

***Disputing Discipline: Child Protection, Punishment, and Piety in Zanzibar Schools.* By Franziska Fay. Rutgers University Press, 2021. ISBN 9781978821743 (hardcover); 9781978821736 (paperback).**

In *Disputing Discipline*, anthropologist Franziska Fay presents her ethnographic research to examine corporal punishment among young children in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Drawing on eighteen-month of fieldwork with sixty interviews of young participants, Fay takes a rich visual participatory approach by using photos taken and drawings created by them. Their voices and images are evident throughout the book. Fay's empirical puzzle starts by describing the contradictory views between international aid workers and local townsfolk. Is caning an abuse of children or a morally justified educational approach? This was the question she was interested in.

It takes seven chapters for Fay to explore this puzzle, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. Chapter 1 sets the stage by introducing the actors and the issue. Chapter 2 discusses the socialization process that Zanzibar's children undergo into adulthood. Chapter 3 contrasts two lines of thinking toward the idea of child protection. Chapter 4 shifts the scene to schools, focusing on students' and teachers' views on positive discipline and traditional caning. Chapter 5 explores the nuances behind gendered reality to protection and children's agency. Chapter 6 takes a decolonial approach to deconstructing the international child protection program. A very short Chapter 7 sketches out a future of improving children's well-being.

I found the first three chapters most persuasive. Fay argues that the issue of corporal punishment in Zanzibar cannot be addressed without fully understanding the notion of personhood. According to the universalist framework of children's rights, anchored in the liberal ideal of children's agency and a participatory approach, Zanzibar's children lack agency. They are obedient and silent. Yet, in the local culture, rooted in the Islamic religion, obedience and silence show degrees of agency (pp. 45)<sup>1</sup>. Because they reflect upholding the responsibilities and duties, which are considered core elements of the concept of personhood in Zanzibar. "Children's responsibilities are as important as their rights and consequently Muslim children are required to respect their parents and obey them" (pp. 41), as Fay quotes the Quran, and children are considered humans but incomplete (pp. 40). The Zanzibarian ontology, or as Fay puts it, ontogeny, is a processual one. Its temporal characteristics -- setting in the present but geared towards the future, constantly being made and remade -- doesn't adhere to a static image of the child-adult dichotomy (such as those mandated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). Through the analysis of the local ideas such as *adabu* (manners), *adhabu* (chastisement), and *utu* (personhood) (pp. 52ff.), Fay convincingly translates Zanzibar as a world deeply rooted in Islam, Africa, and Arab culture.

In relation to education, raising a child in Zanzibar means educating them to be sane (both in the present and future), and that requires learning and cultivation. Being a child in Zanzibar doesn't mean being an equal to the adult, but rather, like in many other cultures, the child has its place in a hierarchical and paternalistic society. Chastisement is part of the civilizing process, which involves socializing the child into the society, enables the child to self-discipline, and shows care from the adults. When local aid workers try to implement child protection policies, they encounter resistance as these are incompatible with existing beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> The pager numbers refer to the paperback version.

Despite the strengths, sometimes Fay's analysis is embroiled with unadorned dichotomies. For instance, she asks whether paying money (part of the positive discipline solution) or being hit is a real choice (p. 130)? This question leaves the reader with an impression that institutions are reified as the reader has not been informed of how the idea of choice is rooted in the moral system of Zanzibar. If children are incomplete humans, isn't learning how to choose and negotiating what to choose part of the learning process? Occasionally the author makes claims such as "the aim of children's socialization is achieving social personhood" (p. 111). Such a functionalist claim does make Fay miss an opportunity to examine the mechanisms behind social actions, particularly the temporal element. Socialization is a term Fay uses to describe persistent social interactions over time. These interactions can lead to multiple effects, sometimes adhering to the social norm and sometimes defying it. We did not read much of the latter. Some structural questions remain unanswered: under what conditions would people's value and actions change? We are told that the Swahili equivalence of "modernity" is *kwenda na wakati* (to go with time) (p. 172). Yet changing social hierarchies requires not just concepts but also a careful historical analysis of the social structure and social time behind them, which the current book lacks.

*Disputing Discipline* is a stimulating book about how customs, institutions and values such as punishment, courtesy, personhood, and morality are engrained in a society. It provides educators and aid workers who work in a context different from their own an opportunity to reflect on the complexity and at times inadequacy of their efforts.

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