating and relationships, and hopes for a future elsewhere. We listened to the youth around us, as they spoke of propositions and cautionary tales. One of Joel’s friends said: “I am looking for a girl to go home with” (youngsters speak about each other as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’), and Joel responded by advising his friend to think about books instead, since school was resuming soon. His friend retorted: “Everyone sleeps around, even those at colleges, universities, and churches... even the Catholic father is a prostitute”. Meanwhile, in one of the dark corners, young men were talking to a young woman who was lying on her back, on the ground. Some were flirting, while one told her “there is no lodging here”. Rambo was studying the girls and young women by the hut, looking at each closely, and then pointing out one young woman to Onyango. Petronella overheard part of their exchange:

Rambo: I am scared of pursuing that girl; what if I find out she is one of my students?

Onyango: It doesn’t matter, no one will know.

Rambo: They (the Teachers Service Commission and the school) are very strict. If they find out, I will be suspended and interdicted. Many people have been interdicted and those who have impregnated girls have been taken to court and half of their salary goes to the support of the child. Sometimes, the parents insist that they marry and maybe they are not compatible.

This bit of conversation reflects the complexity of the situation in which young people live: the weekly *disco matangas* are the perfect occasion for finding dating partners—and having a partner is not just enjoyable, but can also, as this study shows, improve a
person’s prospects—but the matter is fraught with complications. Young people are
tempted to engage in sexual relations and see virtually everyone around them doing so,
including those who should be their positive role models, such as teachers, priests, and
other adults in the community. There is a clear gender bias as young women are
expected to abstain from sex while young men’s sexual activities are normalized.

A bit later, we came across Enoka, younger brother to Otieno and Atieno, and Onyango’s
friend. Enoka greeted us and we could see from his reaction that he did not expect to
meet us here. Unlike some of the older youth we had encountered that evening, Enoka
had dropped out of primary school, and had started to earn his living at only 14 years of
age. Instead of going to school, he spent his mornings hanging around the fishing
beaches, and helping the fishermen empty their boats. Omosh, a 16-year-old orphan who
also had dropped out of primary school, then came over to greet us. We knew him as the
younger brother of Ochien’g, one of the youngsters we already followed closely. Omosh is
a fisherman but he is also a musician from a local band and now and then performs in
Kisumu.

Omosh, who was clearly drunk, asked Onyango about a young woman he had
seen earlier who was “smoking a cigarette like a man”; Omosh reported that she also
“drinks like a man”, and that he had seen her at a bar with men who had misused her—
when she was drunk, the men would take turns having sex with her out on the grass
nearby. Omosh commented that she is “new” to Dhonam, and that she had recently
come to visit her sister, who is married and lives in Dhonam. Tonight she was out with
her sister’s brother-in-law, one among the men who was having sex with her. We could
see after she returned to the party that she was drunk and her hair was mussed; some
young men were trying to touch her and a fight almost broke out. She was quarrelling
with them, and one of the men pulled her away.

The air was now filled with smoke and we could smell bhang. Enoka’s friend and
some young men in reggae attire were rolling up joints and openly smoking them. A
man who had ‘passed out’ was carried by some men and placed on the grass to sleep.
One of our older female neighbours was also drunk by now, had fallen down, and was
helped to stand back up. Girls and young women joined the young men dancing in the
tent; most of the young men were drunk by now. Two young men started quarrelling
with each other over a young woman, and were using offensive language. Each wanted
to be the young woman’s boyfriend, and they started to fight. Suddenly the music
stopped, everyone walked out of the tent, apparently to see what was happening between the young men. Others started fighting.

But as quickly as events had deteriorated, things turned around. The visitors—those who had travelled from other villages and towns to attend the funeral—had a “chairman”, or a leader who spoke for the group. He asked everyone to come back in the tent, to behave well, and to respect the home of the host. Reminding everyone why they had been brought together, the death of one of the women in the village, he asked people not to fight with one another. The music came back on, dancing resumed, the tunes switched from reggae to benga (local Dholuo music), and everyone thronged the dance floor. Then, after an hour, the music stopped, and everyone sat down.

The chairman announced that it was time to make contributions. Two men sat by a table in the middle of the tent, and on the table was a bowl: the men had a book in which to write. The chairman explained that he would call one person at a time to give money, and asked others to add something small on top of it, as the music played. This kind of dance, in which money was collected, is called seyi. The chairman also noted the visitors’ group had brought some young women, and in order to dance with them, one needed to pay 50 Kenyan shillings (60 eurocents\(^5\)). We left when the harambee (fundraising) was starting; walking out of the compound, we saw that the older relatives and friends of the bereaved family were eating together, happily. Arriving home around 2 a.m., we knew it would take a long time to fully understand all we had seen, but we were convinced that the disco matanga was an important nexus of many things: death and life, support and sanction, and risk and hope.

This event, early in our field research, encapsulates many of the key issues at stake in the struggle to reduce the level of HIV infection in Kenya. In just a few hours, we witnessed the strong pull of desire between young men and women, who want to find a one-night lover, a life-long partner, a mate. We overheard the castigation and shaming that happens when people transgress gendered norms. We saw the exchange of money for a dance with a pretty young woman. We listened as young people told us of their limited opportunities, their stunted school careers, and their hopes and aspirations to leave the village. This dissertation unravels these many aspects of the disco matanga: how youth try to creatively manage the risk of HIV in their lives, how they enjoy their lives while constantly being reminded of the ubiquity of death, and how they wrestle with conflicts with authorities—those adults they see at night cheating on their wives or approaching primary schoolgirls, who can, during the day, expel them from school or
physically punish them for going on a date. The *disco matanga* also demonstrates the uphill struggle of rural families who have to bear the high costs of such an event while their sources of income are shrinking further. Funerals are a big drain on the whole community’s resources, since everybody in the village contributes through the *harambees*, and most of the funds leave the community, going to the *matatu* (public minibus) drivers who bring the deceased back from town for an absurdly high price, or to the businessmen who supercharge the party with a modern sound- and light-system. Accumulating resources is not possible in this context and consequently many youths aim to leave the village and move to town. At least for this, the *disco matanga* with its urban visitors is the perfect occasion: social skills can be practiced that might serve at some point in the future.

---

1 Throughout this dissertation, I use pseudonyms for the places (except the cities as Kisumu, Nairobi and Mombasa) and for the people of my research study in order to protect their privacy (see Chapter 2). Winam consists of more than 80 villages and is one of the communities that constitute Bondo District, in central Nyanza Province, located in Western Kenya. Winam touches Lake Victoria towards the east and has several fishing beaches (see Chapter 1 and 3).

2 In this dissertation, when I talk about ‘young people’ or ‘young men’ and ‘young women’, I refer to people approximately 16 years old and older. I also use the terms ‘youth’ and ‘youngsters’. When I refer to boys and girls, on the other hand, I am referring to people under the age of 16. I make this distinction throughout this dissertation, although the youngsters with whom I worked did not make such a distinction. They usually talked about ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ for those who were not married yet; once they were married, women were named after their natal residence, for instance Nyaralego (daughter of Alego) or after one of their children, for instance MinAkinyi (mother of Akinyi). Married men were often referred to by their proper name, or when older, with a term of respect, ‘mzee’.

3 Many ‘Luo people’ are polygamous. A Luo homestead (*dala*) at the time of my fieldwork usually consisted of two generations (before usually up to three generations but due to land scarcity, this was no longer the case): that of the husband and the mother(s) and their offspring. Thus, the homestead is composed of the house (*ot*) of the male head (*wuon dala*, the owner of the homestead), and several matrifocal (*jokamiyo*, people of one mother) units, close to the fields. It may also consist of the bachelor huts (*simba*) of their sons who have not yet formed their own homestead (see also Chapter 3).

4 In this account of the *disco matanga*, I combined my field observations from three different *disco matangas* that were spread over time in the months between August 2005 and November 2005.

5 The exchange rate was 80 Kenyan shilling (KES) per 1 euro during the time of my fieldwork. I use this exchange rate throughout this dissertation.
Part I

Contexts
Chapter 1

Introduction

Tactical agency—Living a good life today?

1. Introduction

In Winam, the disco matanga, or funeral disco, is an important gathering for kin and community the nights before and after a burial, and a place where people find comfort and say goodbye to a loved one. At these events, relatives who travel in from distant towns are happy to see one another once again, and young men and women from different locations take advantage of the chance to meet and interact. Rather than being a somber occasion, it is a space where joy and fun have no limits, where you find people dancing and chatting, sharing food, drinking chang’aa (a locally brewed, illegal, strong spirit), smoking bhang (marijuana), having sex in the bushes, and fighting over young women. But the disco matanga is also an ambiguous space, where life and death shake hands. While kin and community gather to mourn the death of someone—frequently someone who has died of HIV/AIDS—they also run a high risk of getting infected at this very same event, either through consensual unprotected sex or by forced sex. In this way, the disco matanga exemplifies the larger ambiguous and uncertain context in which young people are growing up, experimenting with sexual relationships, and trying to make a living.

The disco matanga has received much attention by local HIV/AIDS activists and public health workers in Nyanza Province, who assume that the disco matanga provides a major opportunity for HIV transmission given the prevalence of sexual activities at these events. There is, however, no epidemiological evidence that these venues promote HIV transmission. This assumption is merely based on the behavior at disco matangas and on self-reports of the youngsters of Winam (see also Njue et al. 2009). By not contextualizing the disco matanga and describing it as a ‘harmful risk situation’ practiced only by ‘the Luo people’, one runs the risk of stigmatizing and exoticizing Luo cultural practices (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989).

The disco matanga is not a static ‘cultural practice’ as is assumed by some public health workers but an event that has changed and is changing over time and is
perceived differently among the people of Nyanza Province. The grandparents of the youth with whom I worked, in their youth, attended events that were more of a quiet distraction, with *nyatiti* (traditional harp) music played in an attempt to re-establish the equilibrium disturbed by death (Shino 1997; Onyang’a 1998). In the 1970s this quieter event evolved into a real party, and began being called *disco matanga*. While *disco matangas* were banned in some parts of south Nyanza Province, for most of the youngsters of Winam, the *disco* was still ‘the place to be’. Youngsters would often go from one *disco matanga* to the other, when several people were buried on the same day. Days before the burial, young people would spread rumors, for instance, that famous Luo singers were performing at a particular *disco matanga*. Just like with other, non-funerary parties, the one with the biggest sound system or popular live band was the most successful, drawing the widest attendance.

During my research, it was clear that the reason why *disco matangas* were so popular among the youngsters of Winam was because there were not many other leisure activities for young people, where they could go enjoy life, and have fun drinking alcohol, smoking, and having sex. Attending a *disco matanga* also required few resources, since the attendees only had to contribute to the *harambee* (fundraising for the family) and the bereaved family members covered most of the expenses of a funeral. The *disco matanga* was usually organized by the youngsters in the family of the deceased person, which meant that many young people were likely to enjoy the musical entertainment. *Disco matangas* typically began with gospel music or a church orchestra, but soon after, Benga music (local Luo rhythms) and other types of Western ‘modern’ music, especially reggae, hip-hop, and rap were played.

While the youngsters with whom I worked continue celebrating life during *disco matangas*, the ubiquity of death and the suffering of JoWinam (the people of Winam) in the field often left me with a bitter feeling. I often asked myself how JoWinam managed to deal with this depressing situation. What about the young people whose aim was to achieve a ‘better life’ than their parents? What if their parents had passed away? What kind of future perspective did this allow them? This dissertation is rooted in the daily life world of young people (between 16 and 25) in Winam. It seeks to understand how young people struggle to find or create a livelihood and how this influences their sexual relationships in a context of social change in Winam. My assumption is—as various studies have already demonstrated—that the precarious living situation of young people in Winam affects their decisions concerning sexual relationships.
This dissertation focuses our attention on young people’s hopes, aspirations, and expectations and shows how the young people of Winam creatively constructed their daily life in a context where HIV/AIDS has taken a high toll. More precisely, I examine young people’s livelihood opportunities and challenges in Winam. I try to understand their sexual relations and networks, specifically, how they form sexual relationships, avoid the so-called health risks associated with sex, and understand the links between sex, love, and money. I show that young people’s aspirations and concerns need to be examined through a lens of intergenerational relations (see Cole and Durham 2007) as young people are members of families and other social entities and should be studied within this given context (see Amit and Dyck 2012). Young people’s perceptions of a ‘state-of-the-art’ HIV/AIDS prevention project are also analysed to discern the role this and similar interventions play in their daily life.

I discuss not only young people’s ‘tactical agency’ (De Certeau 1984), but also discuss the limits of that agency, and show how youngsters are confronted with ‘choiceless choices’ (Scheper-Hughes 2008). This analysis includes the context of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 1999) that surrounds and gives shape to young people’s uncertain life worlds, in order to understand how they deal with sexual relationships and create ‘livelihood networks’. I argue that instead of asking ‘Why do young people take risks when they engage in sex?’ we should recognize that the real question is: ‘Why shouldn’t youngsters take risks if they hold the promise of a better life in the future?’.

1.1. Livelihoods, opportunities, networks

‘Winam’ (meaning “head of the lake”) is a pseudonym for the place where I carried out my fieldwork, which I use to protect the privacy of the people involved in this study. ‘Winam’, however, should not be confused with the actual Winam Gulf (the extension of north-eastern Lake Victoria), where it is located. When I use the toponym ‘Winam’, I refer to one of the communities that is part of Bondo District in Nyanza Province, located in western Kenya. Nyanza Province is one of the nine provinces in Kenya, and shares a boundary with the Rift Valley Province to the east, the Western Province to the north, and Tanzania to the south. Winam touches Lake Victoria, providing the area with several fishing beaches. Winam consists of more than 80 villages and measures 178.4 square kilometres, 1.6 of which are under the waters of Lake Victoria (Government of Kenya 2002). In 1999, Winam had a population of 56,883 and a population density of 319 persons per sq. km. (Central Bureau of Statistics 2001).
Figure 1. Kenya

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit 2008
Almost half a century after Independence, Winam remains one of the least economically diverse regions of Kenya. In Winam, disparate but converging socioeconomic, cultural, ecological and political forces prepared the stage for the HIV epidemic. The chronic poverty and the high mobility that characterize life in Winam have contributed to the rapid spread of epidemics. With the spread of HIV/AIDS, the inadequacy of the health infrastructure took a high toll on many—often very young—lives in Winam. When I began my fieldwork in 2005, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) were only available at a very high cost in Kenya. Although this picture changed as medicines
became more readily available, there were a number of invisible obstacles (for instance, lack of emotional support and nursing care, and lack of nutrient-rich food such as milk and eggs) that continued to prevent people in disadvantaged places from receiving treatment (see also Whyte et al. 2004 for Uganda).

In a high-unemployment environment like Winam, young people devote tremendous energy to creating a ‘livelihood’: more than just earning a living, they pursue “a wide range of activities and social support capabilities” (Ellis 1998a) to create some level of stability and security. Their high level of mobility—going back and forth between rural and urban areas—helps them build sexual and social networks, which act as resources in constructing their livelihood. My work endeavours to explain how they work, and struggle, to do this. Understanding young people’s everyday concerns and larger aspirations is of great importance if we want to understand young people’s sexual relationships since the latter is related to the former. Creating livelihood networks—and utilizing sexual relations to do so—I argue, is a form of ‘tactical agency’ (De Certeau 1984). However, the limitations of the concepts of ‘tactical agency’, ‘livelihood’, and ‘social capital’ deserve special attention. These concepts usually start from the capabilities of a person to act in and adapt to, despite difficult, uncertain circumstances, but in an environment severely affected by persistent poverty and HIV/AIDS, many do not even have opportunities to act. Throughout this dissertation, it will become clear why “playing sex”, as they call it, is so important for young people, and why they continue to engage in ‘risky’ sex, despite their knowledge that it could lead to disease or death.

1.2. Gender inequality, sexual relations, and the quest for security

The large difference in HIV/AIDS infection rates between young men and young women in Winam has led many researchers to speculate about the transactional nature of sexual liaisons and the related power discrepancies of gender relations (see, for example, Amornkul et al. 2009). Although these explanatory approaches should not be dismissed, I believe it is a mistake to ascribe the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to simplistic notions of ‘transactional sex’. We need to identify and disentangle stereotypes concerning female subordination, male dominance, and sex-for-money exchanges in sexual relationships. The mainstream literature on HIV/AIDS and sexual relations generally ignores motivations that rub against gender stereotypes, such as ‘having sex just for fun’ among young women and ‘giving money out of love’ among young men. While I wish to bring such non-stereotypical motivations into our analysis, I also
recognize that the discourse of love is sometimes used to mask less romantic intentions, such as getting money, having sex, or claiming a ‘modern’ identity, and demonstrate this with my ethnographic data. I examine not only what people say about their motives for sexual relations, but also the structures that inform their possibilities for action.

While young women’s economic and social vulnerability has received substantial attention (for instance, UNESCO and UNIFEM 2010; UNAIDS 2004a; UNAIDS 2008) in the context of AIDS research and treatment, the ways in which young men occupy a vulnerable position are all too often overlooked (Silberschmidt 2001; Simpson 2009). In this dissertation, I show how both young men and young women employed creative tactics and capitalized on social and sexual networks in order to find some degree of security. In these young people’s quest for security, mobility is central. By spending time outside or moving away from Winam, young people tried to extend their social networks—to maximize their social capital—including, sometimes, through sexual liaisons with multiple, concurrent partners (Thornton 2009). Although this tactic entailed health risks, the young people with whom I worked believed it was their only avenue to escape the misery at home. Sexual relationships could give them access to goods and services that conventional social networks could not (Thornton 2009). Yet, as my data illustrate, success at attaining a better standard of living through sexual liaisons seemed to be more prevalent for young women than for young men. By analysing young people’s sexual relationships in relation to their quest for social and financial security, my research shines new light on our understanding of the political economy of HIV/AIDS and its prevention—both of which are necessary if we are to find ways to help bring about structural changes.

1.3. HIV-prevention projects and ‘interdisciplinary’ research

What constitutes change, and how do we know ‘success’? In this dissertation, I examine the relevance of HIV prevention projects for young people, and how they make a difference in young people’s daily lives. Taking one project as an example, the Yeshica youth centre, we see that such projects do indeed have impacts, but not necessarily those expected by project designers and implementers. Yeshica, which stands for ‘Youth’s Economic, Skills, and Health Improvement Centre in Winam’, was funded through PEPFAR (the US Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), and organized by the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Kenyan Medical Institute (KEMRI). The goal of Yeshica was to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people
between 10 and 20 years old in Winam, and it was structured into three main interventions: the ‘Families Matter! Program’ (FMP), which targeted youth between the ages of 9 and 12, along with their caregivers; the ‘Life Skills Program’ (LSP), which targeted school-going youth between the ages of 10 and 14 and out-of-school youth between the ages of 13 and 17; and the ‘livelihood intervention’ (targeting out-of-school youth between the ages of 16 and 22). By examining young people’s motivations for and expectations of participating in Yeshica’s interventions, I show how diverse actors produced and understood ‘success’ or ‘failure’.

Understanding local perceptions and interpretations of HIV/AIDS prevention projects is a core task for any anthropologist fighting on this battlefield against HIV. The twist that my work gives to this well-studied area is that it occurred as part of an ‘interdisciplinary’ approach that was, actually, more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary. I was part of a medical team—consisting mostly of epidemiologists—from the Belgian ITM who in collaboration with CDC/KEMRI were implementing a HIV/AIDS Youth Intervention Program (YIP) in Winam. The YIP aimed to measure and compare behavioural and biomedical parameters (specifically, the prevalence of Herpes Simplex Virus 2 (HSV-2) and HIV) before and after the establishment of Yeshica’s intervention programs. The planning of my ethnographic research was thus the result of collaboration between Belgian, Kenyan, and American scholars—including, as well, some important policy makers—from various disciplines. My medical colleagues were however, not very familiar with anthropological research and I found myself needing to explain and justify my methods, a process that caused me to consider in depth the different approaches of anthropology and epidemiology. Woven throughout this dissertation are my reflections on these differences, not only regarding methods, but also, and perhaps more importantly, power relations between quantitative and qualitative researchers (see also Streefland 1990) (see especially Chapter 2), and the interplay between institutional funding and whose ‘evidence’ is regarded as most robust (see Chapter 7).

One limitation of this study is that the wealth of empirical information was challenging to analyse, making it difficult for me to apply a method called ‘symmetrical anthropology’. This is a methodology used within science and technology studies, of which Bruno Latour’s (1987) actor-network theory is a part. In symmetrical anthropology, the anthropologist questions his/her own methodologies, concepts, and actions in the field in the same way the anthropologist studies his/her respondents, for example as Rottenburg (2009) did in his ethnographic work in sub-Saharan Africa. I
believe I worked according to the highest standards of anthropology in studying the relations between different actors as well as between myself and the youngsters with whom I worked. But on further reflection, I also believe that I could have described more closely how my methodology and concepts were perceived in the field, which I still hope to do in the near future —by writing a scientific article about it for instance. This means that in certain sections of this dissertation the reader may still detect a certain bias or lack of critical distance regarding my methodology, concepts, or actions. While this might be one of the limitations of this dissertation, it was the price I have chosen to pay for being passionate about the fate of the young people in Winam.

Since I was part of a medical team, some might expect from this dissertation clear-cut recommendations for HIV/AIDS prevention; some might wish to just skip to the conclusion. Missing the ethnographically informed ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of my study, however, would be a mistake. I invite readers to first consider this whole work—to understand the full complexity of how AIDS is interwoven into the everyday life of young people—before assuming that I, or anyone, can come up with ‘the’ answer to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. After many years of expert research from epidemiology, anthropology, and other fields, we still have not found ‘the’ solution to stop this epidemic from spreading. My study will not alter this fact: the problem is just too complex. My contribution is, in the end, an invitation to listen to young people’s voices, which speak clearly about why they carry on with ‘risky sex’; they do so because although they have plenty of aspirations, the choices young people make in life are often ‘choiceless choices’ (Scheprer-Hughes 2008) because they have to act within a context of perpetual crisis.

2. HIV/AIDS in Kenya and Nyanza Province

To contextualize the goals of the multidisciplinary medical research project and my part of that study, I begin with a statistical depiction of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya and, more precisely, Nyanza Province. Kenya is one of the countries most severely affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. The first case of AIDS was reported in Kenya in 1984, which—because of the long incubation period between HIV infection and AIDS—means that HIV had likely already begun to spread in the late 1970s. Booth (2004: 59–64) notes that the rise of HIV/AIDS during the late 1980s went along with the country’s political and economic crisis. The failure of Daniel arap Moi, the second president of Kenya (1983–2002, see also Chapter 3), to implement the structural adjustments imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank resulted in the
unwillingness of donors to further send monetary aid and loans. Such cuts in assistance forced Moi to decrease spending on education, health, infrastructure, and social services. This context set the stage for the denial of the existence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s in Kenya (Booth 2004).

President Moi made an inadequate initial response to HIV and AIDS as he silenced the enormity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Okuro 2009). Nevertheless, Kenya was quick to set up a national AIDS committee and a National AIDS Control Program in 1987 with the primary intention of receiving AIDS funding. President Moi did little to break the silence about the existence of HIV in Kenya, and AIDS funds were missing or used for other purposes at least until 1995 (Booth 2004: 59–64). Okuro (2009: 1) attributed the slow response to HIV/AIDS in Kenya to the president’s need to maintain the structure of his neopatrimonial leadership.

In 1999, President Moi finally called AIDS a national disaster but restated that, together with the churches, the Kenyan Government would not advocate condom use as doing so would promote casual sex (AIDS Analysis Africa 2000). Only at the end of 1999 did Moi break the silence surrounding condom use and start promoting it as HIV prevalence was increasing. HIV prevalence in Kenya reached its peak in 2000 with 13.4 percent of its population infected with HIV (NASCOP and Ministry of Health 2006). By 2003, the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey noted a decline in the prevalence of HIV, estimating that 6.7 percent of the population (1.2 million people) between the ages of 15 and 49 were living with HIV (Central Bureau of Statistics 2004). Apart from the rapid expansion of preventive interventions since 2000, this decline has mostly been attributed to the large number of people dying from AIDS in Kenya: 150,000 in 2003 alone (UNAIDS 2004a).

Affordable ARVs only started to become available through public sector programs at the end of 2003. Beginning in 2003, Kenya supported the ‘3 by 5 Initiative’ of the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, which aimed to provide ARVs to three million ‘people living with HIV/AIDS’ (PLWHA) in developing countries by the end of 2005 (UNGASS 2006: 26). In 2006, Kenya’s President Kibaki declared that ARVs would be provided for free. The Kenyan Government aimed to provide ARVs to 95,000 PLWHA, of the total number of 1.3 million PLWHA (National Aids and STI Control Programme (NASCOP) 2005: 51); by September 2005, 54,000 PLWHA had received free ARVs (UNGASS 2006: 26). Whilst many people in Kenya are still not being reached with HIV prevention and treatment services, access to treatment is definitely increasing. In 2012, at the moment of writing, 72 percent of adults who needed treatment were receiving it,
with around 200,000 additional people on treatment in 2011 compared to 2009 (UNAIDS 2012). Due to the availability of ARVs at affordable prices or for free, people are no longer dying as quickly. However, this does not mean that HIV infection rates are going down. In addition, although more people than ever are now living with HIV, poor adherence to ARVs may lead to drug resistance, further complicating the picture.

There is a substantial gender disparity in rates of infection between men and women. The 2007 Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey (KAIS), which demonstrated a small increase in the national HIV prevalence compared to the 2003 survey, showed a prevalence of 8.8 percent among females, and 5.5 percent among males. Among adolescents aged 15–19 years, HIV prevalence was 3.5 percent among females and 1.0 percent among males—a gendered difference that widened further among those aged 20–24 years: 7.4 percent in females and 1.9 percent in males (NASCOP 2007). This gendered disparity in HIV prevalence is found across Kenya, as well as in other African countries. Women’s higher HIV rates are often attributed to the female reproductive tract’s greater susceptibility to HIV infection from unprotected heterosexual intercourse. Other factors may include women’s lack of power to negotiate safe sexual practices (see Chapters 5 and 6). Although the overall prevalence of HIV between 2003 and 2007 did not significantly change, a closer look at the data shows an increase in the proportion of HIV in rural areas (Central Bureau of Statistics 2003; NASCOP 2007).

According to Kenyan surveys (2003 KDHS and 2007 KAIS), Nyanza Province has been hit the hardest by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Despite an overall downward trend in HIV prevalence across the nation, Nyanza Province still suffered high rates of HIV infection. The 2007 KAIS demonstrated an overall HIV prevalence rate in Nyanza Province of 15.3 percent in 2007: 17.6 percent in women and 11.4 percent in men (NASCOP 2007). Here, the gender disparity has been even more striking. Findings from a 1997–1998 multicentre study demonstrated a large difference in HIV infection rates between young men and women 15–19 years old in Kisumu, Nyanza’s capital: 23 percent among women and 3.5 percent among men (Buvé et al. 2001). However, little was known at that time about HIV prevalence in rural areas, where the majority of Nyanza’s population resides. The epidemiological component of YIP was a Baseline Cross-Sectional Survey (BCS), conducted between October 2003 and April 2004, in order to be able to evaluate the impact of Yeshica. The survey showed shocking results: 2 percent of the 13-year-old girls and 20 percent of the 19-year-old girls were already infected with HIV (Vandenhoudt 2004b). Among those aged 13–34, an HIV prevalence of 15.4 percent (20.5 percent among females and 10.2 percent among males) was
measured—about twice the national rate. HIV prevalence among females aged 15–19 years was 12 times higher than among their male counterparts. The investigators of the Baseline Cross-sectional Survey (BCS) speculated that one cause of this large gender disparity might be that young women have sex with older, more sexually experienced men, who are more likely to be infected with HIV (Amornkul et al. 2009). In the baseline study, however, young women reported that most of their sexual experiences were with peers. Thus having a first sexual partner much older in age was not significantly correlated with HIV infection (Vandenhoudt 2004b); instead, it was thought that biological factors and the high HSV-2 infection rate might contribute to the high rate of HIV among women in Nyanza Province.

3. AIDS control strategies in Africa and Kenya

To combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a number of interventions were initiated. The first generation of interventions that appeared during the 1980s aimed to induce behavioural change by educating target populations about the risk of HIV infection (see also Parker, Barbosa, and Aggleton 2000; Barnett and Whiteside 2002; Altman 1999). Such approaches—focusing on individuals’ rational behaviour—failed to account for the more powerful forces that constrain social life and influence sexual behaviour patterns.

Within these initiatives, there are two parallel and competing approaches. The first, a ‘morality-based’ approach, was inspired by PEPFAR, started by US President George W. Bush, which has the promotion of Christianity as a side agenda. In 2003, PEPFAR launched the ‘ABC’ (Abstain, Be faithful and use Condoms) campaign, a multibillion-dollar initiative to address HIV/AIDS around the world. The ABC campaign adopted the Ugandan concept of ‘zero grazing’, translated as either abstaining or being faithful to one monogamous partner (Ocholla-Ayayo 1997: 120). This concept was, notably, in line with the politics of the neoconservative, religious groups that were important constituents of Bush’s presidency. In Uganda, however, ‘zero grazing’ does not refer to abstinence (zero sex), but invokes instead the image of the ‘zero’ that results from tying a cow to a peg while it grazes—the cow grazes as far as its tether will allow, forming a circle of grazed grass. The analogy of zero grazing implies that you can ‘eat’ or have sex as much as you like, as long as you keep it local and close to home (Thornton 2008: 19–20). The decision to adopt the ABC approach was, according to the US administration (US Department of State 2006: 11), based on Uganda’s success in reducing the prevalence of AIDS, but there is no conclusive evidence showing that
abstinence or fidelity were major factors in the decline of HIV in Uganda since 1992.\textsuperscript{11} We will probably never know for certain what contributed most to the decline since the literature is contradictory (see also Green et al. 2006; Thornton 2008: 85–91).

The politically biased interpretation of the Ugandan experience has from the early 2000s been used as a template for US-funded HIV-prevention programs in all fifteen countries receiving PEPFAR funding, including Kenya. PEPFAR funding was also provided to faith-based organizations. Given this funding source, the main focus of the AIDS control strategies has been on ‘abstinence’ and ‘faithfulness’ and a ‘responsible use of condoms’. The distribution of condoms has been restricted to ‘high risk groups’, such as sex workers and their clients, sexually active ‘discordant’ couples (in which one partner is known to have HIV), and drug abusers (see US Department of State 2006). In this way, PEPFAR imposed a policy regime that ignored the reality of sexual activity before or outside of marriage among millions of young people (Murphy 2006).

The ABC campaign, which has often been synonymous with abstinence-only sex education programs for youth, failed to acknowledge and respond to the actual social circumstances driving sex. One after another, research projects began to demonstrate that people, even with full knowledge of the dangers of the epidemic, continued to have unprotected sex (Campbell 2003: 7). This gave rise to the second approach: ‘community-based’ interventions to address the more powerful forces that constrain social life and influence sexual behaviour patterns instead of only focusing on individuals’ rational behaviour. This approach concluded that morality-based interventions—based on the idea that the spread of HIV was associated with ‘individually based risk factors’, such as certain sexual practices among particular ‘risk groups’—were ineffective (see Link and Phelan 1995). This important shift in the AIDS discourse emphasized contextualizing risk factors in order to uncover the processes that put people at risk (see Parker 2001; Schoepf 2001).

Community-based interventions were designed as a response to this more contextual view of HIV/AIDS. The aim was to work closely with communities so that prevention messages would come from peers and locally respected individuals instead of from the top down and from outside, as before; ‘participation’ became a key concept. However, in her book, ‘Letting them die’: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programmes Fail, Campbell (2003) convincingly argues that “participation is by no means a ‘magic bullet’ ” or the \textit{sine qua non} for ‘success’, as too often is assumed by health workers. According to Campbell (2003), lack of commitment by key stakeholders or poor capacity in areas like
organizational development and project management might also limit the participation level of a project.

While community-based interventions were an important step forward in moving away from conceptualizing individuals as isolated, rationally calculating actors, broader economic and political considerations were still not incorporated into their design. HIV activists and a number of social scientists (Farmer 1999; Campbell 2003 among others) argued that only structural interventions such as the implementation of vocational trainings and microfinance could combat these broader factors, especially poverty and gender inequality. Such interventions attempt to create the conditions in which people can adopt safer behaviours. Making microloans available to poor women, it was thought, might help women to become economically independent and to reduce their need to engage in transactional sex. One evaluation of the ‘Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity’ (IMAGE) in South Africa found a decrease in partner violence but no direct impact on sexual behaviour (Hargreaves et al. 2010; see also Kim et al. 2007). Giving loans to women however, could also have adverse effects, for example, causing conflicts within households where women have no control over the use of the loan. Repaying a loan could be an additional burden for poor women (Kabeera 2001). Apart from addressing women’s empowerment in HIV-prevention programs, researchers emphasized that men’s vulnerability also required attention. Higgins et al. (2010: 443) conclude: “HIV programs and policies should include men as well as women in structural interventions, such as job training, debt relief, income generation, and trade and migration policies, while also attending to gender-based power in relationships”.

4. Young people and HIV/AIDS research: A generation ‘in need of change’?

Part of effective treatment and care is starting with a grounded understanding of the population to be treated. In this section, I describe how youth have been targeted, and why such programs have failed to recognize young people as ‘tactical agents’. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 20), “one global feature of the contemporary world is a sense of crisis surrounding the predicament of juveniles”, and this is certainly true in much public health research (see, for example, Kebede et al. 2005). In public health literature—but also elsewhere, for instance in daily newspapers—youth are often viewed as troublesome and constructed as a ‘problem’ (Amit and Dyck 2012; De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Connell 2000). Much of the writing on youth depends upon “stylized
and stereotypical anecdotal sources of information”, which are not obtained through detailed empirical and ethnographic investigations that would give us a rather more varied and complicated picture of the daily life of young people (Amit and Dyck 2012: 5).12 Many, if not most, HIV-prevention programs focus on young people because they are considered to be the most vulnerable age group due to their limited access to education, employment, health care, and basic nutrition (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2010). They are believed to engage in ‘risky sex’ and therefore are often targeted as a generation ‘in need of change’ in particular ‘behavioural change’. This lens creates difficulties for successfully fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS, because it presents a narrow vision of youth instead of highlighting youth’s potential power and ability to change.

Africa might be considered the world’s youngest continent, as young people are the majority of the population: in 2010, more than 70 percent of the population was under the age of 30, and slightly more than 20 percent was between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNYouth 2010). Young people are severely affected by HIV: about 40 percent of new infections are among 15–24 year-olds (UNFPA 2010). In addition to seeing them as at risk, UNFPA (2010) acknowledged in 2010 that young people are “the greatest hope for turning the tide” against the spread of AIDS because—if not yet infected—they can still change their behaviour and stop the spread of the disease. Moreover, they are generally more receptive to changing their behaviours than are adults (see also World Bank 2006). However, young people are often placed at the margins of the public sphere, and their voices, views, and visions are rarely consulted (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 1).

4.1. Historical and social constructions of the concept of ‘youth’: From ‘vandals’ to ‘intergenerational’ change agents

In order to understand the contemporary use of the concept of ‘youth’, it is necessary to first understand that the concept of ‘youth’ is a historically situated and socially constructed concept, including related beliefs about how youth should behave. In the Western context, the rise of industrial capitalism is related to the emergence of the category of ‘youth’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 23). The creation of mandatory primary schooling separated very young people from the workplace and from adults; earlier, children worked on farms and in family enterprises, alongside adults. Children were expected to enter the world of education. However, in manufacturing towns, ‘delinquent’ crowds of the rising working class gathered in the urban slums as they were often left on their own to survive. State education systems did not eradicate the
delinquency of youngsters by excluding them from the productive sector of national economies, but rather reproduced it by different means (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 23). In the early 1900s, as industrial capitalism developed, youth personified “the failure of moral reproduction” and were an “affront to bourgeois family values” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 24), as they were underclass, delinquent, unruly, and violent. The Comaroffs (2005: 24) note that sociologists in the 1920s depicted ‘youth’ as “a disruptive masculine force in the city”. Such writings about youth at the same time conceptualized youth as “incomplete, cultural actors” and believed that the transition to adulthood was shaped by biological factors, following the psychological patterns of human development (Cole 2007: 77).

In the twentieth century, the rise of neoliberal capitalism gave rise to a global ‘youth culture’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 24), distinguishable from ‘the culture of parents’ (Cole and Durham 2007b: 17). Scholars focused on youth as a distinct cultural entity, analysing them as independent, social actors who were actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of social and cultural forms on a local and global level (Cole 2007: 77). By studying youth as a subculture with their own worldviews, styles, behaviours, and interests, these scholars moved away from approaching youth as a stage in development (Christiansen et al. 2006: 15–16). With the creation of a Western ‘youth culture’, the category of ‘youth’ came to be associated with consumption. A market was created to meet young people’s desires for clothes, music, and magazines, inspired by media-driven ideologies and the production of identity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 24–25; see also Cole and Durham 2007b). The structural, economic transformation from production to consumption altered the essence of labour and social reproduction. Or as the Comaroffs (2005: 28) nicely describe: “Neoliberal capitalism has become invested with an almost magical, salvific capacity to yield wealth without work, money without manufacture”. Youngsters, probably because of their relative marginal position in the productive sector, became ‘consumer-citizens’ (Cook, cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 25) and created their own spaces of production and recreation. In this way, young people gained semi-autonomy as a social category (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 21–22). Young female bodies became increasingly visible, used everywhere “as part of the market eroticizing of consumer goods” (Cole 2007: 79).

Importantly, this concept of ‘young people’ varies within societies and across cultures over time (De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006). Several authors have argued that—in contrast to the Western context—the social category of ‘youth’ or ‘adolescent’ as completely distinct from adulthood did not exist in the African
The belief that young people are in a transitional stage and must evolve through various phases of development before they reach adulthood is a Western, middle-class concept (De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006). In Western societies, young people are perceived as “people in the process”, still becoming adults (Honwana 2005). In many places in Africa, in contrast, very few children enjoy the luxury of being dependent on their parents until they have finished their studies and found a job to sustain themselves. Being a child has little to do with age and dependency but is rather linked to social roles and responsibilities (Honwana 2005). Children might have adult responsibilities such as running the household because they have lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS; they might drop out of school and begin working at an early age. The social divide between childhood and adulthood is therefore often blurred and should not be regarded as static and stable. The connotations and expressions of the generational category of ‘youth’ develop in relation to specific social processes and historical influences (Mannheim 1952, cited in Christiansen et al. 2006: 10).

During the last two decades, various disciplines have criticized the socialization theory that views youth as a universal stage of development. Thorne stresses that “more is to be gained by addressing young people not solely as a future generation of adults but as fully engaged social actors” who are not in “preparation for life; they are life itself” (cited in Amit and Dyck 2012: 5). The ‘life-stage perspective’ as the focus on ‘youth culture’ does not capture the complexity of being a youth; it underestimates “the agentive capacity [of youngsters] to change or move within or between generational categories” (Christiansen et al. 2006: 16). In contrast, the subcultural approach to youth overestimates youth’s power to construct their own worlds, separated from the context in which they live and position themselves (Christiansen et al. 2006: 15–16). Whether youth are constituted as social actors or as dependent, marginal beings definitely depends on cultural and historical factors but also on the opportunities and daily life chances that are shaped by the social environments in which young people are living. Only by illuminating the dialectical relationship between agency and structure, might we be able to fully realize the complexity of young people’s position in society (Christiansen et al. 2006).

At the same time, speaking of youths categorically creates misunderstandings (Amit and Dyck 2012). While different scholars (for example, Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Nilan and Feixa 2006) have focused attention on
youth as a particular age group as a way to examine the social processes associated with modernity and globalization, a recent study of Cole and Durham (2007a) argues that studies of age should question the very social categories of age, such as ‘children’, ‘youth’, or ‘the elderly’. Instead, they claim that ‘age’ itself should be taken as an analytic—approached as a relational concept—which implies that youngsters’ role in social change cannot be examined “without taking account of the complex generational relations within which they are embedded” (Cole 2004, cited in Cole and Durham 2007b: 18). One can only be a youngster in relation to parents and to grandparents. Youngsters are individuals who are operating within a certain social environment and are members of families. They cannot be viewed outside of their given context (Amit and Dyck 2012: 5). It is only within these intergenerational relations that changes take shape, as such relations are important for passing on and transforming traditions (Cole and Durham 2007b: 2–3). Karl Mannheim’s concept of ‘fresh contact’ (cited in Cole and Durham 2007b: 18), articulates how ‘re-generations’ are manifested: “fresh contact takes place as young people, reaching adulthood, “come into contact anew” with their accumulated sociocultural heritage”. According to Mannheim, with each “fresh contact”, there is always a “loss of cultural material” as each new generation modifies some aspects of the past cultural heritage and transforms or keeps others in new circumstances (cited in Cole 2007: 78). This generational transformation has to be viewed as a dialectical process of change, as intergenerational relations are not only shaped by historical, political, and economic processes, but also shape the transformation of these processes (cited in Cole 2007: 78). Cole (2007: 78–79) states that youngsters are in a unique position to take advantage of new social and economic conditions since they are less embedded than adults in older networks of patronage and exchange. Thus, in order to analyse youngsters’ role in social change, it is important to take young people’s participation in processes of social regeneration into account.


Since 2007, HIV/AIDS research has paid special attention to ‘out-of-school youth’ (Stroeken et al. 2012) because they are regarded as more likely to be sexually active at an earlier age than those that are enrolled in school (World Bank 2006). The term ‘out-of-school youth’ refers to primary-school-aged children who have left school (Burk 2006). This distinction between in-school and out-of-school youth is considered important because some studies have shown that there is a correlation between educational attainment and less ‘risky sexual behaviour’ (see, for instance, Burk 2006: 13).
Hargreaves et al. 2008; Stroeken et al. 2012). While out-of-school youth are believed to engage in ‘risky sexual behaviour’, the ones who are still in school are assumed to benefit from health literacy and from a ‘safer’, near-age sexual network in school. In their literature review, Stroeken et al. (2012) argue that the school environment where students associate with other students decreases ‘risky sexual behaviour’, since there are fewer economic exchanges between students to lure them into so-called transactional relationships (see Chapter 6). Moreover, there seems to be a difference between rural and urban out-of-school youth (aged 13–18) concerning knowledge of HIV/AIDS among young men; according to Bastien, “boys in urban areas with higher education are believed to be more knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS than their rural, less educated counterparts” (cited in Stroeken et al. 2012). Stroeken et al. (2012: 7) further emphasize that “the lure of pastoralist and agricultural lifestyles should not be underestimated, nor their incompatibility with school curricula and attendance”. However, several research projects have highlighted the limited impact of school-based AIDS education (for instance, Campbell 2003; Kinsman et al. 2001) and demonstrated that knowledge about HIV/AIDS does not necessarily lead to different sexual behaviour (see for instance Akwara et al. 2003). Noting a correlation between educational attainment and sexual behaviour does not mean that one is causing the other. Indeed there are many other factors than school attendance that explain sexual behaviour. Stroeken et al. (2011) seem to underestimate the potential of peer pressure in schools to engage in ‘risky sex’. Masatu et al., demonstrate an “unexpected higher risky sexual behaviour in rural Tanzanian schools” (cited in Stroeken et al. 2012: 8).

Although the Kibaki administration made primary education free of charge in 2003, many parents in Winam still find it hard to pay for the required books and uniforms, and their children often stop attending school. They are considered victims of a vicious cycle, in which family poverty forces them to drop out of school, leading to further poverty. Additionally, girls and young women often drop out because of pregnancy. For these reasons, out-of-school youth are often considered to be particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and are targeted as a priority population for HIV/AIDS interventions. Since the sexual behaviour of ‘out-of-school youth’ has been associated with ‘risky sex’, public health workers have come up with an extensive list of (negative) characteristics to describe young people’s ‘risky sexual behaviour’, including “early sexual debut, high levels of partner concurrency, transactional sex, age-mixing, low STI/HIV risk perception, a high life-time number of partners, and inconsistent condom use” (Stroeken et al. 2012: 1). Being out-of-school is never a choice, and such a description of ‘out-of-
school youth’ adds to the stigma already attached to this group of young people. By presenting such a negative picture of those who have dropped out of school, it is not a surprise that public health workers view out-of-school youth as an extraordinary group, one that is difficult to deal with.

There are a number of barriers that local staff of NGOs or public health researchers experience when they target ‘out-of-school youth’, and they find it extremely difficult to reach this group of youngsters using conventional sexual and reproductive health messages. This is mainly due to the fact that they cannot be identified and followed through the easy recruiting method of contacting schools. Surveys are usually conducted in urban settings among easily accessed groups of young people, such as secondary school or university students (UNAIDS 1999a; UNFPA 2010; Stroeken et al. 2012). Public health workers often describe ‘out-of-school youth’ as being marginal and constantly on the move. They are hard to communicate with since they usually speak a slang version of local languages, such as Dholuo, mixed with some English and Kiswahili words. They are often not reliable participants, as they do not turn up on a regular basis whenever there are interviews or samples to be taken. As a consequence, marginalized youth all too often do not have a voice. The experiences of school-leavers and people living in rural areas are often not captured, or even sought out, since they are hard to reach (UNAIDS 1999a). AIDS ethnographies about urban school leavers, working in the streets of Dar es Salaam (Moyer 2003)14 and Dessie (Tadele 2005) have helped illuminate the situation of those youngsters, however, as this dissertation demonstrates, livelihood options for rural youngsters are different than those of urban youngsters.

4.3. Conceptualizing ‘young people’ and ‘out-of-school-youth’

Despite the fact that definitions of ‘young people’ cannot simply be based on one’s physical age, organizations typically use age to define their target populations; complicating matters, there is a lack of standardization in defining ‘youth’ for HIV/AIDS in interventions and research (Stroeken et al. 2012: 5). The Youth Fund, an initiative of the Kenyan Government that provides microloans to youth groups (introduced in late 2006), defines youth as young people aged 18 to 38. The WHO usually defines young people as those between 10 and 24 years old (WHO 1999). Yeshica, the HIV-prevention project in Winam, adjusted their definition a little further, targeting youths between 9 and 22 years old. Depending on the intervention, the minimum and maximum age limit for Yeshica programs varied. For example, the ‘livelihood intervention' targeted ‘out-of-
school youth’ between 16 and 22 years old, and the ‘Families Matter Program’ targeted youth between 9 and 12 years old. Yeshica’s targets did not prevent young people from creatively defining themselves as youth, participating well past the age of 22, and before the age of 16 for the ‘livelihood intervention’.15

Apart from the difficulty of defining young people based on physical age, it is hard to make a boundary between ‘out-of-school youth’ and school-goers or students. Schooling is not a linear and clearly demarcated process, and these are not mutually exclusive and fixed categories. Students can at any time become out-of-school youths, and out-of-school youth can resume, months or even years later, attending school. Youths drop out of and resume attending school in accordance with their financial status (and that of their parents), or pregnancy. In some families, both father and son are students. Moreover, young people can simultaneously occupy more than one position: a student might, at the same time, be an artist, servant, or fisherman (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 3).

In Winam, as in other places in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa, schools can hardly be called ‘protective’, given that school provides students access to a near-age sexual network. Attending school in the context of limited financial resources means that young people are vulnerable to peer pressures and pressures from adults. Many students for instance engage with bus conductors because they do not have bus fare or are in need of cash to pay their school fee. In Winam, it was also common to hear that teachers, being in a powerful position, had sexual relations with female students. Furthermore, students often do not go to school near their home village, but rent a room near the school, far from parental control. In these cases, one may actually argue the opposite, following Masatu (cited in Stroeken et al. 2012): attending school actually increases risk.

In sum, the differentiation between ‘out-of school youth’ and ‘in-school youth’ made by public health research is problematic. In this book, I eschew the use of ‘out-of-school youth’. Young people do not primarily self-identify as ‘out-of-school youth’. They identify themselves instead with what they are doing to earn a living or with the vocational training they are taking at the moment. In this way, they can be described as ‘tactical agents’.

4.4. Young people as ‘tactical agents’
Are youngsters simply passive victims of the societal crisis created by the HIV/AIDS epidemic? De Boeck and Honwana (2005: 2) argue that ‘youngsters are both makers and
breakers of society, while they are simultaneously being made and broke by that society”, and that, despite their marginalization from education, health care, and salaried jobs, many young people have demonstrated tremendous creativity in making a living for themselves (see also Christiansen et al. 2006). It is this creativity and power of youth who are living in a precarious context of persistent poverty that is often ignored in public health research.

The young people of this dissertation do not perceive nor describe themselves as ‘victims of structural violence’ (Farmer 1999). The ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985)—the ways people assert power and agency to act within limiting circumstances—are sometimes much stronger than we might think. While the young people of Winam are a heterogeneous group, they can be analysed as ‘tactical agents’. ‘Agency’ is defined here as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own decisions, whereas ‘structure’ might enable or limit an actor's agency. Humans act under the pressure of society, which limits their freedom of choice and determines the extent of their agency. However, the core of Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984) was to conceptualize the active interplay between human action and structural constraints, each one shaping the other. While the social structure determines and limits the choices and opportunities of the young people in Winam, the youngsters are at the same time ‘reflexive agents’ who are able to actively produce and reproduce the social world. It is within this dialectical relationship between agency and structure that social relations are constantly being redefined (Giddens 1984).

In their book Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood, Christiansen et al. (2006) try to balance their analysis between how young people are positioned in society and how they seek to position themselves in society. In the same volume, Vigh (2006) who focuses on terrains of war in Guinea-Bissau, illuminates how young soldiers navigate their path by trying to escape social death—characterized by the “absence of the possibility of a worthy life” (Hage 2003: 132, cited in Vigh 2006: 45)—in the hope of maximizing their future possibilities in a time of warfare. While the concept of ‘navigation’ suggests an actor-oriented approach, Vigh (2006) uses the term ‘social navigation’ to capture the relationship between objective structures and subjective agency. The term shows the way “[agents] move within moving social environments” (Vigh 2006: 54).

In De Certeau’s (1984) work on ‘everyday practices’, he opts for a distinction between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’. Strategies are characterized by defined goals and coherent, long-term plans, in which certain situations are approached as opportunities.
A strategy can be abstracted from an environment whereas, in contrast, a tactic is a response to existing conditions in an environment. A tactic as De Certeau (1984: xix) states “depends on time”. Since it is reactive in character, it risks losing in the next moment what was just won. Tactics may allow people to seize opportunities when they suddenly arise, but they do not structurally generate opportunities. A tactic could thus be described as a kind of temporally dependent, situational intelligence embedded in everyday struggles, whereas strategy has a deep running connection to power often concealed under objective calculations (De Certeau 1984). Tactics cannot be observed through statistical analysis as such research breaks down these “bricolages (the artisan-like inventiveness) into units [...] that compose them but to which they cannot be reduced”, leading to homogeneous findings (De Certeau 1984: xviii).

In her study in Mozambique, Honwana (1999, 2005) shows how child soldiers acted as ‘tactical agents’, trying to cope with the immediate conditions of their lives in ways that maximized the circumstances created by the military and the violent environment. The youngsters of Winam, like those child soldiers whose possibilities for action are structured by a position of weakness, can similarly be seen as ‘tactical agents’. Expanding social capital by utilizing sexual relations is a form of tactical agency. Winam youth are not in a position of power and they act within certain constraints; “they may not be fully conscious of the ultimate goals of their actions [since] their actions are likely to have both beneficial and deleterious long-term consequences” (Honwana 2005: 32). But youngsters do “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities” (De Certeau 1984: xix), and enjoy the immediate rewards of their actions (Honwana 2005: 32). One such youth, Ochien’g, for example, was an orphan at early age. Due to a lack of financial means, he dropped out of primary school (in Class 3, when he was about 8 years old) and when he was about 14 years old, he started to earn a living as a fisherman. When Yeshica was established in 2003, he became an active member; when the opportunity arose, he took advantage of the chance to serve as the centre’s security officer for a month. This opportunity resulted in long-term consequences, as he, thereafter, no longer wanted to work as a fisherman since he assumed that he had already moved upward, and found it difficult to resume a lower status position. Although he was a married person and thus obligated to take care of his young wife and baby, he often was unable to do so (see also Chapter 7). As Honwana (2005: 51) highlights, “young people navigate a diversity of spaces and states of being: they are concurrently children and adults, victims and perpetrators, and more”.

30
While I refer in this dissertation to young people as ‘tactical agents’, I also point out the concept’s limitations in the following chapters. The notion of ‘tactical agency’ tries to capture the interaction between agency and oppressive structures by demonstrating ordinary people’s creativity in which they ingeniously manage to manoeuvre within certain situations to their own benefit given the limited opportunities. The concept does not, however, address the restrictions for agency under times of ‘enduring’ uncertainty (De Bruijn and Both 2011) or, said differently, where “uncertainty has become the norm and is no longer seen as deviant” (Vigh 2008, cited in De Bruijn and Both 2011: 1). Young, ordinary people certainly have a ‘talent for life’ (Scheper-Hughes 2008) but in Winam, the opportunities for agency are very limited, even when they try to deal with it in a tactical and pragmatic way. On a daily basis, the youngsters of Winam have to deal with ‘choiceless choices’ (Scheper-Hughes 2008), as I explain and reflect upon during the course of this dissertation.

4.5. The research population

My research population consisted of youngsters of Winam between 16 and 25 years of age, who were not enrolled in school at the moment I came into contact with them. As requested by the Belgian Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), I focussed on youngsters who were not able to finish primary or secondary school, those who in most of the public health literature are defined as the most ‘marginal’ youngsters and the ‘hard-to-reach youngsters’. In selecting the youngsters, I included people who participated in Yeshica and those who did not. I had no intention of forming a ‘control group’—as experimental designs do—in order to compare participants with non-participants. My goal was simply to reach a wide variety of youngsters who were working to secure their livelihood; as Yeshica was one such avenue, I wanted to grasp young people’s motivations for participating or not participating in the project.

Using the ‘snowball method’—in which one contact leads to another—I selected a number of youngsters between 16 and 25 years old with the broadest possible background and coming from different villages within Winam. My aim was to maximize diversity rather than construct a sample of ‘representative’ youths. My work should be seen as a step prior to selecting for representativeness, because I wanted to gain an understanding of all the variations of meanings and representations that existed in this heterogeneous group of young people.

My research assistant Petronella and I approached young people and engaged in informal conversation with them at places where they usually hang out, for instance
at fishing beaches, marketplaces, sport fields, and churches and also at Yeshica. Of course, youngsters were chosen on the basis of their willingness to share with me their life stories and aspirations. Once they had agreed to be part of my research group, we followed them throughout the fieldwork period, from March 2005 through October 2006 (total of 20 months).

Only a few members of my research group were already ‘married’ when I first met them. However, I had decided that I would not select young people on the basis of their marital status as this is unstable and ambiguous: a young woman might be considered ‘married’ if she has spent only one night at her boyfriend’s place. Marital status thus changes frequently and is therefore not an important criterion for selecting youngsters. This means that my research group included unmarried and married young people as well as those whose status was ambiguous, for instance those who recently ‘married’ while it was not yet clear if they were in a stable relationship.

The youth who were participants in Yeshica and who became part of my research group were mainly active in Yeshica’s ‘livelihood intervention’ as this intervention was targeting ‘out-of-school youth’ (i.e., which for Yeshica staff implied youngsters who had dropped out of primary and secondary school) between 16 and 22 years old. The two other interventions of Yeshica, the ‘Life Skills Program (LSP)’ and the ‘Families Matter! Program (FMP)’, targeted youngsters who were still attending school and who were younger than those in my research group. Although I tried to reach a wide variety of youngsters in my research group, many of the youth that were participating in Yeshica’s ‘livelihood intervention’ were not dropouts but secondary school graduates, who were waiting to get admitted to college or university (see Chapter 7). Many were also much older than 22—some were even more than 30 years old—and a few were younger than 16. Although Yeshica’s intervention mainly served secondary school graduates, I was able to reach a variety of youngsters, including primary and secondary school dropouts.

In addition to the youngsters we followed closely, my research assistant Petronella and I had many other informal conversations and in-depth interviews with youngsters’ parents, grandparents, and other family members, as the intergenerational relations within which youth are embedded are an important aspect of youths’ experience. Whenever Petronella and I visited a youngster at their rural homestead, we usually first had an informal conversation with their father, mother, their neighbour or whomever we encountered. It was a common and polite way of welcoming us (see also Chapter 2). We also had numerous formal and informal conversations with Yeshica
staff, CDC staff, other health workers, traditional herbalists and staff members of public and private institutions, in order to glean insights from all possible stakeholders.

In the end, the research group consisted of 44 youngsters with whom Petronella and I met on a regular basis. In addition, there were many other youngsters with whom we encountered once in awhile, such as during the weekly microloan program meetings at Yeshica, but whom we did not follow closely. Of the 44 youngsters we followed closely, 23 were young men and 21 were young women; 20 were participating in Yeshica, including 10 young men and 10 young women. The remaining youngsters (13 young men and 11 young women) we worked with had never participated in Yeshica and most did not know that Yeshica even existed. By the end of my fieldwork, all 20 of the youngsters who originally constituted my group of ‘Yeshica participants’ had left Yeshica because they had found other, better means to improve their livelihood.

A number of the youngsters whom I followed closely moved in and out of Winam during the course of my fieldwork, which helped me realise just how mobile the young people of Winam are. Although Yeshica staff had hoped to stop young people’s migration from the village to the larger towns by giving them some viable livelihood options, they were ultimately unable to do so. As an anthropologist, I was able to follow the youngsters to their new places and understand the opportunities and challenges they were facing there, as well as what they had left behind. Moving away from Winam is thus an integral part of the story and not just ‘attrition’, as categorised in surveys. To understand their mobility better, I invited some of the youngsters who were already familiar with town life to travel with me to Kisumu, where they brought me to places they knew and introduced me to their relatives and friends. Spending time together, we became more familiar with each other, and I was able to get a detailed understanding of their livelihood networks, and the kind of places they frequented in town. Petronella and I tried to visit them all over Bondo and Siaya Districts, where they went to stay with relatives or where young women relocated after getting married. At times we had to pursue them even further, all the way to the suburbs of Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa. Mobile phones were an essential technology in maintaining our connection when youngsters moved to a new place, as they would “flash me” (let my phone ring once), and I could then call them back. When I did so, they would tell me: “I am in Nairobi”, “I am at my sister’s home in Ahero”, “I am at my boyfriend’s place in Obambo, near Kisumu” or “I am at my uncle’s in Mombasa”. Together with Petronella, I strove to follow them all. Only a small number (about 3 young women and 2 young men) of the 44 youngsters that I followed closely moved very far away (to Nairobi or Mombasa or even
to Uganda) and remained there. The majority remained within Nyanza Province. Others (about 12 young women and 8 young men) lived far away from their home only temporarily (longer than a month), just for a visit or for temporary work.

Throughout the dissertation, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the youngsters I worked with, as well as for the members of the Yeshica team. My research assistant is also identified through a pseudonym, not because her identity needs protection but because using her real name would make it easy for many people to identify the research setting and my respondents. For people who could be easily identified because of their position, I used their real names, and I obtained their permission to do so throughout the dissertation.

5. Outline of the chapters

One of the questions the youngsters asked themselves was how to live a good life, in the immediate framework of today and tomorrow. ‘Living a good life’ for them simply meant living in a cement house with electricity, close to a marketplace, and preferably in the city; and being able to buy good food (meat, chicken, and rice) and luxury items (such as nice clothes, lotion, soap, and mobile phones) without having to do agricultural work, which is perceived to be “hard work”. To some extent, these might be viewed as banal, but for these young people, they were the basics for survival, and not necessarily within reach. This dissertation focuses on their quest for security, as pursued, in part, through their sexual relationships. ‘Living a good life’ thus is bound up in sex and in risk, in livelihood and in disease.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 2 to 3) provides the larger context of the research while Part II (Chapters 4 to 7) focuses on the young people in particular. Chapter 2 starts off with the methodological concerns of my research. Based on an activist approach, I explain how anthropological work with its methodological rigour can contribute to understanding the causes and patterns of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the second half of the chapter, I share the challenges I encountered as the only anthropologist working in a medical team. I explain the methodologies I used to carry out the research and end the chapter with some recommendations for future interdisciplinary work between anthropologists and epidemiologists.

Chapter 3 presents a concise history of Nyanza Province in general, and Winam in particular. By explaining the political economy of Winam, the chapter highlights how
the rapid spread of HIV is related to ‘structural violence’. I show that this kind of structural violence’ is stressed in situations of prolonged crisis and limits the capacity of agents to deal with the deterioration of the social fabric. The chapter further examines why the area was subject to a huge HIV epidemic and has become the focal point for a gamut of research studies and interventions, dominated by a powerful American organisation, the CDC. I explain how these biomedical research studies have influenced the way in which the people of Winam perceive medical health care in general and why they participate in such studies despite their fear generated by the old stories of ‘bloodsucking’, and their associated distrust in medical research. This background on the CDC’s medical research projects not only sheds light on the lack of basic health care in the area but also serves as context for the creation of Yeshica, a HIV/AIDS prevention project in Winam, discussed in Chapter 7.

Part II delves into the life world of the young people with whom I worked in Winam. Chapter 4 explores the different livelihood opportunities of young people in Winam and elaborates on their aspirations towards urban mobility. While highlighting the importance of social and sexual networks in young people’s livelihood tactics, I also point to the key limitations of the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’. Chapter 5 explains how people deal with disease and risk. I elaborate how JoWinam interpret AIDS and discuss their modes of managing uncertainty. I explain the importance of “playing sex” for young people and explores their tactics for avoiding ‘health risks’. The ambiguity of sexual relations and gendered power dynamics, which I begin to explore in Chapter 5, are further analysed in Chapter 6. This chapter, written from an intergenerational perspective, critiques the focus on the transactional aspect of sexual liaisons, showing that love also has an important role to play, going beyond stereotypes of male domination and female subordination. Chapter 7 explains the tension between policy and practice. It explains young people’s motivations for and expectations of participating in Yeshica’s interventions, and shows that opportunities to meet other youth and salaried staff were an attraction—much more so than the HIV-prevention messages themselves. I elaborate how the project resulted in unintended consequences because of the different interpretations and expectations between the project management, the staff and the youngsters. I further examine how different actors produce ‘failure’ and ‘success’: while the youngsters at the end perceived the project as a ‘failure’, the project management described it as a ‘success story’ by highlighting only one intervention of the project.
Finally, in the concluding chapter, I reflect on what my contribution is to the fight against HIV. Although AIDS is no longer a death sentence at the time of this writing, owing to the availability of ARVs (mostly) for free, my dissertation does not have a happy ending. I conclude that in a context of enduring uncertainty, agents have only limited room to manoeuvre because social structures inhibit them and are hard to modify. Despite their inability to affect change, youngsters are inventive and creative in their attempts to make the best of their situation. They act pragmatically to deal with HIV risks, gender inequality, mobility, and HIV/AIDS prevention projects, which they encounter along their pathways. I explain that although their choices might be considered ‘pragmatic’, they are at the same time also ‘choiceless’: whatever they chose to do, chances are that in the end they will be in the same situation as before.

1 The relaxing, quiet atmosphere changed when nyatiti was replaced by “music from town”. According to JoWinam (the people of Winam), in the 1970s, a gramophone was used, and around the 1980s, the cassette was introduced. Later, from the mid-1990s onwards, big sound systems or bands were hired (see Blommaert 2014, forthcoming).

2 Combining local music and other types of Western ‘modern’ music during the disco matanga is a nice example of how young people “create, re-invent and domesticate global trends into local forms” (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 1).

3 The division of provinces was abolished in Kenya in 2010 when the Kenyan government enacted a new Constitution with devolved structures, creating 47 counties instead of 9 provinces. However, since I conducted my research in 2005–2006, I use the language of ‘provinces’.

4 I put ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in quotes because both terms are very relative in their use. Mosse (2003: 3) states that “failure as much as success can reconfirm theory and its models”, because it depends on what grounds a project is deemed a ‘success’ or a ‘failure’. Or as Apthorpe (cited in Mosse 2003:3) argues: “even if projects fail as practice they may nonetheless succeed as code or policy argument in the wider arena”.

5 A multidisciplinary team is not the same as an interdisciplinary team. In a multidisciplinary team, different disciplines work in a coordinated way, but each discipline retains its own methodology and assumptions: there may be a lack of exchange between the different disciplines. An interdisciplinary team creates something new by crossing the boundaries of different disciplines, and drawing on all of them in an integrated way. While ITM wanted to apply a more interdisciplinary approach, my experience was that we worked as a multidisciplinary team.

6 The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines epidemiology as follows: “Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events (including disease), and the application of this study to the control of diseases and other health problems” (http://www.who.int/topics/epidemiology/en/, accessed July 2013).

7 I want to clearly distinguish between the larger, PEPFAR-funded Youth Intervention Program (YIP) and the Youth HIV Prevention Project of Yeshica, part of which was funded by the Belgian
government. YIP had two major components: Yeshica was the community-based component, and the Baseline Cross-Sectional Survey (BCS) was the epidemiological component. In Chapter 7, I elaborate further on this distinction.

8 I put 'risky sex', and also 'risky sexual behaviour' in quotes because it is a common term in the public health field, but it is a term that I find faulty because it has a very negative connotation and is not neutral in its use.

9 The 2007 Kenyan AIDS Indicator Survey, funded by PEPFAR and executed through the CDC and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is recognised as the most comprehensive national surveillance effort ever implemented by the Kenyan government.

10 Luke (2005a) explains in her study on Kisumu that the magnitude of the 'sugar daddies' phenomenon' is not as significant as generally assumed (see also Chapter 6).

11 The promotion of condom use may not have played a major role in reducing HIV in Uganda since condoms were not yet available in large numbers before 1992 (Thornton 2008: 87–91). Nevertheless, Ugandan's condom-promotion program grew significantly between 1992 and 2002, even in the face of opposition from various religious groups (Kinsman 2008: 95–100).

12 Some recent examples of ethnographic studies on youth are Setel (1999a), Honwana and De Boeck (2005), Christiansen et al. (2006), and Cole and Durham (2007a).

13 In Kenya, there is a so-called 8-4-4 education system: primary school begins with Class 1 (from five years of age onwards) and continues through Class 8 (from 13 years onwards); secondary school begins with Form 1 (from 14 years onwards) through Form 4 (from 18 years onwards). Attending university adds another four years beyond secondary school.

14 Moyer (2003) does not describe the urban Tanzanian youngsters with whom she works as 'out-of-school youth' but rather associates them with the particular kijiwendi or maskani (street corner) on which these youngsters worked.

15 Participants tended more often to be older than the target age: it is more difficult to lie about being younger. For example, some participants who were about 32 years old claimed to be 22 (see Chapter 7).

16 I could easily have included youth who were much older than 25 or younger than 16 in my research group, as physical age is a rather arbitrary means of defining someone as being a youth. For instance, even someone as young as an eleven-year-old could commence sexual activities and have a livelihood. The Belgian YIP program coordinator from the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), however, asked me to use this age limit, as she was afraid that CDC/KEMRI would not approve a project that went beyond Yeshica's age target for the 'livelihood intervention', which capped participation at 22 years old.

17 For more on Petronella's background and responsibilities, see Chapter 2.

18 The fact that Yeshica, the HIV/AIDS prevention project in Winam, did reach a high number of secondary school graduates should not have been a surprise since Campbell (2003: 56) who did research among young people in South Africa, notes that “there is evidence that participation in local networks is most likely to take place among the most advantaged members of a community”.

19 Due to the 'output approach' of the YIP program coordinator, Yeshica local staff rushed to fill classes with youth, regardless of whether the training was appropriate or whether the participants fit the target profile (see also Chapter 7).
The results of YIP’s Baseline Cross-sectional Survey (BCS) in Winam show that there was an attrition (due to migration or refusal) rate of 25 percent (Amornkul et al. 2009).
Chapter 2

Methodological concerns:
“What makes a useful contribution to the fight against HIV?”

1. Introduction: Arriving

Looking out of the window of the plane, I already could feel the heat and I could certainly see it: the shimmering air above the ground, and the plains and hills coloured in the dry yellow of foliage and fields that have not seen rain in quite a while. What a contrast to the deep green surrounding Nairobi, which I had left behind just 45 minutes ago! Descending rapidly, the plane turned, and there was Lake Victoria (Nam Lolwe in DhoLuo), the largest lake in Africa, and the largest tropical lake in the world. I would come to learn about the tensions that the lake represents: life and death, calm tranquillity and brute force, livelihood and economic decay, natural wonder and pollution, and even national pride and cross-border cooperation.

Safely on the ground after a rather scary landing, in which the plane glided awfully close to the water before touching down on the runway, I made my way out the front of the plane, where the heat hit me as if I had stepped into an oven. I waited with the other passengers, about 50 people, for our luggage to be unloaded, standing in the sun next to the small building that serves as the terminal for the single-runway airport. Then, happy that all my things had arrived after the long journey, I made my way through the gate where a crowd awaited the arrivals. My heart stopped for a split second and I winced (probably visibly): there was a person holding a sign with my name on it, and, in fat, bold letters, the word ‘CDC’, with an official logo.

I then noticed the car: a new, air-conditioned, white 4x4 Subaru station wagon. Leaving the airport, this shiny, metallic vehicle appeared to me as if it was from outer space, such a contrast as it was to the boda-bodas, the beautifully decorated Chinese bicycles, used as bike taxis that crowded the potholed road all the way to town. The driver of this big CDC vehicle was Jorge, a friendly middle-aged man born in Nairobi. We passed through Kisumu’s main road with its three banks, a handful of local restaurants, two cyber-cafes, one post office, two opticians, two pharmacies, and crowds of street vendors, driving alongside the boda-bodas and the more upmarket tuk-tuks (three-wheel, motor-powered rickshaws imported from India and China). At the end of
the street, we turned and drove up a small hill and into Milimani, Kisumu’s upper-class neighbourhood, with its beautiful colonial villas, lush, green gardens, and the town’s two best hotels. We stopped at a high wall and the gated entrance to my colleague’s house, in the direct vicinity of the State House, the regional residence for the Kenyan president.

At the gate, a small window opened and a guard inspected us. He then came out, fully attired in a black army-style uniform, bulletproof vest, and holstered gun. He inquired about my identity and the purpose of my visit, and disappeared for what felt like a very long time. Finally, the gate opened and three German Shepherds barked at our car. Behind them was a big one-storey house, surrounded by a beautiful garden. My colleague came to greet me and, after Jorge helped us with my bags, she brought me to one of their bedrooms and invited me to take a shower. I tried to chat with one of the maids, but she was shy and ducked away. Once I was refreshed, I tried to find my way back, but I was a bit lost in the big house with its many bedrooms. I finally ran into another maid who brought me to the kitchen, where a man who I assumed was my colleague’s husband was busy reading the newspaper. He briefly looked up and greeted me with a faint ‘hello’.

I waited awhile until my colleague resurfaced and brought me to the nearby Hotel Nyanza Club. It turned out that the hotel check-in began at 11 a.m., which was why I had had a few hours to spend at my colleague’s house. The Nyanza Club is the local watering hole for the CDC’s visitors and expats living in Kisumu, who come there for dinner or their children’s swimming and tennis lessons. For me, the Nyanza Club was a colonial kind of place that lacked any connection to ordinary life in Kisumu. I looked forward to finally meeting ordinary Kenyans.

Being part of a medical research team that was carrying out a development project in Winam quickly introduced me to the ‘expat’ way of life. It would have been easy to become part of that world, with its luxury and security. But if I wanted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the daily life of young Kenyan people in order to contribute to the HIV/AIDS prevention, I had to find a different way of setting up my research.

As anthropologists it is worthwhile to ask, as Bolton (1995) urges, whether what we contribute is useful: Does our research further the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic? Throughout my fieldwork, I asked myself this question quite often. At the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, epidemiologists dominated HIV research, while anthropologists were rather slow to respond. But in recent years, and certainly during
the writing of this dissertation, many anthropologists have contributed to a more holistic and contextualized understanding of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In this chapter, I explain how anthropological methods can make unique contributions to both HIV/AIDS research and interventions. Despite the difficulties I encountered as part of a ‘multidisciplinary’ research team, I strongly believe that anthropologists can engage constructively with quantitative researchers, and that we can help improve HIV-prevention efforts when we deliver high-quality ethnographic, qualitative data.

My principal research method was participant observation, the basic research practice of anthropology. Fieldwork was carried out for a period of 20 months between 2005 and 2006, with preparatory field visits in September 2003 and March 2004. I returned to the field for two months in June 2007 to verify my data. During my fieldwork, I mainly used participant observation as an anthropological method to gain insight into the context of Winam: the organisational structure and the activities of Yeshica, the community-based component of the HIV/AIDS Youth Intervention Program (YIP) in Winam; and to capture the dynamics of the interactions that took place between different people, especially the young people of Winam. From March 2005 until October 2006, my boyfriend (now husband) Sven and I lived in a rented two-room house that was part of the compound of Mama Daky, a community health worker who had worked for the CDC since 1984. We were living in a neighbourhood where many youth gathered and lived. Our room was situated near the busy market centre of Dhonam, behind a primary and secondary school, and close to the fishing beach of Dhonam. Through spending a lot of time with the youngsters and sharing in their daily life activities together with my research assistant Petronella, it was possible to get a rich understanding of their sexual relationships and their livelihoods. To complement this research method, I also carried out informal and formal in-depth interviews (including family genealogies), collected life histories, organised focus group discussions and read one young man’s diary. The strength of my research methodology was founded on the triangulation of multiple qualitative methods.

2. Methodological approach

My fieldwork took place under the auspices, and was but one portion, of a large, PEPFAR-funded YIP, a collaboration between three medical institutes: ITM, the CDC, and KEMRI. The YIP was led by Belgian epidemiologists, including the program coordinator who was based in the city of Kisumu (two hours’ drive from Winam) and my
ITM supervisor who was based in Antwerp, Belgium. When my ITM colleagues began setting up the YIP in August of 2003, they realised that a better understanding of young people’s ‘risk-related’ sexual behaviour and their livelihood struggles in Winam was necessary in order to help improve their sexual and reproductive health (see also Chapter 7). They hired me for my knowledge of anthropological research methods and because my Master’s thesis research had demonstrated my ability to deal with sensitive issues and harsh life circumstances.\(^2\)

In September 2003, my ITM supervisor, the YIP program coordinator, and my predecessor, a Belgian anthropologist who formerly worked at ITM, organized for me to visit the field site, as a way to orient me and to introduce me to a number of people who could be of importance during my fieldwork. Since my employment at ITM coincided with the start of the implementation of Yeshica, I was able, in that initial visit, to observe the setting up of Yeshica, and to have conversations with some of their first youth participants. Six months later, in March 2004, I returned to Winam for one month, staying in the house of one of the local field staff of Yeshica, which was located at the Yeshica compound. During that period, I obtained a good impression of Yeshica participants and staff, its organisational culture, and the work of the CDC in collaboration with KEMRI. During these early visits, I realized that conducting research on a topic as sensitive as sexuality, in a locale where the CDC has conducted a great deal of research, and, moreover, an area that is dominated by medical research in general, could have an impact on my research findings. With this in mind, I realized that my approach had to be different if I wanted to gain access to people’s everyday lives, namely, I needed to distance myself from the CDC, live in the village, and find ways to build trust with local residents.

2.1. Distance and independence
When I mentioned the name of the village where I was planning to carry out my research, it was immediately obvious to Dr. Onyango-Ouma, an anthropologist at the University of Nairobi whom I interviewed before beginning my fieldwork that I would be working with an affiliate of the CDC that was known for its medical research in Nyanza Province. The best advice he gave me was “Do not make use of the CDC transportation”, knowing that simply being seen in the CDC vehicles would mark me as part of the medical establishment, and thwart any attempts to establish rapport with the people of Winam.
I had already realised during my preliminary research that JoWinam (people of Winam) had a substantial distrust of CDC research programs.\(^3\) In order to collect good, valuable data, I realised I had to make clear that my research was different from the CDC’s medical research—and that maintaining distance from CDC and YIP was key to doing so. Moreover, since one of my objectives was to analyse the perceptions and practices of young people in order to find out why only some youngsters participate in Yeshica’s programs, it was important to distance myself from Yeshica’s implementation team.

Alongside maintaining distance from the staff of the CDC and Yeshica, I also tried to minimize the use of the CDC office in Kisumu and to avoid the use of the CDC cars that commuted between Kisumu and Winam. On a daily basis between 20 and 30 white Toyota Land Cruisers with diplomatic license plates travelled the earthen roads from Kisumu to the rural area and back (a two-hour drive), with medical researchers or foreign visitors on board. Sometimes the cars contained only a driver, sent to pick up some material and to bring it back to the city. Locals complained that they could not get a ride in these vehicles—not even the urgent cases of AIDS-infected patients who needed to be brought to the hospital—while the vehicles were driven empty. Empty cars passed local residents at high speed, and, with understandable feelings of animosity, they are left behind with plenty of time to ponder the purpose of all these vehicles while they walk to their destination. Since I wanted to socialise with the people of Winam, I travelled on the local buses back and forth between Winam and Kisumu. In this way, I also quickly realised how mobile young people in Winam are and how mobility is used as a means to improve their livelihood. This observation became an unforeseen but important topic of interest, one that I had not included in the initial design of my research. This is one of the benefits of the anthropological method—observation on the ground allows one to refine research questions in real time.

### 2.2. Entering village life

Being white and an outsider caused the locals to suspect that I was with the CDC, as no other organisation—even not the handful of local churches who usually have Kenyan pastors and, sporadically, white visitors—is so active in the area. It was the first issue I had to deal with when introducing myself to the inhabitants of Winam. People were also shocked at first, seeing me walking around rather than sitting in a car. They yelled to me from their homesteads that I should take care because my feet would get hurt, since they assumed I was not used to walking around. Their concern was genuine, and
everyone was friendly and curious. As I walked along country paths, every person I passed approached me to say hello. Whenever I went to buy something at the market, it took at least an hour due to the constant need to stop and converse. Greeting is a very important aspect of social life in Luoland (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). JoWinam asked me the typical questions: “Idhi nade?” (How are you?), “Ichiew nade?” (How did you wake up in the morning?), and “Idhi tedo an’go?” (What are you going to cook?). Before waiting for an answer, locals joked that they were planning to visit me, so that they could enjoy my food. People loved to hear me talking in their local language, Dholuo, for which I had taken classes in Kisumu, and it really helped me to communicate with them and to win their sympathy.

Everyone I met wanted to know where I came from and what I was doing in Winam, which gave me the opportunity to introduce my study in nearly every initial conversation. Right from the start I decided not to spell out in full the purposes of the research and all the procedures to be employed to everyone involved in the research. I was sure that doing so would influence their behaviour in such a way as to invalidate the findings (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 72–73). As the people of Winam are over-researched, and thus wary of any form of research, I decided to leave out what seemed to me to be the more delicate aspects of the study until trust had been established. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explain, unless one can build up a trusting relationship relatively rapidly, people may refuse access in a way that they would not do later on in the fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 72–73).

I was not surprised to find out, right at the start, that people who otherwise hardly spoke English were familiar with the English words ‘research’ and ‘investigation’, even though the real meaning of the words was not clear to them. They mostly asked me as a way of introduction if I came to Winam to carry out some research for CDC. The way they asked me, sometimes with a clearly suspicious voice, made me realise their fear of another survey or CDC randomised-control study in Winam. Their fear was associated with their distrust in medicine (see next chapter). I began by explaining that I was carrying out a study for the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM): I told them that I was collaborating with the CDC people at Yeshica. Secondly, I emphasised that my study was different, compared to other studies that have been carried out in Winam, because I was not taking urine or blood samples. Finally, I explained that my study was about understanding how young people live today—learning about the problems they face, what their needs are, and what is important in their lives. After this introduction, most immediately started to tell me
their thoughts about the daily life of young people, and invited me to visit them in their house.

My boyfriend Sven joined me in Winam during the longer period of my fieldwork, from March 2005 to October 2006. However, he also regularly stayed in a room we used to rent in Kisumu since we lacked electricity in Winam. Sven was writing his PhD thesis—on a totally different topic—at that time (see Harten 2011) and regularly travelled to his university in London and back home to be with his father in Germany, as his mother had died one month before we left for Winam, in February 2005. Although Sven and I were not married yet, we presented ourselves as ‘husband’ and ‘wife’. Sometimes Sven accompanied me during my walks in the village, which helped people see that we were a ‘married’ couple, and which made a good impression since people respected us. In this way, people were aware that we were engaged and that prevented men from pursuing a relationship with me. The local male youngsters also liked to hang out with Sven, which only improved our relationships with them. Sven was a big support to me when I encountered difficult situations in the field, including my difficulties explaining my methods to my medical colleagues. Together we took private classes to learn the local language, Dholuo, and he also taught me and my research assistant Petronella, who joined me after six months, how to drive motorbikes.

2.3. Building trust

I carried out the first five months of fieldwork alone, without the help of a research assistant. I spent time at various places in Winam, such as the fishing beaches, and stopped at every place where people wanted to talk to me. I made my first contacts with young people on my own, and it helped me to improve my Dholuo knowledge. If I needed translation help, I asked whoever was around to translate for me, and when going to meetings, I asked a secondary school graduate to join me. I later found out from the Belgian program coordinator that I could get a research assistant who would be employed by CDC/KEMRI.

From the sixth month of fieldwork onwards, I received the help from my female research assistant Petronella, who held a Bachelor’s degree in anthropology. She had applied for the position based on an advertisement I had published in the daily newspapers. I had called for a female Luo speaker who held a Bachelor’s degree in Social Science, preferably in anthropology, and who was willing to spend a year with me in the village. I preferred a female assistant to a male one since during the first five months of my fieldwork I had observed that I found it difficult to get close to the young
women—mainly due to the language barrier (see also later). Petronella was ultimately chosen from a short list of five female candidates because she had a good understanding of anthropological research methods, had never worked with the CDC before, and came right from university (a plus for me since I wanted the assistant not to be biased or used to certain working styles). Petronella was 25 years old when she started to work with me in 2005. I presented her to JoWinam as my friend from university who was carrying out a study for her Master’s thesis, as we believed that one day she might use her experience for her Master’s studies (which she did, successfully).

Although she spoke the Dholuo language fluently, Petronella was unfamiliar with village life and ‘chike Luo’, which translates as ‘Luo customs or rules’, and means how people structure their daily life in rural ‘Luoland’, the home of the Luo ancestors. Petronella was born in Siaya District (Nyanza Province) and lived there until the death of her mother in 1994, just around the time Petronella had finished primary school. She moved to Nairobi for her high school and undergraduate degrees. Two years after the death of her mother, her father died and she became an orphan: from that point on she was taken care of by her eldest sister, who was living in Nairobi. Petronella identifies herself as a ‘town girl’ and has not returned to Siaya since 1994. It was only her work with me that brought her back to Luoland. But her inexperience with village life did not hamper our collection of data—on the contrary, JoWinam were very willing to explain anything and everything to her, and in detail. The same happened to me, being a white foreigner, coming from abroad. Petronella and I were treated as students, outsiders who were eager to learn while doing.

The first months while Petronella was still looking around for an appropriate place to stay, my boyfriend and I shared our two-room house with her. Later, she moved within the same compound to one of the rooms in Mama Daky’s house, which was also used for Mama Daky’s chickens, and thus not very comfortable. Finally, she rented one of the first rooms that received electricity in January 2006, situated on the other side of Dhonam market where also other members of CDC staff happened to be staying. Whenever we travelled to Kisumu, we travelled together, and, as Petronella was new in Kisumu and had no relatives to stay with, we also shared our two-room studio in Kisumu with her. In this way, we worked long hours and spent plenty of time together, during which we were able to reflect on different topics related to the field.

I trained Petronella how to carry out participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. It helped that she was fresh from university and that this was her first job. It was not easy to find someone who had not worked yet for CDC/KEMRI in
Kisumu, and who was willing to come and stay in the village. For most people, once a graduate, coming from Nairobi, it is considered somehow beneath your status to live in the village’s basic conditions. Petronella understood and realized that a simple dress code was needed in the field in order not to differentiate us too much from the people of the village. Whereas most CDC/KEMRI staff wore high-polished shoes, white shirts, and black trousers, I emphasised that we as anthropologists should wear clothes suitable for every possible situation. We would meet the youngsters who were doing the cooking and cleaning, and we would help them with whatever they were doing; during these times we would have informal conversations. I repeatedly stressed the importance of becoming seen as one of them so that they would share their sorrows, problems, and moments of joy and happiness with us.

Before we started the intensive fieldwork, we introduced ourselves formally to the four chiefs in Winam and attended two barazas (public meetings) where we clearly introduced the purpose of our stay in Winam. After this formal introduction, we walked together all over Winam; later on, we also made use of a motorbike. The motorbikes were the property of the CDC and I felt reluctant to use them at the beginning, for the same reason as it created a distance with the locals. In order to build friendships, I preferred walking and at times biking. For long distances, Petronella and I used the local buses. But when friendships and trust were built, in order to save time—as local buses do not stop frequently, and are usually overcrowded—we decided to take the motorbikes for long distances from the tenth month of fieldwork onwards.

JoWinam did not seem to feel more or less confident with either Petronella or me. The only big difference was that Petronella came from a neighbouring district and was fluent in DhoLuo. My level of DhoLuo was proficient and I managed to understand 80 percent of what was said, but I could not actively lead lengthy conversations in the local language. People appreciated my efforts to express myself in Dholuo and Petronella always did a great job with translating. Despite my language handicap, joWinam were used to both of us, and shared information with us equally. There were only a few young women, whom Petronella had met on her own, who felt more comfortable with Petronella. In hindsight, it was good that I had conducted fieldwork during the first five months on my own, because by the time Petronella arrived I had already established rapport with a good number of people. Some, certainly the female youngsters whom I had first met without Petronella, were a bit suspicious when I introduced Petronella to them. Even though Petronella was dressed very casually, they saw her as a “town girl” and did not know if she wanted to be associated with “village girls”. But once the ice was
broken, Petronella managed to build strong relationships with a large number of young women and men from Winam. Also the youngsters’ caretakers and parents encouraged them to associate with us, because they saw us as ‘good role models’ since we were ‘educated’. Petronella also managed to have close relationships with the local field staff of Yeshica. She lived in the same compound with some of them, and in the evenings they usually ate together and shared what they had done during the day. Although I was often present, I was unable to follow their conversations as they used a lot of Kiswahili and Luo ‘sheng’ (slang). I was confident that Petronella would later write these conversations down in her diary book, which enabled me to follow accurately with what was going on in the field at Yeshica. I am pretty sure that without Petronella’s assistance, I would have not been able to have such a detailed, rich data on both the youngsters and the Yeshica project.

Petronella was a talented research assistant, and we made a good team. She respected my position, accepted my comments, and followed through with my requests. She was my colleague and, except for my boyfriend Sven, my closest friend in the field. Later, we became like sisters to each other. We built a very close relationship from which we both have learned a great deal.

2.4. Dealing with suffering and death

Death and illness were omnipresent in Winam. On our walks through the village we passed many graves of the fathers, mothers, children, and grandparents of the youths I was working with. Every week, several people were buried. In every home there was someone suffering. During my fieldwork, I did not witness the death of any close friend but was continually confronted with the suffering of the affected families. I witnessed quarrels between family members about where to bury the dead, how to pay for a funeral, whether or not to stick to chike Luo rules such as bride inheritance, and more.

In the beginning, I found it difficult, emotionally and ethically, to attend funerals in people’s homes, because usually I did not know the deceased person personally. Mama Daky, our landlord, convinced me that this was actually a good way for people to get to know me, because people truly appreciated my condolences and compassion. Early on, Mama Daky took me to several funerals, since this was one of the main activities in the village between Friday and Sunday. People basically went from one funeral to the other. On a personal level, this was also hard because Sven’s mother had recently died, and each funeral made us remember her, and our loss, time and time again.
Illness seemed to be all around us. It often happened that we visited a home and found a person there showing all the symptoms of AIDS. Sometimes we would find a deathly skinny person sleeping outside the house, but most times they were hiding inside, reluctant to meet anyone. Add to this the usual sight of malnourished children, and people of all ages with malaria, all of them too poor to buy medicine or pay hospital bills. People came to me to show their wounds and illnesses and to talk about their pain. I do not deal well with seeing blood, or hearing in detail about someone's wounds, and my empathy is such that I often remained sleepless after such encounters. But really, no one could remain impassive in the face of so much daily suffering.

We frequently helped pay for the most urgent medical care, and I was glad to help in this small way, but I was frustrated that I did not have more medical knowledge to help people myself. One of the few things I was able to do was to give sick people a ride to the hospital on my motorbike, flouting the CDC/KEMRI rules that forbade me from transporting strangers. The back of a motorbike is not very comfortable if you are deathly ill, but it's better than walking two hours under the boiling sun. I felt that this was simply my moral obligation, nullifying any bureaucratic rule that focused instead on my lack of insurance for passengers. In a way, overriding the CDC's bureaucracy was my silent protest against their practice of racing those empty cars through the village.

Winam is a place that reflects both individual, everyday hardship as well as global injustice and inequality. When one of my academic supervisors came to visit me in the field, she was shocked by the suffering, and by the many people trying to kill their pain and sorrow with alcohol. In my conversations with her, I realized how much I had adapted to this place: the graves, the skinny AIDS victims, the people drunk at 9 a.m.—it all seemed so normal and self-evident to me. “This is just how life is. How could it be any different?” I thought to myself.

The situation in Winam was really hopeless, and perhaps having a return ticket helped me persevere during fieldwork. When I did leave, saying goodbye to the young people was particularly hard. We slaughtered a goat, and together prepared a celebratory meal. It was a lovely and joyful get together, but when we parted I realized that the odds were small that I would find most of them again when I return: I knew that some would have moved in their quest for work, and others surely would have died. I was lucky to be able to return to a safer, healthier world, with its own problems but still with basic security and many more opportunities.

While writing this dissertation, I maintained contact with a number of youth from Winam. During fieldwork I established strong relationships with some of them,
and we are still in contact thanks to the mobile phone. The situation of some of those youngsters has already deteriorated. This shows how fragile their livelihood opportunities are. For Petronella, however, it was not feasible to remain involved with all of the youngsters, and to continue following their concerns and aspirations. Her situation was different than mine: she remained working in the field of medical research in Kisumu after she had finished working with me. Many youngsters sought out Petronella at her new work place and asked for me, which was somewhat disturbing for her. At the same time, she felt uneasy when they asked her for financial assistance since she also had brothers and sisters depending on her. The youngsters recognized her change in attitude towards them and felt confused since they thought they used to be friends. Carrying out research in one’s home country can make it difficult to draw a line between private life and research, whereas for me, it was much easier. My living situation is generally different, and I have no (grand) parents, sisters, or brothers who are depending on my financial assistance. Whenever I have the resources to assist one or two young people, I do so. At times, Sven and I send some money, or we send new and used clothes. We also have collected money from our friends and families to pay for two of the youngsters to attend secondary school: one young man was able to take three more courses after graduation from high school, and we helped another young woman by sending some starting capital for an income-generating business in selling second-hand clothes. Although our contribution is only a drop in the bucket and will not change the larger, structural problems, at least we can share a bit of our wealth from home.

3. Contributing to HIV/AIDS research and interventions

I was one of the few anthropologists—in comparison to the many epidemiologists—who was invited to participate in HIV/AIDS research at the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM). At first, I viewed this invitation, and my position, in a very positive light. I was happy that the Belgian medical team at ITM had thought of hiring an anthropologist to work with ITM’s epidemiologists to improve the implementation of YIP, and more particularly for Yeshica, the community-based component of YIP.

The ITM team could not afford to hire an expert in anthropology with the same years of experience as most other members of the ITM team; they hired me as a junior anthropologist who would be allowed to use the data for a PhD dissertation. This was an attractive position for me, because being part of a medical team at ITM would give me the opportunity to participate in their meetings and get an insider’s point of view on
Yeshica’s implementation. I considered myself lucky to be offered this privileged position as there are few medical teams who acknowledge the value of an anthropological perspective (see also Streefland 1990).

I was eager to dive into this topic and to contribute both to the work of ITM and to the wider academic debates in anthropology. I was also insistent on carrying out my work the way I was trained as an anthropologist. I vowed not to repeat the earlier errors committed by anthropologists before the 1990s: diluting our anthropological research methods into ‘rapid appraisals’, focussing only on focus group discussions or in-depth interviews, and excluding participant observation from the research methodology (for more on this critique, see Farmer 1992b; Bolton 1995; Parker 2001; Schoepf 2001). Participant observation is viewed by some as too time consuming, a perspective that appears absurd in the context of a 30-year epidemic and the long timeframe of development work. Unfortunately, both the HIV/AIDS epidemic and development work continue to be articulated as imminent crises requiring quick responses, a standard argument made by grant applicants and donors alike. Nevertheless, as an anthropologist, I was determined to use anthropological methods and triangulation to confirm my findings, as the combination of several research methodologies could cross-verify my data. My adherence to participant observation is not a question of scholarly pride or a matter of methodological fundamentalism, but is, rather, motivated by my belief in anthropology’s potential to add valuable insights to the fight against HIV/AIDS. But in some contexts, anthropology’s methodological legitimacy (see also Streefland 1990) is not yet won, and working together with epidemiologists remains a challenge.

4. The uneasy marriage between anthropology and epidemiology

Epidemiology is concerned with the distribution of illnesses and health in a population, and with understanding how, where, and why someone becomes sick. Human behaviour can play a role in this, but there is a large range of other (for example, genetic) risk factors. A common objective of anthropology and epidemiology is thus their understanding of human behaviour. A more integrated approach between the two disciplines would make a significant change in health care today. Nevertheless, cooperation between the two fields does not yet yield most of its potential synergies (Trostle 1986, 2005). There is still a discrepancy between what epidemiologists expect from anthropologists, and what anthropologists offer to epidemiologists. Epidemiologists call in the help of anthropologists in recognition of the limitations of their own
METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

discipline, but then find it a challenge to use the empirical material delivered. The anthropological work does often not fit the research and funding frameworks of epidemiology, nor the requirements of policy makers (Streefland 1990). Over the last decade, anthropologists and epidemiologists have tried to overcome the “benign neglect” (Trostle 1986: 80) and “missed opportunities” (Trostle 1986: 79) that have characterized their earlier relationship. But their current partnership is still imbalanced: epidemiologists have greater authority in the space of health and illness, by far, than do medical anthropologists (Hahn 1995).

4.1. The origins of an integrative anthropological-epidemiological approach

Until the last quarter of the 20th century, with a few exceptions, anthropologists and epidemiologists rarely cooperated despite the disciplines having much in common (Trostle 1986, 2005; Hahn 1995; Streefland 1990; Inhorn 1995; Leclerc-Madlala 2000). The pioneering work in South Africa by the Karks, in conjunction the Pholela Health Centre in 1940, and by the epidemiologist John Cassel, in Appalachian communities in 1964, led to the incorporation of anthropological methods and theory into epidemiology (Hahn 1995: 100; Leclerc-Madlala 2000: 138–139; Trostle 2005: 26–30). Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when human migration—mainly male labour out-migration—increased in scale and distance, raising concern about the spread of chronic diseases, epidemiologists pushed for more interdisciplinary work (Trostle and Sommerfeld 1996: 257–258; Trostle 2005: 33–34). According to Streefland (1990: 13–14), only at the end of the 1970s, a decade marked by the launch of primary health care in many developing countries, epidemiologists started to recognize the consistency between poverty and disease. In this way, they created space for cooperation between anthropologists and epidemiologists. In practice, as Trostle (1986: 68–69) and Digiacomo (1999: 442) highlight, such studies did not really contribute to further theoretical developments either in anthropology or epidemiology, nor did they contribute to social structural change (Trostle 2005: 24). Little was done to link sociocultural factors with the epidemiology of diseases. As Trostle (2005: 34) explains, sociocultural factors “served as context” rather than being analysed for their “relationship to human health and disease”.

Although Inhorn (1995) tries to demonstrate that the areas of divergence between epidemiology and anthropology may be reconceptualised as areas of convergence in which the two disciplines could have exchanged insights, the power relationship between the two has been unequal and beset with difficulties. Medical
researchers, because they secured more funding, usually took a dominant position and, frustrated, anthropologists were included only as consultants, which gave them less institutional leverage than full-time staff (Streefland 1990: 18; Trostle 2005: 34). Anthropologists had little control over the nature of the questions being asked, over the content of the research, or the application of results. Over time, changes have occurred and progress has been made to bridge the difference between anthropology and epidemiology. Although I myself had no control over the protocol or content of the Youth Intervention Program (YIP)—of which my study was part—since it was already designed before my arrival at ITM, I at least managed to have control over my own anthropological research.

4.2. Anthropology and AIDS research

The rapid rise in reported HIV cases at the end of the 20th century encouraged greater cooperation between anthropologists and epidemiologists. Anthropologists had initially been rather slow to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and only during the 1990s did they begin to contribute, emphasising the cultural meanings of sexuality and the political economy of structural forces that construct sexual experiences and practices.

Early on, HIV research was strongly shaped by biomedical and epidemiological perspectives, and relied on psychological theories of individual behaviour change (such as the ‘Health Belief Model’, ‘Social Cognitive Learning Theory’ and the ‘Theory of Reasoned Action’6 (Waterstond 1997: 1383). Such theories are based on a rational behaviour model, leading to the collection of certain kinds of data: partner numbers, sexual networking, and frequency of intercourse. Based on these theories, behavioural interventions aimed to give individuals knowledge in order to motivate them to change their behaviour in ways that would reduce the risk of HIV infection (Parker 1987). These rational models had disappointing results since they examined sexuality as an independent variable, decontextualized from the everyday practices and meanings of sexuality (Spronk 20067; see also Vance 1991; Davis and Whitten 1987). In addition, categorizing certain groups of people as ‘risk groups’ misled others who were also potentially at risk, leading them to think they were immune because they did not belong to one of the so-called risk groups (Trostle and Sommerfeld 1996: 261).

These biomedical and epidemiological approaches, based on individualized notions of risk, were “searching for individual ‘deficiencies’ to explain seemingly irrational behaviour” so that individual (mis)behaviour could be blamed (Bolton 1995: 293: for more on this critique, see also Farmer 1992a, Treichler 1999). Certain cultural
METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

patterns such as polygamy or widow inheritance, among others, were also seen as obstacles to behavioural change and development (see, for example, Suda et al. 1991; Prince 2007). Many who were implementing HIV/AIDS interventions perceived culture as a fixed and immutable force (for more on this critique, see Sobo 1999). The dominant paradigm left little scope for understanding how broader socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors mediate behaviours, and why some persons are more vulnerable to the disease than others (Schoepf 2001; Parker et al. 2000a; Altman 1999; Farmer 1999).

From the mid-1980s onwards, anthropologists were invited to collaborate in large-scale surveys of risk-related sexual behaviour and the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about sexuality that might be associated with the risk of HIV infection. These research projects were mostly sponsored by public health agencies. The anthropological portion of such research was usually relegated to a subservient role (Schoepf 2001). Anthropologists were usually only “called in after the quantitative data [were already] collected and the number crunchers [could not] make sense of them” (Bolton 1995: 299). In effect, as Parker (2001: 173) describes, anthropologists often became subservient to others who dominated the field and who received “the lion’s share of funding and prestige”.

Partially as a consequence of this and partially because of a lack of interest among top anthropologists in the issue, the early research did not always provide high-quality anthropological data, as qualitative methods were often limited to focus group discussions and rapid appraisals (Bolton 1995: 298; Farmer 1992b, 1997). “At best,” Bolton (1995: 293) writes, “an ‘anthropological approach’ consists of calling for ‘cultural sensitivity’”. Such an approach tries to uncover cultural meanings to better understand what sexual practices mean to the persons involved, the contexts in which they take place, and how they are conceived within the local conceptual categories of the diverse sexual cultures within different societies (see also Farmer 1992b). During the 1990s, this focus led to culturally sensitive, community-based HIV/AIDS programs that aimed at transforming social and cultural norms, rather than individual behaviour (Schoepf 2001). However, Bolton (1995: 293) correctly asks: “Have we [anthropologists] nothing else to offer?”, stating that “calls for cultural sensitivity are problematic too”, since they stigmatize certain groups of people.

In the mid-1990s, book-length ethnographies that examined the broader socioeconomic and political factors responsible for the HIV epidemic started to become an important contribution to the battle against AIDS. The work of Farmer (1992), in particular, was groundbreaking, as he demonstrated how the ‘structural violence’ of
poverty and other inequalities contribute to people’s vulnerability in contracting HIV/AIDS. The idea that HIV spreads because of people’s normal responses to everyday life situations, such as dealing with economic hardship and uncertainty (Schoepf 1992; Barnett and Blaikie 1992; Farmer 1995, 1999), became dominant. Scholars recognized that unequal gender power relations and their relation to poverty also play an important role in the prevalence of HIV in most African countries (Farmer 1995; Setel 1999a; Schoepf 2001).

Although the notion of structural violence leaves little scope for agency among the poor, it has widened our response to the fight against AIDS. Setel’s work (1999) for instance, tries to capture the tension between structure and agency by writing about African youth at the time of AIDS, showing how the crisis of poverty wiped out young people’s attempts to reduce their sexual risks (see also Schoepf 1992). Thornton (2008: 55) goes even a step further and asks for a radical shift in perspective, as he wants to “redirect our attention from the scale of the individual to the scale of the social network”. So far, epidemiologists have mostly stressed the number of partners for the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and the visible links between different people (who has slept with whom). With his valuable concept of the ‘unimagined community’ (Thornton 2008: xx), Thornton invites us to focus on the structure of large-scale sexual networks and why the community of the sexual network cannot be fully imagined: he states that “the change in HIV prevalence is primarily determined by the differences in the configuration of large-scale sexual networks rather than by the cumulative effects of behaviour change, [which is] a necessary but not sufficient condition” (Thornton 2008: 1). Comparing Uganda and South Africa, Thornton (2008) tries to understand how and why sexual networks in South Africa are densely interconnected, pervasive, and extensive while in Uganda, they were more fragmented and isolated until 1992. He argues that, after 14 years of warfare in Uganda, previously separate sexual networks came into contact with one another, which resulted in an increase in HIV transmission. The later sudden decline in HIV prevalence was possible due to the fact that some (relatively few) people no longer were linked to the densely clustered network (Thornton 2008: 77–78).\(^8\) In South Africa, the majority were “multiply linked to all parts of the network, both near and far, and across most social categories” (Thornton 2008: 77). South Africa is characterized by a high degree of urbanization and physical mobility, which has caused a densely interconnected sexual network that is highly randomized (Thornton 2008: 71–77). A randomized network means that “large numbers of people in a population are linked to two, three or four people and all have
multiple links to others through circles, chains” (Thornton 2008: 63). In his book, Thornton (2008) also explains how HIV prevalence can be reduced when we reconfigure sexual networks (see also Chapter 5). Thornton’s contribution is an important one in HIV/AIDS research: through the analysis and understanding of sexual network configurations in a certain area, we might be able to develop HIV/AIDS interventions accordingly.

To conclude, anthropological research on AIDS has thus helped to demonstrate the limitations of some HIV/AIDS prevention theories and provided contextualised data that might contribute to the development of an alternative paradigm (Waterstond 1997). Around the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has most often affected those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. As anthropologists, our role is not to merely bear witness and record this catastrophe (Bolton 1995: 288), but rather to create an in-depth understanding of people’s lives in a context of uncertainty. As anthropologists, we have to continue to improve the quality of our work, uphold our methodological rigour, take the lead in crafting research proposals, and not let others dictate our methods. My experience working in a medical team demonstrates the need for anthropologists to be clear about the need for and value of long-term, participant observation-based, ethnographic research.

**5. The ‘black sheep’: An anthropologist in a medical team**

The freedom to design research or to utilize methods according to professional standards greatly depends on funding (Mosse 2006) and on the degree of collaboration between the different team members. Since my research was embedded in a large quantitative study that was funded by PEPFAR, my anthropological research study was subjected to the same guidelines as the other medical studies. Being the only anthropologist surrounded by medically trained people in ITM was often challenging since there was a lack of interdisciplinary exchange in the Belgian team.

My intent was to conduct ethnographic research using methodological triangulation, but I was challenged in doing so by a number of factors. First, there was a misconception of anthropology serving as just a ‘toolbox’ of methods, from which one could pick and choose. There were additional, related difficulties in the approval of my ethnographic research proposal by medical and ethical committees (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), especially that of the CDC. I was also continually confronted by the
team’s prejudices against anthropological research, specifically their belief that it lacks empirical rigor as well as their misunderstandings about participant observation in the field. Finally, my Belgian colleagues had difficulty understanding that in addition to being co-investigators in a research team, they could also be my research subjects for some aspects of the research. Though most of these challenges were resolved during the course of the fieldwork, they never completely disappeared; there lingered in the background some suspicion about the ‘unscientific’ nature of anthropological work. Defending the methods of anthropological research was not only a time-consuming activity, on top of the daily fieldwork activities I was undertaking for my research, it was also as Streefland (1990: 18) nicely describes it: “a tough fight for recognition”.

5.1. Anthropology: A discipline or a ‘toolbox’?

Two anthropologists had preceded me at the ITM, and I assumed that there was no need to explain the basics of anthropology to my Belgian medical colleagues. However, my predecessors—following the instructions of my medical colleagues, like many other anthropologists who had carried out HIV/AIDS research during the 1990s—had used anthropology as a ‘toolbox’ (Streefland 1990: 16–17). This basically means that they pragmatically picked out the tool, or research method, that suited their particular purpose, rather than using a holistic approach where different qualitative methods were used with the final aim of carrying out methodological triangulation. Such research, according to Bolton (1995: 290) could hardly be called ‘anthropology’ since it was not based on “thorough field research in a community”. In essence, my predecessors had reduced the discipline’s qualitative methods to focus group discussions, ‘rapid appraisals’, and a sometimes unrealistically large number of in-depth interviews. Some anthropologists have tailored ethnographic methods into a formalized process called ‘rapid assessment procedures’ (RAP), the so-called ‘rapid ethnographic survey’ (Pool et al. 2006), or ‘rapid ethnography’ (Beebe 2001). To a certain extent, the phrase ‘rapid ethnographic survey’ is an oxymoron, since, by definition, quality ethnographic research requires an investment of time. Moreover, the maxim “bigger is better” also holds sway in many public health approaches, as an artefact of the reliance on standardisation. Knowledge of specific research practices is not enough to carry out behavioural research: one must also have a sufficient grounding in the theoretical knowledge of those methods as well (see also Bolton 1995).
5.2. Ethical regulations on anthropological research

In medical research, each proposal is bound by the World Medical Association’s Declaration of Helsinki (1964), which stressed the importance of Institutional Review Boards (IRB) in the US and later influenced the ethical standards in Europe (Hoeyer et al. 2005). The goal of these boards is to protect the rights of individuals who are participating as research subjects, and to ensure they are not exploited (Molyneux et al. 2004; Hoeyer et al. 2005; Murphy and Dingwall 2007). Being part of a medical team, I was also bound by the same regulations. The protocol format of the CDC’s IRB, however, was clearly created for baseline studies or clinical trials, and was evidently designed for research in the US. The IRB protocol asks the applicant to list the following information about the proposed research: race/ethnicity distribution of subjects; whether specimens are to be collected and stored; whether HIV testing would be performed; and whether genetic testing was planned now or in the future. Despite numerous critiques of using racial classifications within public health statistics (Weissman 1990), CDC protocols continue to consider race and ethnicity as important public health variables. The majority of the questions asked in the protocol template were not relevant for qualitative research, and some even contradicted standard anthropological notions, such as the existence of race (Hahn 1992). Since none of the participating institutes had developed templates for qualitative work, my ethnographic research proposal had to meet the CDC guidelines, including the submission of informed consent forms.

The discussion whether ethnographers need to follow regulatory regimes, which are based on assumptions derived from biomedical experimentation, is ongoing. Various authors (Molyneux et al. 2004; Molyneux et al. 2005; Hoeyer et al. 2005; Murphy and Dingwall 2007) however, have highlighted the problems with imposing such regulations on ethnographic studies. My research was of a descriptive nature, without specimens or tests, and thus following the same ethical guidelines of medical research was not possible (Murphy and Dingwall 2007). In medical research, obtaining informed consent is often seen as synonymous with conducting ethical research (Molyneux et al. 2005: 2547–2548). While there is much merit to this position, the flipside does not hold: we cannot simply equate the absence of informed consent in social science research with a lack of ethics or concern for risks. Anthropologists place great importance on reciprocity and building good rapport with our respondents, and consent is thus based on trust between researcher and researched. Consent is a relational process rather than a contractual agreement. In order to protect our respondents, we choose to utilize
confidentiality and anonymization (see also Hoeyer et al. 2005; Murphy and Dingwall 2007).

While building rapport with the youngsters of Winam, I repeatedly explained to them the topic of my study, as they developed their own insights and questions about what I was doing. I believe that informed consent forms do not make a lot of sense in the beginning of the study, because doubts and complaints usually arise over the course of the study, not at the outset. As Murphy and Dingwall (2007: 2229) state: “negotiating consent in ethnographic research is continuous and constantly vulnerable to withdrawal”. ‘Informed consent’ as it is conceived within the IRB protocol, then, is not very relevant in ethnographic research: it is practically impossible for anthropologists to get consent from everyone they talk to, and the object of study often changes during the course of fieldwork. Anthropologists have many casual encounters with people who pass through their research site, and it is not always clear who will end up being their research participants. Because of the flexible and reflective nature of the work, anthropologists continue to expand and shift elements of their research, including who their informants are, in order to remain open to new ideas as they emerge in the field. Anthropologists therefore cannot give a full account at the outset of what the research or its risks will involve because they simply do not know yet (Hahn 1995; Hoeyer et al. 2005; Murphy and Dingwall 2007). It is therefore up to the anthropologists’ own judgment and ethical responsibility how they should best respond (see also Dilger 2005). As Murphy and Dingwall (2007: 2230) rightly emphasise: “increasing bureaucratisation risks undermining the moral and ethical responsibility of the very researcher it seeks to control”.

In response to this conflict between biomedicine and anthropology about the use of informed consent, Hoeyer et al. (2005: 1747) suggest formulating an alternative approach that “combines the medical inclination towards respect for the individual with the social scientific awareness of political implications and informants’ conflicting interests”. They propose that the disciplines conduct “an enhanced dialogue [that] could serve to invigorate the ethical debate in both traditions” (Hoeyer et al. 2005: 1741). In the field, however, I found little comprehension among the Belgian ITM team, who had never considered informed consent from this critical perspective. Instead, they insisted that I follow the requisite informed consent procedures, and worried that my research protocol might otherwise be rejected. Since they were my co-investigators in the research proposal, had assisted me in the funding of my research, and were higher in rank at the ITM, I had to follow their requests. We had no real debate about the widely

To minimize any bias to my study that the use of informed consent might cause, while still adhering to the ethical standards of my profession (see the American Anthropological Association statement on this (AAA 2012), I felt free to change the standard version of the informed consent form used by CDC. The AAA (2012: 7) defines informed consent as an “ongoing dialogue and negotiation with research participants” rather than a one-off contractual agreement. I indicated in my research proposal that I would only obtain signed informed consent forms prior to tape-recorded, in-depth interviews with the key youngsters I worked with, most of which I conducted at the end of the fieldwork. This was in line with the AAA (2012: 7) as they state that “participation in activities and events in fully public spaces is not subject to prior consent”. According to the ethical guidelines of the AAA (2012: 7), “informed consent does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form”. On the form that I used, I did not mention any monetary reimbursement for travel costs or provision of soft drinks or soap, although the CDC consent form template calls for such. Depending on the time and duration of the interview, offering a soft drink, tea, cassava, or bread was just part of being hospitable, and had nothing to do with a quid pro quo compensation for the interview nor could it be construed with ‘buying off’ my study participants. Travel reimbursement was also not needed because I mostly travelled to the youngsters who lived far away, and those who lived nearby usually came to my house on foot. In addition to the informed consent forms, I made use of oral consent on various occasions throughout my fieldwork, not at only one moment in time. The informed consent in my research was a “process (that) is necessarily dynamic, continuous and reflexive” (AAA 2012: 7).

It took about a year before the CDC’s IRB approved my research proposal, and without the approval of the CDC, my proposal could not be admitted to the other collaborating institutions. It is not clear what precisely slowed down the process, whether it was just subject to delays typical for large bureaucracies. It might also have been some of the anthropological jargon that delayed the approval since the reviewers certainly struggled with it. Their comments demonstrated that these IRB reviewers had a narrow and sometimes negative view of ‘participant observation’, the main and most important method of anthropology. Their narrow point of view on ‘participant observation’ was not only the case on paper, but also in the field.
5.3. Prejudices against and misunderstandings about ‘participant observation’

One of the IRB reviewers’ comments on my proposal was a request to specify precisely “when, where and why [the investigators] plan to collect each set of data (e.g. life histories, interview, focus groups, etc.) and how they will recruit participants for each type of data collection activity” (email communication, April 2005). The reviewers were also dissatisfied with my interview topic guide since it was too flexible and imprecise and therefore not regarded as a ‘valid instrument’. According to the CDC, a research proposal needs to be permanent, not subject to alteration mid-research. This is impossible in anthropological work because the research changes according to the context; necessary changes may only become apparent during the course of the fieldwork itself (see also Hahn 1995; Hoeyer et al. 2005; Murphy and Dingwall 2007). Once a research proposal is approved by the IRB, changes can only be made through an amendment letter that, again, also needs to be approved by the IRBs of the funding organisations before the revised proposal can be implemented.

I tried to answer the IRB comments in a comprehensive way, taking time to explain what anthropological fieldwork entails and the flexible nature of the study. At the same time, I stated my concern that “it is not always appropriate or helpful to judge qualitative work by quantitative standards” (email communication, April 2005), as I realised that one medical doctor and one epidemiologist had reviewed my work, and I knew that they might not possess the necessary understanding of ethnographic work and more specifically participant observation. My revised proposal was then met with a second round of comments, given by a behavioural scientist and an anthropologist (with a Master’s degree in linguistics). It is surprising that in a big institution like the CDC, qualitative work is not automatically reviewed by an interdisciplinary team that includes people with expertise in the kind of research being proposed.¹⁰

For my medical colleagues, certainly at the beginning of my fieldwork, the notion of ‘deep hanging out’, familiar to all anthropologists as part of participant observation, was not clear. For me, doing ethnographic work on the lives of the young people of Winam meant living with the people in Winam. When I was strolling around Dhonam or eating at my place with a number of youngsters, my colleagues might have wondered whether I had nothing else to do besides having pleasant afternoon visits. They assumed I would live in Kisumu, report on a daily basis to the CDC office there, and use CDC cars whenever I needed to go to the village. But I was certain—if one of my main methodologies was participant observation—that I needed to go and stay in the field and
participate in the daily activities of young people, and the closer to the centre of village life, the better. I chose to stay near the market of Dhonam, close to the fishing beach.

There was a serious mismatch between my medical colleagues’ expectations towards me and my intentions. This was caused by confusion about my role in the field as an anthropologist, while being, at the same time, an ITM team member. These misunderstandings caused a lot of friction and frustration, both for me and for my colleagues, because despite my good intentions as an ethnographer I often had the feeling that I could never produce the kind of results desired by my colleagues. I also often felt controlled, as if they wanted to make sure that I was effectively doing something in the field. My work was also often interrupted by requests from the Kisumu office, which did not take into account that I had my own schedule to follow. Although I asked on various occasions for a general staff meeting or an individual meeting in the field, during which I could have increased their understanding of my work and thus improved the situation, it seemed that it was not their priority.

Whenever I travelled to town, where the CDC office was located, I made sure to spend time visiting residents and other establishments, so as not to be solely associated with the CDC and the Yeshica staff. My Belgian medical colleagues from ITM did not understand why I needed to hang around in town, and expected me to immediately report to the CDC office and spend a full workday there. There were multiple reasons for me not to spend all day in the office. As I have noted, I needed to distance myself from the CDC, so that the youngsters would feel free to talk about their sexual relationships, Yeshica, and their perceptions of the CDC. Grasping town life would allow me to situate my local observations of the village in a wider perspective. Being in town gave me the opportunity to meet up with some of the youngsters who had migrated to town, and to meet with social scientists, health workers, and HIV-prevention workers. Of course, I still spent quite some time in the CDC office, and there were plenty occasions to observe the ‘organisational culture’ of the CDC office and to enjoy conversations with the CDC’s research staff. In addition, my research assistant Petronella and I participated in many activities organized by Yeshica, both in Winam and in Kisumu. The only difference was that we were not seen as part of the Yeshica or the CDC team since we only occasionally attended the weekly staff and research meetings. As I had hoped, we were appreciated as independent researchers who were interested in understanding young people’s point of view concerning health-promoting organisations in the area.
I definitely disappointed the ITM team in various ways because there was a lack of understanding and confidence in my kind of work. On numerous occasions I tried to explain what anthropological fieldwork entails and why I was making certain decisions, but often those decisions were attributed to my personality, rather than disciplinary rigour. In their view, I was a ‘die-hard anthropologist’ who did not want to adapt to their way of working, refused to go to the office on a daily basis, and wouldn’t join them in their Land Cruisers. When I became ill with malaria, I chose to be tested at the local hospital of Dhonam instead of going into town; doing so, I personally experienced the lack of resources in the hospital (despite the area being overwhelmed with medical research projects, not even a simple, rapid diagnostic test for malaria was available). These efforts to become immersed in the field and to improve my data were met with scepticism and distrust by my colleagues.

One could suggest that my medical colleagues were worried about me, and that may have been true as well, but there was more at stake. They had expected that I would organise in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with youngsters at the start of my fieldwork, and they assumed I would need their help to reach youngsters. When I carried out my work independently and did not need any help, they had less control over the collected data. Some of the Yeshica staff members were also worried about the kind of information I was gathering, concerned that my data would reflect negatively on them. Once they realized that the data I collected was not immediately reported to the Kisumu office, nor to Belgium, they had more confidence in me.

5.4. Colleagues and subjects

The place of Yeshica staff and ITM/CDC/KEMRI staff in my research brought often confusion. My supervisor at the ITM once asked, to my surprise, “Am I also being observed by you?”. I clarified that, indeed, in order to understand the point of view of the youngsters who were my main research subjects, I needed to look at many different actors in the field in order to place the youngsters’ point of view in context (see also Hastrup 1995). If I wanted to understand what it meant for the young people to participate in Yeshica, I also needed to learn about the intentions and expectations of Yeshica staff and the ITM team, and how their intentions translated into practice. For example, the youngsters’ opinion of the project would be affected if a certain staff member took advantage of his position by having a ‘one-night stand’ with a youngster participating in Yeshica.
My Belgian medical colleagues did not grasp that they were an important part of the larger context of the project, and therefore might be research subjects at certain points in my study (see also Murphy and Dingwall 2007). Whereas in the field, Yeshica staff members were aware that in addition to the youngsters that I followed, they were also my research subjects. In order to make my work understandable, I organised meetings with Yeshica staff, but I had only two formal conversations with the program coordinator, who was usually very busy with the implementation of YIP as well as other medical studies. The communication with our supervisor in Belgium happened more smoothly. Each time I went to Belgium, we had private meetings during which I clearly explained the work I had done so far and the challenges I was facing. My Belgian colleagues from ITM were given the opportunity to read and comment on my draft chapters, which gave me the chance to repeat my research objectives and explain how I came to certain conclusions. I gave several slide presentations for the ITM in which I presented summaries of my preliminary findings. However, most of my medical colleagues continued to question my methodology, and pointedly asked whether I had found some magic bullet for HIV prevention. Hoeyer et al. (2005) write that anthropologists should anticipate that most epidemiologists and medical staff do not understand the ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1983) of ethnographic work, and urge us to continually negotiate the terms of agreements made between epidemiologists and us. My experience as part of a medical team underscores the necessity of repeatedly explaining the nature of anthropological research, so that all potential research subjects—including team members—understand their role in it.

5.5. Research or intervention?

Having realised that I needed to maintain distance from the CDC in order to build rapport with the youth, I was often in an uneasy position of choosing between doing research or helping to implement Yeshica. For example, once during a formal staff meeting, the Belgian program coordinator asked my advice about the ‘livelihood intervention’ that could help young fisherman gain access to microfinance, and how the participating organisation (Kenya Rural Enterprise Program, or ‘K-Rep’) could better reach the fishermen in Winam. I shared with them that Yeshica’s office hours, 9am until 5pm, did not fit a fisherman’s schedule, as they work during the night, sleep in the morning, and hang around at the market or fishing beaches in the late afternoon. I suggested that these young men have no time or interest for savings clubs that promised them a loan in the far future. The program coordinator had asserted that the fishermen
made “easy money”, a characterization I contradicted, explaining the hard circumstances of the work and the small harvests they pulled in (see Chapter 4). The meeting ended with the program coordinator urging me to collaborate with K·Rep and Yeshica staff so that the fishermen I already knew could get introduced to Yeshica. While I didn’t want to disappoint her, I felt very uneasy about this prospect: I did not see it as my role in the field to promote the ‘livelihood intervention’. It would only bring confusion about my position in the field among the youngsters with whom I worked.

While my role was to conduct fieldwork, I received many, many requests related to project management—so many, in fact, that I began to wonder what to do with my knowledge about the problems of the project. I found it hard not to intervene in the YIP-related injustices I often saw happening in the field. In fact, I tried to draw attention to some serious issues of fraud at one point. In addition, I found it my ethical responsibility to intervene (see also Murphy and Dingwall 2007) when I realised that one member of Yeshica staff withheld travel reimbursements from a number of youngsters (see Chapter 7). I reported only some cases of impropriety—the majority I had to leave untouched as they were too delicate—to my supervisor in Belgium, and I hoped she would act on this information as she deemed it necessary.

Knowing about problems and being unsure about whether to intervene is an ethical dilemma that arises when interventions and research are intertwined without a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Throughout my fieldwork, I struggled with the extent to which my empirical data might, in the midst of the research, affect Yeshica. Whenever certain important discussions took place within Yeshica, I wondered: Should I speak up or keep quiet? In many cases, the youngsters explicitly asked me to intermediate between them and Yeshica staff, as their voices were often not heard, and they depended on the money that one Yeshica staff member withheld. In some cases, I did speak up, representing the point of view of the youngster, but the program coordinator often questioned the validity of youngsters’ self-reports (see also DiGiacomo 1999) and had more confidence in what local staff told her.

I was unsure whether my observations of the problems at Yeshica would be heard, and if they were even welcome. Schoepf (1995: 40–42) notes that whenever anthropologists are consulted on matters of HIV prevention, their advice might be ignored, seen as contrary to medical ‘wisdom’ (see also Streefland 1990; DiGiacomo 1999; Schoepf 2001). Similarly, in her work ‘Letting Them Die’: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programmes Fail, Campbell (2003: 171)—a social psychologist analysing an HIV/AIDS prevention project in South Africa—reports that “the social scientists’
attempts to elicit any kind of feedback, comment or discussion of their process evaluation findings from stakeholders or donors have been unsuccessful”. In a personal conversation with Campbell, she confirmed to me that even though she had spoken up during the implementation of the ‘Summertown project’ in South Africa, her voice was often not taken seriously and her views had not been taken into account (personal conversation, November 13 2006). After the data collection was complete, and I was busy with analysis, I spoke up on various occasions to my Belgian medical colleagues from ITM. Besides listening to my point of view, not much action was taken. I wrote two reports, one on the microfinance project and another on the relationship between parents and children, and in this way contributed to the evaluation of two of Yeshica’s interventions (the ‘livelihood intervention’ and the ‘Families Matter! Program’) (see Blommaert and Oluoch 2007; Blommaert et al. 2008).

The microfinance report was highly critical: it clarified some of the participants’ complaints about the livelihood intervention and offered recommendations for how to improve it. External consultants also evaluated the ‘livelihood intervention’ and came to the same conclusions (see Parott and Heyer 2007). In the end, nothing was done with the reports, and the microfinance project was simply stopped. At the time, I recalled a remark made by Hans Sonneveld, the former director of the Amsterdam School for Social Research (now named Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research): “At the time you will be writing up your data, the project will no longer exist”. Indeed, during the writing of this dissertation, Yeshica ceased to exist.

Most of Yeshica participants left disappointed but, at least, had managed to get some benefit out of the project (see Chapter 7). While it did not change their sexual behaviour or prospects for the future, as was the project’s intentions, it had at least helped them to survive the day, and even the day after. And even though Yeshica no longer exists, the youngsters’ experience of the project—articulated in this dissertation—will hopefully contribute to improving many future interventions, even beyond HIV/AIDS prevention projects. Indeed, some of the insights put forth in this dissertation are relevant for any kind of intervention planned in the context of development work. The message emanating from my data is pretty clear and simple, for both researchers and development workers: work as equal partners across quantitative and qualitative disciplines, and encourage open discussions so that direct feedback from the field can be incorporated in project management.
5.6. Conclusion: An alternative contribution under the hegemony of epidemiology?

Working across disciplines, especially when combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, requires a lot of energy and time, usually from both sides. But in the rather common situation where most of the power and resources clearly lie on the quantitative side, the onus of explaining methods, and trying to gain credibility, lies with the qualitative researcher. Although some of the challenges I faced were related to specific personalities or circumstances, the underlying dynamics are common. DiGiacomo’s (1999) efforts were met with resistance, and even hostility. Bibeau described the struggle as “trying to participate [in the medical team] in a manner that did not also require alienating myself from my own profession” (cited in DiGiacomo 1999: 438).

Permitting anthropological methods to be misappropriated will undoubtedly lead to a diminishing of the reputation and meaning of qualitative anthropological work. Bolton (1995) suggests a solution might lie in the development of a professional and ethical code to define clearly what constitutes an anthropological approach. At the very least, such a code could warn anthropologists about the pitfalls of participating in joint research ventures that fail to give anthropology its due.

While frustrating and time consuming, the challenges I faced trying to justify my methodology did not have a direct impact on my research findings. After enduring many difficulties, my situation improved significantly during the last six months of fieldwork, when I was allowed to work totally independently, without having to give explanations about my work. Although the team did not achieve a fruitful interdisciplinary exchange, at least some of my epidemiological colleagues did come to realise the added value of my anthropological work.

6. On researching sexual relationships

Moyer (2003: 8) convincingly argues: “One of the least effective techniques for understanding how people live with HIV/AIDS is to ask direct questions about it in a fashion out of context with their daily lives”. My goal was to understand how young people communicate among themselves about sex, sexual relationships, and HIV/AIDS: how they choose their sexual partners; and how these issues permeate their daily life. Observing and participating in their daily activities could give me insight into these questions, and because premarital sexual relationships are often kept secret, it was important to win young people’s confidence—and to carefully discern how best to introduce and approach the topic (see also Tadele 2005; Spronk 2006; van Eerdewijk
Like Moyer (2003), I did not mention ‘HIV/AIDS’, ‘reproductive health’, or 'sexuality' while explaining my research topic in the local community. Not mentioning these terms helped diminish any association of me with the CDC, and, more importantly, prevented people from giving me practised, socially conventional answers. In order to find out about AIDS and young people’s sexual behaviour, I intentionally did not bring up those subjects until I had established rapport with the youngsters.

In the early months of my research, I spent time learning how to articulate my questions within local ways of knowledge. The UK’s Department for International Development’s ‘livelihood approach’ (Carney 1998; Carney et al. 1998; Chambers and Gordon 1992) served as a rough guideline for my research. Instead of asking questions directly about AIDS and sexual behaviour, my research assistant Petronella and I started with questions about how youngsters tried to earn their living. It was not my intention to measure young people’s poverty level, nor was it my intention to collect detailed data about each person’s livelihood. I just wanted to obtain a rough idea of what poverty and unemployment meant to them and what opportunities and constraints they had in making a living. It was not my intention to apply the ‘livelihood approach’ in all its details, as this was not the purpose of my research. Conversations also often started with people asking me where I was from, about my family, and what we did to make a living at home, which was an entrée for me to inquire about their families and their livelihood. We learned about the different livelihood possibilities in Winam and why young people made certain choices. Since engaging in sexual relationships is part of growing up and is a topic of interest in youngsters’ daily life, the youngsters themselves soon introduced the topic in our discussions. I quickly noticed that youngsters actually talked quite easily about sexual relationships and HIV/AIDS once I had approached the topic with some caution and had won their confidence. It was especially common to hear them gossiping about their peers, and the stories they shared with me about their friends’ sexual experiences made it easier to turn the questions to them. In this way, I could grasp young people’s life world, including their daily problems and aspirations, which would subsequently help me to understand their perceptions and expectations of Yeshica.

I realised at the beginning of my fieldwork that it was much easier to create rapport with young men than it was with young women, who usually just observed me from a distance. Because many HIV/AIDS studies have found that young women’s sexual behaviour is often underreported while young men’s is overestimated—largely because young men often boast about and young women often minimize their sexual
activity (see for example, Tadele 2005 and Spronk 2006)—I found it of genuine importance to find a young female research assistant in order to more easily associate with the young women of Winam. With Petronella’s assistance, I managed to forge close relationships with most of the young women with whom we worked. Many shared their problems with us, and some even approached us for information on contraception and abortion. Approaching young men, on the other hand, was easier since most had a better knowledge of English and were not hesitant to get to know Petronella and me. Petronella had to be clear that she was already engaged, so no one would interpret her curiosity about their lives as sexual interest. The young men’s interest in Petronella presented some problems: some of them tried to present a good picture of themselves to Petronella, denying they had already had many girlfriends. They wanted to hide from her the fact that they had had a sexually transmitted infection, but did not hesitate to ask my advice (and sometimes financial aid) about it. However, we were conscious of this and managed to challenge their answers, showing them that there was no need to hide information from us, and that they had nothing to lose by giving us the right information. Neither of us had any intention of starting a sexual relationship with anyone since we both were in committed relationships. But since Petronella’s partner was not around, she was sometimes a target for some young men: the ‘tactics’ they used to try to seduce her gave us first-hand data about the ‘seduction game’ among young people (see Chapter 6).

Beginning with closed-ended questions such as “Do you have a boyfriend?” or “Have you already engaged in sex?” did not make sense since it was clear that all of the youngsters I worked with between the ages of 16 and 25 had already had sexual experiences, except for one, and I doubted whether her account was truthful. Instead, I approached the matter assuming that the young women already had a boyfriend, which made the conversation flow more naturally, and if they had no boyfriend, they felt comfortable saying so. We found that detailed information about youngsters’ past sexual relationships could best be obtained by listening carefully to the villagers’ gossip. The youngsters themselves did sometimes mention anecdotes about their past sexual relationships but some preferred not to talk about it because they wanted to forget it—which is understandable—as some relationships had left them feeling bitterness and hurt.

6.1. Data collection

I used multiple methods of data collection, including participant observation, informal
conversations, in-depth interviews (including family genealogies), life histories, focus group discussions, a diary kept by one young man, and document analysis; I then triangulated the findings obtained from the different methods.

6.1.1. Participant observation

I wanted to grasp how young people give meaning to their sexual relations and navigate between different sexual partners. In addition, I tried to gain as complete as possible a picture of the diverse activities and tactics that people employed to improve their standard of living, in order to understand why young people made certain choices regarding their sexual relationships. My previous fieldwork in Bolivia had taught me that conversations alone would not always give me the full picture: a mother might tell me that her family was supported by her husband’s salary, neglecting to mention that they also own sheep, tend fruit trees, and cultivate staple crops. People do not always realise that all kinds of information may be relevant for ethnographic research.

Participant observation has also its limitations, and is especially difficult in the study of people’s sexual relationships. Spronk (2006: 34) concisely concludes: “participant observation has to stop, so to speak at the bedroom door”. Sexual relationships are surrounded by secrecy and intimacy and the investigation of such involves many ethical dilemmas (Herdt 1992; Bolton 1992; Abramson 1992). Thus a lot of the information obtained on sexual relationships is mainly based on what people have told me and, to some extent, what Petronella and I could observe. We also obtained a great deal of information by listening to youngsters’ gossip. Through understanding their everyday use of language (and noting what was left unsaid), I gained knowledge of the symbolism that gave meaning to the things that happened behind closed doors.

Participating in the daily activities of young people allowed me to establish rapport, and to eventually reach through the ‘snowball method’ a broad range of youngsters, who had diverse backgrounds and came from different villages within Winam. Together with Petronella, I went to all the places that young people frequented. In addition to the many funerals and disco matanga’s around Dhonam, we visited almost all the markets in Winam and several nearby fishing beaches; weeded and harvested maize and millet; helped prepare meals; washed clothes in the lake; and fetched water. On occasion, we accompanied youngsters to check-ups at the public hospital and visits to the herbalist: I went for my own malaria test at the local hospital. Petronella and I also participated in many forms of entertainment: played draft (checkers), karata (cards), and pool; watched football matches, and played football and basketball—sometimes in
the company of my boyfriend Sven; and watched local youths playing in a band with self-made instruments. We ‘chilled’ (hung out) at the Coca-Cola container (with warm Coke!); spent time at the hair salons; went to various discos; watched movies; and went to the bar in Dhonam. We visited many young people, both at the rooms they rented and at their parents’ homesteads. We observed and participated in religious events, including Catholic, Anglican, Evangelist, and traditional Nomia church services, and prayed with people in private homes. And of course, we participated in many Yeshica activities: the microfinance project meetings, Community Advisory Board (CAB) meetings, staff meetings, the Yeshica Youth Festival, vocational trainings, voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) outreach efforts, school visits, and more. Lastly, there were innumerable walks through and between the villages in Winam, stopping at every house where we were invited in.

It is difficult to communicate the extent of the research in figures, but to give an idea of the magnitude: we saw the core group of about 15 youngsters (of the total of 44) who lived close to our residence almost daily, not always for long conversations, but we at least exchanged a short greeting and we were able to ask how they were doing. We visited some of them at least once a week for a longer conversation of one hour to two hours. A good number of young people regularly visited our compound, so that every now and then the house was filled with visitors—even if Petronella and I were away and only Sven was home. Those who lived farther from the village we would visit every fortnight, and spend an entire day helping them with their daily chores and participating in whatever their activities might be. Every once in a while I brought some small gift as sign of our friendship, to show that I cared about them. My gifts were not always directly meant for the youngsters, as I often just gave them to their mothers on whose household resources they were living. People—usually the older women of Winam—also commonly asked me to bring them something whenever I returned from my trips to Kisumu. As it was a way of showing respect and affection as ‘a child of Winam’—as I could call myself at times since I was given the Luo nickname ‘Adhiambo’ (born in the afternoon)—to those whom I cared for, I often brought sugar, which was highly appreciated since it was relatively expensive in the village, or gave them soap or some of the many second-hand clothes that I had brought with me from Belgium.

6.1.2. Informal conversations and in-depth interviews

As part of observing and participating in the daily life of young people, I shared in and followed along with numerous informal conversations. I did not come up with a list of
topics that I wanted to discuss (although I had them in mind) at the first visit, but rather just visited people and let all kinds of topics emerge. While time was spent on topics that were at first sight unrelated to my research, they helped me gain a detailed picture of daily life, which taught me a great deal. Most conversations started with a group of family members, as everyone wanted to welcome me and my research assistant to their place, but soon after such greetings, we were able to talk one-on-one with the youngster we had planned to visit. When we did not find the youngster at home, we asked the parents or other caretakers about his/her whereabouts. In these moments, we also took the opportunity to ask them about what life was like when they were young, and their opinions on certain topics related to my research. Although the staff of the HIV/AIDS programs and other development programs in the area, religious leaders, and traditional herbalists were not an immediate part of the research group, I also had a number of conversations with them since their opinions and perceptions of everyday life and the HIV/AIDS programs were important in gaining a broader perspective.

In addition to informal conversations, we carried out in-depth interviews to deepen our understanding of certain issues. These took place only towards the end of my fieldwork, between April and October 2006, because I first wanted to have a good relationship with the young people we worked with before having a formal, tape-recorded, semi-structured interview, complete with an informed consent form. I did not carry out formal interviews with all the youngsters I worked with; I interviewed those who I expected to have answers to my questions, or to capture a particular life story. In total, I conducted 18 in-depth interviews with youngsters, seven in-depth interviews with grandparents (family genealogies), and eight in-depth interviews with health staff, two researchers, and a priest. I prepared all interviews beforehand with my research assistant: I selected the person to be interviewed and the topics to be discussed, and discussed the topics with Petronella, who added topics as needed. Petronella conducted the interviews if they needed to be done in Dholuo, but I was present during the majority of the interviews, and, since my Dholuo was relatively good, I was able to follow the conversation. I conducted the interviews when the youngster could express him- or herself sufficiently in English. After each interview, I gave feedback to Petronella about what went well and what could have been improved, giving her on-the-job training and assuring the quality of our work.
6.1.3. Life histories

As a way to examine the interplay of social structure and action by individuals and groups, I made use of life histories. Through this method, I got an overview of the changes and developments of a person’s life and an insight into how large-scale processes of sociocultural change act in local contexts (Schoepf 1992: 260–261). Life histories, however, were not collected all at once but in bits, sometimes on different days. In White’s (2000: 39) collection of social histories related to the various African bloodsucking stories, she confirms that “people do not give testimony that fits neatly into chronological or cosmological accounts”. In the beginning of the conversations with the youngsters, Petronella and I usually tried first to get a general picture about the livelihood options available to them. As trust increased, we could broach the topic of sexual relations. Subsequently we discussed their memories about their upbringing and their parents’ livelihood: some were raised by grandparents or siblings, because their parents had died. Others had never had a relationship with, or had even known their father, especially children born out of wedlock. Some of the young women were already mothers and refused to discuss paternity, shyly laughing our questions away. It was only through gossip and rumours, and tying together little data points like where they went to school or when the child was born, that we eventually came to guess where and when they likely had met the biological father.

During these conversations, the youngsters had the freedom to shape the conversation and describe things in their own terms, such as the meaning they gave to sexual relationships or how they wanted to improve their living conditions. This methodology helped me to discover people’s less obvious motives and emotions, and to put those into the context of their upbringing and family history. Like a large puzzle, we pieced together each life story from many different sources and moments of information. In total, we completed seven life histories of young men and nine of young women. Though fewer in their number than interviews, these 16 life histories are an incredibly rich source of data and a powerful way to understand how and why a person might see things a certain way.

6.1.4. Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were useful for exploring how the accounts of livelihoods or sexual relations are constructed through social interaction. Although I would argue that focus groups are currently a bit overused in evaluations of development work, they are a good tool to analyse the degree of consensus on a given
METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

topic and which opinions are publicly acceptable. Like the in-depth interviews, FGDs were held in the latter part of my fieldwork after a relationship of trust had been established; they were held in our rented room, and participants were offered tea and bread. One FGD on the topic of sexual relationships was held with the five young men who made up Yeshica’s Post-Test Club (PTC, the group of youth who had been tested for HIV/AIDS and were public about the results); they enjoyed it so much that we organised two additional FGDs with them. Another FGD was organised with four fishermen to learn more about their livelihood. Only two of the four fishermen belonged to the group of my research participants that I followed closely. We made multiple attempts to organise FGDs with a group of young women who participated in Yeshica and a group of young women from Dhonam to talk about sexual relationships, but in the end we were only able to organise one with five young women from Dhonam who already knew each other very well. The young women in the group talked mainly about others instead of themselves. Each FGD lasted three to four hours; the PTC group really enjoyed themselves, noting that they lacked opportunities for such frank conversation at Yeshica, while the fishermen and young women were eager to wrap up and get home after three hours.

6.1.5. One young man’s diary

I did not intend to ask anyone to keep a diary as part of my research. But one young man, Onyango, was a particularly rich source of local knowledge. If he was visiting us, which was often, when other visitors dropped by, he usually talked to us after they departed about their reputation and current situations in which they might be involved. Onyango also came by to update us whenever a disco matanga was taking place. As he was eager to improve his English, I suggested he could write for me about what he encountered every day when walking around the village. His account was a very interesting source of information about how young people seduced each other, how they discussed sexual relations, where they had sex during the day, and so on. For ethical reasons, Petronella and I did not ask him to present us to the persons he was talking about in his diary, as these persons were not aware that Onyango was writing about them. Neither had we informed them about our research. Our main intention of this diary collection was rather to grasp where youngsters usually meet each other and the topics they usually discuss amongst each other.
6.1.6. Document analysis

I also collected a number of secondary-source documents before, during, and after fieldwork in order to understand the larger context of life in Winam. Newspaper articles from a variety of journals, translated songs from Dholuo bands, and documents from Yeshica and the YIP were of relevance as they provided important background information.

6.2. Data analysis

Except for writing down a few key words in a small notebook, Petronella and I rarely took notes during participant observation activities or interviews. Afterwards, around lunch and dinner, Petronella and I wrote up the data—sometimes until late in the evening—as accurately as possible in a hand-written field journal that Petronella then word-processed using a computer. A significant number of interviews were conducted in Dholuo, which meant that I had to rely to some degree on Petronella’s reporting. Every evening I took time to go through the notes to point out lingering questions, contradictions, and uncertainties. Petronella was often able to shed light on what was unclear, and if not, we took note and revisited these questions during our next visit.

Tape-recorded in-depth interviews and FGD data were transcribed and word-processed (Microsoft Word 2003). Given the large amount of data that I was able to collect in the field over 20 months of fieldwork (approximately about 3 to 6 pages of fieldnotes per day or about 40 to 60 pages per month; each in-depth interview ran about 30 to 40 pages and each FGD about 50 to 60 pages), transcription took an enormous amount of time. I was lucky that Petronella was willing to transcribe during evenings and weekends while I was busy with the analysis of the data. However, quite a big amount of fieldnotes, in-depth interviews and FGD could not be transcribed and word-processed before the time (October 2006) that Petronella left for another job as my fieldwork period was finished. For the remaining part, Petronella trained two transcribers who finally were able to finish the work three months later.

After everything was transcribed, I coded the data using Atlas-ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Programme. Atlas-ti is used to systematically identify concepts across multiple interviews and fieldnotes, allowing us to find similarities and disparities in how young people perceived their life world. Sometimes I found very similar uses of a concept, but in other cases, I could discern that there were important nuances that needed to be taken into account. In this way, Atlas-ti or similar programs are superior to quantitative programs that only provide statistics about the
frequency of usage of certain concepts. Atlas.ti also allows the quick collection of all information related to a specific youngster. By coding data not only by theme but also by name, I could easily bring together everything that I had learned about a person, either from him- or herself or from others. After identifying the key concepts, Atlas.ti allowed me to build small ecosystems or networks of related concepts. This process allowed me, for instance, to show that a purely transactional account of sexual relations in fact did not exist in the perceptions of young people. Love and emotional attachment were concepts that inhabited the same ecosystem as sexual relations.

With all of this data, the challenge was to gain sufficient distance from my material to be able to formulate a critical analysis. My aim and approach was to work inductively by letting my data inform theory, i.e., to let my data speak for itself, which turned out to be a rich, intense, and, in the end, satisfying process. When writing about ‘the Other’, I take Fabian (1983)’s critique about anthropology’s allochronism into account, which prompts us to reflect critically on the political dimensions of temporal rhetoric. As he writes, the use of the ‘ethnographic present’ creates a timeless sense of action that turns “the ethnographic subjects into exotic creatures” (Fabian 1983: xxv). It is important to be conscious when using time in this dissertation. I decided to use the present tense when I discuss something that has been happening for a long time, or when it has a continual sense to it, while I use the past tense in recounting specific conversations and events. My use of present tense is not supposed to imply that things will never change, but is simply a stylistic tool to make the text more fluid for the reader.

7. Conclusion

How can we as researchers contribute to a more effective fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic? What lessons can be learned from working in multi- or interdisciplinary teams comprised of both quantitative and qualitative researchers? And what methods will help deliver new insights into the sensitive topic of sexual relations and livelihoods among young people in a Kenyan village?

This chapter reviewed the history of HIV/AIDS research, the challenge anthropologists have had in convincing funders of the value of the discipline’s methods, and the more recent theoretical focus on the structural violence of poverty and other inequalities. Since 1990, ethnographic research has helped to shape the creation of more successful, community-based interventions that aim to address the wider socioeconomic
METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

and political factors responsible for the spread of HIV, not just individual behaviour. My personal view is that as researchers we should have an activist approach and work towards improving the situation of the people and the programs that we are studying. To be able to do this, we as anthropologists have to continue to improve the quality of our work and not compromise our methodological rigour. While we strive to provide good anthropological insights, epidemiologists must meet us halfway and embrace collaborative project design, implementation, and evaluation. Only in this way we will no longer talk about “we” and “them” but instead work together, on the same level, in an interdisciplinary team, with the common goal of winning the fight against HIV/AIDS.

But the journey does not end here. Even if our methodology is an integrated part of a research project’s design, the real-life implementation of interdisciplinary work is far from self-evident, as I learned during the course of my research. I argue that we should not allow our interdisciplinary partners to ‘cherry-pick’ one or two anthropological methods: anthropology is not a toolbox, but a rather sophisticated approach that triangulates data obtained through several methods, most importantly participant observation. Sticking to my methodological ‘guns’ meant that it took extra effort to convince IRB reviewers that my work was indeed scientific. While there was certainly a lot of good will regarding the inclusion of qualitative work in my experience with the ITM team, I learned that there still remain prejudices against participant observation, and beliefs that it lacks empirical rigour. From my experience there are two sides to this. On the one hand, anthropologists need to do a better job in communicating how we safeguard the quality of our work and how we make it rigorous. We should not assume, as I probably did, that when we are hired, other team members understand what our work entails. On the other hand, our colleagues need to understand that interdisciplinary teams require additional effort in terms of internal communication, so that all members understand each others’ methodology, including why the team members might be research subjects themselves.

Having discussed the historical and institutional context of my work, the last part of this chapter detailed how I actually conducted the research. The combination of participant observation, informal conversations, in-depth interviews, life histories, focus group discussions, and a diary, was very labour intensive, both in the field as well as afterwards, when I had to dig through mountains of data. The sheer volume of data meant that analysis took a long time, especially because I wanted my data to speak for itself rather than press it into a preexisting framework. In the following chapters, we will see what the data has to tell us about how youngsters create livelihood networks in
an impoverished area such as Winam. I will show how my methodological choices opened the way to an in-depth understanding of the youngsters’ ambitions, concerns, and aspirations in an impoverished, highly unpredictable context. Thanks to the good rapport Petronella and I (and my boyfriend Sven) established with them, I am able to shed light on their pragmatic actions, both in their sexual relationships and in their daily livelihood pursuits.

1 Sven and I officially married in 2013 after a relationship of more than 15 years.

2 I carried out fieldwork in the Tropics of Cochabamba (Bolivia) in 2002; my goal was to understand the impact of the ‘war on drugs’ on the livelihood strategies of coca farmers (Blommaert 2003).

3 In the next chapter I discuss this issue further, including an incident in 2003 when a newspaper reported that people in Rarieda were used as ‘guinea pigs’.

4 I have two academic supervisors: Prof. dr. Anita Hardon from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and Prof. dr. Mirjam De Bruijn from the African Study Centre (ASC). My third supervisor is Prof. dr. Anne Buvé from the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM).

5 The phrase is borrowed from an article by Trostle (2005).

6 The ‘Health Belief Model’, the ‘Social Cognitive Learning Theory’, and the ‘Theory of Reasoned Action’ are different models based on social cognitive theory, and start from the assumption of reasoned action. These theories argue that behaviours can be shaped by rewarding or punishing people for their behaviour. These models are often used in public health approaches that aim to change health behaviour.

7 Spronk’s (2006) dissertation was published in 2012 (see Spronk 2012).

8 When those people “who provide significant linkages across densely intra-linked, clustered sub-networks no longer serve as transmission links (because they die, start using condoms […]), overall prevalence is likely to decline rapidly” (Thornton 2008: 79).

9 For race/ethnicity the IRB used the following categories: white, Hispanic, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian or Pacific Islander.

10 According to Trostle and Sommerfeld (1996: 255), “At least 19 anthropologists are now employed at CDC in Atlanta”, yet I wonder who falls under the category of ‘anthropologists’. My experience has taught me that for some, including the CDC staff working in Kisumu, any social scientist or sociologist or psychologist or even a public health worker falls under this category.

11 There were a number of issues that were going on in the field that were in contradiction to the project’s general aim, such as Abich Rawere (Forum for the Youth) which was organised on Saturday afternoons to show documentaries on HIV prevention, turned into a local cinema with Nigerian and war movies (see Chapter 7).

12 The first formal meeting with the YIP program coordinator took place at the end of my stay in March 2004, the evening before I flew back home. The second meeting was when Petronella and I
organised a formal in-depth interview with her at the end of the research in September 2006. The program coordinator however, had to cancel the meeting and the meeting was rescheduled in October 2006. I had already left the field, so Petronella actually carried out the interview.
Chapter 3

Winam: A place of structural violence

1. Winam piny maber? (Is Winam a good land?)

Standing at the lakeshore of the gigantic Lake Victoria, you can see an impressive bowl-shaped mountain at Homa Bay on the distant side of the Winam Gulf, the small part of the lake that belongs to Kenya. There is a paradox here—the great, magnificent landscape and the harsh reality on the shores—that will always colour my memory of Winam.

Kenya is a diverse country, with 38 million inhabitants who speak 43 different languages. In addition to its capital, Nairobi, there are two other major cities: Mombasa, the old Swahili trading port on the Indian Ocean, and Kisumu, on the shore of Lake Victoria, Africa’s largest lake. About three hours southwest from Kisumu by matatu (public mini-buses), or two hours in private car, lies Winam, made up of more than 80 villages. I lived in Dhonam, nicknamed ‘Kahero’ (meaning ‘the home of Hero’ in Dholuo, the principal local language), after Hero, who was supposedly the first Indian trader to come to Dhonam. During the 1980s, Dhonam flourished as a market centre, when the steamboat connected JoWinam (the people of Winam) to different areas and different people. At that time, gold was discovered, movies were screened and local bars and restaurants had plenty of customers. A famous Luo singer composed his song about the beauty of Winam, referring particularly to Kahero, his home, and how it has attracted many nice women. The singer's lyrics recount his wives who came from different places to marry him and share the wealth of Winam. He recites all the good things—in addition to beautiful women—that Winam produces: mangoes, cassava, fish, groundnuts, even gold. The song was still very popular among Winam’s youngsters during my fieldwork. Yet, when I hear this song, I ask myself: what remains of the singer’s ‘good land’?

In this chapter, I present a concise history of Nyanza Province in general, and Winam in particular, to contextualize the setting where I conducted my research. I begin by explaining the concept of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 1999), a thread that runs throughout this chapter. I then outline the historical legacies of Nyanza Province and Winam before and after Independence (called Uhuru, literally: freedom). Nyanza
Province served as the country’s largest labour reserve with significant consequences for the local economy, including a decline in agricultural production. Even *Uhuru* did not change much of the limitations faced by the population of Nyanza. The structural difficulties were not offset by a gold rush or better connections to cities, but may have actually worsened. In covering a period of more than one hundred years (1900–2012) in just a few pages, I concentrate on what is most relevant to understand the structural limitations faced by the population in Winam.

My aim of this chapter is to sketch out a framework for understanding how disparate but converging socioeconomic, cultural and political forces in Nyanza Province in general, and Winam and Dhonam in particular, prepared the stage for the epidemic of HIV that began in 1984. Two themes play an important role and deserve more detailed analysis: the role of trade in Winam, and in particular the importance of Dhonam as a trading centre and port; and the changes that gender roles have been undergoing. The political economy of Winam illustrates how the rapid spread of HIV, including the large difference in infection rates between male and female adolescents, is related to ‘structural violence’. Winam’s unequal gender relations and its marginalized position in Kenya’s economic system are not *sui generis* but rather a product of its colonial history, the consequences of which persisted after Kenya’s Independence.

Within a context of high mobility, where the marginalized majority of Winam structurally were “denied access to the fruits of scientific and social progress” (Farmer 1999: 209), Winam became a focal point for a gamut of research studies and interventions, mainly dominated by a powerful American institution, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Through the implementation of medical studies in Winam unequal relations between the research subjects and the Kenyan or foreign research staff became apparent. The blood extraction that was often required in such studies reminded JoWinam of the encounters of the past with colonial, European practitioners, which gave rise to bloodsucking stories and the accompanied distrust in medical research.

This chapter is primarily derived from secondary pre- and postcolonial sources. Although colonial historians had written records at their disposal, they did not always have a good understanding of African social life, as reflected in their writings. In this dissertation, the history of Winam from the 1970s onwards, on the other hand, is derived almost exclusively from oral data, including memories of the past, the use of which requires caution since memories are often shaped by nostalgia. Any recollection of the past is by definition reconstructed, and, to some extent, a commentary on the
present (Smith 1986). As a consequence, what JoWinam remember about the past cannot be taken as objective indications of social reality but rather as a way to mark a contrast with the present (Smith 1986).

2. The nobodies: Victims of structural violence in times of enduring uncertainty

I start off this historical review by sketching out the main theoretical concept necessary to understand the context of Winam: structural violence, the existence of which provides a fertile ground for the HIV epidemic. The poem “The Nobodies,” by Eduardo Galeano, paints a vivid picture of what it is like to suffer from structural violence:

“The Nobodies”

Fleas dream of buying a dog
and the nobodies dream of getting out from under their poverty,
that some magic day
suddenly good fortune will rain upon them
that it will downpour buckets - full of good luck.
But good luck doesn’t rain yesterday, or today
or tomorrow or ever,
not even a little drizzle falls from the sky.

No matter how much the nobodies cry for it
and even when their left hand itches
or they get up on the right foot,
or when they start the year getting a new broom.
The nobodies: the sons of no one,
the owners of nothing.
The nobodies: treated as no one,
running after the carrot, dying their lives, fucked,
double-fucked.

Who are not, even when they are.
Who don’t speak languages, but rather dialects.
Who don’t follow religions,
but rather superstitions.
Who don’t do art, but rather crafts.
Who don’t practice culture, but rather folklore.
Who are not human,
but rather human resources.
Who have no face but have arms,
who have no name, but rather a number.
Who don’t appear in the universal history books,
but rather in the police pages of the local press.
The nobodies,
the ones who are worth less
than the bullet that kills them.
Otieno and Atieno, brother and sister, were 19 and 17 years old, respectively, when I first met them in Winam, and they had recently lost their financial security when their father left them suddenly in 2005. They had grown up in Thika, an industrial town to the northeast of Nairobi in Central Province, where they had lived with their parents, their three younger brothers, and their younger sister; they were not used to village life. Their mother, MinAtieno, was their father’s second wife; his first wife, who was unable to conceive, remained at their father’s natal home in an eastern neighbouring community of Winam. Otieno and Atieno had enjoyed their life in Thika (an industrial town to the northeast of Nairobi). Both parents worked: their father, Daniel, for Kenya Railways and their mother, who had finished secondary school, for an American food production company, Del Monte. With two incomes, the children never had problems paying their school tuition. But in 2005, when their family went to Seme to attend a funeral, everything changed. When their father Daniel was enacting a ‘Luo ritual’—eating chicken with the firstborn son—he heard rumours that his firstborn, Otieno, was not his son, and that MinAtieno had already been impregnated by someone else when she married Daniel. When Daniel heard this, he angrily left to return to Thika, leaving MinAtieno and their children behind in his natal home. Otieno and Atieno dropped out of school and were forced to live in poverty.

Their mother became very ill, even being admitted to Bondo hospital. Since people suspected that chira² had affected the family—perhaps because their father Daniel had not followed the Luo rituals accordingly, or maybe the first wife had bewitched MinAtieno out of jealousy since she was unable to bear children herself—Daniel’s family members in his natal home did not take care of them or shared their food with them. As the eldest child, Otieno decided to move his siblings to a neighbouring fishing beach to the south of Winam, where their maternal grandmother lived. To earn money to support his mother and siblings, Otieno started to learn fishing. When MinAtieno’s health improved (most likely after the opportunistic infections related to HIV had been treated), she started selling smoked fish and brewing chang’aa (a locally brewed, illegal liquor). When the police caught her, she moved to Dhonam with her children, except for Otieno, who stayed fishing at their mother’s maternal home. There was no money for school uniforms to send the younger ones to primary school but like Galeano’s “Nobodies”, they still hoped that “some magic day, suddenly good fortune will rain upon them”. And like the good luck that never rains down in Galeano’s poem, their father Daniel never did return, “not today, or tomorrow, or ever”—exemplifying the durable and persistent levels of decline and uncertainty.
Otieno and Atieno greatly respected their mother, and blamed their father Daniel for what they were going through. At first, they both felt responsible for taking care of their mother and younger siblings. However, Atieno lost hope about returning to school and got tired of village life. She escaped her family responsibilities by marrying Otieno’s best friend Sylvester, a fisherman, who had promised her that he would get her back into school. She moved to Obambo Beach, close to Kisumu, away from the gossiping in the village. Otieno then moved back to Dhonam to stay with his siblings. He tried to assume the role of head of the household: making sure that the younger ones went to primary school and that there was food in the house, paying the rent, and keeping the house clean. He missed the stage of being a teenager and assumed the role of being a parent, and, on many occasions, his mother commented on how much Otieno assisted her. Nevertheless, his ultimate goal remained finishing his secondary school.

Otieno and his sister Atieno became ‘nobodies’ to their father, but also to JoWinam and the Kenyan state. Otieno, more especially, considered a ‘child born out of wedlock’, is a child from nobody, without paternity (see also Nyambedha 2006). In Luoland, this means that Otieno has no right to family land, which limits his future opportunities. Otieno might have heard the many rumours about him and might have realised the consequences. When their father left them, he may have felt guilty, and responsible for taking care of his mother and younger siblings. According to Farmer (1999: 38), “the nobodies are from the outset “victims of structural violence”: The nobodies’ share the experience of occupying the bottom rung of the social ladder in inequalitarian societies.

Farmer (1999: 39) uses the concept of ‘structural violence’ to describe how “suffering is ‘structured’ by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire to constrain agency” (see also Parker et al. 2000b). These structures are usually shaped by those who hold power, and wielded against those who are powerless. The most basic rights are violated when those who are suffering from infectious diseases are denied access to care because they are too poor to pay the hospital bills. “Human rights violations are not accidents”, as Farmer (2003: 7) describes, but “are symptoms of deeper pathologies of power”. Amartya Sen (1999: 3) describes these violations of rights, including poverty, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, and intolerance, as ‘unfreedoms’ or destructive forces. These political and social unfreedoms determine the social vulnerability of both groups and individuals, and define “who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm” (Farmer 2003: 7). Some people are made more vulnerable to HIV infection than others.
because they are part of societies that are characterised by inequality, injustice, and poverty (i.e., Farmer 1999, Parker et al. 2000b). Barnett and Whiteside (2002: 73) refer to such societies as ‘risk environments’, which they define as:

the broader factors [cultural, social, economic, ecological, and political], which contribute to the development of social and economic environments in which infectious disease can expand and develop rapidly into an epidemic.

In such an environment, “creating a livelihood will be more difficult and people may be compelled to take risks that are against their long-term interests because they have little long-term hope” (Barnett and Whiteside 2002: 122–123). This is what happened to Atieno. At a young age, she married a fisherman, whom she loved, because she wanted to escape the misery at home. The possibility of prosperity—living in a cement house, in town, with electricity, with a boyfriend who has easy access to cash money, which is what is believed about fishermen (see next chapter)—made her forget that Sylvester had always been very popular among the local young women. The chances that he might have been infected with HIV or that he might not be faithful to her were not weighed against the financial security he ostensibly would offer. Otieno’s situation could be even more precarious. Nyambedha’s (2003a, 2006) research carried out in Bondo (Nyanza Province) shows that children born out of wedlock are particularly vulnerable to getting infected with HIV/AIDS.

Some scholars, such as Amartya Sen (1999) in his book Development as Freedom and Anthony Giddens (1984) in his structuration theory, have emphasized the ‘ability’ or the level of agents’ ‘autonomy’ to intentionally modify his or her place in the social structure. This emphasis, while important, does not show how actors are also confronted with an inability to control those external forces that influence possibilities and choices within a context of persistent poverty (see also Vigh 2008; De Bruijn and Both 2011). Sen (1999) so far, has been praised for his innovative thinking as compared to the standard views on development. He rightly stresses that the social welfare of people should not be approached after a certain level of economic growth has been reached, but instead, should be targeted as a direct good in its own right (see also O’Hearn 2009). Sen (1999) argues that a country’s development can only be reached through the enhancement of freedom for all its inhabitants. In other words, the achievement of development is dependent on the free agency of people. Sen (1999: 19) therefore concludes that attention should be paid to “the expansion of the ‘capabilities’ of persons to lead the kind of lives they value—and have reason to value”, rather than the usual focus on gross domestic product (GDP) and technological expansion. He recognizes five
distinct types of rights and opportunities that help to improve the general capability of a person: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security (Sen 1999: 19). According to Sen (1999: 288), only when people’s individual rights and freedoms are addressed, do agents have the ability to help themselves and improve their choices. By stressing the prerequisites of freedom and capability in individual terms, Sen underestimates that agents at times do not even have the capacity to act. He also does not say much about the historical particularity of unequal entitlements (see also O’Hearn’s (2009) criticism regarding Sen’s approach).

The same holds for Giddens (1984), who in his structuration theory stresses the ‘ability’ of actors who “reflexively monitor” their own actions and that of others. With the concept of ‘reflexivity’, Giddens (1984) refers to the awareness of a person to consciously alter his or her place in the social structure.

In a context of ‘chronic crisis’, which is characterized by Vigh (2008) as a long-lasting condition of fragmentation and instability (cited in Whyte 2008: 97), “agency, in this perspective, is not a question of capacity—we all have the ability to act—but of possibility: that is to what extent we are able to act within a given context” (Vigh 2008: 10–11). A society is constructed and structured by means of a political and ideological “superstructure” maintained by the “cultural hegemony” of the dominant (see also Gramsci 1971). This means that there is not only an economic or political hierarchy but also a hierarchy of norms and ideas. In order to be considered legitimate, our actions have to be situated within this particular structure of power relations of a given society (De Bruijn et al. 2007). Often, this existing hierarchical order is a serious limitation to social mobility if not agency. In Kenya, for instance, there is a clear geo-educational hierarchy with schools in Nyanza ranking rather low. Even good teachers and intelligent pupils in rural schools themselves believe that they are inferior to pupils and schools in Nairobi. The hierarchy of the education system is thus hegemonic, meaning that the place of schooling largely determines the options for higher studies and a subsequent career. This kind of structural violence is accentuated in situations of prolonged crisis, where agents no longer feel able to deal with the deterioration of the social fabric and, instead, disorder becomes the expected norm. There is a loss of stability and security—people are unable to plan ahead and to realize dreams and hopes (Vigh 2008: 15–17)—which leads to what De Bruijn and Both (2011) term ‘enduring’ uncertainty. But the experience of ‘chronic crisis’ does not lead to passivity. People become even more inventive in terms of creating different livelihood networks under constantly changing difficult circumstances. As Vigh (2008: 11) states, life might be
unpleasant but not impossible. The social construction of reality in such situations of “profound instability and unpredictability” is, according to Vigh (2008: 18–19), one of ‘reflexive routinisation’: “the agent must constantly check the efficacy of his interpretation in relation to changes in the environment he seeks to move in”. In this way, reflexivity is part of all practices, every day, as humans try to make their lives as best as they can (Vigh 2008: 19).

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate the dialectic interdependency of structure and agency that is embedded in each social relation. I relate how youngsters tactically try to manoeuvre a trajectory towards better positions—both imaginary or real—in difficult circumstances while at the same time, they feel unable to actualize their dreams and hopes. The intention of this chapter is to shed light on how the ‘structures of violence’ and ‘unfreedoms’ came to be established in the region and how this resulted in a context of ‘enduring’ uncertainty. When Farmer’s work was published in 1992, it was ground-breaking because it demonstrated how the ‘structural violence’ of poverty and inequality contributed to people’s vulnerability in contracting HIV/AIDS. As a consequence, attention became focused on ‘vulnerable people’—like Otieno and Atieno—who, due to socioeconomic, cultural, or political reasons, are more susceptible to HIV infection. A review of the history of Nyanza Province and Winam provides a better understanding of how enduring uncertainty has become woven into the social fabric of everyday life in Winam.

3. The history of Nyanza Province and Winam

About 99 percent of the villagers of Winam descend from the ‘Luo ethnic group’, which belong to the ‘Nilotic’ family of people. This term originally referred to ethnic groups living in the Upper Nile Valley, who shared a number of common physical, linguistic, and cultural characteristics. Despite the shared ethnic background of most of the people in my research group, I prefer to refer to them as ‘JoWinam’, which translates as “the people of Winam”, as a regional group sharing language as well as cultural and social characteristics, in order to avoid ideologizing their history. Although we can hardly speak of ‘the Luo’ as one ethnic group due to its wide heterogeneity, I will sometimes refer to the ethnic designation of my study population when marking the historical and cultural differences vis-à-vis other ethnic groups from Kenya.

According to several historical accounts, the Luo people originally were pastoralists and cultivators. Due to overpopulation, they migrated from the Bahr-el-
Ghazal region of Sudan, moving southwards. Many Luo groups began to enter Nyanza Province between A.D. 1500 and 1600, thereby displacing or assimilating existing Bantu groups (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Ndisi 1974; Ochieng’ 1974; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). Once settled, their way of life became “partial pastoralism and partial agriculture” (Odingo, cited in Ochieng’ 1974: 50). Up to the early 19th century, land was owned communally by the clan and could not be sold to outsiders, but only passed on to other clan members. Since the kinship system of the Luo is patrilineal, land is also distributed along the male ancestral line. In most of ‘Luoland’, polygamy is practiced. The women marry outside their clan (exogamy) and move to the husband’s clan (virolocality) (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Parkin 1978).

The Luo area of settlement in Kenya is extended all around what at the time of my research was called Winam (formerly Kavirondo) Gulf, in the eastern part of Lake Victoria. In administrative terms almost all of Luo country lies within the boundaries of Nyanza Province, with Kisumu as the capital. Apart from the Luo, Nyanza Province is home to three other ethnic groups, namely the Abagusii, the Abakuria, and the Abasuba (Suda et al. 1991: 66). At least one-fifth of the Luo population live outside Nyanza Province, mainly in Nairobi and other cities in Kenya. Luo people living in the cities still retain strong bonds with their rural homes (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 5). In 1967, the total Luo population numbered 1.52 million people, making the Luo the second-largest ethnic group in Kenya after the Kikuyu (Republic of Kenya 1970). By 2010, the number of Luo had grown to 4.6 million; they are now the third-largest group, after the Kikuyu and the Luhyha (Gordon and Raymond 2005).

3.1. Nyanza Province and Winam before Uhuru (1900–1963)

3.1.1. Nyanza Province: The country’s largest labour reserve

Winam’s colonial legacy includes the connections established through the labour recruitment for the white settlements. This long-term migration of men had an impact on the organisation of agriculture in Winam and on household composition (most are now headed by women).

White settlement in Kenya was encouraged once Britain announced a protectorate over Kenya in 1895, and about half of the fertile land of Kenya, which belonged to the Kikuyu people, was turned into a white settlement by 1908. Nyanza Province, which consisted mostly of non-arable land, was therefore ignored in colonial investment plans. It did however become the country’s largest labour reserve (Odinga 1967: 17–19; Ochieng’ 1974: 77–78). Early on, the colonial government faced many
problems in attracting voluntary wage labour because most Africans preferred to earn money by selling crops and livestock. The government then started to introduce taxes to extract labour for the cultivation of cash crops. The practice of forced recruitment was mostly experienced between 1910 and 1922 when the demand for African labour on the white highlands, where British colonialists were settled, was great (Hay 1976: 96–98). Chiefs, no longer the custodians of their peoples’ customary law and customs, were appointed by the British government as civil servants to recruit labour from their areas, or “to milk Nyanza of its labour” (Odinga 1967: 62), and to collect hut and poll taxes (Hay 1976: 89).

The same happened in certain regions in Tanzania, where the British government’s lack of agricultural investment left its inhabitants without the means to raise cash to pay taxes and for other needs, forcing them to migrate and sell their labour power (Brett 1973; Stichter 1982; Turshen 1984).

In order to generate cash for taxes, many migrants from Nyanza found jobs on the European farms around Muhoroni or in the Nyanza sugar belt, both in Kisumu District. Others had to go further to the tea plantations in Kericho District, European farms in the Rift Valley, the major cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, or the sisal plantations on the coast. Many men were also recruited to construct railroads and buildings in urban centres. According to Coulsin, until World War II, most Africans in Kenya were employed in low-paid unskilled work, such as agriculture and domestic service, since the work force was racially segregated (cited in Turshen 1984: 99). Mid-level positions were usually given to Asians or Arabs, whereas Europeans held the positions at the top (Hay 1976).

After World War II, industrial development increased the demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour, rather than unskilled labourers. This meant that those who had attended missionary schools went into the civil service in greater numbers than ever before. Furthermore, they filled a vacuum because the Kikuyu, who had been involved with the 1952 ‘Mau Mau rebellion’, were expelled from employment in the cities (Odinga 1967: 133–134; Hay 1976: 97–98; Stichter 1982; Francis 2000: 105–106; Morisson 2006). The demand for skilled labour brought a significant change in the migrant labour system, strongly affecting the Luo, the majority of whom were unskilled. The peasant economy supplied more labour than the wage economy could absorb. The unemployment rate increased, along with the growing population, at an estimated 3 percent per annum (Stichter 1982).
3.1.2. Decline in agricultural production

During the colonial period, the whole country was focused on export production, which was determined by the wants of European powers rather than domestic needs. According to Seidman (1972), in a short period of time, Britain reshaped the economies of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to export raw material and to import manufactured goods. This development, however, was uneven since some regions became wealthier than others (Seidman 1972: 13). Most of Nyanza Province was largely untouched by the expansion of commercial cash crops, such as coffee, tea, and pyrethrum, due to adverse ecological conditions and poor infrastructure. Cotton was introduced in Nyanza in 1904 but suffered from recurring price slumps, due to market inefficiency and production disincentives (Shipton 2005: 53–56). Commercial farming in Nyanza was also far less developed than in the Central Province of Kenya in the 1930s, where less labour-intensive crops such as wattle (mimosa) trees were introduced (Francis 2000: 104). Therefore, production in Nyanza continued to be dominated by grain and pulses (Francis 2000: 108–109). Cassava, which also has high caloric yields relative to labour time, was only introduced in the late twentieth century as a famine relief crop (Akech 2000: 216; Francis 2000: 105), and to this day has not yet achieved wide social acceptance.

Gradually, the subsistence sector lost its self-sufficiency and food shortages became common from the 1930s onwards (see Turshen’s 1984 study on Tanzania). After the last famine before colonisation, called Langi, and the famine of 1918–1919 (Odinga 1967), the region of Nyanza Province was then hit again by the locust famine of 1931–1932, known locally as Nyangweso (meaning hoppers, or locusts that have not yet grown wings). Drought then caused another famine in 1934 (Hay 1976: 103). Moreover, population pressure resulted in the subdivision of holdings (Francis 2000: 106–107), a problem that fragmented family-held lands. Moreover, because most men were away earning wages, women could no longer rely on their assistance in employing labour-intensive agricultural methods (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 86). Both capital and labour investment in agriculture were reduced to a minimum (Hay 1976: 106–107; Francis 2000: 106–108). Food supplies diminished since fallow periods were shortened and land was overcropped (Brett 1973: 71–72). As a consequence, households no longer had large grain surpluses, and certainly not during periods of drought and shortfall. If they had surplus, it was shared, as it was deemed improper to refuse kin members in need (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 66).
A second important reason for Nyanza’s frequent food shortages stems from the agricultural reorganization during the 19th and 20th centuries that replaced the traditional sorghum and millet crops with monocultures, especially of white maize (Akech 2000: 215–216). The early Portuguese explorers and Arab slave traders first introduced maize along the Kenyan coast in the 16th century. However, it was the colonial government that pushed most for the cultivation of maize in order to generate a surplus for Britain (Shipton 2005: 53–54, see also Turshen 1984: 105 for Tanzania). Maize had more potential than traditional crops because it had lower vulnerability to pests and diseases and it was less labour intensive. Nevertheless, according to Akech (2000: 215), it was only in the 1950s that maize was finally accepted in people's diet, and acquired a high status as food for josomo (people who are studying, or students) or for jonanga (people who are dressed with clothes). From then on, no meal could be served without kuron (a mass of boiled flour), which is believed to give people strength (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 64–65).

The monoculture of maize caused soil erosion and degradation, and by the 1930s, according to Cohen and Odhiambo (1989: 65), it “was acknowledged as the scourge of the countryside: the loamy soils of the lakeshore areas could not survive the waterlogging and stagnation”. The result was “the continuous disguised famine that has plagued [the area around Dhonam] for decades” (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 65). Although the colonial government had believed that maize as an export crop would bring in tax revenues by introducing a cash economy into the countryside, maize also brought disaster and hunger to the region (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 62–74).

3.1.3. Introduction of larger trading centres

The need for cash in the colonial economy resulted in the establishment of larger official trading centres, like the one in Dhonam. However, during colonial times, as Hay (1976: 102) explained, “only the Asians were licensed to buy the bulk of African produce for export and to sell imported manufactured goods. They alone could erect permanent stalls in the trading centres: Africans were restricted to smaller, local open-air markets”. JoDhonam (the people of Dhonam) welcomed the Asian traders (called the “Indians” by JoDhonam) because, according to them, the products that they were selling were not expensive. People came to Dhonam from all over Nyanza Province to buy from them. The Asian traders introduced sugar to Winam in 1945, along with salt, tea, butter, bread, and clothes (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). They also constructed several buildings in the area, including a church in 1930 and the harbour at Dhonam’s beach in
1910. The gold-mining industry in Winam during the 1930s also encouraged the traders to offer new commodities, mainly for European consumption (Shipton 1989: 135–137). According to Odinga (1967), the trade regulations and restrictions that were designed to ‘protect’ Africans merely served to obstruct their economic initiative since the colonial government wanted to leave trade in the hands of the Asians and the Europeans (Odinga 1967: 89). Turshen’s (1984) study of Tanzania under the British Empire confirmed Odinga’s claim and further highlighted that the British colonial government even discouraged agriculturalists from selling their crops for cash at harvest time, as was done in pre-colonial times. Instead, according to Hawkins, the British government wanted them to store crops for times of shortages (cited in Turshen 1984: 82), which discouraged African food producers since they were in need of cash. In this way, the system collected less tax and had less money for capital expenditures in poorer districts, which further exacerbated regional inequalities (Turshen 1984: 82–83).

3.1.4. The Gold Rush

The gold rush in western Kenya also recruited many male labourers for mining in foreign-owned goldmines (Fearn 1961: 130). In 1922, the gold rush started in the south of Kisii (in Nyanza Province in southwestern Kenya), moved in 1927 to Kakamega, and in 1932 intensive exploration began in the Nyanza fields. Four major companies explored for gold in western Kenya but abandoned prospecting due to the lack of economically viable quantities. After World War II, when there was a shortage in equipment, many companies pulled out of the region. The Nyanza mines were abandoned in the early 1950s (Shipton 1989: 135–137).

In general, gold mining in Nyanza did not result in urbanization as it did in South Africa. Gold mining was limited in terms of time, scope, and geographic extent. As usual, most employment was for unskilled labourers. The skilled jobs were reserved for people who had been trained in the missionary schools as clerks and office assistants. Most Luo who had been employed previously in the construction of the railways in Kenya and Uganda were again employed as skilled labourers in the mines, owing to their previous experience and the general lack of technically trained Africans at that time (Fearn 1961: 138–139). Apart from this employment, the locals did not directly benefit from the selling of the mined gold. London-registered companies acquired land rights on ‘leasehold’: local farms and homesteads that were occupied by gold-mining companies were compensated with a very small rent, paid in cash (Shipton 1989: 35–36). The gold rush in general raised fears about the loss of land, and created dissatisfaction.
regarding the small cash compensation. Those whose land was used for gold mining were only given a small token, and their land had become useless.

3.1.5. Tools of connection: The railway and the steamboat

Through the railway and the steamboat, the people of the rural area in Winam were connected to multiple geographical and social spaces. The building of the railway from Mombasa reached Nairobi in 1899 and Kisumu in 1901. Kisumu, the capital of Nyanza, had originally been the railhead for the Uganda Railway, where goods were brought from Port Bell in Uganda by ship. Between 1940 and 1960, the trade link between Kisumu and Port Bell remained strong, making Kisumu one of East Africa’s main trading centres (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 47). Passengers and cargo could continue their travel from Kisumu to Kampala. Uganda attracted many Luo men as it was offering better economic and educational (at Makerere University) opportunities for the accumulation of wealth than Kenya (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 49).

In 1931, the Kenya-Uganda railway connecting Kampala with Nakuru and Nairobi was extended further north over the high ground to serve the white settlers of Eldoret. These settlers had begun arriving in the early 1900s, lured by the prospect of land that could be expropriated with the help of the colonial authorities of the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, and Maasai. The railway became an important tool for supporting the white settlers’ farms, making it a profitable enterprise by enabling the shipping of their goods to Mombasa. This meant that Kisumu as a centre of economic activity was left behind on a neglected spur, especially after the shipments of ferries for Lake Victoria ceased, which had been built in the UK and then shipped in pieces from Mombasa to Kisumu. Railway and road development favoured the white settler areas or ‘white highlands’ and neglected the ‘African reserves’ (Odinga 1967).

From the 1940s onwards, there were three steamboats that provided connections between Kisumu and Homa Bay, with Dhonam as the starting point, going to Kisumu, Kendu Bay, and Homa Bay. Dhonam, being a trade centre at the time, further received a boost with the arrival of the steamboat service, which lasted until the early 1990s. In addition to people and cattle, the steamboat also facilitated the transportation of fish between Dhonam and Homa Bay. According to one Dhonam man, the “Indians” came in the morning and evening to supervise and collect the returns and to pay the workers on the steamboat. He perceived the daily collection as onerous, and thought the “Indians” earned a lot of money in Dhonam.
3.1.6. Missionary activities: Education and health care

The establishment of Anglican Christian missions in Nyanza played a role in colonial domination (Ahlberg 1991: 76–80). The missions brought Winam into contact with Western ways of life, especially with the idea—based on the assumption of racial superiority—that Africans had to be ‘civilised’ by means of Christianising them. This ‘civilising mission’ meant no less than constructing a new culture by making Christianity the dominant religion, particularly through linking it to education and health care. This was intended to serve the double purpose of spreading Christian ideas and values as well as providing tangible benefits for converts.

Education during colonial times

The Anglican Church and the education it sponsored played an important role in the history of Nyanza throughout the colonial period (Hay 1976: 98–99). The Church Missionary Society established a “school for the sons of chiefs” at Maseno in 1906. The education system was mainly geared to males who had been selectively recruited to serve the colonial economy; girls and young women were encouraged to do manual work (Ahlberg 1991: 79). Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the former vice president under Jomo Kenyatta, was one of the students of the mission schools in the 1930s. In his book Not Yet Uhuru, he writes that the mission schools produced “tame subjects and middle men. The educated group reckoned prestige by the closeness of the African to the White man and his ways” (Odinga 1967: 63). The Kikuyu, and to a lesser extent the Luo and Luyha, dominated Kenya’s small, early, (Westernised) intellectual elite. Access to this elite was mainly for the children of an “emerging class of wealthy, native capitalists” (Berman 1990: 225). Yet, the price for education had been converting the people to Christianity, and, once educated, they were absorbed into the government machine. The mission schools supplied clerks, census and tax counters, interpreters, and chiefs. The new education system took leadership from the elders and bestowed it on the youth with a class-based bias for “newly rich accumulators” (Berman 1990: 226). Leadership was then no longer associated with maturity, experience, steadfastness, and wisdom (Odinga 1967: 63–64). Many missionaries cooperated with the government and divided the people into either joChristo (Christians) or jopiny (‘countrymen’, meaning pagans) (Odinga 1967: 68–75) or “laid the foundations of the opposition between ‘Christian ways’, which they equated with progress, and ‘traditional ways’, which they equated with the pagan past” (Ogot 1963, cited in Prince 2007: 92). This division was not only religious but also political.
The use of religion to further the political goal of ‘divide and rule’ clashed with the existing social hierarchy. As a rejection of the control of the white missions, various independent African churches were founded, preaching a gospel with strong political overtones. However, the fact that the revolt resulted in the establishment of Christian churches meant that the missionaries had succeeded in making Christianity the dominant religion. Roughly 30 independent churches were founded all over in Kenya, as an aspect of the nascent political struggle (Odinga 1967: 68–75). During the Emergency Period from October 1952 to December 1959, when the colonial authorities announced a state of emergency in response to the Mau Mau uprising, the independent African churches grew in influence in Nyanza as an anticolonial voice, while also being critical of the Mau Mau movement that had committed atrocities against Kenyan collaborators of the colonial regime (Odinga 1967: 133–134).

Health care and the treatment of tropical diseases during colonial times

The provision of healthcare by Christian missions, in order to win converts, also played a role in the introduction of Western ‘civilisation’. Sometimes the colonial administration was also directly involved, as in the Belgian Congo, with the goal of stimulating and controlling population growth (Hunt 1999). According to Vaughan (1991), medical care during the colonial era was restricted to the towns and other employment centres, therefore favouring the large European community (see also Ahlberg 1991). Vaughan notes that the first contact most Africans had with colonial medicine was usually in the form of ‘medical campaigns’ against epidemic diseases. Colonial doctors feared that disease would spread from African to European populations (see Ahlberg 1991). Fendall and Grounds, who wrote about the incidence and epidemiology of diseases during the colonial era in Kenya, highlighted that in 1925 Nyanza Province accounted for 70 percent of the total reported cases of syphilis, though the reasons for why this was the case were not explained (cited in Beck 1981: 33–34). However, Setel (1999b: 4) warns us about the quality of historical data on STDs because “during the colonial era venereal syphilis was typically confused with yaws, a non-sexually transmitted illness”. Nevertheless, due to epidemiological estimates of the quantity of people infected with smallpox, plague, sleeping sickness, yaws, and syphilis, many sporadic, militaristic campaigns were set up to prevent or treat epidemics during colonial time since they were believed to pose a threat to the entire colonial enterprise (Vaughan 1981).
Large research expeditions were set up for the ‘discovery’ of ‘tropical diseases’, and Africa became a laboratory in which they could be explored. A new specialisation in tropical medicine brought groups of British medical graduates who wanted to practice in tropical and subtropical climates, most of whom came with the armed forces (Beck 1981; Vaughan 1991: 29–39). In the same decade that England, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Portugal established their own national tropical institutes, Leopold II, Belgium’s second King, set up the Ecole de Medicine Tropicale in Brussels in 1906. The Ecole de Medicine Tropicale relocated to Antwerp in 1933, on the initiative of the future King Léopold III (Hochschild 1998). There, it merged with the Clinic Leopold II Tropical Diseases, and in 2004 was renamed the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), with the aim of losing the association with its colonial history. ITM is housed in art deco buildings in the centre of Antwerp, near the former Congo docks on the Schelde River. It was the cornerstone of Belgian medical campaigns in the Congo, and ever since it has combined medical research and treatment of tropical diseases.

Despite the medical campaigns undertaken under the auspices of the several established ‘tropical institutes’ in colonial Africa, the Christian missions were actually the first and only ones to introduce Western medicine on a permanent basis in the ‘African reserves’. It was done as part of their goal to educate and Christianise Africans, since each ill person was viewed as a potential believer. Protestant and Catholic mission hospitals were built in areas where many followers were found (Beck 1981: 65–67), and early mission doctors chose their assistants from amongst former patients. The medical missions remained self-sufficient and independent of the colonial administration. After World War II, however, the distinction between missionary and secular colonial medicine was no longer clear-cut (Vaughan 1991: 55–75). As Hunt (1999: 6) argues, for the case of the Belgian Congo, birth clinics became an important extension of colonial power by using notions of hygiene as a form of indirect rule. The colonial authorities in the Congo were obsessed with stemming the declining population, partly to ensure a sufficiently large labour force. By stimulating, controlling, standardising, regulating, and counting births colonial administration and missionary work merged. Often, medical missionaries were the only representatives, even if only indirect, of the colonial state, which transferred significant powers to them (Hunt 1999: 4–5).

In sum, education and health care were instrumental to colonisation. In some, especially rural, places even well after Independence, education and health care served as a ‘carrot’ to attract people to convert to Christianity and as means to count and control the population. Many African territories were (and still are) also a sort of open-
air laboratory to research tropical diseases. The connections to the world of Christianity were not only material in terms of health care and education, but, perhaps more profoundly, also ideological-spiritual since they affected how people made sense of the world, namely much more along the parameters set by missionary education and medicalized health care. While the effects of education are relatively obvious and have been discussed extensively, the work of Hunt (1999: 13) shows that the effects of health care can still be felt today. Her informants still make reference to whether or not they were born in a clinic, and she recounts how European medicine was perceived as strong but dangerous since it supposedly contained blood stolen from Africans in such clinics (1999: 7) (see later on ‘bloodsucking stories of the past’). In other words, like any introduction of alien practices, we need to be aware that both education and health care were neither purely benign nor malicious, but had ambiguous and complex consequences lasting up to the present day.

3.1.7. Conclusion

The inhabitants of Winam and, in particular, Dhonam, have not lived in an isolated place but in an environment full of connections and opportunities to the wider outside world. The opportunities for mobility given to its inhabitants were realized through many different forms of connections (labour migration and trade, steamboat and railway, missionary education and health care) between Winam and the broader world, which had a range of consequences. The introduction of the hut tax (1901) and the poll tax (1910) contributed to the transformation of household social relations into a ‘shilling’ or gorogoro economy (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 62–74). After the 1930s, only a few young men remained in the rural areas of Nyanza Province, and subsistence agriculture at home became severely depressed. Labour migration impoverished and socially disorganized rural life in Nyanza Province. Regional inequalities grew, and marginalised people had few opportunities to improve their standard of living. The change in the migrant labour system from unskilled to skilled labour after World War II further deteriorated the situation, as the majority of the people in Nyanza were unskilled. High unemployment combined with population growth became a major problem. This situation persisted even after Independence. The economic inequalities created by colonial settlers were hard to eradicate and even intensified: while white settlers continued to possess the most fertile land of Kenya, a large group of farmers remained landless. As Booth (2004: 60) summarizes: “Kenya’s response to this problem was to follow Britain’s neoclassical economic plan based on private ownership of
agricultural land, enormous wealth inequality, foreign direct investment, and an authoritarian state that put itself at the centre of economic development”.

The next section attempts to give a brief summary of post-Independence politics in Kenya in order to illuminate the aspects of structural violence affecting Nyanza Province. Special attention is given to the position of the Luo ethnic group or ‘Luo nation’, which in the late days of colonialism was very much in the process of being ‘invented’ by Luo elites through business, the Luo Union, football, and the cattle trade (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Odhiambo 2000).


Independence came after the bitter, anticolonial, nationalist ‘Mau Mau revolt’ (1952–1960), which began as an agrarian struggle for land between Kikuyu and white settlers. The revolt was led by landless Kikuyu squatters in the highlands and to a lesser degree the Kikuyu urban ‘lumpenproletariat’ (Kanogo 1987: 136). Ultimately, the movement failed to win the support of a majority of Kikuyus and of other ethnic groups, and even used violence to force Kikuyus into taking a Mau Mau oath of loyalty. The increasing use of violence against its own people made it possible for the settlers to present the movement as criminal (Kanogo 1987: 138). In the end, according to some accounts (see Berman 1990), the Mau Mau revolt may have even delayed independence from Britain, which came in December 1963. During this struggle for independence, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (1911–1994), a Luo chieftain who had been recruited by Jomo Kenyatta to organize Luo resistance to colonialism, became a prominent political figure while steering clear of active involvement in the violence of the Mau Mau movement. When Kenyatta was imprisoned, Odinga led negotiations with the British authorities and participated in the Lancaster House conference where independence was decided. In his autobiography Not Yet Uhuru (Not Yet Freedom), he wrote: “December 12, 1963 marked the end of sixty-eight years of colonial rule. Kenya’s was Africa’s thirty-fourth independent country. […] Without the forest fighters in the so-called ‘Mau Mau’ period, Kenya’s Independence would still be a dream in the minds of a few visionary politicians” (Odinga 1967: 253–255). This statement illustrates the contested status of the role of the Mau Mau rebellion in achieving Kenyan independence.

3.2.1. President Jomo Kenyatta (KANU): 1963–1978

Under the banner of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), founded by the principal Kikuyu and Luo politicians (Berman 1990: 409), Jomo Kenyatta, the British-
educated leader of the moderate independence movement, became the first president in 1963 with Jaramogi Oginga Odinga serving as vice president. Odinga then moved into the opposition with his Kenya People’s Union (KPU) and became increasingly marginalized; Kenyatta continued virtually unopposed for a total of three consecutive terms until his death in 1978 (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 4). During Kenyatta’s rule, the Luo were strongly represented in the economic and political spheres, such as in the East African Railways Corporation. They were also among the first to hold prominent jobs as professors, doctors, or senior civil servants. However, many Luo believed that the president’s ethnic group, the Kikuyu, were favoured (Morrison 2006), even though Odinga, a Luo, had held the vice-presidency. This was especially so when in 1969 Tom Mboya, a Luo Member of Parliament with presidential ambitions, was killed, and the KPU was banned after rioting between Kikuyus and Luos (Mueller 1984). The situation did not improve under Kenyatta’s successor, Daniel arap Moi, a member of the Kalenjin ethnic group, who dominated Kenyan politics for more than 20 years.

3.2.2. President Daniel arap Moi (KANU): 1978–2002

During Moi’s reign, Kenya suffered from widespread corruption, clientelism benefitting the Kalenjin, and political repression, especially during the 1980s when political opposition was outlawed (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 4). Morrison (2006) argued that it was not simply the favourable political positioning that led the Kikuyu and Kalenjin to prosper, and left the Luo to feel neglected after 1965. Instead, the preconditions for advancement were already established prior to their assuming control of government, as Nyanza Province had long been stricken by poverty, which limited educational and other advancement opportunities. Morrison’s (2006) work shows that only a distinct minority from central Nyanza could take advantage of higher levels of education. Odinga’s (1967) autobiography similarly states that the ‘Africanisation’ of middle- and upper-level white-collar jobs and the huge growth of public-sector employment after Independence provided opportunities for only a small number of people who belonged to the land-owning elite from Nyanza Province.

During Moi’s regime, the Luo were among the groups most negatively affected by the “ politicization of ethnicity” and patrimonialism that favoured clans and regions close to the regime (Badejo 2006: 46). The Western Province stagnated and political dissent was repressed. Moi’s decision to outlaw other political parties in 1982 alienated the Luo to the extent that they backed a coup attempt in the same year (Badejo 2006: 94). This was a continuation of the tensions between the Kikuyu and Luo that had periodically
erupted in violence ever since the death of Tom Mboya, a young prominent Luo politician, who had participated with Odinga in the Lancaster House conference on independence (1960). Mboya had presidential ambitions based on an inclusive all-Kenyan nationalist discourse, which contrasted with the ethnic discourse of Kenyatta and Moi (Badejo 2006: 74). As a consequence, Moi became particularly intolerant of any Luo political activism, labelling it ‘tribalist’ and ‘anti-unity’ (Sabar-Friedman 1997: 27), and used his increased powers to suppress them, as the Luo were perceived as the only group able to challenge his political dominance. One of the Luo political leaders backing the coup, and a potential political challenger to Moi, Raila Odinga—the son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Kenya’s first vice president—was incarcerated for eight years (Badejo 2006: 93–106). Continued underground opposition gained Luo politicians an ambiguous reputation: on the one hand they were considered to be safeguards of democracy against a tyrannical regime, which had eliminated all intermediary structures between the state and society with the notable exception of the church (Sabar-Friedman 1997: 30). On the other hand, many groups saw them as troublemakers who were creating instability. When Moi won the 1988 elections, Luo politicians were joined by church leaders in highlighting many irregularities and calling the one-party system into question. With the church as an ally, Sabar-Friedman (1997) argues, this set into motion a slow process of change, leading the government to allow other political parties once more in 1991. Since many groups in Kenya feared that a Luo government would take revenge and govern the country only in their self-interest, the increased political competition did not lead to a change in government (Badejo 2006: 167–176). Instead, Moi used his domination of media and state resources in a divide et impera strategy, heightening fears between ethnic groups, to win the two subsequent elections in 1992 and 1997, albeit with limited democratic credentials (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 4).

One of the big arguments of some Kikuyu traditionalists, used to challenge his suitability for the presidency, was that Raila was not the right Presidential candidate because he was not circumcised. What did that have to do with political wisdom? Because ‘the Luo’ do not traditionally circumcise, other ethnic groups view them as an ethnic group consisting of children. In the eyes of many Kenyans, and especially Kikuyus, having an uncircumcised male win the elections would be the equivalent of having a seven-year-old become president (Nairobi Chronicle 2008).
As in any one-party state, the transition to a new leader introduced instability and friction among the ruling elite. This happened in Kenya in 2002 when President Moi was barred from running for election again, and fortunately decided to step down from his self-imposed rule. However, the choice of his successor, Uhuru Kenyatta (the son of Jomo Kenyatta), as the new leader of Moi’s KANU party, was not accepted by many of his older and more experienced allies, who had speculated that they would be considered (Badejo 2006: 199–205, 214–215). In response, they formed a splinter party, the Liberal Democratic Party, which joined in an opposition coalition with the National Alliance of Kenya. This so-called National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and its presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki were then able to defeat Kenyatta in the 2002 elections, ending the 40-year reign of KANU. Kibaki, a Kikuyu, had to pay a high price for the support of other political groups, especially the Liberal Democratic Party (Maupeu 2003). Several secret pacts detailed the distribution of government offices, limiting Kibaki’s ability to rule the country while contributing to instability since there was always one faction that claimed that the terms of a pact were broken (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 8). One notable continuity was the side-lining of Luo politicians, none of whom obtained major positions in the government, as Badejo (2006: 238–253) describes at length in his insightful biography of Raila Odinga. From the perspective of the Luo, the victory over KANU was initially a welcome change and brought much hope. Indeed, the entire country tried to make a fresh start and seriously combat corruption, one of Kibaki’s central promises. As JoWinam told me, even passengers of the matatus (local buses) summoned up their courage to prevent drivers and traffic police from taking bribes. The spirit of a new beginning unfortunately evaporated, as NARC could not fulfil the high expectations placed upon it, and many Luo started to regard it as just another political alliance that ignored their interests.

One central disenchantment with the government was the protracted process of drafting a new constitution, which had been another of Kibaki’s election promises. In 1991, Raila Odinga began demanding that this issue be resolved (Badejo 2006: 255). But the process of drafting the new constitution lasted until 2005 and mutated into discussions that no ordinary observer could follow. In the process of discussing the various drafts, a new political force arose: the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). With Raila Odinga as its leader, the ODM was the political expression of Luo opposition to the status quo, and it at least somewhat transcended ethnic boundaries and
obtained the support of Luhya as well as from Muslim parties from the coastal provinces.

The 2005 constitutional referendum thus turned into a vote of confidence on President Kibaki, who had been campaigning vigorously for the new constitution (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 8). When it became known that the final draft scrapped the proposed limitations on presidential powers, the opposition gained more momentum including support from NARC politicians. In the end, 58 percent rejected the constitution on 21 November 2005, handing Odinga a significant political victory and marking him as the favourite to win the 2007 elections (Badejo 2006: 279).

The two years running up to the elections, which I directly observed during my fieldwork, were dominated not by discussions about political content, but rather by speculations about who would ally with whom. This can be seen as the legacy of Moi, who regularly changed his alliances (Maupeu 2003: 163). Based on my own observations, the Liberal Democrats, key to Kibaki’s first election, were blamed for his later defeat in the constitutional referendum; they switched sides and allied with ODM, together with their former foe KANU. ODM then split into two (ODM and ODM-Kenya) while KANU left the coalition to announce support of Kibaki, Moi’s former archenemy (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 8–9). More reshuffling occurred than can be described here, but my perception was that during the 18 months before the election everything turned on personalities and ethnic alliances. During the last few months before the 2007 elections, Odinga emerged as the main challenger to Kibaki, who was consistently trailing in opinion polls.

In December 2007, however, Kibaki was re-elected, to the surprise of many, especially since the initial exit polls had suggested a victory for Odinga. When votes from the central and northern provinces, which supported Kibaki, came in, they greatly outnumbered those from the opposition-dominated western and coastal provinces. This led many people to conclude that vote rigging had occurred, and international observers from the EU and the US described the election as “flawed” (Reuters, ‘Kenya’s Election Seen as Badly Flawed’, 18 September 2008, http://www.reuters.com/places/africa).

What followed were two months of Kenya’s deepest crisis in recent history, which cannot be adequately described here. Kenya has a long history of political-ethnic violence since before Independence, based on ethnic stereotyping, actual and perceived exclusion from power, as well as the manipulation of urban, frequently ethnically homogenous, criminal gangs for political purposes (see Berman 1990; Anderson 2002; Mbataru 2003; Badejo 2006). As Ajulu (2002: 251) argues, these ethnic clashes “are not
tribal conflicts in the primordial sense; rather they constitute politically organized conflicts orchestrated to achieve short- and long-term political, and ultimately economic, advantages”. The 2008 conflicts thus need to be understood in this light. Initially nonviolent protests against vote rigging turned violent, and evolved into ethnic conflicts between Kikuyus and Luos with Kalenjin (mainly in the Rift Valley), as well as between Muslim Kenyans and the authorities in the east. Kenyans believed that hired goons working for the political elite arm of the police, shot and killed several dozen demonstrators, including two ODM ministers of parliament: this was filmed by live TV cameras, further fuelling the protests. By the time that Kibaki and Odinga reached a compromise, forming a national unity government as the result of mediation by Kofi Annan, the final toll had reached at least 800 people killed and around 200,000 internally displaced (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 8).

In 2013, Kenya held another presidential election in which Luo hopes rested again on Raila Odinga to win. For some time, it even seemed that ‘Raila’, who was again campaigning among the non-Luo Langata constituency, would receive enough support to win the elections from other groups, even from disenchanted Kikuyus, and that at least for some time the old Kikuyu-Luo political antagonism had weakened. When Kenyans went to the poll on 4 March 2013, however, they instead voted for the alliance of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, two former antagonists, who were charged by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for instigating the violence of the previous elections. While the alliance may have been primarily motivated to avoid prosecution by the Court, it also helped to avoid the Kikuyu-Kalenjin clash that had characterized the violence in 2008. Odinga once more came in second with 5.34 million votes, behind Kenyatta’s 6.17 million votes. Odinga and his allies tried to contest the outcome of the election, but on 30 March 2013 the Supreme Court upheld the results, deeming the elections free and fair.

In sum, over a period of more than 60 years of political struggles for recognition, ‘the Luo’ have often felt excluded by their own compatriots. This was the case both when Kenya was ruled by Kenyatta and during the Moi reign. During the latter period, the Luo suffered much political repression since they appeared as one of the few groups able to challenge the regime. When multiparty elections were introduced, Luo politicians were among the first to respond, but even when a coalition of parties were finally able to oust Moi, the Luo once more ended up in the passenger seat of state power. Despite
multiple attempts through 2012, Luo politicians under Odinga have not been successful in winning the presidency.

In this context of general political exclusion, there was only a handful of relatively powerful Luo clans in Nyanza Province, mostly from the areas around Gem and Bondo (Morrison 2006), who were able to obtain some amount of wealth and power and to extend their authority over remaining land. This resulted in the emerging of a widening gap between the land-rich and the land-poor (Odinga 1967). In Winam, on the other hand, there were almost no powerful elite families with prosperous jobs in Nairobi or Mombasa or big homes in Winam.

3.3. Gender relations in Nyanza Province after Uhuru

Shifting focus from the position of the Luo identity within the larger realm of ethnic and national politics, I turn now to describe how gender relations have changed over time, and how this has changed women’s and men’s positions in society. Women had long been recognised for their economic contribution to the household, and had held authority over their own subsistence food production, but numerous factors have led to women becoming more dependent on men’s wages and men’s land-holdings. This shift, which happened gradually over approximately 30 years, from the 1950s through the 1980s, has left women with a subordinate economic position.

In Kenya, just as in other parts of rural Africa, colonialism, the rise of labour migration, the growing importance of the remittance economy, the influence of missionary work, Western education, and the utopia of a better urban life changed gender relations and livelihoods. At the beginning of the 20th century, life in Winam was organized on classic patrilineal, exogamous, and virilocal structures. Male kinship lines were linked to land and territory, and women ideally joined their husband’s homestead (dala) upon marriage. Only through marriage could women get access to land and other resources, and their children belonged to the husband’s lineage. Most of the homes in Winam were polygamous households where a man had authority over his land (mondo) as wuon lowo (owner of the land). He took care of the cattle, representing wealth and power, and had control over women’s labour. Women were responsible for agricultural and domestic work, were perceived as wuon puodho (the person in charge of the field), and were responsible for the fields they were allocated. While women did also most of the work on the mondo, their husbands sometimes lent a hand in the harder agricultural work such as bush clearing. Poorer men also seeded, weeded, and harvested crops. The crops harvested were used when there was shortfall in their supplies, and
any surplus was exchanged for cattle, which were important for bride wealth (Francis 2000: 158–159). Before the mass migration of men for work, the sexual division of labour was clear.

3.3.1. The introduction of new model: Male breadwinner with dependent wife

The labour migration that started from the 1920s onwards had a big impact on the composition of the rural household. Not only unmarried men, who played a minor role in agriculture, but also many married men migrated to work outside Luoland (Francis 2000: 158–159). According to Ominde (1968: 75), together with the neighbouring Luyia, ‘the Luo’ constituted the largest group of people engaged in “long-distance migration” to Kenya’s major urban centres, in particular Nairobi and Mombasa. Unlike the Kikuyu, Kamba, or Mijikenda workers, whose home areas are close to one of these centres, the long-distance Luo migrants could not easily return to their families and, poor housing conditions made it hard for the men to take their families along. Even worse, women were actually prohibited from following their husbands to the urban centres since the colonial system wanted to maintain an economy of low-paid migrant labour (White 1990). In this way, an increasing number of men left women on their own to take care of their children in the countryside (Francis 2000: 158–159; Silberschmidt 2001).

Since there was no agricultural investment in Nyanza Province, rural families’ income, obtained from selling surplus maize, decreased gradually. Periods of drought resulted in food shortages, especially towards the end of the long dry season. These seasonal shortages of food particularly affected children and cattle. In such “maize hunger” periods, rural households became extremely dependent on cash remittances from wage labour. Women were no longer able to feed their families and struggled to stretch the few remittances to their limit. Some women even started begging openly as they had no other choice. However, urban workers hardly had enough to send remittances home, because their wages were just enough to maintain themselves in town (White 1984; Ahlberg 1991). As a consequence, remittances were often irregular or non-existent (Francis 2000).

To make ends meet, women ignored colonial rules that excluded them from urban centres and started moving to Nairobi as early as 1900, as White (1990) describes in his book The Comforts of Home. However with no educational or skills training, women’s employment opportunities were limited. Women often found themselves in petty trades, such as hawking and beer brewing, while others were employed as domestic workers in rural and urban areas (Ahlberg 1991: 44–45) or in formal or informal prostitution.
WINAM: A PLACE OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

(White 1990). In his contribution to the book *Wicked Women*, Coplan (1999) explains how the ‘discomforts of home’ that were created by the migratory labour system in South Africa drove many rural Basotho into the towns and mine shanties of the Orange Free State, even as early as 1892. Coplan (1999: 202) argues that while this system gave women some choice, opportunity, and independence through ‘travelling’, “this ‘independence’ came at such a price that many such women would gladly have exchanged it for stable conjugal life in Lesotho, were this only available”. Neither the Basotho women in Coplan’s account nor the Kenyan women migrating to Nairobi in White’s narrative had much of a choice: broken relationships at home drove them to migrate in the hopes of earning an independent livelihood. Hay (1976: 92–93) notes that several women from the 1930s onwards started to engage in long-distance grain trading, usually maize and millet, in exchange for sheep or goats that, after raising, could be exchanged for cattle. When there were surpluses in maize, fish, and chickens, rural households tried to help their working kin by bringing food to the towns, and returning home with needed consumer goods (sugar, salt, tea, bread, condensed milk, paraffin, and corned beef) (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 65–66). The women’s trade in foodstuff tended to be a seasonal rather than a regular activity (Hay 1976: 92–93).

These patterns changed after Independence, as wages increased and men were more able to send remittances back home (Hay 1976; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 66–67; Ahlberg 1991: 89). It also became more possible for some women to live with their husbands in town; however, when their children reached school age, women usually returned to their rural homes because it was cheaper to bring up children in the rural areas (Francis 2000: 169–170). Cohen and Odhiambo (1989) argue that due to men’s absence through labour migration and their remittances, women’s autonomy in the rural household could have increased in some cases. However, according to Francis’ study (2000) on the relationships between labour migration, agricultural decline, and social change in rural Kisu

mu District, the remittances sent to rural households were not to any degree significant.

Although women took up more responsibilities due to men’s labour migration, Francis (2000) and Hay (1982) argue that it did not really result in an increase in women’s decision-making power. While Silberschmidt (2001) observed an increase in women’s decision-making power in Kisii (Nyanza Province), Kisii and Winam are not comparable. In Winam, in fact, the consolidation of Luo customary law contributed to a decrease in women’s decision-making power. In order to re-establish control over women’s mobility (White 1990), many men did not want to send remittances. They
distrusted their wives while they were absent, thinking of women as outsiders who marry in from another clan. Men felt threatened by women’s economic independence and expressed fear about their sexual mobility, believing that a woman with her own resources might leave her husband for another man. Therefore, men denied their wives any financial responsibility and decision-making power over the use of their land, allowing them only to act as guardians of their land and livestock, rather than “the managers of a farm enterprise” (Francis 2000: 159). Women could not make any agricultural investments, as they had no control over the resources. A number of migrant men also did not want to invest in farming as they started to value money and education more than farming. Parents’ hope laid in the future development of their children: they invested in their children’s education at the expense of intensifying agriculture (Hay 1976: 108; Francis 2000: 159–160). Other migrant men used their salary on personal items, such as the consumption of alcohol, which became a significant problem, or on (multiple) casual partners (see also Silberschmidt 2001: 650, on Tanzania). Thus, due to their husband’s reluctance to invest in agriculture at home, women worked intensely on the land just to meet their subsistence requirements (Francis 2000: 106–108; Hay 1976: 106–107).

Several scholars (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Francis 2000; Morisson 2006) stressed that men’s reluctance to send money to their wives to buy farm inputs contributed to the long-term decline of the rural economy in western Kenya. Since few migrant men did (or were able to) invest in their rural farms, any wages earned in the city did not change the sexual division of labour (Francis 2000). Francis (2000) further demonstrates that this contrasted with those households where the husband was living at home, and where farming was the main source of income. In such households, gender relations were changing. Due to the growing land shortage, the field system became simplified. Some husbands started to claim to be wuon puodho over all the cultivated land and consequently, could request the rights to labour and crop income over their wives’ fields. In this way, women often lost control over their resources, and this resulted in a number of conflicts over power between the spouses in polygamous homes (Francis 2000: 160–162).

Winam as Kenya’s ‘labour reserve’ had detrimental effects upon extended families, the glue of the social structure. Families split up in order to make a living and created many social and economic problems both in the cities and in the rural areas (White 1990). The consequences of the massive labour migration were felt most heavily by women, who were left on their own with the increased agricultural workload at home.
Women were also excluded from producing cash crops and from participating in the educational opportunities provided by Anglican missions (Beidelman 1982; Ahlberg 1991). During the 1940 and 1950s women gradually became unable to provide enough food for their families. According to Silberschmidt (2001) who did research in rural Kenya and urban Tanzania, the transformation of the household economy from subsistence to cash introduced a new model: male breadwinner and dependent wife. This new model gave men greater access to cash and, by extension, greater power, while women were left in a subordinated role (see also Ahlberg 1991). This unequal, gendered dimension of the wage economy created at the same time new values and expectations in gender relations (Francis 2000).

3.3.2. The crumbling of the ‘man-as-provider’ ideology

A number of scholars who have carried out research in sub-Saharan Africa show that women’s unequal access to family land, land inheritance, and educational and job opportunities left them in a disadvantaged situation with increasing burdens and responsibilities (Francis 2000; Silberschmidt and Rash 2001; Simpson 2009). Some have argued that poverty interacts with gendered power relations (Schoepf 1992; Farmer 1995; Hunter 2002) in a way that forces many young women into sexual activity. Young women who are living in difficult circumstances often have to exchange sex for goods or gifts, or depend economically on their sexual relationships with ‘sugar daddies’ or boyfriends (UNAIDS 2002: 69–72). In the last decade, however, more researchers have begun to emphasise that women are not just passive victims of patriarchal society, and to focus on the vulnerability of men as well (Silberschmidt 2001; Hunter 2002) (see Chapter 6). According to Francis (2000) and Silberschmidt (2001), when urban real wages started to fall and urban unemployment increased from 1970s onwards, the ‘provider’ ideology—men should fulfil the role of being the main breadwinner—was no longer realistic. Even young men with a secondary education could not find rewarding employment to the extent they could in the past. Other household members, including women, children, youngsters, and the elderly, needed to contribute to the household economy since men’s earnings were no longer sufficient as a main source of income (Silberschmidt 2001: 663).

Silberschmidt’s (2001) study in Kisii (rural Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (urban Tanzania) argues that gender conflicts escalate and many relationships break up due to economic pressures and limited livelihood options. Many men in her study were not able to pay bride price and temporary unions increasingly substituted for marriage. Women’s
access to land had become insecure and marriage no longer provided life-long security for women. Many of the young men in her study also wanted to delay marriage and parenthood until they had found the financial means to provide for a wife and children. As a consequence, many households ended up being headed by single mothers. Many young mothers also remained in their maternal homes since their sexual partners felt unable to assume their responsibility as fathers. Women felt that “they were better off without a husband” (Silberschmidt 2001: 661), and had no expectations any more about husbands as responsible providers and fathers. Cohen and Odhiambo (1989) also found that many women in Siaya (western Kenya) had become economically independent in order to support their children. Others had realised the importance of having a steady and reliable income before marrying. They wanted to have something to fall back on in case their future husband stopped providing for them. Silberschmidt (2001) notes that women both in Kisii and Dar es Salaam were increasingly aware of their own importance, and that this nourished their self-confidence.

A number of women in Kenya, mostly unmarried, also migrated to town beginning in the 1950s to seek other livelihood opportunities. However, as White (1984) explains, local leaders did not favour women’s increasing mobility and even proposed legislation designed to curtail their movements. Stories depicting white men as vampires circulated to discourage female migration. In any case, female migration was a larger phenomenon than is often acknowledged. Many of those leaders who argued for prohibiting women’s migration later quietly tolerated it as female remittances from Nairobi to male-headed rural households served to maintain a patriarchal system that otherwise would have collapsed.17 Supporting local male power was apparently so important that the source of female remittances was often unquestioned. Many women looking for work in Nairobi ended up in prostitution, responding to the demand from the many single male migrant workers (White 1990).

According to Silberschmidt (2001) and Simpson (2009), increasing female economic independence challenges male authority. Although the men in Silberschmidt’s (2001: 664) study admitted that they could not survive unless women contributed income, they often had negative attitudes towards women’s employment. Silberschmidt (2001) further argues that many men in her study suffered from feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-esteem because of their subordinate economic position. While women had become important contributors to the household, men had difficulty providing financial assistance—in a society where men should be economically successful and socially dominant (Silberschmidt 2001: 657–658). This ideal is becoming more and more
abstract, and not an adequate description of reality any more. However, as Silberschmidt (2001) further explains, since masculinity is so valued and prized, men usually pursue all means to guard and reclaim their manhood (see also Cornell 1995). The risk of failing to be a ‘real man’ is considered the worst thing that could happen to them (Simpson 2009).

In addition to the need to empower women, I wish to highlight in this dissertation the vulnerability of men resulting from the demands placed upon them by particular constructions of masculinity. While the former has been discussed widely, the latter has only recently been receiving attention in scholarly debates. At the same time, it is important to understand that gender relations are not static and do not move in a linear way. Like any form of identity, gender can be negotiated and is contextual: no society has only one single gender power structure, but rather various degrees of power that fluctuate. Gender relations are also contextual as they respond to the changes that occur in the socioeconomic structure of a particular location. Finally, gender relations also differ between households with different types of livelihoods. In the next section, I review how Dhonam, the fishing bay of Winam, became a trading centre and important port that attracted temporary skilled labourers from many places, and how this affected family structures, economic opportunities, and sexual behaviour.

3.4. Dhonam as an important trading centre and port after Uhuru

In spite of its sizeable population at that time, there were only a handful of men in Dhonam who experienced upward social mobility, in part based on the opportunities that were created when the Asian traders were expelled from Kenya in 1964, as part of the ‘Africanisation Policy’ which aimed to increase employment for Kenyans. According to the JoDhonam I interviewed in order to reconstruct the past of Dhonam, Odour (born in the 1920s—died 1992) was among the first people who “chased away the Indians”. He used to work as a salesman for the Indians in Dhonam but after the Africanisation Policy, he became a prominent businessman. He prospered by owning fishing boats and the area’s first pick-up truck, with which he transported sugar and sacks of flour. The flour trade was a lucrative business especially when there were food shortages. In 1978, together with two other businessmen from Dhonam, Ohero (born in the 1910s and died in 1990) and Odhiambo (born in the 1930s and died in 2006), he opened a hardware shop—located in one of the former Indian buildings—named the East African Industry Wholesale. There, Odour’s second wife, Doree, sold cement, nails, wood, and pangas (machetes, in Swahili) for construction work as more permanent houses started to be
erected. These remarkable businessmen were the grandfathers of some of the youngsters that I followed. After *Uhuru*, there was a lot of hope among them, as they believed that they would make progress in the new Kenyan state; another businessman had named a steamboat he bought from the Indians ‘*Wanane*’, meaning “we will see (if we can progress without the Indians)”.

Odour, Ohero, and Odhiambo were seen as respectable men in Dhonam because respectability at that time was given to those who “made life”, meaning those who were able to contribute and take care of their kin. They even made investments to the benefit of all the people of Winam. Durham (2007: 114) writes of Botswana that “work is valued as a means of connecting oneself with others in various ways, and as a means of ‘developing oneself’ through such connections”. Apart from the contributions made by the respectable men of Dhonam, the few remittances sent by the urban dwellers also added to the growth of Dhonam, and Winam as a whole. As an important trade centre and port, Dhonam grew strongly between 1970 and 1980, the same time that Odour, Ohero, and Odhiambo were prospering. It reached its peak in the 1980s with the purchases made by many (semi-) skilled labourers. Then came an economic downward spiral in the early 1990s that continued during the time of my fieldwork.

**3.4.1. Dhonam in the 1980s: Fun and pleasure**

Dhonam attracted many people from different places during the 1980s: teachers, construction workers, steamboat staff, “JoNorway” (the people from Norway), Ugandan refugees, traders working along the Nairobi-Busia highway, and more. Most of these (semi-) skilled labourers (except the teachers) were working for companies in Nairobi or Kisumu and came to stay in Dhonam temporarily. The salaries of these men by far exceeded those of local unskilled men, enabling them to spend lavishly on drinks and women in Dhonam.

Since the steamboat anchored overnight at Dhonam, its staff could spend the night in Dhonam. All the teachers who worked in Bondo District came to Dhonam to collect their salary at the government office, locally known as the AEO (Authorised Economic Operator). (Later, governmental offices were constructed a bit further away from the market centre of Dhonam, replacing the AEO office in Dhonam). The gold-mining industry in Winam also brought many skilled workers from different places to stay in Dhonam; some unskilled male labourers were also recruited from within Winam. The British company San Martin made use of modern mining technology to resurrect
the dormant mines, first explored in the 1930s, located in east Winam and central Winam. Dhonam, being close to the lake, was the site for washing and grading ore. In addition to the skilled mine workers, other construction workers came to Dhonam from different areas, nicknamed JoNorway (the Norway people) after their country of origin. They first had settled at Homa Hill near Homa Bay, making handcarts and fishing nets. They also split timber and built a factory for preserving fish through drying them. They were further interested in farming and were the first people to introduce the ‘Fredo seed’, a sorghum seed, which villagers thought was manna from heaven, since sorghum was one of the traditional crops that had been replaced by maize during colonialism. The JoNorway formed a football club at Homa Hill and, soon after, competition was organized between Homa Hill and Dhonam. The JoNorway discovered then how much more active life in Dhonam was, and decided to stay in Dhonam but continued working at Homa Hill. Many young fishermen, female traders, and fishmongers from different places also came to work and live at Dhonam (see also next chapter), and many former gold miners started to learn to fish when mining began to decline.

The Uganda-Tanzania war of 1978–1979, which led to the overthrow of Idi Amin’s regime (president of Uganda between 1971 and 1979), and the ‘Ugandan Bush War’ (1981–1986) also brought many female refugees to Winam. Male Ugandan professionals usually stayed in urban centres while unskilled, female refugees moved to rural Nyanza Province and Western Province. According to Opiyo (a Kenyan former anthropologist who worked at Yeshica), most of the female Ugandan refugees relied on ‘survival sex’. Some married in Winam: Opiyo claimed that “Ugandan women were believed to be better socially than Kenyan tough-headed women” (informal conversation, June 2006). In the end, most of them had to leave Kenya, when the war was finished and Museveni came into power in 1986.

The main Nairobi-Busia highway that passes through Kisumu and Siaya District also had its effect on life in Dhonam. Busia is a busy town on the border of Kenya and Uganda in Western Province. Mr. Gibendi and WafuLa said that it used to be the epicentre of an illegal cross-border trade (locally called magendo) in the 1970s that included the smuggling of coffee and other agricultural products to Kenya and finished products into Uganda (Business Daily Africa, “Cross-border trade, devolution bring prosperity to Busia”, 1 November 2013). Business centres were created and offered lodging facilities, especially for long-distance truck-drivers who transported goods from the port of Mombasa to the African Great Lakes Region and passed through ‘Luoland’.
People from all over in Kenya, including some JoWinam, as well as some Ugandans moved to settle along the highway in order to set up businesses (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Nyambedha 2006).

Because of the arrival of so many new people from so many different places and many people travelling back and forth to Winam, Dhonam became a small, vibrant town with a variety of facilities: small shops and kiosks selling goods, several bars and restaurants, a hotel, and even a film hall. Kolela Maze, a much-loved and famous Luo singer, and his group of musicians came to perform every month at the ‘Cham gi wadu restaurant’ in Dhonam. Cham gi wadu, which means ‘eat with your partner’, belonged to Odhiambo and was a kind of dance club that attracted many people from all over Nyanza. Although wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, everybody could benefit from the new facilities and the overall economic boom in town. A community health worker from the CDC who started to work in Dhonam in 1984, described that time as follows:

[T]hose who had a lot of money, they were risking their lives. They were not investing and this is why people think that the rate of [HIV] infection at Dhonam is high because they were just wasting their money on women. The fishing [was] there and other sources of income were also high, but they were not spending the money properly, just on women. Maybe [the men] have quite a number of women, [they] say: “You know, I have money”, money can do wonders... They go far away so they spend a lot of money. They eat well, they sleep in good places... [and] they are expected to purchase very expensive things for the girls and the women (in-depth interview, September 2006).

This depiction was confirmed by some of the youngsters’ parents, as they despised what had happened during that time. The work of the (semi-)skilled men, who “were not investing” and “were not spending the money properly”, was not valued as such. Instead of contributing to “generational growth” (Cole 2007) by providing additional goods and services to improve the wellbeing of families and ancestors, these men wasted their money in individual consumption and pleasure. The local women and some of the Ugandan female refugees, on the other hand, used their sexuality to acquire desirable commodities and, maybe, a financially capable husband.

3.4.2. Dhonam in the early 1990s: Illness and deaths due to HIV/AIDS

The local women’s connection with these “men with money” and their mobility made them vulnerable to HIV. Doree, Odour’s second wife, explained:

In 1990, starting in the late 1980s and onwards, many people died. People who worked on the white ships (steamboats) all died. People who came with the ships took many wives and these women too have all died. Even now (2006), many people who are sick, are
dying. Ladies die, women die, men too die. Being a lake that has to happen, even the ladies who are here are still being caught. This village is bad. The fishermen are called “Joamuok” (the people who fish amuok), they just go with them, some too leave school, go with them (in-depth interview, September 2006).

Fishermen, who many people believed were able to acquire cash almost daily, attracted many local girls and young women. Some young women even left school—probably due to unexpected pregnancies—and moved in with fishermen.

Axel (20 years old, finishing his last year of secondary school in 2005), for instance, one of the male youngsters with whom I worked, used to live in Rarieda District, southwest of Winam, but came to Dhonam for secondary education. He was told by his parents to take care because Dhonam is perceived to be a bad place. According to his parents, most of the fishermen from their home who had gone fishing in Dhonam came back ill, and the girls and young women from their home who attended school in Dhonam became infected with HIV by the fishermen of Dhonam.

We asked Axel why his parents had said that Dhonam was a bad place. He hesitated, and then said, “You don’t know?”. He looked at us, and when we assured him that we did not know, he said:

Many of those who left [my home area] to come to fish in Dhonam have gone back home sick and died eventually. The fishermen come with the sickness and give it to the ignorant girls who are only after money. The girls may be unfaithful and spread it to their boyfriends. Some girls even go with older men, and some boys with older women, because of money. There is no trust among partners... Dhonam is also dangerous because it is a beach and the HIV prevalence at all beaches is very high (informal conversation, August 2005).

He then lowered his voice and said: “That is why the CDC is here”. When we asked him, “What is the CDC doing here?”, he replied:

They are doing research on AIDS and malaria. They are also in Homa Bay and Kombewa doing the same, and they published some statistics on those infected and the percentage is so high. People here [in Dhonam] have not seen what the disease does to people—that is why they are not scared and will continue not using a protective device (informal conversation, August 2005).

Seven months later, when we met his mother in Axel’s home, we asked her why she had told her son that Dhonam is a bad place. She explained:

Dhonam is bad because it is near the lake, and at a lake there are different people who go there, and those who fish get some money, and with that they may seduce girls who go to school in [Dhonam], and the girls may also have boyfriends in school, and may infect their peers, and in that way the disease spreads (informal conversation, March 2006).

All over Winam, Dhonam was perceived as a bad place because the manifold opportunities for ‘fun and pleasure’ may have brought HIV to the place. However,
youngsters like Axel who lived in poverty had no other choice than to attend school there.

According to Doree and one community health worker, during Dhonam’s boom time, people were not aware of the dangers of HIV. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhoea were there but could be cured: “After you are treated, you just become well”, Doree told us, in an in-depth interview in July 2007. One could ask: If they had known that they could attract a disease that was untreatable at the time, would it have made a big difference? This straightforward question has a complex answer, which I hope to explain in this dissertation.

The situation in Dhonam was contradictory in the sense that the happiness associated with the 1980s boom could not have happened without connections to the broader world, but those greater opportunities and connections also brought and spread illness. Looking at Dhonam after the peak, we see that that period of growth did not leave a sustainable, positive impact. On the contrary, becoming a crossroads has its downfall: the diversity of connections, more ‘fun and pleasure’ through sex, and JoWinam’s high mobility due to the recruitment of wage labourers to the cities have all contributed to the vulnerability of the people living today in Winam. More specifically, Winam became a fertile ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

4. Medical research in Winam

The chronic poverty and the high mobility that characterize life in Winam have contributed to the rapid spread of epidemics. Due to its high prevalence of malaria, and later, its high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, Winam became a fertile ground for several CDC/KEMRI biomedically inspired research studies. Several youngsters that I followed closely were enrolled in one, two, or even three research studies. Winam is also an interesting research place because it is conveniently located geographically: it is about two hours’ drive from Kisumu and only one and a half hours away from the headquarters of CDC/KEMRI in Kisian (Kisumu District), locally called “Atlanta” after the CDC’s headquarters in the US. In this way, Winam was easily accessible for the research staff and the principal investigators, who mostly resided in Kisumu. In addition to its geographically well-suited location, Winam was also attractive because of its well established Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS). As most researchers prefer to conduct studies in a region where an HDSS has already been set up, it is not a surprise that Winam has been overwhelmed by medical research. In
addition to providing a description of the different research projects that were going on in Winam, I also explain how JoWinam perceived this kind of research during the time of my fieldwork.

4.1. The Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) and other medical research projects in Winam

The collaboration between CDC/KEMRI was established in 1979 through the Kenyan Ministry of Health. They started to work in Winam in 1984, carrying out research on malaria. When HIV/AIDS became very rampant, more and more research programs were set up from 2000s onwards. The Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) is the most prominent research study in Winam. It is a longitudinal, population-based health study that was started in September 2001. It provides general demographic and health information (such as population age, structure, and density; morbidity; mortality; fertility and birth rates; migration; and use of health facilities) and measures disease- or intervention-specific information. Its objective is to generate an infrastructure of scientific data, which is used in the evaluation of a variety of population-based public health interventions (Adazu 2005). Before the HDSS was launched, a RCT of insecticide-treated nets (used to cover beds) was conducted in the same area between 1997 and 2002. As part of this trial, a baseline census of the population was conducted in 1996, followed by biannual updates. All the villages in Winam have thus been under demographic surveillance since 1997 (Andazu 2005: 1152–1153).

The HDSS in Winam is not only the most intensive, longitudinal study that has been executed on a large scale in Winam, but it also tries to document any relevant health issue that happens in the life of each individual in Winam. It is as if you cannot give birth or visit a health dispensary without the CDC being informed about it. The doorframes of all the houses in Winam display a location code that identifies the village, compound, and house. In addition, all residents upon birth or in-migration received a unique, permanent identification number composed of the location code plus a three-digit individual number. The coding makes it possible to identify each household member in Winam through the HDSS. Every four months, local CDC field staff interview every head of a household of Winam. If the head of the household is not around, another member will be asked if any changes concerning pregnancies, births, deaths, and migrations have occurred in the household since the previous visit. According to Adazu (2005: 1151–1152), the reported information was at first recorded in
a hand-held register but, later, every field assistant used a ‘Palm’ hand computer. Adazu (2005: 1152–1153) details the many types of information collected:

[D]uring one round of each calendar year, socio-economic surveys were conducted on all the households. Information collected included material used for house construction, occupations of the household head and spouse, household’s primary source of drinking water, methods of water treatment, use of cooking fuel, and ownership of items such as livestock, radios, bicycles, and televisions. During a different round, current educational status and level of literacy in English and Kiswahili were updated for all individuals. Socio-economic status and education data were collected to be used as covariates in analyses of causes of morbidity and mortality. To monitor changes in causes of morbidity in children, and in particular the proportion of visits due to malaria and anaemia, outpatient health facility surveillance for paediatric (younger than 10 years old) visits for Winam began in 1997. [...] Caregivers of all children attending any of the fourteen outpatient facilities in Winam and Gem for either sick or immunization visits were interviewed by trained study staff, reviewing the child’s health and treatment history over the past two weeks. [...] Study staff attempted to find both the child and the mother’s permanent identification numbers in line lists of registration logs and enter them on the clinic visit form to link clinical and demographic data.

Moreover, from September 2001 onwards, verbal autopsies were conducted on any child’s terminal illness and for neonatal deaths. Two village reporters were paid to report village births and deaths as they occurred in each village. The permanent identification numbers of all children were used to link clinical and demographic data. Next, the monitoring of entomologic parameters of malaria transmission was set up in Winam from May 2002 onwards (Adazu 2005: 1152–1153). Later on, after my fieldwork had finished, KEMRI/CDC initiated data collection on the individual immunization status of children younger than two years old, and self-reported HIV and marital status and history in 2007. In 2008, they began home-based HIV counselling and testing throughout the HDSS and they expected to test all the participants of the HDSS by the end of 2010. In 2010, they even added fingerprinting to enhance the identification of the residents (www.indepth-network.org).19

Most researchers welcome the infrastructure of the HDSS in order to identify their study subjects by stratified sampling. Once permission from the CDC Director and the DHSS data manager is obtained, the principal investigator gets access to the entire DHSS database for his/her research study. During my fieldwork, there were several CDC/KEMRI biomedically inspired research projects running in Winam simultaneously. As noted earlier, in 2003, the CDC, KEMRI, and the Belgian ITM teamed up to carry out a PEPFAR-funded Youth Intervention Program (YIP) in Winam. The epidemiological component of this was the Baseline Cross-Sectional Survey (BCS) that gathered data on the prevalence of HIV, STIs, and pregnancy, in preparation for a clinical trial for an HIV vaccine. It was the first time in Winam that local people were
asked to complete an extensive questionnaire on sexual behaviour and HIV. Alongside the BCS were other CDC/KEMRI studies, including a study on preventing malaria in infants, research into emerging diseases work, and tuberculosis research. In addition to research, since 1999 the CDC also promoted a number of programmatic activities, including the Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) Program, the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) program, tuberculosis care, HIV home-based counselling and testing, and youth services. However, all of these intervention activities were also part of various research protocols.

4.2. JoWinam’s perceptions of medical research

On a daily basis, between 20 and 30 big, shiny, white Toyota Land Cruisers raced over the earthen roads of Winam, employed in CDC projects. Due to the big number of cars observed, JoWinam called CDC the ‘Centre for Display of Cars’. CDC workers would go to a central meeting point, usually one of the four CDC buildings that served as health dispensaries, where they would meet with the local field staff and study subjects, or where they would pick up the local field staff at the beginning of the day’s ‘home visits’. Each research program had their own cars and drivers, however, they all looked alike: a white car with a blue license plate and the CDC/KEMRI logo on the doors. Only people who were working for CDC/KEMRI in that area recognised which program was which, through the familiar face of the driver. When conducting home visits, the driver and the research team travelled the main road by car, and drove as far as they could until they had to step out of the car and walk the last bit to a family’s homestead. The main purpose of such visits was to invite JoWinam to participate in a research study, with the promise of free treatment and other material benefits. Once they agreed, they were invited to come to the central meeting point where local people had to undergo procedures set up by outsiders. Within a short time, they had to provide certain information, blood samples, and other bodily specimens. Such research has certainly influenced the way in which local people perceive illness and health in general. On a daily basis, they have been confronted with a hierarchy of power, wealth, and knowledge (see also Geissler 2005).

4.2.1. Free access to health care

Getting free access to health care, along with some material benefit, was for most people the main reason for participating in medical research. The BCS for instance, offered free treatment to participants diagnosed with STIs and malaria; those with symptoms of
tuberculosis or HIV were referred to other health facilities where they would be treated free of charge. For the study to reduce malaria in infants (Intermittent Preventive Treatment in Infants), free treatment would be given to the baby whenever any illness occurred until its third year. Who among us, having hardly enough to eat in the house, would not participate in a study that offers free health care? Since most JoWinam could not afford to get health care at local and district hospitals, such free treatment was of immense value. Study participants also received small benefits, such as transportation reimbursement or T-shirts with HIV-prevention messages. BCS participants were supplied with a bar of soap and a glass of juice, and free bed nets were given to those who took part in the insecticide-treated netting research. Such benefits attracted many people because most lived in poverty and perceived a bar of soap or a new T-shirt as a luxury. Transportation reimbursements were a kind of income, since most people walked to the research centres. People could only get enrolled in a program, and receive these services and benefits, if they met one requirement: they had to complete a questionnaire and allow the medical staff to collect bodily fluids, such as blood, urine, or vaginal secretions. This requirement, and the reasons for it, were not well understood by most of the local people of Winam and were consequently received with ambiguous feelings.

4.2.2. Distrust of medical research

Studies that involved collecting bodily fluids often gave rise to fear and distrust among the local people. The fear of being used as “guinea pigs” and the distrust of medical research was nourished on colonial memories of blood-stealing accusations, adapted to new, contemporary situations. These long-ago accusations continued to influence local perceptions and responses to the CDC’s medical research in Winam when I was in the field. It was further supported and even escalated by the media during the implementation of the BCS in 2003.

Colonial ‘bloodsucking stories’, now being told again about the CDC, should not be understood as “another groundless African belief in superstition but rather as a way in which the storytellers experienced the world as a place of vulnerability and unreasonable relationships” (White 2000: 5). In her book Speaking with Vampires: Rumour and History in Colonial Africa, Luise White (2000) provides us with a rich collection of social history on the various African bloodsucking stories from the 1920s onwards. She describes these rumours as representations of colonial oppression, and analyses the social changes that were constructed through these rumours. White (cited
in White 2005: 241) emphasises that “rumours conform to standards of evidence”, and that rumours do not seem unreasonable to those who tell or hear them: “rumours [are] collective and socially constructed ideas about evidence. [...] [T]hose who hear a rumour understand it in terms of its context within local meanings and recent histories”.

Vampire rumours are meta-commentaries about the unequal relationship between the European/American/Kenyan research elites, and the poor research subjects of Winam. These kinds of rumours articulate “the racial hierarchies of exploitation and mistrust that colonialism engendered” (White 2005: 243). According to Scott (1985), rumours can also be a “weapon of the weak” as they permit oppressed groups to make claims about those in power and to resist official ideologies. Rumours can produce social change but they can also contribute to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness (Fine 2005: 4).

4.2.3. Bloodsucking stories of the past

According to White (2000: 17–18), stories about white people taking bodily fluids from the people they colonized were common stories in 18th and 19th centuries in eastern and central Africa. These widespread rumours showed both great similarities and considerable differences within a vast geographic and cultural area, including the former Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia’s controversial colonial name) and the Belgian Congo (White 2000: 16–17). In Kenya, such rumours emerged between 1918 and 1925, probably from Africans’ experiences during World War I when many men had been forcefully recruited (White 2000).

In western Kenya, the term kachinja (Swahili for ‘slaughterers’) was used to refer to ‘vampires’ (White 2000: 11). White (1993) explains that rumours about kachinja in western Kenya were related to the Yellow Fever Department of the 1930s, which had led medical research in Kenya before regular health services had reached the rural areas. According to White (2000), the vampires were usually white people or their black collaborators, who took blood from local people at night. Blood-stealing accusations generally featured medicalized, colonial bureaucracies (such as fire, police, and medical departments). The vampires employed Western, specialized tools and technology, including cars, medicines, and injections, to capture local Africans to extract blood from them. For instance, in Tanzania, it was said that the malaria control trucks carried persons “whose blood would be drained” (Smith 1993, cited in White 2000: 129). White (2000: 105) includes that “many believed that human blood was used as medicine”. For instance, one European doctor explained that Africans believed that he might suck their
blood himself (Scobie, cited in White 2000: 110); it was similarly thought the Nairobi Fire Brigade took men so that their blood could be used for the treatment of Europeans with anaemia (Wachanga, cited in White 2000: 106). In bloodsucking stories, there was a repeated association between the red colour of the firemen’s equipment and the red of blood, though White’s (2000: 127) accounts show that the characteristics of the vehicle mattered more. She explains that the description of vehicles in stories “reflected the imagined powers of their manufacturers” as cars can take people away (White 2000: 132). Cars installed fear “depending on who was in them, and where they were going to, or where they were parked” (White 2000: 133). According to White’s fieldnotes from 1986 (2000: 129–130), the first African-owned bus company was told in the 1960s to carry kachinja after dusk. In 1968, the rumour was spread that the kachinja had “cars with specially designed backseats that could automatically drain the blood of whoever who sat there” (White 2000: 130). Travellers at that time were afraid to accept rides since it was said that no one had ever survived blood sucking.

4.2.4. Bloodsucking rumours inspired by the CDC

The way the CDC operated in Winam reminded JoWinam of the many bloodsucking stories they had heard from relatives who came home from town. JoWinam linked and reconstructed the villagers’ historical experiences, particularly of health care and medical research, to the contemporary kachinja in Winam.

As most CDC research entailed the collection of bodily fluids, JoWinam believed that any research going on in Winam that was coordinated by CDC entailed the extraction of blood at a certain moment that was unknown to the study subject. Even when the study did not involve the collection of bodily fluids, people were still very distrustful and believed that researchers would still take their blood without them noticing it. They imagined that the CDC’s technology, such as cars, generators and headphones, could extract their blood at any time. An educated elder of Winam who had been local field staff for CDC during the bed net trial told me and my research assistant Petronella that “some people refused to take the nets because they believe it had a mechanism for drawing blood from people when they are sleeping”. Whenever the removal of blood was required, people usually became very frightened. Most JoWinam asked themselves why researchers came to Winam all the way from America to take their blood away? Their fear of giving blood usually turned into distrust in CDC studies. They suspected that the CDC was selling blood samples to Europeans and that the
Europeans were earning a lot of money from it. One of the research members of the BCS explained to me:

Many people are still rejecting to give out blood samples. They don’t mind so much to be tested for malaria because they are used to it since only a small extraction of blood is taken. Yet, to give out two tubes of blood, [that] they cannot accept. “Why do you take two tubes and not only one?” “They take our blood away and we are going to die!” “What are they going to do with our blood? It is part of our body!” When they hear that their blood will be stored, they cannot understand it. When they see a big car with a pick-up, they think it is meant for the storage of those blood tubes. It gets worse when they see your car is packed with luggage or when your jeep has a red colour! Then they believe that we have painted the jeep with their blood! (informal conversation, June 2005).

Most of the children of the young women with whom I worked who were from Dhonam were participating in the anti-malarial bed-nets study for infants that was carried out during the time of my fieldwork. The young mothers believed that their children became anaemic because of the blood that was drawn from their babies every time they visited the hospital. Since the clinical officer also used to complain to the mothers that her child was anaemic, they were even more convinced of their suspicions. Ochien’g, a 22-year-old fisherman, and father of baby Mercy, explained:

If there is no blood in the finger, then it is taken from the legs, here (he shows Petronella and me the sole of his foot): they first beat like this for blood to come out. And after the blood has come, they remove blood. They can even remove it in bottles two of them, this much. Then they say the blood goes to the store. So the store that it goes to, we don’t know... If the blood is less, they do whatever. You hear when they quarrel with the mother and blame her that the child has not enough blood (i.e., the baby is anaemic). And the blood they took, they can’t return to her. So CDC staff—the community doesn’t want them. Just slowly they will be beaten or they will be chased. It is an issue that even the chiefs know (informal conversation, October 2005).

Local people were suspicious about CDC researchers drawing “litres of blood”. This was also expressed in Manhica (Mozambique) where the anti-malaria bed-nets trial was also conducted, resulting in serious community resistance to participation (Pool et al. 2006: 1673).

Most JoWinam had doubts about the further use of the blood samples. They associated the money given as a reimbursement for transportation expenses with ‘buying off’ the study subjects or as an exchange for the bodily fluids. Few dared to ask clarifications of CDC field staff, and if they managed to ask, they were often referred to the principal investigator of the study, who was typically based in Kisumu. Not giving enough explanation to the local people about the study often resulted in more doubts and distrust. This resulted sometimes in people’s withdrawing from the study, and losing the free health care offered by CDC. A study on emerging diseases study carried out in 2005, for example, provided free treatment to those who suffered from symptoms
that were of interest of the study, such as diarrhoea, coughing, chest pains, jaundice, and parasitic infections. The medication for these infections had to be taken at the very moment of the visit; one person told me that the field staff “would sit and wait until the pill was swallowed”. This made JoWinam very suspicious about the content of the pills, and some therefore were hesitant to inform the local field staff of their illnesses. Even the local field staff realized that sometimes they would see a very ill person, but the person would claim that he/she was fine. The ill person preferred to suffer instead of being helped by this project since he/she had no trust in this study.

4.2.5. “The human guinea pigs of Rarieda”

During the implementation of the BCS in Winam, a revival of old ‘vampire’ rumours, inspired by the presence of the CDC, were supported, and even escalated, by a newspaper article – written by concerned citizens from Winam as an opinion piece – stating that “something not quite right regarding research protocol and ethics was happening in Kisumu, Siaya and Bondo Districts” (East African Standard, ‘The human guinea pigs of Rarieda’, 21 December 2003). The article further announced that the CDC and KEMRI used people in Rarieda as “guinea pigs” for research. The news was quickly spread because, as Axel (a 20-year-old male student) explained, some teachers warned their pupils in Winam not to get involved in CDC research:

Nowadays, they (the CDC) do not come to school because the teachers told us not to be going for the treatment after it was written in the newspapers that CDC was using people in Winam as guinea pigs. There was even an old man that they were treating who later became sick and when he realised he was being used for research, he stopped the medication and died. CDC then tried to go back to the school and refute the claims. They have very good convincers (informal conversation with Axel, August 2005).

In some areas of Winam, CDC researchers were even kicked out on their visits to the compounds to inquire about certain research subjects, as local people did not want to have anything to do with CDC research at that time.

According to some CDC researchers, the newspaper article was the result of some “disgruntled employees” who wanted to damage the reputation of the CDC. The US Ambassador reacted to the newspaper article by writing a Letter to the Editor in the same paper, and a clarification was issued by the Minister of Health in the hope of ending the rumours. Nevertheless, the BCS study had to halt the recruitment of participants for a while until calm returned to Winam. The employees who had spread such bad rumours about the CDC’s work mainly felt annoyed because they experienced little improvement in their community through the CDC. According to one of the BCS’s
local field staff, many JoWinam felt frustrated that the principal investigators of CDC studies had employed interviewers from outside Winam instead of giving employment to local people. Although the principal investigators of the BCS did not object to increasing job opportunities for JoWinam, they found it necessary to employ interviewers from outside Winam because of the sensitivity of the topic of sexual reproductive health. The same held for employment opportunities at Yeshica, the community-based component of YIP. Only few local people were able to get a job at Yeshica, which enabled people to complain about the project (see Chapter 4).

In sum, since 1979 the impoverished, politically neglected area of Winam became a focal point for a gamut of biomedical research studies and interventions, focused mainly on malaria and HIV/AIDS. JoWinam perceived this kind of research very ambivalently. Since the area lacked access to basic health care, many people participated in these studies in order to gain economic benefits. This was however, a difficult choice given their fear of ‘bloodsucking’ and their associated distrust in research studies. Only subjects who had been selected and had given informed consent could access the free treatment and the material benefits. Local people who were not willing to join the study or who withdrew from a study had to pay for health services; poor people had a difficult choice—to either join the research project or go without healthcare.

5. Conclusion

This chapter began by asking the question *Winam piny maber?* (Is Winam a good land?), paraphrasing a popular Luo song. The answer is, unfortunately, negative. Winam clearly is not a good place to be born or to live, and it never has been—perhaps with the short-lived exception of the gold rush and trade boom, although few locals benefitted from this either.

The broad historical picture that I sketched of Nyanza in general, and Dhonam in particular, tells the story of a marginalized place, both politically and economically. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, being one of the largest (but not the largest) ethnic groups in Kenya and having a good amount of educated leaders, ‘the Luo’ were never able to sit at the table of government politics. Economically, ‘Luoland’ was the forgotten hinterland that only provided a cheap labour force for other more economically dynamic parts of Kenya.
The impoverished area of Winam rapidly became ground zero for medical research. The benefits of participation made JoWinam agree to take part in such studies, even swallowing their fear of ‘bloodsucking’ and their genuine distrust in medical research. Facing such structural violence, it was not surprising that youngsters needed to use creative livelihood tactics to make a living. However, in such circumstances, it is difficult at times to characterize this as an ability to act, let alone achieve social mobility. In a world of enduring uncertainty, which makes any estimation of the possible benefits and risk of a decision impossible, young people are confronted with challenges to their ability to act. They might constantly run into obstacles if not walls that stem from existing societal structures. While in the last decade studies in the youth literature have increasingly focused on ‘navigation’ to describe how people tactically deal with difficult circumstances (see Vigh 2006; De Boeck and Honwana 2005), the current work of Vigh (2008: 19) shows that it is an anthropological challenge to understand how actors act in situations of “profound instability and unpredictability”. Human creativity often has to beat the most difficult circumstances as young people’s agency is stuck within the structure. There are no clear paths towards upward mobility because a tactic that may have worked yesterday will no longer do so tomorrow due to limited opportunities or changed circumstances. This does not mean that the system is unchangeable, but instead that the world these young people live in is constantly shifting and unstable, which means that one needs to act in relation to the social changes. Thus, studying ‘tactical agency’ in a situation of enduring uncertainty means being aware of youngsters’ lack of possibilities to act while at the same time documenting how they are constantly alert for whatever new chance may fall from heaven.

1 I did not use the actual name of the famous Luo singer in order to protect the identity of the place of research.

2 Chira is a local illness resulting from violations of kwer (ancestral rules/taboo). These violations cause ritual impurity, which in turn produces consequences such as illness or other misfortunes (Ringsted 2003: 16–17) (see Chapter 5).

4 See note 4, Chapter 1.

5 The hut tax was introduced in Kenya in 1901 and the poll tax in 1910. The taxes were paid in Indian rupees, which due to the influence of Indian traders, had been introduced as the first official currency. Later, the official currency was changed to British sterling (Hay 1976: 89).
The Asians living in Kenya come from different parts of India and Pakistan. They did not all arrive as cheap labour for the construction of the Uganda Railway as some had already arrived before the Europeans came (Pandit and Thakur, cited in Herzig 2006: 10–11).

By Luo custom, a married son would be given plots of land to establish his household: the fields he was given would come from the gardens farmed by his mother (Hay 1976: 93).

From the 1930s onwards, the individual granaries used during the 19th-century homesteads began to disappear since women began to store their grain in tin drums or sacks, inside their houses and out of public sight (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 66).

In total, more than 1,000 Luo and Luhya were working in the Nyanza mines by 1935 for an average of six pounds a year (Fearn 1961: 130). Mineral rights belonged to the British Crown and a new Mining Ordinance (1931) effectively allowed the Provincial Commissioner to issue prospecting permits to settlers, with the payment of a 20-shilling fee and 25-pound deposit (Fearn 1961: 128–129).

They were San Martin (Bondo District), Pan African (Bondo District), French firms BRGM and La Scorce (Kakamega).

The first breakaway church was the Nomiya Luo Church, founded by Winam’s John Owalo in 1907. This church practised circumcision, emphasised the Ten Commandments, and forbade smoking, beer-drinking, and dancing (Odinga 1967: 68–70). By 1913, the Gospel according to St. Matthew had been translated into Luo, and in the 1920s and 1930s many more African churches were founded.

Leopold II had made the Congo his private chiefdom in 1885. He extorted enormous fortunes from the Congo mainly through the exploitation of rubber. His reign became the focus of an international scandal from 1904 due to gruesome stories of how he used torture (hacking off hands when village quotas for rubber production were not met), rape, beheading, slavery, and genocide in order to extract the maximum amount of natural resources from ‘his’ Congo Free State. His regime was responsible for the death of about ten million people, or half of the entire population (Hochschild 1998).

Gorogoro was the term used for the size of a standard measuring tin. The gorogoro economy illustrates how the household’s capacity was gradually shrinking: while the sellers of maize meal steadily reduced the size of the measuring tin, the price of maize remained constant (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 67).

Morrison (2006) for instance took a look at the number and ethnic origin of the 94 professors and (senior) lecturers at the Royal College of Nairobi and shows that four out of the five African were Luo in 1962. She mentioned that although Luo numbers in academia increased throughout the 1960s, so too did other ethnic groups. The Luo became then one group among many. Between 1974 and 1985, the number of Luo professors steadily increased in absolute terms. But it decreased relatively to other ethnic groups. By 1985, other ethnic group total numbers surpassed the Luo numbers (Morisson 2006: 129–131).

For instance, Odinga chose to campaign and win votes among the Langata constituency in Nairobi as opposed to simply seeking a safe seat in Nyanza (Badejo 2006).

See also Ahlberg’s (1991) work in which she describes the impact of the process of colonial and postcolonial domination on the sexual and reproductive health of Kikuyu women.

See Cohen and Odhiambo (1989: 43–45) on his description of Kaloleni, a neighbourhood of Nairobi that is referred to as the ‘homeland’ of Luo in central Kenya.
In Dhonam, the company also bought scattered fields of lands, equaling almost one hectare; people who lived in the area were resettled. [Another company] continued mining for about 10 years until the gold deposits became exhausted, however, even during the time of my fieldwork local people still were searching for gold in some areas (not specified to protect the anonymity of Dhonam). Although only small quantities are found, the benefits are shared within groups of local workers and with the landowner where gold is discovered.

The reliability of the information gathered by the CDC village reporters is an important issue; during our fieldwork it often happened that CDC village reporters just invented numbers and did not visit every home. It was common to hear CDC staff making jokes about it amongst themselves, which is how Petronella and I learned of the practice.

The juice was actually meant for the BCS field and research staff. Yet, since the study participants had to wait a long time before they were interviewed and samples were taken, the staff felt uncomfortable and shared their juice with the participants. The juice given for free was now perceived by the locals as an incentive but was not mentioned in the study protocol.
PART II –

Young People
Chapter 4

Wabayo abayo: “Moving around”
and young people’s livelihood tactics

1. Introduction: Life and livelihood on Dhonam’s shore

Early morning at Dhonam’s beach, and although the air is still fresh you can feel from the first rays of sunshine that it will be a very hot day. The village is already bustling with activity at 7 a.m. After spending the whole night on the lake, fishermen come to shore in their wooden boats, painted with images of heroism, love, and devotion to God or Bob Marley. Depending on the wind and the water hyacinths, the infestation of which clogs increasingly large areas of Lake Victoria, landing a boat can be nearly impossible. On the pathway to the lake, female traders await the fishermen—who will soon have cash in their pockets—hoping to attract them to their wares of furniture and clothes, spread out on blankets along the path. Others sell snacks like boiled mwogo (cassava) and mandazi (East African fried bread). Restaurants along the lakefront are also open to serve the fishermen an early, heavy breakfast.

As soon as the fishermen arrive, female fish traders hurry toward the shore and make their way through the water hyacinths. They surround the boats and purchase omena, a kind of small sardine. Fish traders who can afford to have paid in advance make sure they get priority. Sometimes, they reserve fish before the fishermen even go out, and pay up when the fishermen return. Regular customers who buy a lot of fish also get preference. A number of the female fishmongers are in sexual relationships with the fishermen, as their girlfriends or wives, which guarantees them access to fish. It is said that one must have many fishermen as ‘friends’ to obtain fish. Fishermen sometimes move from one place to another searching for fish. At Dhonam’s beach, a number of the fishermen have migrated to Winam from different places, perhaps leaving behind wives and children. Younger fishermen, who haven’t yet married, quickly find a girlfriend to temporarily stay with.

The fishmongers carry the omena out of the water in basins, and then clean them on the shore; most of the omena will be dried in the sun and then sold at the evening market. Only a few go door to door to sell fresh omena in the morning hours: the lake
has recently been declared off-limits during and after spawning season, in order to let the stock recover, and selling *omena* has become illegal during the closure of the lake. Since there is no alternative, *joamuok* (people who fish and trade fish) prefer risking arrest to losing their small daily income.

After the *omena* catch has been distributed among the female fishmongers, the fishermen carry ashore the rest of their catch and arrange them on the ground according to size. Most nets are half-empty: all the hard work of last night, and all the competition with other boats for the best spots, have yielded very few, decent-sized *ngege* (tilapia)\(^1\) and *nyamami* (bigger tilapia), the type of fish that sells best on the local, national, and international markets. There are plenty of *mbuta* (Nile perch), an inexpensive delicacy in Europe’s supermarkets, but not a favourite in Winam. The fishermen stand next to their boat’s catch while the *karan* (boat secretary or cashier) records the number of fish according to size. The price of each boat’s catch is then agreed upon and sold accordingly. The larger *ngege* and *mbuta* are usually immediately sold to male or female middlemen, who then sell them to markets in Kisumu or Nairobi.

When the fishermen and traders return from the beach between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m., Dhonam’s market centre becomes very crowded. Until noontime, kiosks serve freshly made *mandazi* and *chapati* (Indian flatbread), and sell small bits of *mbuta*, *ngege*, and *omena*. Most of the available fresh fish are small, and locals complain: “Nowadays there is no fish—you cannot even cook for your visitors”. Locals do try to reserve the few big fish that are available for funerals, of which there are many. One important restaurant in Dhonam, which serves employees of governmental and non-governmental organisations, also reserves a certain quantity of fish each day. At the market, there is a small variety of local vegetables like *sukuma wiki* (a Swahili term meaning ‘pushing the weak’), a spinach-like vegetable that can be harvested at any time: traditional green leaves such as *bo* and *mto*; and vegetables imported from Kisumu including cabbage, tomatoes, carrots, and avocados, which can only be found now and then. In addition to a wide variety of beans, including green and black lentils, pigeon peas, and cowpeas, some traders also sell sweet potatoes, white potatoes, and cassava, also imported from Kisumu. When there is less capital this is reflected in the variety of food, as fewer traders can travel back and forth to buy goods. It is rare to find fruit at the market. Since the local soil is not adequately fertile, only a few people are able to grow bananas, mangoes, and citrus fruit, and only for their own consumption.

The market centre, made up of wooden stalls, is surrounded by cement houses built in the 1960s by Asian migrants (referred to as the “Indians,” see Chapter 3). At the
time of my fieldwork, these buildings belonged to prosperous African businessmen who were living in Kisumu and Nairobi. Most of these cement buildings house shops with a surprisingly large range of products for such a poor area, which, according to Ochieng’ (1974), indicates the importance of remittances sent from the cities. Among the local shops, there are three tailors, two chemists, and a posho (maize) mill. A bit further away, a butcher, carpenter, hair saloon, hardware shop, soda depot, and video hall, all present their goods and services. Among these, grinding and selling maize seems to be a lucrative business, as the number of such enterprises increased from one to three during the course of my fieldwork. However, starting up such a business requires financial resources and there is a limit to the number of viable mills in a single marketplace.

In the afternoon, a handful of male youngsters roam about or idle around the market centre, or go to the lake to kill time. Near the hair saloon, between the boda boda (bike taxi) stop and the hardware shop, young men gather to play karata, a card game in which you can earn or lose money. The Kenyan Government prohibits this game because it supposedly encourages idleness and laziness, and because those who play it do not work and waste what little money they have. At the boda boda stop, young people and elderly folks meet up for a drink of chang’aa (a strong, local, illegally brewed liquor). It is a great place to sit and watch the activities of the day: fishermen coming in from the shore; people going to and coming from the market; travellers getting out of the matatu (public mini-buses) and others embarking to go to town; and the big white CDC Land Rovers, passing by. This is the daily scenery of Dhonam.

The local economy of Dhonam revolves around the fishing industry of Dhonam’s beach. Although overfishing and the collapse of Lake Victoria’s ecosystem have dramatically reduced the fishing stock, affecting the local economy (Shege 1995), the beach still attracts many young fishermen, not only from within Winam but also from different places, including Kisumu District and Siaya District. When fish are scarce in these men’s own localities, they move and temporarily rent rooms in places away from home. Despite the meagre catches, the fishermen still preferred it to “idling around” since there was little other work in Winam.

The youngsters often said: “Wabayo abayo”, a phrase that has multiple meanings. It can translate as “We are just strolling”, indicating a level of relaxed-ness when visiting friends, relatives, or lovers, but in a context of high unemployment, it often indicated the lack of direction in their lives. “Wabayo abayo” can mean “We are moving around”, referring to moving repeatedly, looking for work or lovers, and having
the sense that, on this journey, they often lost their way. At the same time, youngsters also used the expression to comment on women who ‘moved around’ too much, a euphemism for having too many sexual relationships (see Chapter 6). Young people sometimes described moving around as “tarmacking”, which meant travelling on the tarmac roads of Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa (see also Prince 2005). What motivates all these forms of *wabayo abayo* is young people’s aspirations, hopes, and ambitions to find a better future, one different than their parents’, different than the one experienced at ‘home’.

Part II—starting with this chapter—focuses on the daily lives of the young people of Winam. This and the following chapters demonstrate that the ‘structural violence’ discourse—described in the previous chapter on Winam—is only one side of the story. The youngsters with whom I worked in Winam are not simply passive victims of structural forces, but ‘tactical agents’ (as defined in Chapter 1). Despite living in a marginalized, impoverished environment, most of the young people demonstrate tremendous creativity in making a living for themselves, as will be shown in this chapter. At the same time, they are also constrained as they act within an environment characterized by ‘enduring uncertainty’.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the different ‘livelihood tactics’ that young people employ in the hope of moving up the social ladder and finding security, including the importance of urban mobility as a tactic. Young people hope to move out of rural areas to urban areas not only for education or jobs, but also to expand their social and sexual networks. Due to the instability of their social networks, some of the youngsters increase their sexual networks—including, sometimes, sexual liaisons with multiple, concurrent partners. In exploring why and how some of the youngsters expand their sexual networks, I review Thornton’s (2009) work and further develop his argument that sexual relationships with multiple partners serve to increase an individual’s social and sexual network. Thornton’s (2009) analysis, however, is lacking a more nuanced view on gender-specific effects. As I will elaborate in this chapter, climbing up the social ladder and finding a better way of living through sexual liaisons was more prevalent among young women than young men.

In order to follow this line of thought, we need to take a closer look at the theoretical concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’. Starting with a brief discussion of these concepts, I point to their key limitations. Taking the criticisms of the ‘Sustainable Livelihood Approach’ (SLA) into account, I present the different livelihood opportunities
of the young people of Winam. I subsequently discuss the youngsters’ aspirations for urban mobility. An in-depth look at the life story of Akinyi, including her previous pathways and her future aspirations, shows that ‘moving around’ is a common feature throughout the young people’s lives, from childhood to early adulthood, in Winam.

2. Theoretical concepts: ‘Livelihood’ and ‘social capital’

2.1. ‘Livelihood’: Strategies, practices, and tactics

The concept of ‘livelihood’ means more than just having a job or an income. Following Chambers and Conway (1992), Chambers (1995), and Carney (1998), ‘livelihood’ includes five types of capital, or ‘livelihood resources’—“the basic material and social, tangible and intangible assets that people use for constructing their livelihoods” (Krantz 2001: 8). These can be grouped into the following categories: natural (land, water, biodiversity), social (networks, group membership, access to other societal institutions), human (knowledge, access to work, health, skills, creativity), physical (livestock, food stock, basic infrastructure and production capacity), and financial (savings, access to credit) (Carney 1998: 6–7). The concept of ‘sustainable livelihood’ moved away from this conventional approach towards a framework of poverty reduction. In so doing, the concept took into account not only the various capital assets of the poor, but also emphasised the wider context (i.e., the institutional processes and organisational structures) that either constrain or enhance poor people’s ability to make a living (De Haan 2012).

The original definition of a ‘sustainable rural livelihood’, developed by Chambers and Conway (1992), was accepted by the British Department of International Development (DfID) after some small modifications:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Carney 1998: 4).

Although the concept can be used at various levels, it is most commonly applied at the household level. In general, the concept of ‘household’ is problematic because it focuses on economic aspects, seeing the household as a utility-maximising unit with one distinct head, a conceptualization that ignores gender-based, intra-household power relations and inequalities. For practical reasons I make use of the concept of household notwithstanding its limitations, since it still has empirical significance (see also Niehof
“MOVING AROUND” AND LIVELIHOOD TACTICS

2004). In this dissertation, I use the definition of ‘household’ articulated by Rudie: “a family-based co-residential unit that takes care of resource management and the primary needs of its members” (cited in Niehof 2004: 323).

The SLA understanding of ‘livelihood’ rapidly became utilised in approaches to rural poverty reduction in marginalised regions. Its approach is actor-oriented and mainly focuses on poor people’s opportunities and agency (De Haan 2012). One of the underlying assumptions of this approach is that economic growth might not automatically lead to poverty reduction, because “all depends on the capabilities of the poor to take advantage of expanding economic opportunities” (Krantz 2001: 2). The SLA also stresses the importance of participatory interventions in order to integrate the ‘local knowledge’ of poor people into project designs, implementation, and monitoring—a bottom-up rather than top-down approach (Krantz 2001; De Haan 2012).

The concepts of ‘livelihood strategies’ or ‘livelihood practices’ refer to individuals’ and households’ attempts to secure and improve their lives, i.e., beyond mere survival (UNDP 1997: 5–6). Zoomers (1999: 18) defines ‘livelihood strategies’ as “the way families respond to change, handling opportunities and limitations”. An important addition to this definition of ‘livelihood strategies’ comes from Ellis (1998a: 1): “the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in order to survive and to improve their standards of living”. While Zoomers focuses on the fact that external factors constrain possibilities for action, Ellis’s definition suggests a more proactive process of assembling diverse actions to improve a situation. Both definitions ask us to focus on what drives families to adopt certain strategies and not others, such as improving income, reducing risk, or improving prestige in the community, and to recognize that they may adopt different strategies at different times, focussing more on accumulation at one point and survival at another (Zoomers 1999: 46–48). Whatever pathways people pursue, it is not always the result of well-thought-through, ‘strategic’ actions. The term ‘strategy’ refers to “conscious and coherently structured actions that are aimed at achieving something in the future” (Niehof 2004), covering a long-term period: indeed, Zoomers chooses to use the term ‘livelihood practices’ in describing actions taken within a short-term study.

Although ‘practices’ is a more accurate term than ‘strategies’, the notion of ‘tactics’ (De Certeau 1984) even better captures the situational navigation that is embedded in everyday struggles of ordinary young people. This concept not only aims to account for the external factors that influence young people’s livelihood practices (see Chapter 3), but also attends to how young people spend their days. The external context
and the actors mutually influence each other. It is important to analyse how specific groups or individuals create space for realising their own projects, which run parallel to, and are often hidden in the shadows of, interventions by the government or other entities, such as NGOs (Long 1990: 14–17). In this dissertation, I therefore focus on young people’s ‘livelihood tactics’ to show how, in their everyday lives, young people try to deal with their immediate conditions in order to maximise the circumstances created by their impoverished environment.

When we try to understand ‘livelihood tactics’, it is important to analyse them as situational since their path and direction of development are hard to predict. We cannot generalise for groups of people, such as young people who might be fishermen or farmers, since they are not sufficiently homogenous to be regarded as having common characteristics and interests. Nor are they static categories: poor farmers can through luck and circumstance work their way up to become rich, and rich businessmen can come into a crisis and tumble into poverty (Zoomers 1999: 46–47). Young people are members of households with histories: what has happened in the past has an influence on decision making in the present and in the future. Households are also affected by their very composition: the expenditures and inputs differ between a household with young dependents and a household with ageing dependents (Niehof 2004). Therefore it is important to take into account that time and the division of labour are also important factors in the management of resources within a household. The roles of the different actors might be well defined but may also change. There is also diversity across households as some have a high degree of internal specialization while in others all the members participate in nearly all the tasks (Zoomers 1999: 46–47).

2.2. ‘Social capital’: Social and sexual networks

‘Social capital’ is a livelihood asset that I wish to dwell upon since it was of great importance in my research. The concept has become more widely used since the late 1990s in association with poverty alleviation (Shepherd 1998) and health-enhancing behaviour (Campbell 2000). Generally, social capital consists of social norms and social networks (Niehof 2004; Nombo and Niehof 2008), a resource that people can rely upon to bolster or improve their situation. The concept was first widely discussed in Putman’s (2000) landmark book Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. According to Putnam (2000: 24), social capital refers to “the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other”, associated with increased trust, reciprocity, and support. For Putnam
The act of ‘bowling alone’ is a metaphor that illustrates the decline of social capital in the United States. The Social Capital Foundation asserts that social capital is not primarily about the networks that a person possesses but is more a collective, shared, and reciprocal disposition to generate, maintain, and develop congenial and social connections. Social capital is thus a relational concept; it exists only as far as it is shared (Portes 1998).

Social capital can often act as an informal safety net during periods of insecurity. Nombo and Niehof (2008: 241) write that social capital might be “a last resort resource to the poor and vulnerable for its ability to provide a buffer to shocks such as death in the family”. Such buffers against shocks are very important for rural households, taking many different forms: shared food stores, helping out in crop cultivation, and community savings-and-loan groups. In the context of non-existent official safety nets as well as the general vulnerability of rural subsistence, these buffers are essential for individuals or households to respond to unforeseen circumstances (Zoomers 1999: 35). Mobilizing social capital may create a supportive context, which in its turn may have a positive impact on people’s health (Campbell 2000; Campbell and McLean 2002; Hawe and Shiell 2000). According to Catherine Campbell (2000: 184), the most important dimension of health-enhancing social capital is ‘perceived citizen power’. This is a characteristic of communities where people are participating in local community networks and where people feel that their needs and views are respected and valued.

2.3. Limitations of the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’

The SLA has received a number of criticisms (see Hoon et al. 1997; De Haan 2000; Moser and Norton 2001; Small 2011). One is that the SLA is based upon a vulnerability-driven ideology: SLA’s use is focused on the poor who are assumed to be most vulnerable to contextual changes, and typically the actions of wealthier people are not taken into account (Small 2011: 31). Others also argue that the SLA is ahistoric (see Small 2011) and that power relations have for a long time not been taken into account (Moser and Norton 2001). However, the initial neglect of power relations in the SLA was quickly overcome by a new generation of livelihood studies that demonstrated the operation of power in livelihood strategies (see overview in De Haan 2012). Nevertheless, the SLA continues to emphasize an actor-oriented perspective in development studies and starts from an “unconditional belief in the adaptive capabilities of man, i.e. the human capacity to adapt repeatedly to changing circumstances and still to guarantee a sustainable exploitation of scarce resources” (De Haan 1999: 13). The livelihood
“MOVING AROUND” AND LIVELIHOOD TACTICS

approach seems to be inspired by the work of Sen (1999) and Giddens (1984) in which it is assumed that the expansion of agents’ ‘ability’ or ‘capacity’ can bring improvement to their standard of living (see also Chapter 3). As De Haan (2012: 348) also highlights, the SLA “tended to focus more on opportunities than on constraints, more on actor’s agency than on structure, more on neutral strategies than on failed access due to conflicts and inequalities in power”. The livelihood concept indeed emphasises the individual’s responsibility to act over the societal task to create employment and facilitate upward mobility. It is the youngsters’ responsibility to earn their daily bread, something often accomplished through enormous creativity. Although the SLA takes into account wider contextual factors as a potential constraint to the livelihood tactics of poor people, it also stresses the potential ability of agents to employ livelihood strategies that can influence and even change structures. The SLA stresses the capacities, abilities, and opportunities of human agents, and leaves little or no room for a situation where actors are not capable, unable, or without opportunity to act. While some actors might have a certain amount of power to act in certain regions and in certain social groups (those with more education, with more access to land, with fewer health risks), for others this might not be the case. It is important to take into account these enormous regional and social disparities (Christiansen et al. 2003). In an environment severely affected by persistent poverty and HIV/AIDS, we cannot ignore the impact of the epidemic when talking about the livelihood tactics of young people. According to Niehof (2004: 333), there are two factors that complicate the ability of rural households to cope with AIDS. The first is related to what Loevinsohn and Gillespie highlight (cited in Niehof 2004: 333), that impacts are not one-time events but processes that are “often hidden, slow-moving, but destructive”. The second factor—which was mentioned by Barnett and Whiteside (cited in Niehof 2004: 333)—is the clustered nature of these impacts, since HIV/AIDS usually affects more than one person within a household and several households within a community. Thus when livelihood tactics are viewed through the lens of enduring uncertainty and HIV/AIDS, a downward spiral becomes apparent, one that leads to the depletion of household resources and the splintering of social capital.

The concept of ‘social capital’, which points to one of the livelihood tactics that young people employ in order to improve their livelihood networks, holds the same limitations as the ‘livelihood’ concept. It starts with a presumption of ‘ability’. However, we cannot take for granted that all people have social capital or can acquire it. Social capital can also have negative consequences. There is evidence that social capital transforms and reproduces unequal relations since it is often unequally distributed
“MOVING AROUND” AND LIVELIHOOD TACTICS

(Portes and Landolt 1996). Campbell and McLean (2002) question if social capital is a useful tool for exploring community-level influences on HIV infection, given that substantial social capital is most likely to exist among the wealthiest and most educated members of a community (see also Chapter 7). Thus, in a context where the possibility of creating or benefiting from social capital is constrained by poverty or other forms of inequality, the lack of social capital may serve as a cause of exclusion. These considerations demand that we examine the economic and political dimensions of social capital, not taken up by Putman (2000) in his analysis, in order to recognize other factors in HIV infection, such as poverty and racism (Campbell and McLean 2002). Importantly, these issues are not temporary problems. For those who are subject every day to unpredictable, tough living conditions, the conventional understanding of human vulnerability and resilience—where crisis is understood as a temporary abnormality related to a particular event such as rape, the loss of a relative, or a disease such as HIV/AIDS—seems to be inadequate, since crisis becomes ‘normalized’ and embedded in the very social fabric of life (Vigh 2008: 7–8). The concept of social capital fails to account for situations where crisis is perpetual; lacking the stable preconditions required to build social capital, there is little to draw upon when problems arise.

Throughout this dissertation, I acknowledge the limitations of the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’. While taking these criticisms into account, I value the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘livelihood tactics’ because—from an actor-oriented perspective—they assist me in framing a holistic analysis of how youngsters organize their daily lives in Winam. While I demonstrate in this chapter how youngsters try to improve their life chances and work towards a better future for themselves, I stress the limitations of their abilities within a context of persistent poverty and uncertainty.

3. Livelihood opportunities for young people in Winam

In Africa, young people are actively participating in socioeconomic developments. Thomas (cited in De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 3) writes that portraying young people as dependent, immature, innocent, vulnerable, in need of adult protection, and incapable of taking on responsibility is inaccurate, since many of the youngsters in Africa already contribute at an early age to the productive work of the family. Among the middle class in Europe and North America, as Honwana (cited in De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 3) has noted, young people are often described as “people in the process of becoming rather than being”. This Western view of young people has been
universalised by several international agreements establishing global standards of child protection. And it is a powerful conception of youth: “youngsters who do not follow this path are considered either to be at risk or to pose a risk to society” (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 3).

In Kenya, the Kibaki administration has made primary education compulsory and tuition-free since 2002, which has led to a significant increase in enrolment, especially among young women. As a consequence, some forms of child labour that had prevented children from attending school are now viewed as violating children’s rights to go to school. Most of the youngsters in Winam have put their hopes in higher education (including secondary school) since they believe that it will enable them to find employment later in life. But school fees for secondary and higher education are disproportionately high, and while parents can pay in instalments, some are forced to sell their goats or a cow in order to be able to pay the fee. Many youngsters dropped out between terms, and stayed out of school as long as three or four years until they could find a scholarship, or until a Member of Parliament or distant relative was able to help. When not in school, they tried to save money by working on farms or starting a small business. Some youth dropped out even before completing primary school, pregnancy ended school for some young women, and ongoing poverty at home meant that some never could return to school. Family resources were mostly invested first in the eldest son, whereas daughters were expected to wait or to repeat a primary education grade while their brother proceeded (see also Hughes and Mwiria 1988: 180–181). Parents reason that their sons are the ones who will inherit from them and who will take care of them later. They assume their daughters will marry and move to their husband’s home; investing in sons is seen as an investment in the ancestral homestead. On the other hand, investing in higher levels of education leads to expectations of white-collar employment, not typically forthcoming in Winam, at least during the time of my fieldwork. Secondary school graduates who were unable to continue their studies into college usually ended up doing the same kind of jobs as the ones who had dropped out of school much earlier on.

The nation’s economic decline began when Kenya and several other African countries were undergoing economic recession and subsequent structural adjustment in the late 1970s. During the Moi’s era, in 2002, the percentage of Kenyans living under the poverty line rose steadily and economic growth slumped (BBC’s News Online, ‘Moi’s legacy to Kenya’, Phombeah Gray, 5 August 2002). The International Monetary Funds (IMF 2007: 3) notes that "Poverty in Kenya increased sharply during the early 1990s,
declined during the mid-1990s and rose steadily after 1997”. The figures for Nyanza Province are even worse than for the nation. The International Monetary Funds (2007: 4) ranks Nyanza with 64.6 per cent as the poorest province in its 2005 Economic Survey. Unemployment has risen rapidly, not only in Kenya but all over sub-Saharan Africa, especially among youth, with 21 percent youth unemployment in 2003 (ILO 2004). Many young migrants in Kenya cannot obtain formal sector work anymore, and instead try to become self-employed or employed in the informal sector.

As the International Labour Office (ILO) states in its 2004 report, “[B]eing without work means being without a chance to work themselves out of poverty”. They argue that there is a link between youth unemployment and social exclusion (ILO 2004). Social exclusion is even more so in the households that are hit hard by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and where orphans are left to fend for themselves or are sent off to live with other relatives. Moreover, rising parental death rates due to HIV/AIDS reduces the transfer of skills from parents to youth and may result in an overall loss of traditional skills. This is definitely the case with fishing practices and with farming experience, for instance with knowledge about crop rotation and irrigation (UN 2003). Such reports, like these by the ILO and the UN, however, only take into account formal employment and are unable to measure the wide variety of informal jobs young people are actually carrying out. Allen (1998) calls these ‘hidden livelihoods’, and asserts they are ‘real economies’ and that the agency of the participants in the informal sector should not be underestimated. Despite their marginal position in society, young people have demonstrated tremendous creativity in making a living for themselves in the midst of social and economic instability. They are not, of course, always successful, but through falling down and rising up again, young people organise and make sense of their daily lives.

3.1. Young people and the household economy

In order to make a living, young people still depend to a large extent on the household economies to which they belong. While they may stay with their grandparents or related kin for long periods of time, their parents usually continue to play a strong role in decision-making regarding education, vocational training, and employment. Often, the youngsters stay within the family household much longer than the family can actually afford. This financial burden on the household makes it hard for the family to get out of poverty and often hampers younger siblings’ chances to gain access to education. However, young people may also contribute a great deal to the household economy, and
be expected to work at an early age to help make ends meet. Even if they are attending school, they are supposed to help with domestic chores, care for siblings, and even take part in small-scale businesses or agricultural work. Their income is not only needed to meet household expenses and to pay school fees, but also to help pay for fashion and cosmetic needs such as body lotion, shampoo, clothes, and necessary luxuries like mobile phones or phone credits. For the young men in particular, masculinity and appreciation for girlfriends needed to be proven by giving gifts or money (see Chapter 6).

As I explain later when discussing the splintering of social networks, many youngsters were part of a household where one or more siblings were sick or had already died. Some were orphans and stayed with their paternal or maternal grandparents. Due to the lack of financial resources, many youngsters were sent to work. Earning money gave them substantial power in their adoptive families. According to Nyambedha (2003b: 41)—who also carried out research in Bondo District in Nyanza Province—this led to several intergenerational conflicts within the household because the youngsters had some resources at their own disposal and, as a consequence, commanded more authority within the household. On the other hand, the exploitation of orphaned children was also very common in households led by elders. According to Nyambedha (2003b), youngsters who refused to assist in the subsistence production and domestic household chores of the household were often punished through denial of food. This often led to problematic situations where orphans might even decide to leave the household. Elders also chased the children and youngsters away when they did not agree with their sexual behaviour. Intergenerational conflicts were more common among the urban-raised orphans than among the orphans who were socialized in a rural environment (see also Nyambedha 2003b). Few elderly people followed up on those children or youngsters who went astray (Nyambedha 2003b: 42), and were consequently left to fend for themselves.

### 3.2. Gender discrepancy in livelihood options

The division of labour is based on gender: men and women have different—often culturally grounded—roles in processes of livelihood generation. During my fieldwork, young men in Winam were experiencing a decline in livelihood options, but young women often felt even more disadvantaged. For young men, declining opportunities for formal (skilled) employment led them to mobilise their own labour, utilizing their access to family resources to acquire capital to invest in business. While older women can acquire start-up capital through their husbands, most young women lack access to
capital. This affects their capacity to meet basic needs, launch entrepreneurial livelihood activities, and develop independent livelihood options for the future. As a consequence, I observed that many of the young women depended heavily on social capital. A young woman might not have her own business, but instead help her mother or older female relatives in their businesses, and in so doing, acquire contacts and networks and sometimes even starting capital in the process. Some of the young women were involved in petty trade ventures on their mother’s behalf, such as selling sugar cane, flour, and other foodstuffs, or paraffin for lighting lamps. Others helped in their mother’s restaurant, cooking chapatis and mandazis and serving the customers. In addition to small-scale trade, the other livelihood option for young women was working as a maid or nanny, which meant emigrating to Nairobi or Kisumu. Young men on the other hand, had more options for unskilled employment than young women. Youngsters, both male and female, who had been able to complete one or two years of secondary school or who managed to finish secondary school had other expectations, linked to their aspiration to move out of the village. However, their higher educational level did not necessarily mean that they had more livelihood opportunities.

Access to family land was also important as a potential source for supplementary livelihood activities to fall back on, including subsistence agriculture. However, due to Winam’s high population density, there remains little family land available, and young people must share it with their siblings. In the long term, young men inherit family land, while young women only have usufruct rights as long as their parents are alive. When young women marry, they lose their rights to family land but get access to their husband’s land. Young women face pressure to bring wealth to their natal home by marrying a wealthy man, someone who can pay a good bride price. Few young men are able to provide a bride price to their bride’s natal home, however, and this can remain a topic of discussion between the families throughout their marriage.

Although it might at first sight seem that young women have fewer livelihood options and assets with which to change their livelihood than young men, some young women in Winam still manage to become economically independent. In order to diversify their livelihood tactics, youngsters depended heavily on social capital, which they maximized (Thornton 2009) by extending their social network through sexual liaisons. This was more prevalent for young women than for young men (discussed further in section 4 of this chapter).
3.3. Livelihood options for young people in an HIV/AIDS-affected area

Winam’s economy principally consists of fishing, petty trade, subsistence agriculture, and remittances sent by relatives. For trade and supplies, the village depends on larger towns, such as Bondo and Siaya, and the provincial headquarters, Kisumu, the third-largest city of Kenya. There is easy access between Kisumu and Winam via a good, tarmac road, but roads to other locations were of poor quality during the time of my fieldwork, especially after a rain. Beyond boda-bodas (bicycle taxis), little transport is available between different locations. New roads were being developed in 2007; with better connections to Kisumu and, by extension, to the rest of the country, an influx of new opportunities and people was expected.

The majority of the households in Winam lived in ‘traditional’ houses, made of mud walls and grass roofs. However, iron sheets for roofing were also very common at the time of my fieldwork and were often used as an index of wealth and enhanced social status (see also Suda et al. 1991). None of the houses in Dhonam had access to piped water or electricity and only towards the end of my fieldwork were some houses close to the market centre (including the room that Petronella rented) connected to electricity. This was to the benefit of certain businesses such as the barbershop and maize mill, but simultaneously increased the rent in these houses. The construction of ‘modern’, permanent houses at the same time was often a major source of jealousy. Ownership of such houses tended to lead to accusations of witchcraft, making city-dwellers reluctant to invest in their rural homes (Suda et al. 1991).

To make a living in rural Nyanza Province, most households practice livelihood diversification since relying on just one source of income is insufficient (Niehof 2004). Farming alone does not provide adequate resources since few households are able to grow enough food to provision themselves through the year. Combining income-earning activities is a way for rural people to spread their risks (Francis 2000), which is not unimportant in an area where HIV/AIDS is rampant. Scholars have emphasised the serious impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on African rural livelihoods (Koestle 2002; Barnett and Whiteside 2002; Rugalema 1999; Barnett and Blaikie 1992). AIDS in a household not only leads to the loss of the sick person’s labour but also to that of the caregivers. Then, as agricultural production and non-farming income declines, households attempt to increase labour participation in a number of ways. One way is to withdraw children from school and another way is to take up income-earning opportunities at the expense of the agricultural production. Relatively labour-intensive crops are replaced by less labour-demanding crops. Furthermore, changes in household
composition due to mortality puts a strain on the performance of gender-specific activities. Exacerbating these effects on labour availability and productivity, AIDS also affects agricultural production through the disposal of productive assets, as cash, livestock, trees, land and furniture, which are sold to pay for medications and funerals (Rugalema 1999: 5–12).

In the following section, I describe the different livelihood tactics of Winam’s young people: nonfarm labour, self-employment, participation in NGO-funded programs, and land-based income-generating activities. ‘Mobility’ or migration as another type of livelihood tactic will be discussed in the second half of this chapter, due to its greater complexity and importance.

3.3.1. Nonfarm labour: Formal, informal, skilled, and unskilled

While many of the young people I met in Winam aspired to secure formal-sector, skilled employment in an urban area, and valued higher education as a route to achieving this, such opportunities were very rare at the time of my research. The market for formal employment, whether skilled or unskilled, in Winam and outside Winam was limited compared to the 1970s–1980s when “graduates were absorbed as readily as they could be produced” (Hughes and Mwiria 1988: 189). Even among highly educated youth with university degrees, it was hard to obtain skilled employment, as competition was very high. Those who acquired skilled jobs were often from wealthier families who could afford to invest in education and, more importantly, could open more employment avenues through their social networks.

CDC/KEMRI offered few formal jobs to people from Winam, recruiting the majority of their employees from Kisumu and Nairobi, and causing serious discontent among JoWinam about CDC (see Chapter 3). Only some JoWinam were employed as ‘community interviewers’ and ‘community health workers’. When the HIV/AIDS Youth Intervention Project (YIP) in Winam, entitled ‘Youth’s Economic Skills and Health Improvement Centre in Winam’ (Yeshica), was announced in 2003, JoWinam had great hopes that they might benefit from the project, and even calling far-flung relatives to tell them that Yeshica was looking for employees who had completed secondary school. In the end, only four people—the concierge, a youth facilitator, an adult facilitator, and the liaison officer—were recruited from Winam. When JoWinam realised that people from outside Winam were being hired, rather than locals, they were really disappointed and frustrated. People criticised the CDC as corrupt, believing that only relatives of CDC employees
were able to get CDC jobs, and CDC staff working in Winam were often regarded with envy and jealousy.

Due to the high competition, many secondary school graduates in Winam were without formal employment. Many of them thought they were “too good” for certain informal jobs, such as domestic work, cattle herding, or doing agricultural work for others, perceiving such jobs as below their status. They believed that once they had become educated, they no longer would have to do agricultural work or domestic work for others. Instead, they preferred to hang around in the hope that some formal job would come their way or they might have the chance to study further and be admitted to college or university. Opiyo, a former anthropologist of Yeshica, explained:

The problem we have in Luoland is that we have an excess of people who have gone up to secondary [school] but they are not working. They thought by the time they reach class six, you go to [class] eight and you go to secondary [school], you should not be doing traditional jobs of fishing or farming, so these people don’t do any productive work. They want to have direct cash (in-depth interview, September 2006).

Unskilled employment was more available to young men than young women. Young women could take jobs as unskilled labourers as maids or nannies in Kisumu or Nairobi, but in rural areas, there was little demand for such services. Some young women found work in tailoring shops, usually located around market centres: to get such jobs, they first had to complete some training, and would be hired to remain if they were skilled enough. Although often not explained as such, working as a sex worker was also a form of informal employment, both in rural areas and in urban centres. Young men, on the other hand, had more options as casual labourers, in building, farming, fishing, herding, and “touting” (i.e., being a conductor in local buses). During my fieldwork, a road construction company (Put Sarajevo) recruited casual workers on a daily basis. Every morning, young men would line up along the roadside of Kalandin in the hope of being picked for some small, temporary, unskilled job. Augustin (a 22-year-old, secondary school graduate who was a conductor on a local bus), one of the young men I followed closely, used to line up every day but was only picked once.

Other casual labour opportunities included fishing, which provided both income and food. Fishing used to be a lucrative business until the 1980s, and in the last two decades fishing income has become minimal, worsened by ineffective government regulation and tough competition for a depleted fish stock. The ecological balance of Lake Victoria has deteriorated dramatically, to the point where some biologists fear the change is irreversible. According to Shege (1995), this is due to “a rapidly growing population, clearance of natural vegetation along the shores, a booming fish-export
industry, the disappearance of several fish species native to the lake, prolific growth of algae, and dumping of untreated effluent by several industries”. Much of this ecological damage is massive and irreversible. The Nile Perch had an unexpected explosion of its population in the 1980s, which has negatively affected native species, and the population of smaller fishes like *omena*, which most local fishermen depend on for their livelihood, consequently has dramatically reduced.

Another aspect that is believed to threaten the livelihood of many fishermen around Lake Victoria is the high prevalence of HIV among its fisher folk. According to Gordon (2005) from the World Fish Center, because fishermen are very mobile and have a transient style of living, they are among the populations most at risk for contracting HIV in low- and middle-income countries worldwide (Gordon 2005: 3). Similarly, the UNAIDS report on ‘Population, Mobility and AIDS’ notes that due to their high mobility, fishermen are particularly vulnerable, like other mobile groups such as truck or bus drivers and seasonal workers (UNAIDS 2001). In very poor coastal or lakeshore villages, fishermen are also among the few people who have access to regular cash income (Béné and Merten 2008: 880; Gordon 2005: 3). Gordon (2005: 3) concludes that “irregular working hours and being away from home places fishermen in a group with disposable income and time off (when not fishing), that favours the consumption of alcohol and prostitution”, which allows them to engage in ‘risky sex’.

Not only are the livelihoods of the fishermen threatened, but also those of many female fishmongers and the larger population of Winam. Gordon asserts (2005: 3) that women who have limited financial resources are drawn to fishing ports because of the opportunities to sell food, alcohol, and sex. Béné and Merten (2008: 875) write that fish processing and trading is recognized as an important safety net for the “poorest of the poor” in rural communities in developing countries. Female fish traders are often widowed, divorced, or single; little capital is needed to start a business. Moreover, in places where the fish catch is meagre, and women need to compete a share of it, “fish-for-sex” seems to be a very common phenomenon, though not all female fishmongers engage in such exchanges (Gordon 2005: 3; Béné and Merten 2008: 875). In the fisheries literature on HIV/AIDS, according to Béné and Merten (2008: 881), the active role that many women play as fish processors is often overlooked; studies too often position them as subordinate. Béné and Merten (2008: 883) argue further, that “assuming a systematic link between extreme poverty and transactional sex may be too simplistic to capture the complexity of the factors leading women to engage in fish-for-sex” (see also Chapter 6 for a critical analysis of the concept of ‘transactional sex’).
Some of the earliest cases of HIV/AIDS were recorded in a fishing village on the Ugandan shore of Lake Victoria in 1982, and many HIV/AIDS interventions in the area have since described fishermen as a ‘risky group’. Consequently, during the time of my fieldwork, JoWinam strongly associated the mobility and the ‘risky behaviour’ of fishermen with the increase of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the area. The fishermen of Dhonam moved with the flow of fish, i.e., they moved to the places where fish were suspected to be. According to Cohen and Odhiambo (1989: 49), in the 1960s–1970s a number of Kenyan fishermen, particularly those of Nyanza Province, found good fishing grounds in the vicinity of large markets in Uganda, where they could also sell their catch without the intervention of middlemen. In 1968, the Ugandan government expelled many Kenyans, including the fishermen, because “the Luo presence in southern Uganda was so strong” (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 50). During my fieldwork, a number of fishermen from Winam also migrated to the lakeshores of Uganda for a short period of time when there was lack of fish, but this was not without risks since it remained illegal for them to do so.

While Nyanza people have long been temporarily mobile fisher folk, following the fish, it is only recently that their livelihood has become linked to ‘risky behaviour’ in the HIV/AIDS literature. Yet, there is no epidemiological evidence that confirms this assumption; still, it definitely has contributed to the stigmatization of fishermen. At the time of my fieldwork, the fishing practice was no longer perceived as a productive job but rather as a low-status job. Nevertheless, the fishermen still attracted a number of young women, not only because they were one of the few people who had access to cash money, but also because their way of dressing was very urbanized and fashionable. For this reason, it is important to have a closer look at the cash income, the work, and lifestyle of fishermen in Winam, and at the secondary impacts of fishing, an industry that creates small-scale trade and work for some of Winam’s women, and allows for a number of local restaurants.

The life of a fisherman in Dhonam

During my research, most of the fishermen were between 14 and 30 years old, though a few were older; most had learned about fishing through a friend or family member. Local fishermen from Dhonam lived at their ancestral home, while fishermen who came from outside Winam rented small, cement houses close to the lake and market centre. In the minds of many JoWinam, fishing was associated with “getting easy money” because, at the best of times, they could earn up to 1000 Kenyan shillings (12.5 euro) in one night.
of fishing. But the best of times were long gone, and the average catch was much less: fishermen were earning only an average of 200 Kenyan shillings (2.5 euro) every four days. While their job was assumed to provide ‘easy money’, their work was extremely hard, tiring, and not without risks.

Every evening around 6 p.m., fishermen who wanted to go fishing that evening would assemble at the lake where a boat leader and the karan (secretary or clerk), both appointed by the boat’s owner, selected those who would go with each boat. In Dhonam, the fishermen usually fish with the same, tight-knit group of three to four people, including the karan, in a rented boat. Before casting off, the boat leader would give a boat’s fishing team an advance (usually about 800 Kenyan shillings, or 10 euro), to buy bread, soft drinks, cigarettes, and sometimes bhang (marihuana) and chang’aa (a locally brewed, illegal, strong spirit), to keep the men awake and happy during the night’s work. Most fishermen could only go fishing every fourth day because there were not enough boats for the number of available fishermen. In addition, due to the intense physical exertion of the work, the fishermen did not feel able to fish every day.

The fishermen mostly used sleek sailing canoes, not too different from the type used traditionally by the Swahili traders along the coast of the Indian Ocean. Working together in one boat meant that the fishermen placed their lives in each other’s hands: fishing from these small wooden boats was already a dangerous affair, even more so since some fished while drunk. Although no safer than a hundred years ago, boat owners were at the time of my fieldwork required to secure licenses, pay fees, and prove the use of proper equipment. However, there have always been fishermen without licenses. Since most of the fishermen at Dhonam’s beach were catching omena, they used nets that were far smaller than what is legally permitted, which meant also catching other species of immature fish that had not yet reproduced. Since most fish breed during the rainy season, the government introduced a recovery period by prohibiting the joamuok (people who fish and trade omena) from fishing between June and August. Joamuok are easily recognizable on the lake during the night, because they use bright lights to find omena, creating a spectacle of a “city on the lake” (Shipton 2005: 62). Whenever joamuok noticed maritime policemen patrolling the lake, they would switch off the lamps and attempt to hide from the authorities. Sometimes they would even jump into the lake, holding onto the boat because almost none of them could swim. Ugandan and Tanzanian patrolmen, making sure the Kenyans did not fish outside their own borders, were also among the hazards fishermen faced. It was hard for local
fishermen to detect if they had crossed the Kenyan borders of the lake—even more so at night.\textsuperscript{10}

The final amount each fisherman received from the sale of the fish was calculated carefully by the boat’s *karan*. Each fisherman was allowed to take home two medium-sized fish (worth approximately 200 to 250 Kenyan shillings (2.5 euro to 3.125 euro). The rest of the fish was sold: the higher the sale, the higher the commission was for each fisherman. The amount collected was divided, with 50 percent going to the owner, and the rest shared equally among the fishermen. If the catch sold for a total of 4,000 Kenyan shillings, then the boat owner would receive 2000 Kenyan shillings (25 euro), and each of the four fishermen would receive 500 Kenyan shillings (6.25 euro).

The downward spiral of fewer and fewer fish and more and more fishermen has influenced the local economy around the lake. Fewer fish means less work for the local women, who bring the fish to nearby rural markets, and when fishermen earn less, they spend less in the local market centre, restaurants, and bars.

Despite this downward spiral, the people of Winam continued to believe fishermen had money, in large part due to their almost-daily access to cash. The fishermen’s access to cash was expressed in their way of dressing. When the fishermen were not working, they were clothed differently, in an ostentatious ‘blingbling’ style, which stood out especially compared to other young men who worked in *jua kali* (unskilled, manual labour). They tried to keep up with urban trends, wearing jeans, T-shirts printed with images of famous rap artists (e.g., 50 Cent) and reggae musicians (e.g., Bob Marley), caps, and chains. With a noticeable swagger in their walk, their movements and dress resembled the local Rastafarian men, called ‘beach boys’, but without the dreadlocks.

3.3.2. Self-employment activities around Dhonam market centre

Young women in Winam undertook small-scale trade activities, such as opening a shop for selling vegetables, *mandazis*, or chips, or selling paraffin or sugarcane along the road. The selling of fish, whether fresh, smoked, dried, or fried, was mostly done by fishermen’s girlfriends or wives. Others carried out illegal activities such as burning charcoal or assisting in the brewing of *chang’aa*. Most of these activities were fast-turnover, low-capital businesses, as they typically had few resources to begin with. Only a few young women engaged in capital-intensive businesses, such as trading second-hand clothes, bananas, or opening a *simu ya jami* (community phone operation),\textsuperscript{11} since these businesses required larger amounts of starting capital and a large social network.
(usually developed through contacts with older female relatives). While some income could be generated through low-capital activities, it was often barely enough for subsistence. Most of the young women with whom I worked and who carried out such income-generating activities were still living with families or relatives, and viewed their small-scale business as a means to contribute to their homes or, more importantly, to allow them to buy fashion accessories and cosmetics. In some cases, young women acquired their starting capital through their mothers or aunts, who were more experienced in carrying out businesses. A few also participated in ‘merry-go-round’ funding, a rotating savings and loan group with older women, in order to obtain finances that would enable them to move into more lucrative businesses.

Young men, on the other hand, worked as barbers, tailors, welders, carpenters, or brick makers. These were slow-turnover, capital-intensive activities, requiring long-term asset investments (e.g., skills training and the purchase of materials). For such businesses—especially for carpenters and brick makers—there was generally an unmet demand. For instance, due to the many funerals for people who had died of HIV/AIDS, there was a large demand for wooden sarcophagi. Other young men operated boda boda (bicycle taxis), which required buying or leasing a bicycle. Those with the means to do so could invest in multiple bikes as a productive asset, and lease them out. Young men were usually not yet able to do this: most just owned or leased one bike. At each marketplace in Winam, there was a surplus of boda boda operators, waiting for customers from morning to evening. One elderly person commented on boda boda drivers: “Sometimes they even lose direction because their mind is not clear [because they are drunk]”. Only a few of the youngsters of Winam went to Kisumu to work as boda boda operators, because the job did not bring enough income to survive in the cities. A few male youngsters that I came to know also became church assistants, mainly in the Anglican and Evangelist Church as few Pentecostal churches were operating in the area (in contrast to the cities in Kenya). A common saying in Winam, and perhaps also elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, was: “If you do not find a job, open your own church”.

3.3.3. Yeshica initiatives to encourage income-generating activities

In order to address the livelihood needs of young people of Winam, the designers of a HIV-prevention project called ‘Yeshica’ offered the ‘livelihood intervention’, which included vocational trainings and a microloan program in which young people could participate as a step toward poverty reduction. The implementation of this intervention
led to less than optimal outcomes (see Blommaert and Oluoch 2007; Parott and Heyer 2007).

**Vocational training**

Between 2003 and 2007, more than 700 youth participated in vocational skills workshops in different fields, including tailoring, bicycle repair, masonry, hairdressing, textile crafts such as tie and dye and batik, bee-keeping, carpentry, tile and brick making, and organic farming, with the goal of improving young people’s skills and encouraging self-employment (Yeshica 2007). Local trainers were hired to teach one-week courses, with the exception of tailoring and carpentry, which were organised over a six-month period.

While the project offered a variety of vocational trainings that could inspire and motivate youth to think about possible vocational pursuits, it fell short of its goals in two ways. First, the intention of the YIP’s Belgian program coordinator was for young people to focus on only one kind of vocational training, the one that appealed to them the most, but young people often hopped from one training to another. Most did not have a particular interest before starting a course; rather, they participated because they thought they could never learn enough skills. They could not discern beforehand which vocational training they would like more, since, as they explained to me, they would take any workshop that could give them a job. Second, Yeshica staff members were unable to fill the workshops in the way they had planned. Staff were unable to recruit ‘hard-to-reach youngsters’—who were an important target—to participate in the workshops, and the program coordinator pushed local staff to meet the required number of participants to be trained, shifting the focus to filling classes instead of choosing those most apt for a particular training.

In the end, not much was done with the knowledge the youth had obtained during the vocational trainings, since they were only one week long (except the tailoring and carpentry course), not enough to allow the youth to have the acquired skills and confidence to start their own businesses. In late 2007, the vocational skills training was reoriented towards developing skills for employment with research and NGO health projects, such as conducting interviews, counselling, educational theatre, and using computers. Yeshica suggested that successful youngsters might be able to obtain employment within CDC/KEMRI. Youth complained, however, that the training was rushed at the end of the year, without good publicity or a clear selection process. Most of the selected participants were from outside Winam, and none were ‘hard-to-reach’
youngsters (primary school dropouts), the original population Yeshica was supposed to target (see Chapter 1 and 7).

Microfinance: Savings and loan groups

The ‘livelihood intervention’ of Yeshica also aimed to provide access to savings and loan services, in order to stimulate income-generating activities and small-scale businesses for young people in Winam. To implement this part of the livelihood intervention, the Belgian team worked with a Kenyan NGO, the Kenya Rural Enterprise Program (K-Rep), that specialises in microfinance services. Young people could acquire a group loan through K-Rep that was especially meant for those who had participated in the vocational trainings. Since most of the youth who had benefitted from the trainings did not remain affiliated with Yeshica after training—mostly due to migration, marriage, or discontent—other youngsters from Winam were also encouraged to join K-Rep groups. As of November 2007, more than 500 youth were participating in the K-Rep program as ‘savers’, and 279 youth, slightly more than 50 percent, were receiving loans (Yeshica 2007). Although Yeshica and K-Rep reached their target of 50 percent, the figures about participation and the number of loans disbursed do not tell us much about the effectiveness of the microfinance project in terms of improving the youths’ livelihood situation.

According to the participants, the conditions set by the microfinance program for the young people to get a loan were very strict. First, youngsters were encouraged to form a group that would register with K-Rep. Within each group, they had to form watano groups (subgroups of five people). Each watano group guarantees any loans taken out by any member of the group: to ensure this, 10 percent of all savings were reserved. If an applicant failed to meet the monthly instalments in repaying the loan—becoming a ‘defaulter’—the watano group had to pay all the missed payments with their current and future savings. Each K-Rep participant was required to have an adult guarantor, as well, which was a problem for most, and especially so for orphans, since it was hard to get a relative other than a parent to act as guarantor. The adult guarantor in most cases also asked for a percentage of the loan. Some of the loans were also taken on behalf of brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles: in these cases, they were usually the adult guarantors. The K-Rep participants expressed how it was difficult to save the mandatory amount of 20 Kenyan shillings (0.25 euro) per week, because the money they earned with casual jobs usually went, as they said, “from hand to mouth”. As an alternative to taking out a loan, participants could also obtain product assets, such as beehives, electric razors for barbers,
or bicycles on credit. The interest rate for both loans and products was 16 percent, which is low compared to most microloans, owing to subsidies, but still unaffordable for these young people. Although Anuka, the local field officer of K-Rep, realised that K-Rep’s conditions for obtaining a loan were difficult to meet, she could not change them since it was her responsibility to make sure that the youngsters paid back the borrowed capital with interest. As is common among traditional microfinance organisations, her job did not entail finding out how youngsters would pay back the money, or if their livelihood got better or worse from having access to this capital in the first place.

This excerpt from my fieldnotes depicts the costs and benefits of getting a beehive as a product asset through K-Rep:

Anuka informed the Meso Youth Group members that registration fee [for signing up with K-Rep] is gratis; passbook is 100 shillings; 4700 shillings for 1 hive (4500 shillings for a hive + 200 shillings transport costs); 470 deposit on each hive; grace period of 2 months; payment in monthly instalments; repayment period of 2 years; interest on 4700 – 470 = 4230 shillings at 16 percent flat rate.

The youth were very attentive but I noticed that they got very disheartened with the information that Anuka had given to them. P. just asked briefly again how much the deposit was and he looked very dismayed. He wrote down in the sand with a wooden stick ‘470’ and just stared at those numbers he had written on the ground. There was a lot of silence. There were no questions any more from other group members.

Anuka admitted that these were hard conditions. She told them that she could organize the beehives for them but they should at least try to find some other persons that are interested so that they can form a watano group. I asked why they needed five people. She explained to me that it is too costly for K-Rep to transport only one beehive. […] But I reasoned that if there are five participants having the same asset, they will compete with one another so then the profit will be small. I also realised that it is very hard to form a watano group: first not all the five members want the same asset and second, there is so much jealousy around and they have no confidence in each other.

Anuka later also explained to me that you can only harvest honey after a minimum period of six months and each hive would give you about 10 kilograms of honey. For me, this project sounded very unrealistic. How would one be able to pay back the loan if they only start to earn money after the sixth month? It would be very hard to repay this product asset (fieldnotes, 23 June 2005).

Many of the youngsters who obtained a K-Rep loan had no idea how best to invest the money. They had never handled an amount of 5000 Kenyan shillings (62.5 euro). They could only dream of having it one day. Certainly those who never finished primary school, and those who had no support from an adult, did not know what kind of business they could use the loan for. Some bought a cow with it, others opened a small shop, others repaid their debts, or bought a goat: many of them used part of the loan for personal items such as new pants or a skirt, or a box to put their clothes in. Others actually asked for a loan on behalf of a mother or aunt who would use it for her own business. The following
“MOVING AROUND” AND LIVELIHOOD TACTICS

An anecdote, recorded in my fieldnotes, recounts what Ouma (a 22-year-old young man who had only attended primary school for three years) did with his first loan—and his last since he was never able to repay it—of 5000 Kenyan shillings:

A few days before Ouma received his loan, he already told his current girlfriend (who might become his wife) that she already could buy on credit the material to make a traditional dress. Once he got the loan, he felt as if he was in heaven and had the most wonderful ideas of what to do with the money, since he had discussed with us weeks prior to his receiving the loan what would be a profitable business to run. A little of the loan was immediately used for some daily needs, such as some sugar and milled maize, and at home, they enjoyed one big meal with fish and meat. The same day he got his loan, he had contracted a carpenter to make three sofas for him. One of his relatives, who had heard that he soon would get his loan, also came and wanted his part since Ouma owed him a lot. There was still some remaining money with which he bought a new pair of trousers, two new T-shirts, and a sheep. He used a little money to go and play karata. The rest of the money he kept as he wanted to go and buy maize in south Nyanza. Some days later his current girlfriend got seriously ill. She was admitted to hospital for three days. The remaining money that had been saved for the maize business was spent on hospital fees (field notes, August 2005).

Although in scholarly articles on microfinance, it is common knowledge that “the poorest of the poor use their loans to meet their basic needs first instead of investing in a business or other self-employment that may increase their income and bring them out of poverty” (Yang and Stanley 2012: 8; see also Stewart et al. 2011), few staff members of Yeshica were aware of this. The YIP program coordinator hoped that the business training and leadership skills training, which were provided at the beginning of the loan’s term in May 2005, would provide the youngsters with the necessary knowledge of how to invest their loan. However, only the group’s leader, treasurer, and secretary could participate in these trainings. Furthermore, because these trainings were only organised once, new members and new leaders, treasurers, and secretaries were never trained. There was a general lack of follow-up with the youngsters who had obtained a loan, and there was no monitoring system in place to look at the changes or improvements to livelihood opportunities at the individual and group level.¹⁴

An evaluation of Yeshica’s livelihood intervention carried out by two external consultants, Parott and Heyer (2007), who were hired by the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), confirmed that although potential existed to build the youth’s capacity to engage in income-generating activities as a step to mitigate poverty, there was a general weakness in the information system since the project failed to track the progress of the youth who participated in the livelihood intervention. Moreover, their evaluation report noted that no market assessment was carried out, and therefore the trainings offered did not necessarily match up with realistic, existing livelihood opportunities (Parott and Heyer 2007). The project was input driven and not outcome oriented, which

154
meant that feedback and evaluations to increase youth and staff ownership were not responded to, and the project was not adjusted as it developed (Blommaert and Oluoch 2007) (see also Chapter 7). Campbell (2003: 171) who was evaluating an HIV/AIDS-prevention project in South Africa, confirmed that “projects of this nature seldom make proper use of evaluation reports”. In the case of Yeshica, even before Parott and Heyer’s (2007) evaluation was carried out, it was already decided that the livelihood intervention would be taken over by another NGO that had other objectives (for instance, targeting adults as well as young people). In this way, the evaluation was not intended to contribute to the improvement of the current livelihood intervention, but was rather a formal fulfilment of what had been promised in the donor proposal. This meant the end of a short-lived project—one of many ‘pilots’ tried out on the backs of young people, quickly forgotten by project management, that contribute to the accumulation of frustrating experiences for the young people of Winam (see Chapter 7). Overall, it was a missed opportunity for the improvement of young people’s livelihoods.

3.3.4. Land-based income-generating activities

Few of the youngsters with whom I worked engaged in farming as an income-generating activity because the farming system in Winam was mainly for subsistence and not oriented towards profit maximisation through sales, although they occasionally exchanged part of what they produced on the market. Compared to the other districts of Nyanza Province, Winam and the rest of Bondo District were not endowed with fertile ground for the production of cash crops (Suda et al. 1991: 66). In addition, farming was made difficult due to a general lack of land and high population density, and the seasonal shifts that make agricultural income unpredictable. Certainly most horticulture (if possible at all given insufficient infrastructure) required high levels of inputs such as fertiliser and irrigation, and only the land by the lake had unlimited potential for this. Maize, a staple crop, on the other hand required lower inputs and incurred lower risks than other crops, but faced more competition and much lower revenues per plot (Francis 2000: 104–105).

Many youngsters thought of agricultural work as “hard work” with low benefits, and therefore did not value it. Secondary school graduates considered it beneath their status to work on the farm. If they were found working on the farm, it was mainly to assist their family or to do a favour for their friends. Only very poor youngsters would go
and work in the fields for other people, weeding or harvesting maize, to earn some cash, and only when no other informal jobs were available.

The organic farming training offered at Yeshica encouraged and supported youngsters to enter into agriculture, promising that there would be a market for their products. At first, few youngsters were interested in the training but the promise of getting cooked food, travel costs, and post-training employment were good motives to join (see Chapter 7). The group planted trees, mangoes, maize, tomatoes, and red peppers. In the end, there was no ready market for their products and the youngsters felt misled by the project. A number of the trainees were very disappointed with the outcome of the training because only a few members of their group, in particular the leader, treasurer, and secretary, were enjoying the proceeds from the sale of their farm produce. There was no proper reporting to the young people about the yield of their harvest, and rumours spread that the management of Yeshica had taken advantage of the youths’ work. Therefore, they decided to sell the harvests of vegetables and maize locally to the local staff of Yeshica and to the local market in Kisumu (Blommaert and Oluoch 2007).

In contrast to vegetable production, the youngsters highly valued ownership of livestock in Winam since it had a significant market potential, and these assets could be sold to absorb shocks to income (e.g., failing harvest) or unexpected expenditures (e.g., death of a family member). Cattle were generally perceived as a higher status animal than sheep and goats (see also Suda 2000). Given the status attached to owning livestock, it was not surprising that young people immediately thought of buying some when they received a K-Rep loan. While it seemed to them a good investment, they did not take into account that owning a very small number of livestock, usually just one animal, does not generate sufficient revenue to repay the loan’s monthly instalments. Having only one goat, cow, or sheep also did not require their time as a herder, and a solitary animal was usually left with a relative who owned several livestock so that it could be in a herd. None of the youngsters had a local poultry business, although it could generate small amounts of cash through egg sales and could provide a form of insurance for emergencies through poultry sale (see also Parott and Heyer 2007). Instead, every family had chickens and eggs for their own consumption, which meant there was very little market for such. Working at a somewhat larger scale also increased the risk of being affected by common poultry diseases.
3.4. Conclusion

The various livelihood initiatives did not bring much development to the people of Winam. Young people who sought employment in Winam ran into limitations and learned that many promising paths were thwarted by inequality and poverty. The gendered division of labour corresponds to a marked gender inequality in terms of opportunities for having a cash income. Young women depended more on social capital than young men. Nevertheless, also for young men, livelihood options were scarce.

Both male and female youngsters tried to set up small-scale businesses at home, but the little they earned with these casual jobs was hardly sufficient or regular enough to rely on. As they lacked capital to set up a small-scale business, they learned that their social network was probably the most important source of opportunities, and they consequently tried to expand their network as much as possible. In a reflection of the structural limitations of Winam, all too often the network was composed of people in very similar circumstances, and therefore networks did not allow youth to use contacts to get a job or starting capital. This meant that many youngsters still depended on the household economy to which they belonged. Only the fishermen managed to some extent to have a reliable, if small, cash income that made it feasible to become independent.

The livelihood initiatives of Yeshica were set up to improve this situation and give young people opportunities to improve their future. At first sight, it did not bring much positive change for the youngsters, although we might say that the only youngsters who benefitted from the savings and loan program were those who defaulted on the loan repayment: once Yeshica stopped functioning, nobody chased them to repay the loan. However, when we take a closer look to the project, which I do in Chapter 7, the assessment becomes more nuanced as “failure as much as success can reconfirm theory and its models” (Mosse 2003: 3).

4. Young people’s aspirations towards urban mobility

Most youth in Winam are highly mobile, traveling to and from town and other villages, drawing on their social connections and networks. Many youngsters of Winam perceive their rural environment as a “bad place” where they cannot make progress. They want to escape the hard rural life, but the suffering at home, mostly due to HIV/AIDS, holds them back or draws them back. In some cases, fathers who worked in town and sent remittances home, came back to Winam very sick, or dead: mothers declined in health, and younger siblings at home still needed care. Youngsters’ aspirations were complicated by family
obligations. At an age when youngsters should grow, learn skills, and experiment in sexual relationships, they become caretakers for their parents and their younger siblings.

The youth of Winam imagine that their livelihood prospects would be much enhanced by moving to town. To capture this aspect of the life world of Winam youth, I use the term ‘mobility’. Mobility was common not only in Winam, but also other rural parts of Nyanza Province. For the young people of Winam, mobility—especially toward the urban areas—was another livelihood tactic employed in the hope of moving up the social and economic ladder.

In the next sections, to situate youngsters’ urban aspirations, I first clarify what the notion of ‘home’ means in Winam. Secondly, I explain that due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and increased poverty levels in Winam, the patterns of shared child rearing have changed. Recounting the life story of one young woman, Akinyi, I show how expanding sexual liaisons can be a response to the splintering of social networks, and a way to enable youngsters to move out of the misery of home in Winam. However, her story also demonstrates that the pathways she had chosen were rarely straightforward. Then I discuss the world of the “dot.coms”, the urban-raised youngsters who for various reasons move back to Winam. I conclude by explaining that one of the livelihood tactics of the youngsters of Winam was the creation of a sexual network, which seems to be more prevalent for young women than for young men.

4.1. Defining a Luo home (dala) and the importance of chike Luo

Evans-Pritchard (1949) wrote that the Luo word ‘dala’ means the residence of either an elementary (or nuclear) or joint family. In this way, ‘home’ signifies a physical place with kinship ties and patrilineal descent in ‘Luo society’. According to Prince (2005: 143), the centrality of ‘home’ among the young people of Winam was “not only for identity and belonging but also for being (the constitution of person and relations, gender and kinship), for growth and the continuity of life”. President Obama is a good example of what the notions of dala mean to a Luo, as he is imagined by the people of Nyanza as being part of ‘Jodala’ (the people of home). In this way, “overlapping spaces of identity” (Luongo and Carotenuto 2009: 15) are an imaginary stretching beyond the boundaries of Nyanza, and even beyond Kenya. Although President Obama has never lived in Nyanza or Kenya, and has visited it only twice, his connections to ‘Luoland’ through his father enables an imaginary representation of him as ‘belonging’ to Kenya (Luongo and Carotenuto 2009). ‘Home’ is thus more than a physical place but is a
relational and imaginary concept going beyond kinship ties, produced discursively as well as through relations between people.

Instead of ‘kinship’ I employ the concept of ‘relatedness’ articulated by Carsten (2000), which better describes this process, and facilitates a broader analysis of local connections and the dynamics of everyday life. Social relations are continuously under construction through everyday acts since people are constantly connected to other people, socially, materially, and affectively (Carsten 2000). Geissler and Prince (2010: 13) write: “Social relations are made in substantial practice rather than simply given by formal affiliations”. Or, as Cohen and Odhiambo (1989: 127) summarize, “Wat imedo gi osiep (Friendship fortifies kinship)”, describing how friendship has become central in urban localities. Thus notions of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’—whether among kin or among friends—emerge with the social relations that underlie them.

According to Geissler and Prince (2010: 114–115), home is “a movement, a process that unfolds over time and in space. Home is the core of ‘Luo culture’, kinship and social order: its creation and sustained growth require rigid adherence to the Luo rules”. We can see how this definition applies in the way that every son is required to construct his own dala. The appropriate rituals have to be performed to establish a dala, which is only allowed after marriage rituals have been completed. Ideally, homesteads consist of three generations: the grandparents, their sons and co-wives, and their grandchildren. The Luo are polygamous and each of the co-wives has her own household: the grandparents have a separate home (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1949; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Nyambedha et al. 2003b; Geissler and Prince 2010). Okoth-Okombo (1989) writes that constructing a dala in the rural setting in the way prescribed by the ‘Luo tradition’ not only entails building a house, but carrying on an ancestral attachment to the family land (cited in Nzioka 2000: 11).

The failure to follow the rituals in establishing a dala was a common concern voiced among the youngsters, their parents, and their grandparents during the time of my fieldwork. Due to the colonial migration of rural men to work as wage labourers in town (see Chapter 3), the residential composition of many Luo homes has changed (Parkin 1978; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). Since many of the men were working and living outside their ancestral home, they delayed establishing their own dala—and if a person dies before their dala has been constructed, their family members do not know where to bury them. Failure to follow rituals can also arise from a general lack of knowledge, as was the case for many town-raised Luo children who were not aware of all the chike Luo (customary law, or the rules of ‘Luo society’).
The *chike Luo* are prominent among the Luo people in private and public discourse. They order everyday life and kinship relations, practices that include cooking, eating, sleeping, sexual relationships, marriage, building a home, and dealing with death (Geissler and Prince 2010: 91). These Luo customs have been codified as ‘rules’ or as ‘Luo moral codes’ (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 146) in Paul Mboya’s (1965) handbook *Luo Kitigi gi Timbegi* (Luo Customs and Beliefs), which was published for the first time in 1938. This book was especially written in order to prevent the vanishing of ‘the Luo tradition’ since many youngsters and parents who have been brought up in town or have spent most of their time in town are not well enough informed about Luo customs. In this way, Luo elders and elites, who were mostly trained in missionary schools, took the authority and power to “make tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and decided what is right and what is wrong. These absolute rules are passed from the older to the younger generation, which is a key aspect of any gerontocracy (see for example, Middleton 1960 on the Lugbara religion in Uganda). The many wage labourers who left their home to work in town consulted this book as an equivalent to the Christian Bible. The book was further used for cultural education in primary schools in the 1950s (see also Geissler and Prince 2010: 88–91). In general, ‘the Luo tradition’ is regarded as unchanging and fixed. However, the context has changed and Luo elders continue to debate how ‘the Luo rules’ should be followed and what can be done in case the person has sinned. During my fieldwork, it was interesting to listen to the program of the local radio station (Ramogi FM) where different cases were presented to a Luo elder, who is asked for advice on issues related to ‘the Luo tradition’. If family members do not follow the *chike Luo* that structure kinship and social life, it is believed that *chira* might strike—not only the person who has strayed from *chike Luo*, but also other people at home. *Chira* is a local illness resulting from violations of *kwer* (rule or prohibition, or *chike*). These violations cause ritual impurity, which in turn produces consequences such as illness or other misfortunes (Ringsted 2003: 16–17). People usually cite *chira* in explaining why a certain person became ill or died. *Chira* has become more ‘visible’ in situations of stress and uncertainty; since the 1990s *chira* has been attributed to the many deaths occurring among the Luo (see also Prince 2005; Geissler and Prince 2010) (see also Chapter 5).

A well-known public discussion about the meaning of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in Luo customary law arose when a prominent Luo lawyer, S. M. Otieno, who was born in Siaya (western Kenya) and died in Nairobi, wanted—against customary law—to be buried at his farm in Ngong (Nairobi) where he had long lived with his family. Otieno had ignored *chike Luo* or his customary obligation to build a house at his ancestral...
home in western Kenya, and had testified before Kenya’s High Court that he would emerge from his coffin and beat all those in the funeral procession towards Siaya if his body was not buried in Nairobi (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 135). The members of his lineage nevertheless demanded that Otieno’s body be buried at his ancestral home, and after a more than five month of dispute, Otieno was buried, against his wishes, in western Kenya (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 134–138). And this incident was not unusual, for even though some urban Luo rarely visit their rural home, their bodies are still buried at ‘home’ in western Kenya, because, it is perceived, this is the place to which Luo people will always belong, notwithstanding their mobility in the past, or present-day.

4.2. Changes in the ‘shared social support’ system: Splintered social networks

Young people typically have connections to and experiences of urban areas, as members of their extended families often live in town. Rural-urban migration during colonialism facilitated the sharing of family resources over rural-urban distances (Weisner 1997; Christiansen 2005). The introduction of formal schooling during colonialism also contributed to the high mobility of children since better schools were not available at local levels (see also Nyambedha 2006). At the time of my fieldwork, parents sometimes sent children to reside with a family member in order to attend a better school, or relocate their family to town in order to seek out a better livelihood. Paterson (cited in Hughes and Mwiria 1988: 189) writes that people’s search for education and a job depend on “the size and the quality of one’s social network and how well one is able to utilize those social linkages”. This phenomenon of ‘shared social support’ (Weisner 1997) in childrearing, which refers to how children are taken care of by relatives who live in another village or town, is very common in eastern and southern African countries (Weisner 1997; Kilbride and Kilbride 1997; Christiansen 2005; Nyambedha 2006).

According to Ominde (1952) and Ocholla-Ayayo (1976), it is the responsibility of the entire lineage to assist in child-rearing practices and in children’s education. During my fieldwork, when a mother or father became unable to provide for their children due to illness, lack of economic resources, or death, better-off relatives often took children into their households. At times, the youngest children had already been sent, at an early age, to stay with their more affluent older brothers or sisters in town, because they could provide a better education for their younger siblings than their parents could in a rural area; some children also attended boarding schools. Firstborn sons and unmarried daughters especially were obligated to support their parents financially, and to help pay
for their younger siblings’ education (see also Simpson 2009 for Tanzania). Some youngsters live with nonrelatives, like Onyango, who stayed with a church-related friend of his mother for a year while attending a secondary school away from home. People’s social networks help impoverished families to cope with feeding all the mouths in their household. During school holidays, most urban children and boarding-school children visit their parents, older siblings, or grandparents in the villages. But not all the movement was toward urban areas: Some urban children lived for short periods with older sisters or their maternal grandmother in rural areas, to help them with daily chores, while attending a school nearby. Sometimes they were sent to their grandparents’ home to keep them company or to learn about the traditional rural life. However, children belong to their father’s kin and live primarily with them: only in special circumstances, such as children born out of wedlock, where patrilineal affiliation has not been established through paying bride wealth to the mother, do children live with their mother’s parents (see also Nyambedha 2006; for Uganda, see Whyte and Whyte 2004; Christiansen 2005).

According to Whyte and Whyte’s (2004) study carried out in Uganda, ‘shared social support’ has become even more widespread in the last two decades. AIDS, unstable relations between parents, and poverty are often considered to be the main factors leading to the increase in fosterage (Whyte and Whyte 2004; Christiansen 2005). In Winam, the grandmothers were overwhelmed with the many orphaned grandchildren for whom they had to care. Some of the grandmothers were too old to take good care of themselves, let alone all the grandchildren who needed to be fed, clothed, and educated. Relationships could no longer be based on reciprocal help, as the flow of support became one-directional. The many deaths became a real burden for the rural families, as terminally ill adults increasingly returned to their home areas or parents’ homes before they died: at times, just the bodies of young people were sent back from town. Many of the parents had put hope in the future development of their children and had sacrificed a lot to ensure their children’s education, but recent newlyweds and graduates were dying, and fathers and mothers of very young children were passing away. Many of the migrating, breadwinning spouses returned from the cities, dead; younger men returned in caskets before they had a chance to build their own simba (bachelor’s hut) in their village. I will not forget the time an older mother sat with me, next to her hut, pointing out the nine graves in her compound: her husband, her sons, her daughters-in-law, and some of her grandchildren. The ubiquity of death caused by HIV/AIDS and poverty has penetrated the private and public homeland of the people of Winam.
Weisner (1997) argues that the high mortality rates of prime-age working adults caused by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa has resulted in the erosion of family solidarity and led to splintered social networks, which has affected the support for children. The study of Nyambedha et al. (2003a; 2003b) carried out in Bondo District (Nyanza Province) confirms that the high numbers of orphans due to the HIV epidemic has exceeded the capacity of the traditional caring mechanisms for orphans. Many old people are no longer in a position to support their orphaned grandchildren (see also de Klerk 2011). They are adversely affected by the loss of some of their children: they find themselves without the financial assistance of working-age adults, and are also left to care for terminally ill adults and parentless children (Dayton and Ainsworth 2004; Barnett and Blaikie 1992). Some of these elders even lose interest in their subsistence activities because of emotional distress (Nyambedha et al. 2003b: 38). Since the elderly relatives and the extended family can no longer meet the daily needs of the many orphans, a number of these children are likely to be moved from one relative to another in an effort to meet their basic needs (Nyambedha et al. 2003a).

Many of the youngsters who I followed in Winam told me that searching for alternative pathways and “the road to town” was not always easy. They could not just visit their relatives in town if they had no means to contribute to their relatives’ household. If their relative in town was married, youngsters found it particularly hard to cope with in-laws who usually did not welcome them. Monica, for example, a 21-year-old, urban-raised young woman, encountered difficulties when she stayed at her brother’s home in Nairobi, because his wife withheld Monica’s tuition money while he was away in Kisii (Nyanza Province in southwestern Kenya). Others were overloaded with domestic chores, and received less food than the other children in the family. Some were also put in risky situations, like NyarAlego (19 years old, completed primary school), who lived with her aunt throughout her primary school years. NyarAlego recalled how frightened she was when she and her cousin, a few years older than she, used to illegally ferry *chang’aa*—up to ten jerricans—for her aunt. They would travel with her aunt to distant places such as south Nyanza and Kisii: the two girls dressed in their school uniforms and carrying schoolbooks would take the bus home with a big bag full of *chang’aa* in the storage compartment. Nyambedha’s (2006: 101) study of western Kenya demonstrated that most of the children missed their parents’ home when they were raised elsewhere, and although adults tended to consider children’s lack of food and their inability to attend school as basic dimensions of children’s vulnerability,
children and youngsters felt that “they were better off suffering at home than enjoying a better material standard of living in other places they considered not to be home”.

By the time most of the youngsters of Winam felt mature enough to live on their own, they had moved at least once, or had been moving back and forth between different places. Some youngsters blamed their parents for what they were going through, particularly when their schooling was interrupted, and held them responsible for the ‘immoral’ behaviour that brought HIV/AIDS to their home. Youngsters dropped out before getting a diploma because none of their kin or close friends could help them further, and the local MP was not available, the Catholic or Anglican Church did not respond, and the foreigner had already paid other people’s school fees. Once they had dropped out of primary or secondary school, some were taken to a trainer to learn a certain skill to enable them to become independent, such as carpentry, mechanical repair, driving, and tailoring (mostly for young women), during a period of one to two years. Yet, without formal education, supportive social networks, and starting capital, these youngsters had little possibility to gain a secure livelihood and to move to town.

4.3. Akinyi’s story

I summarize the life story of Akinyi here, emphasising the various places she moved to, and the different reasons for doing so, starting from her early childhood. I have chosen her story among the many others because I knew nearly her entire social network: her maternal uncles, her paternal relatives, her brothers and sisters, her mother, and also most of her female peers, her male friends, and her boyfriends, which allowed me to verify her accounts and fill in gaps. In addition, Petronella and I were able to visit her in the different places she moved to.\(^{20}\) Akinyi’s story is not exceptional but is rather a fairly good representation of how young people grow up in rural Nyanza and how they are connected to urban life.

Akinyi (and also her mother) tactically navigated different networks to make her daily life worthwhile. She chose pathways or persons that could enable her to move to town or at least to a much more promising place than her home area. The story illustrates that the social networks used during childhood were relied on later in life, when she was searching for ways to improve her standard of living by finding jobs. As her life story indicates, her social networks were splintered and hard to rely on, especially those that broke down due to unexpected shocks and the “hidden, slow-moving, but destructive” (Loevinsohn and Gillespie 2003: 12) impact of HIV/AIDS. While social networks were unstable, sexual networks could be employed as an
Akinyi’s life story illustrates the significant consequences of her father’s irresponsibility for the entire family. Although MinAkinyi, Akinyi’s mother, tried to cover for her husband’s unreliability by acting as the head of the household, she also brewed chang’aa and sold bhang, letting her children grow up in an environment of illegal activities where they were surrounded by drunken people. Whenever MinAkinyi was imprisoned (which happened several times), there were only few people Akinyi could stay with and rely on, like her maternal uncles and her paternal aunt, since her social network was rather small. None of these relatives had a lucrative business. Her maternal uncles, for instance, were her age-mates, without any real prospects and just trying to make ends meet. MinAkinyi criticised her husband’s sister, saying she had not taken good care of Akinyi since she was surrounded by many drunken fishermen all day, and they often sexually harassed Akinyi. At home, Akinyi’s situation worsened once her father’s health deteriorated, and he became another responsibility for her to take care of. While Akinyi tried to assist her mother whenever she could, she also explored sexual relationships as she realised that it could open other livelihood options. She wanted to get out of the misery at home and wished to get a job or to start a small business in Bondo or Kisumu. At the same time, she hoped to find a financially capable husband away from home.

*The movements of Akinyi*

Akinyi was born at her father’s home in west Winam in 1989, the second of seven children. With the help of a fellow villager, Akinyi’s father had obtained a job in Garissa (an estate of Nairobi) with the meteorological department, however, he never sent remittances back home since, according to MinAkinyi, he usually spent the money on drinking and on women. In 1994, when Akinyi was five years old, her paternal grandmother sold a goat to enable MinAkinyi and her children to travel to Garissa to check on their father since he had stopped visiting them. They found him staying with another woman. The other woman left, and they then stayed for about three years with their father, but they experienced town life to be very expensive. Moreover, their father was misbehaving with different women and drinking a lot of alcohol, and, finally, he lost his job. Moreover, he was not in a good health any more, and for this reason, MinAkinyi, Akinyi’s father, and the children all moved back to Akinyi’s father’s home in west Winam. There, he became bedridden, and continued to drink chang’aa.
Soon after they arrived in Winam, Akinyi’s maternal uncle died, and, not much later, her maternal grandfather and grandmother both died. MinAkinyi was now the eldest of her family, with a number of surviving younger siblings. Since JoWinam gossiped that their land might have been bewitched, none of MinAkinyi’s siblings would stay there, choosing instead to stay with paternal uncles or renting a room in Dhonam.

Once the burial rituals were completed, MinAkinyi returned with her children to her husband’s home in west Winam, where their father remained. Since MinAkinyi needed cash money to pay the school fees of her children, she started a business brewing *chang’aa* and selling *bhang*. Although both activities are illegal in Kenya, they at least brought them some immediate cash. Akinyi dropped out in Class 3 (when she was about 12 years old) due to her family’s economic hardship. To make things worse, in 2003, when Akinyi was 14 years old, Akinyi’s mother got caught by the police and was sent to prison for about two years. Their father, who had always relied on the income from their mother’s business, moved with the children to his brother’s place in Kisumu. Soon after, he sent them to his sister’s place, a fishing beach on Lake Victoria, where Akinyi helped her aunt with selling fish and other domestic chores. During that time, a rich man from outside Winam had approached her, wanting to marry her. Akinyi and her older brother George only stayed with their aunt for about two months because George felt that Akinyi was being treated like a maid. Akinyi and George travelled to east Winam, where their maternal uncles lived, and stayed with the most responsible of them, named Canon. During that time, according to Akinyi’s maternal uncles, George behaved like a “prostitute”, inviting so many girlfriends to his uncles’ homes that they told him to leave. George returned to his father in Kisumu town, while Akinyi remained in east Winam until her mother was released from prison.

After some months at home, in April 2005, Akinyi returned again to her maternal uncle’s place while MinAkinyi travelled to Kisumu to learn the whereabouts of her husband and George. It was at that moment that I was introduced to Akinyi by her maternal uncle Ochien’g, and it was also around this time that Akinyi was introduced to Okoth (see Chapter 6), who would become her boyfriend. In May 2005, Akinyi returned home to west Winam since her mother needed her help with the household chores. Her father had been in hospital in Kisumu but was now home, still very ill: he was suffering from diarrhoea and stomach pains, and, as far I could see, he was probably HIV positive. George had impregnated a young woman in Kisumu, and then disappeared without a trace. While Akinyi helped her mother with the domestic chores, she occasionally
escaped to visit her boyfriend Okoth back in east Winam (about half a day’s walk or two hours by bicycle ride).

Akinyi’s mother was against their relationship, and played an important role in introducing Akinyi to a policeman from Mombasa, who had come to visit his home in Winam. Akinyi’s mother hoped that he would be a responsible and financially capable man who would marry her daughter, instead of misusing her, as she thought Okoth did. At first, Akinyi refused to date him, but since she was longing to get out of Winam, she told me she decided to give the ‘Mombasa man’ a try. With the approval of her mother, she travelled to Mombasa in July of 2005, but she only stayed there for about two weeks because she realised that the man from Mombasa, called Jack, had several girlfriends at the same time, and she did not love him.

Leaving him, however, proved a challenge, as Akinyi had to invent a story in order to obtain money to travel back home. She invented a story that I, a white European woman, wanted to employ her. Calling me with Jack’s mobile phone on a regular basis from Mombasa seemed to confirm this to him, and he gave her the money she needed. When I met her at the Kisumu bus stop, I almost did not recognise her: she came with a different look and new glamorous clothes. With such clothes, everyone in the village would know that she had been living in town and that her boyfriend had taken good care of her. However, Jack was not pleased with her leaving, and sent text messages quoting Biblical proverbs to Akinyi about how a woman should not leave her husband. Akinyi didn’t respond to him since she did not want to see him again, and continued visiting Okoth.

Her father’s health deteriorated fast, and he kept on wasting their little earnings by drinking chang’aa. In order to get some additional money, in October 2005, Akinyi left for Nairobi to work as a domestic servant for a fellow villager who was expecting a baby. Akinyi’s mother, who was saddened by the fact that her children could only be servants to people, explained: “Akinyi was not so keen about going to Nairobi. She only went because she knows that we need the money and because she does not want to see us suffering at home, because her father is also sick now”. Akinyi’s mother complained about Akinyi’s father: “The way you see baba Akinyi sitting down beside the house, that is all he does each day, and if he gets a job, like thatching people’s houses—yet my house is leaking and he cannot do it, he drinks the money. He has been like that throughout”. Akinyi left her job in Nairobi before Christmas 2005 since she was treated badly and not paid: the wife of the house withheld the money she had received from her husband. When Akinyi complained about this issue, the wife evicted Akinyi, and she had to spend
the night at a neighbour’s house. After this incident, Akinyi called her mother and asked permission to return home.

For most of 2006, Akinyi stayed in Winam with her parents, except for some visits to Kisumu, and she no longer wanted to work as a maid. Akinyi’s relationship with Okoth weakened and she got interested in other men. She had a short relationship with a young man she met at a disco matanga. Soon after, we found out that she actually had three different boyfriends at the same time: one from Bondo town, one from a nearby village who was still attending secondary school, and a third who was older and working in Nairobi but who, at times, came back to his home village in Winam. The relationship with the boyfriend from Bondo town did not last long since the young man was involved in a fight and got killed. She had favoured him above the one from the nearby village because he was already living independently, and she had little hope in the man from Nairobi since he came only sporadically to Winam. Akinyi realised that she could not rely only on men when she was in need of money because she found most of them untrustworthy.

At the same time, she got tired of staying at home, complaining to me: “There is a lot of work and it is boring”. She wanted to move to Kisumu, and her mother asked their cousin who lived there to help Akinyi with a driving course; a second plan was to raise enough money to sell second-hand clothes in Kisumu. But since there was no starting capital, Akinyi thought she would sell fish with her paternal aunt in a fishing beach in Siaya District. Despite her mother’s warnings that beaches are risky places for unmarried women, and she might get raped, Akinyi was sure that she could handle it. She imagined her success, telling me, “Once I settle, I will look for my own house. If I am doing well, I will not come home frequently because the villagers would get jealous and could bewitch me”.

But Akinyi did not go to the fishing beach in Siaya District. A woman from Nomiya Church (an independent African Christian church) prayed over her and told her that her paternal aunt had bad intentions toward her. Akinyi was told to become a Nomiya believer in order to avoid further hazards. In August, she joined the church, and from then onwards wore long dresses and a headscarf. Petronella, my research assistant, advised her to be careful since some churches force people to marry someone whom you do not like. Two weeks later, Akinyi told us that, after praying, the jaduɔŋ’ (male elder) of the church came to her with a man who wanted to marry her as a second wife. The man, who was a preacher on the famous local radio Ramogi, was not a member of Nomiya Church but had asked the jaduɔŋ’ to get him a wife. Akinyi asked him why
he needed a second wife and he told her: “because I am busy and with my job, I travel a lot with my wife so I want someone to look after my children when I am away with the first wife”. The jaduong’ further told her that he also wanted to marry her as a second wife because he wanted to be on par with his other brothers, who all had more than one wife. After hearing the intentions of the preacher, Akinyi left the church.

At home, life did not improve. Her older brother George finally returned but had another wife who was expecting—in addition to the pregnant girl he left in Kisumu. Without any real prospects, Akinyi tried her luck again in Kisumu since she believed that town life would give her more opportunities to find a job, moving to her paternal uncle’s place in in November. A few months after, in April 2007, she got to know one of her aunt’s male friends and moved with him to his home village, close to the border of Tanzania. However, when Akinyi realised that she actually would be his third wife, she hesitated, and later fell in love with his younger brother. MinAkinyi accused her husband’s sister of selling her daughter and reported the case to the police, even though she knew Akinyi’s whereabouts. Akinyi’s aunt was instructed by the police to find Akinyi, and sent her son to find her. Once found, Akinyi was sent back home. She had hoped to receive travel money from her ‘Tanzanian boyfriend’ to visit his village, but the boyfriend refused because he found it a shameful situation.

Akinyi was annoyed that her mother had interfered in her relationship with the Tanzanian man. She was no longer on good terms with her mother and tried on her own means to find another way to return to her Tanzanian boyfriend. When she heard that the granddaughter of a villager from Winam could use a nanny for her just-delivered baby girl, she quickly took this opportunity in Nairobi. Akinyi would receive a monthly salary of 1000 Kenyan shillings. During my visit to Nairobi in July 2007, Akinyi told me that she had been trying to reach her ‘Tanzanian boyfriend’ by phone, but he never responded. After my last visit, Akinyi continued to inform me of her whereabouts with regular phone calls. While in Nairobi, she got to know a young man from Kisii, who promised to take her to his home and marry her, but when she got pregnant in October 2007, he asked her to abort the foetus. She “flashed” me on my mobile phone in Belgium and when I called her back she asked me for advice about abortions, and for financial help to cover the expenses (about 50 euro). She decided to abort the foetus.

In April 2008, her older brother George died (probably from HIV) in Winam, leaving a wife and a newborn baby. Akinyi went home for the burial, and returned to Nairobi two weeks after the funeral. In May 2008, she had to go back again to her home village because her paternal grandmother died. In mid-July 2008, after completing the
burial rituals, and before she left again for Nairobi, she visited a new boyfriend in Seme, a bus driver whom she had gotten to know during the disco matanga organised for her deceased brother.

In September 2008, her father died, probably from HIV, and she again returned home for the funeral. MinAkinyi quickly realised that Akinyi was pregnant since Akinyi felt very tired all day. In this state, Akinyi could not work in Nairobi anymore, and MinAkinyi convinced Akinyi to keep the baby. The father of the unborn baby, the boyfriend from Seme, did not want to assume this responsibility because, according to Akinyi, “he had too many other girlfriends to take care of”. Akinyi was very worried because she wanted to have a father for her child, and so she got engaged to a teacher in Winam. She accused him of impregnating her, but he also did not want to take responsibility for the child.

In February 2009, about two months before the baby’s birth, Akinyi was admitted to the hospital for malnutrition. I helped her to cover the hospital bill (20 euro) and agreed to send her some money for food once in a while. Her daughter was born in April 2009. One year later, Akinyi’s situation had not changed much: her mother was again imprisoned, now with deteriorating health. I decided to help Akinyi with some start-up capital to begin selling second-hand clothes, because she told me on the phone, after hesitating, “My mother is not good”, not daring to say: “My mother is HIV infected”. Since September 2010, we have lost contact; her mobile number no longer works.

While at first, Akinyi just wanted to experiment with sex, later she tactically sought out different social and sexual networks for improving her livelihood situation. Mobility was not unfamiliar to Akinyi as, beginning even in early childhood, she had moved between many different settings. Akinyi’s mobility—and that of her brother—did not cause any problems for her family, as it was part of their parents’ daily struggle. Akinyi was also able to spend quite some time at ‘home’—the ancestral home where her parents were living—but now and then needed to live with some of her relatives, where she did not always feel ‘at home’.

Akinyi relied on a rather small social network and had no connections to better-off people who had stable jobs and who could give her a helping hand. Her education level was low, which diminished her chances of finding a secure job or a husband with a higher education who might be better able to find a stable job. Higher-educated men in Winam usually preferred marrying someone with the same education level or at least
someone who had been able to finish secondary school (see next chapter). Thus Akinyi’s livelihood opportunities were few.

Left with her maternal same-age uncles while her mother was imprisoned, Akinyi became receptive to the attention she received from her uncle’s friend Okoth. MinAkinyi did not approve of this relationship because she felt Okoth did not have much to offer them. Okoth was ‘merely from Winam’ and his employment at Yeshica as a volunteer was not deemed highly. Due to the limited resources at home to assist Akinyi, it was MinAkinyi’s tactic to find her a financially capable husband who at least would be able to pay the bride price. JoWinam explained that parents usually preferred not to invest too much in their daughters compared to their sons, since a daughter, once married, would move to her husband’s home. Akinyi’s family thought that the bride price paid by Akinyi’s future husband would help them to improve their livelihood situation, but this was highly improbably as few male youngsters during the time of my research actually had the financial means. In addition, MinAkinyi hoped that the husband’s home would not be too far from Akinyi’s parents’ home since that would enable MinAkinyi to rely on her daughter now and then.

Akinyi did not share her mother’s reasoning but, at the same time, did not want to disappoint her mother. After Akinyi’s sexual experience with Jack from Mombasa, Akinyi realized the advantage of having sexual relationships with ‘town men’. Akinyi—like so many other youngsters of Winam—associated urban life with socioeconomic progress. In Mombasa, she had been able to witness the comforts of living in town (i.e., having for instance electricity and a gas cook stove and fashionable clothing). Each time she was pulled back to the village, she tried every means to move (back) to town, even though she did not want to work as a maid since she had been exploited many times. She believed that when she was in town, it was easier to engage sexually with ‘town men’ and maybe find the ‘right husband’ who would be able to fulfil her mother’s wish of paying the bride price. Although she realized that town life was very harsh, her sexual relationships with different men enabled her to have something to fall back on. There was an ongoing struggle between her aspiration to be independent from men, whom she considered untrustworthy; her ambition to improve her livelihood; and her mother’s goal of finding the right, financially capable husband for her.

She moved to Kisumu and imagined herself becoming self-employed one day, but she did not want to get married close to her home since she believed it would provoke envy among Winam villagers and risk bewitchment (see also Chapter 5). Consequently, Akinyi tactically choose her sexual partners from elsewhere, seeing a future with her
Tanzanian boyfriend, for example, until her mother pulled her back home, using the power of the police. Once back home, she again acted tactically: she escaped her mother’s will and sought the help of her village friends, trying to re-establish contact with her Tanzanian boyfriend, only to find the relationship had been spoiled by her mother’s actions.

Running the risk of getting pregnant was another tension she tactically tried to deal with. When she learned she was pregnant for the first time, she was overwhelmed with feelings of fear and shame since her boyfriend did not accept the pregnancy. She lacked the knowledge of abortion methods and the financial means, but, finally, relying on her network (me), she managed. She was too late to abort the second pregnancy when the biological father also denied his responsibility. This time, Akinyi’s livelihood tactic was to enlarge her sexual network and use her pregnancy to try to find a responsible father. In the end, she remained alone with the responsibilities of motherhood, at her maternal home. Neither her nor her mother’s wish had come true, or, at least, not yet. There is still a chance that maybe one day in the future, Akinyi will manage to find ‘a rich man’ who will bring her, her younger siblings, and her mother to town, away from the suffering.

Akinyi’s account represents, to some extent, the experience of youngsters who have spent most of their childhood in Winam and nearby villages; in the next section I present some examples of youngsters who were brought up in town and only later in life came to the village. The size of the social and sexual networks of these youngsters who have been brought up in town was wider than that of their village counterparts. In addition, while all the youth (both rural- and urban-raised) had urban aspirations, the urban-raised youngsters—referred to as the “dot.coms”—had other life expectations than their rural counterparts and faced difficulties adapting to rural life.

4.4. The world of the “dot.coms”

People in town were believed to be much better off than those in rural areas, and children were encouraged by their parents to leave and search for work in town. Parents and youngsters alike believed that living in town would improve young people’s opportunities and broaden their social network, perhaps leading to future employment. Having lived in town was also a kind of status symbol for most of the youngsters, as Axel, a 20-year-old young man who was finishing his last year of secondary school in 2005, explained: “People can say: ‘I have been to Nairobi, to Mombasa’” (in-depth
interview, May 2006). Urban life was associated with escaping the hard work in the fields and difficult domestic chores. In town, houses usually have cement floors, which are easier to clean, and there is electricity, which results in more entertainment opportunities, such as television, bars, discos, cinemas, and supermarkets. These imaginings of urban life do not always correspond to the realities, as some of the youngsters ended up in the lower-class neighbourhoods or slums of Nairobi. Still, although someone might be living in a slum in town, they are still considered to be ‘urban based’ because they can enjoy the benefits of the consumer economy. The urban informants of Cole's (2007: 84–85) study, in Tamatave, Madagascar, felt that they were always up-to-date about the latest “new things” and the latest fashions, and imagined that their rural counterparts, by contrast, were bound to a miserable life of planting rice, in which no progress or pleasure could be experienced.

At the time of my fieldwork, Adhis was a 20-year-old young woman who had been raised throughout her primary and secondary schooling by her paternal aunt. She spent most of her childhood in Nairobi and went to a boarding school in Bondo for her secondary school education. When she was graduated from secondary school in 2005, she returned to her rural home in Winam since she had no real perspective about what she could do in her future. She told us: “In town, people grow so fast”, meaning that people mature faster in town since they are more exposed to mass media than their village counterparts. Young people who have spent most of their childhood in town or who regularly stayed in town grow up with a broader worldview, and have different life expectations compared to those of their peers from the village. Moreover, in town, people also come from many different places and socioeconomic backgrounds whereas in the village, the differences are not as wide. Although the market centre of Dhonam was livelier (with its video hall, billiards hall, disco, and mobile cinema) than other parts of Winam, urban-raised youngsters said there is still much more “movement” in urban areas such as Bondo, the closest town, and the cities of Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa.

Youngsters, especially young women like Adhis who had spent most of their childhood and adolescence in town, were often referred to as “dot.coms”. The nickname merits a closer look, because it shows how the youngsters of Winam were connected to the outside world and how they appropriated concepts to their own local context. Among these youth, the term ‘dot.com’ refers to modernity: the modern world of the internet, mobile phones, and new, foreign things. The term ‘dot.com’ originally referred to innovative online companies, often consisting of little more than a good website; the ‘dot.com boom’, and bust, in the 1990s made many of these fledgling companies very
wealthy, and then bankrupt. Hence in Winam, ‘dot.com’ stood for easy money and an unsustainable lifestyle. The dot.coms were, in the rural context of Winam, perceived to be ‘high-class people’ with habits and sophisticated dressing styles that rural youngsters viewed as being modern and urban, with connections to the modern life that is town life. Notably, ‘dot.com girls’ were also accused for having more than one partner at the same time due to their need for money (see Chapter 6).

Once the dot.coms were thrown back to their ancestral home due to unstable social relations, they suffered more than those who had been brought up in rural areas since they were not used to village life. They were not familiar with chike Luo and hardly could communicate in the Dholuo language. They were not used to food shortages and missed the luxuries that town life offered. Monica (21 years old) was also such a “dot.com girl”; she had enjoyed more educational opportunities, even attending college, than Akinyi since she had a stable social network at first, including an older brother who paid her school fees. Monica stayed with different relatives (her older brother, her older sister, her sister-in-law, her cousin) and lived in different places (Ahero, Nairobi, Homa Bay, Eldoret) during her school years. When left in the hands of her in-laws and other relatives, Monica often felt left out, and realised that she had to try finding her own means of making a living. One of her livelihood tactics was then to explore and expand her sexual network in the hope of getting easy access to goods. After getting pregnant, she left Nairobi, moving to her sister’s place in Winam. Although pregnancy could be a tactic in order to make boyfriends, it could also hinder urban aspirations. And so it did for Monica, whose boyfriend did not take up his responsibility as a father. Monica’s sister in Winam suggested she apply for one of the CDC vacancies there; if she got a job, her sister might take care of the baby. But without a job and unable to adapt to village life, Monica moved again to her stepsister’s place in Kisumu, where her baby girl was born. When the baby was three months old, Monica moved back to Winam, explaining: “My stepsister is very strict. Once you go inside that house, the gate is locked and there is no coming out—and she quarrels a lot, and me, I like going out a lot. I can’t stay all the time in the house and I don’t like being quarrelled with” (informal conversation, September 2005).

Back in Winam at her sister’s place, Monica further tried to apply for several CDC jobs. She realized that having a child put stress on her financial situation, and reduced her chances for pursuing further studies and finding a husband. In Winam, she had short-term sexual relationships with a number of boyfriends but none that could improve her livelihood. With her social network nearly exhausted, she believed that only
in Nairobi could she find a job and simultaneously enlarge her sexual network of well-salaried men. Thus her next livelihood tactic was to move back to town, again employing her nearly exhausted social network. Yet, she would stay only with those relatives who gave her a certain amount of freedom to enable her to get in touch with the ‘town men’. In October 2005, without her sister’s knowledge, she went to her cousin’s place in Nairobi, leaving her little daughter behind. Petronella, my research assistant, and I visited her several times in Nairobi. The first time, in February of 2006, Petronella went to meet Monica alone at the bus station, but soon after, Monica took Petronella to one of the bars on River Road, where Monica was meeting one of her boyfriends. River Road is a street full of bars, clubs, restaurants, and brothels, both overt and hidden, a famous street where, as “Nairobians” (people from Nairobi) say, “everything is possible, from illegal to legal”. There she met up with Charles, a man in his thirties who was already drunk when they arrived. Charles invited Petronella and Monica to have a Smirnoff Ice, and when Petronella left, he gave her 200 Kenyan shillings (2.5 euro). At first, Petronella did not want to accept the money but Monica insisted, as she wanted Petronella to buy something nice for her little daughter in Winam.

It is interesting to observe that Monica’s social network, having lived and studied for some time in Nairobi, was much wider than the one Akinyi could employ when she was working as a housemaid and nanny in Nairobi. Akinyi stayed in the same network as the people she knew from back home, and most of the people that she was familiar with in Nairobi were relatives of her neighbours in Winam. The people in her network also lived in the same neighbourhood; in Nairobi many neighbourhoods are known for being predominantly inhabited by a certain ethnic group. For instance, Kaloleni is an urban quarter in the eastern part of Nairobi that is referred to as another ‘homeland’ of the Luo. The two households that had employed Akinyi in Nairobi were from a higher-status household than her own, but since both places maintained the basic Luo environment as back home, she felt as if she was not really away from home. Weisner (1997) also found this pattern among the Kisa people in western Kenya: related families from certain subclans and lineages in Kisa also lived near one another in a certain neighbourhood in Nairobi. In this way, they continued to stay in the same social network, which enabled them to share information about housing and services and jobs (Weisner 1997: 28–29). Monica also had a wider social network than Akinyi because during her studies she had met many other people outside her close and distant relatives, and so her social network was composed of people from different ethnic groups and not only Luo people. When Monica stayed with her sister in Winam, she had
difficulty adapting herself to the hard circumstances of village life. When we asked Akinyi how life was in Nairobi after her first experience working there, she answered, “Nairobi? I do not like it”, whereas Monica said: “Nairobi is cheap, it is fun”. Although Monica was to some extent socioeconomically privileged when compared with Akinyi, both young women realized that the help they could expect from their social networks was limited. Therefore, they, like most of the (female) youngsters, tried to find a better way of living through the creation of a sexual network.

4.5. Young women and sexual networks

As my ethnographic data show, climbing up the social ladder and finding a better way of living through sexual liaisons was more prevalent among young women than young men. In his article on sexual networks and social capital, Thornton (2009) invites us to look at the ‘rational’ responses sexually active agents make in response to unstable social networks. According to Thornton (2009), people have sexual liaisons with multiple concurrent partners in order to build their social networks and social capital, which may result in an improvement in many other aspects of their life. Sexual relationships can give them access to goods and services that conventional social networks may not. Thornton (2009) further reasons that a diverse sexual network may help people to move out of their current situation. Thus, young people may have very good reasons to engage in ‘risky sex’ (Thornton 2009).

Due to the gender-related constraints in finding reliable income-generating activities for women, women remain dependent on men for economic resources. Many women in Winam tried to intensify their workload in the field and to obtain independent non-farm economic means to cover for the unemployment status of their husband or boyfriend. Although a number of unmarried young women still depended on the household’s economy, she would be considered ‘foolish’ if she did not take advantage of the material benefits a man could offer her. As Cole (2007: 85) in her study in Madagascar writes: “the girl who doesn’t go after what she wants [i.e., fashion, foreign items] is ridiculed”. At the same time, a (young) man is expected to provide (see also Chapter 6). Consequently, young women can legitimately leave their current boyfriend or husband if he is unable to meet her desired needs and get another one. They can also have multiple concurrent sexual partners in order to meet their different needs: a young woman might have a financial boyfriend who gives her money; a social boyfriend whom she goes out with and likes to be seen with; and an academic boyfriend whose role is just to do her assignments. She will make pragmatic choices, depending on her situation.
However, in Winam, young women had fewer choices as there were few desirable men around. Additionally, some young women did not always find the courage to leave their current boyfriend or husband as they had to perform what society or their relatives demanded from them. It was common that young women said: “I know he is polygamous but I cannot leave him because all men are polygamous”. Only some young women had the opportunity to engage in a relationship with a more desirable or financially capable man, who preferably lived in town, in the hope of escaping their daily hardships at home. For the (young) men on the other hand, it was considered legitimate to leave their current girlfriend or wife if she was cheating on him or was only after his money, but he could not easily put himself in a dependent position by seeking a ‘rich’ female sexual partner to provide for him, as this would be very shameful. Since men were expected to fulfil the role of breadwinner, it was hard for them to rely on women for their economic needs. Of course, it happened—and more than is publicly stated—that some men attracted ‘wealthy’ women for sexual favours, like the so-called sugar-mamas, but these relationships were usually just a one-night stand or for the short term. Such situations did not occur very often in the village due to its higher level of social control, but in the cities of Mombasa and Nairobi, such stories were common. On one occasion Ochien’g came to our house, disgusted because he had been locked in the house of an “old lady” who wanted to have sexual intercourse with him; she had offered him goods like sugar and milk in exchange. He was frightened of her and never wanted to walk through her neighbourhood again. He also told me of a mentally ill fisherman who often sexually engaged with older women for money. Thus while men were not culturally permitted to rely financially on sexual liaisons, women could do so. Men might have multiple concurrent partners, which could to some extent expand their social capital, but it did not necessarily improve their living situation—in fact, having multiple partners could deteriorate their living standard as they were expected to provide for all their girlfriends and wives. What about the ‘rich’ (young) man with many girlfriends? He might not need to expand his social capital through sexual liaisons. Thornton (2009) does not take into account that not all sexual agents are poor and want to enlarge their sexual network because they are in need of material goods. Although he puts forward a number of interesting ideas on sexual networking, his focus is too much on ‘the poor’ and he lacks a more nuanced view on gender-specific effects.
4.6. Pragmatic choices

Thornton (2009: 2) writes that “the dynamic properties of these networks-as-structures arise from persons acting in strategic ways”. However, I suggest that not all decisions that sexual active agents make arise from rational thought processes. Although Thornton wants to move away from the rational choice model on which most of the HIV/AIDS behavioural change literature is based, he actually further reinforces the dichotomy between the rational and the irrational person, assuming that people act with free choice, choosing a certain partner to extend their livelihood networks. In sum, it is never pure agency nor pure structure, but a complex, contextual interaction between both: young people tactically make pragmatic choices, acting within constraints but trying to capitalize on opportunities when they arise. In the stories of the youngsters of Winam, we see how HIV/AIDS affects networks. The old network ceases to produce the benefits it once did and other, often more modern networks emerge, which offer young people access to urban (night-)life and fashion. While this new urban world holds many promises, it has a dark side where nightlife turns into prostitution, and higher education’s promises of formal employment turn out to be an illusion that distracts people from using their time and energy to generate income in more humble positions.

5. Conclusion

People in Winam are very mobile, they will disappear—you won’t know where they go to because Winam is like a beach community: somebody goes to Sakwa or Gem or Nairobi so whether they die there, nobody cares.

— Opiyo, former anthropologist at Yeshica (in-depth interview, September 2006)

Examining the livelihood tactics of young people is useful in understanding how young people react to and deal with social and economic changes that are occurring in society. I have used the term ‘tactic’ instead of the commonly used ‘strategy’ in order to highlight this interesting blend of, on the one hand, short- to medium-term agency guided by hopes and dreams for a better future outside Winam, and, on the other hand, the reactive and opportunistic aspects of this agency, which is dependent upon changes in the environment. I pointed to the limitations of the concepts of ‘livelihood’ and ‘social capital’, which fail to capture the lack of certainty and predictability that make any strategy for action impossible. The youngsters of Winam were not in a position to plan their long-term future and had to revise whatever plans they had when opportunities
arose or vanished. Intentions to go to college, for example, might be disrupted by a relative’s death, since all available household resources would need to be spent on the funeral.

When young people sought a sustainable livelihood in Winam, they quickly ran into obstacles and limitations, and learned that many paths were thwarted by a context of gender inequality and persistent poverty. Experiencing their village context as a straightjacket, the livelihood tactics of the young people in Winam were characterized by a high degree of mobility. Their social and sexual networks were two of the most important tools they had to employ for their tactic of mobility. Leveraging connections to friends and relatives brought them to different places, and they constantly sought to expand their network to include people with connections to urban life. However, they had to be realistic: people compete for connections to town, and success in using these livelihood networks was infrequent. Many empty promises were made, and games of persuasion (described in Chapters 6 and 7) were employed, aimed at obtaining sex or promises of marriage. The ambition to establish new connections, and the dialectic between broken and ever-new promises, reveals a quest to find that one perfect opportunity that could elevate them from their misery. This is not a well-planned quest but a spontaneous, fragile, and often interrupted process. In this quest, youngsters move here and there, appear and disappear, sometimes seeming to roam around, while other times having a clear plan of moving to a certain location for good, only to be forced later to abandon that place. This reflects the fragility of their lives and the absence of many structures that protect the livelihoods and guide the lives of their peers in more developed countries. In stark contrast to the security and safety nets available in rich countries, and to rich Kenyans, these youngsters believe, with good reason, like Opiyo says above, “whether they die there, nobody cares”. People will grieve, but JoWinam have grown tough through the many shocks they have experienced, and they have no option other than to tolerate these hard conditions. Although the young people I met have experienced a lot of desperation around them, they did not give up hope, because they believed that they would manage to reach that ‘better life’ outside of Winam. They have learned to act within a context of ‘chronic crisis’ (Vigh 2008). By extending their social and sexual networks, young people saw opportunities and they acted to seize these options, which entailed many ‘health risks’, detailed in the next chapter.
The name *ngege* used to refer to *Oreochromis esculentus*, a type of tilapia found in Lake Victoria in the 1950s. This type of tilapia diminished in Lake Victoria and British officials introduced new kinds of fish, including Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) and Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) (see [http://www.cichlid-forum.com/articles/lake_victoria_sick.php](http://www.cichlid-forum.com/articles/lake_victoria_sick.php)). Although today’s is a different type of tilapia than the 1950s, JoWinam still refer to it as ‘*ngege*’. 


In general, they hope to attend schools with a high national ranking, which would improve their chances to find employment. Some youngsters graduated with good marks from a local school, but since their school is at the bottom of the national ranking, their marks were not highly valued, and university or college scholarships were out of their reach. Only with some luck and the help of a Member of Parliament or a rich relative could those youngsters gain acceptance to a provincial or national secondary school.

Depending on the level (local, provincial, or national) of school, fees ranged from 24,000–40,000 Kenyan shillings (300–500 Euro) per year.

Since many youngsters dropped out in-between and stayed out of school as long as three to four years until they could find a scholarship, I realised that it did not make sense to make a differentiation ‘out-of-school youth’ and ‘school-going youth’ (see also Chapter 1).

However, nowadays due to the scarcity of food and resources at home, parents prefer their daughters to get married to someone from a neighbouring area since that would allow the daughters to come to the parents’ assistance whenever they are in need. Parents also prefer to be able to check on how their daughters are doing.

Youth unemployment in the world has increased spectacularly between 1993 and 2003, from 11.7 percent in 1993 to its historical height of 14.4 percent in 2003, leaving 88 million young people without work (ILO 2004).

However, once they marry, women’s independence means greater precariousness for their husbands, for they are no longer the main breadwinners of the household (see Chapters 3 and 6).

The introduction of the Nile Perch—new species of predatory fish introduced by British officials in the 1950s—has caused enormous ecological damage, explained in the movie ‘Darwin’s Nightmare’. 

Kenya owns only 6 percent of Lake Victoria’s surface (Shipton 2005: 59).

*Simu ya jami* is a system of sharing a community phone, creating an entrepreneurial opportunity for poorer people to set up a business selling airtime to the local community via a shared handset or calling card.

The 700 youngsters that participated in different vocational trainings was the total number of participants, but each youngster participated several times, so the number of actual individual trained was likely to be much lower.

It was not easy for the ITM to find a microfinance institution that was willing to work with young people in a rural setting. Most microfinance institutions regarded young people as lacking responsibility, and therefore the capacity to repay their loans. K-Rep is managed by the Kenyan Development Agency (see [http://www.povertyactionlab.org/partners](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/partners)).
The YIP program coordinator assumed that it was K-Rep's task to keep track of their members, yet K-Rep did not have the time to do this, nor could they forgive debts as their purpose was giving loans and getting their money back.

When new models or best practices are published, it is often ignored that to arrive at one ostensible 'model', many other things were tried without success and with sometimes adverse outcomes for the participants involved.

Sugar cane and peanuts were also staple crops, but less marketable than maize.

At the time of my fieldwork, 'Luo men' who had not built their own homes were usually buried next to their mothers' houses.

The 'Luo elders' were part of the 'Luo Council of Elders'—dominated by men—that was established in 1990 in Kisumu. It refers back to the Luo Council, a group of elders who defended the Luo identity and culture during colonial time (White 1990; Geissler and Prince 2010).

The 'Luo tradition' requires that each boy who becomes mature builds his own simba (bachelor's hut), with its door facing the direction of his father's house. The firstborn son must be the first to build his house—loko ot—and the other siblings can follow one by one.

Petronella and I visited Akinyi almost twice a month in her paternal home in Winam, where we usually would spend a whole day. We also visited her when she was staying at her maternal uncles' place in Dhonam, her boyfriend Okoth's place in east Winam, her older boyfriend's place in Nairobi, the Nomiya church, her uncle's place in Kisumu, and the places in Nairobi where she was working as a nanny. We were not able to visit her in Mombasa, as at that time, I had not yet obtained my ITM supervisor's permission to go and follow the youngsters to the places they moved.
Chapter 5

“Playing sex”: Disease and risk

1. Introduction

The sexual intermingling of bodies has a powerful and ambiguous force in ‘Luo society’, as it underlies proper social conduct between spouses and is fringed with ritual prescriptions and prohibitions. The Dholuo verb riwo, which means mixing or sharing substances (like blood, sperm, food, milk, or chang’aa), to sustain life, fertility, or relationships, is central to what the people of Winam refer to as chike Luo (customary law). One aspect of riwo is sexual intercourse (riwruok) where bodily fluids are exchanged. In the moment of ‘sharing’ (riwo), two people become one (Geissler and Prince 2007: 129–130).

With great attention to chike Luo and generational relationships, riwruok is woven into the social fabric of everyday life, as well as into specific ritual events in Winam, particularly those related to fertility. For instance, when a child is born, the parents are required to have sex that same day: the day preceding the harvest or the eating of the fruits of the harvest also calls for riwruok. In such events, riwruok is a way of “finishing” a prohibition or ending a rule (kwer); any unfinished kwer or chike will dino yo (block the way) and lead to chira (a local illness resulting from violations of ancestral rules or taboos) (Prince 2005: 184–187). Although riwruok is preserved for married couples, this limitation has often been transgressed by unmarried young people, both in the past and today.

In this chapter, I describe and analyse how young people in Winam deal with disease and risk. During the 1990s, anthropologists critiqued epidemiological approaches that conceptualized notions of risk in an individualized way, arguing such approaches assumed that ignorance of risk-enhancing behaviour was the main cause of disease. During the 2000s, when I was conducting my fieldwork, many epidemiologists had become convinced that social, cultural, political, and economic conditions place entire groups in positions more vulnerable to disease. They agreed that AIDS education to increase knowledge of such risks was necessary but not sufficient to change behaviour (Trostle and Sommerfeld 1996: 260; Lindenbaum 1992) (see also Chapter 2). Taking
these developments into account, I argue that young people act pragmatically to avert the so-called health risks of sex, which they deem no more severe than other ‘health risks’, like malaria. I show in this chapter that sexual practices (i.e., coital penetration) among young people have not changed much in recent years: sexual experimenting continues to be perceived as very important for (unmarried) youngsters. Sexual activity is assumed among the youth I studied, having a girl- or boyfriend meant that they were engaged in sexual intercourse.

The main argument of this chapter is that the way young people deal with the consequences of having sex has not changed significantly as compared to the past, in spite of all the changes that have taken place in the context of modernization and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In earlier times, young people were taught how to avoid premarital pregnancy; during my fieldwork, they were also taught to avoid HIV. To minimize their exposure, young people use the tactic (De Certeau 1984) of “doing research” on their lover, especially on his or her sexual network, with a view to determining their chances of being exposed to the virus. They are aware that this tactic does not guarantee they won’t contract HIV, as my data illustrates. Young people’s pragmatic choices illustrate the tensions between their ‘situated concerns’ (Whyte 2002) and the long-term goals of public health agencies and organisations, as young people prefer to live in the uncertainty of AIDS.

This chapter examines the ambiguity of sexual relations and the related, gendered power discrepancies, which are then critically analysed in the next chapter on the transactional dimension of sexual liaisons. While the following chapter deals with the constellation of sex, love, and money, the present chapter seeks to understand what young people call “playing sex”, and the tactics they employ to avoid the ‘health risks’ caused by sex. Together, the two chapters demonstrate that not all relationships are about sex and money, and that love also has an important role to play.

I start off this chapter by explaining how sexual education happened during colonial times, based on the memories of Winam’s elders, the grandparents of the youth with whom I worked. I then explain how JoWinam interpret AIDS, and briefly discuss other modes of managing uncertainty, including dealing with chira, witchcraft, and evil powers. Although chira, witchcraft and evil powers were topics that extensively came to the foreground during daily life in Winam—which means that I gathered plenty of accounts on them—in this chapter I only briefly touch upon them to discuss how they can be seen as different ways of dealing with uncertainty, apart from AIDS. I examine why “playing sex” is so central to the young men and women of Winam, and elaborate on
young people’s tactics for avoiding ‘health risks’ associated with sex. Framing my analysis is an awareness of the risk of stigmatizing and exoticising ‘Luo cultural practices’, particularly in the Kenyan context wherein Luo people are often blamed for their ‘backwardness’ (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). I eschew the notions of “African sexuality” and “Eurasian sexuality”, found in the much-criticized study of Caldwell et al. (1989: 195), which argued that having sex in Africa is as simple and natural as eating and drinking, and that ‘African sexuality’ is characterized by “permissiveness”. I wish to emphasise that “playing sex” is not a universal, natural fact, nor is any ‘culture’ static or homogenous as it is changing continuously.

2. Sexual socialization before the 1930s–1940s

The accounts of sexual practices in the past among the Luo people made by (colonial) ethnographers have to be viewed as products of complex historical processes, which are an entanglement of Christian and colonial influences (see also Setel 1999a). The literary writing of ‘the Luo past’ rely heavily on information given by Luo elders and elites who were trained in missionary schools, and who manipulated ‘tradition’ as a means of increasing their local control. Their observations on sexual education and marriage ceremonies were documented as if traditions were unchanging (Ranger 1983: 262–264). As I explain later on, it is as well a common phenomenon that older generations idealize the past and blame present-day shortcomings on the contemporary way of living and the younger generation. The memories of past sexual practices, related by the grandparents and parents of the youngsters whom I followed closely, were often shaped by nostalgia, which means that JoWinam’s narratives cannot be taken as objective indications of social reality. But this does not mean that no changes have occurred (Cole and Thomas 2009: 4–22). When people talk about the past, it is a way to mark a contrast with the present (Smith 1986). ‘Memory talk’ alerts us to the process of using certain elements from the past in order to interpret and comment on the present (see also White 2000).

According to the parents and grandparents of the youngsters with whom I worked, until about the 1930s, unmarried girls and boys used to be taught by the elderly people of their homestead about sexual matters. Interestingly, people who are required to show respect to one another, like parents and children, are severely restricted from discussing sexual matters, but such discussions were considered permissible when conducted by elders. The grandmothers and grandfathers typically used the sleeping areas, which were designated according to age and sex, for passing on information...
relating to sexuality; information about growing up was also passed on to children while performing their domestic chores. Children stayed and slept in the same house as their parents until about the age of eight or ten. At that point, all the children of the same homestead were moved to sleep in the *siwindhe* (the hut of the grandmother or of an elder wife in a polygamous homestead) because they were growing into adolescents and parents did not want their children to watch them having sex. It was common that, out of respect, “the other body and intercourse ought not to be made an object of speech, [and] they must not be made an object of the gaze” (Geissler and Prince 2010: 233).

Older children stayed with either the grandmother or the elder wife, as long as they “*ma owuok e ria*” (had reached menopause). Several historical descriptions of ‘Luo social life’ emphasize that women whose husbands had died and who had gone through menopause were highly valued, and could perform certain rituals that nobody else could perform (Evans-Pritchard 1949: Mboya 1965). However, as Geissler and Prince (2004: 97) illustrate in their study on the amity between grandparents and grandchildren in western Kenya, “grandparenthood is not simply defined by generational position, but shaped socially in relation to gender”. While only women can make a transition from the social status from being a wife to a grandmother, from adult to old woman, they are free to choose when to redefine their sexual status. Geisler and Prince (2004: 98) give an example of how a mother who was still in her reproductive age, decided to ‘become a grandmother’ by abstaining from sexual contact with her husband in order to be allowed to take care of her granddaughter. Within ‘Luo society’, women in their reproductive age are believed to be very powerful and even potentially dangerous. For this reason, ‘Luo rules’ prescribe that children should avoid having contact with them otherwise *chira*—a serious illness—might affect them and their relatives (Parkin 1978: 149–151; see also Nyambedha et al. 2003b: 33).

Grandchildren also had a stronger, affectionate bond with their grandmothers than with their grandfathers in everyday practice, as children associate more with their grandmothers through childcare and socialization practices (Evans-Pritchard 1949; see also Geissler and Prince 2004: 97–98). In the *siwindhe*, girls slept near the elder wife or grandmother, and boys slept at the other end of the room. Girls were counted as mature when they began to grow breasts and pubic hair; they continued sleeping in the *siwindhe* until they married, when they would move to their husband’s home. Fearing that boys could impregnate girls in the *siwindhe*, at the age of 11 boys began to sleep in the *simba* (bachelor’s hut), which the eldest boy was supposed to construct within his father’s compound. After marrying, young men would demolish their *simba*, move from
their father’s homestead, and start their own homestead. Once a boy had moved into the simba, his grandfather instructed him during evening meals before dusk, either in the duol (by the cattle shed, where the men sit and eat together and discuss customs and issues) or in the abila (the sleeping area for older men who have left ria, the active, sexual life).

In these designated places, the siwindhe, the duol, and the abila, girls and boys were separately instructed about the composition of the kinship lineage, the prohibition on marrying clan members, sexuality, and how to relate to the opposite sex before and after marriage. It was the task of the elderly women to explain to both the girls and boys the practice of chodo (non-penetrative thigh sex), a kind of premarital sexual play, in order to prevent pregnancy. A boy was taught to rub his penis between a girl’s thighs and not to penetrate the girl since the exchange of bodily fluids between unmarried people was not permitted. The girls were warned to guard their virginity (ringruok) or protect the hymen (ringre) because girls were supposed to prove their virginity on their wedding day, as this was highly valued (Ominde 1952; Parkin 1973; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976). According to Evans-Pritchard (1949: 229), during his fieldwork there was considerable sexual play before marriage, when young people would meet and experiment with chodo in the boys’ simba:

Courtship and marriage are intimately connected with the custom of making love to girls (chodo) in the simba or bachelor’s dormitory, the hut nearest to the entrance to a Luo homestead. Youths arrange with girls to visit them there at night [...]. If a girl comes from a distance to visit her lover she may spend several nights with him in the simba. A girl may have several lovers in different homesteads whom she visits from time to time; she pleases herself in these matters. The young men will not quarrel about her, nor will her father and brothers interfere in her love affairs.

However, some of the observers of that time remarked that sexual contact before marriage was restricted for young women who had to avoid social censure, whereas young men enjoyed much greater freedom (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Ominde 1952: 37–38; Blount 1971). Ominde (1952), however, also noted that during colonial times it was also a source of worry if a young woman did not associate with young men since the main desire of the parents was to see their daughters married. Daughters have a higher economic value than sons since parents receive a bride price when their daughters marry. But since daughters move to their husbands’ homes upon marriage, parents might invest more in sons who are expected to remain close to their parents, and to support them into old age. As a result, in the past, parents often looked the other way to give both boys and girls a certain amount of freedom to be together, based on the assumption that they would engage in chodo (Ominde 1952: 37–41). Young women who
became pregnant during that time were usually forced to marry an older man with a number of wives: a premarital pregnancy meant that a young woman could never become a first wife and therefore would fetch a much lower bride-price. This was seen as a punishment and a lesson to other young women (Ominde 1952: 40–42; Ocholla-Ayayo 1997: 115–116). If a clan member was responsible for the pregnancy, the couple could be exiled (Ominde 1952: 40–42).

According to Cohen and Odhiambo (1989), Blount (1971), and some of the parents and grandparents I interviewed, the practice of *chodo* had probably been abandoned by the 1930s–1940s. Christian missionaries, under the Anglican Church in central Nyanza Province, which was dominant at that time, had played an important role in reshaping courtship practices and marriage (see also Geissler and Prince 2010). They banished initiation practices and polygamy, and denigrated sexual practices, such as *chodo* and discreet extramarital affairs. They promoted monogamy as a way to become a true Christian (Ranger 1983; Arnfred 2004; Thomas 2009). Although the ‘traditional’ system of sex education may have suffered from these changes, and many young people at the time of my fieldwork got their sexual knowledge mostly from peers, (pornographic) magazines, TV, and movies, certain aspects of the cultural heritage still exist, such as the importance of the *pim, siwindhe, simba* and the *abila*. These ‘traditional’ practices have been transformed with new circumstances and new generations: Mannheim’s (1923, cited in Cole 2007: 78) concept of ‘fresh contact’ explains how young people change older practices, because they have “a changed relationship of distance from the object and a novel approach in assimilating, using and developing the proffered material”.

It is a common phenomenon that parents and grandparents imagine their past as having been more positive than the present. The parents and grandparents of the youngsters I worked with, for instance, criticized the younger generation for beginning sexual relations at a younger age than in the past, even though they also recalled that young people traditionally practiced *chodo* before marriage. Stewart (2001) refuted similar common-sense ideas held by grandmothers in western Uganda with demographic evidence, demonstrating that the age of sexual debut had not changed much since the 1960s. Some Winam grandmothers hold young people responsible for more premarital pregnancies than in former times while others recalled that there were many children born out of wedlock in their time, as well. The 2003 Kenyan Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) has documented an increase in the age of (first) marriage and first birth over the years, which could suggest that there is quantitatively more premarital sex nowadays: because the
sexual experimental phase is prolonged, young people have more sexual partners before marriage. The KDHS (2003: 86) also found a slight increase in teenage pregnancy, with the proportion that have begun childbearing in their teen years rising from 21 percent in 1998 to 23 percent in 2003. On the other hand, anthropological accounts from the 1930s and 1940s (for South Africa, see Hunter 1936 and Shapera 1940) noted an increase in ‘illegitimate’ children born at that time (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989 for Kenya). Hunter (1936) and Shapera (1940) related this to the inability of African parents to control their children, while school-educated Africans blamed the problem on missionaries who had denounced the premarital practice of chodo, leaving young people with little alternative to sexual intercourse (Hunter 1936). Since premarital pregnancy was no longer an exception any more, according to Ominde’s (1952: 40–42) experiences, a change in attitude towards pregnant young women occurred after the 1930s: both mother and baby were welcomed in the maternal grandmother’s home. In interviews, some grandmothers confirmed that when they were girls (around the 1940s–1950s), becoming pregnant did not have a bad connotation, and a pregnant young woman was described as someone who “had an accident” (ochwanyore), and becoming pregnant was perceived as a “gift from God”. In the 1970s, Parkin (1973) and Ocholla-Ayayo (1976) reported that premarital pregnancy was no longer considered a disgrace because it was so common. Even though children born out of wedlock were ‘a gift from God’ and no longer a disgrace, women were still stigmatized as they were supposed to live up to certain moral standards (Ominde 1952); girls and young women were encouraged to remain virgins until marriage while young men could be sexually active. This paradox encapsulates the double standard of gender inequality that still persisted during the time of my research.

While chodo might have ceased to be practiced, it does not necessarily follow that premarital sex occurs more frequently at the time of my research as some parents and grandparents maintain. By idealizing the past and presenting young people’s ‘immoral sexual behaviour’ as a contemporary phenomenon, the older generations ignore that when they were still young, they also enjoyed having love affairs. And the fact of premarital pregnancy makes clear that youngsters of past generations had penetrative sex, just like the youngsters with whom I worked. What has changed, then, is not “the sexually playful nature of youth” (Cole 2007: 84) but the fact that youngsters ‘today’ are more mobile, less involved in subsistence agriculture, and highly attracted to sophisticated, consumer goods. These changes are part of the ‘modernization processes’
that have taken place on the local and the global level, to which the parents and grandparents of Winam attribute the “many deaths of today”.

3. *Piny okethore* (the land is spoiled): *Chira* and AIDS

In the context of these social changes, many parents and grandparents of the youngsters whom I came to know felt that they have lost their grip on the youth (see also Ocholla-Ayayo 1997: 111; Geissler and Prince 2007: 11–12). The expression “*Piny otho*” (the land is dying)—meaning the people as well as the land itself—was often said aloud in Winam during my fieldwork, as was “*piny olokore*” (the land has changed) and “*piny okethore*” (the land is spoiled) (see also Prince 2007: 85–86). They believed that modernization processes, which facilitate high mobility and encourage a desire for consumer goods and town life, have influenced young people’s sexual behaviour. They perceived that ‘today’, more than ever before, young people in the prime of their productive life are dying.

Different reasons were given to explain why so many relatively young people are dying. Many JoWinam associated it with the fact that people are now more connected to the outside world, which has introduced new, sophisticated lifestyles and technologies. The new connections to the outside world were not directly viewed as a positive improvement into people’s daily lives. People condemned the introduction of the car: “The white man brought the car, which was to help us, but is now killing us”. According to JoWinam, high mobility and globalization, and the resultant increased desire for consumer goods and city life, has caused disconnection from ancestral land and *chike Luo*.

While it is common for people to idealize the past, the specific complaints about ‘today’ are informative. (Note the many ways to refer to ‘then’ and ‘now’). According to JoWinam, *mar kwechewa* (in the time of our grandparents), “there was plenty of cattle, milk, and food—because those days, people worked hard on their *shambas* (fields)”. *Mar tinende* (today), young people prefer to earn “quick money” (cash), but there are not many jobs. *Mar chon* (long ago), “young people would listen to their parents and would respect elderly people, whereas nowadays they hardly ever do”. *Mar jodongo* (in the time of the elders), most illnesses could be treated with traditional herbs, even syphilis and gonorrhoea could be treated. *Mar kawuono* (today), “not all STIs are easily treatable because some recur”, and “there are many foreign, strange diseases like AIDS”, which cannot be treated with traditional herbs. HIV/AIDS was perceived as a foreign disease that came from Europe and America, which was hard to cure with traditional medicine.
One of the jayath (traditional herbalists) around Dhonam said that she has not found a remedy for AIDS, telling us: “It is a bad disease because once you treat one illness, another one comes in, again making its treatment tricky”.

Even though death is a rite of passage, a transition to another state of life, and the beginning of a journey to the land of the ancestors, the Luo people do not accept death as a natural phenomenon. Rather, it is seen as “a strange unnatural intrusion in the normal sequence of events due to violence, hatred, grudge or malpractice of sorcery, which tend to reveal human failures” (Ongang’a 1998: 225). Although many deaths in Winam are caused in biomedical terms by HIV/AIDS-related illnesses, most people attribute the deaths to chira. The symptoms of chira are the same as for HIV: becoming thin, getting diarrhoea and “the hair becomes like that of a baby”. Yet, if they would do the HIV test, the issue should become clear as the jayath (traditional herbalist) explained us: “when you would do the HIV test you will see that the person was negative and thus his death was caused by chira”. Against chira, people usually use manyasi (traditional herbs) to get healed.

Like in countless other parts of Africa, most of the deaths and illnesses that occurred in Winam are actually understood outside the biomedical facts of HIV/AIDS. Besides chira, witchcraft and djinis (spirits or evil powers) are also believed to be the cause of many deaths. It was often said that if you build a nice house in your home area, you certainly will get bewitched and eventually die from it. Jealousy and conflict might lead someone to consult a jadangla (sorcerer) and ask him to kill or harm his/her enemy by using charms. Other people make use of djinis (evil powers) to inflict harm in order to get wealth, offering human sacrifices to the spirits. It is believed that if you do not sacrifice enough to the spirits, they can kill your family and make you poor, and your children will not prosper. People seek advice from medicine men when they feel they are a victim of witchcraft or djinis, such as traditional herbalists (jayath) and ‘strong people’ (jateko), who have the ability to consult the spirits and tell what is wrong with a person. The ones who are ‘Saved’ (born-again, evangelical Christians) do not believe that chira, witchcraft, or evil powers will affect them because they believe in God’s power and protection. ‘Saved Christians’ will explain illness and death in biomedical terms, pointing to malaria, typhoid, or pneumonia to explain why somebody is ill or has died: they never, however, publicly said that somebody died due to HIV/AIDS (see also Prince 2007).

The silence around naming HIV/AIDS as the cause of death was widespread. While some JoWinam did privately confide to me that a certain person died of HIV/AIDS, in public, as for example during funeral eulogies, it was often said that the deceased...
“loved women”, “was a lifist” (a person who has many extramarital affairs), or “had been seriously sick the last months”. Anyone who named HIV/AIDS as the cause of death would be seen as disrespecting the surviving family and friends, who would be stigmatized if it became known that the deceased had died of AIDS. Dying of chira or witchcraft is not seen as negatively; the deceased person could not be blamed for the cause of his death, since there are so many Luo rules and so many witches that it is impossible to be aware of all of them. Blaming chira or witchcraft protects the deceased person and the surviving family and friends, but it also reinforces the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS.

The Comaroffs (1993: xxx) have suggested that blaming witchcraft is a way of dealing with uncertainty and the ambiguities of modernity. However, in her book, Questioning Misfortune: The pragmatics of uncertainty, Whyte (1997) argues that uncertainty is not a product of modernity, as uncertainty has always been among us. She states that “AIDS creates doubts and worry, but so do other afflictions”, and explains that, among the Ugandans she researched, while “sorcery and spirits involve a meaningful plan of action for dealing with uncertainty, the idea of AIDS does not” (Whyte 1997: 205). There are modes of dealing with witchcraft, but JoWinam see no way out once someone is infected with HIV, since during my research, ARVs were still a distant dream.

Having HIV or dying of AIDS is stigmatized not only because the individual is blamed for his/her ‘immoral’ behaviour, but also because it questions the identity and HIV status of the entire family. Dying of AIDS is not only considered shameful because of its association with adultery and unprotected sex, but because AIDS affects some of the most productive members of society. Moreover, AIDS is special because it directly affects that what is most dear to humans: intimacy and reproduction. Therefore, deaths attributed to AIDS are perceived as bad or undignified. A ‘bad death’ is “a death which comes too early, which terminates the life of someone who has not yet completed his course, who has not yet come to full maturity” (Van der Geest 2004: 904). In addition, “those who die of AIDS or related illnesses are assumed not to have a chance of life-after-death, because what is condemned in life is also condemned in the world of the dead. In consequence, death from AIDS is seen as a “permanent death” (Nzioka 2000: 2). In Winam, general talk about HIV/AIDS is permissible, but naming AIDS as the cause of death is avoided, due to fear of stigmatization. Instead, death is mainly attributed to chira, witchcraft, and evil powers, however, at the same time, the existence of AIDS is not underestimated.
4. “Playing sex”

In a context where many deaths are attributed to AIDS, young people in Winam—just as in the past—continue to explore masculinity and femininity through “playing sex”, the phrase they use when they refer to having sex. The use of the verb “playing” implies that sex is just a fun game, something done by children: it is also misleading, since it implies there are no serious consequences. The phrase itself suggests that the serious possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS is not taken into account.

Onyango, a 17-year-old student in secondary school, told us the story of his nephews, Boy and Juma, and his stepbrother, Joel, who “played sex” with various girlfriends. For these encounters, they met up their niece’s empty house (she was away living in Nairobi), which was situated outside their father’s compound, close to the market centre of Dhonam, far from parental control. Onyango wrote in his diary:

From the lake, I go to sell sodas near the butchery. After some time, Boy comes to me and asks me to play draft (checkers). As we are playing, he tells me that he has a visitor [a girlfriend] so he asks me for the key to my room. I win the game because he is not concentrating. He is only thinking about his visitor. He tells me that I should not inform his other girlfriend Rya about his new girlfriend. He also tells me not to come too early to the house because he plans to leave late.

After two hours, Boy’s girlfriend Rya comes to me and asks me where Boy is. I tell her that Boy is playing draft with other guys near the butcher. She tells me to go and call him but I refuse because I know very well that Boy is not there and I do not want to tell her where Boy is. “Give me your key. I want to go and take my newspapers,” she says to me. I lie to her saying that I left the key at home. She leaves angrily and says that she will come back later.

After Boy has cleared (i.e., has had sex) with his other girlfriend, he comes to me and buys the girl a bottle of soda.

At around 4:30 pm, my former classmate Marie comes to the soda depot. Marie sits next to me. I ask her about her school. Soon after, Joel starts talking to her. They make stories and laugh loudly. When Joel starts to introduce the topic of friendship, she looks into my eyes. Joel notices and says: “Onyango is not concerned about our love, it is upon you to decide”. I signal to Joel and whisper to him that Marie has already been booked by (i.e., has a relationship with) our nephew Juma. Joel is really annoyed but he has to bear with the situation.

After that Juma arrives and asks me if I have already informed Marie. I have but ask Juma to wait for me a bit. After that, I leave with Juma and Marie to the cinema. When we reach the cinema, Juma tells me that he has some secret words to discuss with Marie. Therefore, I leave them alone so that they can discuss their issues in my absence. They discuss and Marie agrees to visit Juma that night. Juma calls me and asks me to escort them to my house. After I have escorted them to my house and have left them there, I go back to the cinema. After Juma and Marie have shown their love to each other in my room, Juma escorts Marie up to her home and comes back to the cinema. He finds me in the cinema and informs me that he has escorted Marie. I ask Juma if he had sex with Marie and if it was protected sex or unprotected. Juma tells me that they have played sex but that it was protected sex.
“Never have unprotected sex with your partner”, I told him. Juma is happy and appreciates me because I am a good friend to him. He tells me that Marie promised to visit him again, before she leaves for school. After the cinema ends, Juma and I go home to bed.

Young men and women in Winam “played sex” in places that were easily available and conveniently located, in places, like the niece’s house, that were both hidden and at the same time very public. Onyango’s room close to the market centre was often ‘rented’ by his male friends, so they could have sex in a place away from their own home; as explained before, out of respect and according to Luo rules, having sex deserves privacy, “no speech or gaze” (Geissler and Prince 2007: 130).

Sexual experiments among young people are very common in Winam. They are a way to know the opposite sex and are perceived as an important aspect of life, especially as part of becoming an adult. While “playing sex” is thus a sign of adolescent maturity, it is differently perceived by young women and young men since sexual relationships in Winam are clearly marked by gender inequality, as I explain in the following paragraphs.

4.1. The importance of “playing sex” for young men

According to the young men with whom I worked, they needed to explore having sex while they were young so that by the time that they married, the urge to have many sexual partners would be “exhausted”. Many young men felt that they needed to have a girlfriend otherwise they would lack experience common among their age-mates, and their peers would laugh at them. When I asked Omosh, a 16-year-old young fisherman and musician, why he felt he needed to have a girlfriend, he explained:

To experience what others encounter. You must know how to associate with girls and if you don’t learn how to associate with girls then you will encounter some problems in future, such as you won’t be able to face a girl or a wife directly because you have never learned to talk to girls when you were young (informal conversation, August 2005).

Many of the young men I interviewed grew up believing that their male identity was defined through sexual ability and accomplishment (see also Silberschmidt 2001, Simpson 2009). Just as Simpson (2009) found, the young men with whom I worked told me that newly enrolled students at boarding schools had to have convincing stories of sexual experience, otherwise they were mocked. If a young man did not have sexual relations before marrying, he was often viewed as abnormal or “weak”, and not only by his peers, but also by his parents and neighbours, who would gossip about how he was not showing interest in young women or was unable to attract them. Thus, not only do
young men experience ‘peer pressure’ to prove their masculinity, but also ‘relative pressure’ from parents and relatives to engage in sex. It was therefore in the young men’s interest to prove that their attempt to seduce a certain young woman was successful, and young men who had many girlfriends liked to brag about it, because they believed they had “seducing power” to conquer many hearts and to make women give in to them. When they failed to conquer a certain woman, they did not easily give up. A young man might even force a young woman to have sex with him if she continued denying his approaches. Although forced sex and rape are certainly not acceptable in Winam, if a young woman complained to anyone about it, she might well be blamed for attracting the man. When a man did not win the heart of a certain woman, some men comforted each other by comparing women with *matatus* (local buses): “Girls are just like *matatus*: if you miss one, you get two”, which meant if you miss the first woman, you can catch another one because there are many girls and young women around.

Many of the young men believed that they were in a position to demand sex from their partners whenever they wanted in order to “reduce the heat” they felt. They did not want to hear that their girlfriend was tired: “I want to have sex when I ask for it because that is why we are sexual partners” (Okoth, 19 years old, focus group discussion, June 2006). Young men believed that their sexual lust (*luma*) could hardly be controlled, as Josh (19 years old) said: “There is no way I can control myself. Something has just driven me crazy. That space (the vagina), madam, let me just occupy it” (focus group discussion, June 2006).

Young men described having sex as “having fun” (*raha*) and getting happy. Some of the young men also preferred to have sex with a “smart” (i.e., attractive) woman as the woman’s beauty would make them even happier during sexual intercourse: “She has to be beautiful—not so dark in colour, with a nice butt and breasts and nice legs which I can look at and get happy” (Peter, who claimed to be 23 years old but was probably older, informal conversation, September 2005). In contrast, some of the young men said that they prefer to use unattractive women “to relieve their tension”, but do not have ongoing sexual relationships with them. Another reason for having sex with ‘ugly’ women was that young men assumed that they had less chance of being HIV infected, since not many young men wanted them because of their ugliness.

In addition to the pleasure of sex, young men also described it as the ultimate way to release stress and to forget about their sorrows. Onyango for instance, wrote in his diary that one of his peers from secondary school said that life was incomplete if he did not have a lover with whom he could have sex: “I cannot lose Trina and stay lonely
like a widower. If you remain without a lover then life is incomplete” (Onyango’s diary, November 2005).

Sex is thus at the essence of a relationship: it is the very reason why a young man is with a woman. But notions of men as irrational and filled with uncontrollable biological urges are a discursive construction, and these change over time. Simpson (2009), who did longitudinal research in Zambia on male sexual behaviour from adolescence until adulthood over a period of almost 25 years, highlights that boys who are sexually inexperienced often feel anxious about failing in their performance of sexual intercourse and fear not being accepted among their peers; he argues, further, that the literature does not sufficiently attend to this phenomenon (see also Silberschmidt 2001). Simpson (2009: 7) posits that for many of his former students, the risk of failing to act like ‘real men’ in their sexual lives was sometimes perceived as greater importance than any actual health risk.

To conclude, the importance of “playing sex” stems from peer pressure and to a small extent relative pressure, which frames sex as an important part of masculinity, general wellbeing, and happiness. In a context where the dominant discursive construction of masculinity is based on sexual ability and experience, there is consequently little room left for young men to talk about emotional attachment to young women. My data illustrate that young men struggled to live up to this ideal image of masculinity, to not show any emotions, and to act as the main provider. (In the next chapter I elaborate further on the challenges that men face).

4.2. The importance of “playing sex” for young women

As in the past, young women are expected to refrain from (penetrative) sex and to remain virgins until marriage since, for young women, sex is linked in social norms to procreation. While young women enjoy experimenting with sex just like young men, the social and cultural context demands they ‘play the innocent’ and keep their sexual desires silent. Female chastity is the social norm and sexual pleasure for women is unthinkable, as Arnfred (2004: 7) explains: “female sexual desire in particular […] has generally been in a context of or with undertones of moral condemnation”.

During my fieldwork, I found that even though many of the young women engaged in premarital sex, it was very hard for a young woman to admit that she was engaging in sexual relationships and even more so to confess that she actually enjoyed having sex. Since Elisa (19 years old and a primary school graduate, informal conversation, August 2006) was already a (divorced) mother, it was more acceptable for
her to openly share her experiences with sex with my research assistant and me. She said sex was “something once you have tasted and discovered that it is very sweet, you cannot leave it”.

However, if unmarried women dared to openly admit the “sweetness” of having sex, they were easily perceived as “bad girls” who “ging’eyo mang’eny” (know a lot) and like raha (having fun). Moreover, when young women “gihero bayo bayo” (love roaming around) and were often seen in public with a boyfriend, JoWinam assumed that such women were having sex because they were interested in receiving money and gifts. JoWinam often referred to such women with the insulting term “ochot” (prostitute).

While young men were permitted—even encouraged—to have sexual relations with several women, young women were called ochot when they engaged in sexual relationships, highlighting the gendered normalization of inequality in Winam.

There was a group of women that were nicknamed “the having-fun girls”. They listened to secular music and enjoyed going out to different places to meet up with different boyfriends with whom they could engage in sex. The “having-fun girls” had sex because they liked having fun, and not because they needed money, like the “dot.com girls” (see previous chapter). According to Alice—a 20-year-old young woman who was waiting to get admitted to college—“having-fun girls” who had children usually left them at their parents’ home and continued “with their business (of dating boyfriends and having sex)”. Sometimes the child remained alone while the mother was meeting a boyfriend elsewhere or was at a disco matanga. From time to time the children were even given sleeping tablets to make the baby sleep until the mother got back home. MinMercy, who was 15 or 16 years old when we first met, told us about one case in which a baby actually died while the mother was out visiting her boyfriend: she was gone the whole night and returned home at 5 p.m. the following day, only to find her child dead. Another female youngster, Phyllis (18 years old, with two children from two different men), who got pregnant for the first time when she was in Class 6 of primary school, did not leave her children alone while she met up with boyfriends but did leave them at her mother’s place. She explained her behaviour by saying: “Raha ne omaka” (fun had taken me). Phyllis actually travelled all over Winam to visit different boyfriends, and when we tried to find her at home her mother could only inform us that “Phyllis went to visit a girl in Ramba” or “Phyllis is lost in Seme”. One day, we found her living in a rented house in Ong’ielo, the village next to Dhonam. She insisted she was “just visiting a friend” but later admitted that she was “trying out” a fisherman from Seme. Phyllis was known around Dhonam for having lots of different boyfriends, and
because she was often ill and her lips were discoloured, JoWinam gossiped that she might be infected with HIV.

Just as for young men, the importance of sex also is relayed to young women through peer pressure and to some extent relative pressure. A young man who is interested in a certain girl or woman will attempt many ways to seduce her, including giving her gifts. Young women do not directly pressure their female peers to engage in sex with young men, but by showing off gifts received from boyfriends, other young women realize that they better also look for a boyfriend in order to receive such gifts. Not having a boyfriend may also be an indication to others that the young woman is not perceived as beautiful.

Adhis (20 years old), a strong follower of the Anglican Church which emphasises the importance of chastity, explained that she associated having sex while still being in school with doing something wrong. She imagined that she would not only feel guilty but would regret it since she would have to bear the consequences of taking care of a child born out of wedlock, and she feared getting STIs. Petronella asked Adhis what she thought of premarital sex, and she responded:

I think that it is risky. First of all, to start with in secondary [school]—the girls who already had premarital sex already have children. So at times, they don’t have a clear conscience, so you are guilty of doing something wrong, so maybe it will haunt you, it will just haunt you: “Why did you do that?”

Secondly, maybe you have kids out of wedlock, it is also not a good thing having a kid out of wedlock. I always say that, I promised myself that I will never ever have a kid out of wedlock because . . . [if] I marry someone who is not the father of my kids, how will I expect him to love these kids? So that is why I hated it. There is also the risk of getting STIs, especially HIV/AIDS (in-depth interview, May 2006).

Adhis recalled how her uncle “caned her” after she had exchanged greetings with her boyfriend when she was in primary school:

I can remember, there is a day my uncle saw me with him, I think that is what put me off from him. Then I was [dating] Mike, my uncle’s kid, and I saw him. We were walking with Mike then we exchanged greetings then my uncle saw me, then my uncle caned me. I still have that mark with a metal. Just greetings! I was so much annoyed!

Sex is as important for young women as it is for young men, but the behaviour of young women is subject to a different moral standard when compared to their male peers: young women’s sex lives are seen through a lens of immorality and sin whereas those of young men are not. Sexual relations are thus Janus-faced for many young women in Winam, causing a combination of contradictory feelings of guilt and pleasure: on the one hand, they feel pressured to conform to the moral standards of remaining
chaste, and on the other hand, there is the temptation of sexual satisfaction and gifts, and the desire to have their love returned. Young women manage to find creative, tactical ways to express their sexual and loving desires, and to arrange to receive the gifts they desire (see next chapter). In particular, it is easier and more acceptable to confess an emotional attachment to a young man than to admit ‘sexual lust’. The art is in finding a good balance between the contradictory feelings of guilt and pleasure, or at least hiding the pleasure of sex from the public.

In sum, “playing sex” is a central aspect of young people’s growing-up in Winam. During this phase of sexual experimentation and courting, peer pressure is very high as both young women and men are expected by their friends to enjoy a certain amount of sexual freedom. For most, sex before marriage is to be enjoyed, but for some religious youth, it is sinful behaviour for which they expect God to punish them. Gendered social norms make a difference concerning the role of sex: young men are expected to prove their virility; young women are supposed to remain chaste. Through “playing sex”, young people continuously challenge but also reproduce the existing power relations and dominant constructions of gender roles. There are paradoxical consequences: sex can create new life and even economic security for women, be it only temporarily, but it can also take life away and ruin livelihoods and future prospects. In a context where sex is ubiquitous and ambiguous, there is a notable ambivalence among youths about its consequences and risks, as we will see in the following section.

5. Young people’s tactics for avoiding the ‘health risks’ caused by sex

While premarital sex commonly happens in Winam, it is culturally inappropriate to acknowledge or talk about it, except among peers. The practices of self-silencing and the ‘secrecy’ (Hardon and Posel 2012) of young people are a form of respect towards their parents and grandparents. Researchers in other parts of Africa have found similar practices, including Bochow (2012), for example, who documented that young people in Ghana do not talk about sexuality in front of their parents as this would indicate a disregard for the rules of respect and the hierarchies on which they are based. In addition, secrecy about sexual relationships is also encouraged by Christian churches and HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns, which both stress sexual abstinence before and fidelity within marriage. However, in both present-day Winam and in earlier times, as in many other places, abstinence and chastity do not make sense for many young people.
They enjoy the pleasure and the benefits that they gain through these sexual relationships: feeling like an adult, gaining peer approval, and expanding their livelihood networks. Notably, this does not mean that they do not understand that having sex involves ‘health risks’: they are aware that they need not only to think about pregnancy but also HIV, and they do so in a pragmatic way.

5.1. Avoiding premarital pregnancy and its consequences

Although procreation, fertility, motherhood, and children are highly valued among married couples, many young unmarried people simply wanted to experiment with sex without getting pregnant, especially while in school or having urban aspirations. Having a child born out of wedlock could only hinder their future plans. Many pregnancies of the youngsters that I studied were therefore often perceived as being ‘unwanted’. Van der Sijpt’s (2011) study of how women deal with ‘pregnancy interruptions’ in eastern Cameroon shows that it is unhelpful to categorize pregnancies as ‘unwanted’ or ‘wanted’ because it hinders a deeper understanding of women’s ambiguous experiences of interrupted fertility.21 While at a certain moment of time, a pregnancy might be ‘wanted’, at another moment during the pregnancy it might be ‘unwanted’, depending on the circumstances. A pregnancy might be considered “a hindrance to an urban future” or it might be a way to stabilize a certain sexual relationship with a financially capable boyfriend. Although I agree with Van der Sijpt’s (2011: 163) finding that “the desirability of fertility is often contradictory, temporal, and situational”, in this section I focus on how the youngsters with whom I worked tried to avoid premarital pregnancy; for most of them, it was often an undesirable outcome.

During my fieldwork, the Luo expression used for getting pregnant was “omako ich” (she has gotten another stomach), which has a negative connotation. The poor economic situation made it harder to provide for all the additional mouths to feed. Unlike a few decades ago, premarital pregnancies were no longer perceived as a “gift from God” or as an “accident”, but rather as an obstacle to a family’s progress. Babies born out of wedlock were another burden on top of the many bedridden HIV-infected persons, and the orphans left behind. Many young people who were engaging in sexual relationships were concerned with avoiding pregnancy, especially while still being in school, when they had no financial means for taking care of a child. Girls and young women particularly were afraid that a premarital pregnancy might scare off their boyfriends and would not bring any improvement in their livelihood. Moreover, they believed that having a baby born out of wedlock would “deny the praise of a young
woman”, or ruin her reputation. Their fear of becoming pregnant was actually stronger than that of becoming infected with HIV; pregnancy is noticed within a few months, but HIV/AIDS is perceived as a problem in the long run, as only half the people with HIV develop AIDS within 10 years after becoming infected.

5.1.1. Difficulties in avoiding premarital pregnancy

The first way to avoid pregnancy is the use of contraceptives. Birth control methods, such as condoms, pills, and injections, were available and free of charge in Winam, except for intra-uterine devices (IUD). Although these services existed, the youngsters I worked with found the nurses at public hospitals not ‘youth friendly’, because some of the nurses refused to attend to women who were not accompanied by their male partner. In this way, local hospital staff in Winam reaffirmed patriarchal control and left a number of young women without care. The Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR), measured in the 2003 KDHS, shows that the 35–39 age group has the highest use of contraception, with 48.7 percent, and the lowest level is among the 15–19 age group, with 15.2 percent.

In the past, health providers such as Family Planning, an NGO that offers sexual and reproductive health information and services, used to recommend condoms only for married adults who wanted to limit the amount of children; the youth therefore did not see this NGO as a resource, telling me “Family [Planning] is only for married couples”. The policies of Family Planning changed in the 1990s, but many young women were still misinformed (i.e., they believed that their boyfriend’s presence and his signature was required or that only married couples were treated), and did not dare to inquire about their rights or about contraceptives (see also Rutenberg and Watkins 1997). Even when young women had a chance to escape male dominance in sexual relations, a number of factors stood in their way, such as unwelcoming nurses or exclusive policies. As a consequence, some of the young women left control of their fertility and sexuality in their male partners’ hands. The following conversation with MinMercy, a young woman about 15 or 16 years old who dropped out of primary school in Class 6, illustrated this:

Petronella: Now that Mercy (her daughter) is big, when do you plan to get another baby?

MinMercy: Not now (laughing). I cannot become pregnant now, Mercy is enough.

Petronella: Are you using pills or the injection?

MinMercy: I wanted to go to Family but Ochien’g (her husband) refused.
Petronella: You may become pregnant again. Why don’t you use the pills?

MinMercy: Ochien’g refused because if you use those pills, you would get thin and maybe not be able to have more children.

Petronella: Why don’t you go to hospital and inquire because I think it’s the doctors who advise us on the best option to take.

MinMercy: It would be difficult because normally they prefer that one goes with the husband but Ochien’g might be against it, yet the husband is required to sign some consent forms... If I do not use Family, I can become pregnant now?

Petronella: It is possible, so maybe you could use the safe-cycle method (informal conversation, November 2005).

It would be hard for MinMercy to convince her husband to obtain contraceptives, as this would be very unusual, especially because they already have a child. But MinMercy was not happy with her relationship with Ochien’g since he did not meet her expectations of a financially capable husband, and she wanted to leave Winam. Another baby would make this extremely difficult.

The conversation with MinMercy also illustrates that a number of young women and men believed that contraceptive pills and injections make women infertile, fat, or skinny. Consequently, very few unmarried women admitted taking contraceptives, and in some cases, contraceptives were used only after having experienced the consequences of unprotected sex. Since few unmarried young women acquired contraceptives and many of them feared side effects, premarital pregnancies happened fairly often. In sum, avoiding premarital pregnancy was made difficult by youth-unfriendly services, misinformation about contraception use and availability, and male dominance. As a consequence, for some young women in Winam abortion was their last and only option.

5.1.2. Abortion as the last and only option

Kenyan law forbids abortion, and health centres sometimes portray it as murder. Anti-abortion messages from the state and the churches can be graphic: a poster on the wall of Yeshica, the HIV/AIDS prevention project in Winam, depicted a standing girl, crying as her stomach is being cut with a saw to remove a fully developed baby. Being illegal, abortions in Kenya are more expensive than in other countries (e.g., South Africa), where they are sometimes state- or donor-funded, and free for patients in need.

Despite the moral pressure, risks, and costs involved, some of the young women that I followed saw no other option than “removing” or aborting the foetus because of the burden that a baby would cause. In a context where many HIV/AIDS messages urged young people to abstain or at least to use a condom, pregnancy made young people’s
sexual activity and their ‘immoral behaviour’ visible. Young people felt highly ashamed and feared their parents’ reaction. According to Akinyi’s grandmother, some youngsters even committed suicide once they realized that they were pregnant:

Akinyi: Did parents not quarrel with girls who became pregnant before? Maybe the girls did not say that they were pregnant because they were scared of the parents?

Grandmother: Nowadays, there is much more gossip and bad talk about those who become pregnant [than before]. Nowadays parents quarrel with their daughters, but when some of the children committed suicide, some of them stopped quarrelling. I can give an example of a girl who became pregnant and hung herself because her mother was quarrelling. The girl’s father somehow tried to talk to the mother to forgive the girl but the mother continued quarrelling and the girl took the decision to kill herself. Another example is of a girl who became pregnant and took a lot of quinine: she mixed all the tablets with water and drank it. She died after taking the mixture (in-depth interview, March 2006).

Not only did some girls or young women feel personally ashamed but they were also blamed for bringing dishonour to their entire family. In these cases, it was sometimes the young woman’s mother who decided to take her daughter to the hospital to avoid the shame of a pregnancy. A third reason for choosing abortion, besides escaping the economic burden of another child and avoiding societal shame, was that young women feared they might be unable to find another partner. With a child born out of wedlock, some women expressed that they no longer felt “marketable” since they would lose out in competition for a man against girls or women without children. Elisa—a young, divorced, 19-year-old mother—described a woman in such a situation:

She must have conceived this [child] after leaving her husband, and she tried to abort, maybe, because it spoils her marketability (kethone market) for getting younger men, maybe she loves younger men. It also denies her praise (kethone sifa) (informal conversation, August 2006).

Whatever the motive may be, once a decision was made not to keep the foetus/child, young women first sought advice on how to abort from their female peers. The most common method for abortion was ingesting very large doses of black tea leaves or swallowing a large quantity of washing powder (see also Koster-Oyekan 1998: 1306–1308). Others used traditional herbs, but, according to Elisa, some traditional doctors in Winam did not want or did not have the skills or knowledge to help with abortion. According to Ocholla-Ayayo’s (1997: 115–116) research, many presented at hospitals with septic abortions, which was a problem in both rural and urban settings. For this reason, JoWinam commonly recalled the good assistance of Dr. Martin, who ran the private Neema Clinic in Dhonam until he died in 2006, and who used to carry out a
number of abortions illegally. Youngsters often consulted him as the last option, when ‘traditional methods’ had failed. Although Dr. Martin asked a relatively high price (approximately 4000 Kenyan shillings, or 50 euro), without his expertise, the risks could be extremely high. Youngsters really appreciated Dr. Martin’s help: he kept their confidences, did not ask many questions, and did not inform their parents, as this would be too shameful. Although the youngsters could pay in instalments, the cost was an enormous burden, one that, in general, the young men involved were expected to shoulder.

Although many of the parents and grandparents warned young women against premarital pregnancies, once it was learned that she was pregnant, they tried to convince her to keep the baby. They feared (with good reason) the complications of abortion, which could result in the young woman’s death. Elisa’s mother had tried to threaten Elisa by saying: “If you become pregnant, you do not abort. If you abort, you go and get somewhere else to stay”. MinMercy’s parents also advised their daughter not to abort and promised to send her back to school once she delivered:

Ellen:    And when you found out that you were pregnant, what did you do?

MinMercy: I did nothing, I wanted to abort.

Ellen:    Why did you want to abort?

MinMercy: I knew our father would scold me, and I still wanted to finish school, so I was asking myself, “After I give birth, will I really finish school?” So I did not want this child.

Ellen:    And when you went home, what did your parents tell you?

MinMercy: Our mother is the one who told me—I think our father talked to our mother because she told me that our father said that I should not be scared now, that I did it because it was nice to me, that I did something that I liked (she laughs), isn’t it? So [she told me that] I should not try something that I have heard about (abortion) or that I see other girls do. [She told me] that thing hurts people, can even kill and have someone buried. So she told me just to leave25 and after I give birth, I would be sent back to school and would then study at home (in-depth interview, March 2006).

5.1.3. Bearing the consequences

Being pregnant and having a child was not an easy option because it changed young women’s future prospects. MinMercy, for example, delivered her baby in Dhonam, at the home of Ochien’g, the child’s father. But afterwards, she had no money to get back to her parents’ home in Siaya, two hours away by bus, where she had planned to continue
schooling: it would take her two full years before she managed to get home. Then, being a young mother, she felt ashamed to return to primary school, and desired instead to pursue vocational training—but, again, there was no money for it. Although Ochien’g wanted to assume his responsibilities as a father, MinMercy refused, as she had been clear from the beginning that she did not want a child and she did not want to be married yet, at least not to Ochien’g.26

In or out of marriage, many of the young women that I followed had to bear the consequences of an ‘unwanted’ pregnancy in several ways, e.g., being expelled from school, delivering away from home, and needing to care for the child. Yet they rarely complained when the young men who impregnated them later decided not to marry them. As Elisa, whose boyfriend had left her once he found out that she was pregnant, explained to us:

Some people, once they have impregnated you, they don’t even know what the child is wearing or eating. You know that when you become pregnant, you will be shocked for one week, then you will tell him and he will refuse [to take responsibility], and that is when the friendship ends (informal conversation, August 2006).

Young women rarely protested their inferior position as pregnant, unmarried women in a society where people constantly reminded them about the social norms and values that placed responsibility and guilt on them. This may be because the young women felt some level of agency. During my fieldwork, it rarely happened that a pregnant girl or young woman was punished by being forced to marry an old man with a number of wives, as had been the custom in the past (see also Cohen and Odhiambo 1989). Instead, once the young woman had delivered, she usually stayed with her child at her maternal home, and often found some space to manoeuvre within this situation (see later on).

And it was not only the men who ended relationships after an ‘unwanted’ pregnancy: MinMercy left Ochien’g when the child was two years old. Elisa explained: “It is not a must that [the father] is the one I must stay with. I can still marry someone else”. Omosh, a 16-year-old musician, was left by his girlfriend, who married someone else soon after she had given birth to Omosh’s child. The reasons for this may never be clear, but his girlfriend might have chosen to stay with a man who was more financially responsible than Omosh, believing that he could take better care of them. She might have had a concurrent relationship with this man, and thus been able to convince him that he was the father—or he might have actually been the biological father. In this context of male superiority, women could still employ ‘hidden’ tactics to manoeuvre and choose a man they assumed capable of taking care of them. Van der Sijpt’s (2011: 163–
At around 10:30am, I went to the market to play draft. Before we started playing Odhiambo, Depo and his friends were story telling and the story was about Eddy. They were saying that Eddy has bad luck because every girl he plays sex with, becomes pregnant. I asked them to tell me the girls whom he impregnated. Depo said that he impregnated Scholastica. I told them that in my opinion, Rambo was the one who impregnated Schola. I told them that Eddy was just a messenger but they refused to listen to me and were convinced that Eddy was the one responsible for the pregnancy. After that, Nick also said that Rambo was the one responsible for the pregnancy because he used to see them together. After that, my former girlfriend Flo was passing by with her son. After they have passed, Okinyi asked to know the boy who impregnated Flo. I cheated them that I do not know but I knew. Ngota revealed and said that Erick is responsible for the pregnancy because Flo used to be his lover. Nick disagreed and said that Eddy is the one who impregnated her because the son resembles Eddy physically. After that they told me to prove that I was not responsible. I told them that a long time ago, Flo was my girlfriend but later, Eddy was in love with her. Flo cheated me that Eddy was in love with her but she never agreed. After a few days, I caught Eddy in their room. From then I handed it over to Eddy officially. “Maybe she conceived when she was still your girlfriend?”, Okinyi asked. “Don’t be illiterate, a child stays in the womb for nine months and Flo conceived two years later after we had broken our relationship”, I replied angrily and added: “by the way, we never had unprotected sex”. After that, Okinyi and the group said that they would do research and obtain the truth. I agreed and told them not to forget (December 2005).

Young men argue that young women are supposed to know their “safe days”, i.e., the less fertile days of the menstrual cycle when the chance of getting pregnant is reduced, and should inform a young man when having sex is ‘unsafe’. Okoth (19 years old, Class 3) and Jeremiah (17 years old, Class 8) expressed that a man should not need to worry about this:

Okoth: Conceiving doesn’t come to my mind because I know the time she comes is when she wants me to do it for her: she knows how her days are (when she is fertile). When you see her, you get aroused, then those issues you ask about
Even if a young woman warns her boyfriend that she is not in her “safe days”, however, he might still insist on having sex, and actually be in a position to get his will.

Only a few young men whom I followed said that they would take responsibility for children fathered during adolescence. Many of them, especially those who were still in school, did not have the economic means to support a child. Many were familiar with women’s ‘tactical manipulation’ and argued that women were rarely faithful, making paternity impossible to determine. Petrus, a 17-year-old young man who had just finished primary school and who was one of the participants in the microloans program at Yeshica, told us: “Girls normally sleep around and have children with other men, then they come back saying it is your child. A girl who used to be Musa’s (his cousin) girlfriend, came back home recently with a child that she claims to be Musa’s. We chased her away and insulted her.” When Petronella asked him if the baby resembled Musa, he replied: “We don’t care about the looks. She should have gone back to tell Musa about the pregnancy before one month elapsed. I will also chase away a girl I have been with, who happens to conceive and comes back to tell me about it after one month” (informal conversation, June 2006).

Petrus’ words again illustrate the normalized power discrepancy that existed between young men and women. While it was common for pregnant girls to be expelled from school, the young men involved usually remained in school. There were ways to punish young men, but they were largely not pursued. If the young woman’s parents knew the young man who impregnated their daughter, they could call the police and have him arrested. If he refused to marry her, her father or guardian could take legal action and demand pregnancy compensation under customary law. According to Thomas (2006: 180–186), who did research among schoolgirls in East Africa, such court cases were often held to recoup the money spent on their daughter’s schooling. In Winam, the parents of a pregnant young woman seldom brought such cases into court because they could not afford the court expenses in the event they lost the case. The paternity of the child might not be known or the impregnated young woman might fear revealing it. Due to gender power imbalances and widespread social attitudes that blame women for
pregnancies, the burden of premarital pregnancy usually fell on the shoulders of young women.

With gender inequality being highly normalized, young men often flatly refuse to take responsibility for a premarital pregnancy and seldom faced punishment. Young women used a range of tactics to deal with the consequences of premarital pregnancies, including abortion and assigning paternity to a financially capable man. In a time when HIV is rampant, however, both partners bear the additional consequences of HIV. Young men may be able to literally run away from their girlfriends’ pregnancies, but both young men and young women feel that they can no longer escape HIV. One of the ways that young people attempt to prevent HIV infection is through the tactic of carefully selecting sexual partners. Locally, young people refer to it as “doing research” on their sexual partners, a practice that shows that they know that they not only need to consider their own behaviour, but that of others with whom they are involved.

5.2. Avoiding HIV infection by “doing research” on sexual partners

Several qualitative studies carried out in sub-Saharan Africa have documented how both young men and women use alternative, innovative tactics for HIV prevention (Moyer 2003; Dilger 2003; Watkins 2004; Smith and Watkins 2005; Poulin 2007), because they perceive international and national prevention strategies as unattractive and unrealistic. Few people in Winam had been tested for HIV at the time of my fieldwork despite the fact that testing sites have been widely expanded. In Winam, the young people with whom I worked preferred to study the physical appearance, social network, and rumoured behaviour of their sexual partner in the hope of minimizing their risk of exposure to AIDS. They tried to determine whether their sexual partner showed physical symptoms of HIV infection (e.g., change in hair texture, rashes, and the colour of the skin or lips). They trusted their ability to diagnose AIDS by figuring out their partner’s background and past sexual relationships using local knowledge. As Ochien’g, a 22-year-old fisherman, described it: one should not accept “porridge with lumps”. In this analogy, the porridge is the beautiful young woman; lumps are sexually transmitted diseases. Porridge without lumps can be consumed without worry, meaning that you can have unprotected sex. This metaphor nicely depicts why young people’s perceptions regarding disease and risk are sometimes counterproductive from an epidemiological point of view: Sex is compared to a safe, staple food served daily in school, and you only realize it has lumps when you are eating it, when it is too late. While young people ideally intend to “do research” on their sexual partner before they
engage in sex, the reality shows that many youngsters inquire about their partner’s background and past after they have already engaged in sex.

5.2.1. Inquiring about their sexual partner’s background and past

Many young men inquired about the background and past sexual relationships of young women through various communication channels, most commonly their social networks, which are gender- and age-based (see also Chimbiri 2007). Geoffrey, a 20-year-old carpenter who was only sporadically seen with a girlfriend, explained how he tries to carefully figure out a young woman’s past:

Now if you want to know a girl’s past, you just need to connect with a villager. [...] He will tell you the background of that girl. Or even some girl from there who also knows her walk (behaviour). [...] So those people are the ones you will just be asking slowly, slowly, and you do not ask it when you are very serious. Because when you are serious, someone may get alarmed (i.e., figure out that you are interested in the girl), so you just ask people slowly, slowly. So that is the way that you can know how a person is: maybe the girl is a witch or the girl's movement (behaviour) is like this, or the girl has given birth. Maybe the girl lied to you that she does not have a child, but her child is big, is [already] herding [animals] at home, so she might only tell you this after you are married. So only the person who is close with her is the one who can tell you her cleanness (the truth about her) (focus group discussion, June 2006).

Danny, a 19-year-old secondary school graduate brought up in Nairobi, discussed with Petronella how he would ideally approach the problem:

Danny: I take one month before bringing up the issue of intimacy with a girl I am interested in. I just talk to her generally without telling her I am interested in her, I just befriend her, get to know her friends, at least one of her relatives from home and ask them questions about her like if she has a boyfriend, about her character, for example whether she goes to the shamba (field) or not. During that period as well I take her home and introduce her as a friend to the relatives. At times, I ask her to go and visit me when I am not at home, the intention being to see how she reacts and talks to my family. When I go back home I ask if she came, what they talked about, how long she stayed and how she carried herself around. At times, I send my friends to give her a message, and I ask them what they think about the girl. From that I would find out issues concerning the girl’s temperament. After one month I then sit down with the girl and ask her to be my girlfriend, I tell her “an adwari” (I want you). I ask her before if she has a boyfriend.

Petronella: What if she says she had a boyfriend and they broke up but are still friends?

Danny: Even before I bring up the topic of love, I ask people close to the girl about her past and whether she has a boyfriend, then I would even go to the boy mentioned and ask indirectly to confirm if what I am being told is true. Once I confirm that she has no other boyfriend, then I can tell her I am interested in her but if she has other boyfriends, I will not bring up the issue of love. But of course, you will get different stories from her friends and other people close to her so it is up to you to analyse and judge what’s true and what’s a lie (informal conversation, November 2005).
The young men with whom I worked mentioned how they try to collect the opinions of different people to increase their chances to get accurate information. Yet, it is really difficult for young people to learn about the background of their sexual partners when there exists a lot of distrust in other people’s intentions. Other people’s interests—imagined or real—can potentially distort the truth, and some youth ignore their friends’ warnings about the HIV status of their lovers, thinking their friends’ motives suspect. Young men assume that self-interest determines what information other youngsters give, e.g., if a young man talks negatively about a certain girl or young woman, his motivation for this might be that he is himself interested in her. Obiru’s friends tried to warn him about his lover’s potential risk of being HIV positive, given that her previous boyfriend had died of HIV. Obiru distrusted them and preferred to talk about the issue himself with his girlfriend. In his diary, Onyango wrote:

I saw [Obiru’s girlfriend] in the distance. She was looking very disappointed. She just talked to me using gestures. I called to her and greeted her but she was in a bad mood.

“When Onyango, why are you talking ill about me?”, she asked. “You and Joel, you are saying that I am HIV positive. Can you prove it?”

Surely, I was a little bit confused but I just nodded my head and explained to her all about the story. I told her: “We were three people: myself, Joel, and your boyfriend Obiru. We were arguing that you are HIV positive because your former boyfriend Omondi died of AIDS”. […]

We had heard rumours that Omondi was HIV positive. Somebody, who was a very good friend to Omondi, had told us that Omondi had died of AIDS. My [step-] brother and I then had decided to tell Obiru because his girlfriend could also be HIV infected and therefore he should take care (i.e., by using a condom). When we had told Obiru that his girlfriend might be HIV infected, he was challenged and wished to use a condom, but the problem was that his girlfriend was in a monthly period so they could not engage in sex at all.

But now Obiru had told his girlfriend what we had told him. This means that he did not want to listen to us. He loves the girl so much. […] We were just trying to help him because we know that he sleeps with his girlfriend without protection (without a condom) because they trusted each other.

Similarly, when a young woman gives negative information about her female friend to a young man, the young man might assume that she does so because she is interested in him and wants to discourage competition from another young woman. At the same time, her female friend might feel offended and even end their friendship. For instance, when Adhis was engaged with Rambo, one of the most promiscuous young men of Dhonam (see next chapter), my research assistant Petronella tried to warn her as we had already heard so many stories about him. Adhis did not believe Petronella and instead asked Rambo if it was true that he was used to have different girlfriends at the same time.
Rambo defended himself, saying that Petronella used to be in love with him and due to her jealousy about their relationship, she had probably “talked ill” about him. Consequently, Adhis broke off her friendship with Petronella instead of taking her advice seriously and inquiring with other female peers about her boyfriend.

It seems that inquiring about the background and past of sexual partners takes place more among young men than young women. It is culturally inappropriate for young women as they are expected not to show sexual interest in a man. Instead of directly investigating their boyfriend’s behaviour, women closely observed and discussed the behaviour of their female peers in order to find out about their boyfriend’s behaviour. They kept up an active system of social control through gossip and stories. Whenever they found out that their boyfriend cheated on them, they would blame their female peers as they imagined that they had seduced him. So they might insult their female friends instead of blaming their boyfriend for his promiscuous behaviour. Thus, women need to inquire about boyfriends in a more tactical and hidden way than their male counterparts.

5.2.2. The difficult games of detection and deception

When someone’s sexual partner is suspected of being HIV positive, their peers and other community members start to gossip. People say that it is risking life to engage with such a person. Omondi, a 16-year-old man, was challenged by an age-mate of his girlfriend: “Do you really value your life? You are handsome, but you have lost direction in life”, a question that made him realise he had to inquire about his girlfriend’s behaviour and HIV status. He described how he went about doing so:

I started to gather information from my friend who lives near Eve’s school. She explained that Eve was having a relationship with a matatu (local bus) driver who was HIV positive. All Eve’s age-mates were aware of this relationship: the driver would come and collect Eve every time the school closed. Eve’s age-mates knew that this man was HIV positive and according to them, Eve was being lured by money (since the bus driver is known to earn daily cash, people assumed that he gave her a share of his money or material goods). My friend, who had told me the real story, advised me to end the relationship with Eve for my own good. I knew the driver and I was aware of his health status though I did not know that he was having an affair with Eve. I decided to trick Eve to prove this allegation. Eve confirmed that she was having an affair with him. I even told me that she had been pregnant by him but the baby died during delivery. Later, the bus driver also died, and Eve attended the burial. Eve was embarrassed to confirm this to me. I had a good reason to end our relationship and Eve could never come after me again (informal conversation, September 2006).

Through gossip within young people’s informal social networks, young people receive a wealth of information (both correct and incorrect) about each other’s sex lives. For Omondi,
it was certainly embarrassing that almost everyone, except himself, was aware of the fact that his girlfriend was dating another man, and one who was HIV positive. It revealed his inability to do proper “research” about his lover, and affected his pride. As Watkins (2004: 689) in her research in Malawi highlights: “Those who do not consult local knowledge are considered foolish”. Yet, with distrust so rife and everybody “researching” sexual partners, there is bound to be a lot of misinformation, both intentional—in the form of outright deception—and unintentional.

In fact, it can go even beyond simple deception: some believed that HIV-positive people intentionally wanted to infect others. Some youngsters in my study raised this idea, arguing: “They (HIV-positive people) want many people to die after them. They don’t want to die alone”. Although Omondi at first believed that Eve was “seriously in love” with him, he later began to think otherwise:

Sometimes Eve could visit me abruptly at night and would insist on spending the night together. Sometimes she even demanded unprotected sex to prove my confidence in her. Why was she demanding unprotected sex? I believe that Eve did this with the aim to infect me: she wanted me dead and that’s why she never revealed her health status to me (informal conversation, September 2006).

Once the damage is done to somebody’s reputation, it is hard to repair. Ending his relationship with Eve was not enough to stop the gossip about Omondi’s health status. He had to convince his peers and other community members that he was still HIV negative:

People from [Winam] knew that we had been dating each other and some people started to murmur about my health status once they also realised that Eve was HIV positive. Even my brother questioned my health status, and that forced me to visit a VCT centre and invite my brother to witness the result. I had been visiting VCT centres on a regular basis and always obtained negative results, so I was not surprised when I received that time a similar result. However, my brother was not convinced that I was HIV negative until he could witness my negative result for a second time (informal conversation, September 2006).

On other occasions, my research assistant Petronella and I heard young people gossiping about their peers who they believed were HIV positive. This was based on their physical appearance and on their past relationships with HIV-positive persons who might have died in the course of the time. Young people knew that engaging in a sexual relationship with a widow or widower (who might still be teenagers) might increase their chances of getting HIV, since the chances were high that the deceased had died of AIDS. Knowing a partner’s origins could provide insight into their reputation within the community, but background information is hard to uncover, especially about (young) widows. During my fieldwork, some moved rather than remaining in their deceased husband’s home, which made it easier to conceal their widowhood and their consequent chances of HIV
infection, and increased their ability to start a new life and create new livelihood networks, even perhaps with a new husband, instead of being inherited by their deceased husband’s brother as has long been commonly done.\textsuperscript{27}

5.2.3. Avoiding sexual partners with promiscuous behaviour

Both young women and men mentioned that they tried to avoid being in a relationship with someone who had a reputation of promiscuity because of the increased risks of HIV infection. Young women often generalized that many Kenyan men are promiscuous, and reasoned that they could not therefore make a big issue about it. Young men, on the other hand, tried to select girlfriends with relatively little experience in sex:

Petronella: What kind of girl would you prefer?

Danny: I’m looking for a girl who does not know a lot (\emph{ok ong’eyo mang’eny}).

Petronella: What do you mean by that, “a girl who does not know a lot”? Does it mean to be a virgin?

Danny: One who has not had many boyfriends and does not go with many men (smiling). People misuse the term “virgin”. I believe there are no virgins once a girl is more than eight years old (informal conversation, October 2005).

Promiscuity is inferred from clothing choices, as well. Young women are expected to conform to a conservative style of dress, keeping legs and shoulders covered. Miniskirts or tight jeans for instance, which clearly show the lines of a woman’s body, transgress the social norm of covering the body and wearing loose fabrics. According to the young men I worked with, young women and girls with a provocative dressing style are ostensibly inviting men to have sex with them; they are therefore seen as ochot or prostitutes. Axel, a 20-year-old boy and a student in secondary school, explained:

We call them ochot because they are forcing themselves to be loved by the boys, because you know, if you want a boy, just put on well (i.e., dress yourself well). It is not a matter of you putting on a miniskirt, maybe leaving some parts so to be seen by boys, to attract them (in-depth interview, May 2006).

Women are denigrated with terms like ochot if their dressing style is thought provocative or if they are found to be “moving around” too much. Men on the other hand, can have many sexual relations and hardly any woman would talk about male ochot. In this way, the dominant gender double standard that demands that young women abstain from sex while normalizing young men’s sexual activity is reproduced again and again.
The youngsters whom I followed believed that the young women who are referred to as *ochot* are assumed to “carry death”, because they presumed such women have already run the risk of getting infected with HIV. Young men differentiated between young women who have many boyfriends simultaneously and women who earn a living by selling sex, although both are called *ochot*. Women who sell sex usually hang around at discos and the bars close to the lake in Winam, sometimes being hired by disc jockeys to stand in front and dance. Both young men and women assumed that sex workers are HIV positive. Newcomers to the village or visiting fishermen, who did not know about their ‘bad reputation’, might have a one-night stand with them for about 200 Kenyan shillings (2.5 euro). Others, like desperate older men and drunken young men, might also hire their services.

To minimize their exposure to HIV/AIDS, youngsters expressed that they often tried to have at least one ‘trust relationship’, in which it was possible to enjoy sex without the use of a condom. In addition, marriage or cohabitation was for some male youngsters the ideal way to avoid HIV infection. Ouma (24 years old) who was earning his living with his *kinyozi* (barbershop), for instance, tried out two different girlfriends by having them stay at his house, in order to decide which one to marry. According to him, “having a girlfriend in the house” (i.e., cohabitation) allowed him not to use a condom and prevented him from being promiscuous. Thus for some youngsters, marriage or cohabitation was seen as a tactic to prevent HIV; a multicentre study carried out among four urban populations in sub-Saharan Africa shows, however, that marriage does not diminish chances of HIV infection for women (Auvert et al. 2001). The National AIDS Control Council (NACC) in Kenya states that 44.1 percent of new adult infections happen within unions/regular partnerships (NACC 2009: 7). The relationship between marital status and HIV infection seems to be more complex than the youngsters imagined during my fieldwork.

5.2.4. The ‘invisible’ sexual network

For young people, the purpose of “doing research” on their sexual partner is not to reduce the number of sexual partners or to change behaviour—the goals of public health campaigns and NGOs—but rather to carefully select lovers in order to minimize risk. Through informal conversations within a person’s social network, a potential partner’s sexual and medical history is reconstructed. My data show a gendered pattern in the way young people manage to gather local knowledge on their sexual partner: while young men directly inquire about young women’s sexual histories, young women cannot do so because
it is culturally inappropriate. Instead, they closely observe their female peers' behaviour to see if they have been trying to seduce their boyfriend, which would mean that their boyfriend might have been promiscuous and might have run the risk of getting HIV infected. It is clear that young people’s “research” relies highly on gossip, and this produces situations in which contradictions, distrust, and misinformation concerning sexual relationships are common. This is an imperfect tactic, but better than none: as Watkins (2004: 696) points out: “People may make mistakes in selecting partners, but avoiding potential partners with risky sexual histories is likely to be better than not consulting social networks to gain such local knowledge”. Additionally, although some young people only start to “do research” once they have already engaged in sex with their partner, it is still better than not doing so at all. Nevertheless, the fact that youngsters do not consistently “do research” before they engage in sex means they might have already incurred the risk of being infected before they learn much about their partner. As I will discuss later, youth might at times engage in ‘risky sex’ if they believe it can lead to a better future. This certainly holds for women, because when the sexual partner is a financially, capable man, they might consider “doing research” no longer important.

The tactic of “doing research” might give the impression that many of the youngsters with whom I worked are practicing ‘zero grazing’, in the sense that they might have sex with multiple partners but stay within their own ‘paddock’, close to home.28 “Doing research” on their sexual partner is a way of constructing, on a small-scale level, a ‘visible’ network of sexual relations (Thornton 2008). However, this is only true to an extent. The young women and men I worked with were aware that they may not know the entire reach of the network to which they belong, because their sexual partners might have been “unknowing participants” (Thornton 2008: xx) of other sexual networks simultaneously.

Based on young people’s narratives about their own and their peers’ sexual relationships, combined with their “doing research” evidence, I was able to depict the structure of their local sexual network, which was highly clustered: different small groups of sexually active people are further gathered into progressively larger groups. Figure 3 shows how such a structure of a local sexual network within Winam looks like if young people would do “research” on a systematic basis: they could come to establish a ‘visible network’.
Figure 3. The structure of a local sexual network of some of the young people from Winam

This network shows that (a group of) young people (where 11 persons belonged to my research group) in Winam were, one way or the other, sexually connected to each other even though they did not directly have sex with each other.

The structure of this local sexual network also includes at least some links to outside clusters and thus reflects the mobility of young people. For a long time, there were probably few long-distance links across the population as a whole, but once male labourers were recruited from Nyanza Province to work on the white, colonial farms, this picture changed, and JoWinam became connected to more places, communities, and people. Dhonam, in particular during its peak as a popular trading centre in the 1980s, was constantly connected to cities through people who travelled back and forth (see
Chapter 3). At the time of my fieldwork, youngsters’ sexual relationships extended far beyond Winam since they were very mobile. Also within the local sexual network of Figure 3, a number of people have (sometimes concurrent) relationships with teachers from Kisumu, a music band player from Kisumu, a concurrent partner from Mombasa (like Akinyi (with the red dot) — see Chapter 6), CDC staff member from Kisumu, or a European person working for the construction company ‘Put Sarajevo’ from Kisumu. Thus, several people in the local network had contact with people both close and far away. This results in cross-linkages between the different clusters within and outside the local sexual network. For instance, person A may be very faithful to person B, but during their relationship, person B had a one-night stand at a church meeting with person C without using a condom. However, person C, the evening before her encounter with person B, had sexual intercourse with person D, who happens to be ‘the playboy of the village’. In the case of Dhonam, that playboy was a young man named Rambo (see also the next chapter), who in Figure 3 is highlighted in a dark blue colour. At times, I understood from JoWinam that Rambo has had more than four sexual partners simultaneously (who could not all be drawn on Figure 3), both from within the village and from town, as he moves on a very regular basis between rural and urban areas. In this way, person A gets linked to other sexual networks, even from far away. The links between the clusters act as transmission lines of HIV. Thornton (2008: 78) refers to such situations as “densely intralinked clustered subnetworks”, as was the case in Uganda after 14 years of war.

Since young people in Winam are all connected to each other, this means that if one person moves to town for a couple of months or just for a short visit, picks up the virus, and then moves back to Winam and transmits it further, the results are likely to be explosive. This is especially the case when the infection is newly contracted. Brown estimates that “newly infected people with high levels of HIV in their blood are up to ten times more likely to infect others than are people with older infections” (cited in Thornton 2008: 34). Local sexual networks in Winam are not isolated: they are linked to other networks through the many connections young people have to other networks. Thus one may conclude that having concurrent partnerships in a short period of time that link different networks might result in explosive epidemics. The challenge for HIV prevention is therefore to analyse how to reconfigure such a “densely, intralinked clustered subnetwork” in order to reduce HIV transmissions. According to Bearman et al. (2004: 75), “the most effective strategy for reducing disease diffusion rests on creating structural breaks” (between networks). Thornton confirms this approach in
analysing the Ugandan case: it is likely that the overall HIV prevalence declines rapidly when the sexual behaviour of certain individuals, who serve as HIV transmission links between subnetworks, changes. In the case of Dhonam, if the behaviour of certain persons, for instance Rambo and a few others, would change, overall prevalence might thus decline. So how is this feasible in practice? Does such a practice not result in stigmatising certain persons? How could we best tackle this problem? Thornton (2008) suggested the “one, one, one approach” in order to make sexual networks more resistant to HIV transmission: First of all, one should only have sex one partner at a time; Second, before shifting no a new partner, one should give it a break of at least a month (i.e. new infections are more likely to occur in the first month), and third, keep it close to home in order to avoid long-distance links in the sexual network. Again, this is not really realistic.

In sum, the kind of pragmatic choices young people make about sexual partners shape the macrostructures in which individuals are embedded (Thornton 2008). Although ‘zero-grazing’ might have some protective effect on a population level, it can be much more deadly on a local level where migration is very common, as in Winam. We are all part of an “unimagined community” (Thornton 2008: xx), which makes it impossible to know all the cross-links between different clusters and sexual networks. Therefore, trying to grasp the possible structure of the sexual network at stake is critical for understanding the potential for disease transmission and the determinants of individual risk (Thornton 2008: 56–59; Bearman et al. 2004: 44–52, 80).

In addition to comprehending the configuration and dynamics of a sexual network, it is also important to understand how young people perceive biomedical practices (Thornton 2008). The next section examines why youngsters do not perceive condom use and participating in Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) as effective tactics in minimizing HIV exposure. I further examine why living with uncertainty regarding AIDS is sometimes preferable in a time when ARVs are not yet easily available.

6. Living with uncertainty

6.1. “Why should we use condoms and go for VCT?”

For many youngsters, using condoms and “going for VCT” are not part of their tactics to prevent HIV. Ochien’g recalled how his sexual relationship with MinMercy started:
Ochien’g: Our closeness developed and one day I had sexual intercourse with MinMercy (warwore gi MinMercy). That day she returned with my washed and ironed clothes and spent the night at my place.

Ellen: Did she go for the test (VCT) before?

Ochien’g: I just did it because I trusted her and I knew how she lived: she shared the same bedroom with her sister (meaning sleeping elsewhere was out of question) and her sister is very strict and never let her hang around (informal conversation, September 2005).

Many youngsters fear testing their HIV status. Some only “go for VCT” when they feel ill; others have gotten tested when, according to their research, they feel that they have engaged in ‘risky sex’. Sharing one’s HIV status is considered to be very difficult due to the stigma of having HIV/AIDS. Due to the high degree of distrust between sexual partners, both young women and men believed that their sexual partner would show them faked HIV-test results. In Winam, few of the youngsters that I worked with actually knew their HIV status; if they knew, it did not necessarily lead to a change in their sexual behaviour. Many actually believed that they were already HIV positive without getting tested. According to Weinhardt et al. (1999), HIV testing and counselling occurs more often among people who have tested positive and is used less as a prevention strategy among uninfected people. HIV testing still seems to be most successful for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (Kabiru et al. 2010).

Using a condom is considered a sign of distrust or distance: the young men and women with whom I worked said they would use a condom when the relationship is not (yet) based on ‘trust’ or ‘love’. But young people seldom use condoms, no matter the level of trust or love: “At times, the excitement is so high that one even forgets to put one on” (Danny, 19, informal conversation, November 2005). Atieno, a 17-year-old young woman, also made this clear:

Ellen: How do you know about Sylvester’s background: Do you go for VCT, or do you use condoms?

Atieno: (Laughs.) Sylvester, I know all his background, all of it, very, very well: I know the way his home is, the way they are, how many children are left behind, I know, I know them all, all, all, and that part—for VCT we have never gone, and that other part…?

Ellen: CD [condom].

Atieno: Ah that—just leave it like that (laughs, implying there is no need to talk further about this issue because they do not use condoms) (in-depth interview, June 2006).
The numerous campaigns to promote condom use happen with the simultaneous condemnation of their use by the Catholic Church. As a result, there is a lot of ambiguity about and aversion to the use of condoms. Both young men and women disliked condoms because they preferred to have “skin-to-skin sex” and did not want to “eat a sweet with the wrapper on” (see also Preston-Whyte 1999; and MacPhail and Campbell 2001 on the ‘condom dilemma’ in South Africa). A condom prevents the moment of bodily union, “the moment of difference being brought into touch (riwo)” (Geissler and Prince 2007: 130). It prevents “the sharing of the substance of the other” (Geissler and Prince 2007: 130). Young women stated that the flow of sperm inside their body is necessary to strengthen their fertility. Additionally, male youngsters expressed their distrust about certain brands of condoms or the condoms distributed for free at public hospitals. Ouma, a 22-year-old young man, who had only reached Class 3 of primary school and was operating a kinyozi (barbershop) at the time of my fieldwork, stated:

Ouma: It has been so long since I used condoms and I do not like them because they are fake, they do not help. I can only use one brand called “Sure” because it is the only nice one. The one called ‘Trust’ is very fake.

Petronella: Then how come I am still alive and I use ‘Trust’?

Ouma: (laughs, looks at Petronella with surprise) (informal conversation, April 2006).

Otoy (a 17-year-old young man and secondary school leaver), who used to participate at Yeshica, also expressed suspicions about the quality of condoms:

Petronella: Do you use condoms?

Otoy: I do but not always, only if the condoms are from a good company with a label like Rough Rider but not the ones given for free in hospitals and in public dispensers.

Petronella: What is wrong with the ones given for free?

Otoy: Those are rejects. They are the ones that white people have used and are repackaged, just like the biscuit I see being sold for one shilling in the shops, these biscuits are rejects from the port in Mombasa. Those biscuits are normally thrown away at the port as rejects but some people come and collect them and repackage them and sell them to innocent people (informal conversation, October 2005).

Here, notions about condoms exemplify larger concerns. People from western Kenya have long been ignored by governmental aid, and many feel like they are treated like
the dustbin of the country, not only by the Kenyan government but also by foreign aid
workers.

Among young people in Winam, one can assume that condoms are not used. When they are, it appears to be exclusively the man’s decision. Nancy Luke’s (2006: 338) research in urban Kisumu found that men’s education level is positively associated with condom use whereas income is not, and that divorced, separated, and widowed men are less likely to use a condom than other single men. Women are not always in a position to negotiate condom use due to the widespread gender inequality and the association of condoms with immorality (see also Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001). Even when a woman might suspect her boyfriend has been unfaithful, it is hard for her to refuse unprotected sex when he asks for it. Some of the young women also revealed that they were not always aware if their boyfriend really had put on a condom when they said they had. They mentioned that, according to Luo cosmology, touching one’s genitals is not allowed and since sexual intercourse usually takes place in darkness (some youngsters mentioned they feared eye contact during sexual intercourse), it is difficult for a woman to observe or feel with her hands when a man puts on a condom (see also Geissler and Prince 2007). Only after ejaculation can a young woman be sure whether or not the young man has used a condom, but then it is of course too late to react.

According to Luke (2006: 339), women in urban Kisumu engage more frequently in unprotected sex in “informal exchange relationships” when money and gifts (“transfers”) are given: there is “a significant negative correlation between the level of transfers and the probability of condom use [...], where even a small transfer is associated with a substantial decrease in the probability of condom use”. In her analysis, Luke does not take into account that in ‘trust relationships’, transfers of money and gifts are very common and even a must if a man wants to show that he cares about his lover (see next chapter). Thus, when a transfer is observed in informal relationships, these relationships are based on trust, which means that no condom is used. This probably partly explains the negative correlation between the level of transfer and condom use.

The question that remains for many youngsters is: Why should they use a condom if so far they have not contracted any disease? The same holds for VCT: Why should they go for VCT if so far they have not felt ill? More fundamentally: Why should they need to be certain about their HIV status?
6.2. Certainty or uncertainty in regard to AIDS

Since many of the youngsters had already had sex without a condom and did not experience any harm immediately afterwards,34 they did not see a need to use one, nor a need to go for VCT. Opiyo, the anthropologist formerly employed by Yeshica, explained:

They (young people) experiment with sex and they realize that first of all, it was enjoyable, nobody harmed them, nothing happened and they can even do it for some time. Then they realize that they are not becoming pregnant, they never even got syphilis or gonorrhoea. So you know, they go back to their peers and tell them: “No, this thing that parents just know, it is a sweet thing, that is why they are scaring us. Me, I tried it. I have my boyfriend and nothing has happened to me. How come I have never had syphilis, how come I have never become pregnant, how come I have never had HIV?” (in-depth interview, September 2006).

The youngsters themselves often attributed the low impact of HIV/AIDS prevention interventions to their own fatalistic or ignorant behaviour. During a focus group discussion, a small group of young men expressed many different ideas about AIDS:

Kenny (24 years old, secondary school graduate): People really do not care about contracting HIV.

Petrus (17 years old, primary school graduate): AIDS is just like any disease and cannot deter me from having sex.

Augus (22 years old, a matatu conductor): AIDS is just a sickness like any other, and any way, everyone will die. It is not necessarily AIDS that will kill you, you can die of anything.

Otoy (17 years old, working at his uncle’s battery charging place): AIDS is just a sickness like any other and if I get it, I would simply commit suicide instead of dying a slow death, and if I contract an STI, then [the nurses at Yeshica] are there to treat me.

When I asked the youngsters if they were afraid of contracting HIV, they usually stated that though they were, they would “rather die with sweet grass in [their] mouths,” making reference to the Dholuo proverb, *Dhianq’ tho gi lum e dhoge* (A cow dies with grass in the mouth). The proverb is usually used in the context of sex and means to die for something you love or enjoy. Young people feel that sex (i.e., the grass) is sweet and if having sex means that it may kill them, then they prefer to die from that “sweet” thing rather than abstaining.

Young people are not ignorant, or, as I often heard from public health activists or elders, victims of “their Luo culture”. Young people are informed about the negative consequences of engaging in unprotected sex, but primarily experience the sexual act as very pleasant and enjoyable. They also have pragmatic reasons for engaging in sex, as elaborated in the next chapter. It is true that some youth only thought about the
possible consequences of their actions after having sex. Others are more concerned about the short-term risk of getting an STI or an ‘unwanted’ pregnancy than the long-term, life-threatening risk of HIV, as Opiyo further explained:

Now, if we talk about syphilis or pregnancy, these are immediate things and their consequences are known: if you become pregnant, you drop out of school; you are even chased out of your home to go and stay with a relative. But before the consequences of HIV infection are seen, years may have passed by. HIV is a long-term illness. Somebody will tell you: “Me, I started having sex 20 years ago but I have never had HIV”. It depends with the person you are with, because they look at it [the physical appearance]—because nobody goes for testing, that is what they do. That is the real problem. The real problem is that these people are being told to come and sit somewhere and you tell them how HIV is bad, killing people and HIV comes through sex—but they have been having sex, even when they were very young. They have never had HIV because they have never gone for testing and you know, in our community, people go for HIV testing when they are sick. And these are young people who are not even getting sick, and they even conceive, give birth to these young children, and even continue walking. Maybe the CD4 count is already very high but they are still strong (in-depth interview, September 2006).

The fact that young people rarely or inconsistently use condoms, and do not change their behaviour once they know their HIV status should not be interpreted to mean that young people are not scared of HIV. Instead, it shows that the biomedical messages are not adequate and do not match well with the daily reality of the youngsters.

There clearly exists a tension between the biomedical or public health messages and the tactic of “doing research” that is anchored in locally meaningful modes of reasoning. Long-term concerns such as developing AIDS mean very little in a setting where people’s life expectancy has dramatically decreased—from 60 years in 1990 to 50 years in 2002 (UNAIDS 2004b)—and where people die in large numbers. In an environment where young people’s daily lives and livelihoods are shaped by enormous uncertainty and lack of reliable livelihood opportunities, young people prefer to live with uncertainty regarding AIDS by not going for VCT.

Whyte (1997: 214) writes: “Many people are unwilling to acquiesce in a biomedical monopoly on certainty, especially when the consequences are overwhelming. […] In the case of AIDS, silence and uncertainty are preferable”. Why should the young people of Winam need to know for sure that they are HIV positive? They know that their chances of being HIV infected are very high, so why confirm it with biomedical truth if life can be better without? For a number of youngsters in Winam, living in “uncertainty is sometimes preferable to a certainty that is too painful” (Whyte 1997: 208). The problem with an AIDS test, as Whyte (2002) further argues, “is that it does not show the way forward”; it does not show ‘a plan of action’ (Whyte 1997), certainly not in a time
when ARVs are not easy accessible. Whyte (2002: 186) uses the term ‘subjunctivity’ to describe how people are negotiating and dealing with uncertainty:

The concept of subjunctivity [is] a way of focussing on the intentions, hopes and doubts of people looking toward an immediate future whose concerns are not certain. I pointed to the situated concerns of subjects facing problems and to the directionality of their efforts. Subjunctivity is not just about uncertainty; it helps us attend to purposes and consequences. It asks us to take seriously the question of what people are trying to do.

People are ‘intentional agents’, struggling to make a change, even though they may fail. It is not about knowing the truth, but rather how to alleviate it by acting upon it (Whyte 2002). So is VCT futile? It could be but it is not, since the youngsters of Winam tactically engage in pragmatic actions in order to prevent themselves from HIV infections: “doing research,” cohabiting and marrying, having at least one ‘trust relationship’, and using condoms when they find it necessary.

**7. Conclusion: Young people’s pragmatic actions**

This chapter examined the issues of risk in Winam, and the ways young people deal with the risky and uncertain world in which they live. Whyte (1997) nicely describes from an actor perspective how the pragmatic approach to uncertainty helps us to understand how people deal with AIDS. Instead of having clear plans for action in mind, young people are searching “for whatever measure of security they may be able to grasp” (Whyte 1997: 215). People’s local modes of reasoning for minimizing risks may be more illuminating than convictions about truth, allowing them “to remain in the subjunctive mood of possibility and hope” (Whyte 1997: 215). While young people devise creative tactics to avoid infection, they ultimately do not want to know how effective these tactics are. They prefer to assume that the tactics work to a great extent, understanding at the same time that their risk of infection continues to be high. Many youngsters prefer to live in uncertainty instead of knowing the biomedical truth.

In a context that is shaped by enormous uncertainty, young people realise that in order to live, they need to take risks on various fronts, including in sexual relations. In addition to being pleasant and enjoyable, engaging in sex also promises economic security for many young women and status enhancement for young men. Thus, the question then is NOT why do young people take risks with HIV despite their knowledge, but rather: Why should young people avoid risks if they hold the promise of a better life in the future? The next chapter examines the transactional nature of sexual liaisons and
the related power discrepancies of gender relations, and shows how young people see sexual liaisons as a way to improve their daily lives and livelihoods.

1 There are several verbs in Dholuo that young people use to refer to sex, namely: nindo, nindruok, diyo (or dicho – as in jedicho (the people of having sex), discussed in Chapter 7), kayo, and the (vulgar) verb ng’otho. When speaking in English, youngsters usually used the phrase "playing sex" and because that is a term that encompasses most of the Dholuo terms, I decided to follow the youngsters' use.

2 While in the past there was also a preoccupation with contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (see also Sete 1999b), at the time of my research, there was more concern about contracting HIV/AIDS than other STIs that are known to be curable, and I therefore focus in this chapter on HIV/AIDS prevention.

3 The term ‘research’ is derived from the many medical research projects that are going on in Winam (see Chapter 3). A number of people from Winam who spoke almost no English also made use of this term.

4 Not all the youngsters with whom I worked were familiar with the term siwindhe and just called it "ot pim" or "ot dayo" (grandmother’s house). The practice of staying in the grandmother’s hut while young was still practiced by some families in Winam.

5 At the time of my fieldwork, it was no longer possible to build another simba for each son due to financial limitations; today, younger brothers usually take the simba built by the eldest son once he moves to his own homestead.

6 A similar practice of chodo was observed in Kwa-Zulu Natal, described as ukusoma (Hunter 2002). Also in Owamboland, unmarried people could enjoy an unrestrained sexual freedom until the efundula ceremony marked the transformation from free, playful sexuality to a different stage where women and men must take responsibility for procreation (Becker 2004).

7 On their wedding night, young women could prove their virginity by showing blood on their bed sheets. The blood proved that her hymen had been broken during sexual intercourse, and that she had therefore been a virgin (see Ominde 1952).

8 In Winam, children only get kinship affiliation if the man marries their mother and has paid bridewealth to the mother’s father. That’s why some parents ‘forced’ their daughter to get married if she became pregnant before marriage. This also freed maternal kin from any form of responsibility towards the child.

9 It is possible that chodo had already been abandoned before these grandparents were themselves youths.

10 We also have to take into account that when the grandparents of the youngsters were teenagers, girls used to marry at an earlier age (12 or 13 years old) whereas at the time of my fieldwork, they were usually around 20 years old, or, for those who had studied further, 25 or 30 years old. There were probably fewer pregnancies outside marriage because people married younger. Data from 1979 shows that up to 31.9% of the children were born to women between 15 and 24 years old and about 93% of the women in this age bracket had never been married (Government of Kenya 1979, cited in KDHS 2003: 81). The age-specific fertility rate for five-year periods preceding the KDHS 2003 shows that fertility seems to have declined steadily for women aged 20–24 and 25–29 while it tended to increase between the most recent periods for women.

11 The lowest median age at first birth (18.4 years old) among women aged 25–49 in Kenya was recorded in Nyanza Province (KDHS 2003).

12 “The proportion of teenagers who have begun childbearing increases dramatically from 4 percent at age 15 to 46 percent at age 19. Not much disparity, though, is observed in this parameter between rural and urban women. Teenage fertility is much higher in Rift Valley, North Eastern, Coast, and Nyanza provinces, where at least one-fourth of women age 15–19 have begun childbearing” (KDHS 2003: 86).

13 As Ocholla-Ayayo (1997: 116) writes: “Similar statements have been made about the Gusii, Akamba, Logoli and Bukusu in Kenya”.

14 It is believed that djinis reside in the Indian Ocean, and thus there are many in Mombasa. It is said that you should not kick a cat in Mombasa since it might be a djini.

15 During an eulogy, relatives can tell stories about the deceased person’s life, and these include not only positive memories, but also the sad and bad moments from his/her life.

16 As explained earlier, when boys in Winam are assumed to be sexually mature, around the age of 11 years old, they build a simba (bachelor’s hut) in their father’s compound, and, in this way, they can enjoy sexual freedom and invite girls and young women to “play sex”. Joel and Onyango were advised against building a simba in their father’s compound because the community believed that the compound was cursed.

17 Although polygamy is practiced among the Luo, young men are aware that polygamy is no longer the norm since economically, it is hardly possible.

18 Quite a number of the youngsters who were participating in Yeshica lied about their age since Yeshica only offered activities to young people under the age of 20 (except for the ‘livelihood intervention’ where they extended the age limit to 22 years old) (see Chapter 7). Petrus was born in 1974 and was 31 years old during my fieldwork in 2005.

19 In Dholuo: “Kasto gimoro ka isebilo ma iyudo ka olungre ni, to ok inyal weyo” (Once you taste something and find it sweet it’s difficult to quit).

20 Although in the past the term ‘ochot’, which is derived from chodo (playing between the thighs), did not have a bad connotation, nowadays it indicates an immoral, sinful practice associated with prostitution (see also Geissler and Prince 2007: 131–132).

21 Premarital pregnancies are also social affairs since the pregnancy may be wanted by some but not by others within kinship dynamics (see also Van der Sijpt 2011: 97–98).

22 While premarital pregnancy is a common concern among young mothers in Winam, the public health literature devotes more attention to ‘teenage pregnancy’ due to higher risks of illnesses, death, and complications during pregnancy.

23 Pills were available at every kiosk or chemist, and injections could be obtained at every public hospital, both free of charge. Many young women in my study favoured injections because they could easily forget to take a pill, and because they had less control in the use of condoms due to the widespread gender inequality and the association of condoms with immorality (see also Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001). According to the KDHS (2003), injectables are the most widely used contraceptive (14%).
The proportion of currently married women using contraceptives in 2003 was 39% (KDHS 2003), the same proportion as in 1998 (KDHS 1998). Forty-eight percent of the women who used contraceptives had already three or four children (KDHS 2003).

According to MinMercy, she could not deliver at her maternal home because her mother had not yet entered menopause. ‘Luo rules’ prescribed that young ones should not be touched by those who had not reached menopause (Parkin 1978: 149–151; see also Nyambedha et al. 2003b: 33), otherwise MinMercy and her baby could be affected by chira.

MinMercy accepted a proposed relationship out of fear of physical abuse and beating; her sister had convinced her that Ochien’g could protect her from being bothered by other young men, and especially fishermen.

During my fieldwork, a number of young women of Winam refused to be inherited by the brother of their deceased husband as it has been postulated that the practice contributes to the spread of HIV (Agot 2005)

See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the notion of ‘zero grazing’ in the context of public health campaigns against HIV/AIDS.

Even the members of the Post-Test Club of Yeshica never shared their status with each other, although the purpose of the group was to encourage young people to know and share their HIV status with each other (see Chapter 7).

However, sometimes young women also used their lack of knowledge about whether the young men had put on a condom to excuse their unwillingness to use condoms (Geissler and Prince 2007: 146).

When caring for their siblings, girls were taught not to touch their little brother’s genitals because it might affect the boy’s ability to reproduce in the future (Geissler and Prince 2007: 130).

Some of the youngsters that I followed told me they believed that sex ought to take place in darkness because either of them might have a genital abnormality and they wouldn't allow the partner to observe or touch it.

Luke (2006: 230) uses the term ‘informal exchange relationships’ to describe “non-marital sexual partnerships where material items are given by a male to his female partner”.

Some of the young people had not become ill so far, or, at least, did not associate any illness they might have had with the opportunistic infections of HIV since they did not go for an HIV test.
Chapter 6

Sex, love, and money

1. Introduction: Okoth and Akinyi

Any account of the sexual relationships between the young people of Winam needs not only to analyse their livelihood aspirations and expectations but also to conduct this analysis through a lens of intergenerational relations, the context in which traditions are passed on, and transformed (Cole and Durham 2007b: 2–3). In contrast to earlier generations, youngsters during the time of my fieldwork are drawn into a world of consumerism and urban life associated with fashion. Before examining in depth the relationship of two lovers, Akinyi and Okoth, I will provide some background on their lives. Akinyi’s life story, emphasizing her mobility, was introduced earlier in Chapter 4; we begin here with the story of Okoth.

I came to know Okoth as a tough person who doesn’t use many words, and on the few occasions that he does talk, it is usually in an abusive, rude manner. He is a hard-working person, but he only was unable to finish primary school due to financial limitations. In the morning hours, he could be found herding cattle and in the afternoon, he was usually at Yeshica, the HIV/AIDS prevention project in Winam, attending a vocational training or meeting. One of the first members of Yeshica, and a member of the Post-Test Club (PTC), Okoth was always present at the rehearsals and outreach events of the PTC theatre group. This group performed sketches on issues related to HIV/AIDS, and Okoth was an important actor and rapper in the group. Although it was ‘volunteer work’, Okoth perceived the PTC outreach events as his main job: participating in the group provided him with 200 Kenyan shillings (about 2.5 euro) twice a week, funding that came from the Youth Intervention Program (YIP) through PEPFAR (see Chapters 2 and 7). Okoth used this money to buy second-hand clothes for himself and gave some of the money to his girlfriends. Luckily, he did not have to worry about food since his mother provided that. Okoth dreamt of becoming a famous rapper one day and, by acting for Yeshica, he hoped that one day somebody would acknowledge his talent and give him a job as an artist. When the outreach events came to an end, Okoth and many others did not find other income.
After we had left the field, a serious incident further deteriorated Okoth’s situation. His father, a pastor of the traditional Nomiya Church, had a conflict with Okoth’s mother, which resulted in chasing Okoth, his mother, and his sister out of the compound: we heard later that they had to relocate to Kisumu. Rumours about the incident helped my research assistant Petronella and I to realise that Okoth and his sister were born out of wedlock, which meant that ultimately Okoth’s ‘father’ had little actual responsibility for Okoth. Becoming seen as a child born out of wedlock meant that Okoth had no claim on family land, which limited his livelihood opportunities.

On an ordinary day in April 2005, I was drinking a chai (tea) at the restaurant where Akinyi, a 16-year-old young woman, was working (see also Chapter 4). Okoth, who was about 19 years old at that time, was also there drinking chai. I heard later from Ochien’g (a 22-year-old fisherman from Dhonam, who was also a participant of Yeshica), who is Akinyi’s maternal uncle, that Okoth had come to the restaurant to admire Akinyi’s appearance. Okoth had already asked Ochien’g about her background, as he really wanted Akinyi to become his girlfriend. Akinyi had noticed Okoth when he performed theatre for Yeshica at the market, and she knew that he and Ochien’g were good friends. Okoth invited her to visit him at his ‘workplace,’ Yeshica. From then onwards, they started to meet each other on a regular basis at Ochien’g’s place in Dhonam, where Akinyi stayed when her mother was in prison, or at Okoth’s home, about 20 minutes walking distance from Dhonam.

In May 2005, Akinyi returned to her home, about half a day’s walk (or two hours by bicycle) from Dhonam, to live with her mother, MinAkinyi, who had just been released from prison, and to help take care of her father, who had come back from living in Kisumu with a severe illness. The greater distance did not stop her from visiting Okoth. On one occasion, Akinyi stayed at Okoth’s for several days, and rumours reached MinAkinyi that “Akinyi osetedo” (Akinyi has gotten married). Her mother hurried to Dhonam to learn Akinyi’s whereabouts, and finally found Akinyi harvesting millet at Okoth’s home. MinAkinyi asked Okoth’s mother why she had allowed Okoth and Akinyi to get married, when MinAkinyi had yet to give permission. Okoth’s mother denied that they were married, saying that Okoth could not marry because tradition requires that the firstborn son marry first, before his younger brothers. MinAkinyi took her daughter back home and scolded her. She was not happy that Okoth’s mother treated her daughter as a worker and allowed her son to sleep with her before they were married.
Akinyi continued visiting Okoth, but Okoth no longer wanted to visit Akinyi because his ego was hurt by MinAkinyi’s protestations. In the meantime, a policeman from Mombasa, who had come to visit his home in Winam, approached Akinyi and asked for her hand. MinAkinyi, who knew the mother of the policeman very well, likely arranged the proposal. She hoped Akinyi would choose the policeman instead of Okoth since the policeman was more financially stable. At first, Akinyi refused because she did not know him, but the opportunity to move to Mombasa, away from village life, with a salaried man, was attractive. The man called Jack paid for her travel to Mombasa in July 2005, but just two weeks later Akinyi returned home. Everyone could tell she had been to town because she returned with a totally different look. She had extensions added to her hair and was wearing it plaited with red colour at the ends; she was also wearing grey sunglasses and a long, fitted dress with slits up both sides. Despite her glamorous new look, which seemed to suggest success, she told me that her stay in Mombasa was not positive: “I do not like the ‘Mombasa man’ because he has too many other girlfriends whom he even brought to the house in my presence”.

Two days after returning from Mombasa, Akinyi told me she wanted to visit Okoth but was having trouble tracking him down. They finally both met at my place in Dhonam. Akinyi, who had been wearing a lesó (long skirt), removed it to reveal a short, red skirt clearly worn to attract Okoth, as it revealed her beautiful, long legs. I left them alone to talk, and Akinyi later informed me that she would spend the night at Okoth’s bachelor’s hut (simba).

A few months later, in October, Akinyi moved to Nairobi to work as a domestic maid as her financial contribution to her parent’s household was needed. Although far from Winam, Akinyi tried to keep track of Okoth by calling me and her friends, using a simu ya jamii (community phone). She told us: “I heard that nowadays he is modern, he is getting girls from [outside Winam]”. When Akinyi returned home from Nairobi at the end of December 2005, she visited Okoth a couple of times for the purpose of “doing research” to confirm the rumour that he was going out with different girlfriends. Another young man, Josh, who was interested in her, gave her the most information about Okoth’s promiscuous behaviour.

When I asked Akinyi if they always used condoms, she told me that Okoth kept condoms in his simba, but they never had used one. She decided to leave Okoth, telling his sisters-in-law that it was “because of his character of out-going” (i.e., he was dating too many women). Without telling Okoth directly that she was leaving him, she disappeared for a while. Three months later, in March 2006, Okoth informed me that he
saw Akinyi walking with another young man at one of the biggest markets of Winam and started quarrelling with her. He urged her to come and see him but Akinyi ignored his request. Again in June 2006, they crossed paths in Dhonam and Okoth approached her once again. In conversation with me, Okoth wondered how she could come to Dhonam without telling him or visiting him. Later he told me: “She wants me to beg for her. Me, I do not have the time for begging her”.

Akinyi’s and Okoth’s story is typical of premarital sexual relationships among young people in Winam. As the two go back and forth in their relationship, we see how different aspects such as sexual pleasure, emotional attachment, generational ties, and economic motivations are interwoven in the fabric of their relationship. The story also illustrates the ways that their livelihood concerns and opportunities influence their choices and how intergenerational relations shape their sexual relationship.

Akinyi and Okoth enjoyed being together and experimenting with sex. Akinyi, in addition to finding Okoth handsome, was charmed by Okoth’s theatre performances and his status of being ‘employed’. Okoth was aware that his social status was enhanced by his Yeshica activities, and exploited this to attract more girlfriends. Although neither Akinyi nor Okoth had considered marriage, Akinyi’s mother had imagined that sexual experimentation should lead to marriage. Facing poverty at home, she hoped for a more responsible and financially capable husband for Akinyi, someone who would be able to pay a bride price; this illustrates how expectations for sexual relationships among young people differ between the generations (explored in more depth later in this chapter). For MinAkinyi, the ‘Mombasa man’, the son of a family friend, seemed to be more “serious” than Okoth. Since he was employed as a policeman in a big town, MinAkinyi assumed he had the financial means to take care of Akinyi. Akinyi accepted the offer because of her urban aspirations, as she wanted to move upward, like other young women of Winam. Moving upward through schooling had not been an option for her, or for her parents and grandparents, and she understood that through a sexual liaison with a wealthy man she could get access to desirable consumer goods and commodities, otherwise unavailable in conventional rural life. After a stay of two weeks, Akinyi tactically left the policeman (see Chapter 4) and came home with a new fashionable, urban look. Whereas Minakinyi still valued ‘arranged marriages’, Akinyi felt she could not stay with a man when there was no love regardless of his financial capabilities, and certainly not when he was promiscuous (see also later).
When Okoth heard the rumours that Akinyi had left for Mombasa, he had given up on Akinyi, as he knew his position in society: He was a younger man with less money who could not compete with an urban, salaried man. He was also not the eldest son in the homestead, but instead was a child without paternity. As a consequence, Okoth was not in a position to choose when to marry and risked losing his girlfriend as a result. Akinyi did not know of Okoth’s poor background, as he had introduced himself as someone working for Yeshica. Moreover, Akinyi loved Okoth, and, once back in Winam from Mombasa, she did her best to attract him physically. While Okoth chose not to think about Akinyi’s previous boyfriends, Akinyi was a bit naïve, thinking she was his only lover when in actuality, Okoth was known for having many girlfriends. And while Okoth thought it obvious that Akinyi would continue to visit him, despite the fact that she might have different boyfriends as well, Akinyi had another perception of sexual relationships. These different perceptions and expectations of young people are important to clarify if one wants to understand young people’s pragmatic choices.

This chapter is about sex, love, and money, each of which, though intertwined, has different significations for different people, and the meanings of which may change according to circumstances and time. The way young people perceive and give meaning to sex, love, and money is a product of complex socioeconomic and historical processes, and is influenced by gender norms and relationships. Shedding light on young people’s perceptions of and practices related to sex, love, and money within an intergenerational context demonstrates how socioeconomic changes have affected traditional gender roles and consequently, how ‘transactional’ sexual relationships can reproduce or disrupt gendered inequalities. In this way, this chapter helps to broaden our understanding of the notion of ‘transactional sex’, and to disentangle the stereotypes concerning female subordination, male dominance, and sex-for-money exchanges in sexual relationships.

I start this chapter with a critical analysis of the concept of ‘transactional sex’, followed by a theoretical explanation of why the constellation of perceptions and practices that I am identifying as ‘sex, love, and money’ should be viewed through an intergenerational lens. I then describe how young people deal with sex and the art of seduction, illustrating how both young men and women make use of creative, and sometimes manipulative, ploys to win over sexual partners. I explain the meaning of money/gift exchanges in young people’s sexual relationships and analyse typical situations in which money/gift exchanges occur. After tackling the money/gift exchange aspect of sexual relationships, the last section examines the role of emotional
 attachment in young people’s intimate relationships, and how this forms part of their ‘modern’ identity.

2. ‘Transactional sex’: A critical analysis of the concept

Gifts and money play a vital role in many sexual relationships between young men and young women in sub-Saharan Africa (Hunter 2002; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004). In the public health literature, the exchange of money or gifts for sex between casual or long-term sexual partners is usually described as ‘transactional sex’ (Nnko and Pool 1997; Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004). The concept of ‘transactional sex’ is used to emphasize the centrality of material exchanges to everyday sexual relations and to clearly differentiate the practice from ‘commercial sex’ and ‘prostitution’ with their stigmatizing connotations (Hunter 2002; Cole 2007). Transactional sex is different from prostitution because “the exchange is not necessarily a straightforward cash transaction and sex is not pursued on a professional basis” (Leclerc-Madlala 2004: 3). Obligation can be generated, however, by accepting gifts and favours from men: women understand that by doing so, they may be agreeing to engage in sex (Meekers and Calves 1997; Hunter 2002). In most of the literature on transactional sex, which is extensive, it is argued that due to poverty and economic dependence on men, women engage in ‘survival sex’, i.e., women need money for survival and sex is one of the only ways to get it (e.g., Schoepf 1988, 1992; Hunter 2002; Luke 2003; Leclerc-Madlala 2004). Qualitative researchers often make the distinction between women’s basic survival/subsistence needs and their needs for fashion or consumption goods, such as body cream, cell phones, and clothes (Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004). Young women whose access to resources is limited may also use transactional sex to help advance their education or gain employment or business opportunities (Hunter 2002; Nyanzi et al. 2001; Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004).

It is important to understand that money and material resources can take on different meanings in different situations and kinds of relationships. A number of qualitative scholars have illustrated that in many sexual relationships, gift giving is understood to be a natural part of a relationship that may or may not result in coercion or a loss of negotiating power (e.g., Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Luke 2003; Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004: 3; Poulin 2007). Dunkle et al. (2007) for instance, finds it important to make a distinction between financial or material transfers that function as ‘gifts’ and those that function as ‘transactions’. A gift is an
expression of respect and care, and does not necessarily imply that one must engage in sex, whereas a transaction is perceived to motivate the other to engage in sex. Gift and transaction motives, however, can coexist and overlap, and sometimes the sexual partners may have different understandings of the meaning of the transfer (Dunkle et al. 2007). Although Dunkle et al.’s reasoning is clear, based on my experience in the field, this is more of a conceptually imposed distinction than what I found in practice. It is difficult for either sexual partner to differentiate between gift and transaction, as they overlap and merge into one another. Usually, it is a mix of both motives since both gifts and transactions are part and parcel of the courting practices of young women and men.

Although I argue in this chapter that reciprocity and exchange are part of social life, gender power relations, and subsequently sexual relationships, are seldom fully equal. This holds for Kenya but also for countless other locations and societies. In a capitalist society, where financial resources are a key, determining factor for a secure livelihood, financial needs mesh with existing gendered power imbalances in the realm of sexual relations. Many transactions in social fields are structured in ways that benefit some and disadvantage others. Both neo-Marxist and feminist scholars have argued that certain groups (women, labourers) can exert agency, but that structural arrangements impart to them (as groups) more limited opportunities than those enjoyed by the dominant strata.

In the biomedical and public health discourses, the gender inequality that characterizes transactional relationships is often perceived as one of the main driving forces for the continued spread of HIV/AIDS (Glynn et al. 2001; Kelly et al. 2003). Many scholars stress that women, especially young women, are vulnerable to engaging in what is called ‘risky behaviours’. Women face a greater risk because they are biologically more susceptible to infection with the virus (Higgins et al. 2010). They are also assumed to have a weaker negotiating position concerning condom use as it is usually the man who decides whether or not a condom is used (Meekers and Calves 1997; Nyanzi et al. 2001; MacPhail and Campbell 2001; Luke and Kurz 2002; Hunter 2002). Some women may also be confronted with rape and physical violence from men when they refuse to reciprocate with sex (Wood and Jewkes 2001).

Paul Farmer (1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2003), physician and medical anthropologist, played an important role in emphasizing that not biological or cultural barriers but the combination of poverty and gender inequality facilitated the spread of HIV (and tuberculosis and other infectious diseases) (see also Chapter 3). By unravelling the political economies of the regions where he carried out research (Haiti
and Peru), he demonstrated how these processes have contributed to the continuous lack of financial resources for the health of many of his informants. His ‘vulnerability discourse’ (also described as ‘structural violence’), in which the low socioeconomic status of young persons, and in particular young women, was associated with an increased exposure to HIV infection, was quickly incorporated into biomedical and public health discourses (see for instance, Glynn et al. 2001; Luke and Kurz 2002; Kelly et al. 2003).

The association of young women with vulnerability allowed many public health workers to assume that young women are at higher risk for HIV infection than adults because they engage with older male partners, often referred to as ‘sugar daddies’. These older men are of particular concern because they often have higher infection rates than young men. The age and economic asymmetries that are part of a wider set of gender power differences further limit adolescent girls’ power to negotiate ‘safe’ sexual behaviours (Silberschmidt and Rash 2001; Luke and Kurz 2002: 3–4; Luke 2003; Luke 2005a: Luke 2005b). Sexual liaisons between teachers and students, for instance, are one of these power-imbalanced relationships with (sometimes large) age differentials. In exchange for passing marks or help with homework, female students have sex with older male teachers (Mensch and Lloyd 1998; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004: 4–5). However, Luke (2005a) demonstrates in her study in Kisumu that the magnitude of the ‘sugar daddies’ phenomenon is not as significant as generally assumed: only four percent of all sexual relationships in the sample qualified as ‘sugar daddy’ relationships. Her research also contradicted the assumption that adolescent girls are more at risk than older women (Luke 2005a: 119–120) because “adolescent girls are generally more likely to receive money or gifts for sex than older women” (Luke 2006: 114). Her study stressed one should not make a differentiation based on age and assume that adolescent girls are more vulnerable than adult women. All women, independent of their age, are at risk of unsafe sexual behaviour in transactional relationships (Luke 2005a: 119–120).

In much of the public health literature, women are mainly described as poor and powerless, and sometimes even as being passionless (for more on this critique, see Tawfik and Watkins 2007). Men, on the other hand, are perceived to be economically and socially dominant and unable to control their sexual needs. Yet, masculinity and femininity are both social constructs, which vary through time and space, and both are subject to internal ambivalences, contextually conditioned fluctuations, and historical disruptions (see also Connell 1995). Recently several researchers have started to challenge stereotyped notions of gender, providing alternative perspectives on the ‘sex-for-money exchange’ debate. In particular, they have highlighted that not all male-to-
female money or gift exchange in sexual relationships is coercive or exploitative. Women are not always passive victims just because they are poor and have limited opportunities: they are often also negotiating agents who do not necessarily always reproduce but can also challenge patriarchal structures (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Poulin 2007; Verheijen 2013). Several authors emphasise that women have considerable decision-making control over the process of relationship formation and termination (Luke 2006; Poulin 2007; Van der Sijpt 2011; Verheijen 2013). In her dissertation, Van der Sijpt (2011) shows how “pregnant bodies still have room for individual management and tactical manipulation”; women may resort to abortions, for example, if pregnancy may be considered a hindrance to urban respectability. Spronk’s (2006: 163) study of young unmarried professionals in Nairobi found that sexual pleasure among young women, who felt appreciated and ‘sexy’ in their interaction with their partner, became “symbolic of their identity as a contemporary woman”. Sexual pleasure was thus no longer perceived as exclusive to being married, and was tied more strongly, instead, to being ‘modern’ (Spronk 2006). Notions of transactional sex that only highlight the economic dimensions of these exchanges minimize the role of emotions in intimate relationships.

Emphasising conflict and inequality excludes notions of love and tenderness and de facto reproduces and confirms unequal power relations, albeit unintentionally (Spronk 2006; van Eerdewijk 2006; Wardlow and Hirsch 2006; Thomas and Cole 2009). This parallels the way in which 19th-century missionaries and European colonialists stressed the hypersexuality of ‘Africans’, depicting African marriages as lacking deep emotional attachment (Curtin 1964, cited in Thomas and Cole 2009: 8; see also Vaughan 1991; Thomas 2009). According to Thomas and Cole (2009: 8), such racist accounts depicted “lust as omnipresent and love as absent in Africa”. The much-criticized epidemiological study of Caldwell et al. (1989) built upon these old discourses by saying that ‘African sexuality’ is characterized by “permissiveness” and that most African marriage bonds are loose (Caldwell et al. 1989: 195). Early campaigns against HIV/AIDS at first reinforced these portrayals of Africa, often laying blame on ‘African promiscuity’ while excluding the wider range of contextual factors that are responsible for the AIDS epidemic (Silberschmidt 2001: 257–258). In this way, intimate relations were reduced to sex, and the role of emotions in having sex was overlooked. Following Wardlow and Hirsch (2006: 3), if we want to study gendered relationships, we need to consider the “socially, politically and economically structured inequalities within which couples negotiate and the possibilities for tenderness, pleasure and cooperation that exist in spite of these
inequalities”. It is therefore important to present a nuanced and holistic notion of
gender as well as the interrelationships between ‘sex, love, and money’.

Finally, an important part of the larger context that has started to receive
attention in the study of transactional relationships within the HIV/AIDS literature is
the importance of intergenerational relations; for example, Cole (2007: 78) argues we
must study youthful practice “relationally with respect to the larger intergenerational
matrix of which it is a part”. In her study on transactional sex among young people in
Madagascar, Cole (2007: 78) invites us to analyse young people within their web of
‘intergenerational relations’ rather than emphasizing simply youth culture and youth
agency, “separating youth off from the families and communities in which they live”. Powerful economic constraints that shape youthful practices are important to analyse,
but so are the consequences of youngsters’ actions for the families in which they are
presumably embedded (Cole 2007). In her study, Cole (2007: 79) stresses how the
youngsters of Tamatave (Madagascar) have reworked transactional sex practices from
the past, and how these ‘new’ practices reshape the ways in which families are currently
being created and may be sustained in the future (see also Durham 2007).

3. Sex, love, and money through an intergenerational lens

Young women’s practice of exchanging sex for money has a long history in Kenya (see
White 1990). Most literature about colonial times only focussed on the transactional
element of sexual relationships and rarely took into account emotional content.
According to Cole (2007: 79), youth draw on these old practices of transactional sex but
enact them in a new context, which in their turn shapes the content of these practices in
novel ways (see also Mannheim’s concept of ‘fresh contact’ in Chapter 5).

Cole (2007: 83) writes that in Madagascar, where young women’s practices of
transactional sex existed long before colonialism, and where high formal unemployment
has accompanied the rise of the consumer economy, youth have been increasingly drawn
into consumerism. She discusses the distinction between tanora and jeunes, both of
which refer to youth. The concept of tanora encompasses an older understanding of
youth, while jeunes invokes both the new category of ‘consumer youth’ and the old
practices of tanora that are now enacted in new circumstances:

In contrast to tanora, with its emphasis on productive labour and growth rooted in and,
ultimately contributing to, the flourishing of families and ancestors, the concept of jeunes
combines older rural ideas about the sexually playful nature of youth with a new
emphasis on sophisticated individual consumption as a means to self-realization. Where
This distinction could also be applied to the context of Winam, where the period of *tanora* was the time when the grandparents and parents of the youngsters with whom I worked were still youngsters, and the period of *jeunes* was the time of my fieldwork, when the youngsters with whom I worked were perceived as being part of the new, younger generation.

The structural context of Winam’s youngsters during the time of my research was in a constant state of transformation. In the past, the grandfathers and fathers of the young people with whom I worked with could seek success and upward mobility through schooling, but this was no longer the case during my fieldwork. Education no longer gives youngsters the assurance of finding a job. At the same time, most of the youngsters have left the agricultural livelihood of their parents, ending up in the unpredictable informal sector. These socioeconomic changes combined with the emerging mass media culture have transformed the meanings of sexual relationships and the notions of sex, love, and money, as I will demonstrate in this chapter.

Like the *jeunes* of Cole’s (2007) study in Madagascar, the young people of Winam drew on the old practices from the time of the elders’ youth. Just as in the past, sexual experimentation remains important, although the expectation that sexual play should ultimately end with marriage and the birth of children has undergone some change. At the time of my fieldwork, (informal) marriages were being delayed, and the period of searching and trying out many different pathways seemed to be never-ending, due to livelihood insecurity. Young people were not finding the financial security they were looking for in a marriage. Despite their marginal position, young people had high aspirations and expectations about their future, and they believed in social change: their urban aspirations and desires for new, foreign clothes and commodities were part of being a youngster in Winam. It is within this new context of consumerism, economic marginalization, and desire for an urban lifestyle that we need to analyse how sexual relations come about.

### 4. The art of seduction

With the shift towards urban lifestyles and the emergence of the consumer economy, new emphases on individual consumption and romantic self-expression have come to
SEX, LOVE, AND MONEY

play an important role. Young people desire luxury consumer items from outside Winam, trying to follow the fashions and stay ‘up-to-date’. I want to dispel the notion, often assumed by urbanites, that rural youngsters are all trapped in a traditional life of agriculture. Based on my fieldwork, these youngsters live in a ‘global village’ that is characterized by high mobility between the town and the villages, even if they are economically marginalized and lacking financial resources to acquire desirable goods.

For young men and women in Winam, various reasons—such as physical attraction, sexual pleasure, emotional attachment, economic motivations, and social norms—came into play to explain why one lover was preferred over another, or why someone had several lovers at the same time. For young women, the additional factor of money came more to the foreground when they considered potential boyfriends. This was not only due to the fact that most of the young women in Winam were in a more economically dependent position because they had unequal access to resources, but also because young women expected that their boyfriends would provide for them, as this was one of the social roles assigned to men.

For most of the grandparents and parents of the youngsters I followed, a ‘good husband’ was a financially capable man, someone able to take care of his girlfriends and wives. Or, as Francis (2000: 164) writes, a ‘good husband’ was someone “who could provide enough money to feed the household, as well as providing clothing, household goods and school fees”. While men were expected to provide for women, many failed to live up to these expectations. Due to high unemployment, the rural young men of Winam struggled to find the means to contribute to their natal household, support their siblings, and provide money or gifts in exchange for sexual favours. In order to be seen as ‘real men’, young men needed to seduce women. Although one might expect young women to act demurely, their role in seducing young men should not be underestimated. While in previous generations, young women could just be approached by their future spouse at home, at the time of my fieldwork it seemed that young women actively had to seek out a spouse or lover in order to acquire the consumer goods they desired and pursue their urban aspirations.

In this section, I discuss the ‘rules’ of the seduction game and young men’s creative tactics in seducing young women, especially the use of “sweet-talking” (i.e., using ‘nice words’, or promising to provide). Following that, I discuss the meaning of money in contemporary sexual relationships among youngsters in Winam.
4.1. The ‘rules’ of the seduction game in Winam

In Winam, young men were expected to take an active role in approaching girls or young women, and to compete with other men in order to prove their virility. Male youngsters gave many reasons why they preferred a certain young woman to another, among which the most important was that they wanted to experiment with sex and were attracted by the woman’s beauty. When a young man set his eyes on a beautiful young woman, he would do whatever he could to seduce her. Any female ‘newcomer’, someone just visiting Winam, was usually the attraction of the day, since she had not been “tried out” yet. Young men reasoned that they had to be quick in their efforts to seduce her since she might be going home the next day, and, more importantly, another young man might succeed.

Most of the male youngsters that I followed explained that they commonly approached a girl or young woman they admired through a ‘go-between’: a close female or male friend or relative who knew her, could serve as an intermediary, and could keep a secret. Okoth admitted that young men would not easily share their feelings about a certain young woman with another male friend because they saw each other as rivals who might compete for the same girl. Moreover, if a young man kept expressing his feelings about a woman to his friends, it was thought that he was incapable of approaching her and expressing his feelings to her, signifying that he was not a ‘real man’. Okoth felt safe to use Ochien’g as a go-between when he wanted to approach Akinyi because Ochien’g was Akinyi’s uncle, and would not have any interest in her. Onyango, a 17-year-old schoolboy at the time of my research, was often asked to act as a go-between because he usually kept his word, and because he was familiar with a number of girls and young women because he worked at the soda stand during school holidays.

Onyango’s friend Omosah urged Onyango to introduce him to Eunice, a young woman Onyango had just met along the road while they were both strolling. Onyango at first did not want to present Omosah to Eunice, stating that he disliked her “because she is after money”. However, Onyango’s refusal made Omosah suspects that Onyango was involved with her. To prove the contrary, Onyango finally agreed to act as a go-between.

Here is an excerpt from Onyango’s diary:

Around 9:30 am, my schoolmate Omosah paid me a visit and asked me to stroll with him. As we were strolling, we met Eunice as she was going to buy a soda. I called her to greet us. She came to greet us and told me that she had a bone to chew with me. She told me to see her before the next day to discuss the issue. After she had left us, Omosah asked me if Eunice is my girlfriend. I told him “no,” and asked him why he was asking that question. He just kept quiet, and then he said:

“Onyango, I have [just] fallen in love with that girl and I don’t know how I can see her”.

239
“Just chill, you are still a schoolboy”, I said to him quietly.

“The way you are talking, it seems Eunice is your lover”, he added.

“I don’t know how you are reasoning”, I said loudly.

“If Eunice is not your girlfriend then why are you telling me to chill”, Omosah told me angrily. After that I told him that I thought I was helping him, but to him I was helpless so I promised him that girl.

“Now you are a good friend, I can accept you”, Omosah said happily.

Me, I dislike Eunice because she is after money. I knew that if I would tell Omosah those things, he might think that I don’t want him to be Eunice’s boyfriend, so I just kept those thoughts in my mind. After we had reached my room, Omosah immediately asked me to go and invite Eunice, and I just obeyed and went to look for her. At first, she refused to come but later I convinced her and she agreed to accompany me to my room. I didn’t inform her about Omosah and we just sat.

“Actually, Onyango, what were you calling me for?”, Eunice asked me politely. I didn’t utter a word but I started laughing. Eunice felt like leaving the room but I told her to relax a bit.

“To your opinion, what are you here for?”, I asked her but she was unable to reply. After that I told her that Omosah has cast his eyes on her so she can decide what to do about it and she just laughed.

“What Onyango has told you is true and I am serious about it”, Omosah said.

After that I told Omosah to utter his speeches, and I also informed the girl to be frank with him. Surely it turned to be a debate and I thought to leave them since they might want to tell each other some secrets. Eunice realized and quickly said: “Onyango, don’t you move [leave] because I cannot hide anything from you”. Eunice cheated (i.e., lied to) Omosah that she has no boyfriend and that she doesn’t want one. She claimed that there are more demerits than merits in having a boyfriend.

“Love shouldn’t be forced therefore if Eunice is not willing, you look for another girl”, I said.

“Furthermore, I don’t want to be pregnant”, she added.

“Does it mean that lovers must enjoy sex, we can love each other without sex”, Omosah said to her. “If so, then we will use CD (a condom)”, Omosah added but Eunice refused.

After that I “sweet-talked” her myself and she immediately changed her mind and she agreed to be Omosah’s girlfriend. After that she told us that the following day she would pay Omosah a visit. She left hurriedly, as there was no one to serve customers at her hotel.

Someone serving as a go-between could make a little business from it, asking for something in return for his efforts to convince a young woman. Onyango did this at times, as illustrated in the next excerpt from his diary:

Odipo asked me: “I have admired Caroline for a long time and she refused to be my girlfriend. If you are used to Caroline then you can convince her to be my lover. Please!”
“Will you give me a present if I convince her?”, I asked Odipo.

“Yes, I will give you anything you ask for”, Odipo replied, adding, “I want to receive reply on Friday.” But I told him: “Wait till Monday”.

“Monday you will find me in school and I need Caroline before we start school” (Odipo goes to a boarding school so once he is away at school, he hardly can see Caroline) (August 2005).

It was ultimately up to a young woman to accept or refuse a young man’s proposal. However, just as for young men, various reasons were at play when young women considered accepting young men’s proposals to start sexual relationships. In the case of Eunice, she said she refused Omosah’s proposal at first because she did not want to come across as an “easy girl” who could be easily convinced to engage in sex. According to Onyango, she refused because she did not see that she could get anything good from a schoolboy. Later, she agreed to be Omosah’s girlfriend because she did not want to disappoint Onyango and probably felt socially obligated. In the end, I do not know if she actually stuck to her promise to pay Omosah a visit (i.e., have sex) the following day. MinMercy, a young woman about 16 years old, on the other hand, accepted a proposed relationship out of fear of being forced into sex. Although she was still in primary school (Class 6), her older widowed sister had convinced her to start a relationship with Ochien’g, a 22-year-old fisherman, as he was respected for being tough. According to her sister, Ochien’g would protect her from being bothered by other boys and young men. The truth behind this story was actually that MinMercy’s sister was a young widow; since the death of her husband, a fisherman, she had received fish from Ochien’g. In exchange for the fish, she said that she would try to convince her sister to become involved with him; MinMercy indeed felt obligated to start a relationship with him.

If a girl or young woman kept on ignoring the sexual demands of a young man, he would often develop antipathy towards her. Young men felt very uncomfortable “losing to a girl”, which was why many did not give up in pursuing or “sweet-talking” a “difficult girl” until she gave in to having sex. The socially constructed division of gender roles reinforced the belief that men were in a dominant position to demand sex from their girlfriends whenever they wanted. Omosh, a 16-year-old orphan who dropped out of primary school and earned a living as a fisherman and musician, told us that he did not want to hear from a girl or young woman statements like: “I will think about it,” or “Later, I will give you an answer” because, he explained, “later does not exist. Nowadays it is one touch”.7 Like most of the young men, he believed that any young woman might be found later with another boyfriend, probably one who had more to offer financially. Others also mentioned that “the world of today has changed”, signifying that there were
more diseases and they could die tomorrow. Jeremiah, (a rather shy, 17-year-old boda boda (bicycle-taxi) operator, who had recently finished primary school), explained:

On my side, I approach her like: “Yes, I have seen you, you have caught my eye (I am attracted to you. What can we do? I love you so much”. So she is the one to see how she can answer me. And if she still meanders... sometimes she can tell you: “I will think about it”. Then I tell her: “There is nothing for you to think about. It is just a small issue that you respond to, then I leave, knowing it is a ‘yes’ or ‘no’” (focus group discussion, June 2006).

At another time, Petronella spoke with Augus (a 22-year-old matatu (mini-bus) driver who recently had finished secondary school), and he also expressed a similar attitude:

Augus: When I have a girlfriend to show that I love her and the girl also loves me, I must be able to hold her and have sex with her.

Petronella: What if she asks that you wait?

Augus: (Laughing.) Girls cannot hold, you can wait and someone steals her from you, someone will just take her to the social hall in Kisumu, buy her a drink, and cheat (i.e., lie to) her that he loves her then she gives in (informal conversation, November 2006).

For many young men in Winam, when two partners love each other, they must have sex. Moreover, love was a self-evident notion once the partners had engaged in sex; love became a synonym for sex, and showing love was associated with having sex.

Although young women were supposed to use subtle ways to relate to men because their sexual behaviour was subject to a different moral standard than that of the young men, in reality, women were sometimes very assertive in showing their interest in a certain man. In a conversation between two cousins, NyarAlego (19 years old, completed primary school) and MinMercy, they discussed how some young women were ‘misbehaving’ by trying to meet young men:

NyarAlego: Have you seen how the girls from Bur were behaving?

Ellen: What did the girls do?

NyarAlego: The girls from Bur were standing near the pitch talking to the boys who had come for football. Almost all these girls have children and are not married. They stay home with their children but during the school games, most of them came carrying their children and were out to meet new boyfriends.

(then talking directly to MinMercy) Even the one who was going out with one of my neighbours was around. She has spent the night at my neighbour’s.

MinMercy: Imagine, that is someone who is already married, and only came back to visit her parents, and she still goes out with her old boyfriend (informal conversation, October 2005).
While some used discreet ways to show their interest, others were more provocative. A number of young women used their body language in the hope of attracting men, or wearing clothes that transgressed social, such as a tight, fancy jeans and a “spaghetti top” (halter-style, sleeveless shirt), as Akinyi did when re-connecting with Okoth. Some would move their buttocks in such a way that they were, according to young men, “like a magnet”. At disco matangas, a number of young women came “poorly dressed”, in the sense that they wore very little. This also occurred at Yeshica meetings, where they hoped to attract staff members with their fashionable style of dress. Both male and female youngsters with whom I worked considered such dress and behaviour provocative, and said it invited men to have sex with them. Young women, Okoth said, knew how to “put a man on heat (set a man on fire)”. Others were subtler, giving just hints, for instance by giving a man a few extra things if he came to buy something at their kiosk, or by promising him something, such as giving him extra fish next time he came by.

In the dating field, young men and women admitted that there were many male and female competitors. Some could be fierce rivals, using all kinds of tricks to get the man or woman they wanted, ignoring whatever (emotional, financial, or reputational) grief this might cause their rival. Some did not try to attract a man or woman simply because they did not want to hurt their friend, while others told rumours about their friends to put them at a disadvantage. Josh, a friend of Okoth’s who was also interested in Akinyi, for example, tried to cast Okoth in a negative light by telling Akinyi stories of his cheating, saying: “Okoth loves girls. He goes to all the discos around near and far”. Josh also told her that sometimes while she was waiting for Okoth at his simba, he and Okoth used to meet other girlfriends and “they just finished (had sex) with them in the bush”.

Having multiple lovers was fairly common for many young men. Okoth used an interesting metaphor that he said helped him in “double dealing” (i.e., having two or more lovers simultaneously). Comparing human beings to fish, he reasoned that just as fish have no fixed partner, human beings also roam around and can have several sexual partners at the same time. He said:

For me, I can just convince a girl with politics. Just tell her reasonably: “You know, madam, even if we go back to the sides of the waters, fish can also chase one another and knock themselves on a stone. So with me, you know what is happening, I don't want to hit a stone with the other man (I don’t want to collide with the other man). So let’s do this. For me, the time I have found you, is when you are mine, and the time you will be with the other man, you will be his. And don’t think that if you throw a club to hit a bird that you will hit one bird. You can throw a club on a tree and a pigeon sees you there,
Akuru will be there, Odwer will be there, Oyundi will be there. Don’t think that if it is Akuru that you wanted, is the one you will get. You can even hit Odwer and it falls down, and you can also hit two birds at the same time. So you can double deal and the time you will be with him, I wouldn’t want to know. And when you are with me, let him not know. So we will be like people who are swimming (focus group discussion, June 2006).

In this narrative, Okoth explained that different young men might be after the same young woman, or a young man might want one young woman but end up with a different one. The young men whom I followed also recognized that girls and young women had different boyfriends simultaneously. Some women ‘managed’ several lover(s): they had one for sex, one they really loved, one who was the most handsome, and one for money. Okoth mentioned that a young woman should not tell her other boyfriend(s) about him, nor should she tell him about them. Rather than fidelity, he said, what mattered to him was getting the young woman’s complete attention when they were together. When Akinyi left for Mombasa, Okoth ignored the rumour of another man; what counted for him was that whenever Akinyi was in Dhonam, he wanted to enjoy sex with her, but he did not want to know about her other boyfriends. Okoth’s metaphor, importantly, goes against all HIV/AIDS prevention messages, since he had multiple lovers and Akinyi had her man in Mombasa, and they never used a condom when having sex.

The seduction game encompasses a veiled space where young women and young men challenged the dominant discourse on female sexual passivity and male dominance. Young women found creative and often partially hidden ways to express their desires and also had decision-making power about the starting or ending of sexual relationships. This took place in the obscurity of simbas, but also in public spaces like markets and disco matanga, under what I would call the ‘cover of the openness’. The public nature of these places and events provided an opportunity for nonconformist behaviour and ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott 1990). The seduction game had an economic aspect, as well. Due to the difficulty in making a livelihood in Winam and the expectation that males should be providers, young women were often ‘lured’ into sexual relationships with the promise that their boyfriend would take care of them, even if only temporarily. This is reflected in the way especially young men try to “sweet-talk” young women into sexual relationships.

4.2 “Sweet-talking”

Rambo was the ‘playboy’ of Dhonam. Again and again he managed to ‘hook up’ with girls and young women in the village, as well as with “newcomers”. He was definitely a
specialist in “sweet-talking” girls, and his creativity when approaching girls and young women was impressive. To attract young women, he showed off his financial success, because he believed—correctly—that most women like men who have access to money.

As a 23-year-old teacher in the primary school, he was quite popular among the young women and students. But in order to impress Petronella, my research assistant who, with her Bachelor’s degree in anthropology, was more highly educated than him, Rambo thought he needed to invent an additional story. Petronella wrote in her field notes:

I walk to Ong’ielo and find Lilly (19-year-old participant in Yeshica, secondary school leaver) standing with a bicycle outside a house. I stop to greet her. Rambo comes out of the house with a bicycle. I did not know that this is his home. They greet me and Rambo asks me to go with them to escort Lilly. Lilly looks unhappy and I quickly suspect Rambo must be the boyfriend she told me about. I tell them to go on since I plan to go to the junction where Elisa sells her sugarcane. Rambo comes back and finds me talking in DhoLuo with Elisa. He speaks to me in Swahili sheng’ (slang) and English. I ask him: “Where have you been? Were you lost in Nyanza Province?” He tells me: “I left Nyanza ages ago. I am now doing BA Psychology in Nairobi”. I know that he is lying because there is nothing like BA psychology at the University of Nairobi: psychology is only done at master’s level. I ask him: “Where do they hold their classes?” and he answers: “Just there in town. I will graduate next year”. I wonder which degree course you can do in less than two years—even if it is in the parallel program, module 2 can take at least three years. He continues: “My sister works with an NGO in Sudan and she pays my fee. We have been living in Jacaranda (a very posh estate in Nairobi). I drive to college in my sister’s car. My sister is petite (small) like you and she is not married and does not want to get married”. He now asks Elisa in DhoLuo: “Isn’t it, you know my sister?” but Elisa seems to be very uninterested in his stories. [...] It is past six o’clock now and I decide to leave them, but Rambo asks me to come into his room briefly. Rambo stays in the simba of his brother who had passed away. Rambo gives me some notes on psychology to read that he had made at the library nearby. He sits so close to me, yet the chair is so big. Soon after, it starts raining heavily and I have to wait to go home. He shows me his photo album and shows me one picture of a girl from Nyanza College who used to be his girlfriend. She is a Luhyia. He tells me: “We broke up because she was cheating on me. My sister did also not like her. My sister is overprotective of me and never likes me getting close to girls. There is a girl in Nairobi whom I have become close to but my sister had found out about her and she followed us one day”. I do not like the way he sits so close to me. I tell him that I want to go home as I was expecting a phone call from my boyfriend. He tells me: “Never tell a man that you want to go home. You do not know what I had in mind”. I ask him: “Is Lilly your girlfriend?”. He denies it, and says: “We are just close friends and Lilly really confides in me and tells me about her problems. Lilly is undergoing so much stress at home. Recently her uncle tried to rape her but she managed to lock herself in one of the rooms. Because Lilly tells me to take care, I believe she is in love with me. She has also told me that since I left for Nairobi, people have been spreading rumours that we are going out, yet I have not heard those rumours. Lilly has already met with my sister and she often comes to my home to visit my mother, even when I am absent. Lilly is a nice girl, still naive. I do not want to bring up the issue of dating as maybe she does not want us to be lovers”. I know that he is lying to me. I have a strong feeling that they are lovers since Lilly had told me that her boyfriend is in Nairobi and that he is taken care of by his sister and that her uncle knows him. Rambo further tells me: “I am a close friend to Lilly’s uncle, such that at times he asks me if he can spend the night with his girlfriend in my room. I refuse because Lilly would not be happy to find her married uncle with his girlfriend in my room. Lilly is aware about her uncle’s affairs”. He then asks me: “What do you think of
SEX, LOVE, AND MONEY

me?”. I know that he wants to go back to the topic of asking me to be his lover. I tell him: “I know you as Rambo, Onyango's friend”. He tells me: “After meeting you at the disco with Onyango, I wanted to talk to you and to get to know you better”. I tell him: “This is not possible because I am already seeing someone”. He keeps on insisting: “You should also give me a chance and consider me”. He is really irritating me because I have already told him that I am in a serious relationship, yet he is insisting I should consider him. He tells me: “I have not been having girlfriends apart from the Luhyia lady from college. Many girls have shown interest in me and visit me at home. One girl from Dhonam Secondary School is actually telling everyone that I am her boyfriend, yet I am not.” [...]

He finally escorts me home. It has rained heavily outside. I get back home past 9 pm. He tells me: “I am disappointed that you have refused to give me a chance. I hate failing. I want an educated woman who can reason intellectually”. I wish him a good night and go into my house. I am annoyed with Rambo and I hope he is not going to hurt Lilly. Lilly really loves him and has many problems at home (she is an orphan, lives with her aunt and uncle and is one of the participants at Yeshica) (December 2005).

Rambo tried to impress Petronella with his stories and therefore needed to lie to Petronella at various moments. He did not realise that Petronella could easily uncover his lies since she was familiar with university and town life: most young women from Winam were not always able to judge if a man’s stories were true since they were used to village life. The fact that Rambo was an attractive, young teacher who claimed to be studying for a university degree and to have a rich sister in Nairobi who lent him her car was enough to convince most girls and young women that he would be a good catch. When Petronella made him realise that she suspected that he was trying to seduce her while he was actually dating Lilly, Rambo was not amused. He tried all means to ‘save face’ by demonstrating his innocence and by refuting the rumours that she might have heard about him. He denied being Lilly’s boyfriend and cast Lilly’s uncle in a negative light in order to try to convince Petronella that he doesn’t approve of “double dealing”. Yet, he did exactly that, over and over again.

In “sweet-talking” young women, young men tried to say exactly what women wanted to hear. If a man was financially capable, a woman might be more easily convinced of his ‘virtue’, but the majority of the male youngsters of Winam had few financial means. According to some of the male youngsters, the first thing young women consider in response to a proposed relationship is money: they reasoned that a man should approach her by showing off his wealth. To do so, men talked about their possessions or bragged about their educational level or job. In this way, they promised and pretended to be a responsible future husband. They also tried to present themselves with a fashionable dressing style: in formal suits (white shirt, black trousers, and polished shoes), or in the urban dress code of American rappers (baggy pants, big shoes, heavy necklaces, and sunglasses) commonly seen in movies, TV, and magazines. In
addition, many also tried to initiate a kind of ‘love story’ in which they praised the young woman (see also ‘What has love got to do with it’, later in this chapter). They believed that young women liked to hear how their appearance emotionally touched a man, and used lines like: “You are the most beautiful girl in the world”, “I love you so much”, or “I cannot wait to have you in my arms”. Thus rural young men tried to conform to the image of being a ‘responsible lover’ or ‘ideal boyfriend’, and often employed a kind of ‘provider-discourse’ that emphasised their financial means.

In Tadele’s (2005: 38–39) study in Dessie, a provincial town in Ethiopia, he writes that his informants perceived “women as objects that can be fooled around with” since a man may not necessarily be required to prove his financial status. Sometimes the young men from Winam made promises to young women that they couldn’t fulfil, and ‘got away with it’ by using delaying tactics. Axel (18-year-old attendant at the secondary school) called young women the “weaker sex” since they were in a dependent position and easy to convince: “If you promise them something and they fail to get it, they will still be together with you”. Axel continued:

You know, a boy can even tell a girl: “You know, I love you”, or maybe “I will marry you, I will cater to you, I will take care of everything. After your school, just work hard, I have this and this, I have something to give you, please let’s meet on this date, so that I give you this particular thing”. Sometimes, let’s say, he might promise to give [her] 100—not 100, even 5,000 shillings, somebody can tell a lady that. So the lady is going to be happy. That appointment, the lady will not miss, that is the place or that is where they will meet. You know, when they meet, the lady can sometimes ask the boy: “Where is the money or where is the promise?”. The boy may tell her: “No, I had a problem, I had some problem somewhere else so you know, you have to excuse me for the time being, but your matter or your case I know. I am solving the case, so just persevere, yeah, just chill for the time being, I know your case”. You know, like the ladies, so many ladies are easily convinced. They will just be very happy, waiting for another day. Again that other day—she may end up not seeing him the second time, yeah. By that time, the boy shall have gone somewhere else again: he is having another girlfriend somewhere else (in-depth interview, May 2006).

“Sweet-talking” was used to convince young women that there was no cheating or double-dealing going on. The young man often needed to convince a friend to make up a story for him before his girlfriend found out: young women would sometimes employ this same subterfuge. In the following anecdote, Onyango described how he tried to solve a situation that happened in his friend Ken’s simba, where two of Ken’s girlfriends came to visit him at the same time. The young women were very suspicious and Ken needed to “sweet-talk” them later in order to win them back. Onyango wrote in his diary:

At around 8:30 am, Ken came to our home to call me because his girlfriend NyarSakwa paid him a visit and wanted to greet me before she left. Ken told me that she had arrived yesterday evening. When we had reached Ken’s simba, NyarSakwa had already swept
Ken’s room and collected the rubbish inside the room. I asked her why she had left the rubbish inside and she said that she was afraid of the neighbours. NyarSakwa asked me to tell her about the quarrel between my stepbrother Joel and Ken. [...] As I was explaining that story to NyarSakwa, Safi, another girlfriend of Ken’s, appeared. Ken started worrying because Safi and NyarSakwa were going to know that they were sharing a boy. I signalled Ken and called him outside. I told him that I was going to cheat NyarSakwa to escort me to the market, then he [could] escape with Safi to my room. I told NyarSakwa to escort me to the market but she refused. It seemed like she had realized the secret. I again called Ken outside. I gave Ken my key and told him to escape to my room. After he had gone to my room, I called Safi outside and cheated (i.e., lie to) her that NyarSakwa is my girlfriend so she had no reason to think deep. I told her that NyarSakwa had paid me a visit and I had exchanged my room with Ken. I convinced her and escorted her to my room where Ken was. When I came back, NyarSakwa asked me where Safi had gone. I cheated (i.e., lied to) her and said that Safi is my girlfriend and someone told her that I was with Ken and that is why she had come to this room. She asked me again where Ken was and I told her that he had gone to look for a bicycle to escort her. After that NyarSakwa asked that we go and rest in my house. In my opinion, it was as if she had realized something. I cheated (i.e., lied to) her that I had forgotten my key at our home. She told me that I was cheating (i.e., lied to) her that I knew what was going on. I convinced her and escorted her up to the main road (26 November 2005).

Young women were often left with the impression that men were trying to fool them. Yet, Achien’g (a 15- or 16-year-old young woman who was staying with her maternal grandmother) confided that if a young woman really likes a man, it is hard to be sceptical of his “sweet-talking” because she loves him. Most of the female youngsters I worked with often generalized that “Kenyan men are all womanizers”, who only view women as sexual objects: “the men only want sex” and therefore have different girlfriends. They complained that men in general could not be trusted and that their “sweet words” were just to seduce them into sex instead of indicating that the men would really take care of them. They felt betrayed by the man’s ‘provider’ and ‘love’ discourse. Young women also “sweet-talked” men but to a lesser extent. They might use phrases such as “I like you so much” or “You are the only one for me” to get pity from their boyfriends or to play the victim in order to get some financial help. If a boyfriend suspected a young woman of cheating on him, she could “sweet-talk” him by telling him that he was her only lover. Young men, on the other hand, usually complained that most of the young women were motivated to start or stay in a sexual relationship not for love but for money and sexual intercourse, and, as I explain later, they also felt cheated.

4.3 Delaying marriage

Utilizing the language of love, affection, and pleasure, youngsters tried to seduce their lovers. However, at the time of my research, few sexual relationships turned into long-lasting relationships or (informal) marriages. Just as with young people in most places, most sexual relationships among young people in Winam were casual, lasting a couple of
months or less (including “hit and runs” or one-night stands), and only few were more
enduring. Both young men and young women imagined that they would become more
“serious” with age, and that the sexual freedom (such as dating members of their own
clan) they experienced during childhood and adolescence would diminish over the
course of their lifecycle, certainly with the transformation of boyfriends into husbands
and girlfriends into wives.

In Winam, few marriages were legally recognized or protected by law. Usually
couples just decided to ‘stay together’, sometimes after the young woman was found to
be pregnant. In such situations, there was no formal commitment binding the couple.
Although such relationships are usually referred to as ‘informal marriages’ or
‘cohabitation’ in social scientific literature, JoWinam said “osetedo” (she or he has
married) about people who have come together in this way. The truth behind
cohabitation was that most young men could not afford to pay bride wealth to the young
woman’s family, lacking the necessary resources for formalizing a marriage or taking
care of a family. Most of them tried to satisfy themselves with the rationalization that
cohabitation is a precursor to marriage, saying they hoped to “legalize their marriage
soon”. Most informal marriages among young people, however, did not last long (at the
time of my research and among the youngsters I worked with, they ranged from a few
months up to five years). At any time, one of the partners might decide to leave the
other. As Paul, a 20-year-old secondary school graduate, explained: “To marry is easy:
you just marry by staying in that place. So you can easily divorce. You can just go away
and marry somebody else. I can even stay with a girl without my parents finding out”. I
also often heard stories such as: “She was first married in Siaya, left her husband, and
then married a fisherman”, or “He already married twice before he settled with that
girlfriend”. Robert, a 25-year-old, said about his second wife, whom he had married after
his first wife had left him: “This one will just run away soon [too].”

Parents more easily gave consent to a proposal from a wealthier person, since
marriage was to some extent still perceived as a socioeconomic contract between two
families. For a long time, this contract was only valid if the young woman was still a
virgin. Because marrying a virgin was no longer (or perhaps never has been) realistic,
the economic value of a young woman was no longer dependent on her virginity. Many
parents living in poverty, however, still saw the marriage of their daughter to a ‘rich
man’ as an opportunity to generate income. This was certainly the case with MinAkinyi,
who thought it better to intervene when her daughter Akinyi started to have interest in
the opposite sex. She was eager to get a son-in-law with financial means in case she died soon, and her daughter assumes responsibility for taking care of her siblings.10

Economics also played a role in terms of inequality within marriages. Young men emphasized the importance of maintaining their dominance during marriage, since most of them believed that to avoid quarrels in a relationship a man should always be on a higher level (i.e., higher level of education and better-paying job) than a woman. They imagined that if a woman became independent she would start to disrespect a man. The young women with whom I worked shared these sentiments, preferring a boyfriend who was more highly educated than themselves so they could look up to him. Most, however, also believed that during adolescence it was still possible to have relationships where men did not dominate, as long as those relationships did not lead to marriage. Ochien’g (a 22-year-old fisherman, married to MinMercy) offered the famous Portuguese football player Ronaldo as an example:

You know that Ronaldo marries girls who are very educated—that is why you hear that Ronaldo marries year after year. It seems like he wants to be proud and that girl also wants to be proud, so that makes them not be able to do what? They cannot live well together. [...] It should be that one person is up [higher] and another is down [lower]. That is when it is good, but if you are both up, true, if you are both up—then there is no understanding in that house (focus group discussion, June 2006).

Most of the male youngsters often delayed (informal) marriage because they did not feel ready yet and had not secured their own financial means to sustain themselves. At the same time, the expansion of the labour market had enabled young women to become less economically dependent on potential husbands. In Winam, young women expressed a desire for their own steady source of income in case their husband stopped providing for them. Alice (a 22-year-old secondary school graduate), who was dating Moses, one of the musicians from a famous local band, did not want to hurry into marriage. She also understood that the impact of HIV/AIDS put an additional burden on household members, and was another reason why youngsters delayed marriage. When Petronella asked Alice if she planned on marrying her boyfriend, Alice replied:

Not now since we are still not ready for marriage and he also told me that he couldn’t marry me now. I am also not ready because I have no job and a steady source of income. I do not want to fully rely on the man. I feel that times may come when the man does not want to give you money and may change his colours and stop providing for you and maybe mistreat you. I think it is important to be able to stand on your own two feet just in case something like that happens. Moses is not ready to marry now because he will not be in a position to start supporting his family. He gets very little from the band and since he is the eldest boy in his family, he has to take care of all those at home. His father died and left two women who I think are all [HIV-] positive and his stepmother is very sick now compared to his mother. The rest of his siblings are still in school (informal conversation, January 2006).
Although young women might have their own income-generating activity, the discourse that men were supposed to be the head of the household remained hegemonic at the time of my research. Women expected men to provide them with basic needs (food, rent, or school fees), and any money women earned would be used for buying their own luxury items. Young women in this way reaffirmed the social gender role of men as breadwinners, even when they might be earning more than their boyfriends or husbands. In any event, both young men and young women in contemporary Winam earn very little, and, as a consequence, marriage—formal or informal—is no longer a stable form of union in Winam.

To summarize, both men and women used creative ways, which did not always conform to gender stereotypes, to win over their sexual partner. Sex, love, and money all came into play in shaping why one lover was preferred over another, and, in some cases, young women dated several boyfriends so that all three of these areas were covered. The young men whom I followed up were well aware of this, and tried to win over young women by “sweet-talking” them and presenting themselves in a better light than they actually were. Both female and male youngsters complained that sex and money took precedence over love. Informal marriage has come to dominate the social landscape, as men can no longer meet their roles as breadwinners nor offer bride wealth, and young women and their mothers often angle to create relationships with young men who seem to have financial means. Within this context, some young women sought to earn their own income, not just for luxury items, but to provide some measure of economic independence.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, young women’s use of sex to obtain money has already been widely described in the literature on ‘transactional sex’ in sub-Saharan Africa. I hope to broaden the simplistic public health understanding of ‘transactional sex’ by illustrating how youth are adapting to a changing socioeconomic context and taking into account their intergenerational relations. In the next section, I examine the meaning of money in young people’s sexual relationships, describe the practices of money/gift transfers, and analyse the situations in which they occur.

5. The ‘money/gift–sex exchange’ debate

The exchange of money or gifts between sexual partners need not be related to coercive or exploitative relations. As Cole (2009) demonstrated in her research on young women’s
narratives of sexual relationships in Madagascar, money often served as both a motivation to seek love and an expression of it. Other research shows that money often forms an integral part of courtship and can be an expression of care and affection within relationships (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Poulin 2007). As long as the giving of money or gifts from men, and the giving of domestic services from girls or young women, remains within certain limits, such actions can demonstrate appreciation and respect. This was also the case in Winam. However, when limits were not respected, for example, if a young woman became ‘too demanding’ or a young man made promises he never fulfilled, the issue of money became problematic in young people’s sexual relationships.

5.1. Demonstrating appreciation and respect

In Winam, a young woman was aware that when she accepted money or gifts from a young man, this almost automatically implied that she had accepted him as her boyfriend. It was quite common and almost expected that a young man would provide some financial support for his girlfriend(s) (regardless of whether or not she became a wife) for a number of years prior to marriage (see also Simpson 2009: 61–66). In this way, during a sexual relationship, young men demonstrate their ability to meet the financial needs of their partners. Giving gifts or money was perceived as something ‘normal’ and part of young people’s everyday life, and a way to show girlfriends that they were cared about.

Most young women expected to receive occasional financial support from their boyfriends. This was given in the form of material goods, such as soap, body lotion, a soft drink or biscuits, a dress or underwear, schoolbooks, or a small amount of money (for example, 50 or 100 Kenyan shillings, about 60 eurocents or 1.25 euro). Sometimes girl- and boyfriends exchanged “snaps” (pictures) of each other in different styles of dress or taken at different places, or young men invited girlfriends to go and take a picture together. In addition, at an early stage of their relationship they sometimes surprised their girlfriends with sentimental cards expressing their love. Most of the young women tended to prefer money to gifts, because they could then buy what they lack or what they like.

Most of the young women and young men with whom I worked did not directly link the gifts or money with sex, but rather considered it as a sign of love and appreciation, as Josh (19 years old and boda boda (bicycle taxi) operator) explained: “I can buy her many clothes to show her that I love her. [...] I just surprise her with them.”
That is when a girl will know that you love her. If you cannot provide her with such things, if from the time you started the relationship, you have only been taking her for tea in hotels and sodas, is all you have to count, that is not enough. It means you are fake material” (informal conversation, June 2006). Handing over money or a gift was not directly followed by sex: it could come any time before or after it. When a young man gave his girlfriend pocket money, he would usually say something like, “Take this for your bus fare”, or “Take this for your lunch”. When a young woman needed to take a matatu (local bus) or boda-boda (bicycle taxi) to reach her boyfriend’s place and to return home, she typically assumed her boyfriend would cover the travel costs. Sometimes a young woman would also ask her boyfriend to assist her with “something small”: she might, for example, ask her boyfriend to help her to settle a debt of 150 Kenyan shillings (approximately 2 euro) in a local shop, or tell him that she lacks a bra, a pair of shoes, or a pair of socks. If the young man had money at that particular moment, he would try to share it with his girlfriend. He might not give her the total amount she requested, but at least a part of it. The young men knew that it was often due to poverty that the young women would ask for assistance, and that the money might not go where first described, as Axel (an 18-year-old schoolboy) explained: “Sometimes she does not use this money to buy the socks. She maybe uses it to eat some things, yeah. So it is, [because of] poverty, generally, it is poverty”. It was often too shameful for young women to admit that they were running out of food at home. Young men, on the other hand, felt proud that they could show their girlfriends that they were capable of taking care of them, at least to some degree.

In most of the public health literature on transactional sex, ‘providing’ is usually observed and described in a one-way direction, where the young man is the one who gives. The young women I worked with, however, also often tried to express their ‘love’ to their boyfriends, not only by “playing sex” together, but also by offering their help in domestic duties. Whenever the young man was in need, his girlfriend would try to assist him with the laundry, iron his clothes, sweep his room, and cook his food. Just as the young men found it obvious that they should provide for their girlfriends, the young women also understood that they should relieve their boyfriends from domestic tasks if the men were living on their own. The women’s gifts usually took the form of services and small presents rather than money. This reflects the gender inequality of the cash economy: young women were economically dependent on young men and young men had greater access to cash. Nevertheless, there were rare cases when a young woman provided money to her boyfriend because she was working when he was not. JoWinam
would gossip about such situations, regarding it with ambiguous feelings, as it was not the way things should happen.

In sum, apart from demonstrating appreciation and respect, money was an important form of financial assistance that young men were expected to provide to their girlfriends. When a man was not able to meet a young woman’s basic needs, her parents and other relatives might support—or even encourage—her in breaking off the relationship. Young men therefore made a distinction between covering a woman’s basic needs versus luxury needs. They believed it their duty, as a man to assist a girlfriend when she had basic needs such as food, soap, body lotion, basic clothing, rent, school fees, transportation, or medical costs. When women asked for expensive, luxury, and fashionable items such as mobile phones, an upscale dress, or a watch, most young men preferred to break off the relationship, in large part because such demands could not be fulfilled. Young women, on the other hand, did not see the need to stay with someone who could not meet ‘their luxury needs’. Thus, while there was economic inequality between the sexes, there was a different kind of inequality in relationships: Young women could navigate between and maximize multiple ‘resources’ (men) whereas young men, lacking financial stability, faced difficulties in securing a sexual relationship.

5.2. Negotiating the terms and boundaries of exchange

At the places where young men congregated, such as the market, the boda boda (bicycle taxi) stop, the karata (cards)-playing place, the draft (checkers)-playing place, and the video halls, they often discussed women and their powers. They talked about “girl X”, who was “overpowering” her boyfriend, “girl Y” who was “only after money”, or “girl Z” who was not behaving the way she should. The young men—and young women—with whom I worked disliked young women who were “too demanding”, dismissing them as “girls who like money”. Many young men mentioned that they did not want “their love [to be] based on money”, and they disliked being judged on the basis of their available cash flow. Many believed as Onyango did, that “most girls are after money and therefore do not choose their boyfriend wisely”. They believed that such women leave their boyfriends if they can’t fulfil their needs. As Ochien’g said: “She only loves you when money is there but once you are broke, she runs away, which means that she is not a true lover”.

When a young man was very much in love with a young woman and he really feared losing her, he would try to provide the young woman with all that she demanded from him. Even if the gifts were very expensive, he would try to fulfill her desires. This
was also a way for a young man to keep a young woman for himself, and to try to control her movements, as he was conscious that if he did not invest in her, she might search for another or additional boyfriend, or be taken away from him by another, more financially capable man. Some young men went so far as to beg their male peers to lend them money or to steal from their parents. (Borrowing money from female friends was considered too shameful.) Other young men tried to find additional work, as Axel explained:

These boys could maybe go as far as stealing things from the parents. Maybe some could beg, they could beg and beg and beg, and if you refuse, they steal—but some could go and work hard somewhere, maybe like weeding for some people. After weeding, you maybe get forty or fifty shillings. This one is going to be divided among the girlfriends. You know, some people could even have four or three girlfriends and some could just have one. So if you are the only one, you are lucky, you can even get that fifty, because the girl is going to demand it if she sees you have it: “Just give me that thirty tomorrow, I will come” (in-depth interview, May 2006).

According to Onyango, if a couple’s love was not mutual and the woman started to realize that her boyfriend really loved her, she might take advantage of him and exaggerate her need for fashionable goods. However, there was a limit to this and young women knew that if they started to be ‘too demanding’, the relationship might end. But when love was not mutual, she might still press the limits since she had nothing to lose. On the other hand, if the young man did not love his girlfriend and if she demanded a lot of money or presents from him, then the young man might quickly walk out of the relationship because he had nothing to lose.

Among fellow youngsters, young women did not hesitate to show off the goods or money they had received from their ‘rich’ boyfriend. Young men, on the other hand, would seldom brag to their male friends about providing money to girlfriends because their friends might criticize them and accuse them of using money to buy love and affection. Still, fellow youngsters noticed if a male friend was in the possession of money and this gave him some honour and status. There was no doubt that the young men loved to be able to behave and spend like middle-class people from town, as if they had a stable job and no difficulty in providing for their girlfriends. Yet, most village men were realistic: they simply could not afford certain gifts or big outings with young women.

Conquering or impressing any of the “dot.com girls”, for instance, was no longer something any of the rural young men tried to do. The dot.com girls were a group of female youngsters who had spent most of their childhood and adolescence in town, were extremely mobile, and who were perceived to be ‘modern’ (see Chapter 4). According to
most of the young men of Winam, as girlfriends they were “too demanding” since their desires exceeded what were considered basic goods.

The so-called townspeople were usually able to attract the dot.coms. A number of rural men in Winam felt annoyed because they could hardly compete with their male rivals from town who had more to offer to the rural young women and the dot.com girls. The fact that their male rivals lived in town was already enough to attract rural women. Apart from the townspeople, the fishermen, teachers, bus drivers, construction workers, and CDC employees who were living in Winam or who came to Winam for a short period of time were attractive to most of the young women of Winam. Tadele (2005), who did research among young men in a provincial town in Ethiopia, reported that the men in his study who were living in the streets of Dessie felt frustrated because for a number of women “taking a boyfriend or husband is one strategy for survival” (Tadele 2005: 49; see also Schoepf 1992). While it is for some women a survival strategy, for many others, a lover’s wealthy background may act as “an extra spice in a relationship” (Tadele 2005: 49), giving women an opportunity to climb up the social ladder, even though it was only temporarily.

Most of the young men could only occasionally afford to give their girlfriends a little present or a small amount of pocket money, and thus could easily be left for a townsman. When young men realised that their girlfriends did not take their efforts into account, especially when they ran off with a man more likely to secure their livelihood, the young men became very bitter. Augus complained:

How many girls have disappointed men, they cheat (i.e., lie to) you that they love you, you pay their [school] fee, then when the graduation day comes, she tells you not to attend her graduation, why is that? It is because she has someone there, she comes back home with a baby accompanied by another man. That can really hurt (informal conversation, December 2006).

Many young women know that both men and women are enduring the same economic hardship. Young women who were really emotionally attached to their boyfriends were also empathetic towards their boyfriends: although boyfriends were at times not able to provide, they continued to stay with them. Unlike the young women who were just after money or the dot.coms, they would not leave a boyfriend if he was in a difficult situation. Some young women might also have no option other than to stay with a boyfriend: as an orphan, or without family members to support them, such women would have no one if they left their boyfriend or husband.
The exchange of money, gifts, and domestic work continues to play an important role in contemporary sexual relationships in Winam. My data confirms and expands upon what other anthropologists already have emphasised, namely the significance of love in the context of commoditised social relations. The exchange of money and gifts in sexual relationships is viewed as an expression of appreciation and respect. However, if the exchange of money/gifts exceeded certain limits, the man's economic position or his livelihood was threatened. In this precarious economic context, young women navigated between multiple men, seeing them as resources. They also often misused or exploited their so-called subordinate role and demanded from young men more than they actually could afford. In this way, a number of male youngsters actually became victims of their expected ‘provider’ role in society. Emotional fulfilment in a relationship was not only a preoccupation of young women but also that of young men.

6. ‘What’s ‘love’ got to do with it?’

Relationships based on money and gifts are often viewed in contrast to those based on ‘love’. As explained above, intimacy and exchange are not inherently opposed but can go hand in hand in a continuous process of negotiating the terms of a relationship. In this section, I explain the role of emotional attachment in the intimate relationships of young people of Winam and what it means to them to have a ‘modern’ relationship.

6.1. Emotional attachment and modernity

Whereas young men often used ‘love’ as an euphemism for sex, most of the young women I worked with stressed that an emotional attachment towards each other was as important as or even more so than having sex. Akinyi, for example, broke off her cohabitation with the man from Mombasa, disappointing her mother, because there was no love involved in that relationship. Not only did she not have romantic feelings for him, but also he disrespected her family and had multiple girlfriends simultaneously:

[Being in Mombasa] was bad because that man would talk badly about my family and about me. I never had any feelings for him and I found it hard to stay with someone I do not love. When two people are living together without love, it normally leads to a lot of quarrels and fights, and when the children see what is happening at home, they will not respect others and will end up having the same fights and problems in their own homes. [...] Someone might want you, yet you do not love him. Love is more important than money and I love Okoth more (Informal conversation, August 2005).

Young women often judged the quality of their relationships according to ideals of emotional intimacy (see also Spronk’s 2006 research on middle-class youngsters in
Nairobi and Van Eerdewijk’s 2006 research in Dakar). Young men did not so easily show their emotional side to a woman since they thought that this was what was expected of them. Yet, even though love was more important for Akinyi than it was for Okoth, who mainly was searching for sexual satisfaction without any exclusive commitment, this did not mean that Okoth was not emotionally attached to her. Akinyi expressed that she would have preferred to have a more attentive lover who would show his love by taking her out, not only by having sex. To Akinyi’s irritation, Okoth did not want her to join him when he went to a disco matanga; she later discovered that he was seeing different girlfriends simultaneously. Similarly, Akinyi had a relationship with Jack, her boyfriend from Mombasa, while she still was with Okoth.

The larger story about love and the youngsters of Winam was also about modernity. Not only economic and demographic shifts (see Illuoz 1997) but also the globalization of images and “proto-narratives of possible lives” (Appadurai 1996) played a crucial role in shaping young people’s desires for ‘romantic love’ that were linked to ideologies of ‘modern progress’. In this way, the youngsters positioned themselves in contrast to their parents and grandparents, for whom relationships had been a contract between two lineages. However, we need to be sceptical about claims that assume that the measure of human progress can be marked by a society’s shift from ‘traditional’ to a ‘modern’ relationship, in which a companionate relationship or marriage is perceived as being ‘modern’. This would be a very Eurocentric way of analysing this phenomenon (Larkin 1997; Lindholm 2006; Wardlow and Hirsch 2006; Thomas and Cole 2009). As Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) argued in their book Modern Loves and Cole and Thomas (2009) did in Love in Africa, companionate or romantic courtship practices are not a consequence of economic development (i.e., ‘progress’) and should consequently not be viewed as being superior to other forms of intimate relations. The idea of romantic love is not new in Africa, even though in the social scientific and Christian accounts from the 1930s, love was a neglected topic (Thomas 2009). Previous generations of African youngsters have also experienced passionate love in their relationships.

While romantic love is not new, companionate marriage is a relatively recent global ideal that “implies a constellation of associated ideals and practices, such as marriage based on a prior romantic relationship, individual choice in spouse, monogamy, nuclear family households, [...] [and] viewing marital sex as an expression and symbol of emotional attachment” (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006: 5). The mass media have further facilitated the spread of a companionate courtship ideal, and HIV/AIDS campaigns have in recent years started addressing subjects as love, trust, passion, and attraction (Spronk
In Dhonam, and in other places all over the world, young men and women often use ‘love’ as a trope through which they hope to claim a ‘modern’ identity (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006: 13–14).

In Winam, when young men and young women spoke about romantic relationships, rather than feelings of affection, they typically discussed sexual satisfaction. ‘Romantic relationships’ in Winam were mainly understood as unions where both partners enjoyed and expected sexual pleasure and satisfaction from each other. Thus an important measure of the quality of such a relationship was not only that the young woman satisfies her boyfriend but also that the young man understands that women as well need to enjoy sexual pleasure. A ‘modern man’ thus should know how to please his girlfriend sexually. Youngsters differentiated, as well, between the town and the village, positioning people from town as being ‘more modern’ than they are in the village. In town, emotional feelings and attraction came to the foreground when someone claimed to be ‘modern’: emotional attachment, urbanity, and modernity were thus closely linked.

6.2. Ideals of romantic love

Both female and male youngsters stressed that an emotional attachment to each other was as important as having sex or receiving money, and therefore avoided arranged relationships. Most of them were familiar with romantic ideals from ‘Nollywood’ (Nigerian) and ‘Bollywood’ (Hindi) movies, and the popular American soap series ‘The Bold and the Beautiful’ shown at the village’s video place. Romantic love relationships were believed to promise greater intimacy and communication between partners and such relationships were thought to be based on equality (see also Verheijen 2006; Thomas and Cole 2009).

Adhis, who longed for a romantic relationship, described how her former boyfriend Felix had been an ideal boyfriend: showing love and care, spending time with her, assisting in solving problems, and being well educated. Adhis was not only emotionally attached to Felix, but, and perhaps more importantly, she could also rely on him whenever she was in need because of his status as a good student and an employed young man. He was a presentable lover, someone who was hard working and who tried to achieve his goals in life. They never engaged in sex, and she broke off the relationship the moment he said he wanted to be sexually active. Looking at her story in more detail, we can see how notions of love shaped her understanding of her relationship with Felix.
Adhis came from a family of eight children. Her father was a primary school teacher and her mother took care of the children. Adhis had spent most of her childhood in town, where she stayed with her older brother at their aunt’s place. When she finished secondary school in 2005, she returned to her parents’ home in the village. Adhis’s only wish was to get out of Winam and to continue with college as soon as possible; she had a strained relationship with her mother, and had enjoyed living in town. When we asked her in an in-depth interview what kind of a person she wanted to marry, she told us what her ideal boyfriend would be like:

The kind of person I have always wanted maybe is loving or kind. Someone who understands people, someone who will accept me the way I am with my weaknesses and everything, so that is the understanding. But I always look at four things in a person: first of all, I look at your character, then I look at your integrity; your character also is in your morality, then I look at if you are God fearing. Character, integrity, moral, and God fearing (in-depth interview, May 2006).

Then she shared with us her story of Felix, her second boyfriend (it is not clear if they ever had sex together), whom she got to know when she was in secondary school. Adhis had difficulty paying her tuition, and she was often sent home to get her school fees; often there was no money, and she was unable to return to school. On her way home one time, she met Felix, who had just finished his Form 4 (i.e., last grade in secondary school) exams and was walking home. They started to meet regularly, and Felix would send her flowers, love letters, and cards, and even giving her money to get transportation home. They went to church together, and would meet sometimes at the Winam library, where he would coach her on mathematics. She said: “He was really loving and caring about my education—he could send me these past papers, coach me on maths, as he was a mathematician too”.

After secondary school, Felix went to stay with his brother in Nairobi where he went to a college to study insurance, and he still sent Adhis money now and then. When he asked her to have sex, she broke things off with him:

During the course of our friendship, there was a time he told me: “I now want us to be engaged”. Then I asked him: “Are we not engaged?”, and he said: “Anyway, don’t be a fool, I want us to be engaged sexually”, so he insisted. So he used to bring me [advice columns from] newspapers [in which they discussed love relationships], these letters to Donna and Madonna [to try to convince me]... He also sent me many greetings. He used to bring me so many things... So I have so many things of his, even CDs (condoms), I still have them to date. Up to now, he is still calling my brother. I think I burnt his love letters after we broke up. His letters were so painful, all these letters. If I think about the reason why we broke up... After that, I hated him: he was pressuring me so much, so I stopped talking to him. After pressuring me to enter into premarital sex, I thought that: “Is he really caring about me? Is he really loving?”. I was so mad, how could he! Whenever he used to come to my place, I could hide. I don’t know, maybe something is always wrong with me. I just
live like that. Yet, I never knew whether he wanted protected sex or not. We never talked about it. That is the mistake I made. I never asked him about it. So I was remorseful about that, I held it for so long, until recently—maybe I could have just discussed it (in-depth interview, May 2006).

She admitted to still having feelings for Felix:

We had great feelings; we could even marry each other. We used to talk about marriage so much, but also something discouraged me: Felix comes from ‘K’ (the name of a clan) and I also come from ‘K’. We cannot marry [because of this], so it is so painful for me. Till today I cry because I fear how much I have mistreated him, up to now I still miss him because he was waiting for me, crying over me. So many times, he still tries to reach me through my younger brother. He tells me that his life is not going to be like he had hoped, that he is going to loose his life because of me, he is not going to have the good future he thought of. But he doesn’t know that we come from the same clan. And you know, he was the only guy who understood me, the way I am, everything, he understood me, he knew me. As for me, I also thought that maybe me and him, we could have a better life together. So when I left, that strong bond broke up. I also thought that, Felix told me that if I leave him, everyone that I will date, those relationships will never succeed. So maybe it is true—I don’t know, maybe I am the person who believes that. I also pray that maybe we can still marry. I have seen people who marry, even in the Bible: I read that someone married a very close relative. Something always misleads me that I still have him but if I think of my parents, what they would talk about or what people would say, maybe I am being put off, but in my mind, I still believe that it is possible. I have always tried to forget about him, but just recently, I was just going to call him (in-depth interview, May 2006).

While having sex would be a way to affirm their love, Adhis was afraid to engage in sex before marriage. Being a faithful Anglican, she was afraid of the feelings of guilt that would haunt her for the rest of her life, having committed a sin. She was also frightened of the beatings she would receive from her uncle or mother if she was seen with a boyfriend. (She was once terribly beaten by her uncle with a metal stick when he saw her greeting her first boyfriend, when she was still attending primary school). Although they were clan related, Adhis regretted that their relationship had ended, and that she had not talked with Felix about protected sex, because she was not sure if she would ever fall in love with someone else. In addition to having a loving relationship, Adhis might have been economically better off in a relationship with Felix than without him, as he could have been a responsible husband since he was working at a commercial bank in the city. Adhis remained at home, with no real future prospects, only false promises from her parents that one day they might pay her college fees.

Love was also an ideal for, a 17-year-old young woman, who believed that ‘love is blind’. She reasoned that once you fall in love with someone, it does not matter if he is broke, or ugly, or a drunkard.
depends on the way that your heart is and the way he treats you. That happens for both boys and girls.

Ellen: Okay, you say love is based on strong feelings, but could you love, a very, very ugly person?

Atieno: Yes, you can love a very ugly person, yes, as long as you have feelings for him. You see love is blind, it doesn't matter that this person is ugly, or he is good looking, the way he is, even if he looks like an ape. I mean you just love him because you know very well what he means to you.

Ellen: Yeah, but you also said that a bad boy is one who drinks too much, so if that boy you love a lot is drinking and behaving disrespectfully, you would still love him?

Atieno: I will tell him: “Boy, look”. I will sit down with him when he is sober. I tell him: “What you are doing is not good, so you have to change your behaviour,” and then, even I will, as long as I really love him so much, I will try to pray for him so that he becomes nice and stops that bad behaviour of his. It is a must, that even if he also loves me, he will listen to me (in-depth interview, April 2006).

‘Love is blind’ applies to the relationship Atieno had with Sylvester, whom she finally married, despite her mother’s and other relatives’ warnings. Since Atieno had completed the first year of secondary school, her relatives believed she deserved a better-educated boyfriend instead of a fisherman like Sylvester. But Sylvester was more than just a day-labouring fisherman: he drove his brother’s motorboat between Dhonam and another fishing beach close to Kisumu, and stayed with his brother in a two-storey cement house. In the village, these were signs of some degree of financial success. The fact that Sylvester really loved her became clear to Atieno during a time she was ill, when he cared for her. In addition to his love, Sylvester was also able to give Atieno a prospect for her future, something her parents could no longer guarantee, as he promised he would get her back to school once he had finished his driving course and became a professional driver in Kisumu. Below, Atieno explained the reasons why she really liked Sylvester and therefore, would also accept Sylvester’s one-year-old son:

Atieno: Sylvester is really caring. I like Sylvester a lot. Yet, my aunties and uncles do not like my relationship with Sylvester. They pretend and talk badly behind my back. They want me to go out with an educated man. When it comes to issues of love, such things do not count. All I know is that I love Sylvester and Sylvester cares about me. He took care of me when I was sick. I miss [Sylvester and his son] so much and soon, I will go to visit him and come back the same day. Sylvester wrote me a very emotional letter, asking me to come back to Kisumu. I will reply to him. I asked someone to buy me a card but he has not brought it yet.

Ellen: And what do you really like about Sylvester?

Atieno: He is a nice guy, as in he is a person who cares, as in even if he is annoyed,
Sex, love, and money stand in a complex, situational relationship to each other, further complicated by the intergenerational context. The key purpose of this chapter was to get
beyond stereotypical depictions of young women as having ‘survival sex’ for money and being the only one actually feeling love. Young men are also more complicated, not simply searching for satisfaction and willing to pay whatever it takes. It sounds a bit strange having to stress something seemingly obvious but the reality is that facts such as ‘young women can have sex just for fun’ and ‘young men can give money and gifts out of love’ are often ignored by the mainstream literature on HIV/AIDS. I wish to emphasise that sex, love, and money have different meanings and functions in different situations and for different people. Having said that, this variation occurs within a larger structure, which doesn’t determine the role of sex, love, or money, but does limit the options available at some points in people’s lives.

As being a youngster in Winam is often a period marked by scant economic resources, both young men and women employ creative tactics to deal with this situation and to increase their chances for a better future. On the one hand, rural young women competed to have access to men with financial means, men who preferably have connections to town. In a way one could say that they are ‘managing’ their lover(s), as they would any other resource. On the other hand, rural young men faced difficulty in competing with those who were more financially capable, and worked to ‘maintain’ their girlfriend and employed “sweet-talk” to make promises and cajole. Furthermore, in many relationships, the language of ‘love’ was often used to hide other intentions, be it money, or sex, or a ‘modern’ identity. In this way, the language of love obscures gendered structural differences. Young men struggled under the pressure of social norms that insisted they must take care of their girlfriends and wives, and not display emotions. In the difficult economic context of Winam, this was a burden for them, and many failed to live up to what both society at large and individual young women expected from them. There is a need to recognize the vulnerability of these young men, just as we must recognize that many young women—through sex, love, and money—gained access to resources and extended their social network in order to “maximize their social capital” (Thornton 2009) and to obtain financial security.

In the next chapter, I elaborate how an HIV/AIDS Prevention Project had unintended consequences. Instead of changing youngsters’ sexual behaviour, it became the best place for meeting sexual partners. While it at the end was a ‘failure’ for the youngsters, it was a ‘success’ for its management team.
1 The members of the Post-Test Club (PTC) of Yeshica have done an HIV test in order to become a member of the Club. Although the project staff had hoped that the PTC members would share their HIV status with each other, this was not the case with the Post-Test Club members of Yeshica. The HIV testing also was done only once, at the beginning of the group membership.

2 *Leso* is a Swahili word that is absorbed from the Portuguese language, which means ‘handkerchief’. In the Swahili language itself, the word *leso* is used to refer to a ‘kanga’, an artefact of the Swahili culture. *Leso* is a piece of printed cotton fabric, usually worn by women wrapped over their legs, as a long skirt.

3 *Simu ya jamii* is a system of sharing a cell phone, and an entrepreneurial opportunity to set up a business selling airtime via a shared handset or calling card to the local community.

4 Akinyi used the Kiswahili word ‘*amechanuka*’ for ‘enlightened, modern’.


6 Most of these “newcomers” are the younger sisters or younger nieces of someone who just has delivered a baby and who needs some help in the household or with the harvest. Some of these girls and young women have no experience in sex, and others enjoy the freedom they are given by their sister, away from the social control of their home, and the young men of Winam take advantage of that. Other young men, however, view these “newcomers” as potential marriage partners since they come from outside the village and are not always related by clan.

7 This is a double entendre meaning both “you only get one shot at it” and “you only need one time to penetrate”.

8 See also discussions on ‘*piny okethore*’ (the land is spoiled), *chira*, and AIDS in Chapter 5 on ‘the deaths of today’.

9 Both young women and young men mentioned that they could date clan members during adolescence but that marrying a clan member is not allowed due to exogamy.

10 MinAkinyi is probably HIV positive since she suffers from opportunistic infections, and since her husband died in 2008, probably of HIV/AIDS. Their firstborn son disappeared to another region in Kenya where they heard he got married, and Akinyi was seen as the one who will have to take care of her siblings when the parents are no longer able.

11 Tina Turner’s song title seems apt; it was also used by Van Eerdewijk (2006) in her article ‘The intimate relationships of Dakarois Girls’.
Chapter 7

City life in the village:
Youth speak about Yeshica

1. Introduction

Leaving the crowded market of Dhonam behind, I took the road going down towards Yeshica, locally called the “Youth Centre” or just the “Centre”, the community-based component of the Youth Intervention Program (YIP). I was heading there to attend the microfinance project (K-Rep) meeting of the Post-Test Club (PTC), which was part of the Yeshica ‘structural intervention’. The Post-Test Club’s (PTC) main objective was to promote Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) by openly bringing together people who had been tested for HIV and who were willing to share their HIV status. Walking with my bicycle, as the many big stones on the road made it difficult to ride downhill, villagers greeted me and inquired where I was heading. Once back on the bike, I went pretty fast on the dusty road. The wind on my face was warm but it still cooled my head a bit and, at least, I did not feel the burning sun as intensely. As I passed, people yelled to me, laughing because they were not used to seeing a white person riding a bicycle. After the bridge, it was uphill again, and I understood why people preferred walking; cycling uphill under the burning sun was not really pleasant. I turned left and bumped into Jeremiah (a 17-year-old young man who had just finished primary school), Okoth, and Ochien’g—all PTC members—who were also heading towards Yeshica to attend the meeting. The three young men were not bothered by my presence since we had met a few times before, and continued their conversation in their local language, Dholuo. Ochien’g said: “I wonder if we will get paid this time. Jerry (the local project manager) keeps telling us to wait because Kisumu office has not brought the money yet. I am sure that he just keeps the money for himself”. The youth usually received an amount of 200 Kenyan shillings (2.5 euro) each time they performed theatre at the Centre’s outreach events, but had not been paid for the last performance, and were irritated. Most PTC members tried to attend the weekly meetings since failure to attend the meeting meant that they had to pay a fine of 50 Kenyan shillings (about 60 eurocents).
On our way, we passed the Anglican Church and three cement houses that had been constructed for Yeshica’s local field staff. A bit further, the youngsters were gathering in one of the two *kibandas* (semi-open, round houses with roofs made of palm fronds). I put my bicycle against the wall of the Youth Centre, a rectangular, one-storey building, and joined the youths in the *kibanda* who were waiting for the arrival of Anuka, the person responsible for the microfinance project, who appeared to be delayed. The youths decided to begin the meeting without Anuka, starting with a prayer by the chairman or youth leader, Maureen. Maureen was about 19 years old and was elected as a chairman by the other PTC members. She announced that PTC members were invited to participate at the Amani (a faith-based youth centre) football tournament, which brought up the issue of transportation. Some felt that they should go by bicycle; others felt that they should walk since not everyone had a bicycle. Ochien’g then mentioned: “I heard that Yeshica got five new bicycles and they are in the storeroom. Why can’t we just go and ask for our bicycles and just use them?” Everybody laughed. Okoth responded: “You think that those are your bicycles, that you can just walk in any time and use them?” The transportation issue remained unresolved but a date was set to visit the Amani project.

Anuka had arrived by this point, and began with the issue of loan repayment and savings. She inquired individually why they were not saving the required weekly amount of 20 Kenyan shillings (25 eurocents). Odich and Okoth said that they had no money: “Where can I find that 20 shillings if my family too has to eat?” Anuka was not happy with their answers since she (incorrectly) assumed that each member of the PTC group had received at least 200 Kenyan shillings each time they did outreach activities with the Yeshica staff, and she warned them that without sufficient savings, she could not give them a loan. However, not all PTC-members participated in outreach activities; those who did often did not receive their money on time, or at all. Although some of the PTC members were still hesitant to take out a loan, the idea of possessing 5,000 Kenyan shillings (62.50 euro) all at once sounded attractive. They joked about it in their local language; Okoth said: “If I get the loan, I will buy *mutura* (a meal made of an animal’s intestine and blood) in Kisumu and get so drunk—plus I will use the money on girls”. Josh chimed in: “I want the money to marry”. Since Anuka did not understand Dholuoo, she could not follow their conversation; if she had, she would have disapproved of the young men’s jokes because she wanted them to start a business rather than using loans just for buying goods. In fact, if they did not start a business, they would face difficulties coming up with the required monthly instalments necessary to repay the loan.
This account of the meeting at Yeshica raises a number of issues related to youth participation in development interventions that will be discussed in this chapter. It shows that young people were willing to make a serious effort to get to the Centre, walking quite some distance on dusty roads, to be able to participate. But their participation is full of ambiguities as it signifies different things to the various beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project. Both the meanings and the terms of participation and ownership are continuously negotiated among participants, as well as between the youth and Yeshica staff. The opening vignette demonstrates the friction between the bottom-up ethic of the project—the youth are supposed to make decisions and become empowered—and the top-down logic inherent in the interventions, exemplified by the K-Rep microcredit program. All this creates an ambiguous mix of aspirations for a better life (imagining employment at the Centre or starting a business with a microcredit loan) combined with feelings of anxiety (being fined for not attending) and irritation (waiting on promised payments).

Youths’ narratives about Yeshica are an important piece of the wider argument of this dissertation because they illustrate how young people adopted (and adapted) the project as another way to improve their livelihood. This chapter raises the issue of how a development project obtains its own meaning in the life world of young people. Housed in its modern cement building with electricity, Yeshica is a substitute for urban life for most of the youngsters, offering what ordinary village life usually cannot promise: formal jobs, higher social status, and opportunities to expand livelihood networks. The youths felt that perhaps they no longer had to leave the village, as they found benefits through Yeshica that were usually associated with city life within their reach, in the village. To them, Yeshica was ‘city life in the village’, and thus wielded the promise of a better life outside Winam.

In the literature on development projects, there is often little understanding of the motivations of individuals for involvement or non-involvement in participatory projects (Cleaver 2001). This chapter digs into the complexities and contradictions surrounding young people’s motivations, which were very different than what Yeshica’s designers and its staff had planned. While most of the youngsters perceived the project as a ‘failure’ at the end, the project’s designers still considered it a ‘success’ even though it did not succeed in biomedical terms, as I elaborate further in this chapter. The greater issue, however, is not whether the project’s practices led to the desired impacts but
rather how ‘success’ or ‘failure’ were produced by different local actors (Mosse 2004: 646–647).

The chapter is structured as follows: I begin by sketching out the theoretical framework of the chapter, and then continue with an analysis of the implementation of YIP. This section makes clear what YIP’s main designers—epidemiologists—aimed to achieve and how it was conceptualized. Then, I elaborate on why some young people participated in Yeshica and why others never got involved. More precisely, I explain how Yeshica became young people’s ‘shopping centre’, a kind of city life in the village. In the fourth section, the stories of Ochien’g and the Post-Test Club (PTC) are set out as a case study to illustrate how Yeshica participants and Yeshica’s local staff both adapted the project to their own benefit. Then I continue with illustrating why, according to Yeshica participants, Yeshica did not provide what they expected and the consequences of this perception of ‘failure’. Based on this discussion, I conclude that development work suits different interests, projects are shaped and reshaped to better meet those interests, and, in the end, only what is in the interests of the most powerful stakeholders is communicated to the outside world.

2. Theoretical framework: The tension between policy and practice

The basic framework of this chapter is inspired by Ferguson’s (1990) and Mosse’s (2004, 2006) accounts of how development projects and policies are produced. While HIV/AIDS prevention projects are biomedically inspired, they do not differ much from other development projects regarding their design, planning, and implementation processes. HIV/AIDS interventions, just as any other development project, are usually conceived with an instrumental view of policy as problem solving, and are concerned with how to best realise program designs in practice. I argue that an actor-oriented perspective is central to understand these processes, and that such an approach recognizes the multiple realities and diverse social practices of a wide range of social actors. It also delves more deeply into the ambiguities inherent in the ‘battlefields of knowledge’ (Long and Long 1992) that shape relations between local actors, policy workers, and researchers. Long and Long’s (1992) notion of ‘battlefields of knowledge’ “conveys the idea of contested arenas in which actors’ understandings, interests, and values are pitched against each other [...] where struggles over social meanings and practices take place” (cited in Long 2002: 1). One such battlefield is related to the HIV epidemic, where
researchers from different disciplines search for the right policy models and practices to tackle this enormous problem.

With changing sexual behaviour as the cornerstone of HIV prevention, several interventions targeting young people have been established and tried out. From the point of view of the program designers, projects are ‘successful’ when the desired outcome of decreased HIV incidence is obtained. Several projects have combined diverse HIV interventions in the hope of being hailed as the most ‘successful’ HIV prevention project, which would mean professional recognition and large-scale ‘replication’ of the ‘best practice’ (Mavedzenge et al. 2010: 8–9). Yet, the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of biomedical and behavioural interventions is usually evaluated against the ‘gold standard’ of quantifiable evidence, through randomized control trials (RCTs). RCTs are scientific experiments that are most commonly used in testing and quantifying the effectiveness of health care services or health technologies (e.g., clinical trials of new drugs). Over the past two decades, several RCTs of different biomedical and behavioural approaches for young people have been carried out in sub-Saharan Africa: Mema Kwa Vijana (Tanzania), Stepping Stones (South Africa), Regai Dzive Shiri Project (Zimbabwe), and SHAZ! (Zimbabwe). Despite enormous efforts in setting up these projects, none of them could demonstrate any consistent impact of the intervention program on biological indicators, such as HIV incidence, the prevalence of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or pregnancy (UN 2003b). Only improvements in reported sexual behaviour were measured, yet as the Mema Kwa Vijana project acknowledged, “reported behaviour is notoriously unreliable in young people and may be subject to differential reporting bias (intervention versus comparison) in the presence of an intervention”.

RCTs rarely investigate the organisational processes of the project. In other words, the trials demonstrate whether the program works but not how it works, as an article in The Economist, ‘Untying the Knot: New Ideas about an Old Problem’ (20 April 2011) explains:

These trials, the critics point out, show whether a drug or remedy works, but not how it works. Even in medicine, a randomised trial can only show whether the average patient benefits, not whether any individual patient will benefit. Human physiology differs from patient to patient, so does the physiology of poverty.

In order to find out why and how HIV-prevention programs for young people function, it is necessary to understand the narratives and social significations that evolve during project implementation, including how management decisions interact with local perceptions of the program. Qualitative evaluations could have an added value in this
respect since they endeavour to give a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of the project. Yet, there are only few such studies. The reason for this is that they do not fit the logic of international funding schemes for HIV-prevention programs, which require quantifiable evidence to demonstrate and communicate results quickly and easily. My epidemiological colleagues saw disadvantages in qualitative evaluations, namely that they are time-consuming and therefore do not fit in the logic or structure of brief field missions. To be sure, evaluations frequently combine quantitative with qualitative methods, but the qualitative part is often limited to a number of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, and comprises less of the overall evaluation than the quantitative portion. There is usually no time devoted to participant observation, for example. In addition, projects tend to be narrowly evaluated, usually in terms of specific targets or goals, often using the ‘rapid appraisals technique’ (see also Dichter and Harper 2007; Bateman 2010). 

The above-described emphasis on RCTs emerges from an instrumentalist line of thought that sees policy as a rational means for problem solving, and as neutral and measurable. The other broad strand is a critical view that sees “policy as a rationalising discourse concealing hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance” (Mosse 2003: 2), demonstrated by Ferguson (1990) in his study on Lesotho. Although Ferguson’s (1990) emphasis on the different power relations at stake in development projects is an important one to take into account, according to Mosse (2001, 2003, 2004, 2006), both strands—instrumental and critical—simplify the complex and ambiguous world of development. Mosse (2004: 639) tries to capture the apparent contradictions and invites us to ask: “What happens when development practice is not produced by theory or policy models?” The question here is not whether development works or whether the practices lead to the desired impacts. The main puzzle is, rather, how development projects work (in both their intended and unintended ways), and how ‘success’ or ‘failure’ is produced by the different local actors’ standards (Mosse 2004: 646–647). As Mosse (2003: 1–2) emphasises, there is no need to discuss the gap between intentions and results or the unforeseen nature of consequences:

It is not policy ideas or project models but the institutional realities of development funding and ‘cooperation’ that determine what happens in development. For another, it is not the failure of development projects that needs to be explained, but rather their remarkable success: not the gap between intentions and results, but its absence: not the unforeseen nature of consequences, but the production of predictable results. To be more specific, my focus is not on the way in which policy theory is implemented in practice, but rather on the manner in which development practices produce and reaffirm theory and models of development.
Even if a project fails in practice, it may still be labelled as a ‘success’. The ‘success’ and the ‘failure’ of a project is socially constructed: the success for one person can be the failure for another and vice versa (Mosse 2003: 1–2). This socially structured judgment means that for most designers of development projects the ‘success’ of a project arises from the project’s ability to continue recruiting institutional support (Latour as cited in Mosse 2006: 937–938). A project’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’ is not about realizing project designs: it is rather “a consequence of a certain disarticulation between practices, their rationalising models and overarching policy frameworks” (Mosse 2006: 936–937). Both ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ affirm and reaffirm policy theory and models of change (Mosse 2003: 2–3). This is because “their orientation is more upwards to validate higher policy goals or justify the allocation of resources than downwards to orientate action” (Mosse 2003: 5). Mosse’s work thus invites us to analyse development projects in a way that tries to explain the tension between policy and practice by examining how local-level actors define a project’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’.

Within this framework, this chapter explores the complex relationship between the various discursive constructions of the Yeshica project. It should therefore not be read as an evaluation of the project since it is not concerned with trying to determine whether or not Yeshica was a ‘success’. Instead, I focus on how YIP, and more particularly, Yeshica, affected the everyday lives of the youngsters in Winam.

3. The implementation process of the Youth Intervention Program (YIP)

Yeshica, an acronym for ‘Youth’s Economic, Skills, and Health Improvement Centre in Winam’, was the community-based component of the YIP, complementing the epidemiological component. Yeshica was set up after a study demonstrated the high HIV prevalence among young people in Nyanza Province (Buvé et al. 2001). A team of epidemiologists from the Belgian Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) argued that collecting samples for HIV- and STI-testing without the provision of improved services for prevention and care was unethical in an area with a high prevalence of HIV. As the YIP program coordinator, who was at the same time the principal investigator of the YIP Baseline Cross-sectional Survey (BCS), explained:

Although CDC had been working there for many years, more than 25 years now, we were struck by the lack of any service or intervention program in Winam, so that is how the Winam site was selected (in-depth interview, October 2006).
The Belgian team searched for a model of behaviour change that would identify and solve the causes of the HIV epidemic. The most important actors in the Belgian team were the YIP program coordinator, an epidemiologist from ITM who is based in Kisumu (Kenya), and her supervisor, a senior Belgian epidemiologist from the same institute, based in Belgium. Both designed the YIP protocol.

3.1. How are young people’s problems and needs identified?

Together with local field staff, the YIP designers employed a Belgian anthropologist and a Kenyan public health worker to carry out a ‘Rapid Needs Assessment’ (RNA) in 2001 in the hope of capturing the reproductive health problems and needs of the young people in Nyanza Province. The RNA highlighted that in addition to sexual and reproductive health problems, young people were concerned about the high level of poverty, the increasing number of school drop-outs, unemployment, the lack of recreational opportunities, the influence of alcohol and drugs, the violence and gender imbalances in sexual relations, and the intergenerational difficulties in communication about sexual matters. Health services available in the area were experienced as not youth-friendly. Youth-serving programs in Nyanza Province were focussing on HIV-awareness campaigns; other reproductive health issues as STIs, pregnancy, and abortions had less attention, and there was a general lack of individual guidance and counselling for youth (Njue 2001).

The Belgian researchers who developed the YIP protocol acknowledged that assessing changes in the knowledge and attitudes of young people was not enough and that several socioeconomic and cultural factors needed to be tackled at the same time. They believed that maximising young people’s participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of programs was “the key to success” (informal conversation with program designers). In most development projects, ‘participation’ is “something which is intrinsically a ‘good thing’; something we believe in and rarely question” (Cleaver 1999: 597). Participatory methodologies are justified in terms of sustainability, relevance, and empowerment (Cleaver 1999: 597–598). ‘Participation’ has become one of the buzzwords in development work (Cornwall 2007) and its use has become necessary to secure funding and acceptance. While RNAs are not inherently unable to capture key needs, we should be careful not to overgeneralize and overemphasize the needs highlighted in such rapid assessments.
3.2. The need for institutional and financial support

Participatory approaches often serve to legitimize and justify a project’s own development agenda, namely to bring together different interests around a causal model to justify the allocation of resources (Mosse 2001, 2003, 2005). Although projects try to highlight technical expertise, the reality shows that the ‘success’ of many projects lies in their ability to mobilize and maintain institutional support (Mosse 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006). The Belgian ITM, which has a policy based on institutional cooperation with a view to strengthen local capabilities and institutions, sought collaboration with two institutions who were already active in Kisumu: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which has its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia (USA), and the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI). After more than twenty years doing research, the CDC has a dominating presence in Nyanza Province and could hardly be ignored. Locally, it was said that the “CDC owns the region of Nyanza Province”, since no investigation could be done in that area without the permission from its Institutional Review Board. ITM’s association with KEMRI was mandatory since it is the national institute responsible for carrying out health research in Kenya. Collaboration with CDC/KEMRI was necessary to obtain institutional support and funds from PEPFAR (the US Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). For ITM, it was therefore essential to respond in its program design to the priority issues of CDC’s agenda, which in turn was largely influenced by the policy of the US government. Anything not on the CDC’s priority list was not incorporated into their communal proposal to PEPFAR. Nevertheless, the Belgian team succeeded in incorporating a ‘structural intervention’ (in the form of Yeshica) in the YIP by relying on the funds of the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC – Belgium). The collaboration between ITM and DGDC had existed for many decades and the researchers were confident of obtaining such funds.

In the sections below, I review the main considerations the Belgian team had to take into account in order to obtain institutional and financial support for the YIP. First of all, their collaboration with CDC/KEMRI prioritized epidemiological research and the selection of Winam as the research setting. Secondly, CDC/KEMRI had a significant influence on the selection of appropriate HIV-prevention models for young people in Winam. While all three institutes had a significant interest in the adaptation of two US evidence-based interventions (described later on), ITM could not count on the collaboration of CDC/KEMRI for the implementation of the Yeshica ‘structural intervention’.
At the end of this overview, I question whether the choices made were really in response to local needs or whether they were rather a reflection of outside institutional priorities.

3.2.1. Pre-defined choices (1): Research methodology and setting

The YIP protocol included an epidemiological component, namely a quasi-experimental\textsuperscript{16} study with a pre- and post-intervention cross-sectional survey. The pre-intervention was referred to as the ‘Baseline Cross-Sectional Survey’ (BCS), and the main objective of this large epidemiological study was “to evaluate [the impact of YIP] with scientifically rigorous methods”.\textsuperscript{17} The intention was to measure and compare behavioural and biomedical parameters (the prevalence of HIV and HSV-2) before and after the implementation of Yeshica, and in this way, to measure the impact of Yeshica on ‘risky sexual behaviour practices’ of young people. The hypothesis was that four years after the implementation of Yeshica, HIV and HSV-2 prevalence would be reduced among the target group and behavioural parameters would indicate the adoption of safer sex practices. The broader strategy was “to develop recommendations for scaling-up of feasible and effective prevention interventions targeted at adolescents in Kenya and other settings in sub-Saharan Africa”.\textsuperscript{18} The principal investigators of this epidemiological study were the same two-person team of epidemiologists from ITM and one American epidemiologist from the CDC.

The collaboration of ITM with the CDC and KEMRI also led to the selection of Winam as the first research location.\textsuperscript{19} Winam is part of Nyanza Province, where HIV prevalence was extremely high, and no HIV/AIDS prevention programs had been set up there yet. In addition, Winam was one of the villages where CDC and KEMRI had set up a health and demographic surveillance system, and this infrastructure would facilitate the implementation of the cross-sectional survey. For these reasons, the different institutional partners thought Winam to be an ideal place for the YIP.

3.2.2. Pre-defined choices (2): US Evidence-Based Interventions

The YIP designers together with their CDC colleagues believed that adapting existing ‘evidence-based interventions’ (EBIs) to different local settings would be more cost-effective and less time-consuming than developing new EBIs. They found this an important justification “in the face of an HIV/AIDS epidemic whose magnitude calls for immediate action” (Poulsen et al. 2010: 274). Another reason, and probably one of the most important related to the need for external funding, was that “the adaptation and
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESHICA

dissemination of effective HIV prevention interventions was a priority for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)” (US State Department 2009). Adapting EBIs formed the basis for the CDC’s ‘Diffusion of Effective Behavioural Interventions’ policy (Dworkin et al. 2008: 51; Poulsen et al. 2010: 274). It was not only in the interest of the CDC but also of the Belgian team to replicate two evidence-based HIV-prevention interventions. For the CDC, it was a welcome opportunity to implement two EBIs—which they already had tried out among African Americans—in another setting, and, if proven effective, to increase support for the scaling-up of the CDC’s own HIV-prevention interventions. This was understood as a “win-win” situation because, for ITM, the CDC not only offered helpful experience and knowledge, but also access to PEPFAR funding.

The two HIV-prevention EBIs that were developed by the CDC for African Americans were the ‘Parents Matter! Program’ (PMP) and the ‘Life Skills Program’ (LSP). PMP was developed in order to improve effective communication about sexuality and sexual risk between the parents (or caretakers) and their children aged 9–12 years (Dittus et al. 2004; Forehand et al. 2007; ITM 2011: 7), whereas LSP aimed to equip adolescents with knowledge, skills, and confidence to abstain from sex and/or practice safe sex to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy and STIs, including HIV. Two US curricula of the LSP, ‘Making a Difference’ (MAD) and ‘Making Proud Choices’ (MPF) (see also Jemmott et al. 1998), were adapted to the Kenyan context. For the adaptation of the PMP and LSP, technical assistance was provided by one of the programs’ designers from the US and her CDC colleagues, who came to Kenya for several short consultations. Every week, conference calls were organised between the American team and the Kenyan research staff at Yeshica based in Kisumu (locally called the ‘Kisumu team’), who were responsible for the adaptation of the curricula, to discuss the material and the outcomes in detail. At the time of writing the YIP protocol—sometime in 2002–2003—the RCT of the PMP was just starting; the trials were completed in 2004, and Forehand et al. only published their results in 2007.

3.2.3. Pre-defined choices (3): The structural intervention

Apart from the two US-based EBIs, the Belgian team also incorporated a so-called ‘structural’ intervention into Yeshica, their community-based component of YIP. However, for this intervention they could not count on the institutional support of the Kisumu CDC team since they had no direct interest in this intervention. Nevertheless, the Belgian team was convinced that this intervention was important for the
youngsters, believing that socioeconomic and environmental factors have an impact on young people’s (sexual) behavioural choices. Their hypothesis, which was supported by the latest specialist literature (for instance, Pronto 2006; Urdang 2007; Lukas 2008; Kim et al. 2008; Hargreaves et al. 2010), was that a better economic future perspective, enhanced by access to microcredit, would decrease ‘sexual risk behaviour’ (Vandenhoudt 2004a). Therefore, the program designers wanted to implement a ‘structural intervention’, or as they more often called it a ‘livelihood intervention’, with vocational training and microcredit programs that would target older youth (between 16 and 22 years old) who had dropped out of school (Vandenhoudt et al. 2004a: 3–4).

The Belgian team managed to get the livelihood intervention funded through the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC), specifically the ‘5-year program II (2003–2007)’, as the intervention matched the main strategic objective of DGDC. This allowed them to include the vocational training and the microcredit programs, for approximately 50,000 Euros per year, in the YIP. To implement this intervention, the Belgian team partnered with a Kenyan NGO, the Kenya Rural Enterprise Program (K-Rep), that specialised in microfinance services. The idea was that K-Rep would help the youngsters form savings-and-loan groups and give them business training to further support income-generating activities. The vocational trainings, for instance in carpentry, tailoring, and bee keeping, were provided by local trainers who were carefully sought out by the local staff of Yeshica after requests by the youths (see Chapter 4).

3.2.4. The uneasy merger: Institutional priorities and local needs

To what extent did these proposed interventions meet the needs of JoWinam? The YIP protocol gives the impression that these interventions were carefully chosen in order to respond to the results of the Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA). But to what extent are those needs really ‘local needs’?

There is always an important element of selection and construction when RNAs are used to articulate ‘local needs’ within the design of a program. As Pottier notes (cited in Mosse 2001: 20–21), ‘local needs’ are often socially constructed. Projects not only influence the way in which people construct their needs, but people also shape their needs to match a project’s ability to deliver desirable goods in the short term. This ‘local knowledge’ is coined by Mosse (2001) as “planning knowledge” because the project’s institutional interests become incorporated into community perspectives. For instance, when young people in Winam were asked who taught them about sexual issues, they
usually mentioned peers or magazines as sources of information, but not their parents. This is also what the RNA (Njue 2001) reports. With this information, the YIP designers—already planning to adapt the ‘Parents Matter!’ Program—could confirm that, as in the US, there was also a lack of communication between Winam parents and their children about sexual issues. This confirms the guiding idea of most ‘sexual awareness trainings’, launched by several donors from the early 1990s onwards (see Chapter 1), that more open discussions of sexual issues were necessary in fighting the HIV epidemic. Consequently, because young people reported that they did not talk with their parents about sexual issues, the YIP designers could argue that there was a ‘local need’ for a parent-focused intervention to enable communication with youth about sexual health issues.24

But an absence of discussion between parents and children about sexual issues does not mean that youth are not informed. Relationships of respect between parents and children severely restrict discussing sexual matters. Elderly people, including maternal aunts and grandparents, are, however, in a position to do this, and they do—although probably to a lesser extent than before (see Chapter 5). This ‘local need’ is actually manufactured, out of the Western notion that parents should discuss sexual issues with their children and the idea that HIV-prevention projects for young people need to improve this kind of communication between parents and children. The so-called ‘manufactured needs’ in the program design are to a significant degree shaped by the agency’s own objectives, their own ‘cultural baggage’ (i.e., the idea that parents are supposed to teach their children about sex), and funding pressures.

The adaptation of international template materials that were formulated by foreign health education experts has never been an easy endeavour in most of the development projects all over the world. Pigg (2005: 47), who carried out ethnographic research on AIDS prevention in Nepal, found that although such curricula seem to be easy-to-use, practical guides for local health educators “standardize information, priorities, and pedagogical techniques”. She further highlights that “understandings, explanations, objectives, values, and attitudes that deviate from the established norm of ‘facts’ and ‘non-judgmental’ attitudes toward sexuality cannot find a place in the curriculum because these are precisely the misconceptions that sex education is meant to correct” (Pigg 2005: 47). Although most of the curriculum of the US-based Parents Matter! Program had been adapted to the cultural context of Winam, many sexual issues remained too embarrassing for most AIDS workers to discuss. In addition, many of the Yeshica local staff often felt frustrated in their job, as it did not leave much room
for creativity. They were unable to memorize the curriculum and needed to continually refer to the instructions while facilitating group sessions with young people and their caretakers. They had not fully internalized what they were saying but rather recited it from pre-fabricated materials.

The ‘structural’ livelihood intervention responded to some extent to the local demands of JoWinam. My data demonstrate that both vocational skills and capital to start a small business indeed featured as prominent needs among young people, and were not merely a reflection of institutional priorities. Although the livelihood intervention was among the interests of the Belgian epidemiologists, it was not one of the priorities of CDC/KEMRI. Consequently, the livelihood intervention received the least attention within their collaboration, and the Belgian team were not supported in its implementation (see later in this chapter). Thus, the intervention that was most closely related to actually existing needs ranked the lowest in institutional priorities.

The YIP proposal, set up as a collaboration between ITM and CDC/KEMRI, was funded between 2003 and 2008 by the CDC through the PEPFAR. The livelihood intervention was not supported by CDC funding since it was not in their interest. The institutional priorities of the CDC, with its related ability to mobilize financial support, strongly influenced the chances for the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of any intervention, as we will see later in this chapter.

3.3. Making it all happen: The structure of the YIP on the ground

Yeshica, located in east Winam, was formally opened in July 2003. In order to reach the youngsters from other localities, three satellite centres in the form of shipping containers were set up near schools in west, south, and central Winam in March 2004. Together with the three different HIV interventions (Families Matter! Program (FMP), Life Skills, and Livelihood), Yeshica and its satellite centres offered youth-friendly services, including health education, counselling, general and reproductive health services (such as contraceptive services and antenatal care for pregnant teenagers), clinical services (treatment of STIs, common ailments, and opportunistic infections), and HIV and STI testing and counselling (Voluntary Counselling and Testing or VCT). In 2007, towards the end of the project, Yeshica staff also established support groups for HIV-positive youngsters. Additionally, ‘educational entertainment’ was provided through a library with TV, video, and sports/games facilities. Youth participation was promoted through the establishment of ten local committees and one Executive Youth Committee (Ex·Com) who gathered on a monthly basis. A Community Advisory Board
(CAB) was launched one year into Yeshica’s existence to create linkages between the program and the community (ITM 2011). Yeshica had two groups of field staff: the ‘Winam team’ and the ‘Kisumu team’:

Figure 4. Yeshica field staff

The ‘Winam team’ ’s members remained in Winam and were not allowed to commute on a daily basis to and from Kisumu, whereas the ‘Kisumu team’, focussed more on research, superior in the hierarchy, ferried in from Kisumu in white CDC-owned Land Cruisers. The members of the Kisumu team were divided into groups according to the research program for which they were responsible. Both the Winam team and the Kisumu team consisted of Kenyan people.

During the implementation of the YIP, the Belgian program designers aimed to develop an evidence-based program. A baseline pre-intervention survey was conducted (2003–2004) but the post-intervention survey planned for four years later was delayed and then cancelled due to lack of funding. This means that no final impact of the program was measured. From the baseline survey, only the HIV prevalence data were finally published in 2009. A key concern of the program coordinator was therefore to closely monitor outputs and to meet the targets set out in its Logical Framework. First of all, YIP staff aimed to reach 75 percent of all adolescents in Winam with one or more interventions. Secondly, they sought to reduce the proportion of adolescents aged 13–20 years who have ever had sex. Thirdly, they wanted to increase condom use (at last-reported sexual act) by 50 percent. Fourthly, they hoped to reduce the prevalence of HIV
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESHICA

and HSV-2 by 30 percent, and, lastly, they wished to reduce the prevalence of teen pregnancies by 20 percent. Following the cause-effect model of the Logical Framework, it was thought that by meeting output targets, the desired outcomes and impacts could be achieved. The Belgian team and its local staff assumed that as long as Yeshica offered certain benefits (such as HIV and STI reduction) to young people and their community, and gave them the ownership of the project, they would be interested in participating.

In the next section, I explain why some of the young people were eager to participate in the project—in ways different than anticipated by ITM and the local staff—and what their expectations were of the project, and show that the aims of the program’s designers stood in strong contrast to the purposes of their target group.

4. Yeshica: A one-stop shopping centre

For the young people of Winam, Yeshica was a unique place in the village because it provided access to considerable financial resources and high social status. Further augmenting its appeal, the name ‘Youth Centre’ was a foreign concept, new to the people of Winam, and was perceived as something urban. Yanow (1993: 51), who studied the setting up of a community centre in Israel and discussed how policy meanings are interpreted and communicated by various actors, compared the community centre with “a functional supermarket”. Her supermarket metaphor is also quite relevant to Yeshica, which similarly offered a large gamut of interventions to its clients who became customers in the process (Yanow 1993: 51):

[The interventions] were ‘pre-packaged’ and ‘ready to serve’. [...] Clients were to come into the centre, with ‘shopping lists’ (lists of desired courses), to ‘consume’ centre offerings; staff would ‘sell’ [the interventions] to clients [...] and centre success would be evaluated by ‘turnover of goods’ (numbers of registrants, inquiries or attendance figures).

Yeshica, housed in a concrete building, represented a city lifestyle for the young people, standing in contrast to the village’s open-air stalls. Just like a mall, it was a place to meet people and to hang out. Goods were offered, which did not meet the direct needs of the local people, yet, after some promotion, certain needs were created. Initially, young people from all over Winam were eager to ‘go shopping’ at Yeshica. They were curious and proud that ‘a Youth Centre’ was constructed especially for them—schoolgoers and out-of-school youth, alike—in their own village, and they participated in great numbers. Initially, most of the youngsters were invited to join Yeshica through their friends and family members, meaning that only those from the same social network were involved.
at first. But as time went on, the message about Yeshica was spread more widely. Although Yeshica was only designed for youngsters between 10 and 20 years old, the age limit for the livelihood intervention was extended to 22 years. Many of the youngsters who wanted to participate in Yeshica were above the age limit, and, as a sort of tactic, they lied about their age in order to be able to participate.

In development projects, people with distinct roles, such as staff, participants, and other stakeholders, form their own interpretations of policy language that may differ from one another and diverge from the intent of those who drafted it. These multiple interpretations can facilitate or impede the policy’s implementation (Yanow 1993: 42–43). To understand how Yeshica turned out in practice, it is necessary to examine the discrepancies between the expectations of the designers and the participants. Young people used Yeshica in their own ways, which were often not at all what the designers’ intended. While Yeshica aimed to improve young people’s sexual and reproductive health, the participants used the project for different purposes. Of course, the prospects of a job, vocational training, and/or loans were reasons to take part in Yeshica, but there were other, secondary reasons that made participation interesting for the youngsters.

4.1. Jobs, trainings, and loans

Most youngsters were drawn to Yeshica in the hope of making a better living by getting paid employment. Those who dropped out of primary school or who were unable to complete secondary school hoped that they might get an unskilled job at Yeshica, as a gardener or gatekeeper. The secondary-school leavers wished to be considered for the youth facilitator’s job or whatever might be available for someone at their education level. Their parents and other relatives also hoped that Yeshica would offer employment to the youth. Odera (19 years old, secondary school graduate, born in Winam but raised in Nairobi), for instance, came all the way from Nairobi because her stepmother, who lived in Winam, had told her that she could get a job at the Centre:

After finishing school, I was in Nairobi, then my mother asked me to come back home because there was a Centre and they were hoping that they would employ people. My mother thought that I could maybe get a typing job in east Winam. So I came to see if I could get employed. So the first reason I joined [Yeshica] was to get employed and the second for interaction (in-depth interview, May 2006).
Many youngsters realized that getting a job at Yeshica required them to fulfil a number of prerequisites, and they participated in Yeshica’s activities in the hope that this would increase their chances if one day a job opportunity arose.

Secondly, youngsters participated because of the variety of free vocational trainings, and the possibility of obtaining a microloan through K-Rep. The program designers thought that youngsters would pick out a vocational training that was of their immediate interest, and use that training to start a business or get a job, the young people reasoned differently and tried to attend all the different trainings on offer. They believed that having more skills might give them better job opportunities in the future (see Chapter 4). However, the duration of the trainings was too short to provide them with sufficient skills to open their own business or to be qualified for formal employment. As a consequence, the youngsters did not see much value in the training; instead, it was a nice kind of entertainment, with a free lunch. The microloans were highly valued, but very few knew how to make a good investment with a loan. Consequently, the program suffered from a high default rate; many defaulters could not be located, and so, for some, the loan became “free income”.

In late 2007, two new opportunities arose for Yeshica participants, namely the support groups for HIV-positive people and the vocational training for research skills, both of which promised to provide jobs for the most successful participants. In order to become part of the HIV-positive support groups, some HIV-negative youngsters falsified their test results and lied about their status. Although there was still stigma attached to being HIV positive, the fact that Yeshica staff had promised to create job opportunities for the group’s members was the biggest motivation to participate. The vocational training for research, which was intended to prepare youth to be employed by NGO projects, was a disappointment: although youngsters from Winam would have loved to participate, they were not selected, as most participants came from outside Winam and were secondary school graduates (see also Chapter 4).

4.2. Transportation money as micro-income

The ‘transportation compensation’ as envisaged by the program designers was a very attractive micro-income. It motivated the youngsters to participate in performing theatre sketches, in sport activities, and all sorts of other meetings. Every time the PTC members acted, they received an amount of 200 Kenyan shillings (about 2.5 euro). Every time the representatives of a certain youth group or community attended a meeting, they received the same amount as a form of reimbursement for their transportation.
costs. However, by walking to meetings, the youth could save the ‘reimbursements’ for themselves. Even if they needed to spend money to hire a boda boda (bike taxi), it only cost about 50 Kenyan shillings (about 60 eurocents) to cross all of Winam. To the youngsters—and their parents and other community members—the 200 Kenyan shillings was a welcome salary that was perceived as their ‘daily bread’, or even weekly income. For most of them, it was their only source of income and their family members depended upon it. Although the local staff of Yeshica realised this, the Belgian program coordinator regarded the theatre performances as an entertainment that would keep the youngsters from idleness. I tried to explain to her how important the acting stipend and transportation reimbursements were, and how they were used, but she could not believe that they were one of the main reasons youth participated; she did not seem to realize that families in Winam often survived on only 100 Kenyan shillings (about 1.25 euro) per week. When the Kisumu team decided to increase the number of PTC-outreach sessions, the members could act, and get paid, twice a week. This resulted in an even higher salary of 400 Kenyan shillings (about 5 euro) per week, which was a substantial amount, especially considering that it did not entail hard manual labour.

4.3. Other material benefits

Other material benefits attracted many young people to the Centre, gave the youngsters a sense of ownership of Yeshica, and motivated them to invite new members. For instance, youth received Yeshica T-shirts, borrowed bicycles (for outreach sessions, but were used for many other activities, like fetching water and visiting relatives), accessed materials for the recreational activities, ate lunches that were provided after official meetings, borrowed books from the library, and received (or stole) medication from Yeshica’s pharmacy.

The documentaries on HIV prevention shown during Abich Rawere (Forum for the Youth) on Saturday afternoons also attracted a big number of children and youngsters to Yeshica, not because of its content but rather because the children were curious to watch a television, something to which they otherwise had no access. After several Abich Rawere sessions, the youth turned Yeshica into a local cinema. Youngsters from all over Winam came to watch Nigerian and war movies for free during Abich Rawere. Others also used the available electricity to charge the batteries of their mobile phones, something that is otherwise difficult or expensive given the lack of power and power outlets. Although these activities were not aligned with the objectives of Abich Rawere, the youth facilitator could attract a high number of young people in this
way, which was important for the records. The number of attendees during the project’s activities was a key concern for the program coordinator, as she wanted to meet the ‘output’ targets in order to maintain financial support and to achieve the desired impact.

4.4. Nonmaterial benefits: A larger social network

Apart from the material and financial benefits, young people participated in Yeshica to expand their social network and social capital. Most of Yeshica’s staff were from town or at least had studied there, and the youngsters admired them and enjoyed being associated with them, since it gave the youngsters a higher social status. They closely observed the different clothing styles and behaviour of the staff. Opiyo, the anthropologist who used to work at Yeshica, explained:

You won’t remember but they even know what you wore yesterday. They know the number of clothes you have because, as a girl, you might only have two clothes to interchange. That is why even the Yeshica T-shirt means a lot. You know, girls like changing clothes (in-depth interview, September 2006).

Moreover, Yeshica participants were invited to travel with Yeshica staff in the CDC car whenever they went to outreach sessions or other activities. They felt part of the Yeshica team, even though they were at the lowest level of the ladder. They could travel to different places all over Winam, places where they did not often go if they had to walk or cycle there. They usually combined outreach sessions with visits to their distant relatives or friends, and invited their girl- or boyfriend to watch them performing whenever they acted close to their girl- or boyfriend’s house. The representatives of the Ex-Com, the youth counsellors, and those who performed (usually PTC members) were admired by many people in the village. Community members wanted to be associated with them because they imagined that they were earning “a lot of money with CDC”. People believed that being connected to Yeshica participants could give them easy access to jobs at Yeshica. Members from Yeshica could therefore easily make new friends.

4.5. Unintended benefits: Extending the sexual network

In addition to expanding their social network, the youth participants of Yeshica also used this opportunity to enlarge their sexual network. Yeshica participants could easily find (other) girl- and boyfriends away from their home area due to their higher social status and access to money. They usually presented themselves to others as if they were Yeshica staff instead of just participants. By doing so, they were more sought out as a potential sexual partner (see the case of Okoth and Akinyi in Chapter 6). Moreover,
female participants of Yeshica also flirted with the salaried Yeshica staff and other CDC personnel, especially the CDC drivers. Young women would dress up to attend trainings at Yeshica in the hope of being noticed by CDC staff. There was a lot of jealousy among the female participants as they were competing with each other. Opiyo, the anthropologist who used to work at Yeshica, stated that Yeshica staff needed to be very responsible because they could easily misuse their position, and might attract a female participant to Yeshica just for having sex:

Actually, when you work in Winam, you need to be a very good person. If you are a very bad person, you can take advantage of the community because, first of all, like me, I work with parents in Parents Matter! and the mothers call you “my son-in-law” because they would be happy to actualize that. The women look at you, you are a hero in their eyes, and you are much better than them. But they don’t know that I am going to die next year. They just look at the car I am driven in and that it is a CDC car [...]. They just associate you with it, like it is yours. And when they follow me – they will find me in Rarieda where I spend my lunchtime. That place is fully packed with CDC cars. CDC people are eating food there, drinking sodas, and the meal is 100 [Kenyan] shillings [about 1.20 euro], which even some parents have not seen for decades, and the young girls have never seen. They monitor you and look at the way you dress and the shoes you are wearing. The perception is that people who come from outside, especially people who are working, they are doing much better and not just CDC people, so many people are coming from outside (in-depth interview, September 2006).

As Opiyo explained, for most female Yeshica participants, the staff members were potential boyfriends or even marriage partners: they had a good (i.e., well-paid) job, were in possession of a car, dressed well, could spend at restaurants, and were connected to town. Thus it was not difficult for Yeshica or CDC personnel to abuse their power and social status to win sexual partners among the community members. Opiyo commented further:

Today if I meet a woman of my age (around 35 years old) or maybe a girl who has come out of university, they will have so many questions [about my background and past relationships] but if I go for a teenager, it is much easier. [...] If you follow that part, you are likely to end up with a young girl from Winam. When I just say to a young girl: “I want to have you for sex or I want to marry you”, they would agree very fast. So it depends with the way I want it, but you know, the men choose very young ones, so-called ‘for marriage’ (in-depth interview, September 2006).

The young women of Winam would not question the background or past relationships of a CDC employee, and their parents would encourage such relationships. The fact that he was a financially capable man coming from town was enough to satisfy any concerns. Although Yeshica participants who engaged with CDC employees expected more from that relationship, most were only “a hit and run” and did not last long. Thus while it did extend their sexual network, it did not produce a new livelihood path.
4.6. To participate or not to participate: That’s the question!

Although most of Yeshica participants had their specific reasoning about whether and how to participate, for a number of youngsters it was even easier or sometimes more beneficial NOT to participate. Young people’s deliberate nonparticipation could be attributed to their choice or expression of agency as well as to their “necessity by constraint” (Cleaver 2001), meaning that, forced by circumstances, young people often had to fulfil other duties rather than attend Yeshica’s activities. For instance, a number of young women did not participate in Yeshica’s activities because they had to help their mother or take care of their child. My female neighbour reasoned: “Those people of Yeshica, they have time. I am mostly busy”. In her eyes, Yeshica participants, certainly the female ones who had so many other domestic chores to fulfil, were just wandering around at the Centre instead of working. Adhis, a secondary school-leaver of 20 years old, was never really interested in participating in Yeshica since she preferred to spend her time looking for ways to get admitted into college. Others left Yeshica because they got married elsewhere or migrated to town, where they hoped to obtain better future chances. Lilly, Akinyi, and MinMercy, three young women who once had been members of Yeshica, mentioned that they had stopped attending because they did not really fit in with the group of Yeshica participants. According to them, most young women at Yeshica behaved childishly, too playful with the men, even though some of them were mothers. Lilly, Akinyi, and MinMercy instead behaved more reservedly and were more respectful; the Yeshica young women accused them of being boastful.

Many young men were not at all interested in joining, as well. There were not always profound reasons as nonparticipation could as well be “both a ‘rational’ strategy and an unconscious practice embedded in the routine” (Cleaver 1999: 607). Given that a big part of life in Winam was lying on the shores of Lake Victoria, and that many people lived from fishing, Yeshica did not succeed in reaching the important, heterogeneous group of fishermen and their wives. The fishermen considered Yeshica’s activities a waste of time because they worked hard at night, and during the day they wanted to relax and enjoy life (i.e., by smoking and drinking chang’aa) instead of going to meetings and rehearsals. They were also more independent as they managed to earn a living and did not depend on what the project could offer them. Furthermore, most of the fishermen and their wives associated Yeshica with unattainable things, and thought that the Yeshica staff, with their big Land Cruisers, were people they could not really relate to, as they were used to another way of life. In addition, they liked to communicate in their local language, Dholuo, and were not fond of using English or
Kiswahili, the languages often used at the Centre by the Kisumu team. While the K·Rep officer believed that the microcredit project could be of direct interest to them, the fishermen feared taking out a loan since they rarely saved any money. Their earnings were meagre, and supplemented only with a small catch of fish every forth day they worked (see Chapter 4). Other youngsters of Winam also shared the fishermen’s view of Yeshica.

In summary, for those who participated, Yeshica clearly served other means than what Yeshica designers and staff had intended. Young people inventively transformed the project into a kind of ‘shopping centre,’ using offered services to advance personal goals. However, like any other shopping centre, only those who were able to pay for the consumption benefitted. Although attending itself did not cost money, it did have an opportunity cost since during that time no other income-earning activities could be pursued, which was also a reason why a number of youngsters never participated or dropped out. Moreover, as I will show in the following sections, with time, the project no longer met young people’s expectations and young people’s dissatisfaction grew exponentially once their patience with the project and the staff was gone.

5. Ochien’g’s story: The Post-Test Club from an actor-oriented perspective

Based on the actor-oriented approach to development interventions by Long (2001), the following case study of Ochien’g and the Post-Test Club (PTC) illustrates how one of the youth groups of Yeshica started up due to the need of Yeshica staff to mobilize youngsters for VCT. The case study moreover shows how the ‘beneficiaries’ of the project like Ochien’g, but also the local staff, creatively tweaked Yeshica’s arbitrary top-down aid to their own benefit. While the different project interventions were implemented, Yeshica participants continued with their daily struggles to make ends meet.

5.1. PTC and its members

One of the redefined goals of the YIP program designers was to establish or support several youth groups all over Winam. The aim was to reach Yeshica’s output targets by having active members in each location who would help with the implementation of the YIP and mobilize other youths. The Post-Test Club (PTC) was one of these youth groups, consisting of the first and most active members of Yeshica. The name suggested a major
difference from other groups: PTC’s main objective was to promote VCT by openly bringing together people who had been tested for HIV and were willing to share their HIV status. During PTC meetings, Yeshica staff’s intention was to facilitate discussions on HIV-related topics, and to invite HIV-positive people to encourage the members “to go public” with their HIV status. Given this particular focus of the PTC, it was the only one among several other youth groups that required members to have been tested for HIV. Although the PTC differed from other youth groups in this one respect, it illustrates how youth groups were created based on the goals of Yeshica staff. In this sense, it was not an exception among the other Yeshica youth groups, and, like other groups, PTC had weekly meetings. PTC had 15 to 20 members, most of whom were primary or secondary school-leavers, along with a handful of secondary school graduates.

PTC was created in response to a request by the Belgian program coordinator: after the carpentry and tailoring vocational trainings, offered at Yeshica from April until November 2003, the program coordinator asked the trainees to come together and register as a group in order to get access to the K-Rep microloans. She also invited them to go for VCT and to set up a ‘Post-Test Club’, with the goal, as she wrote in a progress report: “to create an opportunity for all the ones that have been tested to share ideas and also to counsel and encourage one another” (Yeshica 2003a: 4). However, only five people who had taken the carpentry and tailoring trainings were willing to participate in the PTC. They tried to invite more members, but asked for a registration fee of 50 Kenyan shillings (about 60 eurocents), in addition to requiring members to go for VCT. They decided to implement this membership fee in agreement with Yeshica staff, to give them a sense of ownership. The PTC members reasoned that if a new member wanted to benefit from the project, they should be “serious” and should show commitment by paying a low admission fee. This was also supposed to discourage new members from leaving too soon.

The group reached about 20 registered members but usually only about 10 people attended the weekly meetings. In the beginning, most of the PTC members were youth who had dropped out of primary school—the real target group of Yeshica (see also Chapter 1). One of the first members of both Yeshica and PTC was Ochien’g, who had only gone to school up to class three (departing at age eight), and who was actually one of the very few fishermen (in fact perhaps the only one) the project had reached. Unlike most fishermen, he believed that Yeshica might help him move up the economic ladder. Already 22 years old when he first began participating at Yeshica, Ochien’g was above
the age limit of Yeshica. Lying about their age was one of the strategies young people applied in order to be allowed to participate in Yeshica and thus to be able to benefit from the project’s activities. The local staff turned a blind eye to this in order to meet their targets for number of participants in activities.

5.2. Participation: Selective benefits and barriers

As a sort of compensation for the high barrier of entry to the group (i.e., getting tested), its members enjoyed selective benefits of the Centre’s facilities not available to other groups. Since PTC was the only youth group that gathered at the Centre itself, their members were usually among the first to be informed about the free vocational trainings. Consequently, they quickly claimed the available spots, no matter what the training was about. After they had secured their own spots, they informed their closest friends and discouraged others from going. Members also enjoyed the travel ‘reimbursement’ benefit, less explicitly contemplated by the YIP program designers, of financial compensation to take part in outreach sessions. Since most of the youngsters had only few clothes to wear, another attraction was that each Yeshica participant received a green T-shirt with the Yeshica logo. The idea behind outreach sessions and T-shirts was “to promote VCT and to strive towards the recruitment of more members into the Club” (Yeshica 2003b: 3–4). When K-Rep introduced microloans to the PTC members beginning in May 2004, PTC lost much of its original meaning, and was transformed into a savings-and-loan group. HIV-related issues from that point on were rarely discussed.

In the case of Ochien’g, he stated that his main motivation to join PTC was the possibility of receiving a loan. He also preferred performing theatre for Yeshica to fishing as he explained:

The big thing that made me decide to join was that there was a loan that was being promised to be given to youths. The other reason [...] was that I am a born drama person (in-depth interview, March 2006).

Apart from receiving a loan, Ochien’g was also interested in the vocational trainings and had received instruction in hairdressing, bicycle repair, and organic farming. He hoped—like most of Yeshica participants—that one day Yeshica would change his life, ideally by getting a job at Yeshica, or at least gaining material benefits from his daily visits to the Centre.

Recruiting youngsters for PTC was not easy for a variety of reasons, including the typical attitude of members who wanted to limit access to the group because of the
selective benefits, as well as existing stereotypes around HIV, which meant that none of the youngsters felt free to share their HIV status. Most of the youngsters admitted that they found it hard to join PTC because of the requirement to go for VCT. Petrus, a 17-year-old primary school graduate, explained:

> Joining was hard because going for VCT yourself is hard and then also sharing your status with the rest is not easy. So maybe you mingled (i.e., had sex) and now you ask yourself what will happen if I am positive, it’s like there is death ahead, and that can really stress one” (informal conversation, September 2005).

There was still a lot of stigma attached to disclosure of status and the project did actually not succeed in overcoming this problem, even within the PTC, since members did not open up to each other about their HIV status. The expectations for the PTC for Yeshica staff were different than for the youth who participated in it. As already explained above, most PTC members did not attend the PTC meetings because of the HIV teachings and behavioural change messages, but joined for different reasons, including priority access to trainings, the small stipends given to members, and access to Yeshica t-shirts. These reasons for joining PTC were why youngsters participated in Yeshica in general.

5.3. The downside of participation: Opportunity costs

Ochien’g’s life story shows how his participation in Yeshica interacted with his other activities at home. Participating in Yeshica meant making choices and not engaging in other income-generating activities, such as fishing. This is a classic example of opportunity costs, which denotes the income forgone by not choosing to pursue an alternative but mutually exclusive activity. In other words, Ochien’g could not continue fishing and participate in Yeshica. After Ochien’g became a participant, he only went fishing when Yeshica delayed paying his ‘income’ for his theatre performances. Ochien’g and his wife, MinMercy, hoped that one day Ochien’g could get a job at Yeshica and no longer need to go fishing at all. It would also mean an improvement of his social status:

> If Ochien’g goes to east Winam [where the Centre is located], I know that he has gone to work. I know that if he goes and comes back without a thing, that he is just searching. He also tells me that one day he may get lucky or he may get a place and get employed there. That is the reason why he puts some effort in order to get a job there. He tells me that he will get it, so I also say: “let it be” (MinMercy, informal conversation, May 2005).

In June 2005, Ochien’g successfully applied for a job opening to temporarily replace the security officer of Yeshica during his annual leave. For Ochien’g, it was a dream come
true, and he assumed that it would last forever because he imagined that if he did the job well, he would remain employed at Yeshica. He was grateful to Augus (a 22-year-old matatu conductor who recently had finished secondary school) for giving him some hints on how to prepare for his job interview. For about two months, Ochien’g worked at Yeshica, on a temporary contract. When his fishing mates asked him why “he is so lost”, he proudly told them that he no longer went fishing since he was now employed at Yeshica. The job gave him a number of advantages such as easy access to the clinic and the storage room, from which he stole contraceptive vaginal rings, malaria tablets, and spare parts to repair bicycles. With his new income, he moved to a bigger, two-room rental apartment. But when the Centre delayed in paying his salary, he could barely pay for food. He explained to me:

MinMercy is good. She does not make noise (i.e., quarrel). I told her that she has to wait, I promised her to do well. In the beginning, I was a fisherman and look, now I am not a fisherman any more, I have a job at Yeshica. Maybe another day, I will be working at Yeshica. Now I am happy but—bad luck, we have no food (informal conversation, August 2005).

While Ochien’g struggled to make ends meet, some changes occurred within Yeshica that were disheartening to most of the PTC members. Matin, who was hired to replace the original project manager, decided to cut some of the privileges of the PTC members. Matin realised that the PTC members took most of the vocational training spots, and used the facilities of the Centre for their own interests. In response, Matin only allowed youth who had not followed any training at Yeshica to sign up for future trainings, and insisted that PTC members use their bicycles rather than the CDC car to get to outreach sessions, even when the event was two hours away.

Under pressure from the Belgian program coordinator, Matin needed to reach a target for disbursing K-Rep loans, and he strongly encouraged the PTC members to take out a loan. He convinced them by saying that they could easily repay the loan with their weekly outreach travel reimbursements, and created such an agreement with Anuka, the K-Rep officer. Three months later (in September 2005), the program coordinator decided that she wanted to evaluate whether theatre sketches had any impact on VCT attendance; she put a halt to the sketches, and PTC members were left without a regular income to repay their loan.

Ochien’g had difficulty finding an adult guarantor to back up his loan of 5,000 Kenyan shillings (about 62.5 euro), which was required by K-Rep as a form of collateral. He solved his problem by ‘borrowing’ his best friend’s identity card without his knowledge. Repaying the loan was also difficult. Although Yeshica had intended youth
to use their loans to start an income-generating activity or enterprise, using the skills they had acquired during the vocational trainings, Ochien’g, like most of K-Rep participants, did it differently (see Chapter 4), spending most of his loan to buy a goat, three new sheets of iron for his roof, and a new dress for MinMercy. The iron sheets had to be sold soon thereafter, as he needed the money to pay for hospital expenses. In the end, very few of the benefits that Ochien’g obtained through his participation at Yeshica were left to improve his livelihood.

5.4. Expectations, discontent, and fading away
Great expectations were generated but when participation did not yield what was expected, discontent grew, leading people to leave the groups, and diminishing the project’s relevance and importance.

A general discontent brewed among the PTC members. George, who owned a carpentry shop, explained: “Those people of Yeshica are not helping us. Had it been that K-Rep was not there, I would have left Yeshica long ago” (informal conversation, July 2006). Participants no longer wanted to attract new members because they did not want to share the few benefits with more people, and they increased the admission fee to discourage new members from joining. Following the example of another youth program (Ruma, outside Winam, sponsored by the German Development Foundation), some youth wanted to become independent from Yeshica, and opened their own office separate from the Youth Centre. Ochien’g explained: “The Centre confines us so much. If we rely on it, we wouldn’t go far”. Wanting to emerge as independent development actors, they started to write a proposal, but this was not easy since the youth had no experience in writing proposals, and very few donors accepted proposals from local youths. So this attempt went nowhere.

In the meantime, the PTC members had disagreements and the group was divided. Matin urged Ochien’g to get the youth to solve their conflicts, and threatened to stop all PTC activities at Yeshica if they did not. Matin gave the PTC members the impression that they were no longer needed, telling them: “There are many youths in Winam, not only the 18 who are in PTC”. Matin’s top-down management style conflicted with what was promised to the PTC members: the program coordinator had always told them that the Centre was theirs and that their voices would be heard. The PTC members felt that this was no longer the case. Consequently, one after another dropped out of the PTC, and the project faded away. What about Ochien’g?
I want to cut all ties with Yeshica. Before I was so committed (i.e., I would work for Yeshica without pay) and at times, my wife and daughter even had nothing to eat in the house. Now, my heart doesn’t welcome PTC anymore because depending on the manager who was brought to us, he is a person who wants to control the minds of the youths. I decided to leave Yeshica. I remain calm but still I can’t leave because I have a loan there that I want to finish paying so that I can separate from them. I cannot leave because first, Yeshica is a place of pride but Doctor A. (the program co-coordinator) doesn’t follow up on her work. After she has said how things need to be done, she thinks that the things happen [that way]... However, even if things are being spoilt, she doesn’t know and when she comes, she doesn’t want to know how the youths are doing. So that is why youths nowadays, many of them run away from Yeshica (informal conversation, April 2006).

Yeshica remained just one aspect of young people’s lives, and the activities there were overshadowed by more serious life events: for instance, Ochien’g’s wife MinMercy suffered from a severe malaria attack, and he needed to sell some of their belongings to pay the hospital bills, including the iron roofing sheets he had bought with the K-Rep loan. He could not go back to fishing since someone else took his place in the boat. To make things worse, MinMercy’s mother fell ill but they had no money to visit her. Even if Ochien’g had the money, he did not want his wife to go visit her mother, as he feared that she would never return because he was unable to provide food for her. Indeed, since Ochien’g did not manage to take care of his family as he was supposed to do, MinMercy decided to leave him and marry someone in town because she imagined that life in town was much better.36

When Yeshica stopped the theatre performances, leading to the loss of participants’ regular ‘income’, the harshness of their daily life just continued. One could even argue that life became more difficult since the participants had incurred opportunity costs, such as losing one’s place in a fishing boat, making the transition to other income-generating activities more difficult. Ochien’g felt “cheated” by the project. His participation had only been rewarded for a very short time, and his life afterwards went in a downward spiral. He had no job, and his wife and daughter left him. He started drinking heavily, and begging for money and food. Although he had been one of the most active members of Yeshica, once he was no longer needed, he felt as if he was left alone to solve his problems. Although Ochien’g’s livelihood options differed from the other youths’, his case was not exceptional.

To summarize, there was a discrepancy between the expectations of Yeshica’s staff and those of the ‘beneficiaries’, both the young people and JoWinam in general. While Ochien’g’s main concern was how to make ends meet as a responsible father, for example, the priority of the YIP program designers was to mobilize certain actions among as many young people as possible (e.g., in the case of PTC, to encourage them to
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESHICA

The life worlds of everyone involved and affected—the youth, JoWinam and the staff—reached far beyond the ‘projects’ and ‘interventions’. As Long (2002: 4) explains, ‘beneficiaries’ such as Ochien’g do not “reduce or limit [their] perception of reality and its problems simply to those defined for [them] by the intervening agency”.

The YIP program designers usually did not bear in mind that by implementing a certain project they were creating new ‘local needs’, leading to (sometimes unrealistic) expectations. In order to reach project targets, staff made promises to the target group, creating expectations, but they could not always fulfil their promises. Yeshica participants did not realise that once the interventions had been tested and their impact measured, the project would come to an end. In their reasoning, Yeshica was set up for them and it would always be there, just like most of the shopping centres in town. For them, this project did not have a clear beginning or end, in contrast to what project documents envisaged. “This boxing in of space and time” (Long 2002: 4) and neat delineation of project boundaries—all related to funding requirements—is characteristic of many development projects but looks quite different from an actor perspective. Let us therefore analyse in more detail what contributed to the general malaise of the participants of Yeshica.

6. Youth perspectives on Yeshica

6.1. Discrepancy between policy and practice

Overall, Yeshica was an innovative project, one that tried to move away from biomedical and behavioural approaches and to incorporate broader contextual factors into its project design. Yeshica intended to invite all community members to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the project’s different activities. It expected community-wide participation and hoped that HIV transmission was recognised as a community problem. In line with state-of-the-art development theories, the program designers believed that involving the ‘beneficiaries’ in program implementation and evaluation would ensure the sustainability of the interventions and the proper allocation of services and resources. So, why were the youngsters unhappy about the project and why did they drop out at a high rate?

The participants of Yeshica were less dissatisfied with the content of the interventions than with the promises of a participatory approach—or, more broadly, the discrepancy between policy and practice. The participatory activities of Yeshica were constrained by organisational procedures. The program designers of YIP were extremely
concerned with adapting and implementing evidence-based HIV interventions to the Kenyan context, which left little room to actually examine whether the structures of their participatory project secured the interests of the young people (see also Odingo and Lefèvre 2006). The program designers had to ensure they would receive their annual financial support by monitoring and achieving their output targets. Both the Winam and Kisumu teams of Yeshica’s local staff had a number of requirements to fulfil for the Belgian program coordinator. They worked to meet their targets, under pressure, and within a specific time frame. Yeshica staff often took direct control of the program activities and their implementation, leaving no space for the youngsters’ creativity or for goals to be adjusted in accordance with actual needs.

6.2. High expectations

Yeshica staff members were often under intense pressure to obtain a minimum number of participants for their activities since they were concerned with meeting the output targets. Yeshica staff realised that they easily could recruit by delivering desirable goods as T-shirts, transportation reimbursements, and training certificates. The youngsters of Winam agreed to ‘participate’, i.e., to attend meetings and trainings, and to be Centre members, because they knew that only by fulfilling their role as ‘clients’, could they make legitimate claims on program resources (see also Long 2002). At times, the staff also promised items to soothe tempers and to win sympathy in the short run. One of the members of a youth group, Bishop, a 19-year-old secondary school graduate, recounted the difficulty getting activity resources from the Centre, and even the gifts promised by the staff:

We had been asking for balls but Yeshica never came up with it. We managed to get balls and nets from the library instead. Matin came to me some time back, and he had asked me to write down the names of the active members [of our group] because there were T-shirts to be issued. That was some months ago, but up till now the shirts have never come (informal conversation, May 2006).

Yeshica staff also often withheld money that was promised as transportation reimbursements or stipends for participation.

In the long run, unfulfilled promises created an atmosphere in which the youngsters did not trust the staff anymore, or feel that the staff took their activities seriously. For instance, if Yeshica organised an “open day” of sport competitions, the youngsters thought that the staff should provide a kind of trophy for the winner, just like at school competitions. Without such, they felt little desire to mobilize youths from
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESHICA

their neighbourhood to watch, since the game was not perceived as something serious.
Owino, a 19-year-old secondary school graduate, who worked as a barber and also made money charging batteries, described such open days:

When there is an open day, there is nothing serious that happens. It is more like an outing. We are just going to have a walk, we go and have a soda and bread. Then after a few minutes, you are told that the thing is over. Even the participants do not get something to recognise their efforts, like a ball, a trophy or maybe a football uniform. So maybe, people are not taking it seriously now (informal conversation, March 2006).

Yeshica participants wondered why they should continue promoting the activities of Yeshica and attract new members if promises were not fulfilled, activities were not taken seriously, and the paid staff was not responsible. Okoth summarized the situation:

Yeshica is not helping us at all. We ask to use bicycles, and to get T-shirts and transport to visit other groups, but we are denied. People around [east Winam] do not like Yeshica and CDC since they were told at first that the program is for Winam people, yet no one from around east Winam has been employed there. They always apply for jobs but always fail at the interview level... The staff really do not do anything. Just come for outreach, you will see: we act, then we and the VCT counsellors walk around to get people for VCT while the staff just sit and read newspapers. They really do nothing, yet they get paid at the end of the month (informal conversation, October 2005).

Even at the second Youth Festival in 2005, according to the participants of the festival, the staff—especially the Kisumu team at that time—did not show a professional work attitude. Instead of joining the youngsters during lunchtime in a show of unity, the Kisumu team members went somewhere else for lunch, riding off in the CDC cars. They came back drunk and continued drinking at the Festival. Yeshica participants felt that the staff sent the wrong message by not setting a ‘good example’.

6.3. A tipping point

Many development projects generate expectations as part of their design and sometimes through unintended consequences of funding pressures (see also Gibbs et al. 2010). When frustrations piled up and reached a tipping point, it became nearly impossible to win back the participants.

6.3.1. Unintentional harm

Between the period of 2003 and 2008, two project managers had overseen Yeshica. Jerry, the first one, left Winam sometime in 2005 in order to assist with the start up of a second Youth Centre (which was meant as a comparative study) in another district.
within Nyanza Province. Matin, Jerry’s successor, had previously been part of the mobilization team of the Baseline Cross-sectional Survey (BCS). From the beginning, Matin was not very popular among the youngsters or among his colleagues.

According to other staff members, the handing over of the project manager position was poorly coordinated. They believed that Jerry did not sufficiently inform Matin about the program policies because he did not agree with Matin’s hiring and wanted him to fail. Jerry had wanted to stay at Yeshica, and to manage both of the Youth Centres, since this would give him an additional income. Additionally, a number of other staff members did not agree with Matin’s promotion within the CDC. They mentioned that Matin, who had an educational background in biology and no previous experience in management, was not well qualified to manage a social centre such as Yeshica. This situation left Matin in a difficult position.

Matin took his job seriously but his colleagues and the youngsters both felt he had a ‘bossy’ attitude. At the start, he immediately reported a number of organisational errors and corruption cases to the Belgian program coordinator. He noticed that the VCT counsellors exaggerated the number of people tested for VCT. One counsellor had ostensibly seen 50 clients per day, an unrealistic quantity, Matin explained in an informal conversation (August 2005), because—if done correctly—only three to four persons could be counselled per hour. Matin’s revelation shocked the program coordinator, who was expecting a visit from the CDC director who was interested to know how Yeshica staff managed to reach so many VCT clients.

Soon after reporting these issues to the program coordinator, Matin realised that he had violated the organisational culture of Yeshica where the staff had refrained from informing the program coordinator about what was not functioning. Whenever there was a problem, they tried to solve the issue among themselves and only permitted Sheriff, the protégé of the program coordinator, to communicate with the program coordinator. By stepping on many people’s toes right from the start, Matin made himself unpopular with both the Winam and Kisumu teams. The staff made clear that if he continued like this, they would simply ignore him, making his work even more difficult.

Similarly, Matin was not very popular among the youngsters. From the beginning, he wanted to make clear that his way of management was different than Jerry’s: he no longer would tolerate the passive participation of people who just came for the material benefits. His approach to the youngsters was authoritarian. His style left little space for ‘participation’ where youngsters’ opinions and preferences were taken into account. Various misunderstandings and frustrations between the participants and
staff arose. For instance, Matin decided single-handedly to dissolve one group, the youngsters’ Executive Committee. On another occasion, without discussing a problem—too much material was disappearing from the storage containers—Matin installed new locks. The youth representatives who were in charge of the containers were very angry, as one of the youth facilitators explained:

The youth feel bad because Matin is acting without consulting them, and by locking the containers without their consent, we (the youth facilitators) cannot even show our faces by those containers anymore because it will be generalized that we have locked out the youth from the containers – and I can even be beaten up in the field by the angry youth, yet we were not party to that decision (informal conversation, October 2005).

Matin also expected the youth representatives to be present at the containers on a daily basis to avoid theft. One of the youth representatives, Ouma (22-year-old operating his own barbershop), felt that this could not be expected from them: “Whenever [Matin] found the container locked, he went to ask me to go and open it. I chased him away. Is it my job just to sit the whole day in that container, when I am not paid? I am planning to leave Yeshica and let them get new members” (informal conversation, October 2005).

Because it was a participatory development project, Yeshica participants expected another kind of leadership and not Matin’s authoritarian approach. Ochien’g stated:

The management at Yeshica is bad. We are treated badly and our views and needs are not taken into consideration. We are just expected to sit back and do all we are told even if it is bad. It is like a dog that is called by his master and comes and bows and coils his tail under the legs in fear (in-depth interview, March 2006).

Bishop (19 years old) agreed:

Jerry was bad but not compared to Matin. Matin is much worse. Leadership is also something inborn. A leader should not be too authoritative and also not too democratic such that he listens to what everyone says, like even what a little baby says. Those under a leader should not be shouting his name and [not showing respect] like that (informal conversation, August 2006).

Although Matin’s interventions might seem reasonable, even necessary, and the youngsters acknowledged that a somewhat authoritarian attitude was expected from a leader, his actions nonetheless undermined Yeshica participants’ ownership of the project. According to Yeshica participants, Matin did not treat the youngsters as valuable partners but as low-status participants. While Matin may have had good intentions, his lack of experience and his failure to communicate effectively meant that he started out on the wrong foot with virtually everybody and caused lasting damage to the project’s ability to mobilize participants.
6.3.2. Only good news for the king

Management problems are of course common in development projects, but in this case they were made worse because of another not infrequent issue, namely the fear to deliver negative news to the foreign program coordinator. Participants recognized that the program coordinator was not getting the whole story but did not find the courage to approach her and inform her about what was really going on at the Centre. They often were timid, believing that their knowledge of English was not good enough to express themselves. They felt the staff tried to prevent them from voicing criticism, and believed that the staff thought such criticism was disrespectful:

We wish to have a meeting with Doctor A. (the program coordinator), and that no staff member or Matin should attend. We feel that whenever we want to talk to Doctor A. when she is around, the staff do not let us, or when she comes to us, they also follow her to the room or the banda (hut), thus we cannot freely talk to her. We really do not want Matin because he is arrogant and never listens. He is a stupid person! (Okoth, informal conversation, October 2005).

When an anonymous threatening letter was sent to Matin, the program coordinator rushed to the Centre. The author of that letter had threatened to “chase Matin out of Winam, dead or alive”. When the youngsters heard about it, they hoped, as Mary, one of the PTC members, expressed “that what was written in that letter would happen for real. When things do not improve, then one day a human body part will be found at the Centre” (informal conversation, March 2006). Fortunately, nothing happened, but for Jerry, Yeshica’s project manager prior to Matin, it confirmed again their feeling that “the youngsters of Winam are really a difficult group” (informal conversation, October 2005). Failures in communication, and distrust and animosity on all sides resulted in problems not receiving the attention they deserved. The absence of effective, open communication was startling since the project was explicitly designed to be participatory and to give local youths and their communities a voice. In the next section, I discuss the organizational tools implemented to facilitate this participation.

6.4. The ‘Executive Committee’: Participatory organ without participation

Participation is usually envisaged “through democratic representation and [based] on the election of representatives” (Cleaver 1999: 602). In development projects, elected representatives are typically invited to participate in the different phases of the program: planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. However, as Cleaver (1999: 597) puts it, “participation has become an act of faith in development: something we believe in and rarely question”. Stating that participatory features exist in a project
is often already enough to claim that it is community-based and participatory. However, the way participation is realised on the ground is often unclear. The actual mechanisms and impact of participation, and the potential scope of the empowerment that is supposed to take place through a project, requires more exploration. The following story of one of the participatory organs of Yeshica, the Youth Executive Committee (called “Ex-Com”), illustrates that the term ‘participation’ covers a vast range of activities, including some that hardly qualify as ‘participatory.’

According to the project design, the aim of the Ex-Com was to promote young people’s participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of Yeshica. Ex-Com consisted of elected representatives from each local committee. Participation was voluntary and members’ commitment and dedication were awarded with an annual certificate of participation, identification badges, and T-shirts.

In practice, an Ex-Com meeting was not a participatory event during which staff and youngsters together planned upcoming activities. Instead, Yeshica staff imposed a predetermined agenda that left little space for the youngsters’ input. The staff used the meeting to announce their decisions. The task of the youth representatives was to mobilize their peers from each of their locations and, later on, to report on the general progress being made by their local members, any problems faced, and materials needed for implementation. In addition, the youth representatives submitted a monthly action plan that was aligned with the programs’ objectives. For instance, during the Ex-Com meeting in September 2005, one representative mentioned that a large number of female participants in her group had dropped out, that the storage containers were placed too far from the local Centres, and that more bicycles were needed for youth to use to get to farther away places. Although the Ex-Com members could only make minor changes to planned activities, youth group members did not hesitate to tell their Ex-Com representatives their opinions, which they in turn reported to Yeshica staff. It was unclear whether those opinions eventually reached the Kisumu office and the program coordinator. At the first Ex-Com meeting that took place after the second Youth Festival, representatives critiqued the staff’s behaviour at the event:

Ramba representative: “First of all, the staff should learn to work well with one another and with one voice. Secondly, the festival committee did not liaise well with the staff: it lacked ownership on the youth’s side. It was like the staff hijacked our festival”.

PTC representative: “I got very embarrassed when the staff started quarrelling in front of the youth in the kitchen, until those who were waiting for plates just returned their plates and watched the staff quarrelling. I felt pity. It was a
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESHICA

big shame on the staff’s part”. [...] The staff should also equally share responsibility and not leave everything to one person” (fieldnotes, September 2005).

Criticisms of the staff and the project that were voiced during meetings were not reported in the minutes and thus did not reach the program coordinator. As a consequence, no remedial action was ever taken.

Yeshica staff expelled youths with critical perspectives on the project by suddenly organising new Ex-Com elections; according to Odera (19 years old) some “big mouths” were “a threat to their work”. 42 The selection of candidates did not happen democratically: one day, the staff simply picked new committee members, choosing from youngsters who were attending a football match. After the game, one of the adult facilitators asked the youth to form groups, saying, “We have money to give you”, 43 and requesting people to come forward to be elected. The youth had not been informed that there were going to be elections, as mandated in the bylaws. Petronella overheard youths asking each other what those who were being elected would be required to do, and what Yeshica would do for them in return. The staff selected three youths for each local committee, to serve as chair, secretary, and vice-chair, and tried to include a young woman, a school-going man, and a young man who was not attending school, but there were few young women to choose from. The newly chosen committee members were shy, and many had not been involved in any of the youth groups before.

The same approach to elections happened in other regions, making Yeshica participants very unhappy. Mary, an active PTC member, complained that the new elected Ex-Com representatives were still in school and might not be able to attend the Ex-Com meetings. She further mentioned that the staff elected young and more inexperienced people; they were too shy to complain about anything since they were lacking the backing of their peers, which democratically elected leaders might have had. Owino explained:

The last time that I went to Yeshica was last year. We were sent away last year because those people (the staff) had discovered that we have known their shortcomings and we had started talking back and asking why things were going wrong. Yet, they told us that they had sent us away because we were over age, but that was not the case this time. They just wanted people that they can manipulate because at the last meeting, we really talked openly about the bad things that Yeshica was doing and the staff was not happy with us. Therefore they have elected new people, some young children who will not speak out and some school-going children who cannot even address people (informal conversation, April 2006).

Yeshica staff did not see the need to use participatory methods. On paper, the result looked just the same as it would have if the matter had been handled democratically: a
report was sent to the Kisumu office listing the names of the different newly ‘elected’ youth representatives. For the local staff, appointing youth rather than holding elections had three advantages: it was quick and simple, it yielded representatives unlikely to cause trouble by voicing negative opinions, and it enabled the continuation of claims about participatory development. Without direct supervision or observation in the field, participatory mechanisms on paper could mean anything in practice. Staff had strong incentives to tweak ‘participation’ to suit their own interests. In fact, unchecked ‘participatory’ mechanisms could increase the power of local staff over participants, as they had more room for manoeuvre. When participatory methods were hijacked, it became more likely that decisions that ran counter to the program designers’ intentions would follow, as well as unprofessional behaviour among the staff.

One could conclude that all actors involved in Yeshica had their own hidden agendas. Both the participants and the staff wanted to assure their position or job. Each of them tried to benefit through manipulation, and, in a way, they all were playing the same game. Some even played ‘the game of sex’ while Yeshica promoted ABC (Abstinence, Be faithful and Condoms).

6.5. Unintended consequences: Yeshica, “the people who have sex”

JoWinam and the parents of Yeshica participants often called the Yeshica participants “the people who have sex”. Maduong, one of the two youngsters that worked at the library of Yeshica, told Petronella the following story:

Kelly of PTC has been sleeping with [a CDC staff person] in Matin’s house. Kelly does not care what people say. She walks around saying that she has not gotten a house. Kelly goes to her home during the day but at night she goes back to Matin’s house. She had two children but one died so only one remains. Kelly is an ‘I don’t care–er’ and her parents cannot condemn her behaviour, they just leave her alone. Once girls grow up, they will have boyfriends and it is up to them to choose whom they want once they are big, and there is nothing you can do about it. You know, one day, when we were seated at the hut with some of the Winam girls, an old man passed by and greeted them like this: “amosou jo dicho” (I greet you people who have sex). I did not understand why the old man greeted them like that, but, later, after what has been going on with Kelly, I understood why the old man called them like that. I wonder what is wrong with those girls in the Centre, that they are allowing themselves to be used by the male staff at the Centre! Definitely these guys have other girls in Kisumu so they are just wasting their time with the Winam girls. Sheriff (a Kisumu staff member) is married but he dates girls in Winam. In the end, Sheriff is just spoiling the name of Yeshica. One day, one of the new staff members asked me why I am always serious and he told me that he had heard [from other male staff] that I am very strict and difficult [and unapproachable]. Imagine! Here [at Yeshica], if you are not patient, you cannot stay (i.e., if you are not strict/able to resist men’s advances; you cannot survive). I am actually thinking of withdrawing from PTC because if something goes wrong with Yeshica, like now, people will say “Yeshica people do this”. If the people who are supposed to be teaching us behavioural change are behaving like
this, how do you expect us, the youth, to take what they teach us seriously? Some parents are even discouraging youths from going to the Centre because they say: “You are going to learn prostitution there”. In addition, those at the primary school in East Winam were warned not to be seen at the Centre. The numbers are going to drop because of the staff's own behaviour. When the numbers of attendees goes down, Sheriff will ask me why people are not going to the library anymore. I cannot lie about the numbers, I will just write the correct figure, even if only two people come (informal conversation, June 2006).

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons why young people participated in Yeshica was to expand their sexual network. A number of youngsters were said to have had sex with staff members, in the staff housing next to Yeshica. At the Centre, young women also flirted with the theology students whose college was in the building behind Yeshica. The containers that were used as satellite offices for Yeshica services were ideal places for meeting lovers and “playing sex”. Ironically, Yeshica—the place where young people were supposed to be taught HIV/AIDS prevention—turned into a place abounding with opportunities for sex. Everyone knew that this was happening but nobody discussed it because they did not want to be accused of misbehaving. Bishop told us:

I used to go to the container but I stopped going because I did not want to clash with people: people would say that I had gone to chat up girls at the container. You know, it is said that people go to meet girlfriends and boyfriends at the container, and that would really taint my name (informal conversation, November 2005).

Not only did sexual relationships between staff and participants occur, but also sexual relationships among CDC/KEMRI staff were very common. In the Kisumu office, jokes were made about “practicing zero-grazing within CDC”. According to Opiyo, the anthropologist who used to work at Yeshica, HIV-prevention programs could not succeed when the staff behaved differently than the messages they promoted:

Now imagine that you are my female colleague, and both of us are working with CDC, and you are very serious about your work: you are trying to help young people, how they are living, developing life skills so that they learn how to negotiate, and you are helping them to have a better livelihood – but me, your male colleague, I am going behind your back by having an affair with this young girl. Do you think you can succeed? You cannot succeed. Now, that is how you can explain the failure of intervention because the message is important. You are carrying the message but I am sending other messages because I am having an affair. But none of us has ever lost his job because he was having an affair (in-depth interview, September 2006).

In the end, both Yeshica staff and its participants contradicted the very purpose of the program. Some female participants tried to seduce salaried staff members, but many participants of Yeshica were seduced by the sexual advances of the CDC staff, who had a responsibility to refrain from abusing their power and engaging in such behaviour. I know only of one staff member who had married a participant after she was
found pregnant. For the others, sexual adventures with CDC staff only brought temporary financial benefits but no long-term enhancement of their livelihood opportunities. Instead, Yeshica participants were given the sobriquet of “jo dicho”, the people who have sex.

These unintended consequences do not mean that the project necessarily ‘failed’. Clearly, the story is more complicated than that, and I am not concerned with making a judgment about the success or failure of the project. What my fieldwork shows—beyond any progress report from the project—is that both participants and staff used the project in their own interests, whether or not those were aligned with the project’s goals. Indeed, plenty of people got from Yeshica what they wanted, at least in the short term.

6.6. The fallacy of participation

Interactions between actors with different interests and constraints impacted the participatory mechanisms in the project. This chapter mainly examined the interests of Yeshica participants: I only briefly touched upon the perspectives of the YIP program coordinator and Yeshica staff. The youngsters’ stories made apparent that the program coordinator mainly relied on reports from her staff since she had many other tasks to fulfil in Kisumu, making it difficult for her to visit the project regularly on the ground. In the end, for her, ‘participation’ came down to reporting large numbers as evidence of project ‘success’ to the donors.

The main concern of the staff, by contrast, was promoting the ‘success’ of the project to the program coordinator in order to secure their jobs and livelihood. Therefore, the field staff seemed to care little about the interests of Yeshica participants and did not communicate their criticisms to the program coordinator. Their solution was to creatively meet their job targets by promising material benefits, which they could not always provide, and by artificially inflating the numbers they reported. This proved to be quite effective as virtually no signals reached the program coordinator that things were not going well on the ground. For staff, ‘participation’ meant reporting the desired numbers while making sure that no criticism was heard.

The young people sought a means to make a living but also opportunities to have fun and make friends. They were not passive victims and found their own ways of benefitting from the project. Having said that, they bore the consequences when others’ interests tweaked the actual content of the project. They muddled through the project, grasping on to any advantage they could seize. For the youths, the idea of participation generally meant that their voices were heard, but at Yeshica, ‘participation’ was reduced
to just being physically present at Yeshica, waiting for some kind of opportunity to arise.

Participation in projects should involve more than sitting on committees or speaking at meetings. Participation does not need to be limited to formal moments; often, really meaningful participation, for example influencing decisions, occurs in informal settings, outside of a project’s structures (Cleaver 1999, 2001). Participation at Yeshica was an illusion and often served as a façade.

7. Conclusion

When I have talked about Yeshica to development practitioners, including my ITM colleagues, I have often been asked to reduce my conclusion to answering a simple binary question: Has Yeshica ‘failed’? My intention has never been to evaluate the project, hence I will not make a judgement or answer this question. Instead, by using an actor-oriented approach, this chapter sheds light on the complex web of meanings given to Yeshica’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’ that was produced by the program management, its local staff, and the participants or ‘beneficiaries’.

Latour conceptualized the ‘success’ of a project as arising from the project’s ability to continue recruiting institutional support (cited in Mosse 2006: 937–938). By doing this he approached the issue from the perspective of program designers and managers. My work not only shows how programs are shaped through their interaction with local power structures, but also that even less powerful actors are able to make these interventions fit their own interests by using their own “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990). While the YIP designers hoped that Yeshica would have an impact on HIV/AIDS incidence, the participants and staff of Yeshica were more occupied with how Yeshica could improve their livelihood and their daily life.

If Yeshica’s ‘success’ is defined in biomedical terms, the program management might consider it as a ‘failure’. Due to the lack of financial resources, the evaluation of the program’s impact that was to be conducted four years after the implementation of Yeshica never took place. By 2010, policy priorities of donors had changed, with the result that no extension was funded under PEPFAR 2. In the end, there was no hard statistical evidence of impact as initially promised by the project. However, the qualitative information I obtained from working with the youngsters does tell us something: Yeshica became a fertile ground for new sexual relationships, which could be at odds with the goal of reducing HIV/AIDS risk.
While it was not a ‘success’ in biomedical terms, if we look at the project from the perspectives of the youngsters, it was a ‘success’, certainly at the beginning, since Yeshica provided many things that were important to the youngsters. The project provided (some) youngsters with new skills, higher social status, and, for young women, opportunities for sexual liaisons with salaried men from town, which could improve their livelihood, even if only temporarily. After some time, Yeshica no longer conformed to the expectations of some members of the project, which caused them to leave the project and search for something else to make a living.

We might also go a step further in our analysis. While in biomedical terms, Yeshica could be called a ‘failure’, the program designers managed to describe it as a ‘success’ story in the epidemiological community. Having seen the reality in the field, one may wonder how this is possible. The answer is simple: When the program designers published their ‘success’ story, they only talked about one of the HIV-prevention interventions of Yeshica, namely, the ‘Families Matter! Program’ (FMP). The evaluation of FMP—published in an article called ‘Evaluation of a U.S. evidence-based parenting intervention in rural western Kenya from Parents Matter! to Families Matter!’ in AIDS Education and Prevention—showed a positive effect on the intergenerational communication between children (10-12-year-olds) and on parenting skills (Vandenhoudt et al. 2010). However, any ‘impact’ attributed to FMP may have been influenced by the impact of the other interventions. Furthermore, beyond the problem of untangling impacts, the evaluation did not recognize that it was culturally inappropriate in Winam for parents to talk with their children about sexuality issues.

In the end, FMP was a ‘success’ for the program designers because they succeeded in obtaining funding (and thereby legitimacy) and maintained good institutional relationships. However, interventions that were less popular among donors, like the ‘livelihood intervention’, were easily discarded as ‘failures’.

---

1 K-Rep stands for the Kenya Rural Enterprise Program that specialises in microfinance services. The participants of Yeshica usually referred to it as “K-Rep”.

2 This anecdote comes from my early fieldnotes (June 2005) when I was not yet accompanied by my research assistant Petronella. Petronella only joined me in August 2005. When I did not understand what the youngsters were saying in Dholuo, I just asked the person sitting next to me to translate. During this meeting, I received most of the translations from Onyango’s sister (a secondary school graduate), whom I already knew quite well since she was one of my neighbours in Dhonam.
YOUTH SPEAK ABOUT YESSICA

3 The youth were paid for participating in outreach sessions, locally referred to as “outreaches”; these were precisely what the word suggests: a form of reaching out to the community by going into surrounding villages to offer VCT, clinical services, and leisure activities.

4 *Mutura* is not considered to be a rich man’s meal nor a poor man’s meal. It is a common meal for those who like meat, including those who can’t afford large cuts of meat. Okoth cannot afford to buy *mutura* very often. He associates *mutura* with food from town, although *mutura* is usually prepared in the village and not in town.

5 Policy by Mosse (2004: 1) is defined as “development models, strategies and project designs”.


7 Several reasons have been given for the limited impact of behavioural interventions, including timing of intervention delivery and the breadth of focus. The majority of HIV-prevention efforts reached young people after they had already begun having sexual intercourse. Additionally, most behavioural interventions did not take into account contextual factors (Mc Leroy et al. 1988; UNAIDS 1999b).

8 See the information on the three-year evaluation of the project, available at: http://www.memakwavijana.org.

9 The recent critique of quantitative impact evaluations, though related to microfinance, is applicable to the wider problem of how to evaluate the results of development projects. See, for instance, Dichter and Harper (2007) and Bateman (2010).

10 A multicentre study on factors determining the differential spread of HIV in four African cities reports a prevalence in Kisumu of 23 percent among women between 15 and 19 years old and 3.5 percent among men between 15 and 19 years old (Buvé et al. 2001).

11 As I described in Chapter 1, I was part of the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), as the ITM was my employer and the Belgian epidemiologists were my colleagues. My work and role within the institute, however, were entirely contained to this ethnography.

12 The ‘rapid needs assessment’ (RNA) was funded by the CDC, more specifically by the GAP/LIFE project, and was carried out in five districts of Nyanza Province in August and September 2001. The selected sites represented the variety of environments (rural, urban, peri-urban, and lakeside). Focus group discussions with in- and out-of-school youth between the ages of 10–24, interviews with key informants, and observations were used to generate qualitative information on youths’ sexual and reproductive health problems and needs (Vandenhoudt et al. 2001).

13 The CDC started to work in Winam in 1984, carrying out research on malaria. After 2000, when HIV/AIDS became rampant, more and more research projects were set up (see Chapter 3).

14 Although direct funding from the Department of Defense (DoD) of the US government is relatively small (approximately $35 million) (Global Health Funding, http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/globalhealthfunding.htm), the CDC and DoD are closely working
together in Kenya as part of PEPFAR programs (Government Agencies, http://www.pepfarwatch.org/about_pepfar/government_agencies/).


16 “Quasi-experimental studies aim to evaluate interventions but do not use randomization. Like randomized trials, quasi experiments aim to demonstrate causality between an intervention and an outcome” (Harris et al. 2004: 1586). Randomized control trials (RCT) are generally considered to have the highest level of credibility with regard to assessing causality (Harris et al. 2004), however in a village like Winam, it is often impossible or unethical to randomly select people for a ‘treatment group’ (where they will get access to the project’s so-called benefits, for instance, training or medication) and a ‘control group’ of people who won’t receive the ‘benefits’ that the ‘treatment group’ receives. Quasi-experimental evaluations get around the issue of selecting people at random by using statistical techniques to ensure that both groups are as comparable as possible, though this is often limited by factors not included in the statistical tests. This is because it is impossible to define, quantify, and include everything that makes up a person in some sort of statistical calculation.


18 Ibid.

19 Later on, in July–August 2005, another place in Siaya District was chosen as the second field site since the CDC had also started to work in that area.

20 In the PMP, parents were given tools to build a positive relationship with their pre-teens, and to communicate with them about sexuality prior to the onset of sexual risk. The intervention was delivered to small groups of parents in five sessions of three hours (ITM 2011: 7).

21 The abstinence-based approach of the ‘Life Skills Program’ however, did not completely fit with the philosophy of the Microbiology Department of the ITM because they preferred the ABC campaign instead of only promoting abstinence. This stood in contradiction to the PEPFAR policy of the Bush administration, and, in order to secure funding, ITM changed the ‘Life Skills Program’ from an abstinence-based approach to an abstinence-focussed approach. This was much more than just a shift in semantics since it meant that abstinence became the central aim of the program. An abstinence-based approach in contrast began with positive assumptions about abstinence and built upon that to achieve wider impacts.

22 The adaptations were called ‘Healthy Choices for a Better Future I’ (HCI), which was an abstinence-focussed intervention targeting in-school adolescents aged 10–14 years, and ‘Healthy Choices for a Better Future II’ (HCII), which promoted abstinence alongside other safer sex strategies among ‘out-of-school youth’ aged 13–17 years (ITM 2011: 7–12). Both HCI and HCII were delivered to small, mixed-gender groups in eight modules of one hour (ITM 2011: 7).


24 Parents were not directly interviewed for the RNA (in 2001) so their perceptions about whether there was a lack of communication between them and their children were not mentioned (Vandenhoudt et al. 2001). Only later, in 2003, when the adaptation of PMP was already decided upon, the YIP team held small-group discussions with parents, teachers, community leaders, and adolescents. The goal of these discussions was to grasp the changing context of sex education and the role of parents in it (Poulsen et al. 2010: 278). However, after these discussions, when YIP staff concluded that there was a lack of communication between parents and children about
sexual issues and that “elders no longer play a major role in communicating with youth about sexuality” (Poulsen et al. 2010: 478), parents acknowledged the relevance of a parent-focused HIV-prevention intervention in their community. This ‘need’ was clearly socially constructed: it was hard for the parents to say “no” to a foreign intervention that offered to help them “protect their children from the dangers of early sexuality” (Poulsen et al. 2010: 278). Not only might the program characterize their non-participation as ‘irresponsible’ (see also Cleaver 2001: 47–48), but parents also might not want to miss the possible job or learning opportunities that this intervention might offer them and their children in their community. The PMP promised to provide parents with knowledge, skills, and confidence to undertake the program’s created role of ‘sex educators’ for the youngsters (Poulsen et al. 2010: 278).

25 The ‘Parents Matter! Program’ (PMP) was adapted to the Kenyan context and its name changed to ‘Families Matter! Program’ (FMP).

26 A Community Advisory Board (CAB) was felt as an urgent necessity once the BCS research team experienced serious problems with the implementation of the BCS in Winam (see also Chapter 3). Soon after its implementation, a CAB was used in several CDC research programs in Kenya, for the same reason: to avoid situations in which the community members could expel the research team from their local area because they felt they had been used as “guinea pigs” (see also Chapter 3 on medical research in Winam). The role of the CAB members was however, rather confusing. In the beginning, they were asked to mobilize and inform the youngsters about Yeshica but once there were some disagreements and unhappiness among some CAB members, Yeshica staff only wanted them to act as a reflection board, which would report the complaints of the community members and advise the staff on how to better implement their activities.

27 The local staff at Yeshica, who were based in Winam, were locally referred as the ‘Winam team’. They consisted of a local project manager who was supported by a nurse (later replaced by a clinical officer), a social worker, and later, four youth facilitators, four (later eight) adult facilitators and four VCT youth counsellors. The task of the youth facilitators at the start of the project was mainly mobilizing young people to form youth groups and to participate in the offerings of Yeshica. Later, they were responsible for the implementation and adaptation of the ‘Life Skills Program’. The adult facilitators were responsible for implementing and adapting the ‘Families Matter! Program’. The job of the VCT Youth Counsellors was to invite people to receive VCT through ‘behavioural counselling’. This consists of walking or cycling distances to encounter youths, and approaching them with the words: “I know my HIV status, do you too?”. They also gave health talks in school. Youth and adult facilitators were paid about 20,000 Kenyan shillings (250 euro) per month; the VCT Counsellors were paid about 100 Kenyan shillings (about 1.20 euro) per client seen and tested (which resulted, as noted earlier, in inflated reporting of clients seen).

28 Apart from the local staff at Yeshica, one administrator and eight research assistants were hired to form the research team of Yeshica. All of the research team members were based in Kisumu and commuted between Winam and Kisumu. Due to their different work location compared to the ‘Winam team’, who were required to remain in Winam, they were referred to as the ‘Kisumu team’. The staff members of the Kisumu team were divided according to the research program they were responsible for: one who held a Bachelor in anthropology led the ‘Families Matter! Program’ (FMP) together with three research assistants, and one who was holding a Bachelor in was leading the ‘Life Skills Program’ together with three other research assistants. Both the ‘Kisumu team’ and the ‘Winam team’ were operational staff but the Kisumu team was higher up in the hierarchy, and had more general overview of the program compared to the Winam team. The Kisumu team was more involved in the analysis of the different research projects.

29 ITM had submitted a proposal to conduct the final survey but by the time the IRB of the CDC finally approved it, the deadline for spending the funds under PEPFAR 1 (March 2008) had already passed. ITM did not receive any funds for the program under PEPFAR 2.
The survey showed an overall HIV prevalence among adolescents aged 15–19 years in Winam of 8.6 percent among females and 0.7 percent among males: by age 19, one in five young women was infected (Amornkul et al. 2009; Vandenhoudt et al. 2004b).

Youth participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities was promoted through the establishment of ten local committees and one Executive Youth Committee (Excom) who gathered on a monthly basis. At the community level, YIP received advice from the CAB that was comprised of youth representatives, parents, teachers, church leaders, and community leaders.

Not everyone could benefit from a lift from the CDC car, as strict US security rules prohibited the driver from carrying non-CDC-staff.

Lilly started to participate in Yeshica around June 2005 because she was interested in joining the Yeshica Festival in August 2005. After the vocational training for organic farming in December 2005, Lilly left Winam because she had problems with her uncle with whom she was staying. Akinyi actually never participated at the Yeshica as an active member but was familiar with it through her boyfriend Okoth who was an active member of Yeshica (see Chapter 6). MinMercy, the wife of Ochien’g, took part in one vocational training on hair styling in June 2005 but stopped going because she had to take care of her one-year-old child Mercy, and did not have enough time.

Yeshica was located in east Winam. The staff also set up three satellite centres in the form of shipping containers near schools in west, south, and central Winam in order to reach youngsters from outside east Winam. In addition to meeting at the containers, youngsters also met at market places, nearby churches, and other public places.

Between June and August 2005, the lake was “closed,” i.e., fishing was not allowed during and after spawning in order to let the fishing stock recover; during this time, Ochien’g relied entirely on income received from Yeshica.

MinMercy’s wish did not differ much from most of the other young women of Winam (see Chapter 6).

According to the Yeshica Constitution, the Youth Festival was to act as a General Assembly but it never did function as such. The Festival was begun in 2004, and was supposed to provide a forum where young people (out-of-school youth and school-goers between 10 and 20 years old) could express their talents, learn from one another, and share experiences (Yeshica 2005). At the same time, Yeshica staff used this opportunity to provide information on YIP’s activities and to attract new members. In August 2005, the majority that attended the Festival were ‘school-goers’ and only a few ‘out-of-school’ youth were reached. About 300 participants attended from all over Winam and from even further away. The students from school prepared a theatre sketch or a song on HIV prevention.

It was common within CDC projects in Kenya that staff was ‘recycled’, moving easily from one project to another. Although this gave the staff some kind of stable employment, it was noteworthy how few of the local staff actually had long-term contracts.

Since the VCT counsellors were paid according to the number of people they had recruited to get VCT (100 Kenyan shillings per person), they simply invented a higher number to get a higher salary.

The threatening letter was probably written by one of the four adult facilitators, as a high level of disrespect toward Matin existed among them.
The Ex-com consisted of ten local committees, spread over Winam. Each local committee consisted of various youngsters that participated in Yeshica. Out of this group, one youth representative was supposed to be elected on a democratic basis every year.

The elections in December 2005 occurred unexpectedly for the youths in Winam: new youth representatives were chosen without actually announcing new elections. The Yeshica Constitution mandated that “the secretary must give a twenty-one day notice to all members before the General Assembly” (Yeshica Constitution 2005: 9) before new elections could be organised.

This was an example of how the staff made false promises to the youth: there were no funds to be given out at that time.

In development circles, “zero grazing” was often equated with abstinence (zero sex). However, “zero-grazing” was a slogan borrowed from Ugandan AIDS-intervention efforts (see Chapter 5), which refers to the circle, or ‘zero’, that results from tying a cow to a peg while it grazes. The cow can eat the grass in a circular area around the peg and this is a metaphor that people can ‘eat’ or have sex as much as they like, but they should keep it local and close to home.

This was the US evidence-based intervention that was widely deemed successful before it was adapted to the Kenyan context. The CDC – being a very powerful stakeholder – has managed to scale-up this so-called effective HIV/AIDS intervention all over Kenya and the African continent. The Yeshica staff member responsible for the implementation and adaptation of FMP in Winam were hired in 2012–2013 to consult in different African countries based on this ‘success’, and I noticed on the internet that FMP was even implemented in Singapore in order to build “strong, happy families” (Ministry of Social and Family Development of Singapore 2013).

Yet, in the evaluation of FMP the authors assume that “the reported increases in sexuality communication also suggest that the intervention may have helped overcome traditional cultural barriers that restrict parent child communication about sexuality” (Vandenhoudt et al. 2010: 340) but no details are given on how they came to such a conclusion. ‘To overcome traditional cultural barriers’ is not something one easily can effect, or demonstrate.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

1. Introduction

Onyango, Joel, Adhis, Rambo, Otieno, Enoka, Atieno, Lucy, and Omosh were some of the youngsters we met at the disco matanga in August 2005, when my research assistant Petronella, my boyfriend (now husband) Sven, and I were still pretty new to the field. During the course of my fieldwork period of 20 months, with the enormous help of Petronella, I was able to gain some insight into their young lives, which I have tried to present in this dissertation.

Since a funeral brings together people from near and far, the disco matanga was an ideal place for the youngsters of Winam to meet and interact. Before the HIV/AIDS pandemic, when people began dying in such large numbers, there were few disco matangas in Winam. Well into the epidemic, at the time of my fieldwork, young people had many opportunities to experiment with sexual relationships and perhaps find their future spouse. The disco matanga is an event where fun and pleasure have no limits, but also, at the same time, where life and death are shaking hands.

People in Winam go to a disco matanga for many different reasons. Close relatives may be in mourning, and comforted by the sharing of food and the drinking of chang’aa with relatives and friends, while music plays and people dance. Many youngsters go to a disco matanga to hang out and dance with their girl- or boyfriend, or to seduce (another) one. Some young women try to get young men’s attention by dressing in tight shirts and trousers. I often heard JoWinam say: the “disco matanga is where girls get married”. While many youth did begin sexual relationships at disco matangas, during my fieldwork most youth delayed both formal and informal marriages and, if they did marry, their unions did not last long. This was the setting where I met many of the key persons of my research for the first time.

What has happened to Onyango and the other youngsters since I left the field? Prior to my last visit, in July 2007, I thought that all of the youth I had come to know would have moved to another place, developed a severe illness, or, in the worst scenario, died. I did not have much hope that I would be able to keep in contact with them and to find them once more when I returned. Some of my worst fears have been confirmed: two
CONCLUSION

youngsters from the small group that I met at the disco matanga have already died, along with many other youngsters whom I came to know in Winam who were not part of my research group. Onyango has kept me informed about many of these tragic deaths, mostly through emails. At first, I kept in touch with many youth by mobile phone, an important tool that allowed me to stay connected to the lifeworld of Winam (see also De Bruijn et al. 2009). Unfortunately, in 2010, due to a yearlong illness and my family moving to Peru for my husband's job, I lost contact with most of them. When I had recovered from my illness, many of the phone numbers no longer worked: my number had changed as well, so they could not phone me anymore. Onyango was the only one who had made a habit of writing me emails on a regular basis, so every time he went back 'home' to Winam—he was living in Mombasa and Nairobi—he informed me about the whereabouts of my Winam friends. I am really grateful for this, and I long to see them all again.

Omosh died from HIV-related opportunistic infections in February 2012. He was one of the few youngsters I followed closely who finally decided to learn his HIV status. He did so in 2008 in order to be able to be admitted to a CDC study, which provided ARV drugs to HIV-positive people. Nevertheless, he died four years later. So what happened? Was he no longer part of the research study? Was he not informed about where he could get free access to ARVs? Did he take his medication as indicated, or irregularly? Did he lack the means to follow a vitamin-rich diet? Or even worse, did he give up hope and just stop taking them? I have no answers to these questions but I hope to learn more if I get a chance to go back. Omosh was only 23 years old when he died.

Enoka, who was around 16 years old when we first met in 2005, died in September 2012, when he probably was about 23 years old. In an email to me, Onyango wrote that the news of Enoka’s death was “devastating” to the community. According to Enoka’s younger sister, Enoka was probably bewitched in Nyanza. On the phone, she told me that Enoka’s limb had begun to itch and was swollen, and he was groaning in pain. He died before he could be taken to a witch doctor. According to Onyango, Enoka was the breadwinner of their family at that time, paying the school fees for his younger brother and sister. He no longer worked on the fishing beach, but as an unskilled worker for the road contractors in Bondo. Enoka had made sure that his older brother Otieno also got a job there. When Enoka died, Otieno left his job and moved to Siaya as the job reminded him of his younger brother.

This dissertation has tried to frame young people’s hopes, aspirations, and expectations
within the context of everyday hardship in Winam. I have sought to shed light on the dynamics and ambiguities of young people’s sexual relationships and livelihood networks. In particular, I have attempted to explain why the young people of Winam continued to engage in ‘risky sex’, despite their knowledge that this could lead to their death. I emphasized that young people’s aspirations need to be viewed from an ‘intergenerational matrix’ (Cole 2007), as young people cannot be separated from the different generations with whom they live. In young people’s lives, what seems to be of relative importance is finding a ‘good’ sexual partner and reliable financial resources. Dating and income are what brings them closer to their aspirations. But the conclusion to this dissertation is still somber: in a time when ARVs are supposed to be available and free, and AIDS is no longer a deadly but a chronic disease, people in Winam are still dying. Why? What were the obstacles that prevented Omosh from receiving treatment in time? What about Enoka? What had happened that people imagined that witchcraft had affected him? And is there something I could have done? I am aware that thus far my contribution has been small, but I hope that this dissertation will find its place in our common struggle against HIV.

2. My contribution to the fight against HIV

The way young people shape their lives within an insecure and unpredictable environment in Winam, like a microcosm, presents a picture that raises important questions for HIV prevention as well as broader development work. My findings challenge many of the foundations on which HIV interventions are built, and unfortunately, I do not have an easy solution to this. The youngsters in Winam are enormously at risk. Their stories within a context of ‘enduring uncertainty’ are unsettling, sad, and shocking, but also funny, full of love, hope, and friendship. I feel privileged that they have allowed me into their lives and that I can give them a voice here. The ‘million-dollar question’ for me is: what do they need to avoid becoming infected? Answering such a question would mean providing a complete list of practical recommendations for HIV/AIDS prevention. As such is expected by my medical colleagues and other policy makers, I will provide a separate document of policy recommendations to them. However, reducing my ethnographic ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) to a rather ‘thin prescription’ in this conclusion would bring me into a different logic of reasoning, going against what I—with the help of Mosse (2003, 2004, 2006) and Ferguson (1990)—have been trying to argue so far.
In Chapter 7, which focussed on a HIV/AIDS prevention project implemented in Winam between 2003 and 2008, I explained that many such projects start from a logic—dominated mainly by public health workers and epidemiologists—that is different than that practiced by the people of Winam. This public health reasoning can be described as ‘instrumental’ in that it sees policy as a rational, measurable means for problem solving. However, taking Mosse (2003: 1) as reference, development work is not produced by theory or policy models, it is, instead, produced by “the institutional realities of development funding and ‘cooperation’”. This means that there is no direct link between policy and practice, and therefore no need to discuss whether practices lead to desired impacts. Instead, following Mosse, by explaining how predictable results are created and how ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are produced by local actors, we come to a better understanding of what is really at stake on the ground. Not only at the management level, where a main preoccupation is securing continued funding, but also at the local level, where the youngsters try to shape the project to their own benefit, typically bearing little relation to HIV prevention messages.

Although many HIV prevention projects have tried to enact ‘structural changes’ as an answer to the ‘structural violence’ confronting many projects’ beneficiaries, this approach has not demonstrated a big impact so far. Social structures are not easy to change as they are based on a certain division of labour, a certain class hierarchy in an economic system, and a certain political climate. Such a change implies much more than, for instance, just providing a microfinance project for the poor. In Winam, as in many other places over the globe, people are confronted with social injustice and inequality on all levels. As Ferguson (2006: 19) states: “inequality is thus not only a matter of ‘political economy’: cultural differences may in practice be just as ‘stratified’ as income or wealth”. The differences in dress code or language might “index membership in different and unequal social groups” since many of the global goods are largely not within most Africans’ reach (Ferguson 2006: 20). Social structures are hard to change and if they can be changed at all, this takes more time than any development project might have. Social structures also explain why some people get ARVs or can send their children to primary school while others cannot do so even if this is for free. Although the disease is treatable and every child is provided a place in the primary school, people are still at risk, and they continue to take risks on various fronts, including in sexual relations. This brings me back to my main framework for this dissertation: The relevant question is not ‘Why do young people take risks when they engage in sex?’, but ‘Why should youngsters not take risks if this holds the promise of a better life in the
future?’. This is not to say that HIV interventions are superfluous, or that young people are inherently sceptical about interventions. Indeed, they would certainly welcome interventions that arise from an understanding of their aspirations and then try to work out ways to realise them. However, many HIV-prevention programs still start from the wrong logic in that they primarily respond to the bureaucratic needs of the funding agencies and implementers rather than going to the potential beneficiaries with a truly blank slate, and designing the intervention together with them from scratch. In order to understand the different logics, development practitioners, funders, and researchers across quantitative and qualitative disciplines need to work together with the beneficiaries of these programs on an equal basis. However, given the institutional realities in the context of global economic crisis, and scarcer resources where only ‘success models’ offer access to funding, the political economy of the development industry means that we still have a long, long way to go before this can happen.

3. The limited room for ‘tactical agency’ in times of enduring uncertainty

I used the term ‘tactical agents’ to describe how youngsters try to create their livelihood networks in Winam. Their power is constrained and they lack direction in life, but this does not mean that they give up. They try to capitalize on opportunities when these arise, or as De Certeau (1984: xvii) articulates: “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong”. These ordinary youngsters of Winam have a certain amount of freedom to act and tremendous creativity, which they use to explore alternative pathways. They definitely have a ‘talent for life’ (Schepere-Hughes 2008). They are attentive to incoming possibilities, such as certain contacts or networks of people, which might help them to move beyond the difficulties at that certain moment. They won’t wait for the Kenyan government or a member of parliament to make an improvement in their lives. They have already learned from the case of Raila Odinga that it seems impossible for a Luo to become president, and that both the future president and the (local) members of parliament only seem to care about them when elections are near. Thus, as youngsters still have their entire life in front of them, they do not give up, and keep on searching and accepting any opportunity offered to them. They ‘navigate’ or manoeuvre their way along the few livelihood options that Winam offers.

While the notion of ‘tactical agency’ tries to capture the dialectic interplay between agency and structure, the concept has its limitations in a context of enduring uncertainty. In such a context, the question is not what are the capacities of agencies to
act but rather what are their possibilities to act (Vigh 2008). Given the social injustice experienced on a daily basis in Winam, the livelihood networks that these young people carefully create and try to maintain are often ineffective at improving their lives. They cannot diminish the power of those external forces that determine what choices are available to them in a context of persistent poverty (see also Vigh 2008; De Bruijn and Both 2011).

Recent research on youth has extensively focused on ‘social navigation’ as an option for agency and the levels of creativity of young people to deal with difficult circumstances (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006; Vigh 2006). Vigh’s (2008: 15–17) current work, Crisis and Chronicity, picks up this point, highlighting that in situations of prolonged crisis, there is a loss of stability and security and uncertainty becomes the expected norm. When poverty, unemployment, disorder, and uncertainty are ever-present, when ‘chronic crisis’ becomes the continual context, we talk of a very different reality, one which implies a very different way of understanding the world and a very different way of acting in it (Vigh 2008: 13). Therefore, the question that Scheper-Hughes (2008: 37) asks, “What is required to survive and even to thrive where terror and trauma are ordinary and usual events?”, helps us to focus on “how agents act in crisis, instead of through it” (Vigh 2008: 17). I argue that the subject of my analysis is not so much ‘young people’ as a particular social category but rather young people operating in perpetual crisis. By moving our attention from category to context (see also Amit and Dyck 2012), this ethnographic dissertation contributes to a more realistic understanding of how young people of Winam deal with a situation where crisis is the norm.

This particular focus on crisis as a context rather than a singular event challenges our regular analytical, anthropological categories. Whyte (2008: 98) rightly states that it is a challenge for most anthropologists—born into a world with a social security system for all its citizens—to go beyond the notion of crisis as singular event. Although it is important to acknowledge young people’s sense of frustrations, their unrealised dreams of a ‘better life’ with more resources and more security, ethnographic richness lies in both “discriminating the particularities of fragmentation and instability in the case at hand, and showing how people draw on resources in that place and time” (Whyte 2008: 98).

In Winam, the HIV/AIDS crisis, political corruption and instability, the many infectious diseases, the lack of job opportunities, and the struggle to secure for themselves one meal per day and to simply survive the day are only some of the aspects
that colour young people’s everyday feelings of insecurity. In such difficult circumstances, the boundaries of their resilience are felt and the room for agency becomes very limited. While many youngsters of Winam still have hopes and dreams, they often feel stuck within the structural violence that is embedded in their daily life struggles. For many of them, as already mentioned, Winam is perceived as a “bad place” to live. They often reflected upon their environment and compared it unfavourably to other places, both imaginary and real. They observed the people around them, including their parents, and tried to reason why some people were doing well while others were suffering. They speculated on how things should be. They often blamed their parents for what they were going through, certainly when one or both of their parents had died due to HIV/AIDS. They were left to fend for themselves and their siblings. Many, certainly the unemployed young men, are “just strolling” (wabayo abayo) or “tarmacking”: moving back and forth along the tarmacked and potholed roads without any direction in their lives.

Doubt and uncertainty are not necessarily a result of a changing global context, or inherent to modern or postmodern lives, as Whyte (2002) argues. Such an assumption would imply that life was more certain in the past, which is not the case. According to Dewey (cited in Whyte 2002: 174), uncertainty has always been there as “existential problems always present uncertainties to social actors”. However, as Whyte (2002: 187) also states, uncertainty is not a characteristic of the times: uncertainties themselves change, as do the means available for acting upon them.

4. Dealing with enduring uncertainty: Pragmatic actions

The lens through which youngsters look at life focuses on what they need to do to make their aspirations happen. Despite their limited room for agency, young people do not give up but are very inventive in terms of creating different livelihood networks under constantly changing difficult circumstances. They are full of dreams and plans to find some amount of security in their lives. They want to make progress in life, to have a better life than their parents had. A number of analyses on the high youth unemployment all over the world, however, assume that youth unemployment might lead to crimes or might encourage them to join violent gangs. Amit and Dyck (2012: 16–17) instead ask why young men are not angrier and more violent, looking at the persistently depressed socioeconomic context. Young people continuously have to cope with their sense of social exclusion in the world market, yet the majority “remained
committed to mainstream values about the value of work, domestic respectability, and adult independence” (McDowell cited in Amit and Dyck 2012: 17). Many of the youngsters are confident that one day they might be able to improve their living conditions. Thus even though they may have felt ‘stuck’, they still manage to sustain themselves (Vigh 2006).

Whyte’s (2002) term of ‘subjunctivity’ (see Chapter 5) helps to describe how young people are negotiating and dealing with their life conditions and how they act upon them. The ‘subjunctive’ is “the mood of doubt, hope, will and potential” (Whyte 2002: 175) to deal with misfortune. Youngsters not only undergo suffering and distress, but they also try to act in order to alleviate the sorrows associated with misfortune. They are ‘intentional agents’ who “struggle towards an ending that is not yet certain” (Whyte 2002: 174) as they believe in the possibility of improving their standard of living, despite the fact that life with a ‘chronic disease’ means that they are often confronted with oppressive institutions (Vigh 2006).

Finding a ‘good’ partner and having a stable income are the most important motives behind young people’s livelihood tactics. Their ‘choices’ of a sexual partner depend on the context in which they grow up and live in. In contrast to other accounts that find that the religious institutions (mainly Pentecostal churches) and the counselling they offer are important for youth (see Van Dijk 2006, 2009), among the youngsters I studied, church was just another place to meet potential partners. Religious life had some value to enhance social mobility but not to the extent it did in town, where people frequented church with intentions to get married (see Van de Kamp and Van Dijk 2010). For the youngsters in my study, experimenting with sexual relationships was paramount, but none participated in pre-marriage counselling sessions. Marriages happened informally, and were not always planned. Those relationships and informal marriages, furthermore, were shaped by a high level of distrust, which caused the young people of Winam to act in an ad hoc manner, and pragmatically.

4.1. HIV risk and sexual networks

Contrary to the thinking that underlies many HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, young people are well aware of HIV, how they can get it, and its consequences. They are aware of the risk of contracting HIV when engaging in unprotected sex. The issue is not knowledge but rather what is important to the youngsters—what their primary, daily concerns are. Facing many other pressing problems, while also just being young and
wanting to have fun, the risk of HIV usually is not very relevant to their daily life and is thus not in the forefront of young people's minds.

When crisis is part of the social fabric of every day life, as Whyte (1997) notes, “social life unfolds within a terrain of risk and uncertainty” (cited in Vigh 2008: 12). In order to deal with HIV risk, young people have devised their own way by “doing research”, which may strike outside observers as risky, but which makes a lot of sense to the young people themselves. They believe this tactic allows them to avoid HIV/AIDS or at least minimize the chances of getting it. In “doing research”, they use various communication channels, most commonly their gender- and age-based social networks, to obtain gossip and observations in order to profile a potential partner. It comes then down to a binary division: either a partner is likely to have been infected by having many partners or (s) he is potentially trustworthy because (s) he has not had many sexual relations. The young people also try to determine whether their sexual partner shows physical symptoms of HIV infection (for example, change in hair texture, rashes, and the colour of the skin or lips). They trust their ability to diagnose AIDS by figuring out their partner’s background and past sexual relationships using local knowledge.

While understanding this, I argue that we must also be careful not to demand rationality from their actions. As everywhere, people sometimes act spontaneously, driven by emotions and constrained by context. Although this tactic of “doing research” was often used by the youngsters I worked with, my data revealed that it could be altered or abandoned if a youngster felt the benefits of having a relationship with a particular person outweighed any potential risk, for instance because the partner was offering city life or had a decent job. This explains the inconsistencies and ambiguities that plague the lives of young people. Their actions are pragmatic and are constantly renegotiated, depending on the particular situation. What they actually do is quite the opposite of what is advocated by international public health campaigns; their diverse and ambiguous actions can hardly be transformed into one static pattern of sexual behaviours among young people. The youngsters by far preferred their own tactic to the international and national HIV prevention strategy of ABC (Abstain, Be faithful and use Condoms), which did not fit very well with the daily aspirations of the youngsters.

The young women and men were aware that they may not know the entire reach of the network to which they belong, because their sexual partners might have been “unknowing participants” (Thornton 2008: xx) of other sexual networks. We are all part of an “unimagined community” (Thornton 2008: xx), which makes it impossible to know all the linkages between clusters and sexual networks. In my analysis of the sexual
networks of the youngsters with whom I worked, it became clear that there were several
dense clusters that were actually all linked to each other, which meant that there were
effective transmission lines of HIV. Hence, the virus was very likely to have spread to
most of the youngsters I followed and other people in their networks. Individuals could
escape infection by chance, but the clear finding was that all were structurally highly
likely to get HIV. This means that even the best form of “doing research” might only
decrease risk temporarily, but it would not change the fact that the structural conditions
severely affected young people’s lives.

Young people’s tactic of “doing research” allows them “to remain in the
subjunctive mode of possibility and hope” (Whyte 1997: 215) instead of actually learning
their HIV status, a fact that could ruin their aspirations. However, this uncertainty
regarding HIV status can prove deadly for others. My findings confirm that ‘zero-
grazing’ can be deadly on a local level when migration is very common, as in Winam.
Someone from Winam who moves temporarily to town, becomes infected, and then
returns to the village, introduces the virus to the densely linked local networks, through
which it then spreads like wildfire. One important conclusion of my work is, therefore,
that trying to grasp the possible structure of the sexual network at stake is critical for
understanding the potential for disease transmission and the determinants of individual

At the time of this writing (August 2013), AIDS is no longer a deadly disease, but
a chronic disease, because there is access to HIV testing and ARVs, even in Winam.
When people are found to be HIV positive, there is a ‘plan of action’ (see Whyte 1997)
and people no longer have to die. ARVs were not easily accessible during my research,
but I imagine—now that treatment is readily available—that preventing HIV now ranks
even lower on youngsters’ priorities. The way they make choices about their sexual
partner remains pragmatic. They might prefer to marry an HIV-positive person with a
good job than an HIV-negative person who is unemployed. Moreover, being HIV positive
is no longer the end of the world, because the disease gives access to all sorts of benefits,
including, for instance, jobs at local NGOs to participate in awareness-raising
campaigns. ARVs have a further unintended consequence: they make ‘doing research’
more difficult since they eliminate many physical signs of the disease. The youngsters
are therefore not entirely happy about ARVs because they may make people gain a bit of
weight, which appears as a sign of good health. While the availability of ARVs is
generally a positive development, in practice there are unintended consequences, which
need to be dealt with. Otherwise there is a risk of people becoming resistant to the drugs, and much of the progress against the disease will be destroyed.

4.2. Gender inequality and the transactional sex paradigm

In the transactional sex paradigm, it is argued that young women are economically dependent on male support, leading them to engage in ‘risky sex’ situations. Since women have fewer opportunities to diversify their livelihood tactics than young men, they are believed to exchange money or gifts for sex with their sexual partners. This is however a very simplistic assumption as the real picture is far more complex.

I argue throughout this dissertation that the exchange of money and gifts is part of any sexual relationship in Winam and is a sign of respect and appreciation. Women expect that their boyfriends will provide for them, as this is one of the social roles assigned to men. Within the transactional sex paradigm, the role of other dimensions of sexual relationships such as physical attraction, sexual pleasure, emotional attachment, and social norms are underestimated. It is not purely economic motivations that come into play when one chooses a sexual partner. As long as the giving of money or gifts from men, and the giving of domestic services from girls or young women, remains within certain limits, such actions demonstrate care and affection. Viewed from the intergenerational lens, young people’s urban aspirations, romantic self-expressions, and desires for new, foreign clothes and commodities were all part of being a youngster in Winam at the time of my fieldwork. Young women would be considered foolish if they did not try to tactically acquire financial support or even luxury consumer items from their boyfriends. Under certain conditions the transactional aspect can become defining for a relationship, but not always in the way the paradigm assumes, namely that it is the fundamental reason for the relationship. Instead, there are expectations for both partners to keep their part of the deal: women should not have extreme demands and men have to stick to their promises.

One can argue that this view of the transactional aspect confirms the importance of emotions and trust in the relationship for both young men and women. On the other hand, using the language of ‘love’ can be a tactical move to obtain money, sex, or other benefits. Young people are creative in their ways to deal with their difficult economic situation and to increase their chances for a better future. Although I explained that young women suffer from gender-related constraints in their livelihood options compared to men, my data has shown that young women have a relatively better chance to improve their lives by having sexual liaisons with financially capable men, preferably
CONCLUSION

‘townsmen’. They can even manipulate their so-called subordinate role and demand from young men more than the men actually can afford. Their relationships with wealthier men can bring short-term benefits such as an expensive dress, a drive in a car, or some body lotion—but it might also turn into marriage. Men, especially rural young men—who are expected to provide financial support for their girlfriends in order to be considered a ‘real man’—on the other hand, face difficulty in competing with those who are more financially capable, especially those from town. Nevertheless, just like the women, they employed creative tactics such as “sweet-talk” and a kind of provider discourse that emphasized their ‘imagined’ financial resources in order to conquer their sexual partners. Although sexual liaisons with ‘wealthy’ girlfriends or “sugar mamas” were not very common among the young rural men I worked with, I have heard from some of the youngsters in Winam that it is happening more often than before. In at least one instance, a young man, married and with children, was living with an “old and fat sugar mammy” under the same roof. In this case, the sugar mama was not from Winam but from abroad: having bought a piece of land in Winam and constructed a house, a young, married man convinced her he was single and introduced his wife as domestic help. This story is not as exceptional as it may sound and similar relationships are becoming more common. It signals that the young men of Winam face difficult challenges: they no longer can perform the role of breadwinner that society demands from them. Not only can they not live up to the high expectations but also they may become economically dependent on ‘wealthier’ women. In this way, they are stigmatized twice: for not performing their social role, and for being dependent on women who are supposedly weaker. In the ladder of the social hierarchy where gender inequality is normalized, these men fall down two steps at once: they are below ‘real men’ who can support a family, and they are even below women.

Thus, whereas young women to some extent can navigate between and maximize multiple ‘resources’ (men), rural young men usually cannot use a girlfriend for social advancement and have much greater difficulties securing a sexual relationship as they lack the financial stability. It is important to recognize the vulnerability of these young, rural men. However, it is also important, as we study sexual relationships, that we not only examine the forces that create structured inequalities between sexual partners, but also consider the notions of pleasure, emotional attachment, and love—despite these existing inequalities (see Wardlow and Hirsch 2006). At the same time, we must acknowledge that in times of enduring uncertainty, financial needs often reinforce existing gendered power imbalances in sexual relations. The crisis of poverty also wiped
out young people’s attempts to reduce their sexual risks. This is a symptom of the temporality of young people’s tactical agency: they are creative in their attempts to benefit from the few opportunities they encounter, including accepting unsafe sex if that appears to be the only way to secure a ‘good’ partner. All these actions are marked by their limited time horizon. To put it differently, the gains obtained are often very quickly lost or overshadowed by larger, long-term, negative effects. In the context of enduring crisis where lasting relationships can be a path towards socioeconomic improvement, the majority of the sexual relationships in Winam were casual due to the lack of stable and predictable income of young people. Very few sexual relations resulted in long-lasting relationships or (informal) marriages, fewer still with rich, urban men. In this perpetual crisis, marriage—formal or informal—is no longer a stable form of union. This is further impacted by young people’s aspirations to leave rural life, as we will see in the next section of the conclusion.

4.3. Physical mobility versus social mobility

Mobility is one of the main tactics youngsters employ to escape the village life of Winam as they hope to find better grounds, close to busy town or city centres. Their urban aspirations, imagining that life is better in town, are similar to the unorchestrated dreams of millions of young people all over the world. The attraction of cities is also grounded in the experiences of their (grand-)fathers and older brothers who found some casual work in the cities. Ambition is still alive, but it is not really a realistic option as Kenya’s major cities are already overflowing with young people searching for jobs. They know this and hope that a good education will set them apart from other young job seekers, but they are also realistic enough to know that these days nothing much will happen without the right contact (see also Amit and Dyck 2012). The capacity of schooling to enhance social mobility by preparing students for white-collar jobs in town has remained in many parts of the world. Schooling not only raises aspirations and expectations among young people to escape rural poverty through an urban future, but also creates such expectations among their parents and other relatives (Amit and Dyck 2012: 13–14). Youngsters explore both social and sexual networks in order to search for a pathway to move up the social ladder, however in times of crisis such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, such networks are not that effective anymore. Other members of their social and sexual networks are usually in the same condition of poverty and limited opportunities: the few people with a viable business or decent income are flooded by requests for assistance or adored by many potential lovers.
Without formal education, supportive social or sexual networks, or starting capital, youngsters have little possibility to gain a secure livelihood and move to town. What does this mean? The youngsters are trapped in a structure that does not give them many opportunities for advancement. They can try to escape the local structure of Winam, but they take these limitations with them to the city and there find themselves under the same constraints as before. The structure I am describing is not completely deterministic, but it does still limit young people’s options and is not easy to escape by simply moving to another place. Paraphrasing Gramsci (1971), this is a sort of social prison where release and/or escape is a possibility, but a very remote one that only very few will achieve. Just as in the prison metaphor, most people who get out find themselves back in prison sooner than later. In other words, social mobility is at best temporary: some young people may be better off for a time and believe they have moved up the ladder, but sooner or later, most are back where they started, or even further behind. Nevertheless, even this ‘one step forward, two steps back’ is enough movement to keep their hopes and dreams alive. Despite the energy, against-all-odds optimism, and creativity of young people, at the end of the day we need to ask ourselves: how many of them actually improve their lives through mobility (or any other tactics)? As far as I know, none of them.

4.4. An HIV-prevention project or an income-generating activity?

The motivation and goals of Yeshica were to improve the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people between 10 and 20 years old in Winam. To realise this, a number of interventions were put in place on the ground. Although the program managers from ITM could not count on substantial institutional support from the CDC, they believed in the importance of combating the structural forces that drive the HIV epidemic and therefore incorporated a structural intervention (the ‘livelihood intervention’ whereby youngsters were invited to enrol in vocational trainings and to take out microloans). Their theory was that an improvement of the livelihood of the youngsters would mean a decrease in ‘risky sex’. On paper, the project’s aims were good and appropriate: the focus blended prevention, vocational training, and loans. In the practical realisation, however, it unfortunately did not go as planned: the project was not able to reduce HIV risk among its participants.

By examining how HIV-prevention programs work and how diverse local actors produced and understood ‘success’ or ‘failure’ (Mosse 2004), it became apparent that while Yeshica could not be described as a success in biomedical terms, for the young people involved, the project was considered a success at first. To them, Yeshica was
more than an income-generating activity. Participating in Yeshica meant that they could improve their livelihood networks—not by being hired for formal jobs, but by acquiring material benefits and expanding their social capital, often through sexual liaisons. Yeshica was ‘city life in the village’, and a new venue to explore sexual relationships. The prominent men that young women could not find in Winam were within their reach at Yeshica!

Youngsters hoped that Yeshica would make a difference in Winam and would improve their livelihood, but this sentiment soon turned into frustration and malcontent. Their voices were never heard since Yeshica’s local staff made sure that only ‘success’ stories reached the program coordinator, as they were also concerned about their job security. Although Yeshica had provided some improvement for a happy few, they bore the consequences when others’ interests tweaked the actual content of the project.

Despite the dissenting voices of the young people, the project became a ‘successful model for replication’. How? Quite simply, the YIP program designers forgot about what happened on the ground—thus silencing the power relations on which the production of Yeshica depended—and only accentuated the one part of the story, the Families Matter! Program (FMP), deeming it a ‘success’. This was, as noted, an intervention that had already been chosen to be ‘scaled up’. The institutional priorities of the CDC, with its related ability to mobilize financial support, strongly influenced the chances for the ‘success’ of FMP. Thus, the main direction of YIP was already defined before FMP was actually conducted. Mosse (2003: 2) was right to state that “it is not the failure of development projects that needs to be explained, but rather their remarkable success’. With the implementation of Yeshica, the YIP designers were able “to produce and reaffirm theory and models of development” (Mosse 2003: 2). This “production of predictable results” is what matters in development work. It comes as no surprise that the program designers of YIP wanted to end on a positive note, as only this could secure future funding. However, for the local people of Winam, the intervention achieved very little—pretty much nothing, except for a pen and paper, a ‘one-night stand’ with a CDC employer, some transportation money, and a certificate that they can hang on their living room wall.
5. Conclusion: Choiceless choices

Does the lack of successful stories about achieving social mobility mean that there is no agency at all among Winam’s youth? No, as I have tried throughout this dissertation to highlight what young people do and have argued that they should not be regarded as passive victims. Then again, we have long since moved beyond a black and white discussion over structure and agency, and the interplay between the two is widely recognized.

We cannot discuss structure and agency in a vacuum and free of context. Winam is characterized by a context of perpetual crisis and enduring uncertainty, which means that any tactical agency is limited, above all by time. All gains achieved one day can be undone the next, any tactic that worked today may fail tomorrow, and all useful social contacts may either cease to be useful or vanish altogether. It is very difficult (sometimes impossible) to plan ahead, and any window of opportunity might close as soon as it has opened.

What this means is that young people have to be ingenious and attentive to new opportunities that come up unexpectedly. Agents practice ‘reflexive routinisation’, as they constantly need to be alert to changes in the environment in which they are moving (Vigh 2008: 19). To some extent, they do have choices, as they live in a relatively free world compared to young people in a dictatorship; there is also no ‘Hukou’, the Chinese family registration system to prevent rural-urban migration, for example. However, the choices young people make in life can be regarded as ‘choiceless choices’ (Scheper-Hughes 2008). Youngsters have the capacity to make choices but they do not have the possibility to act towards a certain desired outcome. The opportunities for improving their standard of living are based on choices that come with strings attached, such as leaving school to earn money as fisherman. ‘Choiceless choices’ also means that they already know the outcome of choosing a certain option. They can become boda-boda drivers, fishermen, or do some casual work in the shamba (field). None of these ‘choices’ will help them advance in their life. There are also no clear actions towards their objectives but rather a multitude of divergent ways, which may seem contradictory but which make sense for any individual actor at a given point in time. It does not matter which way they choose, as chances are they will end up the same as before, irrespective of what activity they picked.

When we pair the context of ‘chronic crisis’ with the understanding of ‘choiceless choices’, we have to be careful not to dramatize this situation. The entire African continent is constantly depicted in extremely negative ways in Western media as well as
by certain NGOs who use pictures of starving African children in their fundraising. Even if the money is not destined for Africa, the continent has become a symbol for poverty and perpetual crisis with notions such as ‘the African problem’, ‘hopeless Africa’, or ‘a failed continent’ (see also Ferguson 2006). If we characterize Winam as being in an enduring crisis, this runs the danger of perpetuating the notion of hopelessness and ultimately preventing any improvement to the region. We have to be mindful of stigmatizing the people living in Winam. Ferguson (2006: 10) points to the social and historical construction of the category ‘Africa’, and correctly notes that “we have to be suspicious of accounts that see in Africa only a lack or an incompleteness” while at the same time, we should not deny the manifold problems marring the many African countries. It is a fine balance we need to achieve. For this reason, I write not only about ‘enduring uncertainty’ in Winam, but also of young people as tactical agents, who find ways of getting by within difficult circumstances. While their ‘inventive bricolages’ might be regarded by anthropologists as a creative form of tactical agency, the young people might not describe it as such. They see it as “a sign of weakness instead of strength” (Ferguson 2006: 20) because it is not yet to what they aspired to reach. They do not perceive it as a kind of progress, but rather a ‘choiceless choice’.
References


and Garvey.


Molyneux, S. et al. 2005. ‘Even If They Ask You to Stand by a Tree All Day, You Will Have to Do It (Laughter)!’: Community Voices on the Notion and Practice of Informed Consent for Biomedical Research in Developing Countries’. Social Science and Medicine 61: 443–454.


Pool, R. et al. 2006. ‘Community Response to Intermittent Preventive Treatment Delivered to Infants (IPTi) through the EPI System in Manhiça, Mozambique’. Tropical Medicine and International Health 11, no. 11: 1670–1678.


346


UNYouth. 2010. ‘Regional Overview: Youth in Africa’. Fact Sheet prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Programme on Youth (UNPY) to support the International Year of Youth, August 2010-2011.


Summary

This dissertation is rooted in the daily life worlds of young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in a rural area of western Kenya (called ‘Winam’). It seeks to draw our attention to young people’s hopes, aspirations, and expectations, and shows how these young people creatively construct their daily lives in a context where HIV/AIDS has taken a toll on human lives and livelihoods. I examine the livelihood opportunities and challenges of the young people of Winam with the goal of understanding their sexual relationships and networks. More precisely, this dissertation examines how they form sexual relationships, avoid the health risks associated with sex, and understand the links between sex, love, and money. I argue that young people’s aspirations and concerns need to be examined through a lens of intergenerational relations (see Cole and Durham 2007). Young people's perceptions of a ‘state-of-the-art’ HIV/AIDS prevention project are also analysed in order to discern the role such interventions play in their daily lives.

This ethnographic research was part of collaboration between the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Kenyan Medical Research Institute (KEMRI). I conducted participant observation over 20 months, complemented with informal and formal in-depth interviews (including family genealogies), life histories, focus group discussions, and one of the youngsters’ long-term diary. These qualitative research methods were triangulated, strengthening the validity of the data. As the anthropologist within a medical team, I was asked to explain and justify my methods, a process that caused me to consider and compare different approaches of anthropology and epidemiology. Woven throughout this dissertation are my reflections on these differences, not only regarding methods, but also, and perhaps more importantly, power relations between quantitative and qualitative researchers, the role of institutional funding, and arguments about which ‘evidence’ is regarded as most robust.

This dissertation begins with demonstrating how disparate and converging socioeconomic, cultural, ecological, and political forces prepared the stage for the HIV epidemic in Nyanza Province. According to Farmer (1999), the ‘structural violence’ of poverty and other inequalities contribute to people’s vulnerability in contracting HIV/AIDS. A closer look at the history of Nyanza Province and Winam shows that enduring uncertainty has become woven into the social fabric of everyday life in Winam. ‘Luoland’, of which Winam is a part, was long a forgotten hinterland that only provided a cheap labour force for the more economically dynamic parts of Kenya. Almost half a century after Kenya’s independence, Winam remains one of the least economically diverse regions of Kenya. The chronic poverty and the high mobility that characterize life in Winam have contributed to the rapid spread of epidemics. With the spread of HIV/AIDS, the inadequacy of the health infrastructure took a toll on many—often very young—lives in Winam.

When I began my fieldwork in 2005, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) were available in Kenya only at a very high cost. Nyanza Province has been hit harder by the HIV/AIDS epidemic than any other region in Kenya. The gender disparity is also striking: in Winam in 2003, HIV prevalence among females aged 15–19 years was 12 times higher than among their male counterparts, and 20 percent of the 19-year-old girls were already infected with HIV (Vandenhoudt 2004b). I conclude that the rapid spread of HIV in Winam, including the large difference in infection rates between male and
female adolescents, is related to the structural violence that is a result of prolonged crisis and the deterioration of the social fabric. Winam’s unequal gender relations and its marginalized position in Kenya’s economic system are not sui generis but rather a product of its colonial history, the consequences of which persisted after Kenya’s independence, and were joined by new forms of exclusion.

The young people of this dissertation do not perceive nor describe themselves as victims of structural violence as they try to manoeuvre a trajectory towards better positions—imaginary or real—in an impoverished, highly unpredictable context. They are constantly alert for whatever opportunities may fall from heaven while, at the same time, they often feel unable to actualize their hopes and dreams. I elaborate on the different ‘livelihood tactics’ (building on De Certeau’s (1984) discussion of tactics) that young people employ in the hope of moving up the social ladder and finding security. One important tactic is urban mobility: young people hope to move out of rural areas to urban areas not only for education or jobs, but also to expand their social and sexual networks. Due to the instability of their social networks, some of the youngsters increase their sexual networks, including, sometimes, sexual liaisons with multiple, concurrent partners. In exploring why and how some youngsters expand their sexual networks, I review Thornton’s (2009) work and further develop his argument that sexual relationships with multiple partners serve to increase an individual’s social and sexual network. I examine how climbing up the social ladder and finding a better way of living through sexual liaisons was more prevalent among young women than young men, a gender-specific effect that is lacking in Thornton’s analysis. While this tactic may have worked at other times, in times of crisis, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, building such networks is no longer very effective. Other members of Winam youths’ social and sexual networks are usually in the same condition of poverty and facing similar limited opportunities; the few with a viable business or decent income are flooded by requests for assistance or pursued by many potential lovers. Youngsters’ social mobility was at best temporary.

I explain how, in such a context of HIV and prolonged crisis, youngsters deal with disease and risk. For most of the youngsters of Winam, as in many other places, “playing sex” is an important sign of adolescent maturity. Young women and young men perceive sex differently, however, since sexual relationships in Winam are clearly marked by gender inequality. While young people try to enjoy “playing sex”, they act pragmatically in order to avoid the health risks associated with sex. Instead of reducing the number of sexual partners or changing their sexual behaviour—the primary goals of public health campaigns and NGOs—young people have developed the tactic of “doing research” on their lovers in the hopes of minimizing their exposure to HIV. This tactic is anchored in locally meaningful modes of reasoning. Through informal conversations within a person’s social network, young people try to reconstruct their potential partners’ sexual and medical history and use this information to carefully select their lovers.

In order to understand the potential for HIV transmission and the determinants of individual risk, it is critical to try to grasp the possible structure of the sexual network at stake (Thornton 2008). The practice of “doing research” might give the impression that the youngsters of Winam are constructing, on a small-scale, a ‘visible’ network of sexual relations (Thornton 2008). Yet this is not the case because young people do not systematically “do research”. More importantly, the structure of the local sexual network is highly clustered—there are many small groups of sexually active people, who are then combined into several, ever-larger groups—making the creation of a ‘visible’
network impossible. This kind of structure shows that young people in Winam were, one way or the other, sexually connected to each other even though they did not directly have sex with each other. Individuals could escape infection by chance, but in the end, all were structurally highly likely to get HIV. Moreover, because youngsters in Winam were very mobile, several people in the local network had contact with people both close and far away. This resulted in cross-linkages between the different clusters within and outside the local sexual network. In such an environment of “densely intra-linked clustered sub-networks” (Thornton 2008: 78), the results are likely to be explosive as disease can spread like wildfire. This means that even the best form of “doing research” might only decrease risk temporarily, and it would not change the fact that the structural conditions severely affected young people’s lives. The kind of pragmatic choices young people make about sexual partners thus shape the macrostructures in which individuals are embedded.

My dissertation confirms that biomedical messages, such as the need for condom use and the benefits of voluntary counselling and treatment, are often inadequate and ill fitted to the daily reality of youngsters. At a time when ARVs were not yet easily available in Winam, living with uncertainty regarding AIDS was often preferable for the many young people with whom I worked. While young people employ creative tactics to avoid infection, they ultimately do not really want to know how effective these tactics are. They prefer to live in uncertainty instead of knowing the biomedical truth. This does not mean that HIV/AIDS prevention methods are futile. Young people do make use of “doing research”, cohabiting and marrying, having at least one ‘trust relationship’, and using condoms when they find it necessary, but they do so only tactically and pragmatically, not consistently.

The large difference in HIV/AIDS infection rates between young men and young women in Winam has led many researchers to speculate about the transactional nature of sexual liaisons and the related power discrepancies of gender relations (see, for example, Amornkul et al. 2009). In biomedical and public health discourses, the gender inequality that characterizes transactional relationships is often perceived as one of the main driving forces for the continued spread of HIV/AIDS. Although these explanatory approaches should not be dismissed, I believe it is a mistake to ascribe the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to simplistic notions of 'transactional sex'. In this dissertation, I attempt to broaden our understanding of the notion of ‘transactional sex’, and disentangle the stereotypes concerning female subordination, male dominance, and sex-for-money exchanges in sexual relationships, and I argue that youthful practices need to be examined within the matrix of intergenerational relations. Not all male-to-female money or gift exchanges in sexual relationships is coercive or exploitative. Women are not always passive victims just because they are poor and have limited opportunities: they are often also negotiating agents who can challenge patriarchal structures. Notions of transactional sex that only highlight the economic dimensions of these exchanges minimize the role of emotions in intimate relationships. While bringing non-stereotypical motivations into this analysis, I also recognize that the discourse of love is sometimes used to mask less romantic intentions, such as getting money, having sex, or claiming a ‘modern’ identity. In this way, the language of love can obscure gendered structural differences.

Young women’s economic and social vulnerability has received substantial attention in the context of AIDS research and treatment, but young men’s vulnerability is all too often overlooked. Young women are able to navigate between and maximize multiple ‘resources’ (men), and the young women I studied often demanded from young men more
than they actually could afford. Young men, on the other hand, who lack financial stability, face difficulties in securing a sexual relationship. Rural young men find it difficult to compete with those who are more financially successful; the young men I studied worked to ‘maintain’ their girlfriend and employed “sweet-talk” to make promises and cajole. In this way, male youngsters can be victims of their expected ‘provider’ role in society. There is a need to recognize the vulnerability of these young men, just as we recognize that many young women—through sex, love, and money—are able to gain access to resources and extend their social networks, or “maximize their social capital” (Thornton 2009), thus obtaining financial security.

Youths’ narratives about Yeshica—an HIV prevention project for young people, which stands for ‘Youth’s Economic, Skills, and Health Improvement Centre in Winam’—are an important piece of the wider argument of this dissertation: they illustrate how young people adopted (and adapted) the project as another way to improve their livelihood. Yeshica is one of the interventions created by the CDC in collaboration with KEMRI and ITM. In addition to Yeshica, since 1984 the CDC has conducted several medical research studies and interventions in Winam. I explain how these biomedical research studies have influenced the way in which the people of Winam perceive medical care in general, as well as why they participate in such studies despite their fears, which have been generated by stories of ‘bloodsucking’ and their distrust of the CDC’s motives. This overview of the CDC’s medical research in the area sheds light on the lack of basic health care in Winam, and gives context to the creation of Yeshica.

I examine the relevance of Yeshica for the young people in Winam, and how such projects make a difference in young people’s daily lives. While such projects do indeed have impacts, they are not necessarily those expected by project designers and implementers, and they are not necessarily those expected by the participants. Yeshica’s designers hoped that Yeshica would reduce HIV/AIDS incidence within the project’s timeframe. The participants and staff of Yeshica were less interested in the health messages of Yeshica than in how Yeshica could improve their livelihood and their daily life. While most of the youths ultimately perceived the project as a failure, the project’s designers still considered it a success, even though it did not succeed in biomedical terms. There was no hard statistical evidence of biomedical impact as initially planned for, but the qualitative information I obtained from working with the youths does tell us something: Yeshica became a fertile ground for new sexual relationships, which could be at odds with the goal of reducing HIV/AIDS risk.

A perhaps greater issue, however, is not whether the project’s practices led to the desired impacts but rather how ‘success’ or ‘failure’ were produced by different local actors (Mosse 2004: 646–647). Following Mosse’s line of thinking, this means that there is no direct link between policy and practice. Only by explaining how predictable results are created and how ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are produced by local actors, do we better understand what is really at stake on the ground—not only at the management level, preoccupied with securing continued funding, but also at the local level, where the youngsters try to shape the project to their own benefit. I conclude that development work often suits different interests, projects are shaped and reshaped to better meet those interests, and, in the end, only what is in the interests of the most powerful stakeholders is communicated to the outside world.

My concluding remarks are somber: In a time when ARVs are supposed to be widely available and free, and AIDS is thus no longer a deadly but a chronic disease, people in Winam are still dying. Although the disease is treatable, people are still at risk and
continue to take risks on various fronts, including in sexual relationships, because the social structure has not changed. The relevant question is not ‘Why do young people take risks when they engage in sex?’, but ‘Why should youngsters not take risks if this holds the promise of a better life in the future?’

When poverty, unemployment, disorder, and uncertainty are ever-present, when ‘chronic crisis’ becomes the continual context, it implies a very different way of understanding the world and a very different way of acting in it (Vigh 2008: 13). This particular notion of continual crisis rather than crisis as a singular event challenges our regular analytical, anthropological categories. In such a context, we must not ask ‘What are the capacities of agents to act?’ but, rather, ‘What are their possibilities to act?’ (Vigh 2008). Given the social injustice experienced on a daily basis in Winam, the livelihood networks that these young people carefully create and try to maintain are often ineffective at improving their lives. Such ‘inventive bricolages’ (De Certeau 1984) might be regarded as a creative form of tactical agency, but these young people themselves might perceive it a ‘choiceless choice’ (Schepers-Hughes 2008), rather than any kind of progress.
Samenvatting

De dagelijkse leefwereld van jongeren tussen 16 en 25 jaar in Winam, een landelijk gedeelte in West-Kenia, vormt de basis van dit proefschrift. Het wil de aandacht vestigen op de hoop, ambities en verwachtingen van jongeren en aantonen hoe deze jongeren op creatieve wijze hun leven vormgeven, in een omgeving waar HIV/AIDS reeds vele mensenlevens en bestaansvoorzieningen kostte. Ik onderzoek de kansen en uitdagingen onder de bestaansvoorzieningen van jongeren in Winam, met als doel hun seksuele relaties en netwerk beter te begrijpen. Dit proefschrift onderzoekt meer bepaald de manier waarop ze seksuele relaties aangaan, hoe ze de gezondheidsrisico's (al dan niet) vermijden die gepaard gaan met seks, en hoe ze het verband tussen seks, liefde en geld interpreteren. Ik toon aan dat de ambities en zorgen van jongeren moeten bekeken worden vanuit het oogpunt van intergenerationele relaties (Cole en Durham 2007). Ook de perceptie van jongeren op een innovatief HIV/AIDS-preventieproject wordt geanalyseerd, om zo vast te stellen welke rol dergelijke interventies spelen in hun dagelijkse leven.

Dit etnografisch onderzoek maakte deel uit van een samenwerking met het Instituut voor Tropische Geneeskunde, de US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) en de Kenyan Medical Research Institute (KEMRI). Gedurende 20 maanden voerde ik participatieve observatie uit, aangevuld met informele en formele diepte-interviews (waaronder familiegeschiedenis), levensgeschiedenissen, gerichte groepsgesprekken en een langetermijndagboek van een van de jongeren. De triangulatie van deze verschillende kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethodes, versterkt de validiteit van de gegevens. Als antropoloog in een medisch team werd ik ter verantwoording geroepen voor mijn methodiek, wat mij ertoe aanzette om de verschillende benaderingen van antropologie en epidemiologie te bekijken en deze te vergelijken. Doorheen deze scriptie worden mijn bedenkingen over deze verschillen beschreven. Bedenkingen niet enkel aangaande methodiek, maar ook, en misschien belangrijker, betreffende de machtsonderverhoudingen tussen kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve onderzoekers, de rol van institutionele financiering en de argumenten over welke ‘bewijsvoering’ als solide kan beschouwd worden.


Toen ik in 2005 aan mijn veldwerk begon, waren antiretrovirale geneesmiddelen (ARV’s) enkel verkrijgbaar tegen een heel hoge prijs. Van alle Keniaanse regio’s werd Nyanza Province het hardst getroffen door de HIV/AIDS-epidemie. Opvallend in Winam
is ook de genderongelijkheid. In 2003 was het aantal HIV-infecties bij vrouwen van 15 tot 19 jaar 12 keer groter dan het aantal bij hun mannelijke tegenhangers. Daarbij komt dat reeds 20 procent van de 19-jarige meisjes geïnfecteerd was door HIV (Vandenhoudt 2004b). Ik stel vast dat de snelle verspreiding van HIV in Winam en het grote verschil in besmettingsgraad tussen mannelijke en vrouwelijke adolescenten, in rechtstreeks verband staat met het structureel geweld, ontstaan door de langdurige crisis en de achteruitgang van het sociale leven. Winam’s genderongelijkheid en zijn achteruitgestelde positie in de Keniaanse economie zijn niet sui generis, maar een resultaat van zijn koloniale geschiedenis, de gevolgen die bleven bestaan na de onafhankelijkheid van Kenia, gekoppeld aan nieuwe vormen van uitsluiting.

De jongeren in deze scriptie beschouwen nog beschrijven zichzelf als slachtoffers van structureel geweld. Ze trachten zich een weg te banen naar een beter bestaan—verzonnen of reëel—in een verarmde, zeer onvoorspelbare omgeving. Ze zijn voordurend waakzaam voor elke kans die in hun schoot kan worden geworpen, terwijl ze zich vaak onbekwaam voelen om hun dromen te realiseren. Ik ga in op de verschillende overlevingtactieken (gebaseerd op De Certeau’s (1984) discussie over tactieken) die jonge mensen aanwenden om te stijgen op de sociale ladder en zo zekerheid te vinden. Een belangrijke tactiek is stedelijke mobiliteit: jonge mensen hopen uit de landelijke gebieden weg te trekken richting stedelijke gebieden, niet enkel voor onderwijs en jobs, maar ook om hun sociale en seksuele netwerken uit te bouwen. Vanwege de instabiliteit van hun sociale netwerk, breiden een aantal jongeren hun seksuele netwerk uit, soms door seksuele relaties met meerdere partners tegelijkertijd. Bij onderzoek naar het hoe en waarom hiervan, bespreek ik Thornton’s werk (2009) en werk ik zijn argumentatie verder uit over hoe meerdere, gelijkstijdige seksuele relaties gebruikt worden om iemands sociale en seksuele netwerk uit te breiden. Ik onderzoek hoe het klimmen op de sociale ladder met het oog op een beter leven door middel van seksuele relaties, vooral heerst bij jonge vrouwen dan bij jonge mannen, een genderspecifiek effect dat ontbreekt bij Thornton’s analyse. Terwijl deze tactiek soms heeft gewerkt, in tijden van crisis, zoals tijdens de HIV/AIDS pandemie, is het uitbouwen van dergelijke netwerken niet langer heel effectief. Andere leden van de sociale en seksuele netwerken van de jeugd in Winam, verkeren meestal in dezelfde staat van armoede en worden zelf ook geconfronteerd met beperkte kansen: de weinigen met een haalbare zaak of redelijk inkomen worden overspeld met hulpvragen of het hof gemaakt door veelvuldige potentiële minnaars. De sociale mobiliteit van jongeren was dus in het beste geval slechts tijdelijk.

Ik leg uit hoe, in een HIV omgeving in een aanhoudende crisis, jonge mensen omgaan met ziekte en risico’s. Voor de meeste jongeren in Winam, zoals in de meeste andere plaatsen, is "seks spelen" een belangrijk teken van hun adolescentie rijpheid. Jonge mannen en vrouwen ervaren seks hoedanig verschillend, aangezien seksuele relaties in Winam duidelijk gekenmerkt worden door genderongelijkheid. Terwijl jongeren van "seks spelen" trachten te genieten, gedragen ze zich pragmatisch om de daarmee gepaard gaande gezondheidsrisico’s te vermijden. In plaats van hun aantal bedpartners te verminderen of hun seksueel gedrag te wijzigen—het belangrijkste doel van publieke gezondheidscampagnes en Ngo’s—hebben de jongeren een tactiek ontwikkeld waarbij ze "onderzoek verrichten" naar hun minnaars om zo hun risico op blootstelling aan HIV te minimaliseren. Deze tactiek is verankerd in lokaal betekenisvolle redeneringsmethodes. Door informele gesprekken binnen hun sociale netwerk, proberen jonge mensen de seksuele en medische voorgeschiedenis van hun potentiële bedpartners te reconstrueren. Deze informatie gebruiken ze dan om zorgvuldig hun minnaars te selecteren.
Om de kans op HIV-overdracht en de determinerende factoren van het individuele risico te begrijpen, is het essentieel om de mogelijke structuur van het seksuele netwerk dat op het spel staat (Thornton 2008) te proberen vatten. De praktijk van het "onderzoek verrichten" zou de indruk kunnen wekken dat de jongeren van Winam op kleine schaal, een zichtbaar netwerk van seksuele relaties (Thornton 2008) aan het opbouwen zijn. Dit is echter niet het geval aangezien jonge mensen dit "onderzoek" niet systematisch uitvoeren. Nog belangrijker is het feit dat de structuur van hun lokaal seksueel netwerk heel sterk geclusterd is. Er zijn veel kleine groepjes van seksueel actieve mensen die op hun beurt gecombineerd worden tot verschillende grotere groepen, wat het maken van een 'zichtbaar' netwerk onmogelijk maakt. Dit soort structuur toont aan dat jonge mensen in Winam op een of andere manier seksueel met elkaar verbonden waren ook al hadden ze geen direct seksueel contact met elkaar. Een paar enkelingen konden toevallig de infectie ontlopen, maar uiteindelijk hadden allen structureel gezien een heel hoge kans om HIV op te lopen. Bovendien, omdat jongeren in Winam zeer mobiel zijn, hadden verschillende mensen in het lokale netwerk contact gemaakt met mensen zowel ver als dichtbij. Dit resulteerde in overschrijdende banden tussen de verschillende clusters binnen en buiten het lokale seksuele netwerk. In een dergelijke omgeving van "intra-gekoppelde dicht geclusterde subnetwerken" (Thornton 2008: 78), zijn de resultaten waarschijnlijk explosief aangezien de ziekte zich als een lopend vuurtje kan verspreiden. Dit betekent dat zelfs de beste manier van "onderzoek doen" enkel tijdelijk het risico op HIV infectie kan verminderen, en dat dit niks zou veranderen aan de structurele omstandigheden die het leven van jongeren zwaar aantasten. Dit soort pragmatische keuzes die jonge mensen maken in verband met hun seksuele partners vormt dus de macrostructuur waarin individuen worden opgenomen.

Mijn proefschrift bevestigt dat biomedische berichten, zoals de nood aan condoomgebruik en de voordelen van Vrijwillige Counseling en Testen (VCT), vaak ontoereikend en sluiten niet aan bij de dagelijkse realiteit van jongeren. In een tijd waarin ARV's nog niet gemakkelijk verkrijgbaar waren in Winam, was leven in onzekerheid betreffende AIDS vaak wenselijker voor vele van de jongeren met wie ik samenwerkte. Terwijl jonge mensen creatieve tactieken aanwenden om infectie te vermijden, willen ze uiteindelijk niet echt weten hoe doeltreffend deze tactieken zijn. Ze verkiezen in onzekerheid te leven boven de biomedische waarheid te aanhoren. Dit betekent niet dat HIV/AIDS preventie methodes futiel zijn. Jonge mensen doen uiteindelijk wel aan "onderzoek", ze wonen samen en trouwen, hebben op zijn minst één vertrouwensrelatie, en ze gebruiken condooms wanneer ze dat nodig achten, maar ze doen dit alleen tactisch en pragmatisch, niet consistent.

Het grote verschil in het aantal HIV/AIDS-infecties tussen jonge mannen en jonge vrouwen in Winam heeft vele onderzoekers ertoe aangezet te speculeren over de transactionele aard van seksuele relaties, en de daarmee gepaard gaande machtsverschillen in genderrelaties (zie bijvoorbeeld, Amornkul et al. 2009). In volksgezondheids- en biomedische uiteenzettingen, wordt de genderongelijkheid die transactionele relaties kenmerkt, vaak gezien als een van de belangrijkste krachten achter de voortdurende verspreiding van HIV/AIDS. Hoewel we deze verklarende benaderingen niet willen afwijzen, geloof ik dat het een vergissing is om de verspreiding van de HIV/AIDS-epidemie toe te schrijven aan de simplicistische notie van 'transactionele seks'. In dit proefschrift probeer ik het begrip 'transactionele seks' te verbreden, en de stereotype ideeën over vrouwelijke ondergeschiktheid, mannelijke dominantie en betaalde seks binnen seksueel relaties te ontwarren. Ik pleit dan ook om de manier waarop jongeren hiermee omgaan om te onderzoeken binnen de matrix van intergenerationele relaties. Niet alle uitwisselingen van geld of giften tussen man en
vrouw in seksuele relaties zijn dwingend of uitbuitend. Vrouwen zijn niet altijd passieve slachtoffers, gewoon omdat ze arm zijn en beperkte kansen hebben. Dikwijls zijn ze ook onderhandelaars, die de patriarchale structuren aanvechten. Denkbeeldens van transactionele seks, die enkel de economische dimensies van deze uitwisseling benadrukken, minimaliseren de rol van emoties in intieme relaties. Terwijl ik niet-stereotype beweeegredenen aanhaal in deze analyse, erken ik ook dat het discours van de liefde soms gebruikt wordt om minder romantische bedoelingen te maskeren, zoals het verkrijgen van geld en seks, of om aanspraak te maken op een ‘moderne’ identiteit. Op deze manier kan de taal van de liefde de structurele genderverschillen verbergen.

De economische en sociale kwetsbaarheid van jonge vrouwen heeft aanzienlijke aandacht gekregen in het onderzoek naar en de behandeling van HIV/AIDS, maar de kwetsbaarheid van jonge mannen wordt te vaak over het hoofd gezien. Jonge vrouwen zijn in staat om te schipperen tussen en gebruik te maken van verschillende ‘bronnen’ (mannen). En de jonge vrouwen die ik bestudeerde, eisten van de jonge mannen meer dan ze zich eigenlijk konden veroorloven. Aan de andere kant ondervinden jonge mannen zonder financiële stabiliteit vaak moeilijkheden in het behouden van een seksuele relatie. Jonge mannen uit rurale gebieden vinden het moeilijk om te concurreren met zij die financieel succesvoller zijn. De jonge mannen die ik bestudeerde, werkten om hun vriendin te onderhouden en gebruikten “sweet-talk” om beloftes te doen en te vleien. Zo kunnen ze het slachtoffer worden van de hen door de maatschappij opgelegde rol als ‘voorziener’. Het is nodig om de kwetsbaarheid van deze jonge mannen te erkennen, net zoals we erkennen dat veel jonge vrouwen door middel van seks, liefde en geld in staat zijn om teogang te krijgen tot (hulp)middelen en hun sociale netwerken uitbreiden of ‘hun sociaal kapitaal maximaliseren’ (Thornton 2009), en zo financiële zekerheid verkrijgen.

Verhalen van jongeren over Yeshica – een HIV-preventieproject voor jongeren – zijn een belangrijk onderdeel van het wijdere betoog van dit proefschrift: ze illustreren hoe jonge mensen het project opnamen (en aanpasten) als een andere manier om hun levensstandaard te verbeteren. Yeshica (Youth’s Economic, Skills and Health Improvement Center in Winam) is één van de projecten opgericht door het CDC, in samenwerking met KEMRI en ITG. Naast Yeshica heeft het CDC sinds 1984 verschillende medische studies en interventies uitgevoerd in Winam. Ik leg uit hoe deze biomedische studies beïnvloedden hoe inwoners van Winam in het algemeen medische zorg waarnemen, en waarom ze deelnemen aan dergelijke studies, ondanks hun angst die het gevolg zijn van verhalen over ‘bloedzuigerij’ en hun wantrouwen tegenover de motieven van het CDC. Dit overzicht van het medisch onderzoek van de CDC in het gebied werpt een licht op het gebrek aan basisgezondheidszorg in Winam, en toont aan in wat voor context Yeshica werd opgericht.

Ik onderzoek het belang van Yeshica voor jongeren in Winam, en hoe dergelijke projecten een verschil maken in het dagelijks leven van jongeren. Terwijl dit soort projecten inderdaad een impact hebben, is het niet noodzakelijkerwijs die impact die verwacht werden door de ontwerper en uitvoerders van het project, en evenmin door de deelnemers. De ontwerpers van Yeshica hoopten dat de verspreiding van HIV/AIDS zou afnemen binnen het tijdsbestek van het project. De deelnemers en medewerkers van Yeshica waren minder geïnteresseerd in de gezondheidsboodschappen van Yeshica, maar eerder in de manier waarop Yeshica hun bestaansomstandigheden en dagelijkse leven kon verbeteren. Terwijl het project door de meeste jongeren uiteindelijk als een mislukking beschouwd werd, zagen de ontwerpers het project als een succes, zelfs al was dit biomedisch geschreven niet het geval. Er was geen hard statistisch bewijs van de
beoogde biomedische impact. Maar de kwalitatieve informatie die ik verkreeg door met de jongeren samen te werken, maakte wel iets duidelijk: Yeshica werd een vruchtbare bodem voor nieuwe seksuele relaties, iets wat in strijd kon zijn met het doel om het risico op HIV/AIDS te verminderen.

Een mogelijk nog belangrijkere kwestie is niet of het project de gewenste impact had, maar eerder hoe ‘succes’ en ‘falen’ door de verschillende lokale actoren werden teweeggebracht (Mosse 2004:646-647). In Mosse’s manier van denken betekent dit dat er geen direct verband is tussen beleid en praktijk. Enkel door uit te leggen hoe voorspelbare resultaten gecreëerd worden, en hoe ‘succes’ en ‘falen’ teweeggebracht worden door lokale actoren, kunnen we beter begrijpen wat er werkelijk gaande is. Niet enkel op het niveau van management dat bezig is met het veiligstellen van een continue financiering, maar ook op lokaal niveau, waar de jongeren het project in hun eigen voordeel proberen vorm te geven. Ik concludeer dat ontwikkelingswerk dikkwijls verschillende belangen behartigt, dat projecten worden gevormd en hervormd om beter te voldoen aan deze belangen, en dat uiteindelijk enkel hetgene dat in het belang is van machtigste belanghebbers, naar de buitenwereld toe wordt gecommuniceerd.

Mijn besluitende opmerkingen zijn somber: in een tijd waarin ARV’s verondersteld worden om op grote schaal beschikbaar en gratis te zijn, en AIDS zodoende niet langer een dodelijke maar chronische ziekte is, sterven er nog steeds mensen in Winam. Hoewel de ziekte behandelbaar is, lopen mensen nog steeds gevaar en blijven ze risico’s nemen op verschillende vlakken, zo ook in seksuele relaties, net omdat de sociale structuur niet is veranderd. De relevante vraag is niet: “Waarom nemen jonge mensen risico’s wanneer ze seks hebben?” maar “Waarom zouden jongeren geen risico’s nemen als dit de belofte van een beter leven in de toekomst inhoudt?”.