Aspirations and sex: Coming of age in western Kenya in a context of HIV
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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 chira\(^2\) 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 Luyha (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 kعون (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
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-
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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-owing 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).
3.2.3. President Mwai Kibaki (NARC): 2002–2013

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.
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 meditation 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.
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. 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.\textsuperscript{18}

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 \textit{magendo}) in the 1970s that included the smuggling of coffee and other agricultural products to Kenya and finished products into Uganda (\textit{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; Nyambéda 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:

> Those 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.