Because of temptations: children, sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania
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PREFACE

My interest in children and working with children has a very pragmatic basis. I am convinced that in a new and unfamiliar environment, children are the best guides you can have. As a newcomer in a different culture it is often difficult to ‘settle in’. My first working experience with children was as an intern at the pediatric department of a Dutch hospital, when I was nineteen. I did not like the hospital at all: the smell, the seriousness, the protocols and hierarchies. Being unfamiliar with the social rules, the language, the hospital culture, I made mistake after mistake. I took refuge in the common room with the children, who shared my opinion of the hospital. During my first days, the children explained to me who was who and who was doing what and they took me around to explore the pediatric wing. The children introduced me to their parents and started to ask me to accompany them when they had to see the doctor or go for tests. Through the children I found a way of communicating with the adults in the hospital. They helped me to define my position and role within that setting and made me feel at ease.

This scenario was repeated a few years later, during my visits to Benin and Tanzania. Even without me speaking the language the children would come to my house and just hang around, helping me out with household tasks or we would play games. The children were always the first to teach me new words and to give me a tour of their areas. They would show me where to get my groceries and in Benin, explained to me where to go to the toilet and what to use for toilet paper. Children would laugh about my silly questions instead of judging me for it. They liked to give me answers and explanations. They facilitated my introduction to adults and I found that adults were quicker to accept me when they saw that their children accepted me.

During my time at the hospital, I learned how interesting it is to speak with children first about their illness before learning the medical diagnosis from doctors, nurses or parents. I became fascinated with the children’s perceptions, explanations, logic and coping strategies. This experience certainly influenced my choice to study children’s perceptions of disease transmission and hygiene, a few years later in Benin. In the evenings I would discuss my day with the neighborhood kids and ask them questions. I found that they not only liked to explain
things to me, but also liked to add their own opinions. I noticed how much they actually see, how they analyze the behavior of others around them and come to conclusions about good and bad, injustices and contradictions. They became my lens for studying and understanding their culture. When I went to Tanzania for the study described in this book, it was a logical step to ask children to help me with interpretations and to involve them as co-researchers.

My hope for this book is to show how fascinating, interesting and important it is to study children perceptions of what is at stake for them, especially regarding sex and sexuality. My greatest hope is for children and youth to become more involved in the design and implementation of the sexual health interventions that target them. Their meaningful participation is crucial for the effectiveness of those interventions and for our joint fight against HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, gender injustices and maternal mortality.

My gratitude first and foremost goes to them, to all the children who helped me to understand their realities, concerns, hopes and wishes. For their patience, courage, humor, enthusiasm, energy, creativity and insights. I will attempt to represent their ideas and experiences as closely as possible in this book. My contact with the children in Tanzania would not have been possible without the help of many people. I am particularly indebted to my friend, research assistant and interpreter Godfrey. Without your help and hard work this research would not have been possible and would not have been so much fun! You have become a brother to me.

My sincere gratitude goes to my guides at home: Sjaak van der Geest and Ria Reis who have been at least as patient with me as my young guides in the field. You have been part of this journey for a long time. Thank you for believing in me, for giving me the opportunity to teach with you and to learn from you and for allowing me to make my own mistakes. Sjaak, thank you for teaching me a different way of looking at the world. Ria, thank you for travelling with me, spiritually and literally. One of the highlights was fighting that giant spider together!

I want to thank the members of the promotion committee for their willingness to read and comment on this thesis, for their input on my proposal at the start of my PhD course and for inspiring me through their own work. I thank WOTRO for funding this research and the ASSR for providing me with an academic home.
Without the permission and support of the Tanzanian government, in the form of Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, the district Ministry of Education, and of the schools and NGO’s involved in the Guardian Programme, I would not have been able to conduct this research. I give my special thanks to the staff of the schools for allowing me to disrupt their schedules and talk with their pupils. I also want to thank the parents and adults in the local communities for their participation; their contributions were most valuable. In particular I want to thank the people in Tanzania who helped me reflect, who asked critical questions and shared their ideas and insights with me: the researchers from NIMR, TANESA and AMREF and Mama Salalah from the International Languages Training Centre in Mwanza. You were my PhD-club in the field. I want to thank Bill, Robyn and Carol for helping me out with cars, paperwork and accommodation. Thank you for your friendship and hospitality, whenever I come to Mwanza. I also want to thank Christopher and Hope, for helping me during the last part of the fieldwork and their courage to talk about sensitive issues.

At home in the Netherlands many people helped and inspired me during the course of this PhD. I want to thank my friends and colleagues at the ASSR, in particular Christine Dedding, Heidi Sauls, Marie Lindegaart-Rozeknranz, Trudie Gerrits and Winny Koster for reading my manuscripts and giving me valuable feedback. Julia Challinor has been a tremendous help editing this book and with her practical questions. I also want to thank my colleagues at the Rutgers Nisso Groep for their interest in this research and their willingness to read this book and help me prepare for my defense. I am particularly grateful for their vision and progressive work in the field of youth and sexuality and their determination for meaningful youth participation in their projects.

Lastly I want to thank my parents, brother, friends and Tijmen for their never ending support. I would not be where I am today without you. Tijm, despite my many goodbyes and leaving you behind for yet another long trip to Tanzania, you have always supported me. All of you are always there for me and there is nothing in the world for which I am more grateful.

Miranda van Reeuwijk
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