



PHD

**Fucking not kissing : teenage girlhood and sexual agency in rural Tanzania**

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## **Abstract**

Recent years have seen a growth of interest in the value of 'girls' empowerment' for international development. When it comes to teenage girls, efforts to 'empower' tend to focus on outcomes implicitly linked to their sexuality. Popular discourse on the African teenage girl tends to paint a picture of a person who fundamentally lacks agency over her body and relationships. These narratives pay little attention to girls as sexual subjects. This thesis uses ethnographic methods to explore how teenage girls in Northern Tanzania experience girlhood and sexuality. Insights from the new social studies of childhood and the literature on sexuality in development are drawn upon to move beyond existing approaches to researching sex with young people. Rather than viewing girls as passive victims of oppressive sexual norms, girls' sexual agency is the focus of the research.

Whilst girls in Tanzania are expected to defer to sexual norms which are restrictive and highly gendered, the girls I met sought various ways to negotiate, subvert and resist expectations which limited their agency. Development narratives often problematise girls' sexuality, yet I found that some girls were able draw upon sexuality and sexual relationships as a way to expand the range of choices available to them. School-based education is frequently presented within international development as a route for the empowerment of girls, but school itself can limit the way in which girls are able to navigate restrictive norms around girlhood and sexuality. This thesis argues that approaches by international development organisations working with girls must both recognise girls as sexual subjects, and pay attention to the role of various socio-economic factors in shaping girls' opportunities for sexual agency.

## **I: Introduction**

### **I.i. Sanama's dilemma**

Sanama was never particularly friendly to me during the time that I spent doing fieldwork at Tufurahi School. In fact, I was slightly intimidated by her. Although only nineteen, she appeared to me to be supremely confident and self-contained. She dressed in fashionable and revealing clothes which made the teachers purse their lips, and her regulation schoolgirl shaved head featured tiny swirled patterns, and an almost imperceptible mohawk. She used scented lotion, wore glittery polish on her toenails, and owned several pairs of jeans. She was much cooler than me, and I think we both knew it.

I was surprised, therefore, to get a text message from her a couple of weeks after I finished fieldwork and left Tanzania. 'Hi sister, how is England? I miss you.' I responded that I missed her too, and asked how everything was going back in Kavuni, the town I had left behind. And so a correspondence began, enabling me to maintain contact and follow Sanama's life from a distance of seven thousand miles.

Over the past year Sanama and I have shared regular updates via email and Whatsapp. Of all the girls I met during fieldwork, it continues to surprise me that it is Sanama with whom I have had the most continuous contact, and not just because of her apparent disdain for me whilst I was actually in the field. For the duration of my fieldwork, Sanama had not appeared to be very happy about being in education, and was certainly not interested in being involved with my project. I often felt I was being observed by her at a distance.

Sanama's career at Tufurahi School had begun a couple of years before my arrival there. However, at one point she left to work in her aunt's salon in town. She then began sleeping with safari car drivers who travel through the town transporting tourists to the nearby nature reserves. The director of the school invited her to come back after passing her on the street one evening, and she agreed.

According to the school director, Sanama had returned to school an altered person. Though previously she had been studious, she now approached her studies with little enthusiasm. She was constantly nursing a series of ailments; period pain, headaches, diarrhoea, a sore foot, a mysterious rash. These usually improved at mealtimes and in the evenings, but prevented her from attending lessons. Despite having been in secondary education for longer than many of the younger girls, she struggled with academic expectations. She spent most of her time in bed in her dormitory, usually attended to and waited upon by a gaggle of friends.



Shortly after Christmas, a rumour started amongst the girls that she had a secret boyfriend, and this spread to the teachers. The school director speculated to me that she might be pregnant. Already frustrated at her poor attendance, her relationship with the staff began to decline further after she overheard some of them calling her lazy and promiscuous. She became increasingly disrespectful towards them. When school broke up for Easter, Sanama was meant to go to her aunt's house. She slipped away from the school; nobody came to collect her. When her aunt contacted the school, it soon transpired that she had not arrived home at all. After the Easter holidays, she did not return to Tufarahi.

Sanama has been unable to find a job in the town where she lives. Whilst still at school, she said that she wanted to be a lawyer in a big city, and to leave the town behind completely. She is now considering returning to education, but tells me that it would be a difficult decision because of her age. As this thesis will explore, school rules make girls into 'schoolgirls', no matter their age. With this identity comes certain expectations about behaviour and appearance; expectations which Sanama had clearly found irksome during her time at Tufarahi School.

However, in our most recent conversations, something else has become clear. Should she try and go back to school, Sanama is even more self-conscious about what other students would think of her failures to 'make progress'. But Sanama is getting older. Not only are fewer choices available to her - but she feels that time is running out.

## **I.ii. Background**

The expansion of opportunities to girls like Sanama features prominently within international development discourses. Stories of empowerment dominate representations of teenage girls in policy literature, appeals for sponsorship, campaign photographs of charmingly peppy 'tweens' and their accompanying stories of 'overcoming the odds'. These images have become part of a popular imagination in countries like the United Kingdom. When I tell people about my interest in girls' agency, education is always the first thing they prescribe; education and empowerment are seen to go hand in hand. The appeal of such a rationale is that it appears to offer a straightforward way to transform vulnerability and poverty into opportunity, hope and emancipation.

My motivation for exploring what lies behind such imaginings comes from a number of places. After completing my Masters degree, I ended up working for a small NGO with in-country partners in Tanzania. I assisted on a project which focused on improving girls' secondary school enrolment rates. One of the main ways in which girls could be kept in school, according to this organisation

was by reducing opportunities for them to become pregnant. International development narratives provide various explanations for pregnancies which cause girls to leave school, but these tend to gather around certain themes which categorise girls in specific ways.

The first explanation is that girls who become pregnant are being preyed upon by men and boys. For the NGO I was involved with, the insecure housing near the schools in which girls stayed overnight in order to avoid several hours of walking to and from home every day presented a major cause for concern. This approach presented girls as vulnerable and passive, fundamentally lacking agency. These girls were often also presented as devout schoolgirls who would sacrifice their own personal safety for their education. School was framed as a safe space for these girls; a place away from harassment and violence.

There was an alternative explanation for the problem of girls becoming pregnant and dropping out of school, but this was less clear cut and arose more in my conversations with others working in development. This framed girls as sexually knowing and requiring control and chastisement, rather than protection. Such girls needed to be physically sequestered in order to prevent them from becoming pregnant out of ignorance. School was still felt to be the answer here given that education of girls is shown to lead to delayed pregnancy and marriage (UNFPA 2014).

I found that these frameworks for understanding girlhood were not limited only to the NGO where I worked for that year, but other international development organisations working with girls too. It nonetheless struck me that they contained a variety of problems and limitations; not least because they presented girls' sexual agency as almost entirely absent. Girls were not framed as really having an active part in their sexual lives. Either they were being forced into sex, or if they did make decisions to get pregnant or leave school to marry, it was presumed that given their age these were poorly thought out mistakes.

This presumption about girls' lack of agency forms the basis for the link between education and empowerment. Education is framed within development as the key in enabling girls to have more options for their lives. However, all options are not created equal; empowerment work with girls tends to be premised on an assumption that if girls are educated they will make different, better choices. These choices are used to provide evidence of their successful empowerment - or more cynically, of the success of the organisations doing the 'empowering'. This line of thinking is implicitly circular.

My time in the NGO world made me question how and why certain choices girls make are designated as 'empowered', and others as problematic. When contemplating how to begin this thesis, Sanama's story felt like an appropriate starting point for introducing a key theme of this

thesis; how to think about girls' sexual agency beyond a simplified 'empowerment' narrative in which girls' lives can take only one, approved direction. In developing my research questions I have drawn on my own experiences within NGOs, but also as someone who has been a girl herself; and therefore encountered how complicated it can be to move through the space of girlhood. Perhaps it is this which made me so interested to hear from girls whose trajectories did not fit into the model of 'goodness' which is promoted in the representations of wholesome, desexualised schoolgirls. Sanama's story shows the limitations of delineating girlhood as a protected space, in the way it places some girls outside of its protective boundaries and suffocates others within them.

Based on this background, I identified my central objective for this research: to explore how girls in Tanzania experience sexual agency in the context of local and global discourses on girlhood and sexuality.

### **I.iii. Structure of thesis**

I begin the thesis by establishing the theoretical foundations of my research. I reflect upon key work and ideas within the existing literatures on agency, the new social studies of childhood, and sexuality in development. I then bring these three together to reflect upon how sexual agency and girls' empowerment is conceptualised and deployed within development research and practice. This chapter presents the approach to agency and empowerment taken within the thesis as a whole, defining both the methodology which I used and the later analysis of data. Drawing on critical theory, I argue for the need to develop a politicised, relational and contextually-driven understanding of girlhood, sexuality, empowerment and agency.

Chapter Three provides background information on the social, political and economic issues in Tanzania which have affected the research and therefore require due attention and understanding. This is particularly important given the argument I have made for the importance of context in understanding how girls' agency is shaped. I give an overview of existing policy initiatives relating to girls' empowerment and sexuality within Tanzania and discuss initiatives of both international organisations and the government on various issues affecting girls. I also attend to the tribal, cultural and religious dimensions of life in Kavuni, where I carried out the majority of fieldwork. This complicated and dynamic environment provides important context for understanding girls' lived experiences.

The discussion of methodology contained in Chapter Four shows how the critical framework explained in the preceding chapter shapes the epistemological and ontological foundations of the

project. I outline the methods used and their advantages and limitations. I show how the approach I decided to take enabled me to move my line of vision beyond the expected in order to recognise acts of resistance to norms of girlhood and sexuality. It also meant I focused on creating spaces for alternative expressions of these identity practices. In line with this, I discuss my use of participatory approaches as a way of integrating recognition of girls' agency into the research process. I reflect upon my own identity and positioning within the research process, and the network of power relations within which I was embedded.

The first empirical chapter - Chapter Five - lays out the rules of girlhood which girls are expected to follow in Tanzania. It complicates these by showing how these norms change over time, through both forces beyond girls' control but also as a result of girls' own moves to renegotiate and reshape them. This, I suggest, counters the assumption that girls lack agency. It also points to a diversification of acceptable forms of girlhood through complication and disruption of the local discursive regime, which generates cracks. This chapter begins to show how some girls are able to act agentially through moving into new subject-positions beyond local norms of girlhood. Such positions have become available as a result of economic, social and political change in Tanzania and are being reconciled with existing femininities in various ways by girls themselves.

Chapter Six continues with and expands upon the theme of girls' agency introduced in Chapter XX. It examines the degree to which girls are able to exercise agency given the restrictions they encounter. I argue that girls' agency was contingent upon both by broader socio-economic context and their more immediate networks of relationships. A key issue explored here is how girls oppression upon each other and experience disempowering effects as a result. On the basis of this, I advocate for a conceptualisation of agency which centres on girls' own perceptions of their reality, rather than the normative perspective of development actors who work with them.

In Chapter Seven I look explicitly at schooling. My aim in this is to emphasise the ambiguous role of education in potentially both expanding and obstructing different girls from acting agentially. Despite a prevailing discourse of 'education as empowerment', I suggest that school can reiterate and endorse existing contextual and relational constraints upon girls' agency and even can enable new forms of oppression. However, being at school can generate opportunities for agency in ways that are unacknowledged because they fail to dovetail with the normative expectations of girls trajectories that arise as an effect of the dominance of 'empowerment' thinking. To break from this, I advocate for thinking about girls' agency in terms of resistance and freedom.

In concluding this thesis, I summarise the key findings in relation to my original research questions, and draw together the central arguments which have been made. Having established the themes and dilemmas which this research draws attention to, I reflect on its theoretical and practical

implications. I reflect on the challenges presented by the research for moving away from a depoliticised rhetoric of 'empowerment' and towards theorising agency in a way that acknowledges its relational dimension and looks to the possibilities this generates for girls' to exercise agency. I take the opportunity to reflect on the way in which my own beliefs and approach to research have changed as a result of my experiences in undertaking this project. I discuss some ideas for potential future research which have been generated by this project.

#### **I.iv. A guide for reading**

This research project is of great personal importance to me, but it is also of academic and practical significance for international development. My work makes a number of empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions on the key themes of sexuality, girlhood, empowerment and agency which run throughout this thesis. It underlines the importance of an in-depth understanding and familiarity with girls' lived experiences for finding ways to enable emancipatory change. It is perhaps unsurprising that my own experiences of growing up and 'doing' girl have not made me interested in the experiences of girls purely for abstract academic thinking, but in identifying implications for development practice. This is how I ended up at a small school in Northern Tanzania for several months, hiding in bunk beds and stirring pots of ugali, learning lyrics to pop music and fetching interminable buckets of water.

I have sought to structure this thesis in a way which follows the trajectory of the research as I experienced it, as a novice ethnographer, critical theorist and 'recent girl'. However, I also hope to leave the reader with an impression of how I experienced being part of the lives of the girls whose stories form the heart of this thesis. Fun, chaotic, confusing; sometimes distressing, often melodramatic; but never passive or voiceless.



## **II: Theorising young people, agency and sexuality**

### **II.i. Introduction**

Theories of agency have been significant for international development research for some time. As will be explored, over the past thirty years attention to the emancipatory effects of expanded agency has manifested in the proliferation of 'empowerment' as a development outcome to be worked for and delivered. This enthusiasm for empowerment has become particularly evident in the increased attention within international development on teenage girls in recent years; a group who are perceived to be particularly lacking in opportunities in part as a result of broader gender inequality in the Global South.

Much of this recent work has focused on their lack of sexual agency. Campaigns such as the 'Girl Effect' (a campaign organised and funded by a coalition of more than thirty charities and private companies) draw attention to teenage girls' vulnerability to early pregnancy, forced marriage, rape, sexually transmitted diseases and female genital cutting. In this chapter, I critically evaluate existing frameworks for conceptualising young people's sexual agency that are drawn upon within international development, as seen in the above approaches. Drawing on poststructuralism and critical theory, I advocate for a relational, context-driven and dynamic concept of agency as holding the most potential for theorising girls' sexual agency.

This chapter opens with a discussion of agency, as debates over agency and structure have been influential for work on gender, sexuality, and in shaping how development organisations view young people within development. In the first section of this chapter I therefore begin to consider some of the broader conceptual issues in thinking about agency, focusing in particular upon how agency can be linked to empowerment.

I then consider the ways in which sexual agency specifically is conceptualised within existing literature and highlight some of the limitations of existing definitions and approaches. I reflect upon poststructuralist, postfeminist and sex-positive feminist theoretical frameworks for understanding sexuality, in order to understand how sexual agency is situated within development discourse. I explore how the resulting frameworks shape the way in which sexual agency is measured, and consider the implications of this for cross-cultural research and praxis.

In the following section, I return to debates on agency and explore how these relate to work with young people, particularly in the context of international development. I discuss some key features of the social and historical construction of youth and consider how this influences popular notions of their agency. I will reflect upon how this limits engagement with young people's lives and perspectives, even in the context of international development work that specifically seeks to enable their participation in issues that affect them.

I finally bring the issues discussed thus far together to explore young people's sexual agency, with a focus on how the intersection between youth and sexuality is approached within international development policy and praxis. I show some of the difficulties of engaging with young people's agency within a framework of 'empowerment', and propose alternative ways to understand young people's sexual agency in terms of resistance.

## **II.ii. Agency**

In this first section, I consider how concepts of agency are drawn upon within international development work. I begin by looking at poststructuralist understandings of agency developed by theorists including Althusser and Foucault. I next discuss some of the frameworks often used for analysing agency, looking at the work of Butler, Bourdieu and Giddens, as well as critical responses to their propositions. I consider the links between agency and action, contrasting and reflecting upon notions of empowerment, resistance and subversion in the work of Sen and Deleuze.

### **II.ii.a. Defining agency: structures, agents and relationships**

To better understand the notion of sexual agency, it is important to consider how agency as a broader term is conceptualised and used within the academic literature and explore some of the key debates around it. Originating in the Enlightenment period, 'agency' was understood as the capacity of individuals to make choices and act upon them. This was seen as an integral aspect of the embodied human experience. The extent to which a rational 'free will' is possible has subsequently formed the basis for debate within sociology which are pertinent to this research. Whilst humanist and rational choice theorists follow in the Enlightenment tradition with their emphasis on the role of the individual in making choices, poststructuralist examinations of agency suggest that 'free will' is itself a problematic premise. A key feature of poststructuralist analysis is the idea that the subject-positions and choices of individuals are dependent on the discourses through which they are constituted. Framing one's choices as agentic and rational is just one subject position, which may not be available to all individuals or societies (Davies 1991:44). A poststructuralist approach questions whether the individual or the structures within which they are embedded are the key determinants of 'agentic' behaviour and decision making.

Althusser (1971) suggests that individuals are nothing more than the carrier of social relations. He describes how 'ideological state apparatus' - a collection of representations of what is imagined by the general public - creates the subject by embedding these ideas into social rituals and giving them a material reality. In this understanding of structures and agency, postmodernity is a totalitarian environment which erases any room for manoeuvre by individuals. Butler (1997; 2009)



draws on Althusser in her descriptions of the reiteration of ideological structures through interpellation, but suggests that agents are not entirely duped by them. Whilst performing these rituals, spaces may open up for resistance and subversion (Butler 2009). Although Butler does not explicitly deny agency, in asserting the subject and its actions are determined by as well as being constituted through interpellation it has been suggested by Benhabib (1995) that she fails to adequately explore how subjects may indeed exercise agency. This might be considered problematic for the practical functionality of Butler's argument, although not necessarily; Fraser (1995) suggests that critically interrogating the existence of social regulation does not preclude attempts to reformulate it in a more just way.

Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1986) also offers a view of agency which emphasises interactions between agents and their environment. He suggests that economic and metaphorical forms of capital (such as social capital) move across social spaces in various states, and may be accumulated, lost, gifted and traded by individuals within what he calls the 'field'. A person's actions, and their perception of events and structures, are shaped as a result of various interacting factors. These factors include one's positioning within the field, the social processes one is subjected to, and one's own free will, with these tendencies described as constituting the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1984). Similarly to Foucault and Butler, Bourdieu suggests therefore that ideologies and norms arise from practices and reproduce them rather than being precedent to them (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the objectivity of the structural field versus the subjectivity of the individual is often criticised on the grounds that the two are not as simply separable as his work implies. For example, King (2000) argues that as Bourdieu's account of 'structure' is defined by exchanges and trades of capital, the 'structure' is in fact 'only the simplified reification of complex, negotiated and ever-changing relations between individuals who are constantly renegotiating their exchanges with each other' (King 2000:421). This, he suggests, makes the effects of structure more complex than the static and timeless institutions of exchange which Bourdieu's theory of the habitus is ostensibly premised upon (King 2000).

It is clear from the discussion so far that there is a need to navigate a space between overly 'deterministic' accounts which emphasize the rigidity of various societal structures in dictating outcomes and diminishing options, and accounts of agency which are overly optimistic about people's free will. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory is often considered central to discussions of agency because of its efforts to reconcile structure and agency and reveal their imbrication. Giddens refers to 'authoritative resources' in a way that is reminiscent of Bourdieu's forms of social and economic capital as resources which attribute power to those who possess them. These may be class, education, race, gender and other social signifiers. Giddens (1984) explicitly rejects the dualistic nature of both poststructuralist and individualist analyses which posit agency and structure as creating a false dichotomy, instead asserting that the sociocultural mediates agency in ways that can either constrain or enable action, rather than preventing it entirely. He

conceptualises social action as a product of motivation, its rationalisation, and then reflexive monitoring of whatever has taken place, emphasizing that an agent can only know or understand a partial element of this action.

Giddens' work has been subject to a variety of critiques, including that it supplies an overly 'volunteeristic' account of agency which overestimates the choices which people are able to make or indeed the alternatives they are able to perceive (Cohen 1989). However, the most important critique of Giddens' argument for this thesis comes from Archer (2000). Archer's morphogenetic theory attempts to link structure and agency in a way that avoids what she describes as 'conflations' – the notion that structures are a product of individual actions ('upwards conflation') or that individual actions are determined by structures ('downwards conflation') (Archer 2000). She rejects Giddens' structuration theory and the emphasis on the interactions of agency and structure as featuring 'central conflation'; in his approach agency and structure are mutually constitutive and therefore cannot be 'teased out' (Archer 2000:6). Instead, she proposes an analytically dualistic approach which presents the individual as separate to the social structures surrounding them. Archer's approach does, however, assume a fixity in how agency is experienced and how structures shape it.

Returning to the aims of my research and my desire to attend to opportunities for dynamism and change, a concept of agency that underlines the negotiated character of both agents and structures is therefore needed. Reflecting on Bourdieu (1984), King (2000) suggests that his 'practical theory' on the intersubjectivity of social practices, which sees the 'habitus' as an embodied social structure, provides a useful way of understanding the potential for transformation. King asserts this potential is present in the constant renegotiations which characterise social relations. This suggestion provides a useful starting point for moving away from an understanding of agency as the product of tension between structure and agent, and towards a focus on these social practices themselves.

Dépelteau's (2005; 2008) work in particular seeks to critique the poststructuralist emphasis on determinism, which he describes as 'killing the possibility of progress based on freedom and critical reflexivity' without embracing co-deterministic understandings (Dépelteau 2008:55). Dépelteau rejects Archer's assertion that agency is a property attached to individuals, suggesting rather that it is an effect of social 'trans-actions'. Whether these trans-actions are 'agentic' is dependent on the nature of their impact and interpretation within broader social and relational processes. Echoing King's analysis, in this concept of agency structures are not fixed, but the product of trans-actions being continuously reproduced over time (Dépelteau 2008).

Thus far I have shown that a variety of social theories propose a dichotomy between individual agency and societal structures. This oppositional framing has been increasingly emphasized in research focusing on children and young people because it highlights the way in which the

boundaries which delineate age are socially constructed. The relational character of power and knowledge seen particularly in the work of Foucault (1983), King (2000) and Depelteau (2008) contributes to a picture of interdependent interactions being constantly in flux, with the structures they create centred as a locus of agency. This enables focus on the possibility of agentic action, rather than being preoccupied by the idea of an intrinsic agency as belonging to individuals.

A relational approach such as this can therefore present a useful understanding of young people's agency for two reasons. Firstly, whilst it acknowledges that social context may determine how young people (and indeed their actions) are perceived, it suggests that these structures are not fixed properties, and may be subject to renegotiation if the repeated trans-actions which comprise them are challenged. Secondly, this approach moves away from attempting to establish young people's agency through defining it as an intrinsic feature, and instead focuses on the extent to which they are able to take agentic action.

### **II.ii.b. Operationalising agency: empowerment**

The question that the above discussion raises is what agentic action therefore looks like. A central premise of my theoretical approach to this research is the need for better engagement with how young people understand their own sexuality and exercise sexual agency. This calls upon us to reflect on assumptions which might exist about what kind of outcomes young people's agentic action might lead to. Within the literature, 'agentic' action is defined in a variety of ways, but according to Brown (1995) these may be broadly captured within two spheres of thinking. Firstly, agency is seen as being the key to unlock empowerment, as asserted by Sen (1999); and secondly, agency can be linked to resistance, as emphasized by Deleuze and Guattari (1984).

The rhetoric of 'empowerment' within international development draws upon the Foucauldian emphasis on power relations mentioned earlier. This can be seen within theories which suggest that to be meaningful people's ability to make choices – their agency - must be linked in some way to the capacity for these choices to be realised (Sen 1999; Kabeer 1999; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). This politicises injustice, calling upon those who hold power to be accountable. However, the way in which 'empowerment' is understood and instrumentalised varies enormously within development practice. 'Empowerment' has been used to both call for a focus on the consciousness of individuals, and deployed as a political concept reflecting struggle against oppressive social relations (Luttrel and Quiroz 2009). Critiques of development engagement with empowerment often focus on the depoliticising nature of many interventions, which reduce the exercise of agency to the expansion of individual choice rather than broader transformation (Cornwall & Edwards 2010).

A more nuanced understanding of agency is essential for ensuring that 'empowerment' does not become detached from its political roots. Feminist development theorists have particularly taken up

this challenge through gender analysis. Kabeer's (1999) analytical framework for women's empowerment exemplifies such an approach. She emphasises the exercise of strategic forms of agency by women, arguing that these are needed at both the individual and collective level and must be directed at both individual and structural forms of gendered injustice (Kabeer 1996; 1999; 2008). However, Cornwall and Edwards (2010) criticise development agencies for frequently conceptualising and involving women in ways that reduce their empowerment to economic and political outputs. They argue that such approaches ignore how the specific contexts of women's lives may impact upon the effectiveness of strategies being used and risk marginalising less privileged women. They propose that there is a need to acknowledge the role played by social relationships in enabling as well as constraining women's agency, and to recognise that negotiations which increase room for manoeuvre might be just as much part of their empowerment as overt acts of resistance (Cornwall & Edwards 2010).

Ahearn (2001) echoes this argument, suggesting that historically, definitions of agency have equated it with free will and thus ignored its social nature or else equated it with resistance from domination. She challenges this dichotomy, suggesting that oppositional agency is not the only kind of agentic behaviour (Ahearn 2001). This latter point is emphasized by MacLeod (1992) who suggests that conceptualising marginalised social players as either accepting subordination or being victimised by it simplifies the ambiguity and complexity of their agency, in which they might 'accept, accommodate, ignore, resist or protest – sometimes all at the same time' (MacLeod 1992:534). Such nuance is important to capture within this research. Brown (1995) suggests that it is often argued that a problem with 'resistance' is that it transpires within regimes of power, whereas empowerment at least registers the potential for choices which do not capitulate to these regimes.

Foucault's (1978) insight that resistance is not external to power but is configured by and within the systems of power it contests is a helpful reminder that so-called emancipatory action may unconsciously mirror and reiterate the mechanisms of power which it is intended to oppose. This can be seen in the increasing calls for the inclusion of issues such as sexual decision-making and youth participation in the development agenda in recent years, yet the failure of subsequent efforts to adequately critique and unpack those forces which may be preventative of agentic action in these areas in the first place (Hart 2008).

### **II.ii.c. Operationalising agency: resistance**

The relationship between agency and resistance became significant within cultural and youth studies because of the potential it offers for thinking about how young people relate to the world around them in ways which challenge the expectations of adults. Drawing on the idea discussed

earlier that human agency is productive of structures rather than structures as external to individuals, McRobbie (1978) calls for attention to how choices which may at first glance appear capitulative in fact can be about generating spaces for subversion. This notion of agentic action paints a picture of resistance as a repeated series of negotiations and navigations. This is similar to Negri's (1999) proposal that resistance actually serves to constitute the nature of the structures and norms through which power is expressed, which in itself creates potential for constant remaking.

Deleuze and Guattari (1978; 1987) emphasize resistance in their work on 'deterritorialisation', pointing to the way in which agents make departures from molar forms (or norms) of expression and identity through 'lines of flight'. In the sense that Deleuze and Guattari use it, 'territory' is what gives meaning to a sign or action. An example which this thesis later revisits is that of the wearing of school uniform; wearing uniform in school makes sense within the existing order of school which requires students to perform their student status through such signs. Similarly, girlhood here forms a 'territory' - a pattern of interactions, signs and norms which delineate it as a discrete 'thing'. 'Deterritorialisation' refers to the removal of a sign or action from the context which gives it meaning. Therefore, deterritorialisation is about the un-doing of territory and the signs associated with it; it is a disruptive act. Whilst wearing a uniform in school may denote the wearer as studious, ready to learn and adherent to the rules of school life, wearing a school uniform outside of school may give the uniform (and the wearer itself) a different meaning.

Deleuze (1995) explains that in the process of deterritorialisation, even when subject to reterritorialisation, spaces for further resistance may unfold. Agency lies in the disruption of territories and the move away from a moralistic, imagined ideal. Through 'lines of flight', the actor can dissolve of binaries of normatively 'good' and 'bad' outcomes, and towards new ways of thinking and being. Spaces for such questions and explorations to happen within are essential to transformative change; this has clear implications for development practice. Marginalised people are expected and conditioned to do and be certain things; but they may also reject these. Through 'lines of flight' people might move away from the binaries of what is and is not socially acceptable, and towards acts which are reflective of genuine desires. Such approach is appealing not only for its emancipatory emphasis; it also aligns with the call from within development studies to situate pleasure and positivity within work on sexuality (Jolly, Cornwall & Hawkins 2013). Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the 'vitality', joy and excitement that lines of flight entail enables a new way of relating to oneself 'which resists codes and powers' (1987:103). Once broken off from these recognisable formations of power or identity however, there is the potential for lines of flight to be 'reterritorialised' (1987). Deleuze describes the process of reterritorialisation as one in which the 'deterritorialised' spaces carved out as opportunities for autonomy and agency are recuperated through other deployments of power, to form new loci of control. In the above example

of school uniforms, this might involve rules to prevent girls from wearing uniforms outside of school. Deleuze and Guattari state that territories are constantly constituted through processes of deterritorialisation (and reterritorialization) as part of its negotiation and establishment.

A further concern with an 'agency as resistance' approach is that it does not necessarily lead anywhere meaningful; it can simply become about oppositional action rather than emancipatory change for those who are marginalised within the status quo. However, Brown argues that empowerment as a contemporary discourse coexists with rather than challenges domination because it fundamentally emphasizes that individual worth and capacity is located in the realm of individual feeling. This entirely disregards any relational element as impacting upon one's sense of agency. Brown (1995) suggests that the register of individual feeling is 'implicitly located on something of an otherworldly plane vis-à-vis social and political power', enabling a radical decontextualisation of the subject (Brown 1995:22). Brown points to the chasm which often exists between feeling empowered and actually being able to shape one's life as being a result of this 'un-deconstructed subjectivity'. In such a deployment of the term, the transformative potential of 'empowerment' is lost.

The discussion of empowerment in this section shows the need to conceptualise young people's sexual agency in a way which acknowledges the specifically local, personal ways in which power is experienced, whilst not losing sight of the ways that political and economic conditions and relationships can be both generative and obstructive of opportunities for agentic behaviour. In questioning whether an 'empowerment' framework creates the space to do this meaningfully, I suggest that thinking about 'resistance' may create more opportunities for seeing subtleties in girls' agentic practices<sup>1</sup>.

### **II.iii. Sexual Agency**

My research directly engages with the framing of girls' sexuality within international development discourse. In this section I establish how the theories of agency discussed in the previous section have influenced understandings of sexuality. I particularly focus on feminist engagement with the issue of sexual agency, and the search for a space between theories of sexual subjugation and sexual freedom. I critically reflect on the definition and measurement of sexual agency in the context of international development and consider how these debates are played out in relation to some key areas relating to sexuality, including sex work and disease prevention.

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller discussion of what Deleuze and Guattari's work offers to research on sexual agency with girls specifically is found later in this chapter.

### II.iii.a. Defining sexual agency

Debates between the key schools of thought on agency and structure discussed earlier have inevitably shaped debates on sex and sexuality within feminism. Feminist researchers questioned whether female sexual subjectivity and indeed meaningful consent might exist at all within the structural economic and social oppression of women (MacKinnon 1982; Petchesky 1984). For example, MacKinnon's (1982) work reflects a poststructuralist proposition that the ability to occupy the subject-position of 'freely choosing, rational individual' is mediated by one's access to power (Foucault 1978). It also implies that such a subject-position is a product of a masculine preoccupation with rationality and objectivity (Brown 1995). However, MacKinnon's work is critiqued by Brown as an example of how the power dynamics involved in the production of a normative discourse of behaviour - in this case, that women cannot enjoy sexual relations under patriarchy - enable their projection onto others and generate new regulatory structures. Brown (1995) suggests that MacKinnon's radical feminism mirrors, rather than analytically deconstructs, the specific normative regime of sexuality which has proliferated throughout the twentieth century.

In the 1990s, postfeminists rejected the central 'dominance' theory of radical feminism of the 1980s and 1990s which theorists like McKinnon espoused. This was in great part premised on the idea that sexual liberation had been achieved by this point (Gill 2008). Postfeminism rejected radical feminism for constructing women as 'victims' of men's aggressive sexuality (Genz 2006:334) and called instead for a focus on and celebration of women's sexual empowerment. Whilst asserting that the achievement and promotion of sexual freedom can be considered to be an important feminist goal, the paradigmatic break with feminism that postfeminism represents has also created space for reflection on what sexual agency might look like. For example, Gill (2008) rejects the narrative of 'sexual agency' deployed within postfeminism and popular culture, and presented as evidence of such sexual liberation, as constituting a form of regulation in itself, pressuring women to be 'sexy, sexually knowledgeable and 'up for it' (2008:35). She compares postfeminist discourse to neoliberalism, arguing that 'the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of post-feminism' (Gill & Scharff 2011:7).

This debate over what agency looks like within postfeminism is particularly split over the issue of sex work, where Gill suggests capitalism and sexuality intersect (Gill 2007). Abrams (1995) suggests that agency within feminism is often presumed to be resistance to structures and practices which contribute to or reinforce gendered subjugation. As sex work is often argued to be replicating patriarchal oppression in a way which is harmful not only to sex workers but to other women (Overall 1992), the 'genuineness' of the agency of sex workers is the subject of fierce disagreement. However, sex workers' rights groups have fundamentally objected to being treated

as symbols of oppression (Sloan & Wahab 2000). Snitow et al. (1983) state that middle class 'social purity' feminists have been simply entirely unable to comprehend how their working class sisters might act as sexual agents not victims, and use sex strategically to further their own purposes<sup>2</sup>. Showden (2011) asserts the difference between being reduced to nothing more than one's body – which she suggests is a denial of one's agency - and using one's body in the way one does in sex work. She argues that a feminist argument which denies prostitution the status of labour and reduces women to nothing more than their bodies is 'as essentialising and totalising as the misogynist one' (Showden 2011:153).

Opposition to a radical 'dominance theory' of feminism contributed to the development of a 'sex-positive' strand of feminism. This asserts that women's liberation is integrally about liberation towards a plurality of sexual pleasure, exploration and agency, particularly for those whose sexualities have been historically socially marginalised (Lemoncheck 1997:70). Writing in response to MacKinnon, Vance (1982) argues that dominance theory could foster an intolerant and shaming attitude to sexual diversity and enjoyment. She suggests instead that feminism should 'move toward something: to... increase women's pleasure and joy, not just decrease misery' (Vance 1982:23). Rubin (1984) echoes this, suggesting that whilst one strand of feminism has traditionally seen sexual liberalisation as an extension of male privilege, restrictions on women's sexuality impose high costs on women for being sexually active. Therefore, Rubin argues, a sexual liberation which works for women (as well as men) is necessary (1984:301). A sex-positive approach asserts that sex workers, like all women, are sexually and politically agentic figures rather than the 'passive holes' MacKinnon may be accused of caricaturing (Bell 1994:86).

The interlinking of sexual agency with everyday practices and expressions of resistance is useful for thinking about what girls' actions signify in terms of their broader patterns of social relations. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer possibilities for thinking beyond relationship between individual desire and social norms of sexual behaviour to contemplate the emancipatory potential of sexual agency. They emphasise desire as a productive force, and argue that agency more broadly is intrinsically about desire; in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, desire is seen a precondition for knowledge, because to seek knowledge necessitates an interest. Drawing on this idea, Goodchild argues that the expression of sexual desire is 'key to the social and cultural liberation from oppressive power-formations' (1996:11). By being able to pursue sexual agency, one is also able to resist other social structures which determine norms of sexuality and result in sexualised oppression (Goodchild 1996).

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<sup>2</sup> This agent/victim dichotomy is important to emphasise here, for it appears again later in relation to young people.



However, a major critique of such an understanding of sexuality and gender is that it fails to account for 'negative' desire. Indeed within much of the literature on gender and sexuality, desire is taken as a key measure of agency. Desire and pleasure are central to 'role of bodies in agentic practice' in various theoretical discussions of and relating to sexual agency (Maxwell and Aggleton 2010). Researchers such as Allen (2005) suggest that pleasure is a measure of social power and a vital step to young women feeling agentic within their sexual relationships. However, Fahs (2010) argues that the polarisation of feminist discourse from the 1970s and 1980s into 'sex positives and sex radicals' ignores a third camp, which rails against equating sexual expressiveness with liberation. It is important to recognise in relation to this research context, and the demands which girls may encounter to be sexual, that this itself is very much a valid expression of sexual agency.

Exercising sexual agency is no more a matter of individual freedom versus total hegemony than is agency more broadly, and some caution is therefore required in considering how to conceptualise sexual agency within this thesis. Evidently, context is important. As sexuality is experienced and constituted socially, sexual agency cannot be understood as distinct from the relationships within which sexual encounters take place. It is important that the 'complex nonschema of discourses and economies' that are mediated not only by gender but by class and race and together constitute multiple 'sexualities' are acknowledged (Brown 1995:83) in order to challenge a monolithic framing of 'sexuality'. However, at the same time it is important to ensure that an emphasis on sexual agency is not coopted into complicity with neoliberal discourses of empowerment and freedom, but remains critical of them (Budgeon 2011). As explored later in this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the 'body without organs' and 'deterritorialisation/lines of flight' also promote a non-normative understanding of such practices. This is helpful in ensuring that underlining the productivity of desire does not result in a lack of sexual activity being equated with absence of agency.

### **II.iii.b. Sexuality and development practice**

The above reflections on how sexual agency is conceptualised within the literature are an important starting point for discussing sexuality in the context of international development. Too frequently, these debates focus on the specific experiences of women and sexual minorities in the West, and when extrapolated abroad are insufficiently reflexive about their cross-cultural utility. Mohanty (2002) describes constructions of women within international development as reinforcing a monolithic divide between 'false, overstated images of victimized and empowered womanhood' (Mohanty 2002:528). Such constructions echo the dichotomy presented by the furthest extremes within debates over women's sexual agency; as either victims of a generic patriarchy or entirely liberated from it. They also reinforce racial and cultural difference between women in the West and

in the Global South, with the foreignness of the lives of 'other' women presented as a cause for concern.

Clearly, such portrayals are unrealistic and lack nuance. What they also often disregard is that challenges to gender-based discrimination and violence exist within developing countries. Work by feminist post colonialist scholars such as Mohanty (2002) challenge dominant, conservative framings of the nature of women's sexualities and sexual agency. Indeed, until recently, the majority of research within development has failed to critically engage with sexuality at all, let alone in a way that acknowledges that women in developing countries are more than just passive victims who require external interventions. With these discourses increasingly being interrogated by research that seeks to understand women's lived experiences of sexuality and sexual agency, it is important to critically reflect on the current state of research in this field.

The reticence which development organisations have historically shown towards engaging with sexuality has its roots in Euro-American history and culture, which reinforce an essentialist, problem-focused and universalising discourse of sexuality. The ensuing medicalisation of sexuality as something to be controlled by science and technology is consolidated through what Butt describes as the 'homogenising discourse of development' (2005:183). The result of these intersecting factors is an approach to sexuality within development that treats sex as inherently problematic and sexual diversity as irrelevant. Historically, the intersection of development and sexuality was in the arena of health, originating in imperialist interventions in colonial territories. Shoepf (1995) argues that the work of missionaries in reshaping norms around sex based upon the values of the imperial West was an integral aspect of colonial efforts to dominate indigenous people in sub-Saharan Africa. Missionary ideology was involved in investing new meanings in sexual activity, stipulating that 'female sexuality was exclusively for reproduction, and otherwise deemed "dirty"' (Shoepf 1995:33). Parents and teachers were taught by missionaries to police sexual behaviour and prevent young people from engaging in deviant behaviours such as masturbation, same sex relationships or unmarried penetrative sex 'in order to protect their charges' health' (Shoepf 1995:33).

Foucault (1978) makes some suggestions as to how and why acceptable expressions of sexuality were a target for missionaries in colonial territories, arguing that as quality of life improved in the West during the Victorian era, 'there emerged a pervasive belief that it was in the public interest to manage the body, and through the body, the population' (Foucault 1978:3). This resulted in a focus of concern regarding sexual 'deviance' and 'abnormality', the policing of which was not located just in legal structures, but in the 'normative infusion into everyday knowledge and practice' (Evans 1993:14) of aversion to non-reproductive sexuality. The aim of this was to manage the threat that sexual deviance from norms was thought to pose to a population's strength and self preservation

(Evans 1993:14). Whilst the changing norms of 'appropriate' sex ostensibly transferred all discourse on sexuality from the public domain to the private – specifically the marital bed (Foucault 1978) – the Victorian era also marked the beginning of an increase in state intrusion into matters of sexuality in the form of legislation and political campaigning against 'vice' (Rubin 1984:150). The emphasis on strong family units as the only acceptable locus of sexuality and reproduction fitted in well with Christian theology on morality and marriage. Christian teaching generally understood sexuality simply to mean lust, 'an aspect of fallen humanity to be wrestled with and defeated' (Connell and Dowsett 1992:188). This was expanded beyond Western borders, with colonial subjugation involving 'scrutiny of intimate relations' (Shoepf 1995:33). Missionaries condemned sexuality outside reproduction as obscene, and sought to construct new norms in the colonies that fitted more appropriately with Western discourse that venerated the family as the ultimate foundation of society.

Rao Gupta (2008) points out that one place where discussion of how sexuality affects development is spoken about openly is in the area of medical and public health. This health paradigm results in interventions in sexuality being 'placed under the respectable rubric of health and population studies' (Mama 2007:155) by development organisations. However, the focus on disease control and population planning has meant organisations ignore the other aspects of sexuality and how they affect the lives of people in developing countries. Rao Gupta argues that this is problematic because the conversation is limited to illness and safer sex, 'while sexual health, pleasure and rights remain on the margins' (2000:8). Pigg and Adams (2005) echo this, pointing out that often the way sexuality is discussed is 'medicalised – and some practices and views pathologised – in ways that speak perfunctorily to local values while advancing donor and state concerns about population growth and disease control' (Pigg and Adams 2005:14).

However, this medicalisation of sexuality has been integral to the perpetuation of power dynamics which position Western interventions as possessing answers to the constructed 'problems' of the global South in relation to sex. Griffin (2007) argues that because it depends on its own reproduction and adoption, neo-liberal discourse constructs very limited acceptable types of behaviour and 'neutralises social dislocations by veiling historical contingency in "truth" and the "real"' (Griffin 2007:224). She points out that neo-liberal economic theory, in particular practised by global institutions such as the World Bank, is 'entirely predicated on a politics of heteronormativity that (re)produces the dominance of normative sexuality.' (2007:222). Rather, she argues that its policies are based upon, and tacitly sustain, gendered hierarchies that privilege heterosexual masculinity, serving to 'straighten' development.

Within development discourse on sexual health, frequently the knowledge of local communities has been historically ignored in favour of generalised messages which rarely involve those who

they are aimed at in determining their content and format (Cornwall & Welbourn 2002). Kothari (2005) argues that even when localism drives development work, neo-liberal development discourse co-opts alternative approaches and dilutes them, limiting their effectiveness. Within development discourse, Kothari suggests that 'expertise' and the generalised message that it produces on various issues depends largely on 'reasserting dichotomies that distinguish between the "modern" and the "traditional"' whereby traditional cultures are always seen as outmoded and in need of succession by 'more "modern", inevitably Western attitudes and practices' (2005:427). This is echoed by Butt, who argues that 'development discourse initiated in Euro-American societies propels a heteronormative imperative, buried deep in initiatives such as immunisation, family planning, higher ages at marriage, and lessons in parenting' with risk-taking in sex and relationships being associated with deviance from norms (Butt 2005:183). This risk-minimisation strategy ignores local narratives of sexuality and sex in favour of assumptions about what 'normal' sex is (Ibid 2005:183).

In Tanzania, as in many parts of the Global South, intolerance towards non-heterosexual, marital and reproductive sexuality manifests itself in widespread abortion illegality and violence against people who transgress gender and relationship norms. Although the history of sexual oppression in developing countries stretches back beyond modern history, this current panic over sexuality that fails to conform to a heterosexual and reproductive model has been exacerbated by the international HIV/AIDS pandemic. The idea that any transgression of conservative sexual norms is a Western import is one that has gained notorious political popularity in parts of Africa and seems unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Sexuality has thereby come to symbolize a cultural battleground between indigenous, traditional practices and colonialist, imported behaviour. Patton (1992) points out that 'neo-colonialists can now denigrate homosexuality as a Western import and thereby gain increased control over indigenous economic and social relations by tightening control over the remaining cross-sex relations' (Patton 1992:227). For many people in developing countries, Western ways of doing things, as characterised by the global rise of neoliberal capitalism, have resulted in increased poverty, inequality and diminished wellbeing. The backlash to the fast pace of change that globalisation has thrust upon many developing countries has been the invocation of politicians and religious leaders of 'traditional values'. However, the values espoused by conservative forces 'often reinforce authoritarianism, patriarchy, nationalism and xenophobia, (predominantly victimising) women, and racial and sexual minorities' (Baird 2007:15).

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have seen decades of states being incapacitated and cut back in line with neoliberal economic policies. It is no surprise, given the history of missionary work in this part of the world, that the church has been an important actor regarding development, stepping in to provide services such as free healthcare and education. However, much dogmatic religious teaching, particularly Christian evangelism, reinforces and encourages norms that

contribute to negative attitudes towards sexual diversity. Evans (2001) makes the points that when it comes to sexuality, 'many religions incline towards a cultural enthronement of patriarchal, monogamous, procreative and familiacentric heterosexuality that proves hostile to difference (Evans 2001:104).' Weeks (1981) proposes that the phenomenon of moral panic, which sexual minorities have throughout recent history been scapegoats for, consolidates 'widespread fears and anxieties, and often deals with them not by seeking the real causes of the problems and conditions which they demonstrate but by displacing them onto... an identified social group (often the "immoral" or "degenerate")' (Weeks 1981:14). Rubin (1984) explains that such panics 'rarely alleviate any real problem because they are aimed at chimeras' (Rubin 1984:171), or scapegoats for the real issues – in the case of developing countries, usually political upheaval and social unrest due to poverty and inequality. The outcome of this panic over sexuality is a high level of hostility from African governments towards non-normative sexualities.

This makes incorporating progressive approaches towards sexuality very difficult for NGOs. This stigmatisation of sexuality affects those who are already marginalised. This atmosphere particularly denies sexual agency to young people; Armas (2008) points to taboos around sexuality as a factor in governments failing to incorporate sex education into school curricula, which denies young men and women opportunities to take informed decisions about sex. As such groups are already disenfranchised due to the atmosphere of intolerance a progressive approach is unlikely to be a vote-winner. There is therefore little political appetite at the national level to tackle these issues in a way which goes beyond contemplating their impact on other development outcomes.

Indeed, the only place where there is an increasing discussion of sexuality in the global arena is with regards to the issues of population growth and tackling the spread of HIV. These issues are prominent within development policy-making, and development organisations are able to work with states and donors to come up with solutions. However, there is limited scope for progressive discourse in these areas either. Smyth (1998) points out the fact that population institutions, such as the Population Council, are able to dominate international debate over sexual health and sexuality simply by being much more powerful and therefore influential than other groups such as women's health lobbies. The result is that 'priorities and the terms of debate will be set by the former' (Smyth 1998:232) and the former have more interest in population as an economic issue than one of women's rights.

Discussions that propose a more progressive approach towards sexuality are often met with hostility from world leaders in international negotiations. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo exemplified this polarisation of views, with the Vatican partnering with various African countries to delay proceedings, over the phrasing of various paragraphs in the Programme of Action. These delays were most notably regarding the articles

that referred to safe abortion, which representatives of the Holy See argued was an oxymoron as abortion results in death and therefore by definition is never 'safe' (Johnson 1995). This example demonstrates the way that debate is polarised with progressive groups forced to take a reactive rather than proactive stance (Smyth 1998), meaning that they lose ground to conservative forces which are able to set the agenda.

At the 1994 Cairo Conference, activists from several countries attempted to have the expression 'sexual rights' included in the Programme of Action for reproductive rights, 'but the text approved by the Main Committee... did not include the expression because of opposition from Muslim and other religiously conservative delegates' (Johnson 1995:127). This reflects the divergence of perspectives on reproductive and sexual rights between the population establishment and NGOs. Within international agendas, debate on population is less about sexuality and more about the 'poor women and poor countries' who are seen as responsible for problems rather than agents in their own right (Smyth 1998:230). Both Western and non-Western states have limited debate on population to exclude sexuality as an issue worth considering on its own merits. Over the years the United States has taken firm opposition within international negotiations to various battles for a more progressive approach towards sex and sexuality within development and aid. An oft-cited example is that of the Mexico City Policy or 'global gag rule' announced under Reagan that prevented American aid money being used to fund NGOs that used funding from other sources to lobby for loosening of abortion restrictions, or provide information and advice on or referrals for abortion. This is a particular issue because it has prevented NGOs from supporting grass-roots, local movements within the countries they operated in to legalise abortion (Crane & Dusenberry 2004) something which would be a key step towards NGOs promoting a more empowering approach to sexuality.

Within HIV/AIDS policy, 'neoconservative ideological positions have been particularly influential' (Cornwall et al. 2008:8), with HIV prevention efforts often undermined by regressive policy-making by states. An example here is the conditionality attached to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a large source of United States funding for HIV, explicitly banning money going to HIV prevention and education organisations which do not explicitly have a policy that opposes prostitution (Ditmore 2008:62). A 2006 consultation by the UNFPA with public health professionals, development organisations and sex workers from every region of the world found that 'sex workers' rights – with an emphasis on workers' rights for sex workers of all genders – are key to HIV prevention in the sex industry' (Ditmore 2008:62). However, the UNFPA ignored this overwhelming message, instead choosing to centre its efforts and put its financial clout behind the less controversial approach of preventing women entering the industry in the first place and providing alternative, 'decent' employment – language that in itself perpetuates the stigma associated with sex work. Lancaster (2007) also points out that US aid agreements over recent

years have included stipulations that a proportion of funding for HIV projects goes on promoting abstinence as a means of preventing the spread of the disease. This is typical of what Tan (1995) describes as the focus on condemning 'moral decadence' that characterised many official responses to the HIV crisis. Tan argues that the emergence of a 'moralistic analysis' at the beginning of the HIV epidemic, which was bought into by conservatives and progressives alike, was the direct result of the lack of critical analysis and studies on sexuality (1995:273).

This level of conservatism inevitably has a huge influence, both on the way that organisations choose to approach issues around sex, and what efforts they make to advance their understanding of sexuality. Hulme and Edwards (1997) point out that the quest for aid finance creates pressures for organisations to enter into agreements with donors about what is done in the field. With donors heavily influenced by agendas that are set at the international level, this can mean organisations with a progressive outlook feel pressured to make their strategies as palatable to funding bodies as possible. The financial pressures of aid and concern that projects are 'value for money' and have measurable impact also means 'mainstream development agencies are fonder of one-size-fits-all "magic bullets" that can be scaled up irrespective of setting' (Cornwall et al. 2008:17). This disincentivises the vital task of contextualisation to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and will not have negative externalities, which demands a great deal of time and attention that organisations are often unable to spare.

Within international negotiations on development such as the UN Conferences on Women, progressive NGOs have been able to surmount the boundaries of state and national governments to lobby for visions of women's empowerment, something which has in recent years been cause for disquiet and concern among conservative forces in national governments (Baden & Goetz 1998:26). This has exacerbated suspicion and tension within international conferences, which are often dominated by the interests and priorities of Western states, where these NGOs tend to originate from. Therefore, lobbying by progressive NGOs, particularly on issues of sexuality, can be seen by developing countries as challenges to their own sovereignty. Tvedt (1998) points out that this suspicion can arise when development initiatives are run by organisations that receive funding from the aid budgets of Western countries. This is unsurprising given the history of aid conditionality that has pressured governments to make concessions that advantage Western governments, but puts those organisations which have a genuinely progressive mandate in a difficult position.

The problem with this reactionary type of conservatism is that it has resulted in the debate on sexuality and its place in development work being polarised, with NGOs forced to meet on a middle ground, preventing any real progress from occurring. Religious groups hold sway at an international level and help to set the agenda for what areas of development concern are focused

on. The stigma with which sexuality is tarred in global politics closes the opportunity for organisations to challenge norms and taboos at a local level. On top of this, organisations are constrained by pressures to create easily transferable solutions, which means they are often unable to dedicate time to context analysis. When sexuality is so frequently seen as a controversial issue to be silenced or ignored, there is little incentive for organisations to do this. However, an assumption that development organisations represent universal values that must be balanced with 'local' values is patronising and displays the attitude of homogeneity that causes problems in so many aspects of development work. Indeed, the work of researchers such as Nyanzi (2013) challenges such representations of 'reified African culture' within work to promote sexual rights by Western NGOs in Uganda, which risks failing to acknowledge the implications for activism of everyday contestations of sexualised oppression by non-activists.

As Pereira suggests, sexuality is 'deeply woven into the cultural, economic and political inequalities embedded within development' (Pereira 2009: 23). Yet as Hinton (2004) points out, organisations often assign responsibility for understanding social and cultural influences to an anthropologist or sociologist, or work with local organisations which champion particular causes. However she suggests that this is not enough, as such strategies are often seen 'as an alternative, rather than an addition, to the personal responsibility to build an extended knowledge base' (Hinton 2004:217) and therefore do little to bring reflexivity into the work of staff. Cornwall and Welbourn (2002) point out that changing norms and values about sexual and reproductive health cannot be done simply by raising awareness within vulnerable groups, but by working 'with those whose actions and attitudes affect the vulnerability of others' (Cornwall and Welbourn 2002:9). If the strength of conservative religious forces in development has been their ability to appeal to the desire of people in developing countries to take back ownership of their lives through invoking tradition and culture, progressive organisations must learn from this and also work to understand the history of and social norms around sexuality and avoid the use of culturally inappropriate terminology.

The key to enabling access to sexual rights in developing countries is to put 'the lived experiences and concerns of women, men and young people at the centre of efforts to improve sexual and reproductive wellbeing' (Cornwall & Welbourn 2002:15). NGOs may benefit from undertaking sexuality analyses in the same way as they currently expect to undertake gender analyses, and mainstream the resulting knowledge into all aspects of practice. However, when it comes to work with young people on areas outside those which clearly relate to sexuality in the ways discussed above, such as education, this can be particularly challenging. Bhana's (2014) work on the regulation of sexuality within secondary schools in South Africa draws attention to the disrespect, intolerance and intimidation which characterise school environments in relation to sexual diversity. This is despite South Africa's political recognition of sexual rights and educators' and students' embrace of the state's promise of equality. In countries such as Tanzania, such recognition is



absent at both the individual and state level. A lack of support for sexual rights within the structures that young women must interact with on a daily basis generates some major challenges for NGOs seeking to promote sexual agency. These issues are explored later in this chapter when I discuss youth sexual agency more directly, but are worth noting here in relation to their implications for NGO practice.

### **Sexuality, sexual agency and international development**

Having established some of the themes within current development practice on sexuality, it is possible to now return to the question of how to conceptualise sexual agency in relation to this research. Firstly, it is clear that an emphasis on desire as a metric of sexual agency is not confined to literature on women and girls in the West. Increasingly, the idea of pleasure as a sexual right is also discussed within development literature, most prominently in research undertaken at the Institute for Development Studies (Cornwall, Correa & Jolly 2008; Cornwall & Edwards 2010). An example of the use of pleasure to measure sexual agency in cross-cultural research can be found in Lesch and Kruger's (2005) exploration of the sexual agency of low-income adolescent women in South Africa. Both psychologists, these two authors premise a large part of their argument that the women interviewed demonstrated a limited sense of sexual agency on the finding that they did not take physical pleasure from their sexual relationships, or at least were hesitant to identify with this construction of their selves (2005:1077).

In addition to the critique of desire as a metric of agency discussed earlier, the notion of pleasure as a measure of agency within sexualities research has also been criticized on the grounds of ethnocentricity. Ahmadu (2000) argues that the emphasis placed on particular and often narrowly defined concepts of pleasure is a product of a universalization of Western cultural assumptions regarding women's bodies. Commenting upon the problem of applying these assumptions to other cultural contexts, Kirby (1987) points out the way in which scientific discourse presents sexuality as a biological fact rather than being a social phenomenon. She suggests that the obscuring of the range of historical practices and developments which went into producing what we now 'take to be this essence of our personhood' has enabled the Western constructed body to be universalised. In reality, she argues, 'the pleasures and desires of a body situated in other histories and other cultures may not be so readily comprehended' (Kirby 1987:44). This is echoed by Jacobsen and Stenvoll (2010) who call this a 'conditioned autonomy' in which people are only seen as autonomous when making choices which accord with dominant norms and standards. Development work that fails to acknowledge the plurality of ways in which pleasure is understood and experienced risks missing the ways in which sexual behaviour can be agentive by this definition.

Equating individual pleasure with personal sexual agency is also limited in its usefulness because it fails to acknowledge that pleasure may not be the primary objective of sexual encounters. Indeed, sexual agency might be exercised in ways that, by Western ethnocentric expectations, appear definitively non-agentive. However, practices that may be perceived as harmful can be rendered desirable as a consequence of socio-cultural and gendered conditions, showing the necessity for definitions of sexual agency to be expanded beyond a pleasure-centric model. Scorgie et al. (2009) point out the way in which South African women engage in sexual practices which are not only often uncomfortable or painful but are also linked to increased susceptibility to HIV to enable them to exercise agency within their relationships.

This again raises the question of whether free will is truly being exercised in such circumstances where the presence of sexual pleasure may be questionable. Millett's (1970) application of a Marxist theory of 'false consciousness' to understand the politics of (hetero)sexual relationships is a key example of an attempt to critically assess the validity of sexual choices. Such an evaluative approach to women's decision-making capacities and the validity of their exercises of sexual agency can be seen more recently in the work of Snyder-Hall (2008) and Ferguson (2011), demonstrating that it remains an important ongoing question within feminist research. What is clear however is that the subjectivity of the experience of sexual agency has important implications for how those working within development might reflect on assumptions about what constitutes pleasure and agency, and in particular the terminology they use. For example, Scorgie et al. (2009) suggest that what is understood in Western terms by the phrase 'sexual health' might be translated in other contexts as being about successfully attracting men and sustaining personally and economically rewarding relationships with them.

A further way in which sexual agency is defined is in terms of sexual assertiveness, which within the research is generally conceptualised as being evidenced by measures such as deciding to use contraceptive methods to protect oneself from disease and pregnancy (Morokoff et al. 1997). To presume that avoiding the 'risk' of pregnancy, for example, will be a priority across the world may be a problematic assumption. Such an approach ignores research that indicates the importance of context for how decisions about contraceptive methods are perceived and negotiated. The equation of sexual agency with with predetermined 'positive' outcomes such as avoiding pregnancy may fail to account for alternative decisions by women and girls. Research by the Rowntree Foundation in the United Kingdom for example suggests that early pregnancy is in many cases consciously planned by British young mothers from deprived backgrounds as a way to change their identity and access more opportunities (Cater & Coleman 2006). This underlines that sexual choices are not considered only in rational terms of immediate costs and benefits. Such decisions are deeply enmeshed with one's socio-economic status and context, and the perception of one's future life.

Within developing countries, where patriarchy occupies forms which are often more explicit and damaging to women's rights, sexual agency becomes even more difficult to pin down. If decisions over sexual relationships are dictated by the need to access social and financial resources rather than disease prevention as various research, including Silberschmit's (2001) work on adolescent girls and 'sugar daddies' in South Africa, the need for an understanding which is more holistic and integrated than current approaches allow for is made even more evident. Pigg (2005) suggests that the hygienic and scientific language of family planning creates a space in which the state and development organisations can discuss sex without actually discussing sexuality. She argues that 'medical' interests in the sexual behaviour of citizens are invariably linked within policy discourse to modernisation and are therefore inherently political in nature (Pigg 2005). The result of this framing in terms of health and individual behaviour change is that does sexual agency risks being instrumentalised as a means to the achievement of other development goals, rather than emphasized for its own intrinsic worth.

As mentioned earlier, a focus on gender relations provides a backdrop for much of the research which discusses the constraints to women's agency. Feminist research increasingly challenges the notion that women are defenceless when it comes to structural gendered inequalities and the influence that they have on how their personal (heterosexual) relationships are played out. Leclerc-Madlala's (2003) research into transactional sex highlights women's agency in navigating contexts of gender and economic inequality. She suggests that Black South African women may consciously choose multiple partners and engage in transactional sex to assert their own interests and access goods and services, perceiving the use of their sexuality to do so as a pragmatic adaptation to modern and costly urban life. Through this, Leclerc-Madlala challenges the notion that transactional sex is a matter of survival, situating it instead as a response to the cost of modernity and consumer culture (Leclerc-Madlala 2003).

Although work on issues relating to sexuality has increased within development, particularly over the past ten years, it can be seen that there remains a lack of nuance when it comes to sexual agency. This is arguably in part due to a dominant framing of women in developing countries as inherently lacking room for manoeuvre when it comes to their sexuality. It is clear that there is a lack of reflexivity within certain sectors of international development when it comes to sexuality. This exacerbates ethnocentric assumptions about what sexually agentic behaviour looks like for young women. A risk of this approach is that by presuming certain (often marginalised) groups in developing countries to inherently lack any sexual agency, the complex ways in which they may participate in reforming and refocusing the social regulation of sexuality and creating spaces in which agency can be exercised may be missed or misunderstood.

## **II.iv. Young people and agency**

With teenage girls being the focus for this research, I now move on to a discussion of 'youth'. I consider how an understanding of young people's roles and perceptions of their capacity to do and be certain things is shaped by particular notions of their agency. I suggest that despite increasing critical engagement with the social and historical construction of youth within some fields, policy approaches to young people's limited agency remain a product of a naturalised and universalised understanding of their place in society. I highlight how tensions over young people's agency are played out within the context of development practice and reflect on the terminology used when describing young people's lives within international development policy literature.

### **II.iv.a. The construction of childhood and its implications for agency**

Within American and European cultures, children have tended for much of the last two centuries not as agents, but as inherently passive. This is emphasized in Western depictions of young people in developing countries in which passivity is indeed idealised, represented as a normative role for children. Zelizer (1985) suggests that in the discourse of modernity, children who are seen to be 'properly loved' are kept in a state of unproductiveness and dependency. These framings of childhood are the product of historical changes within Western societies, including the changing economic priorities of a utilitarian state in the 1800s followed by increasing middle class charitable attention to the presumed 'plight' of working class children who were not 'properly protected and dependent' (Cunningham 1995:136). Hendrick (1997) argues that these notions are key features of 'childhood' as it is currently constructed. He suggests that 'childhood' has often been presented as a natural state which occurs everywhere, and that the (normative) family, the government and public services have an integral role in perpetuating this idea (Hendrick 1997).

These notions of children's inherent vulnerability and incomplete nature have been challenged through the 'new social studies of childhood' that emerged in the late 1980s / early 1990s. The approach to childhood pursued by pioneers of this field emphasises children and young people as agentic actors in their own right who have the capacity to construct and determine their social lives (Prout and James 1990). This framework seeks to reveal the socially constructed character of popular discourse on childhood, showing that children are indeed a product of various political and social changes which have taken place over time (Hendrick 1997). A variety of international cross-cultural studies have taken this stance, demonstrating the utility of the new social studies of childhood for understanding young people's agentic participation in their own lives. A useful example of this is Katz's (2004) longitudinal ethnographic research with children in Sudan. She argues that whilst childhood is evidently affected by social, environmental and political changes, children are active social actors and are able to resist, show resilience to, or rework these changes

to their advantage. Her conclusions further echo the earlier discussion of the negotiated and relational character of agency.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) was an important part of a shift in policy discourse on childhood and youth in many ways mirroring the approach taken within the new social studies of childhood. The UNCRC provides a basis for what Warshak (2003) describes as the 'empowerment rationale' of children's participation. In such an inception, children are 'beings' in the same way as adults are and not just 'becomings' who are valued only in relation to their future roles as citizens (Qvortrup 1994). This emphasis on young people's participation has been taken up within international development particularly since the early 2000s, as a facet of the broader participation agenda. This has its origin in critiques of 'top-down' development which became popularised within work and research during the 1990s (Chambers 1983; 1997). A central aim of the participatory agenda was to challenge the power dynamics of development processes and build in mechanisms for those affected by these processes to be agentic in determining them (Mohan 2001). However, the extent to which these aims have been realised by participatory approaches has been subject to critical reflection, most notably by Cooke and Kothari, for failing to be transformative or empowering (Cooke and Kothari 2001). It is unsurprising then that work on young people's participation has been similarly critiqued; White and Choudhury (2007) suggest that the structure of the development industry itself can result in the co-option of young people's voices into a pre-established agenda, often in ways which reinforce class and racial divides rather than challenge them.

Increasing reflection on the practice of 'children's participation' has highlighted the diversity of experience amongst those deemed to be in the period of life referred to as 'childhood'. Development organisations have begun to acknowledge that older children often have more opportunities to participate in a broader range of areas of life than younger children. However, within international development, anxieties over the transitions to adulthood leads to problematisation of various dimensions of young people's lives. When it comes to teenage boys, concerns about unemployment and violence shape the types of initiatives which seek to engage them. Work with girls, in contrast, responds to fears about young motherhood and promiscuity; this will be discussed in the next section. Given these anxieties over ensuring that older children make a secure transition to adulthood, the extent to which strategies to involve them in decision-making are actually about meaningfully affirming agency is questionable. Despite the lip service to the importance of their participation and even empowerment, a variety of legal and political mechanisms ensure that young people under the age of eighteen and who can still be classed as 'children' are prevented from obtaining autonomy over their own lives.

Within the UK context, social work literature refers to 'sociocultural mediation' (Ahearn 2001) as a process by which systems with an interest in the welfare of young people potentially function to compensate for a deficit in children's agency. This model presumes the authority of such systems

to determine both what constitutes agentic behaviour on the part of children as well as to act on their behalf. Lam (2013) suggests that whilst the diverse capacities of adolescents may be recognised officially, whether or not they can exercise agency remains dependent on context and recognition by others in more powerful positions. Lam points out the way in which children might be judged legally competent yet still remain subject within law to being overruled by their parents if they refuse medical treatment. Drawing on Dépelteau (2008), Lam argues that the act of being judged competent does not make a child an agent. Their agency is in reality determined by the complex social contexts within which their consent in various situations may be hindered or facilitated (James and James 2004:160).

Lam's proposition raises the issue that whilst young people's agency may be acknowledged within development practice, when their agency subverts broadly held beliefs about a 'normal' childhood practitioners may feel the need to attempt to correct and curtail it, commonly employing a discourse of protection. Young people are presumed to be being agentic when they behave in ways which do not challenge norms of childhood. Jefferson (2012) suggests that agency is symbolised by 'young people's capacity to act positively in relation to surrounding structures' (Jefferson 2012:250). This echoes the literature on sexuality discussed in the previous section, which emphasizes positive experience as being key to definitions of agentic sexual behaviour. Davies (1991) suggests that unless they explicitly signal coherence and rationality, choices which are not understood by others can be perceived as evidence of a lack of some essential aspect of one's humanness. This perhaps helps to explain how young people's choices are undermined and dismissed; they are not perceived as fully rational adult humans anyway (Lee 2001), and from this starting point it is easy to dismiss their decision-making as both product and proof of this status.

Bordonaro (2012) points out that when young people act in ways which are seen as problematic their agency is downplayed as being 'thin' or 'tactical' because 'children are not supposed to engage in what is deemed as unchildlike behaviour unless under extremely constrictive circumstances' (Bordonaro 2012:422). Bordonaro argues that there exists an unresolved tension between the acknowledgement of children's agency within research and the ways in which their participation and citizenship in society is encouraged (or indeed in certain areas assessed, discouraged, and managed) in practice. He suggests that despite the establishment of the agency-centred paradigm within childhood research, and despite the fact that as Jeffrey argues 'we are now well accustomed to reading stories of children and youth who protest against injustice, often in difficult circumstances, or who express agency simply through their own resourcefulness' (2012:245), when young people's actions go against the grain of current morality, the extent to which we affirm their agency is challenged (Bordonaro 2012). This poses a particular dilemma within international development, where the UNCRC and the children's rights approach which has influenced so much of the work of organisations engaging with young people as agents provides a highly normative and, Wyness (2004) argues, ethnocentric, decontextualised framework.

## **II.iv.b. Child, adolescent, young person: reflections on terminology**

The above section troubles several assumptions about childhood, in particular the notion that young people's agency is specifically correlated with chronological age. Whilst 'child' has come to carry with it a clear connotation of innocence and passivity, terms such as 'adolescence', 'youth' and 'young people' are increasingly used within international development literature to denote a more active role for those who are yet to reach 'adult' status. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child describes a child as any person below the age of eighteen (UNICEF 1989), delineating this time of life as separate from 'adulthood'. Near universal adoption of the CRC by UN members states has served to disseminate this understanding of childhood. Categories for older children and young adults are more complex. Although there are no formal or statutory interpretations, the WHO proposes that 'adolescents' are aged between 10 and 19, 'youths' between 15 and 24, while the term 'young people' is used more generically to describe anyone aged between 10 and 24 (WHO 2013).

The blurriness of these terms can lead to inconsistencies within development practice; a child in one project may well be an adolescent, young person or youth in another. It is also important to note that age ranges associated with the terms 'adolescence', 'youth' and 'young people' also clearly share a chronological interstice with what is also defined as 'childhood'. The meaning of these terms then cannot be captured by simply looking at the age ranges they are associated with. Within the literature they are clearly used to draw forth different types of responses from an intended audience, and therefore which is deemed most appropriate will depend on these aims. Such definitions have an emotive role in guiding the reader of such accounts as to whether they are to consider the young person being described as capable of taking an active role in determining their own lives or not. Hendrick (1997) argues that definitions of childhood are socially contingent; they are a product of political and social action through which definitions and categories of people, in this case on the basis of age, have been put together. In the same way, the meaning of age-related categories such as 'adolescent' 'youth' and 'young people' are contextually and ideologically driven, rather than being reflective of the biological age of the children or young people that the organisations seek to engage.

As Jackson and Scott (1999) suggest, the specific risks that young people are presumed to require protection from serve to define the characteristics of youth itself. This is exemplified in the different ways in which the terms 'children' and 'adolescents/youths/young people' are used in the literature, and is particularly pronounced within literature which makes reference to issues of a sexual nature. Where the literature refers to children and childhood, references to sexuality emphasize the passivity of those involved, often focusing on exploitation and the need therefore for protection. Vulnerability is integral to development discourse because it justifies interventions. This reflects Cunningham's (1995) argument that within dominant Western narratives, the ideal childhood is

constructed as a time of dependence and retention within the domestic sphere. 'Childhood' as a framing is frequently invoked in literature that emphasizes protection as a development priority – whether from female genital cutting, early marriage and pregnancy (CARE 2012), or recruitment into sex work (UNICEF 2009).

In such cases, the perceived weakness and inherent desexualisation associated with the romantic figure of the 'child' is used to justify a protective rather than engaged stance on issues relating to their sexuality. The notion of active sexuality is not acknowledged within this stance; as Duschinsky and Barker (2013) suggest, innocence is presumed to be protective, and so sexualised knowledge is implied to degrade this protection. However, emphasis within development is given over to sexual health and reproductive issues, rather than young people's sexuality as an issue in its own right. These protective initiatives also often focus particularly on participants who can be described as 'girls' and even the 'girl-child' (UNICEF 2013). The effect of these framings in relation to development policies aimed at teenage girls is explored in more detail in the next section of this piece, but examples of this type of approach include the ODI's work on preventing adolescent pregnancy (Presler-Marshall & Jones 2012) and DFID's funding for raising marriage ages and encouraging the adoption of 'modern' contraceptive methods (DFID 2012).

As my research focuses on young women, it is important that these terms are not only subject to such critical examination, but that some efforts are made to identify what terminology is preferable. With 'adolescent girls' being enthusiastically identified within development literature and specifically targeted in development interventions, the connotations of sexualised vulnerability that are attached to this group increasingly serve to define it (Fine 1988). Discussing the emergence of the sexualisation debate in the UK, Duschinsky and Barker (2013) point out the 'semantic ambiguity' in the use of the term 'girls', which is used to identify and often conflate young women and children. Additionally, the term 'adolescence' is used within other social sciences as a biologised, naturalised period, an idea that is at odds with the epistemological framework of this research. However, the term 'young women' is also problematic, being found within sexual and reproductive health literature in reference to those who are older and able to assume identities of wives and mothers, as opposed to 'girls', who have 'early pregnancies' or 'child marriages'.

This research is specifically interested in girls to whom development policies and projects often do not attribute the status of 'young women'. Such girls may remain both discursively and chronologically within the parameters of 'childhood' (UNICEF 1989) yet may themselves reject the notion that they can be grouped in with much younger children. To further complicate things, in the previous chapter I introduced Sanama, who was a schoolgirl at aged 19. For various reasons which will be explored in the following chapter, when I consider the context of the research and discuss the ways that childhood is framed within Tanzania, girls who go to school may not always be under the age of eighteen. For these reasons I have chosen to refer to 'teenage girls', a term which is not widely used within development literature.



## **II.v. Young people, sexuality and sexual agency**

In this final section I bring together some of the issues raised so far regarding agency, sexuality and youth to think critically about how young people's sexual agency is presented within the context of international development policy and practice. I consider how the discourse of childhood and youth excludes opportunities to account for young people's sexual agency, before looking at how this shapes assessments of girls' choices and actions.

### **II.v.a. Anxiety over young people's sexuality**

Young people's sexuality tends to be framed within much of the literature as being inherently problematic, with girls in particular being subjected to a variety of pressures which by the nature of their gender and age they struggle to navigate. As discussed in the previous section, in literature focusing on the sexuality of adolescents who are legally unable to consent to sexual activities because they are under the age of consent, focus is often given to ways to prevent their sexual exploitation and abuse. The possibility that they possess any agency regarding their sexuality is generally disregarded. This is in part due to naturalised assumptions about childhood which presume that young people are inherently sexually passive. It has already been suggested that as a demographic young people are frequently subject to naturalised assumptions about what constitutes age-appropriate behaviour. This ontology of the 'child' is often presented as authoritative, and acts to naturalise and validate existing relations of power between adults and young people (Gore 1993) as well as limiting the discourses available for explaining young people's actions. For young people who are above the age of consent, focus tends to be on normative sexual development as part of a transition into 'healthy' adulthood.

In sexual politics, Rubin (2011) suggests that a feature of the past twenty-five years is 'the extent to which legitimate concerns for the sexual welfare of the young have been vehicles for political mobilisations and policies with consequences beyond their explicit aims, some quite damaging to the young people they are supposed to help' (Rubin 2011:37). Youth sexuality is currently discursively framed within a Western context in a way that emphasises 'sexualisation', particularly with regards to girls. As discussed in the previous section, reactionary framing of issues such as in the sexualisation discourse frames young people's sexuality in a one-dimensional way and this limits the solutions available (Loseke 2003). Faulkner (2010) suggests that media constructions of 'sexualisation' as problematic rely on historically constructed notions of childhood's inherent innocence. Hawkes and Dune (2013) comment upon this gendering of notions of 'sexualisation', and suggest that it is intimately linked to Anglophone narratives of protection and danger regarding

young girls' sexuality. They contend that the discourse of objectification undermines possibilities of agency and autonomy of girls.

What Hawkes and Dune (2013) also argue is that this approach also ignores girls' collusion in objectification; a dimension which is essential to account for if we are to reflect on young people's sexual agency in ways that move beyond a celebration of empowerment. Powell (2010) suggests that this limited discourse of objectification is enabled by the absence of a more inclusive feminism that might deliver alternative models for an active, desiring female sexuality. When young people's sexual behaviour fails to conform to expectations of childhood as protected and innocent, there is a risk that strategies will focus on corrective measures that fail to acknowledge that young people may be acting in response to particular contextual conditions. Boyden (1997) highlights how social policies and social work tend to give priority to individual causation of 'social problems', downplaying the broader economic, political and cultural conditions which shape phenomena.

It is therefore impossible to adequately reflect upon young people's sexuality without considering the social context in which it comes to be constructed. Rubin (2011) argues that 'laws and policies that are supposed to protect children have been used to deprive young people of age-appropriate and eagerly desired sexual information and services' and that almost any right-wing platform is 'framed as promoting children's safety and welfare' (Rubin 2011:38). Robinson (2012) suggests that the regulation of children's access to knowledge of sexuality is linked to their innocence means through which the 'good' heteronormative adult citizenship subject is constituted and governed (Robinson 2012:257). She argues that discourses of childhood innocence are used to justify this denial of access to sexual citizenship (Robinson 2012). This underlines the need for attention to context to play a key role in contemplating girls' sexual subjectivity in this research.

### **II.v.b. Sexuality, youth and development discourse**

As discussed in the preceding section, teenage girls have been historically represented within development discourse as victims of sexuality. Work in this area tends to be guided by an assumption of passivity, with the result of this being a closing off of any space to reflect upon their possibilities for sexual agency. Simultaneously, in recent years the development industry has placed increasing emphasis on the empowerment of young people, with girls in particular singled out for attention. Campaigns such as Nike's 'Girl Effect' emphasize the potentiality of 'adolescent girls' for economic development through a series of videos exhorting investment in them immediately. However, these popular campaigns maintain the traditional portrayal of girls as sexually vulnerable; the 'Girl Effect' presents them as having only two outcomes available to them, either doomed and wasted as a result of their sexuality and poverty, or 'compliant and community beneficial forms of waged and unwaged labour' who will repay any investment made in them multiple times (Murphy 2013).

The vulnerable and passive yet agentic and empowered teenage girl presents an apparent dichotomy which must be overcome. 'Dividing practices' enable the subject to be 'objectified by a process of division either within (one)self or among others' (Foucault 1982) - by onlookers in the West for example, to whom such images are intended to appeal. These practices enable categorisations such as 'good' and 'bad', or 'empowered' and 'disempowered'. However, I suggest that this dichotomy is reconciled within development discourse through feminist discourse. The widespread appeal of the 'Girl Effect' is in part due to its use of feminist language and allusion to gender justice. This reaffirms the agency of the (Western) viewer in recuperating an authentic victim from her local context, to enable her to take advantage of the opportunities provided by development interventions (Switzer 2013). This results in the construction of the figure of the teenage girl as an opportunity rather than as solely a victim.

The sexual vulnerability of girls in poorer countries which is central to representations of their lives within development discourse is thereby not negated by the discourse of empowerment. This is because the norms of girlhood are deployed to maintain both vulnerability and empowerment narratives, rather than being challenged and remade. Switzer (2013) points to the 'missionary ethos' contained within the media associated with the 'Girl Effect', in which the viewer is compelled to invest emotionally and financially in reductive representation of 'real' agentic girls, with no incitement or indeed incentive to 'politically engage with the complexities of other girlhoods' (Switzer 2013:357). It is within these contexts that the possibilities and options available to girls are not nearly so obvious or straightforward as the fabled schoolgirl-investment-opportunity implies.

Brown (2015) elucidates the way economic restructuring and the pervasiveness with which neoliberal rationale within development discourse means human life is valued in terms of its merit for the continuance of capitalist modes of production. The state pressures of economic exigency generate an environment in which school is expected for girls if they are to take their place as human capital in a developing society; the details of which are explored further in Chapter Three. At the same time, as explored in Chapter Four, the need to meet more immediate needs can make it difficult for girls to actually remain in school. However, complicating this further is the fact that oppressive gender regimes can mean school is the the space of safety that is often presumed with development narratives. This is one of the many limitations of the notion of agency offered by the 'Girl Effect' branding of young women's potential as reliant on their empowerment through existing available interventions; it reproduces a particular locus and system of power rather than disrupting and remaking it, and thus retains the status quo in relation to both representations of adolescent girls and of development processes involving them. It also raises the question of whether we should dismiss those girls who are not best placed to succeed in ways sanctioned by this discourse as simply not trying hard enough.

Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) draw attention to the way that beliefs about women are encoded in particular myths and fables within development discourse which can be compelling but

also problematic. Indeed, a 'postfeminist' discourse (Whelehan 1995), in which specific forms of feminism are recruited to sustain the neoliberal climate in which poverty and vulnerability are reproduced (Ringrose 2007), helps to reconcile dichotomous representations which challenge broadly accepted 'truths' about girls. The expansion of reproductive choices for girls as an integral part of a neoliberal initiative to include them in the global economy as the ideal worker and consumer also helps to explain why certain choices are normatively perceived and promoted to girls as 'good' or 'healthy'. McRobbie (2004) describes this approach as 'free market feminism' in which girls become the 'poster-boys' for an individualised, success-based discourse. Shain (2011) critiques the representations of teenage girls within this discourse, suggesting that the emphasis on the culture and the presumed universal violent patriarchal oppression in the global South seen within development discourse on 'adolescent girls' serve to decontextualise gender relations and depoliticise poverty and divert attention away from 'the structural causes of inequalities and relations of exploitation and privilege' (Shain 2011:9).

Another limitation of this approach is exemplified in the celebration of teenage girls whose sexuality and behaviours appear to fit with normative understandings of how they should behave as 'empowered'. Their reasons for pursuing acceptable trajectories are not scrutinised because the assumption is that they make such development-sanctioned choices out of freedom. There is a lack of acknowledgement that all choices are subject to a variety of constraints and influences, which enables the external viewer to contrast the undesirable and desirable behaviours of teenage girls. This often results in a framing of girls' identities as being a comparison between choice on the one hand versus force, victimisation and exploitation on the other (Jacobsen & Stenvoll 2010:90). Jacobsen and Stenvoll (2010) propose that this constitution of 'victim-subjects' as different from and inherently inferior to 'autonomy-subjects' does not necessarily mean that those assigned as 'victim's do not possess any agency. Instead, they suggest that this opposition enables a conditionality of this agency, judged by service providers on the basis that only certain choices will count as valid.

The figure of the 'adolescent girl' as she is currently constructed within development discourse as a starting point for working on issues relating to sexuality is problematic. Not only is she objectified as an ideal of neoliberalism through her potentiality for capitalist reproduction (Brown 2015); she is also defined by expectations and ideals which valorise a norm of femininity that is located within a heteronormative imperative (Butler 1990). As Fine points out, a discourse of active, desiring sexuality is often not available to young women and girls (Fine 1988:36). Efforts to measure teenage girls' sexual agency also focus on looking for certain forms of sexual expression and behaviour, rather than by engaging with what girls themselves experience as agentic, which may counter pre-set expectations. Work on the prevention of early pregnancy efforts are frequently based on the assumption that early pregnancy is due to teenage girls lacking the capacity to negotiate their sexual experiences and that they therefore are exercising agency when they do not

get pregnant (UNFPA 2013). However, the assumption that becoming pregnant or indeed engaging in sexual activity at all is non-agentic behaviour is a problematic one. Sensoy and Marshall (2010) suggest that what is seen as a 'good' outcome is determined by Western discourse on what 'civilised femininity' looks like. This discourse dictates the ideals, characteristics, behaviours and values that it is presumed all girls around the world should aspire to (Sensoy & Marshall 2010).

This literature shows there is a gap between work on young people's sexual agency in Western contexts and its satisfactory exploration in the context of development interventions. Given the increasing nuance with which sexuality is encountered within international development, such limited conceptualisation of sexual agency in relation to young people is disappointing. Indeed, when it comes to educational initiatives in particular, sexuality is still too often seen as tangential or problematic and there is still work to be done to bring these areas together. This is seen in the failure of critical research on sexuality more broadly to influence development initiatives with young people, but also in the ongoing hesitation of organisations to engage with young people's perspectives on how they experience sexual agency across diverse contexts. It particularly highlights the problematically limited and normative representations of teenage girls' sexual agency in current discourses within international development. Whilst the work of Switzer (2013) and Shain (2011) speculates on the potential influence these narratives might be having on work being done 'on the ground' in developing countries, there remains a distinct lack of research into the kind of impact being felt by development practitioners and by teenage girls themselves. Van Reeuwijk's work on love and relationships goes some way to addressing this, but does not consider in depth the role of development interventions in influencing norms and behaviour.

### **II.v.c. Exercising sexual agency**

Given the constraints that social norms are understood to impose within theories of agency, considering how agents can and do negotiate these structures is of value because of the implications for broader transformative change. This calls for the need to attend to girls' experiences directly. Ringrose and Renold's (2011) research into the narrative accounts of 'adolescent girls' regarding their sexual encounters takes such an approach. An understanding of sexuality as negotiable and indeed negotiated, even within a highly regulatory framework, emerges here. Ringrose and Renold argue that a binary of 'real/not real' is insufficient in accounting for the role of fantasy as a space where girls could resist subordination and develop their political subjectivity (Ringrose and Renold 2011:461). As Walkerdine (1997) notes, the idea that the narratives through which the self is produced are either 'false' or 'truth' does not have the whole measure of the subject themselves, who may 'struggle to find their own stories through which they

might articulate other kinds of stories to understand their own formation and transformation' (Walkerdine 1997:176).

Even within schools, which are promoted within development discourse as spaces which generate some degree of freedom from cultural expectations, girls remain subject to restrictive gender norms. Ringrose and Renold's (2011) research emphasizes girls' fantasies and desires as a significant space where resistance to 'postfeminist' imperatives can occur. The importance of considering girls' sexual subjectivities in the context of any research into their sexual agency and the way in which they interplay with social context and norms - and also what these fragile 'lines of flight' might look like. Such an approach raises interesting questions for international development in relation not only to how teenage girls negotiate and resist local gender norms, but also how they might navigate the constructions of girlhood and adolescence produced by international development discourse. With my own research being undertaken within a school run by a development organisation, it is even more important to consider how such a multi-layered context will shape girls' perceptions of desirable courses of action.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to the 'becoming-girl' in a way which critiques rather than aligns with the temporally linear way that teenage girls' development into womanhood tends to be framed within the literature. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the figure of the girl is described as a 'line of flight' in and of herself, in that she exists and is defined by her 'in-betweenness' as a product of not belonging to any accepted age groups (1987:276). Whilst I would dispute this, given that adolescence has been recently defined, identified and targeted within development in ways described earlier in this chapter, this idea of 'becoming' as a site of agency and disruption holds some potential. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Soitrin (2005) suggests that 'becomings' (such as the 'becoming-girl') 'do not stop to participate in the organized forms we can recognize as men and women, children and adults... (this) explodes the ideas about what we are and what we can be beyond the categories that seem to contain us' (Soitrin 2005:1999).

The dynamism of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to the relationship between agency and 'becoming' is part of its appeal as a foundation for the development of a conceptual framework for this research. Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the 'body without organs' (1981) can also be helpful in understanding how 'deterritorialisation' as described earlier can occur, and provides a way to think critically about not only how the category of 'girls' is organised, but how it can be resisted and (re)formed by girls themselves. The 'body without organs' is a 'discontinuous, non-totalised series of flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, durations' (Grosz 1993:170). Beyond challenging the conceptualisation of feminine identity as static and binaristic, the concept of the 'body without organs' also presents opportunities for thinking about the ways in which one's body can transcend existing imposed categories and norms. Deleuze suggested that 'organs' in a biological sense develop and come into being (within the foetal stage of the human body for example, or the development of embryos inside eggshells)

without an obvious guiding design. The metaphor therefore constructs people as 'organs' inherently possessing the capacity to generate their own forms, rather than waiting passively to have forms imposed upon them.

In the same way that the idea of the 'body without organs' rejects the intrinsic subordination of the body to existing norms and practices of gender, Deleuze and Guattari's other metaphor of 'lines of flight' explored earlier in this chapter rejects the hegemony of existing modes of being. 'Lines of flight' constitute powerful exercises of agency precisely because of their lack of adherence to available scripts. Lines of flight do not require an action plan; it is their unexpectedness which renders them agentic. In this way, girls' explorative and tentative moves away from norms of girlhood constitute agency because of their potential to disrupt homogeneity and predictable trajectories of sexuality precisely due to their lack of 'destination'.

## **II.vi. Theorising young people's sexual agency: a conceptual framework**

Despite the move towards engaging with sexual issues within international development, youth and sexuality remain areas where engaging with critical and resistant forms of agency can be challenging. It can be seen from the discussion of agency in the first section of this piece that its utility as a way of understanding how people make choices about their lives is implicitly linked to judgements over the nature of sexual outcomes. Within development discourse, one of these metrics of evaluation has come to be about whether these outcomes can be considered 'empowering' or not. When it comes to young people, agency is often framed by a moralising normativity, resulting in mediated recognition which measures choices in relations to a framework of age-appropriate behaviour (Bordomaro 2012). Sexual agency is a dimension of agency where it is particularly difficult to find consensus within the existing literature, yet increasing attention is being paid to the need for young people, particularly young women, to be able to access information and services relating to sexuality and sex. Girls' sexual agency - and importantly how development organisations understand it - evidently therefore has major implications for how such efforts are designed. It is therefore essential that its meaning and use are explored.

This chapter has suggested that within development discourse, young people and girls in particular occupy far ends of a spectrum. They are either seen as victims of circumstance and structure, or as active autonomous agents framed through the discourse of individual choice. How agency is conceptualised remains very much in line with pre-defined development objectives (Switzer 2013:347) rather than led by the opinions and experiences of girls themselves. This is perhaps in part due to the ways that sexual agency has tended to be defined in work with adults. The measures of sexual assertiveness and pleasure which the literature shows are often used are based on the assumption of subject-positions which are often simply not available to young people (Foucault 1982). This cannot only be attributed to 'culture' as understood to mean 'foreignness', as

is often implied within popular discourse on the sexual and reproductive outcomes of girls in developing countries. Development research originating in Western 'culture' often operates from a starting point which positions young people as sexually passive. This is exemplified in the current representations of young people's sexualities, which are beleaguered by anxieties over 'sexualisation' as a thing done to vulnerable young people which disrupts otherwise appropriate sexual development.

These boundaries which are set around what is deemed to be 'inappropriate' for young people tend to focus not on their wellbeing, but in relation to their instrumentality for achieving other outcomes. The regulatory and exclusionary framework of sexuality that this generates is troubling in a number of ways. Within development, the intersection of feminism and neoliberalism can be linked to the construction of young women's transition from school into the workforce without the disruption of 'early motherhood' as paramount to their empowerment. Rather than being a goal worthy in and of itself, expanding 'sexual agency' can be seen as a way of pushing girls towards particular outcomes regarding their sexual lives. This is seen in the way that work on sexuality, where it does happen, tends to be about reproductive health and fertility control. In its framing of sexual agency, post-feminism has unfortunately created a space for co-option by neoliberalism, as well as a retooling of feminism as a vehicle for self-expression, with the 'self' defined as both consumer and consumable (Gill & Scharff 2011). To reiterate an earlier point, the concern I have here is that the use of pre-defined measures of sexual agency such as use of contraception or delayed pregnancy are not about supporting identity and choice but about creating more forms of control for the purposes of serving a neoliberal agenda, cloaked within a discourse of agency. If a gendered understanding of agency comes up against such walls in the debate over the politics of sexuality, it is unsurprising that youth studies offers little in the way of emancipatory approaches either. The section on young people's agency above critiqued depictions of young women within development discourse as possessing only a limited and non-transformational capacity to make choices. This form of 'agency', which is cultivated through what is seen as appropriate support in line with accepted norms of behaviour, enables teenage girls to navigate socially and culturally located forms of gendered marginalisation. However, it fails to identify ways in which they might change their surroundings through their actions and interactions, underscoring instead future benefits to themselves as adult women. This seems to imply that the agency exercised by teenage girls is preparatory, and can only be properly realised and capitalised upon by their adult selves. This disregards the very real experiences of social, economic and political injustices and pressures which teenage girls do not find themselves exempt from simply due to their age.

Given these dilemmas, how can we better conceptualise girls' agency? Drawing on Depelteau (2008) I first want to assert that agency has little to do with 'freedom' in the neoliberal tradition. Indeed, one of the main challenges highlighted within the above discussion is that approaches to



sexual agency run the risk of being used to depoliticise engagement with teenage girls on issues relating to sexuality. Their emphasis on the role of individual choice in determining sexual behaviour enables organisations to ignore the social, political and economic contexts of young people's lives and the role of these structural factors in influencing decisions they make about their bodies. Therefore, agency is more usefully comprehended as being the ability to use and strengthen social and relational capabilities, perhaps in a way which might eventually resist and challenge notions of individuated agency which restrict the subject-positions available to young people.

The first section of this piece highlighted two pitfalls which must be avoided in developing an framework for thinking about girls' sexual agency. Firstly, the approach I take in this project must account for alterity and the factors mediating different girls' experiences of agency, whilst avoiding both neoliberally motivated individualism and the in-group homogeneity of identity politics. Secondly, it must be political in nature and consider how change and transformation can emerge as a result of agency, whilst also not ignoring the nuanced accounts given by teenage girls themselves which are so often subsumed within metanarratives. It is clear that approaches to girls sexuality which sideline their agency and subjectivity are likely to fail in achieving outcomes which reflect girls' own priorities and interests, and therefore cannot be deemed 'empowering'. There is a risk that without care and attention to balancing it with attention to girls' broader context and relationships, a Deleuzian approach to conceptualising agency could lead back to a focus on the individual. This is because of the emphasis that Deleuze and Guattari place upon the freeing experience of identifying and pursuing personal desires and escaping from the restrictions of the socially constituted self, as described in the process of becoming a 'body without organs' as the ultimate experience of emancipation. This is problematic because it would enable us to side step thinking about material change and social justice. A resistant and critical form of agency must avoid a (neo)liberal emphasis on a depoliticised individual, vis-a-vis Brown's argument that such a discourse is deeply problematic for thinking about human freedom and wellbeing (Brown 2015). The conditions within and in relation to which resistance is formed therefore should remain important considerations within a conceptual framework for theorising girls' agency.

Such a framework must also account for the ways in which context both shapes and is reshaped by individuals actions, interactions and transactions. As asserted earlier, a relational understanding of agency allows focus on the potential to change one's material and social conditions rather than changing one's own desires in response to them. A relational understanding of agency for thinking about both young people's experiences of opportunities for agentic behaviour and about sexuality is evidently useful in accounting for the complexities of their lives. There is no specific exploration within the existing literature as to what a cross-culturally situated and relational understanding

might focus on with regards to how sexual agency is experienced by girls. This research seeks to address this by taking an approach which is guided by these considerations.

An understanding of agency as therefore both contextual and relational is perhaps the most useful for approaching issues of sexuality. Such an approach to young people's sexual agency would go beyond any distinction between agents and structures, in the way that, for example, Depelteau's (2008) relational approach attempts to do. Whilst this approach is beginning to be used within development research to conceptualise young people's agency, work which analyses the relational way in which young people experience and negotiate sexual agency is often limited to a Western context. Development work tends to remain focused on homogenised structural constraints as discussed by Shain (2011). In an attempt to make sense of how girls may exercise agency in the context of this project, taking relationality more seriously is a meaningful starting point.

Girls' pursuits of freedom are always at risk of being recaptured through the very relationships and structures that they may seek to move beyond. A critical and contextually situated understanding of how girls make decisions is important for understanding how girls' perceive their constraints and therefore what can be done to negotiate them, and one which can only come about through in-depth research with girls themselves. Working from girls' perspectives enables the identification of ways to challenge and remake the political and social structures which construct young people's sexuality, rather than simply rewriting these narratives within existing limited boundaries which have proved problematic in the first place.

## **II.vii. Conclusion**

This chapter has reflected upon some of the limitations in current frameworks for thinking about girls' sexuality and agency. Recent years have seen increasing attention to the empowerment of teenage girls on issues relating to sexuality. What appears to be missing in development discourse is attention to girls' own experiences, desires and aspirations. The absence of agency in discussions of girls' sexual empowerment may be down to political and cultural sensitivities, or organisations' presumptions about what agentic outcomes look like for girls. It may be driven by models which link girls' empowerment with economic participation and productivity. However, genuine sexual agency may not fit with what we expect appropriate young sexuality to be like, or what is perceived as rational. This calls for a reevaluation of how we conceptualise agency. Thinking about 'resistance' rather than 'empowerment' offers the opportunity to move beyond such normative thinking. I have suggested that the tools for such a relational, contextualised and dynamic approach are provided by critical theory.

The significance of agency as a key conceptual framing for this research cannot be understated. In the later discussion on methods I reflect upon how the framework discussed here for thinking about agency and empowerment has shaped the way in which I myself chose to engage with participants. Firstly however, given that I have argued that it is necessary to pay closer attention to the effects that girls' socio-economic and political environment have on their opportunities for and experiences of agency, the following chapter presents an overview and discussion of the fieldwork context.



### **III: Context**

#### **III.i. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented a discussion of sexuality, youth, agency and empowerment which was grounded within the existing literature. It was critical of international development praxis for its lack of engagement with girls' perspectives, and I questioned the instrumentalist, individualistic and depoliticised ways in which the term 'empowerment' is often used. I also called for more contextualisation of girls' lives in order to better understand their agency and decision-making. The objective of this chapter is therefore to establish the 'real world' political, social, economic and cultural context of Tanzania, and more specifically the location where I sought to investigate the questions arising from this reading of the literature.

I decided to carry out the fieldwork for this project in Tanzania for a number of reasons. I suggest there that development interventions and national policies attribute a particular significance to girls' sexualities as symbolic of Tanzanian progress. Building upon the previous chapter, I suggest that tensions may exist between different understandings of girls' sexuality held by girls' communities, development organisations working with girls, and government departments. This complexity is important to establish because it provides a framework for understanding the sometimes contradictory and unexpected trajectories of teenage girls themselves which are explored later on in this thesis.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss how state policies, laws and government initiatives over the years relate to the vision that successive leaders have held for the development of Tanzania and its future place in the world. I explain why schools are frequently settings for both development interventions with girls and for research with young people. I focus on some of the debates, issues and challenges within education policy, paying particular attention to policies which have implications for adolescent girls and their sexuality. I also give an overview of the priorities identified by international non-governmental organisations working in the country regarding the lives of young people. Establishing the significance of schools for development policy is important for contextualising later discussion in this thesis of how education is experienced by girls.

I then turn to a description of the field sites where I undertook fieldwork. I give an overview of the economy, religion, tribal makeup and politics of Arusha Region. I consider the way in which the experiences of people living in the region, and in the towns of Arusha and Kavuni where I spent most of my time, have been shaped by globalisation and related changes within local job markets. For a number of reasons I suggest that the increased visibility of Western influence through development initiatives and international business makes this region a particularly interesting place for doing research into girls' sexual agency.

I then move into a more detailed discussion of my main field site of Tufurahi School in the town of Kavuni, where I lived between September 2014 and April 2015. I discuss the specific tribal, religious and socio-political dynamics of the town itself. I also describe the school where I conducted my research, showing how its function and goals as a development project must be understood in relation to both this local environment and the broader development landscape. This leads me to a discussion of local and cultural understandings of sexuality within the tribes which live in and around Kavuni and whose daughters made up the majority of the student population at Tufurahi School. I reflect upon how these have changed over time with reference to local experiences of development, globalisation and modernity.

### **III.ii. Policy in Tanzania**

It is important to give an overview of the school system and educational policy in Tanzania for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of my fieldwork time was spent doing ethnographic research in a private secondary boarding school. It is therefore important that the emergence and popularity of such institutions and their significance is understood in relation to the discourse on education in Tanzania and broader shifts in the perception of the value and purpose of schooling in light of economic and social change within the country.

Secondly, schools are where development discourse implies that girls 'belong'. Not only is childhood naturalised as a time for play and school rather than work (Boyden 1990) but girls' education is positioned within development narratives as essential for their later (age-appropriate) participation in the economy. Government policy, particularly towards primary education, has promoted the importance of expanding school access to girls, and NGOs call attention to the issues preventing girls achieving the objective of gender parity in educational attainment. Education at secondary level is a space in which there is anxiety over girls' inclusion, with the previous government noting that 'increased access (to secondary education) especially for girls is expected to be one of the most effective measures to address issues of population dynamics, including reduction in the fertility rate' (Government of Tanzania 2010:67).

#### **III.ii.a. Education policy in Tanzania**

In many public buildings and schools in Tanzania, large photographs of Julius Nyerere are still prominently hung on the walls, captioned with his honorific of 'Teacher'. Within Tanzania, Nyerere remains a popular figure, regardless of debate over the extent to which he might be considered successful as a President. Despite his death in 1999 the ideology he espoused continues to influence political discourse and approaches to development. In what is now widely known as the Arusha Declaration of 1967, Nyerere publicly condemned the exploitation and inequality inherent

within Western capitalism, and called instead for national unity and the pursuit of an agrarian based collective economy based on ideals of hard work, kinship and community self-reliance (Spalding 1996). I begin this discussion of the context of my fieldwork by mentioning Nyerere because of his significance not only for development in Tanzania, but also in shaping narratives on Tanzanian identity in ways which continue to have implications today. Nyerere placed an emphasis on family and kinship bonds and the unity of all Tanzania regardless of religious and ethnic identity through various initiatives. This included the designation of Swahili as a national language, and his efforts to draw support from across the tribal spectrum, rather than shoring up support from particular tribes like many political leaders elsewhere in the region (Stoger-Elsing 2000).

Nyerere's government instituted the immediate abolition of racial segregation in schools and later establishment of universal primary education from the age of seven. Such efforts were at the forefront of a vision to ensure that the 'purposes of Tanzania' regarding autonomy and liberation from colonialism could be served (Nyerere 1968). With the objective of creating a unified and modern Tanzania in mind, Nyerere implemented various policies which were based on economic centralisation and state control over all sectors of industry. This included generous state investment in human capital through education. Jennings (2007) describes Nyerere's vision of Tanzania as a developmental state 'with every ounce of its energy and attention... dedicated to raising standards of living' (Jennings 2007:71). Funding for education was increased dramatically and between 1960 and 1986, gross primary school enrolment rates tripled (Bendera 1998).

However, structural adjustment programs adopted by numerous African countries in the 1980s led to a huge reduction in available funding for social services across the continent, including Tanzania. As in many countries, this had severe consequences for the quality and accessibility of education in Tanzania. The reversal of the government position on free primary education and the reintroduction of fees at primary level had the effect of reversing the progress made on enrolment rates through the 1960s and 1970s. By the end of the 1990s, fewer than 60% of primary school aged children were actually attending school (Wedgwood 2007).

In 2001, under pressure to overhaul its education system, the government of Tanzania implemented its first five year Primary Education Development Programme. The push for this initiative was in part a result of international commitments to meeting the Millennium Development Goal on primary education, and made primary education in Tanzania technically free for all students once again. As seen during the 1960s and 1970s, this resulted in significant increases in enrolment rates (Sumra & Katabaro 2014). Students still have to pay out for uniforms, books and examination fees however; costs which can easily mount up. Government policy now stipulates that between the age of seven and thirteen, children must study primary education.

My research is more interested in secondary education. After primary school, young people can go through four years of secondary education from aged thirteen until seventeen years. Advanced

secondary education for those who pass their secondary certificate examination takes a further two years, and is necessary in order to go to university. If students progress through school in this linear fashion, passing all the necessary examinations on their first attempts, they leave primary school at age thirteen, complete secondary school at age seventeen, and finish advanced secondary education at nineteen years old. However, USAID suggests that only 22% of primary school students are in the appropriate school year for their age (EPDC 2010). Data from 2004 show 61% of girls are 'over-age' for the year group they are enrolled in. This proportion rises over time, due to the challenge of completing each school year successfully (EPDC 2010).

The significance of the frequent incongruence between chronological and social age was mentioned in the previous chapter and is discussed in the following section on girls in school. First, the reason this happens must be unpacked. To obtain a place in a government secondary school, it is necessary to pass the Standard Seven Primary School Leaver's Examination (PSLE) and be selected by a school on the basis of one's grades. However, this is the first point at which it becomes more challenging for many students to continue with their education. Despite the increase in primary enrolment rates that resulted from the Primary Education and Development Programme and subsequent investment and expansion efforts, the number of students passing the Standard Seven Primary School Leaver's Examination (PSLE) has fallen dramatically in recent years (EPDC 2010). Over the past decade the PSLE has tended to be passed by fewer than half of all students, with boys achieving higher pass rates than girls. There is also a clear urban/rural gap in outcomes, and socioeconomic status of one's family has a further impact on the likelihood of passing (Kassile 2014).

If a student fails to get a place at a government secondary school, they cannot take the first of the government examinations, and instead must take a Qualifying Test as a private candidate, often seeking the necessary education to take the QT through private schooling or tuition centres. In line with the vision of education being for the purpose of educating citizens to serve the country as a whole, the Education Act of 1969 paved the way for the nationalisation of private schools, many of which had been run by churches. One of the principles of this was to remove barriers to education for the Muslim population, as many of the established private and religious schools had been established by the church during the colonial period. However, during the 1980s this policy was reversed. The majority of secondary schools established since 1985 are private institutions; by 1991, 56% of all secondary students were attending private schools (Barkan 1994).

The private school sector continues to be an important component of the education system in Tanzania today. Even government secondary schools charge fees, and given concerns over the quality of government schools and education in Tanzania in general which have become part of public discourse through being frequently raised in the media, large numbers of students choose to enrol in fee-paying private schools instead. Wedgwood (2007) suggests that the growth of the private tuition industry is a symptom of the lack of faith many have in the quality of the government



system, as even students who attend government schools are willing to pay extra for out of hours classes to improve their chances of passing examinations.

Whilst the main language of Tanzania is Swahili, and primary schooling is taught in Swahili, currently the language of instruction at secondary school is English. A fierce debate has raged in the press and amongst teachers and policymakers over the past couple of years as to whether or not secondary schooling should be taught in English or Swahili. Students from wealthier backgrounds are often sent to private 'English medium' primary schools which introduce English from age seven, with the result that once they reach secondary school they are able to 'get a head start' due to their familiarity with the language (Sumra & Katabaro 2014:27). Whilst English is taught to all students in primary schools, teachers themselves - many of whom are drawn to the profession due to the perceived relative ease with which it is possible to secure employment and limited opportunities elsewhere (Mkumbo 2012) - lack competence and confidence in using the English language to teach. Students therefore often leave primary school with only a basic vocabulary. A 2012 World Bank cross-national comparative study into the proportion of teachers with minimum content knowledge of their subjects found that only one in ten teachers in Tanzania could complete all the questions on the primary language curriculum they were teaching (World Bank 2013).

### **III.ii.b. Girls in school**

As described above, a significant proportion of girls enter secondary school at a later age than expected. This is due in large part to the complexity of the transition from primary to secondary school and having to repeat years of primary school if they are not successful in their yearly assessments. A widespread lack of primary school places delays student enrolment, and has the knock-on effect of students also applying for secondary school at a higher age than expected by the state. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where there are fewer and poorer quality schools. This means that girls in their early twenties can still find themselves in education. As mentioned above, another factor in this age variation is that from secondary school onwards government schools charge tuition fees on top of other expenses. This puts schooling beyond the cost of many families and causes additional delays for girls in accessing education, as their families must take time to try and acquire the financial resources needed. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, 'childhood' identity is often biologically defined by chronological age (Holloway and Valentine 2000). The variety in ages seen at secondary school level in Tanzania is at odds with the association of the 'schoolgirl' figure with youth and vulnerability seen within development narratives on girlhood in developing countries.

Families that can afford the costs of secondary education prefer to send female children to boarding schools because of the belief that girls do better away from home (Meena 1996). By

remaining at school during term time, they are not under pressure to assist with cooking, cleaning and caring for other family members (Meena 1996). Development organisations working in Tanzania often therefore choose to support girls' education through building school dormitory facilities. In Arusha District where my research was conducted, various boarding schools registered as charities make links between being in a boarding environment and the protection of girls from pregnancy, early marriage and female genital cutting. Some schools also retain girls during the holidays, when they are felt to be at their most vulnerable or do outreach work with girls' communities in order to ensure that they have sufficient support to continue with schooling and return after the holidays (Equality Now 2011). In the 1980s, government policy increasingly focused on building boarding schools rather than day schools, but not only for the reasons described above. This also fitted into its policy of nation-building; children from different tribes and villages would be brought together, only speaking Swahili as a mutual language, and learning English together (Brock-Utne 2000). Therefore the move by NGOs to promote boarding for girls is not without precedent.

Research by the Tanzanian government seems to validate the concerns of NGOs that a major task facing schools is that of preventing girls from doing things which may cause them to drop out. Data collected in 2006 by the Ministry of Education states that pregnancy accounted for 21.9% of secondary school drop-out cases and 5.5% of drop-outs at primary school over the previous five years (MEVT 2007). In 2014, Human Rights Watch produced its own report on early marriage in Tanzania, emphasising among other things the severe impact it has on girls' access to education, which it says has the effect of 'limiting girls' life opportunities and their ability and confidence to make informed decisions about their lives' (HRW 2014:4). Drawing on data from 2008 - 2011 collected for the Demographic and Health survey, the EPDC states that 13% of girls aged between 14 and 17 years in Tanzania are married. They conclude from this that being married is a significant predictor of whether a girl will attend school.

The linkages between education and empowerment are often echoed within official Tanzanian government statements that are available in English, but references to gender and girls specifically are not often found within Swahili language grey literature. Tanzania's Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has put out statements saying that they recognise the link between investment in girls' secondary education and going on to achieve the Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and women's empowerment (TIE 2011). Indeed, the Ministry's national guidelines for 2010 declared that the country 'cannot just stand aside while it is losing the most precious contribution of many young Tanzanian women to the development of the country because of early marriages and pregnancies' (UN Tanzania 2010). However, the 2014 Education Policy only addresses the need to think about gender in passing, mentioning that like HIV, the environment and public-private partnerships, it has relevance for education and the development of Tanzania which 'need to be included in education policy' (MoEVT 2014).

Prior to going to Tanzania, I found that local NGOs that work specifically on education tend to focus on 'marginalised groups' such as minority tribes and the urban poor. Girls are often included within this remit given the challenges they are perceived to face in succeeding in school, but I was surprised to find that they did not tend to be singled out for the type of attention that they continue to receive within international literature. As I began to make connections in Arusha and speak to a variety of people working in government and private schools, I found this to be a trend across the board. The majority of specific 'girls education' projects increasingly focus on rural and Maasai communities (ActionAid 2012) due to the broad perception that women and girls in this tribe face particular challenges. There are also a number of organisations in Arusha focusing on issues relating to sexuality working on providing health education and services including HIV/AIDS testing and treatment, information and advocacy on pregnancy and female genital cutting. Many of these organisations administer projects that are funded by international donors and/or through alliances and partnerships which see them delivering services on behalf of Western NGOs.

These shifts in how NGOs engage with girls is likely to be a result of the perceived success of Tanzania in meeting the Millennium Development Goals on gender. Increased gender parity in school enrolment rates may be shifting funding priorities away from encouraging girls into education and towards other 'problem' areas. However, education remains an important issue for NGOs working with girls and young women. Whilst other dimensions of girls' lives may increasingly be a primary focus for NGOs, there remains a tacit assumption that school is the place where girls should be, and that efforts should be made to hold firm on the advances made in recent years. The impact of issues such as pregnancy, sexual health and early marriage is often framed as related to whether they are attending school or not; for example, in the use of statistics that show girls who attend school are less likely to marry young and more likely to educate their own children.

Whilst Tanzania's education reforms have enabled it to meet the goals of expanding access, the scarcity of quality schooling in rural and poor areas and the costliness of private tuition particularly affects girls' ability to continue studying past primary school. It is pertinent to my research to note here that as a result of both these policy limitations and the resulting drop-out rates, there is a great deal of prestige in being a young woman who is able to attend secondary level schooling. The 'schoolgirl identity' that Switzer (2010) notes in her work with teenage Maasai girls in Kenya is relevant to my project because of the rates of poverty and the limited opportunities available to girls in the area where I conducted research. As I discuss later, such difficulty of access makes being a schoolgirl a significant status symbol.

### **III.iii. People in Tanzania**

#### **III.iii.a Childhood and youth**

Like many countries in Africa, Tanzania is seen as a nation of young people. Half of Tanzania's population is under the age of 18, with 45% being under the age of fifteen (WHO 2013) and adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age make up 23% of the population (UNICEF 2012). The challenges young people face in Tanzania's changing and globalised society is framed as cause for particular concern. UNICEF suggests that a major issue facing young people in Tanzania is that its government is seeking to reduce the deficit in its budgets and that social sector cutbacks 'seriously weaken the prospects of the current generation' (2012:2). UNICEF's report into the state of adolescence in the country also suggests that child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are too high; too many young people drop out of school, often due to these reasons; and they do not have enough knowledge about preventing HIV/AIDS. UNICEF also calls attention to the way in which 'protection threats and risks - such as exploitative labour, trafficking and sexual violence - seem to be more widespread in adolescence than among younger children' (2012:4).

In order to consolidate the investment made in younger children through the Millennium Development Goals, it is felt by UN agencies that it is essential to invest in tackling these issues in order to improve progress in fighting poverty, inequity and gender discrimination, and 'help rescue a generation from poverty' (UNICEF 2012:6). As discussed in the previous chapter, it is notable here that these risks relate to adolescence rather than younger childhood. Adolescence is a period when it is possible to acknowledge young people's sexuality for its social significance and engage with issues relating to sexuality to some extent. Regardless of chronological age, adolescence is socially constructed as a time of becoming and transition, so behavioural expectations about age are anchored within normative notions of what it means to be a girl or a boy in Tanzania which can also be constraining. This means that acknowledgement of teenage sexuality tends to be only in ways that 'stick to the script' on what constitutes age-appropriate and gendered behaviour.

Whilst schools do have access to a government-approved holistic sexuality education curriculum designed to be taught to young people from the age of seven, the UNFPA found that only around a quarter actually implement this curriculum at any point during their schooling. When teachers do introduce the topic, they tend to only cover HIV/AIDS and STIs rather than issues related to relationships, sexual behaviour and sexual rights (UNFPA 2014). Mkumbo (2012) argues that this gap is in part due to discomfort and difficulty among teachers, who despite iterating their commitment to ensuring students are informed, report that they do not feel confident or knowledgeable enough to implement the curriculum. As will be explored later, adults in my field sites strongly iterated the need for girls to abstain from sexual encounters in order to protect their reputations and to enhance their social capital through education rather than relationships. This is

an issue which is similarly noted by Setel (1999) Snyder (2009) and Bell and Payne (2009) in their respective ethnographic research in the region.

In contrast, at the 1995 International Conference on Population and Development, in which Tanzania was a participating state, a Program of Action was agreed in which the importance of 'meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality' was recognised (UN 1995). Indeed, a puritanical approach by adults towards sexuality has not always been the case within Tanzania. Meena (1996) suggests that the introduction of formal systems of education within Tanzania disrupted and undermined traditional forms of sex education within communities which happened as part of initiation into adult society. She argues this happened through the introduction of new norms around appropriate ages at which young people were permitted to take on certain roles, and that as a result of this the government did not attempt to replace this knowledge within the school environment (Meena 1996). In Kavuni town, the Iraqw tribal practice of 'marmo' - an initiation period specifically for girls to be educated on sexuality and relationships by elders - has almost disappeared, with little attention paid to how to replace such systems of knowledge production.

HIV/AIDS is prevalent within Tanzania, and the most widely cited statistic is that around 5.7% of Tanzanians live with the illness (UNICEF 2010). Although prevalence in Arusha region is estimated to be lower than the national average, in the 15 to 19 year old age bracket young women in the region are twice as likely to have the disease as young men (TACAIDS 2008). The social stigma of HIV/AIDS and the criminalisation of groups who are particularly at risk such as sex workers and men who have sex with men causes problems with access to treatment (OHCHR 2009), as do laws around 'gross indecency' which are used to punish homosexual activities (HRW 2008). The Tanzania Commission for AIDS (2013) promotes 'increasing the age of sexual debut, reducing the number of sexual partners, and using condoms' as the core of education efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

These issues imply restrictive norms around sexuality in Tanzania. However, the extent to which these norms influence young people's behaviours in the region appears to be a complex issue. The research of Wight et al. (2006) in northern Tanzania leads them to suggest that whilst norms promoted by church teachings state that it is inappropriate for young people to have sex until they have left school, young women are not actually expected to abstain from sex until marriage and indeed in practice do not always do so. Rather, sexual respectability is emphasized, which is equated with not overtly initiating sex. Girls who do engage in relationships are encouraged by family and peers to negotiate encounters on a 'quid pro quo' basis to secure various financial or material advantages (Wight et al. 2006). Echoing this, ethnographic research exploring sex among young people from age 14 in rural northern Tanzania suggests that young people are positive about the economic and social benefits of engaging in transactional sex, as are their parents (Leclerc-Madlala 2010; Wamoyi et al. 2011). Multiple sexual partnerships among young people are

also relatively high in the region, with around a fifth of young women and over a third of young men having more than one partner concurrently (Fehringer et al. 2013). Such apparent contradictions around sexuality make this an interesting context to consider how girls navigate simultaneously restrictive and permissive sexual norms.

### **III.iii.b. Tribalism**

Tanzania has around 120 distinct tribes. It is frequently noted by both politicians and academics that their ethnicities are not politicised, unlike in many African countries, which makes for peaceful coexistence between tribal groups (Jerman 1997). However, since 1967 it has been illegal to include tribal identity in the recording of population demographics, and therefore there are no official data on the ethnic makeup of the different regions, districts and wards of the country. Malipula suggests that, in part, Nyerere's vision of socio-economic equality and fairness emphasised a need to break with the colonial past, in which tribalist 'native authorities' had been established and encouraged as part of a 'divide and conquer' mentality by the British (2014:61). Malipula argues that various steps were therefore taken to ensure that tribal associations did not dictate politics. This included the ending of collecting such data in census information and even discouraging mention of the tribal background of persons of interest in the media. These moves fitted with Nyerere's vision of Tanzania as a modern, egalitarian nation-state (2014). Indeed, it has even been suggested that the deliberate policies taken to emphasise Tanzanian identity over tribal heterogeneity has been beneficial for rural development based around collective action, such as community fundraising and other small scale initiatives (Miguel 2004).

My research was not explicitly focused on any tribe in particular, but by virtue of where I spent the duration of my fieldwork I happened to end up primarily working with girls from the Iraqw tribe. It should be noted that regardless of the official line on the irrelevance of tribal heritage, one's tribe is considered to be an important aspect of individual identity, and there are strong stereotypes about the behaviours associated with certain ethnicities. When the topic arose in informal conversations, I was often told that tribal intermarriage remains discouraged in many rural areas because of the impact on lineage and kinship relations, with such history remaining an important aspect of identity. Historically, Arusha is the home of the Arusha tribe, and the town where I did the latter part of my fieldwork is home to the Iraqw. As a major city which has been changed greatly over the years by migration and urbanisation, Arusha is now a melting pot of not only tribal difference but international diversity. The small town of Kavuni where I continued my fieldwork was far less ethnically varied, though increased migration from even more remote areas towards the town noted earlier has inevitably introduced some diversity. Kavuni is populated mainly by the Iraqw tribe, but I got to know Chaga, Pare and Datoga people living in the town, including teachers at the school where I conducted fieldwork.

Amongst the students at the school, around three quarters were Iraqw, but there were also several Maasai girls. The Maasai have particularly become symbolic of gender and development challenges in Tanzania both locally and internationally, and have a significant presence in Kavuni. The effects of this on the type of development projects in the town and surrounding areas is impossible to ignore, both for myself but more relevantly for my fieldwork participants. Indeed, whenever I told people that I was doing research related to gender or sexuality, it was always either assumed that I would be doing research with the Maasai, or that to obtain information on these topics I should endeavour to speak to them. Female genital cutting within the tribe and the gender dimensions of ongoing land ownership furores have been the subject of international attention in the last few years. Within Tanzania the Maasai are singled out by people from other tribes as being most in need of development assistance, something I will return to in a later chapter. This is despite the fact that issues which are seen as important development challenges for the Maasai, such as the status of women and girls, are also challenges for other tribes.

Within the town a small number of development projects existed. These initiatives were on a much smaller scale than in Arusha but still had a significant presence within the community. Again, these primarily focused on the perceived needs of the minority Maasai population. These included a secondary school run by a German NGO which run specific initiatives aimed at the educational advancement of Maasai girls. There was also a 'safe dormitory' project for Maasai girls from the surrounding villages attending one of the local government schools to enable them to securely stay within the town instead of traveling the long distance to and from the Maasai settlements each day. A large hospital, which was a joint American-Danish venture set up to provide affordable health services for the local community and to address the health problems of the Maasai, was situated just outside of the town. However, due to the hospital also providing opportunities for qualified doctors from the United States to spend three months at a time as volunteers, sharing skills and training with local doctors, it was noted in the district for the quality of the healthcare available there, with expatriates travelling there from Arusha for treatment. It must be noted that in focusing on the specific challenges facing the Maasai such development projects tended to reinforce a certain narrative about their particular marginalisation.

### **III.iii.c. Religion and spirituality**

As in many African countries, religion is an important part of everyday life in Tanzania. This was equally the case in Kavuni. As with tribal identity, the 1967 census was the last occasion in which data were collected on people's spiritual beliefs, but it is estimated based on the data collected then that Christian and Muslim communities remain roughly equal in size across the country. A

third of people in the 1960s identified their religious practices as being based upon spiritual beliefs linked to tribal customs (Heilman & Kaiser 2002) but there are signs that this is no longer the case. Research by the Pew Forum in 2010 for example found that many committed Christian and Muslim Tanzanians 'also incorporate elements of African traditional religions into their daily lives' (Pew Forum 2010:4). In the Northern area of the country where Kavuni is situated, most people report belonging to a Christian church. In her ethnographic research with the Iraqw, Snyder has written about the importance of membership to a Christian church as a symbol of modernity. She contends that following the Catholic faith, with its international diaspora and visible headquarters in the West, is perceived by young people in this part of Tanzania as being a way of accessing globalised citizenship and being part of something bigger (Snyder 2009).

The majority of the girls at Tufurahi School belonged to the Catholic church. Around seven or eight were members of a Lutheran congregation, and attended a church close to the school. A further five or six girls - the numbers slowly increased over the time I was there through recruitment - belonged to a small and extremely pious sect known as Uamsho Wakristo wa Tanzania (UWATA). UWATA required attendance on several evenings a week for prayer sessions, and also held lengthy weekly seminars with external speakers on topics such as the Devil, how to pray effectively for personal wealth, and the anxiety of Jesus for the souls of women who wear nail polish. The school Matron and all but one of the teachers were members of UWATA.

In his ethnographic work in the region, Setel (1999) observes the way in which tribal cultural values and moral ideologies are 'seamlessly' interwoven with and bolstered by the practice of Christianity (Setel 1999:57). Around two months into my stay at the boarding school one of the girls began exhibiting behaviour that was interpreted by the other girls and teachers as signs of demonic possession. This resulted in allegations being made against another girl in the school that in a fit of envy, and provoked by an argument over a pot of hair gel, she had cursed the possessed student using witchcraft. Green and Mesaki (2005) suggest that far from being dismissible as a 'hallmark of the un-modern' as it is approached within much writing on Africa, it is more useful to understand witchcraft beliefs as an 'aspect of contemporary disparate modernities' through which many people make sense of the world around them (Green and Mesaki 2005:372). They also point out that in Tanzania, with its emphasis on national culture and unity and policies to dismantle tribalist factionalism, witchcraft 'transcends local and national culture and is part of daily life in all social setting and in all locations' (Green and Mesaki 2005:373).

What is notable here is not just the prevalence of beliefs in witchcraft, but also that these beliefs exist somewhat harmoniously alongside people's allegiance to 'modern' religious communities. Whilst these allegiances are easily reconcilable for Tanzanians themselves, there is certainly a perception of certain beliefs as causing problems for development in relation to social justice and equality. An example of this is the recent international anxiety over and funding for the protection of albinos in Tanzania, who have historically been targeted by traditional healers for their perceived



magical properties. As Green and Mesaki suggest, the persistence of witchcraft beliefs are often proposed as being at odds with modernity and this dichotomy is used to cast believers as 'not worthy of full global citizenship' (2005:371). The response of the Tanzanian government, keen to be perceived as neutral on religious matters, has been a blanket banning of 'witch doctors'.

Beliefs in witchcraft and the supernatural are understood to often exist somewhat harmoniously alongside people's allegiance to 'modern' religious communities such as the Catholic church which many of the girls attended. In this context one's modern identity does not therefore presume a rejection outright of belief in witchcraft and demons, but a shift in how these problems should be dealt with. As Marsland (2007) argues, the legacy of the moral and political agenda for development introduced by Nyerere and pursued over the years is that 'traditions (mila) are frequently singled out as obstacles' and it is through critiquing traditional beliefs that a modern identity is made and reproduced (Marsland 2007:753). Simultaneously however, secularism is perceived with suspicion and concern, especially for its impact on the morality and decency of younger generations (Pew Forum 2010). An understanding of local religion and spirituality within Tanzania is therefore important because of its significance as a site of contestation and tension for what it means to be modern and religious in Tanzania, and the way in which girls navigate this in relation to sexuality.

Heilman and Kaiser (2002) point to the proliferation of protestant, evangelical and 'saved' churches in Tanzania over recent years and the way in which they not only provide spiritual guidance but social services, including medical and educational facilities. Indeed, there are several such churches and church-affiliated projects in the local area, in addition to the more secular initiatives described earlier. Some churches run schools; others are involved as partners in development activities within a diverse range of remits, such as a programme run by an American religious CSO which partners locally with Lutheran ministers to promote women's goat rearing skills. Religious adherence and church involvement therefore can be understood as more than just a matter of personal beliefs. The meaning and benefits of membership to a church is both culturally significant, in terms of assuming a modern Tanzanian identity; and economically important, in the opportunities that it can create for participation in development.

### **III.iv. Fieldwork sites**

#### **III.iv.a. Arusha and Kavuni**

Whilst I have mainly discussed Kavuni thus far, the fieldwork for this research project was in fact conducted in two locations. Between June 2014 and September 2014 I based myself in Arusha,

the regional capital. I chose to carry out the fieldwork for this project in Arusha Region for a number of reasons. Logistically it was an accessible place to begin my research. Through networks of friends and previous work colleagues I already had established some points of contact within the city of Arusha, which is the capital of Arusha District, and was able to arrive and begin working very quickly. Additionally, the thriving active NGO scene in the city made it an interesting place to observe how the ideas of development in relation to young women as discussed above were unfolding and being used as points of reference and action in the activities of NGOs. My intention was initially to stay there for the duration of fieldwork, but security concerns led to me making the decision to move elsewhere after three months in the city<sup>3</sup>.

Arusha District has some of the highest levels of urbanisation in the country, with the city of Arusha growing every year due to a constant influx of people from the surrounding areas (NBS 2015). The city is home to more than 400,000 people, with an estimated half of these being under the age of eighteen (UNICEF 2012). People are attracted to the city of Arusha from the surrounding rural areas because of its perception as a commercial hub, with opportunities outside of subsistence farming. The sheer volume of people moving to the city of Arusha (which has increased in size by over 110,000 households since the previous census in 2002 (NBS 2013)) combined with complicated and unfair processes for accessing land ownership means that the city is predominantly growing in geographical size through unplanned housing (Kironde 1995). This has resulted in poor levels of sanitation and safety, as well as a problem with access to roads and transport systems for many who live there. There are high levels of poverty and inequality within the city. With its contingent of NGO headquarters and government offices, there are pockets of wealth and large numbers of expats living in Arusha, but they coexist alongside seas of small haphazard shack houses built from corrugated iron. The city of Arusha is full of development actors who work on children's rights, Whilst the city of Arusha is heavily populated and perceived locally as relatively well-off due to its status as a centre for commerce and tourism, UNICEF's investigation into the impact of urbanisation on children and young people calls attention to increasing inequality. It connects this inequality to urban migration into these same industries, much of which contributes to the large numbers of children and young people who end up living on the street (UNICEF 2012).

In contrast, the town of Kavuni which I moved to in September 2014 has an estimated population of around 26,000 people (NBS 2013). This is itself an increase from 17,000 at the time of the previous census in 2002, and this growth makes it the largest town in the district. Kavuni is to the west of Arusha, and lies within one of Arusha region's six administrative districts. Whilst agricultural production remains the main economic sector, the increasing urban concentration seen in the district over the past ten years which has bolstered the population of Kavuni might in part be

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<sup>3</sup> This decision and its methodological implications are discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.

explained by its growth as a hub for tourism, due to its location on the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater and close proximity to a number of game reserves and national parks. A major new paved road was completed in 2013 between Arusha and the conservation areas to improve ease of access, resulting in a big reduction in the time that it now takes to travel between Kavuni and Arusha city, and to the international airport at Kilimanjaro. According to locals with whom I spoke the road has had a significant, observable effect on their lives in a variety of ways; everything from wider availability and choices of food at the local market to the number of 'wageni' (outsiders) coming through the town.

The area of land surrounding Kavuni has been the subject of controversy over the years, and it is important to note some of the issues here for the way in which they have affected the demographics of the town itself. Since the 1980s, the government of Tanzania has consolidated its control over land in the region through the establishment of conservation areas and the increase in centralised power and ownership over land. The Ngorongoro Crater Conservation Area (NCAA) one of the zones established ostensibly for the protection of wildlife starts directly to the north-west of the town. However, in recent years the government has been granting access to the land to private investors for the building of tourist facilities and the establishment of game reserves. The impact of this has been a reduction in the land available to the Maasai people who have historically lived in the rural areas of the district and claimed the land to use it for traditional livelihoods of cattle grazing. This has resulted in various disputes and political showdowns which have garnered international attention, and raise issues beyond the remit of this thesis.

Due to the resultant decreasing feasibility of pastoralist living as well as the town's increased function as a tourist stop-off point, a great many Maasai have begun to live there over recent years, seeking out alternative forms of work. Being distanced from their livestock or simply unable to graze them in the vicinity of the town due to land shortages (Mkombwa et al. 2011), the Maasai of the town frequently work in the tourism industry in a number of different functions. Income generated activities include selling handmade jewellery and clothing, working as tour guides taking foreigners to see their home villages in exchange for a fee, or even finding employment as security guards at private estates or hotels.

The region has a temperate climate and good soil fertility. Whilst agriculture tends to be the primary livelihood activity for most of the town's inhabitants, small scale farming revolves around crops which are sold locally and consumed for food within the surrounding area, as opposed to feeding into the global market. Historically, cash crops such as coffee which can be sold internationally have been cultivated on large farms which remain in the hands of private owners, who are often foreigners (Richard and Marietha 2007). Changes in population density and therefore reductions in land available for cultivation, along with changes in attitudes towards agriculture as a way of life, mean that farming is being perceived less and less as a viable economic strategy. Snyder notes that whilst many young men and women 'aspire to a life removed

from farm labour', the reality is that economic opportunities in the area are realistically very limited (1996:327).

Tanzania has proportionally very high rates of youth unemployment, with those aged between 15 and 24 comprising over half of the unemployed population. A third more young women than men are unemployed (Restless Development 2012); this is perhaps in part linked to the fact that vocational training for those who leave school after Standard 7 tends to focus on jobs usually taken by men, such as carpentry and road construction (UNICEF 2011). Bar work, transporting shop goods, or finding ways of participating in the tourist trade are options for those who are unsuccessful in education but wish to remain in Kavuni or its surrounds. For those who progress through school, working as a government official or teacher might also be an option, but according to local anecdote these opportunities were seen to be limited to those who knew the right people or had useful tribal or family ties.

The tourist trade which had slowly begun to spring up in Kavuni over recent years has, in the eyes of many, brought new challenges to the town other than the influx of Maasai. The safari drivers who stay in the town after driving Westerners to Ngorongoro or Manyara have a reputation for drinking beer and buying sex, and there is an active nightlife which springs up after dark. Girls who do not succeed in school risked ending up as sex workers or bar girls, as there were seen to be few other employment opportunities outside of agricultural labour. There was a small cooperative of female basket weavers who took advantage of the passing tourist trade, but I was informed by the ladies who run it that the market was becoming saturated. They also commented that because the work of collecting and preparing the materials to make them was dirty and difficult many girls were disinterested. There were a few women employed as tailors and seamstresses supplying the local market, but the majority of dressmaking businesses were actually owned by men. Overall, the majority of people I spoke to perceived the tourist industry as being where the money was, and working in the large luxury lodges which were situated in the countryside around the town was a way of having a share in this. However, work like this also required good connections to secure.

#### **III.iv.b. Tufurahi School**

In September 2014 I decided to move out of Arusha to Kavuni. Directly related to security concerns in Arusha which are discussed in the following chapter, living in a big city put me at a distance from potential participants. I wanted to take an ethnographic approach for reasons I explain later, and in Kavuni I would be able to have a more immersive experience simply due to being able to live closer to participants. Having established some of the key themes in development work with young women in Tanzania, in this section I discuss the fieldwork site of Tufurahi School. I describe the

function of the school, the day to day routines of students and teachers, and some of the specific issues which shaped these activities.

Tufurahi School was a small private charitable institution. Because the school is not run by the government, it cannot administer the National examinations, which can only be held by registered schools. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the rise of non-government run schooling; Tufurahi School is registered as a 'tuition centre', but on a day to day basis it operates as a boarding school. It was established in 2006 with the objective of providing affordable secondary level education to girls from the surrounding town and villages who had successfully passed their primary school examinations but were unable to continue at government secondary schools for financial reasons. The Form Two Secondary Education Examination (FTSEE) is taken by students at government schools at the completion of two years of secondary schooling, and the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) is taken at the end of Form Four. This is followed by the Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (ACSEE), taken after a further two years. Like other private schools and tuition centres, Tufurahi School instead administered the Qualifying Test (QT) to Form Two students, which closely covers the Form One and Two government curriculum, and if passed enables students to go on to sit the CSEE as private candidates.

When discussing the format and challenges of the school system in Tanzania earlier in this chapter I noted its implications for a varied age of students, and Tufurahi School was no exception. The largest form group was Form One, and the age range was between 13 and 20 years old. Form Two girls ranged between 14 and 22, and the Form Four girls were between 17 and 21 years old. Life in the school was very structured, with girls kept busy throughout the day. The morning would begin early, with girls waking at around 6:30am and bathing, holding prayers, singing hymns and telling stories before lessons began at 8:30am. At 10am there would be a break for breakfast, which was maize porridge. Between 10:30am and 1:45pm there were a further two sessions of lessons, with a short 15 minute break in between at midday. The final lesson ran from 2:30pm until 4pm and following this there were some scheduled club activities such as sports, arts and crafts, choir and gardening. Girls would then gossip, sleep, do laundry, bathe, or go out to pray at their church if they had permission to do so, though during the week this was discouraged due to the difficulty in ensuring they could be supervised on the walk to and from respective churches. At around 6:30pm there would be more prayers and reading from the Bible, followed by dinner at 7:30pm and then homework time, supervised by a teacher. Bedtime was at 10pm.

An ongoing issue within Kavuni which had unexpected implications for Tufurahi School was that of water management. The centre of the town is connected to a water supply system, but the population growth that has resulted from migration from rural areas has meant that this has failed to keep up with demand, with many houses simply not connected to the main pipelines. On top of patchy coverage, uncertain weather and the reliance of the electric grid on hydropower means that

water is simply not available on a routine basis. Although the school was technically 'on the grid', like many houses there was no water pumped directly into the storage tanks to enable the taps to be turned on and the toilets to be flushed. Therefore, whilst there were toilets in the school, they could only be flushed using buckets of 'grey water' saved from washing clothes, and to wash themselves the girls used buckets rather than the purpose-built showers and baths.

It is possible to pay to be connected to the water system, but for houses which are not connected to the main lines, there are a number of District Water Points, where water can be pumped into buckets and taken for home use for a fee. This fee is high relative to local GDP. These DWPs also often have water for only a few hours a day during the dry season, but there are also a number of privately owned boreholes from where it is possible to purchase water if one can afford the even higher cost. The water and sanitation system is overseen by a private company which is independent from but works with the local government, and whose trustees are comprised of representatives from the six villages whose water it manages. There is also no sewerage system in Kavuni, with waste water being simply diverted into unused land; the majority of households use pit latrines.

The lack of running water at the school meant that a large amount of the girls' time each day during the drier months was spent collecting water from the nearest DWP, which was about a fifteen minute walk away; or, when this ran dry, making a trip through the town to the next one. This was the only time other than to go to church that the girls were able to obtain permission to leave the school, but it caused a large amount of anxiety on the part of the teachers and school director, particularly when they had to travel to the second accessible DWP. It was felt that these trips made the girls vulnerable to being preyed upon by boys and men in the town. Additionally, when the water situation was at its worst and there was no grey water to use for flushing toilets, girls would leave the school to find other outdoor places to defecate in, which was a source of concern among the teachers given that they were out of school grounds and potentially at risk. Which students were sent by the school Matron to fetch water was influenced by a number of factors; girls who were seen as trustworthy were sent, as were those who were perceived as lazy and in need of some physical work.

Those who had money to purchase water for themselves sometimes requested permission to go and buy a bucket for personal use, which was usually washing clothes or bathing. Another issue that influenced which girls went to collect water was menstruation. Due to beliefs about appropriate activity when menstruating, they were precluded from fetching water at this time of the month, even for personal use, despite this evidently being a time when they were most acutely in need of access to it.

The issue of water is used here to show the complexity of attempts to manage the movements and activities of girls. The aims of the school, as a boarding institution, were the protection of girls from

the rural communities they came from where, in the face of poverty and gender inequality, their continued status as schoolgirls was not assured. This protective sphere also sought to ward off threats closer to the school, particularly from men and boys, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. Among a variety of tensions, this discussion of water introduces and exemplifies the way in which efforts made to 'protect' girls were frustrated by other factors beyond the control of the teachers and director.

### **III.iv.c. The local community**

Speaking to local people informally is how I learned a lot about norms around relationships, gender, sex and girlhood. During my fieldwork I was fortunate to be introduced to a number of local people who were very keen to advise me on what I should be looking at when they found out I was doing research in a girls' secondary school. As noted earlier, girls' education is widely recognised as being something which matters for development in Tanzania; I was frequently told stories of both the benefits of educating girls, and the challenges facing girls in accessing education. I recognised certain development-sanctioned narratives being reiterated through some of what I was told; that educating girls is important because they give to their families, for example. However, there were also concerns raised about the education of girls. Two significant themes were that development actors were focusing on the wrong kinds of girls; and secondly, that educating girls was not really all that beneficial.

Given the historically predominantly peaceful cohabitation of tribes in Tanzania, tribal difference is something I had not considered to be significant beforehand. However, it was clearly important to local people in Kavuni. When hearing about my field site at Tufurahi School, which was mainly attended by Iraqw girls, it was often commented to me that I was in the wrong place. I was advised often that I should instead be seeking out Maasai girls, because they are the ones who face real barriers to education due to their specific cultural norms. Many of the discussions I observed regarding the Maasai seemed to me to reflect the type of pitying conversations that people in the UK have about a generic 'Africa'. One of the teachers at Tufurahi School with whom I had several conversations of this sort was Kevin. He himself was half Iraqw (mother) and half Maasai (father) and was keen to comment on some of the cultural differences that he saw. Kevin said Iraqw men have a reputation for being cheaters and politicians. When his uncles visit his mother, he told me that they look for money to steal, and she has to hide her cash around the house.

Kevin drew a contrast between this financial greed and the way in which his father's family chose to live. He told me that his father, being a Maasai, has a lot of cows but doesn't care for money at all. He said in their houses they don't have read beds or sheets or mattresses, just benches. Kevin

then told me that those who are educated and move to the towns get exposed to other ideas. This conversation took place in a crowded staff room, and on hearing this, one of the other teachers scoffed. She suggested that his father could just sell two cows and buy some better furniture. I suggested that maybe he is happy with a simple life but she quickly disagreed. She told me that this kind of lifestyle is 'not good'. To my surprise, Kevin agreed, adding that 'the Maasai don't know money - except those who are educated'. He said they have wealth in cows but lack interest in 'improving their lives'.

Adults in the town with whom I spoke reiterated the idea I heard from other Tanzanians working with girls that boys and girls should not mix, and that there is no such thing as platonic friendship. Soon after I finished my fieldwork and left Tanzania I was informed by a teacher at the school that one of the girls in Form Two had not returned after the Christmas holidays because she had become pregnant. She had been badly beaten by her parents for this transgression and they had not granted her permission to return to school. She herself did not want to return anyway, citing the teasing and abuse she had received from other students who had found out about the pregnancy as insufferable. The headmistress was very upset that she had felt unable to confide in her, and that so many of the girls knew and had not said anything, either to get the girl into trouble or to help her to access support. This resonates with van Reeuwijk's (2009) suggestion that young people are more frightened of the strictness of adults than they are of issues like disease and pregnancy, and this leads them to hide relationships from parents and health workers.

### **III.v. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the intersections and tensions within and between government policy, development priorities and Tanzanian culture. In doing so, I have sought to convey the dynamism and interactivity of local, national and global narratives around girls' sexuality in my fieldwork context. The way in which girlhood and sexual agency are constituted within my field site can be understood as a product not only of local culture, history, politics, but also the socio-economics of the country and of policy and development interventions.

Reflecting upon my experiences in Tanzania, it is clear that the fifteen years since the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals have seen shifts at multiple levels which have had an impact even within small, rural areas like Kavuni. The local economy has been affected by the growth of tourism; changes in international political will for the education of (especially 'marginalised') girls have fed into changing NGO priorities and the growth of a bustling private sector for secondary education. However, what many in the local community in Kavuni were acutely cognisant of is that jobs for those who are educated often simply do not exist. As I have suggested here, the ability to



participate in 'development' is contingent on one's ability to not just progress through school but to then also access opportunities, which often come about through one's social networks.

It struck me during my time at the school that there was a great deal of emphasis placed on learning English. This came mainly from teachers and local community members who visited the school to see their daughters or give 'guest talks' encouraging girls to succeed. Learning English was framed as a skill that could open up opportunities for other kinds of work within the tourism sector, but there was more to its value than this. I got the impression that being able to speak and build relationships with people from Europe and the United States was seen as equally important given the significance of relationships for obtaining opportunities which would ensure that one was able to be part of 'development'. This participation in modernity was not just about having a certain type of job, but being a certain kind of Tanzanian.

As Phillips (2013) suggests, education has a multifaceted function within development; as a goal in itself, a tool for other social change and an organising principle which determines who benefits and who is involved in development. It is worth noting again that enrolment does not automatically, however, mean success in schooling. Despite ongoing lip service by successive governments to achieving the reforms and subsequent development envisaged by Nyerere, there continue to be problems with the education sector in Tanzania. From a development perspective this results in a failure of young people 'to be harmoniously socialised into society's functioning' (Prout and James 1997:14) and reap the benefits that are supposed to accrue to those who attend school.

Despite my attention to girls' lives specifically, a discourse of development recognisably shapes the expectations of people in Tanzania more broadly. The rapidly changing economic and social landscape of the country was frequently commented upon by ordinary Tanzanians, who often expressed feeling that such changes were beyond their control. This perhaps helps to explain the prevalence of church membership within the country at large as well as within Kavuni.

Globalisation, and the quest to participate in its promised benefits has potentially enhanced membership of religious institutions such as UWATA and the Lutheran and Catholic churches, whose international links hold some symbolism for those seeking to participate in modernity and development.

However, the social changes which globalisation facilitates present the same churches with new things to proselytise against; in particular, the sexualisation of popular culture which is consumed by young people. At the same time as transitions through girlhood are being seen as a source of anxiety because of the expansion of subject-positions presented by social change, initiatives by government and by international development organisations are specifically seeking to address what is perceived to be a lack of opportunities for girls to make meaningful choices about their sexuality. As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, this dichotomy generates a

complicated landscape for girls. The question which evidently is raised therefore for this research is how girls themselves experience this.

I have sought in this chapter to explore how the social, economic and political context of Tanzania plays out in various ways within the town of Kavuni and the fieldwork site of Tufurahi School. The objective of this is to provide a frame of reference for girls' experiences within this specific time and place. In reference to the preceding theoretical framework, this context should not be understood as comprising a series of structures which impose meanings upon girls. It is better conceptualised as a network of relationships which girls are part of. In this way, the fieldwork context can be thought of as dynamic and politicised, with girls actively navigating and interacting with the discourses and actors which comprise it. In the following chapter, I turn to the question of how to account for this in the methods I used in conducting this research.



## **IV: Methodology**

### **IV.i. Introduction**

In Chapters Two and Three, I was critical of international development praxis for its frequent lack of engagement with girls' perspectives on sexuality. This is problematic for both the efficacy of the research, and its ethical conduct. My concern with the type of work and research involving teenage girls led me to make particular decisions about how to carry out fieldwork, which I outline in this chapter. However, I encountered a much more complicated field than I had anticipated, which often challenged my established epistemology. The aim of this chapter is therefore to not only describe what I did, but to show how my methodological framework generated a map for guiding my navigation of the research process as it unfolded in reality.

I begin with my research questions, which evolved out of my analysis of the existing literature on youth and sexuality but developed during my time in the field. Building on the overview of the places I chose to carry out fieldwork which closed the previous chapter, I discuss these sites from a methodological standpoint. I then critically discuss my methodology, reflecting upon my epistemological and ontological positioning and how this shaped the methods I chose to use in exploring my research questions. I argue here that reflexive and responsible research is a messy process, because taking account of the reality of one's field site and the lives and needs of participants often involves making changes to intended plans. I then provide an analysis of the 'ethical issues' which came up during the course of my research and explain my strategies for responding to these challenges.

### **IV.ii. Developing research questions**

Within the literatures discussed earlier on agency, young people, and sexuality, two strands of thinking stood out to me as being particularly important for both the development of my research questions, and the design of methods that would enable me to explore them in a flexible and responsive way. The first was the idea that young people are social actors in their own right and capable of exercising agency in decisions about their lives, be it constrained or enabled by and through social relationships and material conditions. The second is that sexuality is a social, relational and historical experience and a space of constant negotiation, in particular for teenage girls whose sexuality is constructed within international development narratives as being simultaneously a problem and solution, biological and social, passive yet in need of control.

The purpose of the research I therefore set out to do was to better understand girls' experiences of sexual agency, in relation to how their sexuality is constructed and constituted in the context of

development interventions. Because available representations of teenage girls' sexualities within development discourse are united in their exclusion of how girls themselves experience the contradictions and dilemmas of 'doing' girl (Renold & Ringrose 2010), my central research objective was to explore girls' interactions with and experiences of these norms. I wanted to find out how girls encounter and navigate these representations from the 'changing world of their own experience' (Driscoll 2013:293). Therefore, my main participants would be teenage girls.

Much of my motivation for this came from my perception of the exclusion of their perspectives within international development narratives on girlhood, and desire to challenge this lack of attention to girls' voices. However, at the same time I recognised that it is important to also understand how those around girls 'make meaning' of girls' actions (Kirk, Mitchell & Reid-Walsh 2010) in order to better understand the spaces that girls physically and figuratively occupy in Tanzania and within international development discourse. This would provide the necessary context for understanding practices of girlhood and sexuality, and identify opportunities for change to situations which restrict or repress girls' agency. I therefore also sought accounts from various stakeholders involved in establishing and perpetuating representations of girls' sexuality.

#### **IV.iii. Beginning fieldwork**

Having established my interest in Tanzania, and in Arusha Region in particular, I headed to the country in early June 2014. Upon my arrival in Arusha, and determined to hit the ground running, I immediately began pursuing and building links with people and organisations that could broaden my understanding of the field of NGO interventions in girls' lives in this area. I hoped that through these connections I would be able to identify potential field sites where I would be able to engage with teenage girls. I imagined this might be a school or a development project, but kept my mind open to all possibilities that presented themselves, using a snowball sampling approach to meeting new people and making useful contacts.

Between June and September, I spent much of my time getting to know staff of different projects operating in the city of Arusha. These included a safe house for teenage girls who have been living on the streets, two organisations administering girls' secondary school education projects, and three secondary schools (two run by NGOs and one run by the Tanzanian government). During this time I interviewed three programme staff, two social workers, and two charitable trustees. This enabled me to learn more about how stakeholders perceived girls' lives and how they framed their work with them. I also regularly visited the 'safe house' spending time with and talking to the girls living there.

During this time however, two challenges that I would need to confront with some immediacy became apparent. Despite English being the official language of instruction at secondary school level, in reality the spoken English of the girls I was able to meet at this stage was limited, even amongst those girls who were doing well in school, and this meant they often lacked confidence in casual conversation. Concerned about what this would mean for trying to discuss more complex or intimate subjects, I therefore took a course of intensive classes in Kiswahili, which is the official language of Tanzania and the language of instruction in schools until age 13. This took a lot of my time and focus. The second challenge was my physical safety in Arusha. The city had a reputation for being unsafe once evening fell, and with an upcoming election, increasing violence often targeted at women was a major concern. This limited my freedom of movement, and therefore my access to girls with whom to conduct research outside of school hours.

With these constraints on my time proving particularly frustrating for my efforts to build relationships with girls at the 'safe house', and after an incident in which I was mugged and injured, I began to look for opportunities outside of the city. Through the connections I had established in Arusha, I made contact and built a relationship with a woman who was the director of Tufurahi School. Tufurahi School was in the town of Kavuni; around three hours driving distance from Arusha city, but still within Arusha District. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the school specifically admits girls who have passed their primary leaving examinations but whose families have been unable or unwilling to pay the fees for secondary schooling. The director took an interest in my work and after we exchanged some emails and discussed my project aims, she invited me to spend some time at the school and meet the girls there to see if it was a good fit. The site appealed to me because I would be able to live in a house only a short walking distance from the school and could therefore have a much more immersive experience than at the sites I'd visited in Arusha. In September I moved to Kavuni and began to observe and participate in the everyday activities of the forty-something girls attending Tufurahi School.

Interesting research interactions with adults were easier to pursue, and I had fruitful exchanges in both Arusha and Kavuni; but Tufurahi School became my primary site for doing ethnographic, immersive research with girls. For the first few months spent at Tufurahi School, from September until December 2014, I focused primarily on building relationships with the girls at the school through my involvement in their lives and activities both during and outside of school hours. I also spent time with and interviewed the five teachers who taught at the school over the course of the fieldwork period and the school director. I also sought introductions to a number of other stakeholders including the parents of students, staff at other schools, and members of local government and religious organisations. As my research progressed, I continued participant observation, but once teaching resumed after Christmas I decided to pursue more directly some of the issues and questions which had begun to emerge through interactions with adults. This began with a visual methods project and evolved into a participatory action

research project involving 32 girls across the different year groups at Tufurahi School. In February I also recruited a research assistant, who assisted with interviews and focus group facilitation. I held nine focus group sessions with between 8 to 10 girls in each, and then conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with twelve girls from these sessions. I completed fieldwork and left Tanzania in April 2015.

#### **IV.iv. Methodological framework**

##### **IV.iv.a. Epistemology and ontology**

In developing the methodology that I used for this project, I drew on a social constructionist framework, and feminist and critical theories. At a basic level, Denscombe describes the constructionist ontology as one which acknowledges that social reality is 'constructed and interpreted by people' (2002:18). Geertz's description of ethnography as 'thick' description' (1973) is a useful starting point for conceptualising this process. As the discussion of theoretical literature on this topic suggests, a variety of assumptions underpin the constitution of development 'knowledge' about young people's sexuality. A constructionist approach asserts that this knowledge has occurred 'through socially negotiated processes that are historically and culturally relevant and... ultimately lead to social action' (Koro-Ljungberg 2008:430). Of central importance to this analysis is the role of power in determining what ideology is legitimated as natural and inevitable. A constructionist standpoint acknowledges that the 'reality' of young people's sexuality in developing countries is defined and constructed by development organisations and maintained through the mediations of power (Foster 1986) which manifest and solidify these understandings into policies and practices.

Lincoln and Guba draw a distinction between constructionism and critical theory which points to the former's aim of understanding and reconstruction in comparison to the latter's emphasis on 'critique and transformation, restitution and emancipation' (2000:166). These two approaches are therefore not at odds. Whilst social constructionism's emphasis on understanding the subjective interpretation of what constitutes reality was integral to my approach to data collection, critical theory has been of great importance as a theoretical lens because it places an analysis of power at the forefront. A critical theoretical approach takes account of the way in which within the economy, systems of class, gender, race and intergenerational dynamics, discourses and institutions interact to construct our social systems (Kincheloe & McLaren 1990).

Critical theory also offers the tools to ground analysis of the competing interpretations of 'reality' within an emancipatory objective. Originating in a critique of the 'nurturing' of existing social sites of domination by capitalism (Kincheloe & McLaren 1990:88), critical theory is founded upon the desire for a more just society. It is an optimistic approach to development research, asserting that

ideologies are not fixed in stone; we retain the ability to resist and transform the oppressions that they perpetuate. Critical research also problematises the separation of challenges to universalistic claims from the material conditions and circumstances that produce oppressions, underlining the need to contextualise research and affirm the implications of power relations for people's everyday lives.

My literature review cites the influence of Deleuze on my understanding of agency. A key concept in Deleuze's work is that of becoming, which he conceptualises as being not about movement along a linear trajectory from one point to another, but about immanent 'lines of flight' away from such imagined fixed points of reference. However, like Mazzei and McCoy, I go beyond simply analysing data in relation to these metaphors. Rather, Deleuze's emphasis on playfulness, creativity, and indeed deliberate disruption and misunderstanding provide guidance by which we might 'think differently' about girlhood and sexuality (2010:505). For this research, this means thinking about how to generate opportunities for new, unanticipated lines of inquiry to present themselves. When thinking about teenage girlhood, this idea of becoming holds potential for identifying ways in which girls can exercise agency that transcends existing scripts. These features situate constructionism and critical theory as a useful epistemological and ontological framework for the design of methods for this research project.

#### **IV.iv.b. Methodology**

As explored in Chapter Two, the direction of this project was guided by a critique of the depoliticisation and individualisation which characterises development discourse on girls' sexuality. Within development discourse, young women's bodies are consistently problematised. Any failure or ability to reap the perceived benefits of 'progress' tends to be framed as a result of girls' individual management of their (sexual) bodies against the odds of oppressive, ill-defined cultural constraints. Such an approach seems to both justify and feed into the marginalisation of girls' voices within within development research. In reviewing the literature, I found that research into issues relating to sexuality with young people in Tanzania has traditionally been built around the use of questionnaires and surveys, perhaps because of the way in which such interest in sexuality is framed through the legitimising lens of public health interventions (Pigg and Adams 2005).

The problems with this approach are not only limited to the challenge of disclosure and honesty. From a critical perspective, any methods which fail to engage in dialogue with participants can miss vital opportunities to explore subjective reasoning and meanings. They also undermine potential insights of participants into the data generated by affirming the gap between participants and an 'expert' researcher. From a Deleuzian stance, such approaches are problematic because they map easily onto 'taken-for-granted regimes of meaning' (Lather 2007, 85) which means they keep the focus of research trained on that which is already comprehensible rather than offering



opportunities for venturing into the unknown. I was keen to disrupt this dynamic between myself and the girls I was doing research with for these reasons. An approach to ethnographic fieldwork which draws on critical theory goes some way to suggesting ethical solutions to 'extractive' forms of data collection.

A central focus of my research is the exploration of differences and tensions between 'official' discourses and counter-narratives (Andrews 2004), as experienced by various stakeholders within development. Ethnography, which includes the recording of observations as well as interactive discussion, can reveal potential disparities between accounts of behaviour and actual behaviour. In addition to being compatible with a critical and constructionist epistemological framework, an ethnographic approach is also consistent with the way in which regardless of their status as children or young people, participants should be perceived as agents active in making meaning about the world around them (Prout & James 1990). This is particularly important in relation to the girls whose perspectives are integral to this research. In line with the sociological study of childhood discussed in Chapter Two, my work attributes young people with a capacity to engage with the structures which shape their lives, make decisions within the context of the power relations that shape them and be aware of the consequences of these decisions (Mayall 2002).

The influence this has on my project is that my approach to dialogue with my research participants tended to be similar to that which I had with adults, giving similar emphasis to my lack of understanding of their social worlds and thus the need to have things explained to me (Mayall 2008). I tried not to make any assumptions about the lives of the girls I spent time with in order to be led by their perspectives, and be able to meaningfully hear what they told me (Morrow 2008). Prout and James add that ethnography is particularly suited to exploring the lives of young people because it allows them a 'more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data' than more formal surveys might allow (1990:7).

Given the influence of Deleuze upon my own epistemology, I wanted to create space within the research to 'produce previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge' (Mazzei and McCoy 2010:505). Practically, this meant I wanted girls to be involved not only in determining the direction and focus of the research, but in thinking through and discussing the data. It would be helpful for me to have opportunities for girls' feedback at all stages of the project, but also has an ethical dimension in enabling girls to tell me if I had misinterpreted anything. This also underlines the importance of immersion in the local context for a period of time before more potentially 'formal' avenues for research such as interviews or focus groups are utilised, as well as after data collection has been completed. Spending time in Kavuni enabled me to get insights into the broader context of girls' lives, which was essential to understanding their comments, explanations and actions. It was also important that I structured the research in a way which was accessible and open, with the ways in which participants are able to have input into its direction

made clear. It was only by spending enough time on building relationships and establishing the purposes of my presence that they would feel equipped and have the confidence to do this. Early on, I therefore made the decision to focus my time and energy on building quality interactions, rather than obtaining interviews and data from as many individuals as possible.

Girls' involvement in the project also has another dimension which has specific epistemological significance. A critical theoretical framework, as explored in more depth in Chapter Two, places an emphasis on useful findings from research ideally being made available to those who are involved with the project. This goes beyond thinking about 'best practice' around ethical and functional research, but situates development research in particular as a space for uncovering and challenging power relations. In this context, I was interested in how findings might usefully inform changes to existing practices with girls. Hulme suggests that critique is insufficient if the researcher does not then 'attempt to link knowledge to action by analysing the implications of the knowledge they create for the actors involved' (1994:252). With the naive transformational idealism that I had centred my study upon, I was keen to produce work which was of interest to those working with girls, ideally in the specific context of my own research and in other places where it might be useful. To this end I was drawn to a field site where I felt I had enough support and interest from gatekeepers that my research would indeed prove to be something they were invested in using.

#### **IV.v. Methods**

##### **IV.v.a. Participant observation**

Over the duration of my fieldwork, I often felt the extent to which I participated or observed was shaped by a variety of influences outside of my control. I was constantly aware of how I was being perceived and how this affected my inclusion or exclusion from activities. In Arusha, my first foray into participant observation with young people in the girls' 'safe house' centre was a sobering experience. With limited language skills, and interacting with girls who had histories of extreme violence and neglect, I could hardly have picked a more difficult site for beginning fieldwork. Though the experience showed me that it was possible to form relationships despite such language barriers, I felt much better equipped to 'participate' in life at Tufurahi School. This was because I moved to Kavuni after going through language training, and because the girls at this second site were all at secondary level and therefore were expected to be able to speak English.

However, language remained a challenge at Tufurahi School. The girls were divided into three Forms. Form Three contained girls who had passed through two years of being taught in English, and whose spoken English was surprisingly good; Form Two, with one year of English instruction,

had a mixed range of ability. Form One contained students with very limited English except one, a girl who had attended a very good government school and taken advanced English classes until she told me she had been forced to leave because her family could not pay the examination fees. If girls continue from primary to secondary school directly, it should be expected that Form One would have an age range of 12 to 13 years, Form Two would contain girls aged 13 to 14 years, and Form Three would be for girls up to the age of 15. However, as explained earlier, these age ranges are often more theoretical than real. At Tufurahi School, Form One ranged from 13 years old all the way up to one girl of 20 years, though the majority of the girls were aged between 13 and 15. Form Two ranged from 14 years to 21 years, with the majority of the girls aged between 14 and 17; and the Form Three girls were aged between 17 and 20<sup>4</sup>.

On the basis of these language challenges, it was suggested to me by the teachers and school director that I perhaps could recruit Form Three girls to translate for me. However I was not altogether comfortable with approaching them for this purpose. I felt it would be difficult for them to refuse, given that the suggestion had been made by people in positions of authority. I also was aware that they were preparing for important examinations and thus would potentially resent the time it would take up. I decided not to use a translator and to see how things unfolded. After only a few weeks of intensive Kiswahili lessons I still lacked much of the necessary vocabulary and confidence to interact with the girls on the level I'd have liked to when I first arrived, but my Kiswahili was better than many of the girls' English, and the daily practice with them and the school teachers helped me to improve quickly. I also found that my incompetence with the language but eagerness to learn was a great ice-breaker, providing many opportunities for me to be resoundingly mocked and my mistakes laughed at. Several of the girls were curious as to my keenness to learn the language, and seemed to appreciate the efforts that I made; I was often encouraged to keep practising and not to be embarrassed. When I left the field, many were concerned that I would forget much of what I'd learned as I'd have nobody to practise with.

One of the ways in which I overcame the initial (social and linguistic) awkwardness of entering the field, was by starting with a focus on participating in activities which were not academic. Such activities should be ones which could be directed or controlled by the girls themselves, and did not require huge amounts of speech or eye contact. Doing 'arts and crafts' was a popular hobby for many of the girls, so I participated in an 'art club' after school where I sat with girls and we drew, coloured and chatted about our pictures. The girls who attended this club enjoyed the attention and were intrigued by some of the things I drew, and I was often commissioned to draw things for them, which they then hid away in their trunks under their beds. Pictures of hearts, cakes and flowers were particularly popular. With girls who were less disposed to such quiet activities, I played football reluctantly and badly, eventually conceding that I was probably better placed as a

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<sup>4</sup> Sanama, the girl whose vignette begins this thesis, was a Form Three student.

referee. When some girls were stuck for something to do after school one day and asked me to 'tell a story' (which I'd begun to realise was usually a request for a diversion or entertainment), I introduced them to yoga. This turned out to be a great hit, and I started to hold a weekly session before school for those who wanted to do it. Some of them enjoyed it so much that requests to be led through some impromptu sun salutations together in the yard to pass time became commonplace, and the subject of great amusement for local people who happened to walk past the school gates.

I was also advised by one of the teachers that the girls loved to dance but that as teachers, they personally felt it did not help the girls to respect them as adults if they joined the girls in dancing to the type of music liked by young people. On learning this I asked some of the girls for some music recommendations and over a few days, using the extremely slow internet connection, I was able to download several songs onto my phone and brought it into school when classes had finished for the day. This was such a hit that from then on, 'dance parties' became a regular occasion, with our playlist being added to whenever I was able to get online. The music and dancing created an environment in which the girls were relaxed and distracted, and were able to take on the role of expert instructors with me which made them more confident. More interestingly for me, in these environments the girls also observed each other keenly, and conversations with those taking a break from dancing, or watching but abstaining for religious reasons, tended to begin at their initiative with a focus on their opinions of their fellow students but led us into all sorts of interesting conversations.

Whilst the everyday interactions of the girls were of interest to me as a researcher, they sometimes were very difficult to navigate. I was often unsure how to position myself in the existing social order. Firstly, the dynamics between certain groups of girls left me feeling uncertain about whether pursuing certain friendships might preclude me from being able to develop others. When I first arrived I was struck by how intimate and friendly all the girls seemed with each other, However, after a couple of months I became aware of subtle cliques and forms of bullying which had not at first glance been perceptible. I tried to handle this by remaining positive, calm and friendly to all girls regardless of my feelings towards them. The girls who were drawn to me tended to be those who were more confident. This led me to the realisation that to engage with girls who were less assertive, I would need to do more than just be myself and wait to be approached. I started to regularly take stock of the social groupings amongst the girls, and began to seek ways of reaching out and establishing connections with those who seemed wary of me. I found that actually this was often due to either a lack of confidence in language ability, or feeling intimidated by other girls in the vicinity. I made an effort to eat with different girls each day, which was always an easy, sociable interaction. I also took opportunities to speak to quieter, more timid girls when they were with friends, which seemed to make them feel more comfortable (Mayall 2000:123).

Given my own past experience of growing up as a girl, I also felt a natural inclination to align myself with certain girls over others. However, I struggled with this as I felt that it was important to maintain neutrality and approachability to everyone at the school. I certainly became aware that my hesitance to align with certain 'naughtier' cliques had an impact on the extent to which these girls then trusted me with information they would not want to share with adults. This was especially the case as regardless of my own history and experiences I was automatically perceived as successful and associated with authority by virtue of my age, race and status as a 'researcher'. For example, one Monday as we ate porridge in between morning lessons, it was mentioned to me by a teacher that Furaha, a student who I discuss later in the thesis, had left to ostensibly attend church the day before. However, she had not returned with the other girls whom she'd been given permission to go with, and it was rumoured among the students that she had actually gone to see her boyfriend. Furaha shared a room with some of the girls I'd bonded with easily, and she occasionally joined us in the bunk beds to sit and gossip. When I jokingly asked her later that day how her weekend had been and whether she had had fun after church, she looked embarrassed and left the room. One of the other girls present told me she did not want to admit to me what she had really been doing in case I thought bad things about her. I tried to mediate such incidents by being frank and honest about my own experiences of being the same age as them, and how challenging I had found it to be their age, but I was aware that this did not compensate for being perceived as someone to whom conventions of respect between older and younger people should be applied; though I feel Furaha may also have been worried that I might 'tell' on her.

At times I felt entirely powerless to manage the situations which unfolded around me, and was keenly aware that my reactions to them were shaping how I was being seen. There were challenges during fieldwork which often felt like tests because I was so keenly aware of being watched and judged on my reaction to them, calling to mind Brannen's suggestion that the gaze of the researcher is not, and should not be, a one-way street (1988). The most significant of these was when Susanna, another student who we will meet later, was seen to become possessed by demons after being cursed by another student. This caused her to collapse and twitch and have terrible, violent visions. The strategy adopted by students and teachers in response to these episodes was to pray over her. I was often called upon by Susanna's friends to participate in these prayer circles. The student who was accused of putting the curse on her was someone I'd quickly developed a friendship with. However, I did not want to appear judgemental or unsympathetic to anyone involved, so when I was directly requested to come and pray, I began to do so. After these sessions, I would open my eyes to find that I was surrounded by girls watching and then later chattering about my participation. I was later congratulated publicly at a school assembly by the teachers and several of the girls for 'helping' with Susanna when she was sick.

In mid-December, halfway through my fieldwork, the final week of school concluded with examinations for all girls. When they departed to return to their families for four weeks, I also decided to take a break, and returned to the UK for Christmas. The girls seemed very uncertain that I'd return as promised, and so our goodbyes were quite distressing and tearful, and many of them wrote me letters, drew pictures and made small handmade gifts. I was away from Tanzania for over a month in total, as due to my relationship ending and my flat in Bath being sold, I had a lot to do before I could return to the site and refocus on my project. However, given the length of the Christmas holiday, the girls were themselves out of school until the 19th of January, and I returned on 5th February, so I was not absent from their school lives for very long. I was able to maintain contact with a couple of girls over the holidays too, having given out my English phone number to everyone that requested it so that those who had access to internet enabled phones could talk via the instant messaging application Whatsapp.

When I came back, there were new challenges to contend with. Two women from the United States had come to Tufurahi School in the previous term to teach a life skills and leadership course, but they had left the school early in a storm of mutual frustration and anger after a disagreement with the director about her expectations for their role. Upon my return, the director began to place expectations upon me about how she wanted to see my work progress. I soon began to feel that she had started to treat me as if I was their replacement, requesting that I cover the class time which they had been allocated. I was unhappy about this but felt that I did not have much choice. I decided to discuss this with some of the girls and the other teachers, and they suggested that it would be appreciated by them if I was to help out, which encouraged me to stay and persist. The teachers were also anxious that if I refused, they'd have their workload added to, and the girls seemed enthusiastic about seeing me teach.

This change in my function at Tufurahi School did not result in any major changes in my relationships with those girls who I felt had already accepted me in my role as a researcher. Indeed, the students I'd grown closest to in the months leading up to Christmas became my closest friends over the remainder of the fieldwork period. I spent many happy hours chatting whilst ensconced in a lower bunk bed with four girls in particular, with other 'satellite' friends who would come in and join us on occasion. I also participated in cooking on a regular basis, which enabled me to get to know some of the shyer, quieter girls who volunteered to help prepare food and cook as part of their duties. I felt that over this period, the friendships I'd begun were truly cemented and deepened. Despite my concerns about confusing my role, I felt that actually many of the girls were almost relieved when I began to teach them English and facilitated research sessions, as discussed in the next section. My habit of hanging around, observing classes, engaging them in constant, presumably pointless frustrating, conversations was probably irritating to many of them, and by becoming a 'teacher' I fitted into a category they understood and had experience with.

Some girls seemed more confident initiating interactions with me, requesting help with school work and then turning our time together into an opportunity to ask and do other things. Additionally, those who did not want to engage with me presumably felt more able to socially justify keeping me even more at arms' length, in that politely distant way that young people do with adults, without being seen as rude or risking me being able to take it personally.

#### **IV.v.b. Research training for girls**

A critical approach to research asserts the need to reconstruct both the practitioner and the practice setting. This happens through the development of a critical (and self-critical) understanding of how people and settings are 'shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically' (Kemmis 2001:92). With emancipatory goals and an assertion of young people's agency and rights being central to my project, as noted earlier it was important for me to recognise that participants have a right to be consulted, heard and have influence upon the research (Lansdown 1994). Reason argues that a critical and reflexive paradigm disrupts the positivist norm that 'the researcher alone contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects contribute the action or contents to be studied' (Reason 1994:42). It encourages a focus on experiences and understandings which have traditionally been disregarded (O'Connor & O'Neill 2004). This aligns with the new social studies of childhood, which argues that young people's perspectives have historically been socially marginalised.

In the context of my research, this meant finding ways to enable participants to guide what should be included or emphasized. This approach was important for addressing relations of power within the research relationships I built. It was also important for my own objectives of doing research which could highlight useful implications for development practice with girls. Starting from a place which asserted the lack of attention to girls' lived experiences placed an ethical responsibility on me to ensure that the process of the research was a positive and affirming experience for girls who agreed to participate. Therefore, several months into fieldwork I decided to create more space for girls to actively lead the focus of the project and determine the ways in which it was carried out. I did this through initiating a participatory research project which involved training girls in research methods and equipping them to explore questions that they were interested in.

I initially conceived of this as being ideally flexible and reactive; pursuing these objectives in the context of a structured, school environment proved fraught with complexity, however, and I found that I had to compromise a lot on this initial vision. The price inevitably paid for school-based access to participants of this age is that various forms of authority are exercised on their day to day lives, with school activities and rules limiting free time and space. Conducting research within a school setting raises major questions about consent and resistance. Backett-Milburn and McKie contend that if permission from an adult gatekeeper becomes the primary form of consent, young people who do not wish to take part in research 'might be regarded as recalcitrant or disobedient

when in fact s/he may fear the task, dislike the method or find the whole exercise boring' (1999:389). This is particularly a concern within a culture which idealises submissiveness and deference to adults within the school environment, particularly for girls (Kalugula 1991). On the basis of these concerns I took specific measures, which I explain in the later discussion of ethics, to ensure that 'not consenting' was discussed and acknowledged as a legitimate option for girls.

In exchange for what I saw as straightforward access, I also ran the risk of research activities being perceived as an extension of the 'schooling', and laden therefore with the same possibly problematic connotations regarding right and wrong answers. I found however that despite the challenges discussed here, the girls indeed found ways of determining how they participated (or not) in the activities that I was able to develop, just as those who objected to or were discomforted by me found ways of avoiding or resisting my presence more broadly.

I was keen to try a variety of activities with the girls and find out what interested them in order to support participants to shape the focus and outcomes of the research, minimising traditional roles of 'researcher' and 'researched'. As Anderson predicts, different methods proved more effective with different participants (2006), and assumptions must not be made as to young people's preferred forms of engagement or competencies. Opportunities to try different things and move data collection beyond interviews and focus groups was therefore very important. In the first months, I spent time after school finished to do 'mini-projects' with whichever girls seemed interested, on the premise that this was something they were not obliged to participate in. These tended to be drawing-based as this was the most accessible method for all, and as noted earlier also was an activity they enjoyed.

One particularly successful session was one in which I attempted to learn more about social norms through asking for illustrations of 'nice girls' versus 'bad girls', and then asking questions about and discussing the pictures that resulted. This was very successful - a major reason being that the activity was appealing and fun. I participated too, as did the Tanzanian teachers and the two American volunteers, which meant that the project did not unfold in relation to a traditional adult researcher - young participants power dynamic. The participating girls could ask questions and interrogate our pictures, which they did with great enthusiasm. The data generated by this particular project is discussed later in this thesis. Projecting norms of girlhood onto paper as abstract qualities rather than personal descriptions of people that they knew also seemed to make those who participated feel more confident in sharing their reflections on what they had drawn. The success of being able to project and externalise ideas, rather than engage immediately in personal reflections, served as a great learning curve for me on how to encourage the girls to be more forthcoming and open with me in other spaces.

When I arrived at the school in the autumn term, I had been asked by the usual teacher to assist with teaching Form Three Geography the part of their syllabus on Research Methods. The textbook was dry and dull, so to help aid the students' understanding I suggested that we put



together a 'research project'. The girls then selected the subject and questions for investigation. As a result, I found myself spending Saturday afternoons wandering the neighbourhood with five girls looking at the types of trees and crops being grown in the community. The whole project seemed to be a way of getting out of school grounds in order to dress up and walk past groups of boys, but it was relaxing for all of us and I felt that being away from the institutional and controlled setting of school helped us to get to know each other more informally. It also generated some envy among other students from lower forms. Therefore, confronted with the pressure of covering several sessions to fill the gap left by the departed American volunteers, I suggested to the school director that I could run some training on research methods for all girls. Fortunately, she was convinced by my pitch, and I was given free reign to do what I wanted.

Alongside the 'arts and crafts' club, in the previous term a weekly 'current events' club had been set up at Tufurahi School. Girls who were interested were supplied with a couple of newspapers and given the opportunity to read and discuss the stories. The club was well-attended, and the issues that arose in the papers were often then used to inform motions for another after-school activity: 'debate club'. One particular issue which caught many of the girls' attention and led to many lively, passionate discussions, was the ongoing Maasai land disputes in Loliondo. Maasai people were being forcibly evicted by the government to make way for foreign private investors to establish hunting reserves and lodges. The girls discussed the issue at length, voicing a range of opinions - ranging from condemning the Maasai to describing the moves by foreign investors as a new form of colonialism. Several girls got together to write letters to the government demanding that the evictions be halted.

The excitement and engagement of the girls in this activity, along with the interest that other girls had shown in my research activities with Form Three and their questions about my own project, led me to consider attempting some sort of broader research training with a participatory, action-oriented focus, involving all three Form groups. The first session was held after school as an optional activity. I organised the girls into groups, with a girl from Form Three heading each one. My reasoning behind this was that they had a basic understanding of research methods already, were treated by many of the Form One and Two students with respect due to their age and educational level, and because I felt it might benefit them to have the experience of leading a project and see how what they learned had applicability beyond their Geography classes.

As a side observation, it must be noted that the style of learning and content of syllabi in Tanzanian schools often prevent this type of cross-over between extra and intra-curricular activity. From what I witnessed, the challenge of teaching in English means that most teaching time is spent simply translating textbooks from English into Kiswahili, with little opportunity to contextualise the information or relate it to practical examples. This is especially challenging for the teaching of

sciences, where I saw girls learning pages of experimental designs, complete with results of chemical reactions and descriptions of equipment used, without ever seeing a real microscope, pair of safety goggles or test tube. This results in a rote learning style which paired with a strong emphasis on examination success and memorising rather than understanding enough to pass to the next stage, presents a major challenge for interdisciplinary and applied learning more generally. In this case, the emphasis on process rather than outcomes meant that many of the girls struggled to see the value of the research projects I was facilitating as part of their broader education. The fact it took place during school hours and was primarily taught in English was frustrating for both me and some of the girls, some of whom would skip the session or bring other school books to it to covertly work on. Nonetheless, I was excited that a large number of the girls were interested and enthusiastic.

I began by introducing the idea of auto-ethnography, emphasising that there was no special training or skills required to contribute to knowledge and that all the girls themselves are experts on the topic of girlhood in Tanzania. We then explored some options for research methods they could use. Most of the girls were familiar with the idea of interviewing, and already were using group discussions in their homework time, so they quickly identified these as useful strategies for obtaining new information and sharing ideas. The other methods I explored with the girls were participant observation and visual methods. Each group then tested these different methods with the other groups as a way to find out more about each issue, and the girls reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of the methods as they used them. I also held a session on ethics, covering basic issues around power dynamics, trust, consent and harm. I then suggested to the groups that they come up with a research project on something they would be interested in investigating. Drawing on their own experiences, each group compiled a list of issues that mattered to them, which we collated and then discussed. The girls ranked these in order of importance, and then each group selected an issue which they would be interested in investigating further and designed a question and methodology. I then worked with each group at a time, asking questions to help them to flesh out the design of their project and ensure that they had fully considered the ethical challenges involved.

Regardless of her initial enthusiasm, the school director stalled research project activities at this point because she decided that it would not be possible for the girls to conduct the projects they'd designed for a number of ethical and practical reasons. This was hugely frustrating for me to explain to the girls. It also illustrates one of the problems of doing research in a school setting which I identified earlier; young people's activities can quickly be curtailed by the structure of school and the whim of adults to decide what is appropriate for them. However, this setback did not stop those who were the most enthusiastic about their project. One day after school, I was approached by a small group who had decided to investigate the issue of street children in the

town, and asked if they could interview me and the other teachers to obtain adult insights into the challenges. I confessed I knew very little about the issue, but they were very keen to use my Dictaphone and ask me questions nonetheless. When my lack of knowledge became evident, my young interviewers changed tack and began asking me all sorts of questions about my opinion on a variety of other things, under the guise of an interview. I felt quite vulnerable and uncomfortable and uncertain, and on reflection can see that this unsettling of our roles helped to shift the power dynamics between us. When I later conducted my own recorded interviews with girls, I held this encounter in mind and made efforts to ensure that interviews felt like more of an exchange of thoughts than a one-sided interrogation.

Regardless of the limitations that this initiative eventually encountered, a benefit of at least doing some research training with the girls was the ability to give them an insight into the often opaque research process and the rationale behind some of the things researchers 'do'. This was particularly so with the overview of ethical conduct in research. I actually felt rather exposed and vulnerable going over the concepts of honesty, consent, avoiding harm, ensuring confidentiality and other aspects of ethical research praxis. However, I saw value in the opportunity to relate the training to examples within my own research. Not only could I show the girls I was being open with them about my own practices, but I also was able to use it as an opportunity to further expand their understanding of my research and their capacity to meaningfully consent to participate. I particularly emphasised the way in which people may not actively dissent but instead do things like fail to show up, or agree to participate yet remain silent, and emphasised both the legitimacy of such moves and the need to respect such shows of dissent.

The process also gave me an insight into what issues mattered to the girls and for what reasons; particularly those sessions in which we fleshed out the research questions they'd come up with. One group, interested in the issue of female genital cutting, wrote a list of questions they would like to ask girls from another tribe living in the region whose traditions include this practice. However, when discussing the questions, some of the girls suggested that it was a practice which continued into the present within their own tribe, and that they could likely answer the questions themselves. In discussing the questions they'd come up with and answering them based on their own knowledge, it was exciting to see girls learning new things from each other. Girls from different tribal backgrounds spoke about what happens within their own communities, and girls from the same tribe but different villages shared with each other their experiences and knowledge about the practice. Whilst at first these developments felt like a way of fostering a sense of community amongst the girls, as I discuss later in the thesis, any potential for solidarity appeared to remain confined to these research sessions.

At the end of term, the director of the school asked me to resume the research project, but by this point, with exams looming, many of the girls had lost enthusiasm or felt it was just filling time before Easter break. For those who were interested in continuing, I suggested that they could undertake an individual research project during the Easter break using the skills they'd developed during our sessions, and for a couple of sessions we brainstormed questions they were interested in obtaining answers to. This was a fun activity, as it was used by girls as an opportunity to propose all sorts of interesting questions about their communities or society more generally. Nothing was off limits; girls proposed everything from studies with village elders about circumcision rituals, to obliquely risqué questions about sex and relationships. Discussing what the answers to these questions might be was in itself a fascinating insight into their interests, as well as encouraging girls' interactivity and critical thinking. It also meant that we finished the 'participatory research project' on a positive note, with a lot of laughter and excitement.

#### **IV.v.c. Interviews and group discussions**

Before beginning my research, I did not set topics or questions for interviews in stone. This is because I wanted to 'test' certain ideas in informal conversations, before reflecting on how best to frame them. This approach was born out of my recognition of the importance of considering whether the questions and subject(s) of research were likely to make sense to girls and how they might be framed in a way which best reflected their experiences and perceptions (Mauthner 1997; Christensen 2004). The strategy worked well, allowing me to begin to identify issues and topics brought up by girls that were most pertinent to my own research interests, and then pursue them with girls as we chatted informally.

However, as time progressed in the final stage of my fieldwork, I began to contemplate the possibility of conducting interviews. I was very hesitant to blur the lines between friendship and research by introducing a Dictaphone to the chats I had with girls. I did not want anyone to feel that I was only interested in them as data and not people, which was certainly not the case. I had by this point amassed a variety of papers from other activities I'd done with the girls or been given by them; drawings, letters, a wealth of notes, copies of school assignments and activities, lists of recommended music, and of course my own journals which recorded in infinite detail the everyday interactions and activities that I'd become part of. Perhaps a hallmark of a novice researcher, I was becoming anxious that I was failing to really grasp the girls' explanations of some of the things I'd observed, and was keen to obtain their comments on record. I just was not entirely sure how to introduce something which was so obviously 'real research' into the casual, cosy relationships we'd established.

In the end, this decision was to some extent taken out of my hands by the girls themselves. On reflection, it was naive of me to think that on the basis of becoming more at ease in speaking to me over time, girls would have somehow suddenly forgotten that I was a researcher. As we got closer to the month I planned

to leave, I began to be asked by a number of the girls when I was going to interview them for my research. I took this as a cue to ask if they thought it was a good idea, and when they agreed - in a manner that implied this was a rather stupid question - I asked how I should do it. It was mentioned by some of the girls that a translator would be helpful, and when I asked who would be a good choice it was suggested that maybe I should ask one of the teachers. I again considered this, but felt that the insights I'd obtain this way would be limited by the dimension of respect and professional distance that the teachers had made the effort to establish with the girls, regardless of how well-liked they were.

I therefore contacted a young woman called Rachel, whom I'd met briefly in September who was studying her degree in Forestry and Agriculture in Mwanza. When we'd met she had been doing some temporary supply teaching at the school, so we only spent a week getting to know one another. However, we had got on extremely well and had some fascinating conversations about girls' lives in Tanzania. We remained in contact when she returned to university and she took a lot of interest and gave me thoughtful feedback on my research. Rachel was also a member of the same tribe as the majority of the girls at the school, so had a great deal of knowledge about their communities and history and could help me to understand how this background might influence the girls' lives and choices. Most importantly, she already had an established positive relationship with the girls at the school, who had all cried inconsolably when she left and continued to refer to her outstanding kindness in discussions about their experiences of school. When I suggested her as a potential research assistant to some of the students, they were very excited at the idea of seeing her again, telling me that she was kinder than the other teachers and they had been sad to see her leave. I knew she would have a break from her studies coming up, so I asked her if she would be interested in assisting me with interviews for a couple of weeks and I would pay her for her time.

Fortunately, Rachel responded that she would love to spend time with the girls again and would also appreciate the opportunity to get some research experience to add to her CV. Her return was greeted with much excitement from the girls who had met her in the previous term<sup>5</sup>. She settled back in quickly, assisting girls with homework even on her first evening at the school. After a week, we began interviewing, trying a variety of different strategies such as interviewing individuals, pairs, and groups of girls to see which was most effective. Rachel's feedback and suggestions were always insightful, and often invaluable. With her help, I was able to explore in much more depth some of the issues I'd already chatted about with the girls we interviewed; I asked questions in English which she translated into Kiswahili, or Kiiraqw where more appropriate. We had a number of in-depth conversations about my research objectives, which also helped to ensure we were on the same page during the interviews and could operate effectively together.

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<sup>5</sup> As the new school year begins in January, some of the students had not previously met Rachel.

Rachel intuitively knew when girls did not comprehend questions, and the difference between hesitance to answer because of misunderstanding rather than discomfort. She was compassionate and gentle when the interviews touched on more sensitive issues, and in many ways I wish I'd had her with me the whole time. Temple and Young raise the question of how far into the analysis a translator should be involved, given the implicit mark they cannot help but make on the research through their interpretations (2004). A major concern for me when I began considering the use of a research assistant was that any meanings constructed through language (Barrett 1992) might be mediated, missed or excluded in a way which causes me to miss relevant or important insights. However, my competence in Kiswahili by this point enabled me to understand the majority of the answers that girls gave; the challenge was in framing the questions I had in a nuanced enough way, which was where Rachel, with her combined emotional sensitivity and strong English comprehension excelled.

Choosing where and when to do the interviews is obviously an important consideration, but in the case of my fieldwork site, my options were limited. I would have preferred to leave the school premises entirely for the interviews, but was not really sure where I could realistically take girls. The town was quite a walk away and based on my experience of previous walks with a girl or two with me, there would always be people interested in knowing what we were doing and unreceptive to requests for privacy. Rachel and I needed to find a space which was familiar and where the girls would feel at ease, but the school buildings were small and there were really no secluded areas. The structure of the school day meant that interviews had to take place after lessons had finished but obviously this meant that all the girls would be free, not just those who had agreed to be interviewed, so this put the dormitories and outside spaces out of the question. Eventually, we settled on the teachers' office, which had until recently been the indoor kitchen. The advantage of this space was that it had doors which could be fully closed and was not adjoining any dormitories, so there was no risk of girls being able to casually listen in. Although a more formal environment, interviewing in the office would mean we could at least proceed undisturbed.

The style of interviewing we found most effective inevitably varied from girl to girl. Bearing in mind Punch's reminder that young people are not a homogenous group and therefore may have a preference for individual or group interviews (2002:49), I suggested to each girl that they could bring in a friend or friends if they wished, which some did. I found that a consistently useful strategy when discussions lulled was to invite the girls to take the opportunity to ask me any questions that they had previously not felt able to due to the language barrier. The girls we interviewed were the ones I'd become closest to but at times I'd felt their frustration at not being able to adequately convey things to me. This was a surprisingly effective strategy; in the same way that the 'interview' I'd been engaged in on street children led to the most fascinating discussions and revelations, inviting girls to 'ask me anything' resulted in unanticipated swerves in the topics we conversed about. Initially, the girls were uncertain and tended to rephrase my questions of

them back to me; but given time to think, several of them introduced new topics and used the opportunity to draw out my opinions and challenge them. Even when they stuck with the issues we'd already covered, the direction in which they led conversations was incredibly revealing.

Methodologically, shifting the interviews in this way served the purpose of both placing the girls themselves at the heart of the research process by enabling them to lead the interview, and entirely altered the power dynamics of the situation. Participants became more relaxed, using the guise of innocent inquiry to raise topics that I'd not have felt comfortable asking them about in any other exchange, and I doubt they would have either. When I'd answered a question, I would ask their opinion, or what their answer would be, which added hugely to the interviews. However, the most rewarding thing about this strategy for me personally, was that it served to consolidate and tighten the friendships we'd already built. Each interview finished with tears, hugs, and exhausted jubilation on all fronts, including from Rachel, who told me how much she also enjoyed getting to know the girls we spoke to.

In much of my preparatory reading around methods, there seemed to be an emphasis on 'fun' child-centred research methodologies, and a suggestion that traditional methods such as interviewing are perceived as boring and intimidating (David 1992; Smith & Barker 1999; Barker & Weller 2003). Whilst I incorporated a whole range of methods, it was my experience that the young people at my field site felt that unlike drawing or going for walks, an interview was 'real research' and showed that they were being taken seriously and seen as worth listening to. It is worth noting that most young people know what an interview is, and equally are unaware of academic debates within the new social studies of childhood as to whether this is the most effective way of engaging with them. I'd been previously concerned that the interviews would change my relationships with the girls, reminding them of my purpose at the school as a researcher and not just their friend. However, the intimacy of the interviews only strengthened the bonds we had already formed.

When Rachel left the following week to return to university, I had still not completed all the interviews I'd have liked. When walking to a nearby farm one day with a group of girls, I mentioned this to Chusa, one of the girls who had 'interviewed' me on street children earlier in the term. She asked why I did not want to use one of the teachers and I explained that I was concerned that girls would not feel relaxed around them and therefore not open up. Chusa agreed this might be a problem, then called over to a couple of the Form Three girls to explain my dilemma. The girls who had been summoned - Darlena and Sanama - discussed it among themselves, then suggested that they could help me with my remaining interviews if I'd like.

I was elated by this and said that I would appreciate this a lot, but I did not want to pressure their assistance. Not only did I not want them to feel obliged to help, but as noted earlier, Form Three girls like Sanama and Darlena exercised some degree of power over students from the lower Forms. Some Form Three girls bullied and hassled younger or newer students, and I'd seen both Darlena and Sanama getting girls to fetch their bowls of food at meal times and wash their shoes for them. I had been advised by the teachers that this was normal and part of enforcing respect for elders in schools. However, I was concerned that such domineering relationships might not facilitate an open, safe interviewing atmosphere. Young people are themselves not a homogenous group, and the impact of power dynamics amongst girls was essential for me to consider in this regard.

Eventually Chusa, the student who had initiated this exchange, became my new research assistant. I felt this was a good option for a number of reasons. We spent a great deal of time together already, and she began enthusiastically pressing me on when we could do some interviews, so I felt confident that her participation was not being forced. One afternoon I brought my Dictaphone with me to school and suggested that together, she and I could interview someone she knew well already and would be comfortable with. The interview went well - as did the others that followed. It should be noted here that introducing this type of peer interviewing gave me privileged access to a new and unique angle. I encouraged Chusa to ask questions of her own and introduce topics she felt were important to cover for whatever reason, of both the girls we interviewed and of me. This centring of not only what data are collected, but how they are collected, around the needs and perceptions of girls themselves rather than by simply adapting my methods to include them was vital to the integrity of my research project. As Hendrick suggests, overcoming adult-centrism is a vital first step in making it 'possible to hear a more authentic and, probably, unsettling set of voices' from young people (2004:55).

There were a number of differences to the interviews I'd done with Rachel's assistance; for example, Chusa was often hesitant in probing further. On the upside, I noted that participants felt more confident in refusals to answer any questions, directly saying so rather than simply going quiet and looking away. Due to the hierarchical nature of relationships within the school discussed above, it soon became clear to me that Chusa did not feel confident in interviewing girls outside her own social circle or in forms above her own (Form One), balking when I suggested that we do so. Getting Chusa's perspective on the questions I asked was also helpful, and in retrospect I wish I'd discussed them with her in more depth before we did interviews because the process of requesting her to translate questions highlighted those which had made sense to Rachel and I, but lacked clarity to Chusa, and therefore potentially to the other girls too. I'd had many conversations previously with her about my research and what I was interested in, but the way in which I phrased certain things sometimes confused her and I was concerned therefore things might be easily lost in translation given that the interviews certainly were pushing the limits of her language skills



anyway. However, Chusa told me she greatly enjoyed doing the interviews and asked if I thought it would be possible for her to do a PhD one day, and was interested in whether being a researcher was seen as a prestigious job.

Overall, the interviews which produced the most opportunities for probing and depth were those which took place in settings that placed everyone's focus onto things other than the actual conversation. As Freire suggests, informal discussion, with space for personal perspectives in safe spaces can be most conducive to broaching sensitive issues (2004:13). I'd learned this early on from the success of informal conversations over sewing, drawing and walking, and it was really challenging to replicate this sort of casual indirectness whilst also being able to record data and refer to my notes where necessary. I was keen to see if I could perhaps bring this into a group setting. Given the hesitance some girls had shown in exploring some topics in the interviews, I was also keen for my research to benefit from some of the proposed advantages of group discussions with young people, and see if it could create a space in which they might share experiences and cue responses which they might feel less confident sharing one-on-one. Group interviews are also suggested by Eder and Fingerson to be a more 'natural' context given that social knowledge is acquired through interactions (2003:35).

The ideal place turned out to be the outdoor kitchen on chapati night. On chapati night, the table from the office would be brought out, and for three or four hours, a large group of girls would take turns oiling and rolling over a hundred balls of dough to be cooked over an open fire. This was a tremendously sociable occasion and I'd already participated regularly in the rolling, attaining enough competence and speed that the school cook even began requesting me to assist with preparations. I suggested that we try doing a group interview there to Rachel, who was initially hesitant because of the 'noise pollution'. However, she agreed to give it a try, and it went very well. The opportunity to redirect questions to other girls or change the subject back to cooking meant that it was straightforward for girls to opt out of answering things they were not comfortable with. Additionally, girls were able to leave and return at will under the guise of needing to do other things.

This did also mean that other girls who were interested in joining in but who I'd not approached directly to interview were able to come in and out. It was challenging to ensure the informed consent of such a dynamic group, so I kept the Dictaphone in full view and when girls came to listen in I pointed it out and requested that Rachel quickly give them an explanation of what we were doing if they looked like they wanted to stay around. However, it was difficult to establish a bond and safe space with girls coming in mid-discussion, and I sensed changes in how open certain girls were in their answers or how readily they joined in depending on who was present. Michell (1999) suggests that group discussion sessions with peer groups are themselves sites for the reproduction of social hierarchies, and that because of this they can act

as sites of further disenfranchisement of those at the bottom of these hierarchies. She suggests that using interviews alongside group discussions can enable events and experiences which were not able to be discussed with or in front of others in the social group but which were essential to understanding certain girls' silencing or marginalization to emerge (Michell 1999:45).

Despite Rachel's concern that there would be too much noise for the recording to be successful, I actually felt that the noise of the kitchen meant that the girls felt a little more able to talk about things they had seemed concerned might be overheard when we did interviews in the office. A further issue was that the casualness of the setting, despite resulting in a more relaxed environment, may have meant that the girls did not feel that they had been specifically sought out for their opinion and that it was valued in the same way as those who I'd interviewed with Rachel in the office. Rachel's feeling was that a group setting and the audience of the other girls did however have the advantage of preventing girls from lying, which was not a concern I'd had beforehand and demonstrated our different understandings of the purpose of the interviews. For me, in line with the emphasis of a constructivist paradigm on an 'emic' approach, I was not focused on the accuracy of various accounts (Young 2005). I suggested that if she felt girls were lying, then we could discuss afterwards why they might do so, but throughout the interviews we did together she did not raise any concerns about us being misled.

The use of group discussions as complementary to interviews enabled me to then explore one-on-one with the same girls later how they felt about the 'publically' acceptable accounts within this setting and reflect together on the differences between individual and social narratives. Taken alone or 'as read', interviews and focus groups can simply function as yet another site for dominant discourses to be re-presented and affirmed and for girls to situate themselves in relation to this discourse in ways which will present them in a positive light or make a good impression. An ethnographic approach however, in which solo, pair and group interviews generate only part of the data, helps to address these challenges, as I was able to contextualise actions and accounts of girls which were reported in these settings.

#### **IV.vi. Ethical issues: Power and representation**

Reflexivity is integral to research which seeks to explore issues affecting groups whose accounts of life are already marginalised. This is an ethical imperative, as well as a question of rigour. My own value judgements in not only conducting the research and analysing the data it has brought forth, but also planning the project in the first place, has necessitated deep reflexivity as an ongoing process. My whiteness, Westernness, age, and the way in which power is mediated through these characteristics have inevitably had an impact upon how I was perceived as a researcher, and affected my own experiences and assumptions. However, as explored here, the meanings

attached to these categories often unfolded and manifested in ways I had not anticipated. As in all social interactions, there were also opportunities for perceptions to be challenged and altered. It is perhaps worth noting here that I was once a teenage girl, and I found it to be a rather trying time. Like the girls I ended up doing this research with, I went to a boarding school far away from my home and family when I was a teenager. I was very unhappy there, and struggled with the restrictive environment and petty rules which seemed to prioritise success above, and often at the cost of, students' wellbeing. When I failed to attend lessons or complete work in time, these developments were cast as disruptive, rather than troubling; attributed to ignorance and wilfulness. When punishments did not alter my behaviour I was expelled shortly before my GCSEs, aged sixteen.

I was not able to occupy the subject-position I describe above of 'vulnerable' and 'passive', which entitles girls to the benevolence adults bestow upon children. For girls to be labelled thus, it is essential that they do not embody an active, desiring sexuality; I was precluded from this because when I was fifteen I started dating girls. I feel that coming out made me unable to be seen as an innocent child, and therefore despite my evident unhappiness I was also unable to be seen as needing support rather than discipline. I was made to feel that as I had been able to figure out my sexuality, I should also be able to be held solely accountable for the difficulties I was having at school.

Archer provides a basic definition of reflexivity as a practice of 'internal conversation' and suggests it manifests in the ability of one to consider themselves 'in relation to their contexts (and vice versa)' (Archer 2007:4). In the context of my research, one way in which I helped to keep this process at the heart of what I was doing was by keeping a personal journal on top of my fieldwork notes, reflecting on my interactions and experiences each day. This was sufficient at first to enable me to think through the research process and reflect on how I was perceiving events, and how my actions might also be seen by others. After a few months, and when deeper into my time at the school, I then began to also take a couple of hours out of the fieldwork space each week to write a longer reflexive piece, examining my notes and considering how to respond to any issues that they raised. I found this was helpful not only in identifying areas of my research which could be interesting to explore further, but also in thinking through my own actions and considering how I might better ensure that my own actions were appropriate to the methodological approach I'd adopted. Because I was extremely busy on a day to day basis, and each day threw up unanticipated events that I had to react to, this was very important for keeping me grounded in the critical, thoughtful approach I wanted to centre my work around but which was, in many ways, at odds with the immediate, strenuous demands of everyday life in Tanzania.

Something which I struggled with every day was my own positionality. I constantly felt uncertain to whom I 'owed' my loyalty and what my priorities ought to be. Being an adult and a Westerner, I was perceived by teachers and other gatekeepers as having a duty of care for the girls at the school, and presumed to be willing to take up this duty. This shaped my sense of self within the field and had a huge impact on how I navigated the field site. Given my questioning of existing categories and binaries originating within my own epistemology, my own definition of what a duty of care looked like was certainly far more radical than the way in which 'duty' and 'care' were defined and understood by either the teachers at the site or the director of the school.

Part of my ethically motivated reflexive praxis was therefore considering to whom I owed a primary responsibility; my gatekeepers, or the girls themselves, who after all were the centre of the project. Though I struggled with this in the field, and continue to do so in my sustained contact with certain girls via the instant messaging service 'Whatsapp' despite knowing that phones are not permitted at school, I admit I chose to prioritise my relationships with them over those with adults in the field site. A question that this raises is whether the epistemological orientation of the researcher and the subsequent approach towards what constitutes good ethics conflicts with the 'duty of care' which is defined and expected by those working with girls in institutional environments. I often felt that the role I was expected to play in the girls' lives centred on my identity as an adult among young people, rather than as a researcher with a specific ethical stance related to this subject-position. Indeed, my approach to this research, as shown in the earlier chapters, was to question whether school is a priori a protective, positive space. Given that this was at odds with the ontology of teachers and others, I also felt ethically conflicted over how to respond to the expectation that I would act in accordance with the expectations of the school director and other staff.

It perhaps goes without saying that a huge amount of energy each day was devoted into projecting, maintaining and performing various roles, whilst also seeking ways to show my own personality within the predefined ways that 'researchers' are expected by others to function. Indeed, I often felt I had to effectively perform the 'researcher role' in order to obtain the credibility to access and continue to engage participants. My ethnographic and girl-centred approach was constantly interrogated by those in the field site, including teachers and the director of the school, who had their own ideas of what research looks like and what they therefore expected me to do. Whilst at every stage I maintained an open dialogue about what I was doing and why I perhaps was not planning to conduct questionnaires and why I did not have a rigid research question for the entire duration of the fieldwork, this was very tiring and often made me question myself. I sometimes found myself pretending to be doing or planning to do things which fitted with others' perceptions of what I ought to be doing, in order to be seen as professional and trustworthy. However, I resented this 'professional' role and when forced to perform it, found myself doing things to undermine it and myself in various ways. This included actively refusing to obey small

rules or reinforce discipline, as well as confessing to the girls that I did not feel like either an adult or researcher. A cathartic opportunity to do this came in the form of another drawing project I did with the girls, in which we all drew pictures of 'how others see me' and 'how I see myself'.

These experiences raised questions for me about how one does research which is fundamentally about challenging forms of authority and knowledge, whilst feeling a sense of reliance upon and finding oneself seeking credibility within these hegemonies to be able to do the research. This paradox was troubling to me, but at the time I felt rather stuck on how I could subvert it.

I had to contend with a whole series of challenges when I moved out of Arusha and began to establish myself at the small school, where I found myself part of a complex, dynamic network of relationships. This required constant reflexivity and self-critique in an effort to establish positive relationships with the girls whose perspectives I sought to understand. It must be acknowledged that these power relations also affected my interpretations of interactions in the field and afterwards, highlighting the importance of both maintaining a constant personal reflexivity in relation to my own positioning and the assumptions associated with it, and thinking critically about the impact on how my interpretations began to emerge (Hertz 1997). Unequal distribution and access to power was perhaps one of the defining features of my fieldwork. It was something I was particularly concerned about in the relationships I established with the girls, and I felt I had to be careful that these relationships were constantly subject to scrutiny (Smith 1974). In the context of the town where the school was based, Westerners tended to only pass through as tourists, or on occasion stay briefly as volunteers, and I immediately realised how important it would be to distinguish myself from other 'wazungu' (white people) who the girls may have had experience of. The effort of learning and practising Kiswahili helped enormously in enabling the girls to see me as more than 'just a Westerner' but also in providing an immediate space in which I was vulnerable and they were confident.

In my early days in the school, I took every opportunity to defer to the girls' expertise, emphasised my own lack of knowledge, and asked them questions about how to do things properly. I found that as a young woman I was able to discuss topics and engage in activities with young female participants in ways which would not be possible for an older and/or male researcher. However, it is important not to overestimate such grounds for potential solidarity. For example, my race and class privilege, bound up as they are with a history of colonialism and imperialism (Vidich and Lyman 2000:41), create barriers which I had to work hard to stand a chance of surmounting, and even then I was only realistically partially able to access the lives of my participants.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for how I was perceived by girls and teachers as being a powerful actor were my relationships with the teachers and school director. I was acutely aware of their role

as gatekeepers, both formally and informally, and therefore needing to keep them onside. The three female teachers, who lived at the school, were extraordinarily welcoming and kind to me and were keen to embrace me as part of their clique. However, I sometimes felt this kept me at a distance from the students. The teachers invited me to eat with them in their quarters away from the girls and when I visited the school out of hours or in the evenings they would also pull me in to talk and drink tea. It was important for me to develop these relationships, which produced helpful insights into how girls' behaviour may be interpreted and commented upon by adults. However sometimes this devolved into complaining about the girls, and having spent time in the girls' dormitories nearby I felt they often underestimated how loudly they were speaking and how audible their voices were. As these discussions usually were in Kiswahili it was fairly easy to minimise my direct participation by listening only, and pretend I had not been following if asked for my input.

The school director, whose house I was renting a room in, was one of only a handful of other non-Tanzanians I knew locally and vice versa. She was therefore keen to socialise with me outside of school hours. Given her role as the major figure of authority at the school, I was very uncertain about how to manage the image this presented of us as 'friends' when in fact due to the hours I spent working we spent very little time together. In the first weeks the teachers assumed that we communicated a lot about work, and would often ask me about scheduling issues, examinations and lesson content. They seemed frustrated when I did not know things. I was concerned that the girls too might assume our relationship to be closer than it was, and that this would mean they would not trust me with information that perhaps was against school rules. My response to this was to do everything possible to emphasise my 'separateness' from the school director. I spent much more time with the teachers and girls than with her and made a point of my ignorance on various topics which were out of the remit of my purpose at the school. When the teachers asked about my work, I made sure that I particularly clarified my position at the school as a researcher and my ethical approach towards confidentiality so that if the girls then asked the teachers any questions they would feel able to inform them. I was supportive when they critiqued the school director's expectations of them, and shared my own frustrations with them.

However, I also needed to emphasise my distinctness from other staff to the girls. I took small measures that I hope contributed to an impression of me as not being a teacher or American volunteer. I ate with the girls whenever I could, rather than in the teachers' room. Unlike the teachers, I danced with the girls when we had 'parties'. As my friendships with certain girls grew closer, I also hung out with them in their rooms and slept over at the weekends, piling into the bunk beds with them to gossip and look at magazines or photographs or listen to music. When the girls were given chores and I was asked to assist in supervising, I did the work alongside them instead and asked them what needed doing next, rather than try to take a directive role. To the confusion and frustration of the teachers and the irritation of the director I also did not make any attempt to

reprimand or direct any of the girls when I saw them doing something against the rules. I certainly felt that there was a risk in doing this, given the importance of the teachers and director as gatekeepers, but it was my priority to build relationships of trust with the girls and I therefore felt it was worth it. Admittedly however my subversion of school rules has perhaps contributed to the fact that since leaving the field site, after a few initial emails, my relationship with the school director has waned considerably.

Whilst it is possible to downplay one's adulthood, it remains an inescapable reality, and I must emphasise the privileges I was able to obtain by being both an adult and seen as part of the school's staff. For example, I was able to access types of data that would not have been made available to me had I not been identified as honorary 'staff'. I was informed by the teachers and director of girls' various medical issues, given access to family histories and records held in the school office, and offered other private information which perhaps the girls themselves would not have shared with me, at least not so quickly. This raises an ethical tension which must be acknowledged; being an adult at the school, it was assumed that I was entitled to know such things without the consent of the girls concerned. I was very uncertain about this and as such, made special efforts to ensure that the girls saw that I respected their consent and autonomy and did not feel entitled to be present or know things about them. When I accompanied girls to a hospital clinic, I did not go into the doctors' room with them in the way that I saw other teachers do automatically<sup>6</sup>. The girls however found their own ways to mediate the intrusiveness of adults. One particularly effective strategy was to speak in tribal dialects rather than English or Kiswahili, which frustrated the teachers, who felt that any switch in language in their presence was a sure sign of suspicious behaviour.

Adding to my general demeanour of 'difference' was the fact that my methods did not align with what the teachers understood to be the 'correct' way of doing research, and they commented on this regularly. One of the teachers had previously worked for an NGO and been involved with data collection for a baseline study on agricultural development. She regularly asked me when I was going to 'begin research', and asked about my planned surveys and interview questions. I tried to explain the inductive approach I was taking, but often this made me doubt myself and my methods. However, as a positive, my appearance of being a researcher who clearly didn't feel certain about much seemed to make me a non-threatening presence. This, combined with my stilted Kiswahili and lack of knowledge of how to perform basic daily cleaning, cooking and grooming tasks expected of girls from a young age, shifted the balance of power between us. The benefit of this was that it opened up lots of opportunities to ask questions without arousing suspicions or

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<sup>6</sup> However, several girls immediately requested my presence in the room with them, with some of them saying that they were nervous to be alone with a male doctor.

defensiveness. I began asking advice and input from the teachers on everything from methods design to thoughts on my whole PhD question.

As noted earlier, the role I began to carve out for myself within the networks of people in the field site was complicated further a couple of months into my time there. I had selected the field site on the basis that the director, who I'd developed a relationship with whilst I was still in Arusha, had a good understanding of my objectives for research and supported me in taking an inductive, ethnographic approach. However, there were some staffing issues at the school with one teacher departing to return to university and pursue her Masters' degree, and there were major challenges in recruiting a new member of staff so late into the school year. Therefore, the school director requested that I undertake some teaching at the school, covering English classes and being an 'adult presence' in others for the students to direct questions to. I was disappointed in this but felt unable to decline this request. I'd come to the site with the grand objective of having a positive impact on how girls are approached within development initiatives; but a more pressing need for the other adults at the school was to ensure they progressed within their studies and passed their examinations, and I felt unable to protest against my participation for a 'greater good'.

I was relieved that at least I'd spent some time with the girls before assuming the role of 'teacher', so that they had begun to know me in a different capacity to the person who had to stand before them each day at a responsible adult to whom they were expected to interact with deferentially. Being honest with the girls and teachers about my reservations is something that I felt helped to clarify my self-identification as a novice researcher, as opposed to a volunteer or teacher and I hope enabled them to understand some of the tensions I was experiencing. Voicing my feeling of vulnerability and frustration was a relief to me and I feel helped to flesh me out as a multidimensional being, not just the jolly happy researcher who is a friend to all and has no negative feeling to speak of, a role I felt burdened with and oppressed by sometimes. However, at the same time, establishing myself as having no real authority made managing a classroom very difficult. The girls could see I had no intention of enacting discipline or even demanding their attendance and many of them took advantage of this, which clearly affected the quality of the learning environment. I tried to feel celebratory that they clearly did not see me as a teacher - I was quick to correct those that called me such, saying 'I'm not a teacher, I am just helping out' - but I felt anxious over the pressure of juggling my responsibilities to the director and to myself and my project. The disruptiveness of girls was also extremely tiring and difficult not to take personally and I found it much more difficult to feel quite so friendly to some girls as a result of my short stint attempting to teach them.



#### **IV.vii. Conclusion**

This chapter reveals the complex interactions of structures and modes of power in the field. Despite my initial intention being to challenge these dynamics, I was unable to escape their impact on the research process and my relationships with gatekeepers and participants. My research and the access I had to information sometimes benefited from the same aspects of my identity and the webs of power through which I was perceived which hindered me in other ways. Doing fieldwork in a school, where I received support from the staff around me in undertaking research, was a positive experience in many ways. However, I have noted here that this setting had a huge implications for the trajectory of my research, due in part to the expectations teachers at the school had of me as a researcher and as their peer. The way that the teachers interacted with girls, the role they felt I should play in girls' school lives, and the general constraints of being in a structured educational environment were challenges I had to constantly negotiate in order to ensure that my interactions with girls themselves were not harmed.

My perceived relationship with the school director added a further layer to this navigation of self-representation. I often felt as though I was in a no-win situation; seen as powerful due to my whiteness, adulthood and my relationships with those in positions of authority, but lacking any meaningful capacity to affect these relationships. Overall, the success of my fieldwork lay in the flexibility of the ethnographic approach I chose to use, and my ability to therefore quickly respond to these shifts and complexities. The lack of a specific time frame enabled me to take the changing expectations of the school director in my stride. I certainly left the field feeling that I had avoided two of the pitfalls of international development work with teenage girls identified earlier; ignoring the complex context of girls lives, and not listening to their perspectives even when they made me uncomfortable.

The third pitfall of development research that I identified in the opening to this chapter, of ensuring that empowerment is not used in a depoliticised manner, is something that I feel less confident in claiming to have done successfully. Indeed, I often experienced the research process as disempowering myself, given the constraints placed upon me by gatekeepers. The ability of the school director to redirect and halt the research meant that I left the field feeling that I had experienced first-hand the degree to which agency is mediated by relationships and context. I still argue that this research shows how participatory approaches can create spaces in which exciting solutions for addressing challenges girls face around sexual agency can be generated by girls themselves.

As argued earlier in this thesis, empowerment is meaningless without opportunities for action and transformation. What is often ignored in popular discourses about girls in developing countries is

the role of development organisations themselves as a significant presence in girls' lives. This leads to an emphasis on culture and local norms as obstructive of girls' agency and overlooks the relationships between girls and organisations as sites for analysis. The implications of this for development practice is returned to within the conclusion of this thesis. However, in taking the critical approach to methods I describe here, I did my best to look beyond this and find ways to engage with girls' perspectives directly. I accounted for not just what girls say and do, but situated this in the broader context within which this happens into the analysis and processing of the data which this research generated. This approach is inclusive of all actors, and necessitates a critical gaze upon myself, as I have discussed here. The following chapters turn to the empirical findings which were generated through this approach.



## **V: Doing 'girl'**

*'This year's Miss Tanzania deserves the victory she got. You see, she is very beautiful. Because of that, people admire her so much. She is tall and slim. Her breasts are as pointed as needles. Moreover, she has a fair complexion. That is how I can describe this angel of Tanzania.'*

- Excerpt from a reading and listening exercise in a Form One English textbook.

### **V.i. Introduction**

The previous chapters have given an overview of the field site and the methodology which I used within the research. It is not the aim of the research to present a coherent picture of girlhood at a rural school in Northern Tanzania. Given the dynamic, complicated context described in the previous chapter, girlhood is a shifting ideal which is subject to negotiation by girls themselves, and so my aim in this chapter is to convey this complexity of 'doing' girl in this context (Ringrose & Renold 2011). Using data from observations, interviews, focus groups and a visual methods project undertaken with girls at Tufurahi School, this chapter examines what it means to be a 'good girl'. It situates the tensions that are revealed by girls' narratives, reflections, and experiences in the context of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses on girlhood, development, education and modernity.

Much of the existing literature emphasises the important role of cultural norms in shaping girls' behaviour. I have critiqued this as one-dimensional, homogenising and depoliticised. It also implies a lack of agency on the part of girls, who are assumed to uncritically accept and replicate social norms. I was interested to therefore find out from girls themselves how they experience and negotiate various ideals of girlhood which are present in their communities, their schools and in the development projects they participate in. I also include the perspectives of adults including teachers, development actors, family members and others in relation to what girls say and do. This chapter shows that being a 'good girl' is not a fixed and incontestable ideal, as is often implied in discussions in which 'culture' is positioned as a monolithic structural force.

The casting of certain expressions of girlhood as positive and negative was a key feature of the narratives of stakeholders in girls' lives. However, as this chapter seeks to move away from the centring of adult perspectives, it is therefore thematically organised around issues which emerged from research with girls themselves. I first discuss what it is that good girls are expected to 'be'. I introduce the key ideas of respect and discipline, which shape this normative feminine identity. I consider how these come to be physically embodied by girls, focusing in particular on the

significance of cleanliness as an embodied practice. I next look at how girls can perform 'goodness'. I reflect upon the ways that girls spoke about school and the relationship between education and girlhood, suggesting that the status of 'schoolgirl' can be an important way of distinguishing oneself as a good girl. I discuss the ways that the subject-position of 'schoolgirl' which holds such symbolism and significance within development discourse is actually experienced by girls.

Having established some of the key ideals of 'good' girlhood and the tensions and dichotomies that they present for girls in their experience of schooling, I look at how girls at Tufurahi School sought alternative ways of 'doing' girl. I reflect upon the compatibility of these subject-positions with expectations of 'goodness' which have been established. I draw attention to the subject positions which are made available through an emphasis on empowerment and its association with autonomy, a notion which is prominent in both local and international discourse, albeit in different ways. This chapter argues that whilst girls are able to agentially negotiate the complex discursive regime which emerges, new tensions are generated as a result, which they must also contend with.

## **V.ii. Defining the 'good girl'**

When I first began to learn Kiswahili, I was frustrated by the lack of vocabulary in the language for making positive and negative appraisals of things, situations and people. There is a word for 'good' and a word for 'bad', but that is pretty much the extent of it. However, this means these two little adjectives - '-zuri' to describe a good thing and '-baya' to describe something bad - are therefore used in a huge variety of ways. To call something or someone nice, beautiful, charming, kind, pleasing, exciting, virtuous, well-behaved or friendly, would be captured using '-zuri'. To describe it or them as unpleasant, ugly, ill-disciplined, rude, naughty, promiscuous, mean or unsettling, again, only one word would do - '-baya'.

Whilst context provided an indication as to the intended meaning, there was also reliance on a shared cultural framework which designates certain things as good and bad. I found this incredibly difficult to try to interpret, particularly at the beginning of my fieldwork. The daily uncertainty of what exactly was meant by the descriptions of '-zuri' or '-baya' I was encountering, and the frustration of trying to express my own opinions and feelings adequately, was what first made me think about how girls themselves might describe and distinguish different kinds of desirable qualities. The fact that negative words for appearance were the same as those for personality traits presented both an interesting starting point and a challenge for exploring ideas around girlhood identity.

I was interested in how this would manifest in girls' own reflections on what could be described in negative terms and what was seen to be positive, and why this was so. With this in mind, I designed the drawing project which was mentioned in the Methods chapter of this thesis. I asked the girls to draw an 'msichana mzuri' on one side of the page (roughly - with reference to the above discussion about the ambivalence of '-zuri' - a 'good girl') and an 'msichana mbaya' ('bad girl') on the other. I asked them to annotate these drawings to indicate what made them 'mzuri' or 'mbaya' and discuss them with each other. I then spoke to groups of girls and individual girls about their pictures. This formed the starting point for thinking about the question that is at the heart of this chapter. What is a 'good girl'; and how do notions of appropriate girlhood interact with the 'doing' of girlhood in this context?

### **V.ii.a. Respect**

Neema (aged 19) was the oldest Form One girl. She wrote that a good girl is in contact with her community and is loved by them. Neema often expressed feelings of homesickness to me. She was very close to her mother, who had given birth to her when she was very young and shortly afterwards was abandoned by her husband, Neema's father. She later remarried a Tanzanian man of Indian heritage and given birth to Neema's several younger half-siblings. Neema spoke frequently of her stepfather's status as a mechanic in the community and his reputation. She had a collection of photographs of the garage where he worked, and was proud of her ability to name and recognise different cars. She had applied to Tufurahi School along with several other girls from her village half a day's travel away, but she had been the only girl to be successful in her interview and obtain a place. When she moved to the school to begin her secondary education, a number of families in her village had put money together to pay to borrow a car to transport her and her belongings. It was evidently important to her that she was not seen to disappoint them.

In girls' accounts of what a good girl is like, having good relationships with others was one of the most regularly emphasised dimensions of personality. 'She is loving, supportive and cooperative', 'if she sees someone who has a load, she can help', 'this girl is very nice to people - she likes cooperation and respect', and 'she is happy to everyone'. An ideal which appeared across the board was that she is 'respectful'. In contrast, 'she has no respect' and 'she is not cooperative' were among the most frequent descriptions of bad girls. Descriptions of a 'good girl' tended to emphasise social integration, often by doing things which keep one on good terms with one's community and family.

When bad behaviour was described it was in terms of the ways in which it disrupted moral and social norms of appropriate female behaviour. 'When she drinks alcohol she disturbs the people',

'smoking, using drink, angry, she has no honour' 'she is lazy, mad, greedy, her house is dirty' and 'she uses bad language'. However, this is in contrast to the way in which being a 'good girl' was never described in terms of 'abstaining from drinking' or 'being proactive' for example. Being a 'bad girl' was therefore a case of doing things which disrupted norms of behaviour which were presumed to be implicit and self-evident. If being a 'good girl' was about acting in ways which contributed to a peaceful and cooperative community, being a bad girl might also be understood as being someone who upsets this aspired-for social harmony through disrupting these norms.

### **V.ii.b. Self-control**

The idea of 'respect' described above is fundamentally a social characteristic because it is about one's relationships with others. The other ideal of a 'good girl' that I found repeatedly in girls' descriptions constructs girlhood in a more individualistic framing. 'She has self-control' and 'she has enough discipline' appear frequently alongside phrases such as 'she controls her life herself' and 'she is confident in her path'. This presents a good girl as autonomous and self-regulating. When I asked about their sense of control over their own futures, girls firmly rejected the idea that they are not in charge of their lives. They were blasé when I asked whether they perceived whether future success would be contingent on anything other than themselves. However, when pressed further, God was often mentioned by girls, particularly in discussing issues such as who formed one's role models and guided one's decision-making.

When I asked Form Two student Safura (aged 16) whether she felt in control of her life, she immediately responded 'yes', but then clarified; 'first is God and second is me.' Answers to my questions about how and why certain choices are made about one's life often turned back to the need to place faith in God to provide guidance, which in turn would enable one to make good decisions. Safura and I had many conversations about discrimination against girls, a topic she felt passionately about. Following the death of her mother she had been forced to leave her previous school after completing her primary education in order to stay at home to cook and clean for her father and brothers. She had, however, eventually managed to persuade her father to send her to Tufurahi School as it offered reduced fees which she might be eligible for. She had been very happy to get a place there. I asked whether her family have any control over her life and after some reflection she said that God guides her family, so when they guide her, they act through God. I asked about her experiences of discrimination, but she asserted that just because she had been expected to stay at home and take care of her family after her mother died does not mean she can be controlled. 'Family can't control you - for example me, when I don't want someone to rule me I detach from them, and therefore rule my own life'.

Safura's absolute certainty in her own capacity to control her situation was not commonplace. Other girls expressed doubts about the extent to which they were able to control their lives, and framed prayer as more of a hopeful attempt to prevent bad things happening than an inoculation against misfortune. Whilst 'bad girls' were never accused of not being sufficiently religious, 'good girls' faithfulness and enjoyment of prayer were emphasised. Bad behaviour was also spoken of in terms of a lack of self-control, with the implication that girls can be held responsible for their actions, even if such actions are a lack of diligence in religious worship. A 'bad girl' was described as 'careless and stupid' 'she has no honour' 'she has no discipline' and 'she is not confident'. This was perhaps a way of reconciling an autonomous subject-position with one's religious beliefs, and the unbending faith which this required girls to express. It also implies that 'goodness' is linked to self-control; a girl who does not behave in what is perceived to be an appropriate way is seen as unable to exercise self-discipline and lacks the strength and determination to be good.

### **V.ii.c. Embodied goodness**

Like girls elsewhere, taking care of oneself and looking attractive was extremely important. Girls framed appearance as a way in which wholesome and appropriate femininity could be signalled to others. In the drawing project on good girls and bad girls, bad girls were attributed qualities which were less physically attractive. Good girls were described in positive physical terms like 'fat' 'thick' 'clean' 'mwah' - and of course 'beautiful'. In the Form One English textbook with which I began this chapter, girls are asked to answer questions about a passage describing 'Miss Tanzania' which talks of her pointed breasts and pale skin. Whilst some girls felt that being pale was more attractive, others used the term 'black beauty' to talk of very dark girls positively and affirmatively.

The body is powerfully symbolic: a surface on which culture, rules and hierarchies are played out (Douglas 1966; 1982). Pursuing beauty is a marker of luxury and time, rather than being about attractiveness per se. I can attest to the vast amount of time devoted to outfit changes, fights over shared clothes, and the relentless reapplication of BabySoft (a scented jelly deployed as hair gel, lip gloss, cheekbone highlighter, perfume, mascara, foot cream, cuticle butter, substitute for bathing when there was no water, topical medicine for scabies, etc). For some girls, modesty was an important factor in choosing how to dress; long pleated skirts were the most popular choice, and girls who joined the Uamsho Wakristo wa Tanzania (UWATA) church were expected to wear these at all times. Whilst the Catholic church also discouraged girls from dressing 'immodestly' for church services, outside of Sunday most girls still painted their nails, wore jeans (often beneath their skirts) and a mixture of Western clothes paired with pieces made from traditional fabrics but cut in a more 'modern' way.



One of the ways in which many boarding schools in Tanzania deal with the 'distraction' of dress and personal upkeep is by instituting something called 'shamba dress', which is an alternative uniform which girls can wear outside of school hours. Shamba dress usually constitutes a 'tomato shirt' (a plain white blouse) and a pleated skirt, and is plain and functional so it is appropriate for menial tasks, but is smart enough that it can be worn to attend church and travel home. The teachers were enthusiastic about it being introduced at Tufurahi School because of its perceived benefits as a leveller between students, given that 'some girls feel bad because they do not have money' (for clothes and accessories). However, it was felt by many of the girls themselves to be 'ugly' and 'look bad'.

Hair was extremely important to the girls, which I found astonishing given that one of my first impressions of schoolgirls in Tanzania was that they all had the same short hairstyle. However, I soon learned that there were subtle differences in the styling and that these were seen as very significant. When I asked teachers and older Tanzanian locals why girls wear their hair short, I was given two different interpretations; it is practical, because it requires very little maintenance; and because it has the desexualising effect of making boys and girls look the same which is felt to make them less vulnerable to harassment by older men and teachers. These two interpretations were however not ones which the girls themselves subscribed to. When I questioned girls about their opinion of the protective androgyny that unisex haircuts were meant to provide, I was nearly laughed out of the school - it was patronisingly pointed out to me that girls still wear skirts to school.

For a start, having short hair required a tremendous amount of upkeep. Every Saturday a queue for haircuts would form in one of the classrooms, and one of the Form Four girls whose aunt was a hairdresser would shave heads with a pair of clippers, amid much discussion about the appropriate length of different sections, the application of petroleum jelly to style it, and the care taken over a professional finish. The significance of having a freshly and neatly shaved head was in what it conveyed: that you had the money to attend a salon or afford clippers, and that you had the time to care for your appearance. When the clippers broke, there was nearly a mutiny at the school; a special trip to the electronics shop at 9pm was deemed essential. When the proprietor failed to fix them on the first attempt there were actual tears from the more fashionable students, one of whom (Safura) began wearing a hat and declared she could not go to church that Sunday unless they were repaired.

Another function of short hair which relates to sexuality was that it was seen as cleaner than long hair by the girls. The problems with the water supply which are discussed in Chapter Three created the conditions for me to see how important personal grooming was. The value placed upon cleanliness cannot be overstated. Respect for one's own personal hygiene was seen as being of

the utmost importance for girls and women; as I was solemnly informed by Chusa (aged 14), female bodies are fundamentally unclean due to their 'secretions' and therefore require a lot more regular washing than male bodies. Implicit in this link between the continued maintenance of personal cleanliness and menstruation is the idea that needing to be washed frequently was a sign of having a maturing and sexual body.

On Sundays when the girls would go to church and walk through the town, being able to wash and put on clean clothes was seen as essential. Therefore girls who had money would pay for their own buckets of water for personal use for bathing and laundry. Even when there was barely any water for drinking or cooking food, girls would hide buckets under their beds, in the outdoor classrooms, and even in the fields nearby, so that they could wash their bodies and clothes. Being perceived to be clean had great importance for the girls I spoke to in ways which were more symbolic than physical. The social pressure of femininity and respectability resulted in a demand for water, but also necessitated money to pay for it; money which the young men who hung around the tea rooms and bars near to the borehole station were able to provide. This creates an interesting paradox in which keenly felt pressure to look respectable led girls to behave in a way which would be considered disreputable.

The significance of sexuality for feminine identity came up in other discussions. When I mistakenly used a slang word for 'vagina', it was suggested to me by Daniella (aged 17) that 'siri ya wanawake' (a woman's secret) would be better, which was a source of great hilarity among the girls when I repeated it. Sanama (aged 17) suggested that 'umke' is better - 'siri ya wanawake' was old-fashioned. I recognised the root of 'umke' as the signifier of femininity in Kiswahili and asked one of the Tanzanian teachers what was meant by it in this context. It was explained to me that it means 'the essence of being a woman, which is orderly, clean, good at taking care of the home, hardworking'.

### **V.iii. Good girls go to school**

The above section has explained some of the features of being a 'good girl' which were identified through the drawing project on 'good girls and bad girls'. Having established some of the personality traits and embodied characteristics girls associated with being 'good', I turn to the main way in which girls could perform the 'good girl' identity; through being a schoolgirl. Attending and working hard in school was a feature of nearly every drawing and the comments written upon it. 'She likes to study', 'she attends school every day', 'she is capable in the classroom' and 'she has

reached secondary school' featured prominently, and many of the illustrations of 'good girls' depicted a girl in a school uniform<sup>7</sup>.

Given the remit of my research, I was particularly interested in exploring what this meant for girls' sexuality. It was unanimously felt by teachers and schoolgirls alike that it is not permissible to be both a schoolgirl and a girl who has relationships. Restrictive social norms around sexuality and morality in Tanzania tend to be used as explanatory of why there is such a strict and inflexible attitude around girls engaging in relationships whilst still at school (Wayomi, Wight & Remes 2015). The impermissibility of relationships along with the social protection and status afforded to schoolgirls at least at a discursive level might be interpreted to mean that the 'schoolgirl' identity is synonymous with non-sexualisation.

Whilst social norms and morality are 'talked up' in development literature as the major sources of girls' sexualised repression, I suggest based on my interactions that these were not always the foremost motivation for condemnation of schoolgirls who engage in sexual activity. The reasoning that was overwhelmingly invoked by Tanzanians working with girls was that boyfriends distract girls because they offer them an alternative means of obtaining success, as measured in terms of economic goods and financial stability. Avoiding sex was therefore not an explicitly moral imperative. If you are serious about school, then there is no need for a boyfriend. In Safura's words, 'Girls with boyfriends don't care about their lives, they don't pay attention, in class they cannot concentrate on their studies, they are just thinking of the man. Those who are not having boyfriends, they are concentrating on their studies, they are preparing for their future.' This is also implied by the emphasis on self-discipline and respect discussed above.

In contrast to the emphasis on education being the realm of 'good girls', it also did not necessarily follow that bad girls were uneducated. Several girls said that a bad girl 'does not like to study', 'she dislikes school', or 'she is running away from school'. However, more girls emphasised a positive attitude to school as being important for 'being good'. This perhaps is explained by the ambivalence girls seem to feel about school. Although being educated is unanimously framed as a good thing in initial responses, in conversations which went beyond this, I often found more ambiguity in how girls perceived the actual experience of being at school.

Whilst attending school was an important 'good girl' status symbol, school was recognised by many girls to be a difficult space to actually inhabit. Coeducational schools were places where girls felt at risk of harassment and unwanted attention, both from male teachers and from male

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<sup>7</sup> This may have been down to the fact that this research was conducted within a school. However, my observations of the valorisation of the 'schoolgirl' figure elsewhere in Tanzanian discourse on modernity and exchanges with community members and families suggests affirmation of this as a suitable subject-position for girls beyond just schoolgirls themselves.

students. Chusa told me that harassment is a 'big problem' for girls and women alike. She said in school girls are harassed by teachers. She said girls cannot tell a male teacher if they need to go home because they unexpectedly got their period, so they leave without permission, but then get in trouble the next day.

Accounts of successful schoolgirls within international development often emphasise the individual determination of girls to challenge this type of discrimination. They focus on the way in which girls succeed against the odds and rise about the challenges they face. In line with the framing of good girls as self-disciplined and autonomous, stories told by girls themselves about school tended similarly to reflect this type of narrative. Darlena (aged 17) told Chusa (aged 14) and I a story of a girl she had heard of who was in Form 4 when a male teacher had invited her to his room and taken his clothes off and requested she join him in bed. The girl had shouted at him and told him that he should leave her alone, and she would not sleep with him. She left the school to go elsewhere and shamed him publicly. Darlena added triumphantly 'now, she is a lawyer!'

In contrast to this narrative of personal culpability for managing distractions, the distraction of boys was framed by Tanzanians and local teachers in a way which suggested girls are seduced by boys and lack the ability to make good choices. Jacqui, a teacher at Tufurahi School, drew a distinction between 'girls' who lack the ability to know right from wrong and 'women' who have the knowledge and maturity to manage such situations effectively. A concern raised by female teachers I spoke to shows the need for a more nuanced understanding of their perception of girls' agency. This related to the attractiveness of girls to male teachers. This provided motivation for the barring of girls from relationships and 'dressing indecently'. It was not spoken about as a concern for girls' vulnerability however. The feeling was that the exhibition of 'adult' trappings was not only a distraction for girls, but was disrespectful to female staff. Teachers felt it was particularly disrespectful for students to dress 'better' than them. When I asked why this was so, it was implied that when girls can choose their own clothes and develop an interest in fashion they begin to be judgmental of teachers' own outfit choices. In a conversation with Anna and Jaqui, two of the female teachers, Anna told me that if girls dress fashionably they do it for male attention. The outcome would be that male teachers would then admire them, and she felt that therefore it was a way of girls being disrespectful and insubordinate to female teachers. Jaqui added that 'if they have boyfriends and wear these fancy clothes they no longer see themselves as schoolgirls', implying they then see themselves as competition for older women working at the school.

Going to an all-girls school was perceived as a solution to the issue of 'distraction' by boys, and many girls felt that their decision to come to Tufurahi School was a smart one, comparing themselves favourably to girls at other local schools. 'Running from school' was a phrase used to refer to leaving school during the day, usually in the time in between lessons. Ahadi (aged 16) and

Chusa told me that at a local coeducational secondary school in the town, sex between students is a problem, with students taking any opportunity to sneak off during the school day. Chusa said that when the school bell is rung for lessons, 'some (students) are going to the classrooms, but some are going to their farms - they are pretending they are going to the toilet but they are just going off to do bad things'. Despite the framing of sex as a 'bad thing', Ahadi went on to express concern about the potential of boys to ruin girls' scholastic careers due to jealousy. She told me that when girls do better than boys in school, 'boys are feeling jealous... they are saying they will stop them and ruin their lives, and stop them doing well. That is how girls are cheated by boys.' For this reason both Chusa and Ahadi felt that going to a girls' only school is better because there are not these kinds of distractions.

Jealousy was an issue which came up repeatedly to explain conflict within the school. Jealousy was framed as a force which undermined the ability of girls to pursue a path that would fit with their vision of what a 'good girl' is and does. This could come from both outside and within the school. Sanama (aged 17) told me 'I don't want people to know I'm at school because bad people will try and stop me from being successful if they know I'm at this school. They don't like the progress of other people. Other people are jealous.' Jealousy also undermined the pursuit of social harmony which it was seen as important for 'good girls' to foster through their actions. Tafhadali (aged 15) told me in primary school, another student had put a curse on her sister, so as soon as her school leaving exam started her sister became sick. She added that this sort of thing also happened at Tufurahi School, with curses put on girls who are studying to make them fail their exams. An incident of envy-driven cursing involving girls at the school will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. 'Girls do not love each other, and curse each other' Chusa told me solemnly.

#### **V.iv. Alternative ways of 'doing girl'**

I proposed earlier that being a schoolgirl is presented within development discourse as the ideal state for teenage girls. Girls at Tufurahi School claimed to subscribe to this aspiration too. The subject-positions of being self-controlled and respectful, and therefore 'good', were necessary for girls to reconcile with a schoolgirl identity. However, the discussion above suggests that in their accounts of experiences of discrimination, male attention and personal attacks by other girls, girls acknowledge that things are not always so straightforward. Girls also expressed concern that remaining in education in order to access opportunities means other values of 'good' girlhood can be compromised or undermined. Specifically, school was framed by various girls as a sexualised space in which they felt vulnerable to various 'distractions' and 'harassment', as well as at risk of being cursed by jealous peers.

Some of this indeed calls to mind development discourse on teenage girls departing from school due to pregnancy or early marriage, in which the role of men in the community is highlighted as a problem. However, this discourse tends to call attention to girls' lack of agency in dealing with these challenges, emphasising their vulnerability and passivity. In contrast to this, girls themselves - and to a degree, Tanzanians working with girls - speak of resistance to these pressures as a matter of choice. Girls draw on the narratives of respectability and self-control discussed in the first section of this chapter to explain their ability to successfully navigate challenges to their sense of personal integrity. The girls I spent time with expressed degrees of dissatisfaction with the potential of conforming to the 'good girl schoolgirl' ideal which is promoted for actually securing their futures. At the same time, the narrative of personal autonomy that was so often ascribed to - 'I control my life' (Safura) - suggests that at the same time, they felt responsible for figuring out ways of navigating it. The above accounts point to the heterogeneity of girls' experiences and highlight the need to expand this discussion beyond schooling. In this section I therefore consider what alternative trajectories to the 'good schoolgirl' that girls are exploring.

#### **V.iv.a. Religious girls**

A number of girls at Tufurahi School were members of Uamsho Wakristo wa Tanzania, the Christian sect discussed in the previous chapter. UWATA has important links to the American evangelical movement. Its teachings reflect 'traditional values' which are perceived to be slowly vanishing in modernising Tanzania. With its emphasis on sin and its resistance, it provided a strict framework for morality and strong guidance on navigating the complex terrain of modernity. Girls who were members of UWATA were not permitted to dance to Bongo Flewa or Western style music at the 'dance parties'. One evening as I sat with Nyota (aged 16), one of the UWATA girls during a dance party, she reeled off a long list of things which were considered to be 'madhambi' (sinful things), which included braided hair, nail polish, jeans, skirts which showed one's figure too clearly, and of course dancing to music other than gospel songs. Nyota danced on her bench instead, tapping her hands on her knees, and although she couldn't sing along to the songs, she wrote down the lyrics instead.

The reconciliation of God with one's personal autonomy was discussed earlier. However, the reverse was also true; for many girls, prayer provided the answer to a number of challenging situations where other forms of solution were difficult to envisage. Prayer and trust in God was felt by girls to be the only real way to deal with being 'cheated' by boys. In a conversation with Tafhadali (aged 15) about what she anticipated her future being like, she told me about her aspirations for a similarly happy home to the one she had grown up in. However, she was quick to add 'but you don't know what you will get. You can pray to God but you don't know. Maybe you will get a man who is not like your father. Men are not good, some smoke cannabis.'

Girls showed a great degree of ambivalence about relationships. Even amongst those girls who were the most interested, there was a lot of despairing eye-rolling and dismissals of love as a 'big problem' for girls. Chusa (aged 14) felt that one of the reasons men were so unreliable was because they were less likely to attend church than women, which meant that they lacked spiritual guidance. During a discussion about what girls' expected from a relationship, I was struck by the number of girls who said that they never wanted to get married and would rather join a Catholic order and become a nun. This appears to counter a development discourse which focuses on delaying marriage, yet still assumes eventual conformity to traditional marriage as an inevitability for girls.

One of the students who was particularly vehement about this was Josephina (aged 16) who attended the Catholic church at the far end of town, and who had recently had her confirmation ceremony. Josephina and I had been walking in the lane near the school one day when a man passed us on a motorbike and shouted 'habari dada' (hello sister/sisters) in our general direction. I responded, but Josephina did not. I jokingly said that it had been unclear who he was talking to. Josephina looked at me scornfully and told me that clearly he had been greeting me, because in her words 'you are dada because you are a woman, but I am a child because I am a schoolgirl'. As discussed earlier, Western and local NGO workers both emphasise a distinction between girls who make good choices and those who make problematic ones. Josephina's rejection of relationships, identification of herself as exempt from advances by men through asserting her school-girl status, and anticipation of a future trajectory which currently did not include men at all was lauded by some staff at the school as being evidence that she was serious about her education.

#### **V.iv.b. Disminder girls**

The majority of girls were neither devoutly religious nor obvious rule-breakers, but still stayed out of 'trouble' and worked enough in school not to be subjects of concern from teachers. Some girls used the term 'disminded' as an identifier. This was explained to me by Safura (aged 16) as a way of describing oneself as carefree and not influenced by the thoughts of others. She told me that to her it meant being in control of her life. Interestingly this contrasted with the interpretation of teachers; one told me that 'disminded' described girls who were thoughtless and directionless. Indeed, the lines drawn between girls who refrained from participating in dance parties and those who were the first to 'get lost' walking back from the market whilst coincidentally wearing their best skirt reflected the contrasts discussed earlier between 'good' girls who take school seriously and 'bad' girls who do not. Girls like Safura challenge this dichotomy, being perceived by the teachers to be a hard worker and a 'good girl', but was also assertive and forthright.

The 'disminder' girl identity fits in with the narrative of self-control and self-discipline discussed in the first section of this chapter. However, as shown in the contrast between teacher and teenage interpretations of the phrase, the flip side of this emphasis for 'disminder girls' on being the master of one's own destiny is that dismindedness implies the potential for ambivalence towards adult authority. Indeed, I realised on a number of occasions that 'respect', whilst important, is not unquestionable. On many occasions girls were critical of treatment they see as wrong and suggested that they did not necessarily see their communities and families as sources of safety and support. In a discussion with several girls in the kitchen over a spot of chapati-rolling, Safura along with Furaha (aged 17) and Kaidi (aged 13) told me that the prospect of their parents being involved in their choice of boyfriend or husband was a terrible idea as they would not trust their judgement.

This questioning of the justice that girls face in their own communities was also present in a group activity that I organised to find out what participants perceived to be the main challenges for girls. I asked them to come up with a list; we then discussed them and girls proposed which they felt were the most pressing. Girls placed early and forced marriage, discrimination, circumcision and street children as the biggest problems girls face in Tanzania. They shared stories of forced and early marriage, where 'an old man married a young sister and then the old man came to control this young girl in the family' and 'sometimes a parent will force the girl to go to marriage because they want the bride price... this is the problem of forced marriage in the society because you don't happily go to marriage but the parents force you'.

Conversations on discrimination also highlighted the way in which parents cannot be relied upon to prioritise their daughters' futures; 'mother and father discuss about their children then the result is the boy goes to school and the girls go to marriage. It is very difficult.' Worries about street children focused on the failure of parents to provide 'basic needs like food, shelter and clothes and education', forcing girls to live on the street where they may 'go to marriage early to find basic needs... you can be raped and many people will harass you'. This suggests a tension between, on the one hand, emphasis on community and approval and, on the other, girls' concerns about how their families may actually pose a barrier to their access to things that they feel entitled to. This perhaps explains the way in which girls like Safura wished to assert themselves as independent and self-reliant.

Some girls linked their identity as 'disminder girls' with popular culture. I nearly fell on top of another self-proclaimed disminder girl, Ruthie (aged 16) one morning as she walked out of her dormitory and skidded over a freshly mopped floor. She laughed with embarrassment and pointed to her feet; her fall, it appeared, was caused by the fact she was wearing mismatched sandals, one of which was far too big. I asked why she was wearing one wrong shoe. She looked at me askance



and told me it was 'sharobaro', before ambling lop-sidedly off to class. Later in the day I saw Lovely (aged 14) wearing the other shoe. She giggled furiously when I pointed it out and asked if this too was 'sharobaro' and she confirmed that it was. One of the girls present for this interaction told me that sharobaro meant fashionable, but they struggled to explain its significance. When I brought up the term with young Tanzanians outside of the school, I found that 'sharobaro' was a particular sub-genre of rap music and its associated fashions and dress. Such outfits often seemed to be more about looking modern and cool rather than feminine. Whilst 'sharo-baro' could be taken to mean fashionable and trendy, it also was used to describe a lover and admirer of Western culture. Music associated with 'sharobaro' artists is hyper-masculine, with plenty of references to girls, sex and money. However, this did not put girls off adopting its styling. Other girls adopting 'sharobaro' style included Sanama, who often wore small diamante earrings on her teeth in an emulation of rap artists. A common compliment amongst 'disminder' girls was to refer to an outfit or accessory as 'gangsta'.

These affectations can be seen as particularly subversive because they enabled girls to occupy subject-positions other than the 'good schoolgirl' in ways which were not identified by the adults around them as directly subversive; the teachers at the school looked blank when I asked them if they had heard of 'sharobaro', for example. Another avenue for acts of resistance to norms of girlhood which were unrecognised as such by adults were girls' hairstyles. I mention earlier in this chapter that girls shaved haircuts, whilst at first looking homogenous, featured many nuanced differences. Safura and Sanama both had small, peaked mohawks, with the back and sides almost bald. The UWATA girls' haircuts, in contrast, were the same length all over, and they were also much less precious about ensuring that it was kept looking freshly cut.

#### **V.iv.c. Modern girls**

There were tangible differences between what Western NGO workers, local NGO workers and girls themselves saw as a good future. The kind of jobs that were cited by Western NGO workers as being good for girls to aim for were particularly felt to be those which challenged gender norms, such as becoming a female safari driver, engineer or scientist. For many Tanzanians, owning a business was felt to be the gold standard of success. During one discussion, I was told by teachers at Tufurahi School that working for oneself was what Tanzanians aimed for because then it was possible to live one's life in a way that was free from the constraints and pressures of other people and their demands. Girls' feelings on work were more difficult to ascertain; when asked what they wanted to do, I often heard girls claim they would like to be a teacher or nurse. Some were a little more imaginative - a lawyer, journalist, or even a soldier. There were certainly no aspiring safari drivers or scientists, but neither were there actively aspiring entrepreneurs; even Sanama, who cut hair at her aunt's salon during the holidays, or Neema, who had her own sewing machine.

Regardless of this, several girls told me that they would like to have their own business and be in control of their own working life.

Other girls however looked to the opportunities that globalisation was perceived to bring. A number of girls, including Darlena and Chusa, were keen to go to university in the UK or United States. Globalisation was drawn on to explain the moral decline of Tanzanian men, who 'are not believing in God because they are too busy doing other things, to make money' (Chusa). However, it was also what had led to the influx of white people into and through the town. As mentioned in the context chapter, due to its location to the east of several national parks, the town was increasingly a draw for tourists, volunteers and wildlife enthusiasts. For some girls, this was seen as providing an alternative to Tanzanian men. Chusa told me that Tanzanian men 'are not good. They are always cheating girls. Maybe you are with one boy, and then you do something he does not like, then he is getting his friends and they will hurt you. It is not good. With mzungu (Western) men from UK or USA, they are not leaving women. I don't know why, they just can't.' Several other girls agreed with this sentiment, with Ruth (aged 15) adding that the appeal of Westerners was not that they have money but that 'they know true love'. Chusa was quick to add however that 'if someone sees you have a mzungu boyfriend, maybe they will put a curse on you because they are suffering jealousy.'

Whilst some girls certainly declared attractions to various boys and told me what made someone appealing, others gave the impression that given the lack of trust they feel they are able to establish, relationships with men should be about strategy rather than desire. Many girls were enamoured by a life of financial independence and bodily autonomy to which they are told by development organisations they are entitled. However, it was commented to me repeatedly that realistically opportunities for attaining this kind of life through education are limited at best. Relationships with boys are an alternative means to this, as is noted in other research on this issue (Rasch et al. 2000).

Arguably, the cultural exposure girls receive not only through development interventions but through a globalised, sexually empowered femininity do not value schooling per se, but the ends which it is seen to result in. From Western NGOs, girls learn that their sexuality is a burden and a barrier to the pursuit of empowerment; it presumably cannot be a site of empowerment in itself. At the same time, from Western pop music, films, news they learn that sexuality is a way in which women can access success. On the day after I arrived in Tanzania for fieldwork, I found myself watching an omnibus of Keeping Up With The Kardashians followed by Say Yes To The Dress, on a large television at the home of a friend's Tanzanian boyfriend. Girls at Tufurahi School commented on the indecency and immodesty of American pop artists and reality television stars; yet they still avidly consumed the media which promoted American music and fashion. Increasingly

ties to communities are severed through migration for work and indeed movement of young people to different areas to attend school. When added to a sense of dissatisfaction and wariness regarding the possibilities that things can be different, it makes sense that new ways of 'doing girl' are being sought.

### **V.v. Discussion: identity, agency and 'good girlhood'**

During the 'good girl/bad girl' project, it became clear that whilst girls were averse to behaviours which were specifically described as 'bad' like drinking alcohol, smoking, upsetting one's family and community, 'good' behaviour was less well-defined. 'Good' girls were variously described as strong, gentle, confident, submissive, powerful, obedient, trusting and loving but girls were vague about what this meant beyond the issues of respect and self-discipline discussed above. Indeed, the 'good girl/bad girl' project suggested to me that outside of pursuing education, there wasn't really anything that a girl can actively do to demonstrate one's status as 'good'. This lack of clear consensus among girls on what intrinsic traits a 'good girl' possesses does however imply that as long as schoolgirl behaviour is not disruptive to peace in the community - i.e. is unseen - she can do what she wants outside of school hours.

Indeed, many girls seemed to enjoy the opportunities that being at a boarding school like Tufurahi offered them to live outside of the domestic sphere of the home. Some took advantage of the freedom and proximity to town to meet up with boys, often under the guise of going to church or on an errand such as needing to buy school shoes, get clothes mended or fetch water. Occasionally girls would be caught out; for example in the following chapter I discuss the experiences of Furaha (aged 16) who told teachers she was going to visit her brother one afternoon after school but did not come back until the next day. When the school director telephoned her family she was not with them. She refused to disclose where she had been.

One evening whilst we were buying beans at the market, Sanama (aged 17), whom I introduced at the very start of this thesis, began to be verbally harassed by safari car drivers. They knew her Catholic middle name, and shouted it at her, making lewd comments about her lack of innocence. She was very distressed. When I asked how they knew her, she told me it was because her aunt lived in the town and that was why they knew her name. This was at odds with what I had been told by the school director about her relationships with various drivers whilst she was away from school the previous year. It was difficult for the teachers to keep tabs on the girls at all times short of physically locking them inside the gates of the school. This was felt to be impractical, in part because just outside the gate was the pit where rubbish was disposed of and burned, and therefore girls needed to be able to access this regularly to keep the school clean.

Despite these slips, girls were usually careful to ensure that they met most of the criteria of being good. Most of the students worked hard in their lessons and were submissive to the teaching staff. For most girls, keeping one's sexual self concealed was part of capitulating to hierarchies within the school based on respect and respectability. Pregnancy was a particular fear because it would likely lead to exclusion from school and a loss therefore of the respectability associated with it. The expression 'you cannot catch water which has already spilled' was one I heard numerous times, used to justify the exclusion of girls who get pregnant as 'spoiled goods'. For some girls, the fear of this stigma did not prevent them from doing things which might risk their reputation; I turn to this in the following chapter.

The tensions in girls' own narratives of girlhood must be understood in relation to international development and globalisation, even where they do not reference these factors explicitly. This is because these tensions point to efforts by girls to actively reconcile and make sense of both their identities as good Tanzanian girls, and good modern girls. Many of these areas of tension point to the challenges presented by a neoliberal emphasis on girls' individual responsibility for self-presentation and success which is enabled rather than challenged by post-feminist discourse. The primary narrative of appropriate girlhood within international development focuses on girls' ability to move through formal education, which is presumed to be an ideal space for their empowerment. The significance of this notion is such that it deserves more detailed attention later on, and later in this thesis I explore the role which school plays in enhancing or obstructing girls' agency.

The discussions I had with girls highlight that there is a tension that must be negotiated and reconciled between aspirations to modernity on the one hand, and a romanticisation of traditional values on the other. Girls were eager to be seen as modern and aspired to symbols of this like owning a car, using contraception, being au fait with pop culture and having a job which would enable them to earn a disposable income. However they simultaneously felt frustrated and confused by the way in which the demands of modern life undermined or challenged other things they felt were important, such as attending church and dressing with dignity. This is demonstrated well in the consensus that boys are insufficiently religious.

Attending church enabled girls to navigate the modern world well because it validated norms about feminine behaviour in ways which fitted with their own knowledge and value systems, whilst assuring them forgiveness for sexual behaviour which transgressed these norms. Simultaneously it is symbolic of membership to a global community, which was equally important to their identities. In this way religious beliefs formed a means for girls to construct their sexuality in a way which fits with development narratives about their vulnerability, local narratives about respectability, and their own personal objectives.

As a result of both disillusionment with school and community, girls sought out new ways of being and doing girl. What is socially acceptable for girls to be and do in Tanzania is diffused throughout institutions which influence girls' lives, in particular schools and churches. The clarity and rigidity of these doctrines can be seen as barriers to girls' agency; however, their looming presence means that girls are able to forge pathways around them in order to do what they want in subtle ways. In order to do this, however, they put a lot of effort into maintaining a veneer that would not close off the benefits associated with being seen as a good girl, regardless of their own feelings on the intrinsic value of such 'goodness'. These narratives do not deny girls' sexual subjectivity, but frame it as something which must be controlled out of respect for social and moral norms. This implied that as long as girls conform to social expectations about behaviour towards others (respectful) and remain in control of the situations and encounters they experience (self-disciplined) they have more freedom to do what they like than might be anticipated.

In order to exercise agency in this way, girls draw on a variety of narratives. This includes the recognisable sexual girlhood and modern girlhood which seem consistent with development discourses of individualism and girl power. Less recognisable are religious girlhood and 'disindented' girlhood, which channel narratives of respectability and self-discipline, and therefore play by the rules of 'good' girlhood discussed in the first section of this piece. Girls value control and self-control and condemn girls who fail to exercise this by becoming pregnant or even by being sexually assaulted. Religious institutions also promote modern girlhood in an appealing way which emphasises girls' centrality within the community and the need to trust that if you behave well, God will deliver.

These narratives of girlhood are each linked with a performance of sexual identity, whether this be about portraying one's innocence, knowingness, or disinterest. Bay-Cheng describes young women's sexuality as historically being ordered along what she called the 'virgin-slut continuum', which provides a spectrum through which sexual behaviour can be evaluated in terms of its respectability and acceptability (2015:281). Josephina's occupation of the far end of the virgin side was actually cause for concern among a couple of the Western staff at the school, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The implication of this is that the subject-positions available to girls in relation to sexuality are limited. However, this misunderstands the way in which girls actually interact with these norms and use their knowledge of adult expectations in order to pursue alternative narratives. For example, the 'disindenter' girl subject-position used by girls such as Safura show the capacity of girls to deploy alternative narratives of girlhood in order to remove themselves from this gradation and become something else that is unrecognisable to adults around them. The potential of this for girls' agentic practices are returned to later in this thesis.

It must be recognised that social, political and economic changes in Tanzania are creating opportunities for new ways of 'doing' girl. This may not always be experienced in a positive sense. Indeed, globalisation and development, with the increased presence of Western influence through both business and charitable ventures they bring, are forcing girls to contend with multiple demands and expectations of girlhood and find ways of navigating these. This is seen in the alternative forms of girlhood being pursued and reconciled with being a student, many of which force girls to embody and balance certain contradictory subject-positions at once. This is because despite new ideas and new subject-positions such as 'disminder' and 'modern' becoming available to them, girls' sexuality remains subject to restrictive norms. These must constantly be attended to - or girls must bear the consequences.

The rules of girlhood come not only from local norms, but from a neoliberal rationale for girls' empowerment which I argued in Chapter Two has permeated international development discourse. The promotion of schoolgirls as the answer to the future of Tanzania finds expression in girls' assertion of their independence, agency and faith in themselves. Girls must therefore seek ways of reconciling being a modern, school-going, high-achieving girl with norms about respectability. It must be recognised that the subject-position which is generated by this dichotomy poses new challenges. Identifying oneself as a modern, self-controlled autonomous girl whilst also holding religious beliefs which emphasised resigning oneself to God's plan made it difficult for girls to express vulnerability or self-doubt. A concern here is that occupying this subject-position may mean that girls feel unable to ask for help from those around them, because it would show a lack of faith in God or oneself. The implications of this for thinking about girls' agency will be returned to later in this thesis.

## **V.vi. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored a number of ways of showing, embodying, and doing 'good' girlhood in the context of a girls' secondary boarding school in Arusha Region. I have suggested that girls particularly value being respectful, respectable and self-disciplined. The myriad rules on how not to behave creates a hyper-critical environment in which girls must constantly self-check to ensure that they are seen to be behaving appropriately. Being a good girl entails demonstrating one's goodness through looking and behaving a certain way, but such signifiers are not always straightforward to maintain. Often, as in the case of girls' pursuit of clean water, the embodiment of the 'good girl' can be generative of situations where one's 'goodness' is potentially undermined. However, the emphasis on respectability rather than actual purity enables girls to navigate such situations without compromising this identity.

I suggested that girls perceive attending and succeeding school as a way of being seen to be doing girl appropriately. Demonstrating 'goodness' in terms of one's self-discipline and respectability is channelled through the neutral territory of schooling. However, whilst the value of school attendance is common ground with adults in their lives, girls' motivation for schooling may be inconsistent with adults' motivations for encouraging it. Girls are aware of the limitations of school as a development strategy however, and are circumspect about its potential to change their trajectories. This is complicated further because girls' actual experience of school also tends to be negative.

The equation of being a good girl with being a schoolgirl also fails to account for girls' own ambitions and values, instead emphasising girls' instrumental worth whilst increasingly not resulting in the promised development outcomes. This potentially makes girls even more open to looking for other strategies to pursue futures that they see as valuable and aspirational. Such strategies include the exploration of ways of 'doing' girl beyond being a schoolgirl. I have given an overview of several of these manifestations of girlhood. Some of these have received varying degrees of attention in the existing literature, and others are overlooked entirely. I propose that certain girls at school also pursued sexual strategies, identify as modern, value religious communities, and question traditional loci of authority in the family. However, I suggest that these spaces inevitably remain subject to and are restricted by the norms of respectability, respectfulness and self-control discussed in the first section of this piece. This means girls who pursue forms of girlhood which might call into question their own self-discipline and respectfulness or respectability ensure that they are hidden from adults where possible.

The global changes which have affected Tanzania over recent decades and placed such emphasis upon girls' education have inevitably had an impact upon local narratives of girlhood. The tensions which result have had the effect of causing what may be thought of as 'cracks' in this existing discursive regime. Certain girls are able to take advantage of these to pursue alternative subject-positions. Being a schoolgirl therefore does not mean the rejection of normative forms of girlhood; rather, the shield of respectability that being a schoolgirl provides within this landscape enables girls to pursue other trajectories. First however, it must be recognised that these rules retain some strength, particularly in their enforcement by one's community and peers. This can restrict girls who fail to occupy multiple subject-positions effectively and prevents solidarity between girls. So what about girls who do not play the game well? What enables some girls to move effectively through this complicated landscape of expectations and rules and exercise agency, but silos others? The following chapter builds on the complexities of 'doing girl' which have been established here, through a more detailed discussion of the experiences of six girls at Tufurahi School.





## **VI: Adventures in girlhood**

*'God made girls to only see what's right in front of them. This is why they think about boyfriends, and not about their futures.'*

- Comment made by Jacqui, one of the teachers at Tufurahi School, about a Form Two student.

### **VI.i. Introduction**

The previous chapter sought to establish the complexity of what it means to 'do girl' in this specific context. I suggested that despite the presence of restrictive norms and expectations, girls are able to negotiate 'doing girl' in order to pursue other goals which they value. These goals may or may not contribute to their 'empowerment' as understood within development discourse, but are evidence of agency nonetheless. I argued that some girls are able to do this in ways which are subversive of existing regimes of girlhood, engaging with and then pushing various boundaries which are imposed upon them. This contributes to my argument that girls possess and exercise agency even within such a restrictive context.

This chapter seeks to expand upon this argument by theorising girls' agency as a process of interaction and negotiation within their personal relationships, and the context of their lives more broadly. Firstly, I show how the subject-positions girls pursue and occupy are shaped through not only the discursive regimes of 'good girlhood' described earlier, but also through girls' perceptions of social and economic realities. Secondly, I draw attention to the relational nature of girls' agency. The norms of girlhood within which girls position themselves shapes girls' perceptions of each other, preventing the establishment of a solidarity which could mutually expand their agency. The mechanisms girls draw upon in order to opt out of the restrictive norms of girlhood however also end up limiting their agency in various ways, both sexually and in terms of other goals which might be generative of expanded possibilities. This also means that some girls are more capable of pursuing and taking advantage of opportunities than others. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the relationality of girls' agency, through which the challenges and contradictions girls have to navigate are better understood.

This chapter is centred around the experiences of six very different girls at the school where I conducted fieldwork. I start with a discussion of love and relationships in Tanzania that I had with Ruth, who was keen to find a white boyfriend. I use this to explore the links girls make between their own desires and the local and global context within which girlhood is constructed, and how this may shape their approach to relationships and sex. I reflect on the way in which girls reconcile

their pursuit of relationships with the acceptable forms of girlhood established in the previous chapter. It explores the social costs associated with sex, and what is required for girls to reap its benefits.

I then turn to girls' more immediate relational context at Tufurahi School. I illustrate the way in which these relationships in turn affected girls' experiences of being at school. I use vignettes which detail incidents involving six girls. Himidi and Furaha both transgressed the rules of girlhood that were established in the previous chapter by having sexual encounters whilst at school, but with different outcomes. In calling attention to the way in which girls attempt to opt out of the pressures from other girls I discuss Nyota's experience of converting to the Christian sect UWATA. I compare this with Ruth's pursuit of a different strategy for expanding her networks through engaging with foreigners. In contrast, Zawadi met all the expectations of normative girlhood, yet was socially punished. I then discuss the case of Susanna, whose argument with another student resulted in a series of events which led her eventual departure from school. I reflect here on how religious membership both expanded and restricted Susanna and Nyota's agency. I finish with the story of Sarah, whose encounters with demonic possession reveal further limitations to the current way in which girls' empowerment and sexual agency is framed within development discourse. I suggest that there are links between how these immediate dynamics affected girls' agency and the broader context of Tanzania, both of which must be paid attention to in conceptualising girls' sexual agency.

### **VI.ii. Himidi and the pregnancy**

Himidi (aged 17) was in Form Two. She had been a student at Tufurahi School for over two years, and was popular amongst the girls and teachers. She was quiet, placid and worked extremely hard. When I arrived at the school I noted that I was impressed at her confidence in expressing herself in English. Himidi was kind to the girls in Form One, often helping them with homework in her own time. The school staff liked her because they saw her as very sensible and trustworthy; she was quick to offer help and take initiative to clean up, keeping things tidy around the school such as without being asked or needing to be 'overseen' by a teacher to ensure they were completed properly. However, whilst hardworking she was not seen as particularly bright and this perhaps explains why she was able to retain the respect of both the teachers and fellow students who were not threatened by her in an academic sense. In a conversation about beauty Himidi was used as an example by one of the girls as having a body shape which was too 'thick' (stocky/plump) for modern men's tastes. In her appearance, her behaviour and her personality, Himidi was consistently a 'good girl' in all the ways established in the previous chapter.

When the girls returned from their Christmas break however, Himidi appeared to have undergone a drastic change in personality. She was quiet, sad and appeared for no immediately clear reason to have become socially ostracised. She ate lunch alone every day unless I or a teacher joined her, and I would often see her walking around the schoolyard on her own, looking completely miserable. She had begun to complain of illness frequently, and slept a lot instead of attending lessons. This led to frustration from the teachers, who bemoaned that she had become lazy and stupid over the holidays. She went to hospital complaining of swelling and pain in her chest and was discovered to have a severe infection in her breast tissue. Himidi would not confide the reason for her unhappiness to anyone, despite several attempts by the school director to find out what was wrong. This went on for three months, until the Easter break. She left to go home without saying goodbye to anyone. I never saw her again.

In my communication with the school director after leaving Tanzania, I found out that when Himidi did not return to school after the Easter holidays, the school director called her family to find out what was going on. She discovered that Himidi was pregnant, and during her time at home this began to be physically evident. Her father had been incandescent with rage at both Himidi and at the school. He had beaten her severely, and then forbidden her from going back to school, on the grounds that there was evidently insufficient supervision. He alleged that Himidi must have met a boy whilst at school and got pregnant away from home, as there was no way she could have secretly got a boyfriend in her home village under his care. The school director asked to speak to Himidi herself. Himidi told her that the pregnancy was a result of being raped when she went home at Christmas. Himidi refused to consider coming back to school either before or after giving birth. She told the school director that she feared the treatment she would receive from the other girls, and the shame she would suffer if she was a pregnant schoolgirl.

Himidi's feeling that she would not want to return to Tufurahi School because she did not feel supported by the girls there was unsurprising to me because of previous conversations I had had with girls about schoolgirl pregnancies. Before Himidi's departure, Darlena (aged 17), Agness (aged 16) and Sanama (aged 17) told me about a student who used to be a friend of theirs and had become pregnant during the school holidays a year earlier. She was no longer their friend, and I noted how uncomfortable the girls seemed in even speaking about her. Only Agness maintained any contact with her because she was from the same village. When the whole tale was disclosed to the other students, it was met with blank faces and indifference. According to one of the teachers who I spoke to later, many of the students had known about the pregnancy all along and this had been the reason for her misery over the previous three months. Given Himidi's previous relationships with the other students, I had expected perhaps sympathy, or at the very least an expression of support for her return to school after she had given birth. However, the girls were reluctant to even speak Himidi's name. When I asked Chusa and Zawadi what they thought about

it, they tutted, and said 'it is very bad'. I did not know what 'it' was that they referred to - the pregnancy or the situation perhaps - but when I asked for clarification they exchanged awkward smirks and quickly changed the subject. It was clearly not something which could easily be spoken about.

It was clear from the reactions of the other students that they wished to distance themselves from Himidi both emotionally and physically, explaining her ostracism from the beginning of the term. I do not know if she confided in any of her fellow students or if they became aware of her pregnancy through gossip from 'back home'. The major barrier to continuing with schooling here therefore seems to be less about the practicalities of pregnancy and motherhood, and more to do with the social stigma that came with evidence of sexual activity, none of which is more obvious than embodiment through pregnancy. The cause of the pregnancy did not seem to make a difference to social perception of its shamefulness. I recall a conversation with a group of girls and two of the teachers about rape, and hearing them being told that girls who 'play' with boys consensually are not entitled to object if they are then subjected to violence from them.

The experience of Himidi shows the way in which girls themselves cooperate in enforcing repressive norms of girlhood, and show a lack of empathy for those who make mistakes or who stand out from the crowd. Whilst Himidi had previously been well-liked and admired as a proficient student by both teachers and girls, her pregnancy resulted in a spectacular fall from grace. The result of this was that she was forced to access sources of social support outside of her fellow students. She did not feel able to return to school, regardless of the support for her declared by the school director. Indeed, in taking up the identity of 'mother' instead, she would perhaps be able to reestablish some of the respect she had lost in transgressing girlhood in such a stigmatised way. Becoming pregnant meant moving into an entirely new sphere of existence, both in a physical sense by returning to her village but also in terms of the social order of things. This was due not only to the socially constructed impermissibility of occupying the identity of both 'schoolgirl' and 'mother', but her perception of the impossibility of being able to interact with her fellow students from this new subject-position.

### **VI.iii. Furaha and the secret boyfriend**

Furaha (aged 16) was seen as a follower of modern fashion by other students. She had her ears pierced and always had painted nails. Her outfits were much more recognisably Westernised than the clothes most of the girls wore, and she owned a huge amount of 'girly' paraphernalia compared to the majority of the students, for whom a pot of BabySoft petroleum jelly counted as cosmetics. Furaha was much more confident talking with me about relationships than the other girls at the

school. She asked me lots of questions about boyfriends and was excited when she found out that I had a brother. She began regularly requesting that I send him her greetings and asking me if he would like a Tanzanian girlfriend. Her attitude to men was flirtatious, provocative and assertive, both in private and in public.

Whilst to an outside observer this would not perhaps seem extraordinary teenage girl behaviour, in this setting it was rather daring. The other girls were careful at least when out and about in town to present as demure, quiet and respectable, in accordance with the norms of girlhood explored earlier. Furaha was markedly different. When we went to the market and to the pump to collect water, she held her head high and laughed gleefully at the attention she got from men. A lot of the girls were deeply suspicious of Furaha. One day during a school meeting, two girls reported that belongings had been stolen from their trunks. They met with the teachers to report what had been taken and discuss their suspicions and both suggested that Furaha could have taken them. The teachers also felt frustrated at Furaha. Whilst she was clearly intelligent, she was lazy in class and coasted by on her English proficiency rather than attempted to understand what was being taught. She skipped classes when she could, declaring sudden and incapacitating bouts of stomach pain, head pain, chest pain, eye pain etc. She was also labelled as a bad influence on younger students, encouraging them to dress in a more sexualised way. She was accused by one student, Nyota of trying to set up a Form One girl called Sia with a male friend of her own boyfriend. Nyota was a classmate of Sia's and shared a dorm room with her. She said that Furaha had a secret phone and would regularly phone her boyfriend and put Sia on the phone to him, and he would pass the phone in turn to his friend. Sia and her boyfriend's friend had not met, but Nyota said Sia liked the attention.

Twice a month, a large market called Mnada was held in some fields near the centre of the town, and many of the girls were desperate to go. One weekend during Mnada, Furaha disappeared, telling a teacher she was going to visit her mother. The school director was not impressed when her mother telephoned the school asking to speak to her and she could not find her; there was a rule that students were not permitted to leave the school at the weekend except to attend church or go on errands that she had approved and with a teacher escorting them, but Furaha had simply announced her intentions and departed. The school director told Furaha's mother that she had claimed to be staying with her for the weekend. The school gate, usually only locked overnight, was locked for the rest of the weekend so that Furaha would be unable to sneak in.

Furaha showed up the following day, sheepish and tight-lipped about where she had been. After a lengthy interrogation by the school director and teachers, she eventually settled on the story that she had gone to visit her brother instead, who lived just outside of town. Furaha confessed to me during a conversation in the dorm rooms, lying in bed poring over magazines, that this was not

where she had been. Although she refused to tell me whom she had stayed with, she smirked when I asked if she had a boyfriend, and diverted the conversation towards a discussion of relationships more generally. Another student told me later in confidence that she had been to stay with her boyfriend and that everyone knew it. However, being seen as a sexual recidivist and a bad influence did not seem to bother Furaha much; she remained at the school and frequently declared how much she enjoyed being there. Regardless of girls' apparent disapproval of her she was never short of company.

As seen in Himidi's case, girls' relationships reinforce the narratives of self-respect and self-control which make up much of how 'doing girl' is embodied in this context. Girls who transgress the accepted forms of girlhood are punished with social alienation. However, this alienation affected girls differently depending on their access to other social networks. Furaha was felt to be untrustworthy and possibly a thief by girls and staff alike. Her relationships with the other girls at the school were not positive. She was quick, sharp and witty, but this made girls fearful of her cutting remarks. When I spent time in groups of girls I observed the way they held back in front of her, cautious to ask questions, as she would be the first to laugh at them for a lack of knowledge. Her pursuit of relationships beyond school can be contrasted with her disinterest in establishing a support network within school.

Furaha's disinterest in the respect of her fellow students and teachers was in many ways freeing. Her access to alternative social networks freed her from needing those within the parameters of her school life to validate her. This made her even more unnerving, with the discomfort many of the girls seem to feel in her presence evident in the way they looked to her before asserting their opinions, or were reluctant to open up around her. Because she was fashionable and knowledgeable about music however, she had the respect of other girls, and was able to therefore act in ways which transgressed the rules of 'doing girl' explored in Chapter Five.

#### **VI.iv. Nyota and the church**

With both structural context and interpersonal relationships shaping girls' agency, it is important to explore in more depth the ways some girls exercised agency in deflecting these pressures. In many of the narratives of independence discussed earlier, girls drew upon their religious identities to assert their own agency. As seen earlier, girls spoke of Jesus and God as the only ones in their life who influenced them, and used this as the basis of rejection of any suggestion of their autonomy being compromised. Trusting in God was seen to be about trusting in oneself and being freed from others' influence. The membership of religious communities was also significant to girls in itself. It provided a community which both advocated for them and was a source of support outside of the immediacy of school. When they encountered any difficulties, prayer was the first

port of call. In a less esoteric sense, for many girls going to church was the only time that they were permitted to leave the school grounds. It therefore provided a form of escape from the everyday proximity to constant bickering and melodrama which comes from so many people coexisting in a confined space.

The ways that girls spoke about prayer, as discussed earlier, present some challenges for thinking about agency. At first reading it implies a lack of agency, because they spoke of it as a last resort for things which were outside of their control. Yet simultaneously girls claimed their religiosity as empowering and integral to their autonomy. Membership of religious communities may have served to challenge certain expectations of girlhood; for example, support from churches for the principle of girls' education. However, it is important to recognise that churches also promoted a set of rules which girls were expected to subscribe to in exchange for such support, and thus found themselves negotiating in order to preserve such a sense of autonomy. As discussed in the previous chapter girls were expected to dress and behave in certain ways when attending church in particular. This demanded performances of gender which were experienced as restrictive even by girls who elected to subscribe to them, as will be shown shortly in my discussion of a Form One student called Nyota. The girls explained to me the nuanced rules about how to dress and exhibit oneself; for example, whilst a general rule was that long skirts were better, pleated skirts were more respectable than fitted ones regardless of length.

Adherence to these 'rules' was particularly expected from girls who were members of UWATA. As discussed in the context chapter earlier, UWATA was a branch of a religious sect based in Washington in the United States. With its emphasis on lengthy and vocal collective atonement for sin, it was declaimed as a 'cult' by the school director. However it was popular within the local community and half of the teachers at the school had attended the house where it held its 'meetings'. The meeting house was the home of an important member of local government, Mr Juma, and membership therefore held local prestige. Their prayer meetings were ostensibly open to people of any denomination, but any students (and teachers) who began to attend them stopped going to other churches. Several people lived at the meeting house and spent every day in prayer and service. UWATA frequently held seminars with guest speakers, often from other countries. On these occasions, the school cook, as an UWATA member, was expected to cook for these visitors. She would do this in addition to her heavy workload at the school, getting up at 4am to prepare three meals' worth of food for the school so she could spend her day with UWATA. Whilst this was a source of frustration to the school director, Mr Juma's local influence meant that the school director felt obliged to maintain a good relationship with UWATA.

One evening during a dance party at the school, I sat with Nyota (aged 17), one of the UWATA girls. When I asked why she was not dancing, she reeled off a long list of things which were

considered to be 'madhambi' (sinful things). As mentioned in the previous chapter, UWATA placed a lot of emphasis on rules of appearance and behaviour. Nyota looked at me with scorn when I asked if she did not know the music, and told me she knew all the words to the songs that the girls were dancing to. She occasionally gently danced on her bench instead, tapping her hands on her knees, and although she couldn't sing along to the songs, she wrote down the lyrics in great detail for me as if to prove her knowledge. When the teachers who belonged to UWATA were out of the room, Nyota got up and danced - uncertainly and self-consciously, and only a few steps, looking around her as she did so. The conflict she felt between wanting to dance and sing and knowing that it was not permitted was clear. When we discussed her religious identity however, Nyota was keen to assert the positive aspects of it. When I asked about her religious beliefs, Nyota told me she felt that they protected her from doing things which could lead to problems, describing behaviour such as dancing or wearing nail polish as a slippery slope into drug abuse and destitution.

As noted above, the building which housed UWATA itself was perceived as a prestigious place. When at home in the village where there was no UWATA meeting house, Nyota went to a different church, where she had to go to the children's service with her brothers and sisters. She expressed her dislike for being grouped with the children in this way. In contrast, at UWATA she was part of a mix of people, primarily adults from diverse backgrounds. Within the school, there was a mini-community of girls who were UWATA members. They had good relationships with the teachers, all of whom except one also attended the prayer meetings. When dorm rooms were reallocated to accommodate new students after Christmas, the teachers requested that an 'UWATA dorm' be created so that it would be easier for them to pray together in the evenings. The school director refused, but I realised soon after that that the girls who got the best jobs in the school - helping the cook in the kitchen, and therefore getting to eat the leftovers - were disproportionately UWATA girls.

#### **VI.v. Ruth and the white romance**

One evening in Room D, I was lying in the bunks with Neema (aged 19), Chusa (aged 14), Audrey (aged 15) and Ruth (aged 15), when Neema turned to me and asked me to tell them a story about love. I laughed and ambivalently responded 'ni shida' which directly translates as 'it's a problem'.<sup>8</sup> I asked their opinions about love and it was agreed that it was certainly both cool and a problem. Chusa told me that Ruth had decided recently she wanted to marry a Westerner. When I asked why, Neema said 'because they have lots of money!' However, Ruth was furious at this suggestion. She grasped my arm, got eye level with me, and whispered 'wanajua kupendana' -

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<sup>8</sup> 'ni shida' has some ambiguity as a term. Whilst literally meaning 'it's a problem', it was often used by the girls as slang for a good thing, the English equivalent perhaps being 'sick' or 'wicked'.



'they know what it is to love'. She then added in English 'true love'! I couldn't help laughing and asked, what about Tanzanian men? As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, the girls were scornful about the 'love potential' of local boys. On top of being seen as lazy and not 'busy' enough, Chusa told me 'they are not good. They are always cheating girls. And maybe you are with one boy, and then you do something he does not like, then he is getting his friends and they will hurt you. It is not good.' She then continued 'But with mzungu men from UK or USA, they are not leaving women. I don't know why, they just can't. I heard about a mzungu man here in Karatu who has an Iraqw wife and they have a baby.' The girls all discussed the attractiveness of the baby and her pretty name, and how pleasant it would be to be the mother of such a pale child.

I occasionally heard the phrase that certain activities are 'for mama not msichana' (for a wife not a girl), mainly in reference to physical labour like working in the fields and taking care of children. One of the male teachers at the school, himself not long out of secondary school, felt that girls were strategic about the relationships they engaged in. He said girls just want to find a rich boyfriend who would enable them to leave school and hang around the streets socialising; 'they just want to wear nice clothes, drink tea, and run around'. Whilst teenage girls' use of relationships to access resources is documented in the literature (van Reeuwijk 2010; Wamoyi 2010) given the way in which girls spoke of their frustrations with local men I felt that Ruth's intentions to marry a Westerner were about something more than this. An Iraqw tribal elder told me that traditionally Iraqw girls were advised that 'if a boy speaks of love, he is not for marrying' because love and marriage 'do not go together'. However, girls' expectations clearly differed, and a more romantic notion of relationships shaped their perceptions of what Tanzanian boys should offer them.

Girls were quick to identify as autonomous and self-reliant, putting trust only in themselves, God and nobody else, even family. They were often dismissive about parents' knowledge of what constitutes a desirable future for girls, or capacity to ensure this. Asserting independence was a way of putting distance between oneself and one's family. It might be suggested that in part, identifying as an independent thinker was a way of rejecting the interventions of adults in their lives, whom girls did not trust to safeguard either their interests in schooling or their futures more broadly. I was interested to explore how girls reconciled attributing such value to being independent with an apparently common perception of romantic relationships as something which can enable access to other resources. In a conversation with Safura about her independence, I asked whether she would still be able to exercise the control over her life that she placed such a premium on if she married. She laughed; 'well yes, if I am married I will rule my life because I will have my own home'. Independence and freedom were therefore seen as significant benefits of being in a good relationship by both girls themselves and other people from the local community. In this way, romantic aspirations were reconciled with other ambitions girls had around success, garnering respect, and ensuring what they perceived to be their own independence.

The desire for independence from the obligations of their families, yet reluctance to take on the responsibility of starting their own homes, left girls in a predicament when it came to boys. Whilst they were aware of the importance for their future prospects of not being seen to be promiscuous, the pursuit of boys was also something which provided a source of great fun, as implied in the local slang for sex: 'playing games'. Though the narrative of self-control around boys tended to be used to mean abstention from relationships, it can also be understood as not being led by one's feelings and retaining an upper hand to ensure that one benefits from these 'games'. What is significant here is that implied within Safura's above claims is a recognisable agency on the part of girls; their self-control framed not in terms of self-denial and self-restraint, but in making choices about sexuality based on one's self-interest. Although they may be harmed if they engage with boys' offers, the implication is that some girls can and do negotiate these relationships and may choose to do things which are disapproved of if the benefits outweigh the potential social costs.

Within the literature and accounts of people working in the field in Tanzania, there is not only a general impression given of girls as passive and vulnerable, but also the idea that the gender inequality they experience manifests in girls having low self esteem. This is implied as making girls less confident within school and therefore inevitably in need of measures to encourage their assertiveness and participation. Based on my fieldwork, I dispute this; in my experience, girls saw themselves as valuable and important people. As mentioned earlier, when asked about their role models and sources of guidance, nearly every girl described themselves as the leader within their own lives who would not follow anyone other than God. They often referred to themselves as beautiful and intelligent, and talked of the need to love and respect oneself. These narratives challenge the idea that girls lack the confidence to assert their own value.

Having established the desire of girls to access certain resources and status, and the links this has to autonomy and self-efficacy, it is important to recognise that this evidently is not an impulse which is produced within a vacuum. The local and global context was seen as generative of certain possibilities by girls themselves. In the previous chapters I drew attention to the increase in tourism through the town and how this was perceived by local people as causing new dangers for girls. However, for some of the girls, the presence of foreigners and the change in types of jobs which were available within the local economy also created opportunities to engage with white people. Girls spoke about these not only on economic terms, but romantically too. Given the above discussion about girls' aspirations for respect and a degree of autonomy, and relationships as a source for this, for some girls the two were potentially also linked.

The conversation between Chusa, Neema, Ruth and others with which I began this section suggests frustration with male behaviour within their own community. However, it also shows that

girls saw going to school and the increased interactions with foreigners that were enabled by being educated as opening up possibilities beyond these local relationships. School in this way can enable a degree of agency for girls, in that it can enable them to create relationships with people who are linked in girls' imagination to new opportunities and a different way of living. Girls' ability to identify and pursue their own interests in the way described here challenge some of the narratives on vulnerable, passive, insecure girls.

#### **VI.vi. Neema and the sewing machine**

It is clear from the above discussions that girls' relationships with each other had a huge impact on their agency in ways which could be very destructive. As mentioned in earlier chapters, girls valued self-employment and saw owning a business as a way to a respectable standard of living. In an attempt to engage with this, one of the school director's aims for the girls was to equip them with skills that they might find useful once they left Tufurahi School. The significance of education for development is discussed fully in the following chapter but I introduce it here because of the effects that this initiative had on the experiences of one of the girls at the school.

Neema (aged 19), whom I introduced in the previous chapter as the student who had arrived at Tufurahi School in a car rented by the village she came from, brought with her to the school a beautiful old Singer sewing machine of which she was deeply proud. She had learned to sew at home under tutelage of her mother and grandmother. Although old, the machine was in excellent condition and she took care to maintain it after every use, taking it apart to check that the components were clean and functional. Neema used the machine initially to mend clothes for the other girls, but the school director soon suggested that perhaps in the spirit of the school's attempts to foster skills development amongst the girls she might teach some of the others to sew too. Neema was happy to do this, although reserved the right to be in charge of the machine given that it was such a valued possession.

Soon, several of the girls had been shown how to use the machine and also to sew by hand. The school director suggested that the girls might like to use cloth purchased from the market to make some items to sell on. The money that they made would then be collected into a savings account. The idea of this was that if they wanted to begin their own business or attend further education and needed some financial help, graduates of the school would be entitled to take loans from the accumulated money. The girls were excited by the thought of generating some income and the school director suggested that Saturday afternoons might be spent working together to make products of their own design. Neema was put in charge of the manufacturing aspect of this enterprise. She would sew the main parts of the clothes, aprons and bags that had been designed by one group of girls, and then the other girls whom she had taught to sew by hand added the more intricate and smaller parts such as strings, catches and buttonholes. This was seen by many

of the girls as an unequal division of labour, regardless of how often the school director assured them that everyone's participation was valued and of equal importance.

One day, Neema went to use the sewing machine to mend an item of clothing for Chusa and found that the needle bar was missing. The needle bar is the part into which the needle is inserted; without it, the machine was unusable. A search began all over the school, with every corner turned upside down in an effort to find where it had disappeared to. However, Neema was immediately accusatory and angry. She told me that she was certain that somebody had taken it, as there was no way it could have been accidentally misplaced, given that it needed to be screwed into place. When I asked her why someone would take it, she told me that she had felt the jealousy of various other girls for months now. The other girls, she said, were envious not that she could sew, but that her ability to do so meant that the school director was perceived to value and 'love' Neema more than the others.

Neema soon declared that she no longer wanted to stay at the school because the jealousy of the other girls was making her life miserable. She cried as she told me she had been working so hard to do things which would benefit everyone, and yet there were clearly those who hated her for it. Despite Sanama being the first to comfort Neema when she burst into tears at the realisation that the part was missing, the teachers suspected her. When I asked Neema who she herself suspected, she said she was certain it was Furaha because she had a jealous character and was competitive. About two days later, after a meeting in which the girls were told that until its reappearance all privileges such as going to church and playing music were suspended, the part reappeared on the machine. However, with nobody identified as the culprit or willing to own up to the theft on their own, nothing more happened. The girls were not permitted to play music over the weekend but this injustice was keenly felt by Neema and her friends, who were equally affected by this sanction.

Whilst jealousy came up in many discussions at Tufurahi School, it is impossible to simply dismiss this impulse as a harmless teenage concern given the very real impact it had upon girls' lives. The boarding school seemed to create a social environment which was distinctly competitive. On top of this was a widely held belief and sense of fear regarding the ability of individuals to do harm at will through acts such as cursing. Because of the contingency and insecurity of girls' ability to pursue things that they desire, schoolgirl jealousy was genuinely harmful. For Neema, who was fairly new to the school, and had moved far away from home so lacked other sources of support, the incident with the sewing machine had a huge impact. She told me it made her feel deeply rejected and isolated by her fellow pupils. Although she eventually decided to remain at the school, she was distrustful of the other girls and was also critical of the lack of consequences that came about as a result of the incident. With nobody coming forward, no punishment was dealt out. Whilst fingers were pointed, the lack of consequences also served to affect relationships between Neema and the teachers.

The sewing machine incident marked the beginning of a change in Neema. I noted her increasing reluctance to attend lessons and periods of moodiness and sulking as I finished my fieldwork over the following weeks. After I left the field, the school director sent me an email telling me that she had found that Neema had returned after the Easter break with a mobile phone which she was using to phone her boyfriend. The phone was wrapped in a plastic bag and buried in the school garden, where it had been discovered by the school cook. Neema continued to break school rules and regularly declared that she wanted to leave. After a lot of time spent discussing her problems with the school director, she was able to convince her to stay. However, given the happy circumstances surrounding her arrival at the school and the significance I earlier suggested she had attached to school as a way to secure the respect of her family and community, this was a dramatic change. It appears Neema eventually felt there was no point in being a good girl, as it was not getting her anywhere.

#### **VI.vii. Susanna and the demon**

One of the first girls I developed a relationship with at Tufurahi School was an Iraqw girl called Susanna (aged 17). Susanna had come to the school after working at a bar in the town, which did not surprise me; she was confident, assertive, and extremely popular with the other girls. She had been reported to social services because she was only 16 at the time. Her family lived in a village quite a distance away, and she said that she had left home because there were no opportunities there. Her days before leaving the village were spent 'sitting at home'. Her mother was dead and her father was a manual labourer. Susanna was a member of the Catholic church. I observed that the Catholic girls at the school were the ones who dressed in the most modern clothes and were free to express an interest in fashion and music. The Catholic calendar meant regular extra services in celebration of various saints, for which the Catholic students dressed up in their best clothes and walked to the other end of town to church. There was one Catholic teacher who lived on-site at the school, but the Catholic girls outnumbered students who attended the Lutheran church and UWATA, so it was impossible for her to accompany all of them. Overall, the Catholic girls seemed to have much more freedom than students who attended UWATA and the Lutheran church.

Around six weeks into my time at the school, Susanna began exhibiting strange behaviour. She began to collapse and lie very still, occasionally muttering to herself about figures in the distance who were coming to get her. When she was in this semi-conscious state she was impossible to awaken. However, her episodes began to become violent and aggressive. She would try to run from the school towards the figures she saw in the distance, and would hit out and kick anyone who tried to stop her. She tried to climb the walls of the school grounds, and when she was restrained, clawed at her body and face until she bled. Initially the teachers prayed over Susanna

with some of the students. However when she tried to run they instead locked her door and withdrew to their quarters to pray. The girls were also very frightened by these episodes and many of them cried and hid. When she was able to attend class, she was subdued and barely spoke above a whisper; in stark contrast to the loud, ebullient girl I had met at the beginning of my fieldwork, who in my journal I note had the voice and vocabulary of a sailor.

There were clear differences in opinions among those at the school with regards to how Susanna should be handled. It was hotly contested whose religious leaders would be the most competent in dealing with the possession. Susanna's father was distraught when informed of the situation. He immediately came to the school to meet with the staff and discuss the situation. He was an agricultural worker from a remote village, and had several other older children. He told the teachers and I that Susanna's aunt had committed suicide as a result of demon possession and the social ostracism which she experienced as a result. There was a history in his family of various interferences by demons causing them bad luck, child abuse and poverty. His belief was that Susanna was being targeted by the same evil forces, and his wish was to take her to a prophet who lived around two hours drive away for an exorcism ritual.

However, the teachers who belonged to UWATA were emphatic that this prophet was nothing more than a witch doctor and would charge lots of money but not be able to help. In line with the church teachings they adhere to, they felt it was an issue of lack of penitence shown by Susanna for a past sin which was haunting her, not demons. They informed the government official whose house was where UWATA meetings took place, and he immediately visited the school to check on the situation. He advised the director of the project that it would be best if Susanna would come to the UWATA buildings every day after school and be prayed over. Given his importance as a member of the local community, and the influence he was able to wield within the school through the teachers who attended the church, this offer was accepted by Susanna's father on the condition that should it not work, he would then be able to take her to the prophet. The minister came to the school and met Susanna, and she consented to begin attending the church each evening.

Susanna's sudden illness was interpreted by the other girls and teachers as signs of demonic possession. When the school director and teachers investigated further, an allegation was made against another girl, Queenie (aged 18). In a fit of envy, and provoked by an argument over a pot of hair gel, Queenie was accused of cursing Susanna using witchcraft. Queenie was from the same tribe as Susanna, though not the same village. Within weeks of Susanna's first episode, Queenie decided to leave the school. She had been a student there for four years, but in a similar reaction to Himidi's, declared that it felt impossible for her to continue there with the allegations and rumours which had spread against her. Susanna continued to be possessed during the

remainder of my fieldwork period; her attendance at UWATA did nothing to stop the regular episodes of fainting and vivid dreams followed by violent outbursts that she was experiencing. I found out from one of the teachers after I left that it had been decided she was unable to continue to attend school because of the disruption it was causing to other students, and instead she had been sent back to her village to stay with her father.

#### **VI.viii. Discussion: autonomy, relationality and freedom**

This section focuses on implications of the vignettes which have been presented here for thinking about girls' agency. As shown in the first four stories discussed, the need to carefully forge a path amongst frequently contradictory expectations and complex dynamics was not confined to girls' relationships with those outside Tufurahi School. Within the school itself, in which girls were gathered in one place and formed an obviously constructed community, girls also had to negotiate the impact of others on their capacity to exercise agency. For example, the different outcomes that transpired as a result of Himidi and Furaha's experiences were not what restricted their agency in and of itself. It was the reaction of others around them and their own capacity to deal with this which served to either expand or restrict available trajectories.

To borrow from Deleuze, a question which this raises is why girls are so quick to desire their own repression. As seen here, girls' room to manoeuvre and pursue their ambitions is narrowed not only as a result of the norms of girlhood explored within the previous chapter, but in the constant invocation of these norms which they experience from their own peer group. It is perhaps inevitable given the highly competitive environment in which girls must function; not only in terms of school itself, but within a local market which will offer only a limited number of opportunities for girls, even those who progress through school.

Frequently, the power dynamics between groups of girls which have been explored here remain unacknowledged within development discourse, or are presumed to exist simply along lines of tribes and religions. Framing these tensions in such a limited way poses a challenge for thinking about girls' agency because it ignores the role of these relationships in mediating how different girls may relate to and experience broader social, economic and political structures. Additionally, an explanatory framework which groups girls into arbitrary categories such as 'tribe', whilst potentially significant, relegates this to an 'African' problem and avoids looking at deeper forms of repression along the lines of age and gender. These group girls together and hide in-group disagreements, but it seems that these forms of repression consolidate a mindset of needing to fight back and resist, and often the only feasible targets are other girls, whom one must climb over in order to ascend. A structural and relational view of girls' agency allows for a more nuanced

understanding than an approach which focuses on girls as individuals who either do or do not possess an intrinsic capacity to act.

The vignettes about Susanna and Nyota illustrate the intersection of beliefs specific to the context of rural Tanzania with an issue which girls were extremely concerned about: jealousy between students. Indeed, when Chusa, Ruth and the other girls in Room D were telling me about the Iraqw woman who had had a baby with a white man, their story quickly became cautionary. 'People here they get very jealous. If someone sees you have a mzungu boyfriend, maybe they will put a curse on you because they are suffering jealousy.' As noted earlier, prayer was seen to be the only acceptable defence for 'good girls' against such acts. Belief in the power of religion was therefore something of a double edged sword. It provided girls with a tool through which they could at least discursively assert some control over their lives through its promises of protection and guidance. Simultaneously, by buying into the guidance and protection one was expected to give up other things which may be of value. In Nyota's case this was modern music, which she deemed a price worth paying.

Religion also did not necessarily prevent girls from remaining vulnerable to the competitive social relationships discussed in the first section, but the communities that they enabled girls to access did. Whilst Nyota's membership of UWATA enabled her to access a community beyond the school, Susanna's Catholicism did not protect her from being cursed by a fellow student. Her attendance at the regular UWATA prayer meetings intended to cure her did not stop her eventually being removed from school. Whilst there is a lot of pressure on girls to show themselves as cooperative and community minded, this again contrasts with girls' experiences of competition amongst their peers. In many conversations, the word 'mnafiki' came up; the Swahili word for hypocrite. Chusa defined this as 'pretending you love someone but then you are going and doing bad things to them.' Indeed, the pressure to operate with the interests of the community at heart appears to mask girls' capacity to deal with conflict. This in turn means girls turn to mechanisms such as jealous cursing. In her 2005 ethnography of the Iraqw, Snyder notes that among the Iraqw, cursing is particularly associated with women due to their lack of access to more formal mechanisms of power. Whilst this may be the case, it appeared that expectations of femininity which demand girls to be cooperative and harmonious at all times contributes to this problem because they disallowed girls from acknowledging negatively associated feelings such as self-doubt or even distress.

The other issue raised through this chapter is that there is clearly a link between girls' agency over their sexuality and a broader capacity to act, because of the significance of sexuality as a way of showing one's adherence to norms of appropriate female behaviour. Reflecting upon the theoretical framework outlined earlier in this thesis, the recognition of sexual desire as an important manifestation of agency and therefore symbolic of personal emancipation in a holistic



sense is integral to a Deleuzian approach such as I have advocated for. In this framework, the links between Nyota's lack of freedom to dance because of her adherence to a religious code with Susanna's eventual removal from school due to the very same reason must be recognised. The sexual judgements heaped upon Himidi and Furaha originate from the same starkly competitive place as the envy and bullying experienced by Zawadi. Deleuze argues that sexual repression is often the acceptable face of repression which goes deeper. If we accept such a line of thinking, it becomes important to combat such sexual repression rather than become comfortable with it. This however evidently presents a challenge to current development discourse on girls' sexuality; the implications of which will be returned to later.

Navigating the social landscape of girlhood meant constantly seeking balance between one's own desires and ambitions, and the vulnerability which such success could generate for you. Despite their stated ambitions of independence, girls were acutely aware of how fragile such independence was. However much one tried to secure autonomy, there was always a possibility that making oneself less dependent on others would lead to one's downfall through the envy it could engender. Therefore, girls sought out relationships in their immediate environment which would enable access to this desired freedom. Some girls drew upon the church as a way to avoid engaging in things that they saw as potentially detracting from this freedom, such as boyfriends and marriage. The local Catholic church in particular was a strong supporter of girls remaining within education. Belonging to a church may be understood as a resistive act by girls within this context because it provided them with a framework for understanding and challenging patriarchal norms, even if the endorsement of churches for girls' empowerment does not take a form which appears radical from a Western perspective.

Although religion generated some support for girls, these sources of authority could not be relied upon to safeguard girls' agency. Whilst clearly this trade-off was worth it to some of the girls in terms of their ability to claim the benefits detailed above, there were certainly cases when ascribing to a non-negotiable set of rules and putting one's faith in someone else to know what is best had a less emancipatory impact. However, in addition to the immediate social networks churches provide, the religious groups in Kavuni also had an international dimension which allowed girls to feel connected to something beyond just the local. This held appeal in a similar way to the mzungu boyfriend aspirations discussed here, in that they enabled girls to project and map new alternative futures for themselves.

In this way, aspiring to the global might be understood as a process of 'deterritorialisation'. Giddens uses 'deterritorialisation' to mean a detachment from the local (1991), which indeed is implied through girls' enthusiasm for membership to something beyond Tanzania. Whilst this understanding of church membership as enhancing girls' agency holds some potential, it is limited.

Support from churches for 'girls' education' and 'girls' empowerment' often reiterated many of the norms of girlhood discussed in the previous chapter. For example, churches promoted girls should go to school, but with the objective of then getting a job which would make their family proud and enable them to live a respectable life. It is unlikely therefore that religious groups are spaces in which girls are able to resist the restrictions these expectations place upon them and explore new ways of 'doing girl'.

Rather than reaching for something which is already on the radar of international development like organised religion, it is more useful to conceptualise 'deterritorialisation' not in terms of physical spaces, but the way Deleuze uses it; an exploratory search for unknown symbolic and metaphorical territories, moving beyond those already available. Returning to the globalised appeal of church membership, I suggested that a world beyond Tanzania had symbolic value in being so unknown and therefore a space in which girls might access freedom from existing gendered and sexualised constraints. In this sense, reaching beyond local girlhood norms and into new territories through engaging with internationalised communities can be interpreted as an agentic act by girls, rather than churches being a space in themselves for girls to expand their agency.

For Deleuze, agency is the capacity to explore ways of becoming different types of subject; here, it is about pursuing different ways of being and doing 'girl'. Only girls who were able to reach beyond existing relational networks traditionally available to girls seemed able to really pursue things that they desired. Subject-positions other than the 'good girl' are made available to girls through their engagement with a world beyond their immediate environment. Indeed, this sense of a 'world beyond' was integral to girls' ambitions and sense of themselves as schoolgirls who would be able, through this identity, to reach for something bigger. For some girls this involved religious affiliation, and for others it was about aspirations of independence and modernity. These different positions offered different advantages or costs, and girls' perception of these varied greatly according to other dimensions of their lives. For girls such as Nyota, whose family was deeply conservative, attending UWATA was a way of accessing an internationalised community. A similar sense of participation in something global was sought through more immediate relationships with Westerners by girls like Ruth. The role of education itself in such aspirations is important to reflect upon, and the following chapter engages with this in more depth.

## **VI.ix. Conclusion**

I began this chapter with a quote from Jacqui, in which she implies that girls who seek out distractions such as boys are not thinking of the bigger picture. The context was a conversation in which she and the other teachers commented on the reasons, as they saw them, for various girls'

reluctance to study. This approach is in line with much of the way that teenage girls' choices are framed within the literature discussed in the earlier theoretical framework. Girls make choices out of ignorance, or a failure to understand their lives by virtue of their age, and therefore we cannot see such acts as evidence of their agency. However, what I have shown in this chapter is that the reverse is true. Regardless of the way that girlhood is constructed within development discourse, what is not in doubt is that girls have agency. What the vignettes here have emphasised is that this agency is socially and relationally mediated, and the power structures within which girls live and interact impact upon their ability to exercise it.

Girls are made vulnerable or have their options expanded through networks of relationships. These relationships are not only those they are part of through families, communities, and structures such as church and school. They are also the everyday relationships between girls which affect their sense of self. Whilst some relationships can be generative of agency, others close down opportunities for girls. A distinct lack of solidarity amongst students in the face of various repressive norms is intensified by the willingness of girls to impose these norms themselves upon each other. Girls who are most affected by such relationships turning sour are those who rely upon them the most for their immediate wellbeing and future freedom. This illustrates the complexity girls face therefore in navigating girlhood in order to pursue what they desire, such as freedom and autonomy.

Whilst the role of education in empowering girls is critically engaged with in more depth in the following chapter, I have shown here that the views of sex and relationships voiced by girls at the school draw upon a variety of narratives in order to make sense of their own experiences and observations. These include references to modernity, religion, romance and independence. What has also been shown is that although in describing themselves girls stated their sense of self as assertively autonomous, they still need to navigate and negotiate relationships with others in order to pursue things that they value. These relationships are shaped not only by discourses of education, girlhood and sexuality but in turn through the broader socio-economic context with which these discourses are enmeshed. By belonging to institutions such as churches for example, which provide girls with a set of rules which they can follow in order to guide their navigation of girlhood, girls may surrender some of their capacity to act in their own self-interest.

Given their perception that there are so many forces acting against them from amongst their peers, such a surrender of autonomy may indeed make sense as a temporary move to enable greater freedom in other dimensions of their lives. However, the pursuit of alternative subject-positions to the 'religious girl' to expand one's agency was also evident in the desires of girls such as Ruth, Furaha and Neema. Indeed, it is these which I argue are most revealing of girls' agency. These

girls in particular were aware of the boundaries that are placed around what it is to be and do 'girl', and actively seek ways around them.

Despite the constraints shown here, girls can and do challenge these structures in ways which are often ignored or downplayed within international development. Interactions with educational and religious discourses were drawn upon by girls to reshape their existing sense of self and what it was possible for them to be and do. Given the significance of school both for my fieldwork and for international development practice with teenage girls, the following chapter takes up this train of thought and reflects upon where education figures into girls' agency and 'empowerment'.



## **VII: Sex, school and ‘girls’ empowerment’**

*‘The beautiful thing about education is that none can take it away from you’ - BB King.*

Written on the board by Rebecca during her farewell presentation, before she left her job as a teacher at Tufurahi School to pursue a Masters’ degree in Dar Es Salaam.

### **VII.i. Introduction**

The previous chapter showed the ways girls’ agency is shaped and curtailed through their interactions with various actors, structures and discourses. What has not yet been explored is the relationship between ‘international development’ and girls’ sexual agency. Given the focus on education as a means through which girls are enabled to move away from restrictive norms of girlhood, in this chapter I turn to the question of whether girls indeed experience schooling in this way. As established earlier in the thesis, within international development, education is framed as key to the empowerment of girls. The assumption behind this is that school is a space where girls have their opportunities expanded, and that it is the ideal place for girls to be if they want to improve their lives. In the following chapter I interrogate this premise. I suggest that school may enable the expansion of agency in some areas of some girls’ lives, but limit agency in others.

The chapter begins by discussing the ways education is linked to girls’ agency in Tanzania by those working with girls. It situates these narratives in relation to girls’ own experiences of and thoughts on school, in order to tackle some of the assumptions that school is a space where girls are freed from the constraints of girlhood explored earlier. During my fieldwork I observed that girls’ education was framed in a number of interrelated ways, and in this section I explore two dimensions of this framing. In doing so, I show the limits of these notions in accounting for girls’ own experiences of school. I examine the idea of school as a means to secure a good future, suggesting that girls are suspicious of the certainties presented by this discourse. I argue that this can lead girls to look at other options for establishing future security. I then consider the argument that school is a protective space for girls. I suggest that girls’ physical safety is not a given in school, and that emphasis on preventing their sexualisation can be obstructive of girls’ capacity to exercise sexual agency.

Having troubled the direct equation of education with empowerment, I reflect upon whether school can actually be generative of agency. Drawing on the case study of Angela, I argue that it is important to recognise the various factors which enable some girls to take advantage of school to change their trajectories whilst also recognising that once at school, there are no guarantees. I argue that her story shows some of the limitations of how agency is currently conceptualised within international development.

I suggest these overlook its relationality, its dependence on an ever-shifting context, and the necessity of ongoing support to enable girls to exercise agency. I argue that expanding school attendance is in itself insufficient as an objective for the empowerment of girls, given the impact of other factors in their lives on their agency. On the basis of this I reflect on how we might better theorise girls' sexual agency, and what this means for development interventions with girls.

## **VII.ii. School as limiting agency**

### **VII.ii.a. Becoming good**

The way in which girls speak about being a schoolgirl reflect the links drawn between education and development at a discursive level within both government rhetoric in Tanzania and NGO work in the country with girls under the age of eighteen. Even before my arrival in Tanzania, the frequency with which I was told by anyone I met who asked about my research that educating girls is simply the best solution to poverty had already begun to grate on me. Within Arusha, Vodacom Mpesa advertisements for mobile payment transfers spanned billboards over major roads, showing a smiling woman holding the hands of a young girl in school uniform. Together, they skip along a dusty road with the outline of a large academic gown superimposed on the girl. The message 'I am now able to save for her future!' is emblazoned in Kiswahili beneath the merry pair. The implication is that the woman can financially invest in her daughter's educational progress and eventually see her attend and graduate university. The promotion of this commercialised message as a modern imperative, and linked to the use of mobile banking, reveals that educating girls has become a recognisable and presumably shared dream.

Given the scale of the support for girls' education which I heard from local people, this emphasis on education appears at first to be an endeavour which is preaching to the converted. The assumption is also that given its self-evident desirability, any rational girl would choose to remain in school. However, even if girls are able to acquire jobs in the formal sector which require education, there are other issues they must contend with. The demands of full-time work are a stark contrast to forms of employment which women have historically undertaken such as small-scale farming and vending produce at local markets, where there is more flexibility to manage childcare and work. Indeed, self-employment was looked upon very favourably by many of the girls at the school and was promoted by teachers, and it was unclear whether education even fitted into this perception of future trajectories. When I discussed this with girls, some suggested that education was needed to enable you to know good business opportunities and to have the basic knowledge of mathematics and literacy. Other girls rejected this altogether, arguing that formal schooling was not necessary to know how to manage a business, citing examples of relatives and women

they knew who lacked formal schooling and generated income through selling clothing, produce, livestock and food at the local markets..

In my experience in Tanzania, stakeholders working with girls were not immune to questioning the simple trajectory from school to work which is implied within development discourse for understanding the type of work which education might lead to in reality. Development consultants I met whilst in Arusha expressed doubt over the narratives around vulnerability and the way in which it is linked to a need for education. Although they were unable to specify what needed to change about development work in this area, there was a sense that given the failures of many education projects, something in the bigger picture of girls' lives was being missed. One development practitioner suggested that one of the reasons for many secondary education projects being unable to deliver their promised form of 'empowerment' is that they fail to account for the fact that work for girls simply often does not require secondary schooling.

The suggestion that girls' education is only justified if there are jobs available overlooks some of the positive effects of school for girls, which must be acknowledged. Nearly all the girls I spoke to saw school as something which could expand their freedom. Angela (aged 12) commented to me that although education was not a certain route out of poverty, without it, one was even more limited in terms of getting a 'good job'. When I asked her what a bad job would look like she responded that it would be one in which 'there is no need of being in education... a bad job would be drinking alcohol... if you are not educated you will not get a good job and will be drinking alcohol and doing drugs.' However, given that development promotes school purely in instrumental terms which speak to the benefits it accrues for girls and their communities, it makes sense that girls for whom these opportunities do not or cannot materialise will seek other ways to access them.

In contrast to the claims girls made about their desire to be educated was the lack of enthusiasm I saw each day for actual schooling from girls at Tufurahi School. Many would hide in the dorms, pretend to be unwell until mealtimes, or suffer tragic, all-consuming menstrual cramps which prevented them from even sitting in a classroom. This seemed at odds with the enthusiastic way most of them spoke of 'being a schoolgirl'. Within development discourse girls are valorised for the faith they place in schooling and the effort they make. Earlier, I suggested that being good means going to school; and through an emphasis on autonomy, to not succeed within education is framed as a personal failure. However, the longer I spent at Tufurahi School, the more it seemed that attending school was one of very few options open to girls if they did not want to get married immediately. This does not mean all girls are enthusiastic to be there, and may help to explain the reluctance the vast majority of girls showed to actually attend classes or study in the allocated homework hours.



The longer I was at the school, the less remarkable I also found the episodes of girls 'going missing' for several hours at a time. It did not surprise me that girls wanted to get out of school occasionally; it was a small space in which there was little to do other than work or do chores, and I often felt a sense of claustrophobia and boredom amongst the girls. Girls were unanimous in their feelings that there were certainly worse schools to be at; however, this seemed to me to be damnation by faint praise. Their ambivalence was also a far cry from the discourse of the grateful school-going child who would walk for miles, risking their life to study which dominates representations of young people in education in developing countries. One girl, Agness (aged 16) bragged to the other girls that because she had older sisters she did not have the burden of caring for others whilst at home, but nonetheless did not appear to intend to spend her free time at home studying. Another student with whom she shared a dorm told me that Agness had a boyfriend and had said to some of the other girls she was just 'waiting' at school until she was able to marry him<sup>9</sup>. This meant that she had no intentions of working hard at school in order to pass her exams and was quoted as saying she intended instead 'just to please herself' whilst she bided her time.

#### **VII.ii.b. Protective spaces**

School is often framed as a protective space for girls within development discourse, contrasted with home, where they are seen to be vulnerable. Several development practitioners working in schools in the town where I spent the majority of my fieldwork spoke of the concern about the school holidays being the time when girls are most 'at risk' because of their lack of supervision from family members who would inevitably have to go to work, leaving girls alone. Girls themselves expressed their excitement about going home for the holidays, but when I asked what they do, most of the students at the school said that they would spend their time within the house, sitting around in between doing chores which involved waiting on other family members. This was part of the reason why being at a boarding school was seen to be beneficial by both girls and those working in development. Chusa said that girls still are expected to do a lot of work at home which prevents them from studying, regardless of parents' support for them attending school. In a play put on by the girls exploring the topic of discrimination during a research project towards the end of my fieldwork, girls were shown being expected to cook and clean before and after school whilst their brothers relax.

Girls' experiences also challenge the idea that school itself is necessarily a space in which they were protected from discrimination. In discussions about challenges facing girls, a number of girls told me how

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<sup>9</sup> Whist English makes no distinction between male and female versions of the verb 'to marry', it is worth noting that this was translated from Kiswahili, a language in which men 'marry' (active) and women 'are married' (passive).

'harassment' had worried them during primary education and made them want to enter single-sex schooling at a secondary level. Chusa told me that at her previous school, male teachers harassed girls for relationships. She described the power dynamics; 'some male teachers are cheating girls... if a teacher says that he loves you, and you don't agree, he can send something bad to you to make something happen which is not good.' In a play put on by Form Two girls centring on the harassment of girls in school, two submissive and nervous schoolgirls (parts played by the distinctly unsubmitive Ruth and Safura) were shown to attend a government school. The teacher is abusive verbally, but also beats them when they answer wrongly. When they leave to go home some boys chat them up and say they shouldn't bother with school. The boys are shown to call the teacher and bribe him to tell the girls' parents that the girls are not worth educating, which he agrees to do and expels the girls in question. The boys then get to 'go off' with the girls who no longer are in school, so are presumably free to now date them. The girls are shown to have been put into a position in which there existed no further alternatives.

The discourse of schools as protective evidently has a sexualised dimension in the eyes of both adults and girls. Whilst some development practitioners spoke of this protection as indubitably positive, others were more circumspect. Another NGO worker I met in Arusha referred to schools as 'holding pens' for girls - delaying pregnancy and marriage, but not making a difference to their eventual trajectories. This parallels the idea espoused by girls that in order to show they are 'good', they must manage their sexuality and go to school. Doing both simultaneously can clearly create a predicament, however. Remaining in school in order to outwardly show one is being 'good' means also placing oneself in a position where one may have to negotiate or even consent to sexual advances, for fear of then losing one's place in school and losing the 'good' social status associated with being a schoolgirl. This echoes the challenge of exchanging favours with boys in order to access water to make oneself respectably clean for church, as described in the earlier chapter on 'doing girl'.

The often unpleasant experience of being a schoolgirl is a price one must apparently pay for the social value and 'goodness' associated with this subject-position. Whilst girls compared Tufurahi School favourably in contrast to other experiences they had of education at primary level, where the school was overseen by a Western NGO and purported a zero-tolerance policy on violence as a means of punishment, I saw girls slapped around the face and kicked from behind by teachers. I was told this method of correcting mistakes was the only way to make students learn from them. Indeed, girls also expected to receive physical discipline in school. Despite declaring that they felt ashamed and upset when they experienced it, nearly all girls I spoke to about corporal punishment felt that it was an important part of learning how to behave.

As was established in the previous chapter, navigating relationships with one's peer group at the school was a source of great anxiety for many girls. Whilst the school director envisaged the school being a community of girls who would build each other up and support each other, the girls themselves experienced the community in a much more negative way. However, it was very difficult for girls to actually get away from each other and from the harmful relationships they perceived at the school. Most of my most meaningful research interactions happened in Room D, the smallest dormitory in the school. Room D was a space which girls felt was somewhere they were able to be separate. It was the only dormitory for which there was a key, and this key itself was not originally intended for the room, but had been found by a student and used to fiddle the lock into place. As a rule, dormitories were not meant to be locked, but the door was always locked when I was in the room with the girls.

As well as enabling space from other girls, Room D's significance points to the restrictive nature of school environments in general. It was difficult to 'do girl' within school other than by conforming to the 'good schoolgirl' narrative, because school is always a rigidly structured place which demands certain types of behaviour<sup>10</sup>. Girls therefore sought out physical places in which they were able to mentally resist this and think beyond school, not only by leaving the school grounds but by establishing spaces like Room D. In Room D we spoke about family, friends, love, sex, relationships, hopes and dreams. Whilst these conversations could and sometimes did happen in other places, such as the kitchen and in classrooms and in the school grounds, the character that they were able to take here, often in the dark (either with the curtains closed or the lights out due to power cuts or preference) and with the door locked was of a different nature and quality.

### **VII.ii.c. School and sexuality**

With protection from unwanted sexual attention being seen as a function of school, it is perhaps unsurprising that girls' sexual agency was an uncomfortable topic for those working with girls. When I met the director of the school and told her about my research, her reaction was 'you should see (the girls) dancing - it's obscenely sexual'. After school on Saturday evenings the girls would hold dance parties, and a variety of music was played or created. A lot of the dancing displays were traditional Iraqw dances which involved stepping in formation to drumbeat (or hands slapping on an upturned water bucket). However, when music was played on the stereo, girls gyrated against each other, touched their bodies, and shook their hips, mostly amid a lot of laughter and pauses to watch whoever was dancing the most outrageously. It was interesting to hear how the Western volunteers felt about these displays, which were clearly at odds with the notion of the

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<sup>10</sup> A Deleuzian understanding of deterritorialisation does not only recognise mental resistance; in Room D, girls carved out actual space within the constrained context of the school to explore alternative ways of being a girl-subject. The difference between this and the churches discussed in the previous chapter, evidently, is the lack of 'adult authority' to impose order.

younger girls in particular as passive and vulnerable. 'It's so disturbing to see how Salma (a 13 year old girl) grinds her hips in this extremely sexual way', one told me.

A theme which struck me during my exchanges with development practitioners was the frustration that I would hear at the 'cultural pressures' girls were under. These were practices and norms which were perceived from a development perspective to be harmful to girls' sexuality. During one conversation with the school director, when I mentioned my interest in girls' perceptions of relationships and romance she told me that to the best of her knowledge, in Tanzania 'people don't kiss, they just fuck'. She felt it was a shame that kissing was seen as irrelevant for relationships, and that girls do not expect to be kissed and do not see it as part of a sexual encounter. My discussions about relationships with girls themselves suggest that this is not the case, but regardless of its accuracy, a lack of kissing was presented to me as representing a lack of respect. The way she said this was with a mixture of pity at the situation of girls, but also frustration with what she perceived to be cultural norms around interactions between men and women which enabled this to continue. Another development practitioner told me that in Tanzania women 'are not given... opportunities to decide their own destiny or to make decisions that are affecting them... from a young age'. This was used to suggest a lack of ownership and agency over one's body and sexuality.

The ambiguity over the meaning of different girls' behaviour and appearances between local and Western narratives of girlhood was discussed earlier in relation to cleanliness and sanitation, but is significant also for thinking about the 'schoolgirl experience'. The free school meals offered by government schools in Tanzania are intended to ensure that children are healthy and able to study. Girls particularly benefit from this; most of the girls at Tufurahi told me that at home, they ate second, only after men in their family had eaten. However, the school director was told by some of the parents of girls that students were fed too well at Tufurahi School. Their nourished appearances, in addition to their cleanliness and health as described earlier in the thesis, was seen by families to make their daughters more attractive. This was perceived to make them more vulnerable to unwanted attention from men.

What school enabled for girls in terms of their physical wellbeing and safety - three meals a day, a warm bed to sleep in, and someone to provide for your hygiene requirements - also made them sexually appealing, and therefore in development terms less safe and well. I mentioned in the previous chapter that being a schoolgirl was equated to being a child, with the status and treatment which this implies. The appeal of schoolgirls lay not just in health as a marker of 'good girlhood', but also in the association of schoolgirls with innocence. Within Tanzania, innocence is equated with health and virginity, which are attractive features for a girl to possess. This counters an ethnocentric, Western notion that such displays of 'innocence' are protective of children (Egan and Hawkes 2008). The desexualisation of this subject-position

on the one hand can enable girls to opt out of relationships they don't want to engage in in public spaces, but on the other hand it may attract men who may want to pursue schoolgirls.

Given these contradictions, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was no clear consensus amongst the girls at Tufurahi School as to whether being 'recognised' as a schoolgirl by others in the community was a positive or negative thing. Some girls wanted to be seen as schoolgirls, and others did not want people in the local community to see them as such. Safura told me she did not want people outside the school to see her in her uniform because otherwise they may get jealous and this could have a negative impact on her. This negative impact was not specified, but given the way in which the girls feared cursing as a result of envy from others, it might be assumed that this was one of her concerns. Sarah, a Form Two student who I discuss later, was keen to travel home wearing her school uniform because it would put boys off speaking to her. Some girls were keen on the 'shamba dress' described in an earlier chapter as something they could wear to church and mark themselves as schoolgirls. However, others wanted to wear their own clothes and be seen as young women; such vocal opponents included Furaha and Sanama, girls whom I discussed earlier.

Whilst Western development workers were uncomfortable seeing girls as sexual subjects, this was not the case for Tanzanians with whom I spoke about the same issues. When girls went to church, the Tanzanian teachers checked that they were dressed appropriately with their shoulders covered, and I often heard them chided for dressing indecently when they went to fetch water. This management of sexuality was about ensuring that it does not undermine respectability, which was established earlier in this thesis as vital for girls' self-presentation. Girls who put themselves on display were seen as making an invitation of themselves; in a conversation about rape, one of the teachers told students 'if you leave the gate open, you cannot complain if a man enters without your permission'. Although this implied a recognition of girls' sexual subjectivity by the teachers, they were still expected to manage their sexuality according to the norms of 'good girlhood' established earlier.

A limited form of agency was permitted by the frameworks used by Tanzanian teachers in the expectation that girls' take responsibility for what happens to them sexually. However, placing all accountability for sexual encounters on girls' shoulders ignores their actual capacity to negotiate such encounters, given the broader structures of gender, age and norms of girlhood within which they take place. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising given this framing of agency that girls might feel it would be safer to completely reject sexual interactions, given that they can expect to be held accountable on behalf of all parties involved. This acknowledgement of girls' sexual subjectivity, yet the expectation that they do not embody it, is equally restrictive. What it results in is a shaming and secrecy around sexuality which prevents girls from centring their own desires. Although some

girls were able to negotiate these expectations effectively and found ways to do what they wanted regardless, as seen in the previous chapter, this secrecy generates problems for development interventions. These include the inaccessibility of information about sex and relationships or even just preventing pregnancy, a topic which even the Tanzanian teachers claimed to know very little about.

The importance attributed to girls being 'non-sexual', whether driven by a protective or regulatory impulse, evidently deters girls from identifying as sexual subjects and agents. The effect of this is that girls come under pressure to identify sexual experiences as disempowering to avoid finding themselves outside of spaces which demands them to be non-sexual. This type of conflict is seen in the previous chapter in the discussion of Himidi's pregnancy. It also means that spaces for discussion of consent, pleasure and happy relationships are closed down because they are perceived as irrelevant within the discourse of abuse and exploitation. The outcome of this is that when it comes to teenage girls, empowerment tends to be expected to look a certain way; not very sexual.

In Tanzania, schools are seen as places for girls to learn to be modern women who would be able to benefit the development and progress of the country. For Westerners working with schoolgirls, this vision of modernity is linked with the notion that if girls are 'empowered' they will make certain choices about their sexuality. Indeed, measures of empowerment are often based along these lines; this can be seen in the objectives of projects aiming at a reduction in the numbers of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy, or reducing rates of 'early marriage', through the empowerment of girls. These empowered girls would then be able to access 'better' (professional, respectable) jobs and be 'better' (age-appropriate) mothers.

### **VII.iii. School as enhancing agency**

In spite of the problems discussed so far, it is important to recognise that school indeed can expand girls' opportunities for agency. However, this may result in girls making choices which may not be recognised as agentic within current 'empowerment' frameworks. I begin this section by explaining the limitations of 'empowerment' for thinking about the experiences of girls at Tufurahi School. As discussed in Chapter Six, a critical theoretical framework can centre on 'lines of flight' which transcend available narratives and 'deterritorialise' girlhood, rather than just reacting to these existing norms in limited ways which are then inevitably subject to reterritorialisation. With this in mind, I discuss how Tufurahi School fitted into Angela's trajectory. I then reflect on the opportunities which this opens up for thinking about school as a space for girls' to exercise agency outside of the sanctioned scripts made available through a focus on empowerment.

### VII.iii.a. 'Empowered' girlhood

The review of the literature shows that education is usually framed in terms of its transformative potential for girls. The above discussion shows that people working with girls tend to see other factors in girls' lives as undermining the empowering impact of school, rather than questioning how schooling itself might generate challenges for girls. Even those working in development who were more critical of education as a way to necessarily empower girls did not question the idea that school provides safety. The factors which would undermine school's protectiveness were seen as cultural and personal; the expectations and pressures from girls' communities framed as diminishing its protection, or girls' own actions in the form of transgression of the 'good girl' schoolgirl through the assertion of sexual subjectivity.

An example of the need for nuance in how agency and empowerment are linked can be seen in the example of Sarah, a sixteen year old Form Two student. Sarah was studious and intelligent, and popular with girls and teachers alike. When Sarah was a little girl, her mother had become possessed by demons. The demons made her break glass bottles into tiny shards with her bare hands, and the scarring which ensued made her unable to work on the family's land. Sarah, her mother and her six older brothers therefore depended on her father's income from growing crops and raising livestock which he would travel to sell twice a month at the farmers' market in Kavuni. Throughout her childhood, Sarah's mother became increasingly sick. At the direction of the demons, she began to put the tiny pieces of glass into the meals she cooked for her children. Sarah was sick often, and school became harder to catch up on.

As Sarah and her brothers grew up they helped their father more, one by one leaving school to help tend the land. However, Sarah's father was keen for her to remain in school, even if her brothers could not. She was extremely smart, and managed to pass her primary school examinations. Afterwards she applied for a subsidised place at Tufurahi School. The last time I saw Sarah, she was boarding a bus to go home for the Christmas holidays. The school director and I took her to the bus station in her school uniform. The school director told her to be careful; if any boys tried to speak to her, she should ignore them. Sarah laughed and said that if she was harrassed, she would respond only in English and tell them she had a big white boyfriend and was not interested. Local boys would not mess with a big white boyfriend.

Sarah's story contradicts many development narratives on girls' empowerment that have been presented in this thesis. Her cultural background did not prevent her from attending school. Her family did not perceive her as valuable only as a wife and mother. Indeed, her father had

encouraged her education above that of her brothers. At the same time, important dimensions of Sarah's story are not comprehensible when contemplated from within existing development discourses. The ways that personal association with whiteness may help negotiate potential sexualised encounters is unlikely to be on the radar of many NGOs working on girls' empowerment. Whilst her father was supportive of her attending school, his reasoning for this stance may have been little to do with buying into notions of her 'empowerment' in the way understood by development organisations. Given the importance of family lineage in marital prospects, a mother possessed by demons may prevent her from securing a good match. However, an education could improve Sarah's appeal.

Development accounts of girls' empowerment often lack nuance. They tend to generalise about the impact of school on girls' lives, and fail to attend to girls' own experiences of schooling, assuming that leaving school may be taken as evidence of a girls' disempowerment. For numerous reasons explained already in this thesis, it is problematic to assume this is the case without first exploring girls' perspectives which may challenge this assumption. When I spoke to girls about their future plans, many of them were assertive about a desire to marry someone successful, preferably with at least a Masters degree and a good job. With a boyfriend already on the scene, Agness (aged 16) had shifted her goals away from school and towards the future that this offered; education offered little to her in terms of improving her prospects. As established earlier in this thesis, the main narrative of sexuality that girls themselves used in their accounts of what 'good girlhood' means is one which emphasises the importance of self-control and self-discipline. This was also advocated by teachers, and was about girls' responsibility to resist the temptations of sexuality in order to continue to access education and its potential benefits. However, the valorisation of continuing with schooling 'whatever it takes' means that girls who reject the schoolgirl subject-position were treated with suspicion or pity, depending on the perception of their vulnerability.

Girls like Agness are rarely considered to be acting with agency because it is perceived that the choice to marry rather than continue with school is one which will close down opportunities, rather than expand them. Because the benefit of delaying marriage is seen as self-evidently good, the perspectives of girls who wish to leave school are not valued as having any relevance. It is easier to dismiss a desire to leave as naivety, ignorance, lack of motivation; a whole range of personal failings. This highlights the limitations in thinking about empowerment in such limited terms. If choosing to continue with school is an agentic move, then surely it follows that choosing another path is also agentic.

The way in which girls' choices are determined to be agentic or not seems to lie in whether or not they are seen as being detrimental to their lives. However, certain types of 'sacrifice' are valorised if they conform to particular values. This is highly gendered; for example, women who give money



to their families and are therefore worthy of investment are valued within development discourse, with such practices being promoted as a reason to invest in women rather than cause for concern. Girls are categorised as worthy or selfish, 'good girls' or 'bad girls', depending on their level of commitment to school. The question raised by this is whether all sacrifices made in the pursuit of schooling - such as family poverty, missing out on potential income, or putting oneself at risk of forms of harassment and violence - should be seen as unequivocally positive.

### **VII.iii.b. Lines of flight**

One afternoon, around two months before I finished my fieldwork and left Tanzania, the school director received a call from social services. A twelve year old girl had turned up in the town. Nobody was clear on how she had arrived at social services, but she told the social workers that she had left her home in a small town several miles away and walked for more than a day, before collapsing at the side of the road from dehydration. She had left her home because her mother was dead and her father was beating her. She had not passed her primary leaving examinations and her English was therefore not at a level which would enable her to study at secondary level. Despite this, the school director was requested to take her in and keep her at Tufurahi School until social services could find a foster family for her. The girl's name was Angela. Under pressure from the social workers and out of concern that if she did not agree, Angela would be turned out onto the streets, the director consented.

Angela was bubbly and excited to be at the school. The other girls teased her but were kind to her. She told everyone that she wanted to study and learn English so she could get a good job as a teacher herself. She told her life story to me and another student who was helping me with my research. She had several younger siblings and was forced to take care of them instead of going to school. Her mother was dead and her father was a drunk who beat her. She said she had come to the town because her aunt lived here and she was hoping she would take her in. On hearing about this, the school director began to search for the aunt who Angela claimed lived in the town. Soon after this, Angela became unwell and began to refuse food. She vomited everything she ate and had a fever.

After three days, Angela was taken to the local hospital. The school director sat in with her in the doctor's room, and various tests were run. She was then prescribed a variety of pills and sent home. On our way back, I asked how she was feeling; she said she had been diagnosed with malaria and dengue fever. However, the school director told me afterwards that this was a lie. The tests had shown she had chlamydia, vaginal parasites and bacterial vaginosis. The doctor had asked Angela if she wanted to 'study at school or play games' (the latter being a common

euphemism for sex) and she had denied having a boyfriend or any sexual encounters. The doctor suggested to the director that perhaps she was being abused and was ashamed to admit it.

With the holidays coming up and the girls expected to all leave to go home, the school director redoubled her efforts to find Angela's aunt, convinced that it would be unethical for her to simply return her to her father's care. She invited the two social workers, a man and a woman who had placed Angela in her care originally to come and visit the school to discuss what should be done. Angela immediately greeted the female social worker as her aunt. When the headmistress asked what she meant by this, the social worker tried to brush it off and said it was because she had been kind to Angela and it was a term of endearment. The school director began to feel concerned that she was being played. She was no longer certain which story was true and suspected that the social worker really was her aunt and that she had used her position in social services to arrange a free secondary boarding school place for her niece. She also questioned the veracity of Angela's sexual history; at first, she had been concerned that she was the victim of sexual abuse, but her intuition that she was being lied to about her vulnerability when arriving in the town now extended to doubts over whether this was the case.

Agency and vulnerability are not mutually exclusive states, but within existing frameworks Angela's ability to inhabit both subject-positions generated a paradox for the school and put her at risk of being removed. What was most significant about Angela's self-presentation which must be underlined here was her absolute pleasure in being at school. Being barely fluent in Kiswahili, and favouring her local Kiiraqw dialect, she was unable to engage with the lessons which were all taught in English. However she was able to sit in the classroom, wear a school uniform and participate by repeating stock phrases she had been taught by the other girls such as 'good job!' to make others laugh. The discomfort that Angela's sexual history caused for the school director and the feeling of being 'played' was a direct consequence of being unable to reconcile Angela's vulnerability with this delight in her new place in the world and her ambiguous sexual history.

It did not appear to me that Angela's challenging past meant that she lacked agency. She spoke to me about her life before she came to the school. She told me that her desire to go to school came from her experiences in her village, where she said 'I saw it was not possible to build a future without education but first you need money for education.' She added 'I see you and the teachers reading books... I also want to be clever, to study, to go to church... I am just looking for a good life.' Rather, it seemed to be that Angela - and perhaps her mysterious aunt - had taken stock of the proliferation of development projects in the town and realised that this could present her with an opportunity.

Angela's vulnerability was a resource, drawn upon or even performed in order to access other things which would expand her freedom and opportunities. The idea of vulnerability as something which can be deployed in this way first struck me when I was in Arusha and had spent time with people working in development projects. The stories they shared of oppression and violence was voyeuristic in its detail, with horrible tales serving to valorise the organisation that had intervened. This was a trend to which local people were not oblivious; I heard one of the teachers at the school telling girls that white people like to give money and help, and that increasing opportunities to work with Westerners should be a primary motivation for learning to speak English with fluency.

What enabled Angela to navigate the situation and remain at the school was not just her ability to deploy her vulnerability effectively. Her continuance at the school was enabled by an interconnected web of factors. In particular, she was able to draw upon relational resources, which as recognised earlier are paradoxically integral for girls' generation of opportunities to exercise autonomy. Not only did Angela have support from the social worker slash aunt, whose 'adult' and 'government worker' status served to endorse and attribute a validity to her story. She was also young, small and vivacious - her likeability amongst other students and teachers, who affectionately spent time teaching her to introduce herself in English during their lunch breaks and counselled her on how to behave properly within a school meant she was able to fit into the existing social structure of her adopted place despite her difference. Indeed, Angela's 'difference' made her something of a pet amongst the girls, who ordered her around, dressed her up in various outfits and made her sing and tell stories. On top of the network of support she managed to create for herself, Angela was also clear on her objective of remaining in school and knew how to draw on the ideas of current respectability and future ambition in order to appear worthy of a place to those in power.

Given the tenuous set of circumstances which must coexist in order for girls such as Angela to change their trajectories and pursue objectives and experiences which are meaningful to them, it follows that a change in these conditions might lead to these being reversed. When I left the field it was the beginning of the Easter break. All the girls had departed one by one, collected by family members or put on public transport; all except Angela. I sat with her for several hours whilst the school director called social services and told them that she had nowhere to go, and that the school would be closed for the holidays, so someone would need to take responsibility for her. Angela became very morose and anxious, and told me that she did not want to go back to her village because she was scared she would never be allowed to come back.

Eventually the social worker who had initially delivered her to the school arrived along with a male friend, and Angela went with them. I do not know what happened over the Easter break or whether she came back to school, and from my conversation with the school director as we waved her off, she had little idea where Angela would be going either. She also was unsure what her

responsibility was in ensuring that she was safe, given the messy circumstances through which she had come to be at the school in the first place.

#### **VII.iv. Discussion: resistance, agency and sexuality**

This chapter shows the need for an understanding of agency not as something which girls can achieve and then hold forever, but as situated in their networks of relationships, which at different times and places may obstruct or generate opportunities for action. Angela's situation at home and her exclusion from school made her in many ways a classic example of a 'vulnerable girl'. According to development discourse, such stratifications of disadvantage along lines of gender, family structure, rural location and social expectation had ostensibly stripped her of any agency. However, it was these same disadvantages which meant she felt she had nothing to lose by attempting to install herself as a student. Indeed, the two girls at the school who in many ways were able to do this the most effectively were Angela and Furaha, whose visit to her 'secret boyfriend' was discussed in the previous chapter.

Whilst Angela's placing of herself as a 'vulnerable child' may in itself be considered evidence of agency, it is important to acknowledge that such networks of support can also limit available subject-positions. This is because of a broader perception that it is not possible for girls to be both vulnerable and agentic. The effect of this is the generation of a dichotomy between genuine victims and those with autonomy; the mutual exclusivity through which these positions are constructed makes it very difficult for those working with young people in reconciling status as a sexual subject with experiences of abuse (Jacobsen & Stenvoll 2010). This certainly seemed to be the case for Angela. Angela's agency in moving herself to the town resulted in other aspects of her character being questioned by the doctor and school director and she was labelled as deceitful and suspicious. It was not proposed by anyone present that it was entirely possible for her to be both mistreated at home and also engaging in sexual acts with boys.

Girls like Furaha and Angela were able to pursue their self-interest with clarity because of their lack of dependence upon relationships with their family and fellow students respectively for enabling or curtailing them. Whilst girls who attempt to please everyone all the time may conform to the 'good girl' subject-position and reap its social rewards, there is also a risk that this will compromise their autonomy. Being bound by the weight of social expectations can make it difficult to figure out what one's own freedom looks like. Empowerment is, after all, about freedom. The overall goal of freedom is, from a critical perspective, to be reaching a state of immanence, in which one is emancipated from simply doing things by normative processes and about being aware of and able to act upon ones desires.

For Deleuze and Guattari, this immanence happens as a result of 'absolute deterritorialisation'. Absolute deterritorialisation and immanent agency are produced through lines of flight, which are triggered by genuine desire. The reason for this being held as valuable is because to know what one truly desires is to know oneself, and to pursue this is a liberating experience. As discussed in the earlier theoretical chapter, these 'lines of flight' form more sustained movements away from the regulated forms of girlhood which are available. Whilst the forms of resistance above were perhaps inevitably able to be recaptured through the same mechanisms which girls deployed to pursue alternative identities and trajectories, lines of flight constitute a move to a new place altogether.

Emancipation from these networks and their constraints in this way is incredibly difficult to pursue. It is also unrealistic to assume that freedom such as that experienced by girls like Angela who lack forms of support available to other girls with a more stable home life is desirable. Indeed, whilst the girls were kind to her, the pity that she generated was clear. Angela was described by girls as 'maskini', meaning destitute, and this was a term not used lightly; it carried with it an aura of shame and tragedy. Even though other girls at the school were poor, they were keen to assert that they were not 'maskini' as this implies a social as well as material poverty.

Being so deeply socially embedded can be restrictive, but it must be recognised that social relationships were also significant in girls being able to do things which helped them access the freedom which they desired. Whilst they were keen to reject the idea that they are reliant on others, it is clear from girls' own accounts that compliance with social norms and family expectations in order to maintain good relationships is essential for most girls to be able to pursue education and find work afterwards. Given the competitiveness of school and the local economy, having access to these networks is to have an advantage; without them, one is at risk of being 'maskini'. The discourse of education is in many ways about encouraging girls to be pragmatic and think about their futures.

Girls also had to be careful that showing such pragmatism and initiative towards money did not place them at odds with an expectation that they would be cooperative and put their own interests second to that of the school community. In an earlier chapter I mentioned Sanama's holiday job in her aunt's salon; this meant she was usually the one who cut hair at the school. When I remarked upon what a proficient job she did to the school director, she wryly agreed and told me that the previous year Sanama had put up a sign and tried to charge girls for their haircuts, until she intervened and put a stop to it. The development of pragmatism was clearly not expected to undermine expectations of solidarity, and was preferably a tool to be used at a later date once girls were in the 'real world'.

The idea that school is somehow not a 'real world' is clearly unhelpful. Being at a boarding school means spending a significant proportion of time within a constructed community, and relationships within this are important. On a personal level, girls certainly do not aspire to being socially

dislocated, despite the benefits that girls like Furaha and Angela found through maintaining a separation of sorts. I saw this in the distress experienced by Himidi and Queenie in the previous chapter when they chose to leave schooling entirely rather than stay and be socially ostracised or bullied. The fear of being mistreated by peers was also clear in the words of girls like Nyota, Chusa and Zawadi, who all spoke about the cruelty and untrustworthiness of other girls at the school. However, as shown in the first empirical chapter, part of 'good girlhood' was about being peaceful and cooperative, getting along well with all people. It is important to distinguish between the desire to get along well with others and genuine friendships between girls. Further to this, the desire to avoid conflict was based on a fear of recrimination through cursing, perceived as a huge problem within the competitive environment of school. When I first arrived at the school, I saw 'friendships' everywhere, but by the time I left I was aware that many of these were not seen as friendships by the girls themselves.

The relationships between some girls were intimate and described as meaningful by those involved. Friendships between girls such as Chusa and Zawadi, and Sanama and Agness, were clearly built upon something more than mutual benefit, and I would have liked to explore their significance for these girls. However, when I asked Nyota who her friends were at the school, having seen her spend a lot of time with a couple of girls in particular, she rejected the suggestion that they were her friends and told me she did not trust anyone. When I asked the Tanzanian teachers, this approach to relationships was praised as a mature stance; one of them told me that what I perceived as friendships were for children, and that being a woman meant trusting only in oneself. Girls' peer relationships are therefore best understood as made fragile by the broader competitive and challenging context within which they are built, with norms of girlhood also shaping how girls see themselves in relation to others.

Girls' strategies may also change over time, depending on such context, making it all the more important to account for in thinking about girls' empowerment. I don't know whether Sarah's strategy for avoiding harassment by telling boys that she had a big white boyfriend had worked; she did not come back to the school after the Christmas break, and I did not see her again until several months later. In the intervening period, she disappeared. Her father said she never arrived home. He did not know where she had gone, but he told the school director that he suspected she had run off with a boyfriend. She then abruptly returned to school just before Easter, sombre and not quite as keen to chat, but just in time to register for her summer examinations. She passed them easily.

## **VII.v. Conclusion**

I began this chapter with a quote from BB King, which Rebecca had written on the board before she left the school to move to Dar Es Salaam. At only twenty-one, Rebecca was the youngest in

her university's graduating class, and one of only two women. She told me that she had studied alongside men who had children older than her. These men had intimidated her, and she found the work load a huge struggle, but was proud of her perseverance. With her consistent progress through education and firmly held goals, Rebecca held herself up as an exemplary model of a successful schoolgirl. When one of the Form Three girls, Queenie, complained about the lack of school books for Chemistry and Biology, Rebecca was unsupportive. Queenie wanted to be a doctor, and expressed her doubts about her ability to pass these examinations without the proper materials; Rebecca told her firmly that if she really wanted to be a doctor she would find a way to do so regardless of such obstacles.

Rebecca was also very assertive in her beliefs about sexuality. I regularly heard her tell the girls of the importance of cleanliness and respectability. As we got to know each other I discovered Rebecca had a boyfriend. However, she told me she was only 'testing him' before ascertaining whether he would be a marriage prospect, and was quick to assure me that they were not 'serious'. She herself had experienced advances from boys whilst she was at school, but had never permitted these to 'distract' her from her educational goals. Over the months that I got to know Rebecca, I learned a little about her background. She had a mother and a younger sister, but her father had left her family when she was very small. As a schoolgirl, her mother had received financial assistance from a large and well-known Christian NGO which had also sponsored her school fees. The money for the fees was supplied by an American woman named Julia. She had written Julia letters every year to thank her for her investment, and told me that her dream was one day to go to the United States and meet Julia in person.

Julia no longer funded Rebecca's education, so I was surprised when she told me that she had found a way to cover the cost of studying a graduate degree after only taking teaching work for a few months. Many of the Tanzanians I met commented on the cost of university education when hearing that I was a PhD student, so I knew it was expensive and that there was little funding available. When I asked Rebecca what had enabled her to get so far, she told me about her work ethic and her faith. She trusted completely in God to guide her and provide for her, declaring him the leader of her life and the one to whom she owed everything. Rebecca was a member of UWATA and regularly attended their prayer sessions. It was through her contacts at UWATA that she had secured the position at Kavuni School. It was apparent that the role did more than just enable her to earn money; through it, she could expand her network of contacts to include the school director. The school director was the one who was lending her the money for her Master's degree.

Rebecca was an incredibly driven young woman. She emphasised the role of schooling and faith in her ability to have done so well thus far in life. However, she downplayed or ignored the social

aspects of the networks she was part of and the ways that her relationships with people had enabled this. The sending of letters to the amorphous, anonymous figure of Julia had presumably assured her sponsor's emotional investment in her schooling. Her membership of UWATA had expanded her access to job opportunities. Being part of these networks also seemed to place upon her a sense of responsibility, and desire not to let anyone down and therefore undermine their investments. Indeed, before she left the school she had to travel back to her hometown to formally receive her father's blessing before she could even go to begin her graduate degree. Regardless of the significance I read into these networks for understanding Rebecca's ability to navigate her own girlhood so successfully, Rebecca asserted repeatedly to both me and the girls whom she taught that her struggles and faith were the reasons she had got so far.

Rebecca's narrative reconciles easily with the discourse on school espoused within development literature and reiterated by practitioners and Tanzanians alike. This promotes school as an empowering place. Girls like Rebecca are given a great deal of prominence within development discourse, claimed as success stories. Whilst no-one can take education away from you once you have it, this does not mean that moving through education is an individual pursuit for girls. The narrative of 'if I can achieve, so can you' ignores multiple realities. Networks of relationships are clearly extremely significant for girls to actually be able to utilise the education that schooling gives, but the everyday practice of being a schoolgirl seems to actively undermine the building of such networks within one's peer group. Institutional norms promote competitiveness and individualism which stigmatises certain girls and rewards others.

As shown here, school can also compromise girls' ability to achieve other things that they value. The close environment and the importance of good relationships with both peers and teachers creates a pressure for girls to perform 'girlhood' in a particular way. In line with the norms explored earlier in the thesis, this behaviour can then be recognised and affirmed by other girls and adults as acceptable. In previous chapters, I established some of the rules of 'good girlhood' and considered some of the ways in which girls were able to exercise a degree of agency in relation to these. I suggested that these moves were often closed down as a result of the norms of girlhood which were internalised and deployed, often by girls themselves. With education being framed as a way for girls to transcend these restrictions, this chapter has shown that whilst girls attempt to reach beyond them through schooling, they encounter myriad barriers to doing so. School can restrict girls' agency even whilst placing an emphasis on expanding it. This means that some girls succeed despite having to be at school, rather than because of it.

Existing approaches to working with teenage girls in the context of schools have much room for improvement. This is not least because development discourse on and practice with girls currently is unable to account for many of the experiences and issues raised here. Despite references to



girls' empowerment within my discussions with development practitioners, girls experience development interventions as curtailing their agency in a number of ways. Much of what is ignored - or not perceived as relevant - when working with girls is intrinsically related to their sexuality. This is also in part down to a failure to recognise the local and global contexts through which education discourse is channeled and interpreted, or how economic and social norms interact with this relatively new idea of 'education for girls'.

Girlhood tends to be perceived as static and culturally determined by practitioners. The lack of attention to girls' interaction with norms of 'doing girl' means that development organisations risk not only missing the opportunities to engage with significant issues and challenges for girls, but also therefore to enhance girls' capacity to negotiate them. This raises questions about the way in which sexual agency is currently framed in relation to' empowerment within international development. The conclusion to this thesis engages with such dilemmas, reflecting upon the implications of this research for development practice.



## VIII: Conclusion

### VIII.i. The Day of the Girl

In 2011, the first 'International Day of the Girl Child' was announced by the United Nations following a campaign by Plan International to highlight the challenges faced by girls in developing countries. In 2012, UN Resolution 66/170 was passed, which stated that 'empowerment of and investment in girls are key in breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and in promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights'. Over the subsequent years, more and more international development organisations have participated in backing the campaign, though increasingly the 'child' is dropped from its title and an abbreviated 'Day of the Girl' is used as the headline for events and publications.

Two years later, the Nike Foundation - responsible for the 'Girl Effect' described in Chapter Two - released what it called the 'Girl Declaration', a statement based on consultation with over five hundred girls across the world. The Declaration was signed by celebrities, read aloud at the African Union Summit and endorsed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. The Girl Declaration was made public through a series of YouTube videos, which features girls of a variety of nationalities and ethnicities speaking lines from the statement. And a year after that, I was in Kavuni, where it was decided that Tufurahi School would celebrate the Day of the Girl. Emulating the Girl Declaration's YouTube video, the school director filmed the girls at Tufurahi each speaking a line from the declaration.

I watched as girls spoke lines in English that they did not understand. I watched as they were chastised for their lack of enthusiasm in the way they tell the camera that 'I have a voice and I will use it'. I watched girls shown how to fling their arms out and shout that 'this is the moment I was allowed to be astonishing', and then rushing off in embarrassment at the display that was demanded. 'This is the moment when the world sees that I am held back by every problem and I am the key to all solutions', I watched Chusa murmur, before being replaced by Safura, whose eye contact plays better on camera; more confident, more assured, making her mispronunciations charming.

The girls were repeatedly coaxed to smile more. There are gentle suggestions to change clothes into something less 'Western' - unless it is a school uniform. Suggestions to put on something less revealing, unless it is a dress fashioned from a traditional *kanga*. In matching skirts and shaved heads, two girls intone; 'I was not born to be invisible, I was not put on this earth to be denied'. I watched them stutter over incomprehensible phrases, taken out of context for a video which would

be cut together later to make sense to potential viewers who don't speak Swahili. "Being a girl became my strength, my sanctuary' they tell the camera, slowly and uncertainly.

Most of the girls were not natural actresses, and the filming took up most of the day. Lessons were cancelled and meals were delayed. There were tears and tantrums from girls who did not want to participate, and others who insisted on re-doing their part until it was perfect. The final video took some time to cut together and edit. When the school director played it in assembly, the reaction was not one of inspiration or solidarity. Many girls were embarrassed by their poor English, and those with more confidence laughed at girls who were more confident in front of the camera. What was intended as a show of empowerment remained just that; a show. The video, of course, went on Facebook. There was no consent sought from the girls to be on the internet; the final line of the video, 'this is my moment', means we can presume their desire to be heard and to be seen.

### **VIII.ii. Practical implications**

The above story summarises many of the points this thesis has sought to make about the place that girls occupy within international development. This place is one fraught with assumptions about girls' wants and desires, and how to enable these. Girls are constructed as vulnerable subjects who need to be rescued and supplied with a predetermined path to wellbeing, including sexual wellbeing. I have argued that the link between sexuality and empowerment is implicit in work with girls; it presumes certain sexual trajectories as limiting of girls' agency and other trajectories as evidence of the capacity to exercise choice. However, as this thesis has shown, what is presumed to 'empower' girls in relation to their sexuality may not do so - or can have unforeseen effects.

When contemplating the implications of this research for international development, I initially focused on what this means for development practice. How can this be changed? What practical, actionable suggestions could I come up with? Organisations working with girls must find a way to affirm young women's sexual agency in a way which acknowledges both subjectivity and social context, without buying into a limited and depoliticised notion of 'choice' that has been made available to them through neoliberal discourse and consequent development practices. A critical theoretical approach to agency and sexuality offers an epistemology which enables this to some degree by emphasising the importance of resistance as a legitimate exercise of agency. However, the more I reflected upon the above questions, the more I felt that it was neither possible nor desirable to distil the findings of this research into a set of policy recommendations.

This thesis conveys, I hope, the incomprehensibility and 'becoming-ness' of girlhood as a site of agentic practice. Such messiness however is fundamentally at odds with the temporal linearity and

emphasis on forward momentum which is so integral both to development policy, and to culturally and historically 'Western' understandings of both social progress and sexual maturation. However, the trouble that my work presents for development practice as it currently stands is not only down to the complexity of girls' aspirations, and their irreducibility to a neat and accessible summary, being incompatible with the way in which development works (or not). It also reveals the complicity of development itself in perpetuating an aspirational rhetoric of education and empowerment which fundamentally discourages girls' from thinking about what they genuinely want. The 'Girl Declaration' described above asserts that girls have a voice and will use it. But what if that voice does not say 'I will wait until I am a financially independent adult before I get married' or 'I reject male attention and want to focus on school'? What if instead, that voice says 'the choices you have told me will empower me cannot assure me the lifestyle you have also told me will mark me as successful'?<sup>11</sup>

If empowerment is so important, then it is impermissible to continue ignoring, dismissing or undermining girls' actions. If girls go on the hunt for boyfriends, dismiss school as pointless, run off for days at a time; then the response of development organisations cannot be to suggest that they need better education in order to empower them in the right direction. However, the argument of this thesis is not that it is necessary for those working within international development to regard such choices with equanimity. Indeed, Chapters Two and Six sought to emphasise and demonstrate that a post-feminist positioning of girls as agents who with a little individual effort can be liberated from constraining structural norms around gender is a fairy tale, as well as ethically dubious. Rather the sites of discordance revealed in this thesis between what development actors frame as empowerment and what girls themselves desire and do must spark reflection on how to conceptualise agency in more nuanced ways.

Conflicts between the call for girls' empowerment and the often disempowering effects of efforts by international development which have been observed throughout this thesis underscore the need to return to the question of how girl's agency is theorised. As discussed in Chapter Four, historically young people have been denied opportunities to participate in and inform development work. This is increasingly changing. The recognition of young people's agency and right to participate in matters affecting them has had a transformative impact within international

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<sup>11</sup> I must point out that it is unsurprising that questions like those I suggest above were rarely directly asked by my participants, and never in front of other adults in the field. The hegemony of this empowerment rhetoric, which places such emphasis on girls identifying their goals and pushing towards them, means there is little space for doubt. Given that 'good girlhood' has become not only about respectability and goodness, but about taking personal responsibility for these things, to express doubt in one's ability to navigate such rocky terrain is to accept personal responsibility for failure at 'doing girl'. This can be located in the ways that girls were determined to identify as autonomous regardless of the ways their actions were constrained by context and relationships, as seen earlier in this thesis.

development, and has been a great factor in the lip service now prolifically paid to the importance of 'empowering' teenage girls. It is therefore important to critically evaluate the degree to which this is actually happening.

There are several factors which have generated the current state of engagement with girls' sexuality within international development which must be addressed before change can happen. Adults' pathologisation of girls' sexuality as variously dangerous, troubling, uncomfortable or a source of vulnerability is clearly also something which must be recognised as posing a challenge for opening up conversations about sexual agency. As I pointed to in Chapter Six, these attitudes, which are reiterated through schooling in numerous ways, risk failing in their objectives of equipping girls for the future or protecting them from unwanted sexual attention.

Indeed, being at school can force girls to compromise other things they value, such as respect from their communities, or the ability to form good relationships. These may be objectives and 'subject positions' which have come to be aspirational for girls because of their internalisation of problematic gender norms, but it is insufficient to assume education will enable girls to suddenly overcome them. In failing to challenge the discourse of protection and vulnerability upon which such conservative and restrictive norms are built, development organisations advocating for girls' education implicitly endorse them. On the other hand, school as a space can still be generative of opportunities for girls to exercise agency, but in ways which may not be recognised by a narrow development discourse that focuses too sharply upon existing definitions of empowerment through education.

Two dilemmas are raised therefore which call for the need to rethink how girls' sexual agency is conceptualised within international development. Girls' sexuality remains largely unacknowledged at a policy discourse level, and when it is recognised in practice by those working with girls, it is only in terms of its problematic nature. I therefore advocate instead for attending to girls' agency and sexuality in a positive way which centres girls' own lives and relationships. Instead of asking why it is so hard to empower girls to make healthy, age-appropriate decisions about their sexuality, we can then begin to ask what might be missing from these frameworks in the first place. Identifying this is the first step to understanding girls' sexual agency as they themselves experience it, which in turn may contribute to better work with girls. By centring girls' experiences and seeking to explain them from within the context and relationships through which they unfold, this thesis has sought to do this. Recognising as legitimate acts and choices we do not fully understand because current frameworks cannot explain them draws attention to the need to rethink the utility of these frameworks in the first place.

### VIII.iii. Theoretical contributions

This thesis has questioned whether 'empowerment' is a useful way of conceptualising girls' agency at all, given the way in which the term has become diluted and its meaning depoliticised over recent years. I suggested that a Deleuzian approach and its emphasis on 'resistance' can be useful in understanding the potential for girls' transformation of their own worlds. A focus on resistance centres on girls' negotiation of their context and relationships by placing the emphasis on subversion of norms of girlhood. Rather than measuring their actions in relation to their achievement of projected expectations which are generated by adults, their desires and actions are taken on their own terms.

As this thesis has pointed out, these frameworks include an excessive reliance on outcome indicators like reductions in pregnancy, continuation in school, delays in the age of sexual relationships and marriage. Relying on these existing points of reference can only ever lead us to implicitly measure girls' choices and moves against them. A recognition of girls' attempts to move beyond and 'resist' both the norms of girlhood locally *and* those which they are presented with by development discourse can provide a step towards thinking more radically about girls' agency.

Indeed, attention to 'resistance' enables us to see girls' disruption of norms *beyond* the relationship that their choices have to the frameworks of expectations which 'empowerment' discourse has generated. In this way, 'resistance' also has implications for thinking about processes of development more broadly. Instead of development as a linear progression towards proscribed goals, 'resistance' takes seriously the rejection of people in developing countries of both existing injustice and existing options for resolving it.

In arguing this, I am drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, who see acts of agency which are made in reference to existing structures as being transcendent rather than immanent. Through such acts, girls are able to access only relative freedom rather than freedom entirely. The 'territory' of girlhood being moved away from is always the point of reference in the stories of girls discussed in this thesis, and therefore girls cannot think beyond its existence. Without freedom from girlhood, agentic 'moves' are always reterritorialised by that which girls seek freedom from.

Girls' pursuit of choices which end up reinforcing the power of those 'territories' they seek to escape might be understood as 'relative deterritorialisation' in which actions happen as a result of habits rather than desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). However, if girls continue to be discouraged from identifying as desiring subjects<sup>12</sup>, then there is little scope for this to be challenged. The discussion in Chapter Six of why girls seek alternative identities to those currently sanctioned by

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<sup>12</sup> Unless in age-appropriate, heteronormative and other socially non-threatening ways

local and international discourses, regardless of the risks they might entail, shows the importance of interpreting girls' choices in relation to their experiences and ambitions, not those of development actors.

The notion of desire as a productive social force was introduced in Chapter Two, and I was keen to explore whether this could explain girls' acts in the field. In Chapter Seven, the utility of Deleuze and Guattari's work on 'lines of flight' in the analysis of international development interventions was explored in relation to Angela's pursuit of schooling. I argued for attention to the recognition of agency within small acts of resistance as well as bigger 'flights' in girls' trajectories. A Deleuzian approach has potential for further development in the pursuit of more emancipatory ways of theorising girls' sexuality and sexual agency. Whilst not without limits, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the 'body without organs' and 'multiplicity' are especially useful.

The 'body without organs' can be used to explain how girls detach from norms of gendered and sexual identities and remake themselves in different ways. These include subject-positions such as 'disminder girl' and the 'modern girl' seen in the first chapter. Being outside of existing frameworks for girlhood, these positionalities are ones which adults and gatekeepers are not able to identify and therefore govern. For example, the subject-position of 'religious girl' identified in the first empirical chapter at first glance appears to be capitulative. However, its deployment shows how girls can draw on multiple narratives of girlhood at once to remake subject-positions which serve their needs whilst also protecting them from any repercussions of discipline and repression that they might invite upon themselves by challenging norms more directly.

How can we better understand this interaction between agency and structure? A concept from critical theory which I have drawn upon within this thesis is that of 'lines of flight'. I was interested in whether thinking about agency in terms of 'lines of flight' could lead anywhere meaningful in terms of comprehending girls' actual capacity to affect their own trajectories. Although through resistant acts such as occupying alternative subject-positions girls might momentarily disrupt the norms of girlhood described in Chapter Five, it was much harder for girls to actually transform these norms. Indeed, the ability of certain girls to exercise agency serves to highlight the fact that many girls had much less room to manoeuvre within the discourse of 'good girlhood'.

The critical framework through which I theorise sexual agency here asserts that personal experience must not be detached from political objectives of emancipation. For 'empowerment' to be realised, lines of flight must increase one's ability to resist and transform one's life-world in ways which will generate more opportunities for autonomy. Indeed, the acts of resistance described above did not result in such transformation, with even those girls who were able to 'do girlhood' differently unable to prevent the



relations of power within which they are experienced from closing these ruptures once they were recognised as subversive, as in the case of Angela.

Deleuze emphasizes the productivity of desire and that positive affirmative action is the only move towards true change. A reaction against and resistance to existing forms cannot be considered true agency because as a reaction, all moves are shaped through existing structures and modes; they therefore cannot sufficiently move away to be emancipatory. Through reterritorialization, they are subject to being drawn back into existing power structures. Indeed, this is seen in Angela's case. The same state structures of social care and education systems which enabled Angela's line of flight and expanded her opportunities through the basic level of provision they entitled her to were able to restrict her moves later on by the same requirement for her to be 'provided' for. This can help to explain girls' ongoing participation in their own subjectification as 'good girls' – because their experimentation only references the available tools for girlhood, and therefore any resistance which draws upon these is transcendent and able to be reterritorialized.

Empowerment discourse celebrates transformation; but as argued in Chapter Two, the depoliticised and cynical way in which this is embedded within development practice is at the cost of much of its radical potential. In future work, it would be important to consider how change and transformation can and does emerge as a result of girls' resistance to gender and sexual norms. In this regard, the concept of 'multiplicity' offers insights into the potential for agency to have emancipatory effects for girls, but also has its limitations. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that individuals form 'packs' which support each other in the process of unbecoming (moving towards being multiple 'bodies without organs'.) Such multiplicity and solidarity is unpredictable and non-linear, but as such results in 'lines of flight' which are strengthened through their size and force.

The shifting and unpredictable nature of these 'packs' means the ruptures they cause to gender norms are not only bigger but harder to shut down, and thus have the potential to result in more concrete changes to existing patterns of behaviours. The changing nature of the friendship groups at Tufurahi School invoke this image of groups which are temporal and tenuous, and 'noticeably different at every moment of its composition' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:33). What must be noted here however is that the 'neoliberal rationale' (Brown and Halley 2002:5) which encourages girls to compete and discourages any recognition of shared struggle is reiterated through schooling. This is seen in the ways that girls rejected opportunities for solidarity. It is therefore even more important to recognise the way that broader socio-economic context will shape girls' existing relationships, and their reaction to development efforts to expand their agency.

#### **VIII.iv. Methodological reflections**

Chapter Four of this thesis is the longest chapter, which perhaps indicates the significant development and learning I personally underwent as a novice researcher. As is perhaps the case for many PhD students, the research project I ended up doing bore only a passing semblance to the one I conceived of in my first months at the University of Bath. I learned a number of valuable lessons from this, some of which I reflect upon in the section on limitations which follows this one. Despite my frustrations, the experience of conducting ethnographic research, particularly ethnography involving young people, was in itself mostly positive. The time spent with the girls I met through my research was rewarding, exciting and fun. The relationships that I built over my months of fieldwork made a lasting impression. I did however find little within the literature on certain struggles that I experienced, and it is these that I reflect upon here, with the aim that the implications I identify may be helpful to others who find themselves in similar positions.

When I first began to plan my fieldwork I knew it was important to me for the research to have a 'positive impact' for participants. For this reason I was going to need to find field sites where gatekeepers were on board, and thus ended up at Tufurahi School. Drawing on a critical theoretical framework, I felt an ethical responsibility to ensure that my work drew on a conceptualisation of empowerment as a politicised process, and not just a predetermined outcome. This places an emphasis on participatory approaches where findings from research are made available to those who are involved with the project, not only for feedback purposes but for potential changes to practice as a result of any findings. I was keen to generate data which would be of interest to those working with girls, ideally in the specific context of my own research and in other places. I also felt that it would be disrespectful to the girls I worked with if the end product of the research filtered, reshaped or excluded certain content and messages which their input produced.

I aimed therefore to make participation a central part of my research process through creating space for girls to lead the focus of the project and determine the ways in which it was carried out. I also wanted girls themselves to find it a useful process and to be invested in its development. I initially felt at Tufurahi School that I had enough support and interest from gatekeepers that my research would be able to remain consistent with these objectives. However, the price inevitably paid for access to participants of school age in a school setting is that they are subject to rules limiting free time and space. As discussed in earlier chapters, pursuing participatory objectives in the context of the structured environments of development projects would prove fraught with complexity, and I found that I had to compromise a lot on my initial vision.

What I also found is that 'positive impact' is a broad term and open to interpretation. Because of this, like 'empowerment' it risks being meaningless. What positive impact meant to me ended up challenging and being at odds with gatekeepers' priorities for the girls. I had naively believed that

gatekeepers' tacit support for my methodology meant support for what the girls wanted to do with the training they received as part of their involvement. However, as discussed earlier in the thesis, this was not the case. Whilst initially supportive, the school director quickly became uncertain about both the safety of the girls and usefulness of the projects that they came up with. Girls who wanted to explore the reasons why so many girls from the villages who move to cities end up on the streets were advised that it would not be safe for them to go to a nearby home for street children, for example.

It was also the case that activities could quickly be curtailed by placing other demands on girls' schedules, and the final word of adults to decide what is appropriate for girls to be doing with their time. Assumptions about girls not knowing as much as adults about the issues they were interested in meant that gatekeepers were both selective about the types of project pursued and the ideas which were implicated by them. The teachers tried to encourage the girls to consider issues such as bride price and divorce, which they failed to understand were seen as less significant than harassment by girls and therefore tried to correct them.

Despite the 'fun' that we had and the knowledge that the girls undoubtedly obtained through participating, I found myself questioning whether this was enough to counteract the fact that the research ended up failing to have the impact I'd hoped for. Whilst the research training and subsequent projects I did with girls generated some fascinating data, I was not then able to support girls to generate solutions to issues they had themselves interrogated, or to find ways to address these in practice. Given that my epistemology was founded on the principle of girls being encouraged to see themselves as experts on their own experiences and lives, this was challenging to know how to react to when in the field. Evidently this is problematic in ways which go beyond just the impact that this had on my ability to find the support from gatekeepers to do participatory research with girls. In particular the idea that girls did not comprehend the challenges of girlhood to the same degree as white, Western older women is laughable, yet the construction of girls as irrational and uncomprehending enabled gatekeepers to position themselves as more knowing and aware than people who had direct experience of these issues, purely by virtue of their age.

The sense of failure I experienced did however highlight to me in a very real way the integral role of gatekeepers in enabling or obstructing action. Given the relational way in which young people's agency is supported or restricted, the importance of an environment which is generative of possibilities rather than closing them down because they are undesirable or inconvenient cannot be understated. In many ways, the challenges I encountered are the same factors which shape girls' experiences of sexual agency. For example, the experience of girls being confined within school grounds and unable to go outside to conduct their own research for their own safety was done on the basis of adults feeling they know what is good for girls. Instead of engaging with the

reasons for girls' resistance to this, their dismay was taken as evidence of their ignorance to the risks beyond the walls.

In hindsight, these challenges were the result of me making two mistakes. Firstly, I was naive in assuming that tacit support from the school director and teachers would be sufficient to enable me to do the project I had imagined. Secondly, I underestimated the emotional impact of these frustrations upon my experience in the field as a whole. I have always felt myself to be independent, but this is a simpler 'subject position' to occupy when one is socially connected to people who genuinely care for and support you. Being in the field brought with it a whole new level of isolation and I was uncertain how to seek the reassurance I probably needed. This combined lack of practical support and emotional connection, and sometimes even being straightforwardly undermined and treated with apathy and unkindness by gatekeepers, made fieldwork a challenging experience.

In reflecting upon the successes and failures of my fieldwork, at the forefront of my mind come concerns about the effectiveness of the study in meeting the personal research objectives outlined above. Whilst other limitations evidently exist, this was something I felt was the most significant to me, and has been an important learning curve for me as a researcher. In future encounters I would certainly endeavour to assume an identity and positioning for myself that did not make me feel so caught between the world of adulthood and girlhood; in future my age and status will be different, and the ambiguous position I occupied as a young doctoral student may not even be an option. Although I am aware there is no perfect way to do research I had envisaged a process in which the status I claimed was much less dependent on the whims and changing expectations of gatekeepers, and this was a steep learning curve.

#### **VIII.v. Plans for future work**

As suggested by the above discussion, I feel there is much more that a Deleuzian approach can offer development work with girls on issues around agency and 'empowerment'. Moving beyond the scope of the thesis, there were a number of other dimensions which struck me as important during fieldwork but which I was not able to fully explore due to the constraints of the PhD.

I have regularly made reference to the broader economic and socio-political issues which affect girls' agency. Whilst I have argued for attention to context, due to the time demands of ethnographic research and my objective of centring girls' perspectives I was not able to give Kavuni the attention it deserved. A number of policies with no obvious relationship to sexuality can be analysed in terms of sexuality; in this thesis I have shown how water access, tourism and the

changing local economy were all significant for girls' sexual agency. These issues have a global dimension, but focus is often limited to analysis of local culture and individuals when it comes to sexuality.

Broader economic and political dimensions are not sufficiently explored within current research despite the actual practices of girls showing that they are indeed significant for understanding how they experience sexual agency. Whilst there are references in the literature to culture and spatial issues like distance from schooling being a barrier, these remain very localised and call for local solutions. This recalls the critique made earlier about the development industry positioning itself as external to the challenges facing girls' empowerment. There is a need to therefore think more about sexual justice and agency as relationally contingent; not only at the level of Tanzania, but as an extremely politicised issue for development more broadly.

A further topic which I would be interested in doing more research on is female genital cutting. In 2008 Save the Children Sweden reported that 55% of girls in Arusha District undergo some form of female genital cutting, one of the highest regional rates in Tanzania (2008:98). This issue came up in discussions with girls, but they were extremely conscious of the discourse on such practices. The discourse of 'harmful cultural practices' through which many organisations sought to work with girls to end cutting were described by girls themselves as stigmatising and shaming. Girls who had undergone the procedure themselves were very reluctant to reflect on their experiences, and I was certainly not willing to push them to be more open, particularly in the group settings in which these conversations often occurred. However, some girls had a lot to say on the matter, and there is clearly a need for better critical dialogue on this issue. An ethnographic, girl-centred methodology such as that which I used in my fieldwork can open up opportunities for girls to engage with these narratives of harm which they expressed discomfort with.

Within international development there is always pressure to offer solutions, to improve, to present policy implications. But what girls' own narratives show is that sometimes it is not enough to work within existing frameworks. It is important to ask questions about how these ways of seeing girls have come to be the way we see girls lives, and what drives the current emphasis on education, progress and protection. I do not doubt that these imperatives are held with the best of intentions, but if we are to take seriously the participation of girls and young people and truly listen to them, it is also necessary to listen to that which makes us uncomfortable and which we may not want to hear.

I have no idea how the Day of the Girl was marked in the rest of the world in 2014 whilst I was in Tanzania. At Tufurahi School, it cannot be said that there was a meaningful celebration by girls; only a performance targeting an anonymous audience, designed to warm hearts and perhaps

inspire generosity. But I am still quietly amused, and then frustrated, when I recall the theme that year, which was the impetus for the girls' involvement in the video. '2014: Empowering Adolescent Girls'.

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