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

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
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 Nyan’bedha, 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.