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Ordinary childhoods and everyday Islamic practices of protection and care in Zanzibar

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Abstract: In Zanzibar, religiously framed practices impact children's socialisation. Many actions that frame Zanzibari children's everyday lives—from birth rituals, to poetry recitation, to formal education—are closely tied to Islam. With ninety-nine percent of Zanzibaris identifying as Muslim, this sense of identity is fostered and transmitted from when a child is born. This article explores how conceptions of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' reflect in early socialisation practices that address Muslim Zanzibari children's lives, centrally by drawing on knowledge published in three booklets on Islam and child rearing acquired in Zanzibar Town in 2014 and 2021. It thereby shows how religious practices co-construct childhoods and underlines the need to pay attention to less extraordinary aspects and meanings of how being young and pious in contemporary African settings are made.

Keywords: Childhood, Islam, socialisation, everyday, protection, care, Zanzibar.

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Introduction

In order to continue decolonising how we think about African children's lives—also within the academy and as scholars of childhood and youth—we need to deepen our understandings of children's realities beyond moments of marginalisation and hardship. While many children, without doubt, continue to live under extremely difficult circumstances in sub-Saharan African countries, they too live ordinary lives that are structured and shaped by everyday practices of socialisation. It is pressing to counter and balance the overwhelming focus on the challenges and the generalising discourses that are produced about childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa as they 'are closely associated with extreme or difficult circumstances,' for this kind of 'portrayal of African childhoods has eclipsed the mundanities of everyday life for many children whose lives are not characterised by "lacks" and difficulties' (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016: 456). This dimension of the everyday—of the ordinary as the extraordinary's twin—with a specific contextual focus on one Muslim-majority setting, is at the centre of this article. With the words of Stanley Cavell, it is the acknowledgement of the 'small things in response to tumultuous things' (cited in Das 2007: xiv) in children's lives, of 'the spectacular as nevertheless grounded in the routines of everyday life' (Das 2007: 163), that I focus on here.

In Zanzibar, some of those 'small' and less 'tumultuous' things include Muslim socialisation practices that frame and structure children's lives and their becoming as pious persons. In this article I explore how notions of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' (Das 2007) permeate early socialisation practices that address Muslim Zanzibari children's lives. I engage closely with Zanzibari knowledge productions to show how religious practices and processes productively co-construct childhoods in one specific African context and to contribute to a more multidimensional understanding of childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa. In Zanzibar children centrally partake in the worlds they live in through Islam. Many of the ordinary actions that co-constitute Zanzibari children's everyday lives are thus deeply infused by religious belief. With ninety-nine percent of Zanzibaris identifying as Muslim, this sense of identity is fostered from when a child is born.

In order to stray from the wide array of literature on, for example, working children, children living in the street, children affected by illness, and children's involvement in conflict, this article speaks to a less public and politicised domain of children's lives in Zanzibar: Islamic socialisation practices as they are theorised and invoked with meaning during children's early years of growing up. I engage the theoretical framework of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' and three booklets on Islam and child rearing that were distributed by religious book sellers[1] in Zanzibar Town between

[1] All books were procured at either the book stalls outside Masjid Jibril on Tharia Street, the Duka la Vitabu na Dawa za Asili on Market Street, or another similar shop just off Market Street near Shamshu and Sons Pharmacy.

2014–21. During this period, I regularly visited Islamic bookstores in urban Zanzibar to enquire about new publications on child rearing in Islam. The three booklets I draw on in this article were those that were available upon my inquiries and that explicitly set out religious guidelines for rearing and socialising children. In 2021, when I procured the most recent booklet I will discuss, the other two booklets were still on sale and presented to me as the only other booklets available on the matter.

Islam, childhood and the 'everyday' in Zanzibar

In the Zanzibar context, both children and Islam[2] are ordinary and omnipresent categories to think with. Children below the age of 18 make for 48 per cent of Zanzibar's population.[3] The Swahili cultural context within which the majority of Zanzibari children grow up has often been described as deeply Islamic. In order to be considered 'truly Swahili,' being a Muslim is required (Knappert 2005: 182). In public discourse in Zanzibar religious leaders hold unchallenged moral authority and this too applies to discourses on children and childhood. While Islam is the dominant religion in the archipelago, it also presents an ever changing and non-static phenomenon with its 'discursive tradition' taking a unique shape in this context (Anjum 2007). The highly diverse interpretations and practices of Islam imply, for example, that being a 'good Muslim' means different things, 'based on locally grounded and morally imbued interpretations of the Islamic tradition' (Inhorn & Sargent 2006: 5).

In the archipelago most people know what a child is, what the category of child speaks to, through Islam. However, as much as children and Islam are consistent parts of everyday life in Zanzibar, little attention has been attributed to those realms in which the categories intersect and indeed induce each other with meaning. According to Veena Das (1989: 264), a child is 'not only an object of commands and manipulation,' but also a 'civilizational obsession' as 'every stage in childhood is marked by ritual that incorporates the child into the society.' I suggest that there is a need to engage more deeply with this civilisational obsession and with children's societal incorporation through everyday care practices in the context of Zanzibar by turning to Islam and its assigned practices as a lens on the everyday. Simultaneously we can

[2] The form Islam takes in Zanzibar and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa 'is shaped by a history of constant debate and linked to power struggles in the region' (Kresse 2007: 81). Therefore, the variety of African countries' historical encounters with Islam makes it difficult to support a notion of 'a single, African Islam' (Loimeier 2013: 11). Islam in Zanzibar is thus best considered a multi-layered phenomenon that is defined by how people interpret and translate the respective ideas into their everyday lives. Even though some important markers reappear in various forms in this geographic region, the context here also shapes the form that religion takes (Asad [1986] (2009).

[3] National Bureau of Statistics (2018).

broaden our understanding of Islam through the lens of the child 'as a "stage" that could be reactivated at any point in one's lifetime' (Han 2021: 5).

However, in public discourse both childhood and Islam in Africa are frequently invoked with negative connotations and associations rather than multi-layered representations that reflect the complexity and varieties of reality. The '"African child" has become a rather static and one-dimensional symbol,' one that 'obscures the wide diversity in children and renders those that do not suffer "the African way" invisible' (Hengeveld 2012). In the collective Western imagination, and co-shaped by media portrayals, the child in an African context 'has turned into a 'type'; a type with a typical and singular story of despair and helplessness' (Hengeveld 2012). Maria Hengeveld's (2012) line of argument that critically attends to the category of 'child' can be adapted to the way in which the media attends to religion, specifically to Islam. Here too, shortcomings usually simplify the Muslim faith in accordance with that same collective Western imagination in which Islam has become a type frequently defined by a single story of radicalisation and disempowerment. In this context it is largely (male) youth and women who veil on whom such imaginaries are projected. 'Islam', like the 'African child', is commonly not imagined as a multi-dimensional symbol, but instead, reduced to a static, and problematic, category, that renders all Muslims worldwide into potential terrorists or people without voice or agency (Soares & Osella 2009; Mamdani 2002). The diversity of experiences that Muslims make in different parts of the world and within the same communities thereby become invisible and exclude everyday ordinary Islam and its associated practices from that mainstream imagination.

The notion of the everyday has proved to be particularly helpful in drawing out how children's experiences, such as those that are frequently conceptualised and condemned as violence or an interruption to the everyday, are a steady part of many children's ordinary everyday lives (Fay 2021; Scheper-Hughes 1992). It is certainly important to acknowledge that 'risk is pervasive in poor communities, a feature not simply of "extraordinary" childhoods, but an integral part of everyday, "ordinary" lives in which the young negotiate multiple challenges' (Crivello & Boyden 2014: 380). Nevertheless, a focus on the less spectacular or shocking aspects that structure children's realities can help to contextualise some practices viewed out of context. I thus focus on some mundane Islamic practices of care to disrupt the dominant focus on the everyday in suffering and understand it also through practices and spaces of specific non-suffering. To balance the existing excess of observations of the everyday and ordinary through children's pain and violence—that which to many observers remains extraordinary—I consider everyday acts of Islamic child rearing and socialisation in Zanzibar, to bring attention to some of the quotidian and ordinary 'questions, answers and judgements that prevail' (Parkin 2017: 549) in childcare discourse and practice.

In my understanding of the 'everyday,' I follow Samuli Schielke (2019: 3) who considers it 'an attribute, a qualifier that characterises the recurring, goes-without-saying, undramatic, pragmatic and regular livelihood-related qualities of actions, situations, experiences and ways of reasoning vis-à-vis their potential extraordinary, dramatic, liminal, systematically reflected qualities'; who argues that 'nearly all things and situations mediated by human interaction that can be everyday can also be exceptional and extraordinary.' Particularly Schielke's attention to the duality of the everyday—its possibility of both ordinary- and extraordinariness—underlines the need to keep our positionality in mind. When viewed from the position of their actors, or the respective setting, the everyday Islamic practices of care and socialisation directed at children by parents and guardians, teachers and religious leaders in Zanzibari communities that I look at in what follows are perfectly ordinary.

The everyday, is also connected to the concept of ethics. Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando (2015: 63) describe 'everyday life' as presenting 'a series of challenges that require ethical decision-making: should one meet a colleague in a café that serves alcohol? Should a woman alone ride in a taxi with a male driver? Should one go to a mosque study group if one's husband is firmly against it? These are all questions that pertain to piety as much as they do to the domain of the everyday.' Following their perspective, I draw on this interwovenness of the everyday with the ethical which is 'intrinsic to action' (Lambek 2010: 39), or habit 'as a mode of routine and repetition that makes everyday life appear as if given, a flywheel of society' (Das 2018: 538).

Thus, the fact that children are actors in and of everyday Islamic practice also means that through these practices children learn to differentiate what is locally considered ethical and what is not. And they are socialised into the ethical standards of the communities in which they live—into their own moral local lives. If we understand the ethical as 'the site of both repetition and newness' (Das *et al.* 2014: 3) this is located where Zanzibari children have been and will probably continue to undergo the same Islamic childcare practices, without being able to ever fully predict how external circumstances may contribute to add something unforeseen. The moral in the sphere of childhood and Islam in Zanzibar is thus expressed and best observed in the routines, habits and 'small events of everyday life' (Das 2015: 117; Das 2010: 376) such as the practices considered in the following section.

Methodology

The three booklets[4] I discuss in this article are called 'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' (*Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa*), 'The Teachings of Islam about

[4] Other booklets generally contained more educational material such as Arabic learning manuals.

Child Rearing' (*Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto*) and 'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' (*Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara*). While 'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' engages with the immediate period after a child is born and the proper and considered to be necessary rituals of socialising the child into the world in accordance with Islam, 'The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing' mentions the same rituals but also speaks about the relationship and responsibility of the parents in the context of raising a child in accordance with Islamic beliefs. Both booklets emphasise the particular vulnerability of young children to spiritual interferences from, for example, bad spirits of the devil and underline the need to protect them from it. 'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' speaks directly to the need of decreasing hitting children as part of their upbringing and equally centres the role and responsibility of the parents in this matter.

All booklets speak to questions concerning children's protection and safety by drawing on everyday Islamic practices of guaranteeing those characteristics. I argue that these three booklets present a Zanzibari discourse on what in globalised policy terms is frequently referred to as 'child protection' but that remains insufficiently connected to, and integrative of, local conceptualisations of how to guarantee children's protection and safety. The booklets offer a selection of aspects that children are understood to be vulnerable to and thus in need of both physical and spiritual protection from in Zanzibar—they present critical insights into child socialisation as understood from within Zanzibari Muslim communities first.

I analysed the content of the booklets by translating[5] it into English in regard to respective themes that occur in English speaking discourses on childcare and protection. I then put the booklets' content in conversation with some research participants' commentary that I collected while undertaking long-term ethnographic fieldwork on child protection in 2014/2015. This sort of discourse analysis allows to unravel the multitude of angles that exist of concepts such as protection and care. In reference to 'children' I do not focus on a specific age group in this article following that the contour of the categories of adulthood and childhood is unstable and only 'comes to be formed in relation to the other' (Das 2015: 60), and that both childhood and adulthood are 'created in the context of actual interactions between adults and children' (Das 2015: 79). Instead, I turn my attention, more broadly, to 'children' as they are mentioned and addressed in the material and discussions I draw on.

At the time the data was collected I was undertaking 18 months of doctoral fieldwork on child protection in Zanzibar. This anthropological research on child protection and the many meanings of the concept allowed me to engage with a variety of existing discourses that co-constitute how children are understood to be safe and

[5] All translations my own.

protected during their younger years and as they grow up to be adults. It was through this ethnographic approach and by working with religious leaders who were involved in internationally initiated child protection programmes that I learned about the booklets that I centre in this discussion. Due to my fluency in Swahili I was able to conduct all interviews and translations independently. As part of my research training at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) I had additionally completed a training on ethical conduct in the context of research with children. Informed consent for the participation in research activities and the publication of material was provided by all child and adult research participants at the onset of fieldwork and continuously renegotiated throughout.

I choose this approach to respond to some blind spots in the study of childhood and religion. In Zanzibar, Islamic practices give structure to children's lives. Thus, Islam—or rather the embodied experiences of it—for Zanzibari children is interwoven and inseparable from the fabric that is everyday life. And religiously grounded practices of care, such as those I will discuss in what follows, are part of the 'texture of the ordinary' (Das 2020) in Zanzibar. Nevertheless, within anthropology and beyond, childhood has rarely been considered in relation to the 'neglected areas of well-being sometimes referred to as "spiritual"' (Bourdillon 2014: 497), and within the anthropology of Islam only occasionally links have been made to children as agentive, and positive, producers of its realm. I ask: What does it do when we repeatedly speak in a certain way about childhood and Islam? And why are there so few accounts that consider the ordinary overlaps of what it means to be young and Muslim in Africa within each other's domains—Islam as a lens to understanding childhood, and children as agents through whom to better understand religion?

Understanding everyday childcare and protection practices through religious booklets

I came to be interested in Islamic religious booklets on child rearing and care by way of the references that the religious leaders who were among my research interlocutors on child protection frequently made use of. Such booklets were explained to me to generally be written by well-regarded religious teachers and scholars who are referred to by the honorific title of *ustadh*. Similar to other guidebooks on all areas and questions of life as regarded from an Islamic point of view, those that engage with questions of child rearing were available at Islamic book stores or stalls commonly located next to, or nearby, mosques across Zanzibar Town. These booklets—and in what follows I focus on those three that were available to me between 2014–21—outlined in detail Islamic rites of infancy. As accessible guiding sources they are intended to contribute to children's well-being in their communities. The

booklets explain in brief those practices regarded to serve 'to incorporate the child into the human society as a whole and particularly into the Muslim community' (Giladi 1992: 35). As some of children's earliest experiences, these theorisations of religious ritual practices emphasise the authority of Islam as a defining discourse to everyday life that co-determines the approach to assuring children's well-being from early on.

Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa—'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' (Booklet 1)

The first booklet I acquired from a Stone Town religious bookshop, *Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa* ('Things to be Done to a Child at Birth'; Shabaan n.d.) (see Figure 1), written by J. Shaaban, summarises what according to Islam is considered necessary to be performed on children to assure their well-being, safety, and protection after birth. The booklet is structured in eleven sections on different themes that offer a combination of a short content in Swahili with sura from the Qur'an and Swahili translations thereof, including amongst other topics: Congratulations for giving birth (*bishara na pongezi kwa kupata mtoto*), reading a newborn the *Adhan* and *Ikama* upon birth (*kuadhiniwa mtoto akizaliwa*), to feed them something sweet (*kumlambisha kitu kitamu*), to shave their hair (*kumnyoa nywele*), to give them a name (*kumwita jina*), slaughter of sheep/goat as sacrifice (*akika kwa ajili yake*), circumcision (*khitani na hukumu yake*), and some others.

Upon a child's birth it is common practice to read the Adhan, the Islamic call to prayer, into the right ear and the Ikama, *the second call to prayer,* into the left ear (*kuadhiniwa mtoto akizaliwa*). This call to prayer is understood as the words of God which are intended as the first a child should hear (Shaaban n.d.: 6). They are considered to hold specific protective power over the child. The sura Yasini is said to protect both the child and mother (Ingrams 1931: 228). The purpose of the practice is explained so 'the child will not be affected (*hatohudhuriwa*) by Ummu Subyaani, a Jinni that follows and harms (*kuwadhuru*) children' (Shaaban n.d.: 5). The practice of feeding the child something sweet (*kumlambisha kitu kitamu*) like a pressed date or honey, also called tahnik, is said to have been done by the Prophet himself. Following this, on the first, third, or seventh day after birth, the child should be named (*kumwita jina*; Shaaban n.d.: 7).

On the seventh day after birth, a child's hair should be shaved (*kumnyoa nywele*); the weight of this hair (*uzani wa nywele za ujusi*) should be measured against money/silver, and the hair should be buried in the ground (*zifukiwe ardhini*) (Ingrams 1931: 197). One of my female long-term Swahili teachers and regular discussion partner in her forties explained this practice as follows: 'We believe this hair is not good. The

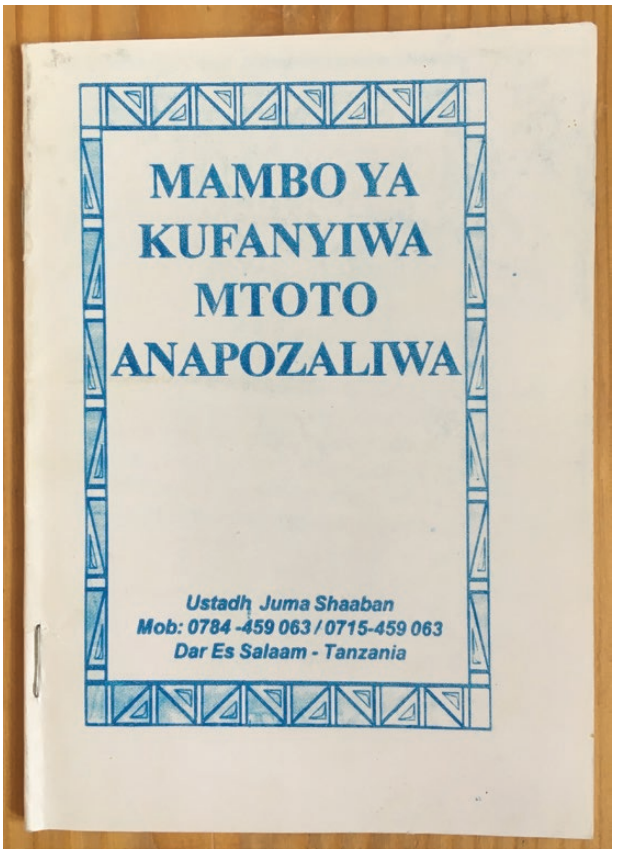

Figure 1. Booklet on the things to be done to a child at birth. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2014. 10 × 14 cm, 16 pages.

state/atmosphere (*hali ya hewa*[6]) is different outside the womb in the worldly life (*maisha ya dunia*) so it needs to go and grow anew.' The Akika—the slaughter of two goats for a male child and one goat for a female child (*akika kwa ajili yake*)—should also be done on the seventh day (8). 'If you don't have money,' another conversation partner noted on this practice, 'you can slaughter them later, but it must be done before the child reaches puberty (*kufika baleghe*). You do this as an offering and to give thanks to God for giving you a child. Men get two goats because they carry more responsibility than women.'[7]

All these customary practices recommended for Muslim Zanzibari children emphasise a newborn child's immediate need to be socially engaged, to be treated as, and made into, a member of her or his respective community. They reflect the value and status of children as inevitably entangled in Zanzibari everyday reality and

[6] Lit. 'the weather'.

[7] For Muslim Zanzibari mothers, childbirth is followed by the *arobaini*, a period of forty days of seclusion of the mother and the newborn.

underline the personhood even of a newborn, for example, through acknowledging that they too may be prone to, and must thus be protected from, possession by evil.

In line with the above, many of my interlocutors in Zanzibar also considered the Qur'an itself to have medical and protective powers for children. 'The whole Qur'an is medicine (*dawa*),' one sheikh emphasised, as he explained its specific application. Qur'anic medicine (*kombe*) was explained to me as commonly practised by religious authorities and as consisting of writing sura from the Qur'an with saffron-coloured ink onto a plate, dissolving the script in rose water, and then either washing oneself with the liquid or drinking it (Nieber 2017). I was told that Qur'anic medicine also consisted, for example, of sura written on a piece of paper, wrapped in some cloth, and worn on the body as a talisman or protective charm (*hirizi*). In urban Zanzibar, but much more frequently in the villages away from Zanzibar Town, I frequently observed children wearing necklaces on which hung small packets that contained sura. Similar constructions could be observed suspended from ceilings on lengths of thread or hung on doors in several of my interlocutors' houses to, as commonly explained to me, ward off 'the evil' (Ingrams 1931: 462). Whether I noticed them on children or in houses, they were everyday rituals of protection.[8]

Even though the use of Qur'anic medicine seemed to be widely accepted, the preparation and use of hirizi were also sometimes contested. Despite their incorporation of Qur'anic sura, they were occasionally considered more 'cultural' than 'religious' and thus, for some people, even antireligious. A female neighbour in her thirties, for example, explained her opposition to the use of hirizi:

> Local healers *(waganga)* and not sheikhs make *hirizi* for children. Here in town there are only few. It doesn't agree with religion (*haiendi na dini*). If you want to protect (*kumlinda*) a child with spirits (*majini*), then what are you worshiping (*unaabudu nini*)? Allah? Or someone else? That's why it's inappropriate (*haifai*) and town people don't like it. In the villages (*shambani*) you find it a lot. Here in town there are no *waganga* who deal with those matters.

Her discomfort with mixing religious and cultural practice pointed to the tension around the compatibility of the Zanzibari Islamic religious and Swahili cultural spheres. As mentioned, even though *hirizi* contain Qur'anic sura that are believed to have protective and curative powers, their use through charms to protect children from evil spirits was occasionally considered blasphemy. However, as another sheikh

[8] In practices that made use of *hirizi* the religious and the cultural spheres in Zanzibar overlapped. *Hirizi* (protective charms) draw on Qur'anic verses' protective power and are considered to lie between religion (*dini*) and 'tradition' (*mila*). The opposition of these two categories is problematic, because at the conceptual level 'it artificially isolates what occurs together or is intermingled in real life' (Middleton 1992: 162). In daily life in Zanzibar, religious and cultural practices commonly complemented each other and overlapped to the extent of being genuinely intertwined as to 'describe a continuum' (Loimeier & Seesemann 2006: 10).

made clear: 'The two most important things for the protection of children (*kinga*[9] *za watoto*) are safety (*usalama*) and health (*afya*). To protect children from diseases caused by spirits (*majini*) we use *hirizi*. Some people say using *hirizi* is against Islam and blasphemy, but this is a lack of knowledge and not true.' His emphasis on health and safety as central to understanding how children's well-being was best assured underline not only the fundamental consensus on children's need for protection but also the expectation to achieve it through religious practice, whether contested or not.

This resonates with David Parkin's description of the use of Qur'anic verses in therapy as causing tension between 'high-placed Muslims influenced by Wahhabism or Salafism' and 'ordinary Muslims.' According to him, 'the former denounce this particular use of the Qur'an as 'superstition' and disrespectful of the Holy Book, while also accepting that God is the source of all successful healing' while

> ordinary Muslims, including divinatory healers, do not normally argue among themselves over the pros and cons of the Wahhabi viewpoint, preferring to go about their everyday business of using Qur'anic verses for kombe and the Holy Book itself as an object in healing and in talking about healing. But, as in this account, they clearly do not condemn the therapeutic use of the Qur'an; in fact, they see it as essential. They say that it is using the benefits of God's work and is therefore both moral and professionally ethical (Parkin 2017: 542).

In Zanzibar my interlocutors' actions and narratives directed at children's care were seldom separable from Islam so that depictions of the boundaries between what was considered 'cultural' (*kitamaduni*) and what vernacular, or 'traditional' (*kienyeji*) practice varied greatly between people. The publicly contested compatibility of Zanzibari-Swahili culture and religion was often visibly undermined by my research participants' lived realities, which were shaped by close-knit combinations of both. Religious protection rituals aligned with 'cultural' rites of care, and both centred around children's health and safety in their everyday environments.

The owner of a small pharmacy of alternative medicine explained to me some of the protective health practices that he recommended when his customers asked for ingredients or cures to heal children's ailments. According to him 'anything can be prepared as protection/prevention (*kinga*) for children' and amongst those were *mvuje*, and *hirizi*:

> You can protect with *mvuje*,[10] which is like a tree, and garlic (*kitunguu thomu*) in a black cloth (*kitambaa cheusi*) tied to a child's arm. Children wear *mvuje* like a watch (*kama saa*) as a protection. Children are also clothed (*kuvishwa*) with *hirizi* to protect them (*kumlinda*) from bad spirits. *Hirizi* consist of a piece of paper with a sura from the Qur'an bound into a special tin (*kibati maalum*) or into a piece of cloth. The child wears it like a bracelet (*kidani*). All this is protection.

[9] Lit. 'prevention'.

[10] The *mvuje* mix consists of wheat flour (*unga wa ngano*), *mvuje*, and gum arabicum.

This understanding of children's well-being and safety, grounded in Islamic belief and medical understandings of caring for children, was repeated by research participants of various ages and genders. Another interlocutor emphasised the importance of using medicinal herbs (*dawa za mitishamba*) to keep children safe and so guarantee their physical well-being and bodily integrity.

> As protection from the devil, you put kohl (*wanja*) on their eyes, both for boys and girls. It must be a special, soft *wanja* without sand in it. You use soot (*masinzi*) with ghee (*samli*) or fat (*mafuta*). This *wanja la kombe* (religious magical kohl) is also called *hasadi*. You can continue doing that even after the *arobaini*, to protect the child (*kumkinga*) from jealousy (*husda*).

Both conversation partners conceptualised care through notions of the body and health. Primarily, they understood children's well-being as a form of preventing disease, treating pain, and protecting them from supernatural harm: it was often believed that childhood illness is 'caused by the evil eye' (Boswell 2011: 105). Treatments with *mvuje, jimbo*, or *wanja* therefore serve as 'a protection from harm' (127). The many ways of protecting children in society according to Swahili-Zanzibari 'cultural' practices—whether tying *hirizi* to their body, applying kohl to their face, bathing or fumigating newborns in herbal concoctions—are all interwoven with Islamic belief to guarantee they are cared for, to assure their cure or well-being. People's differing perspectives on practices of care and healing thus emphasise the multiple viewpoints on Islamic care practices for Zanzibari children.

Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto—'The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing' (Booklet 2)

A second slightly longer booklet titled *Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto* ('The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing') (see Figure 2), written by Baragashi Mswagala, was structured similarly to the first booklet with brief elaborations in Swahili, *sura* from the Qur'an, and passages from the *hadith* in Arabic with accompanying Swahili translations. Nevertheless, in this booklet the author describes Islamic child rearing to begin with the 'search for a suitor/ looking for a fiancé' (*kutafuta mchumba*), instead of with the birth of a child as outlined in the previous booklet, or pregnancy as the onset of parenting:

> Islamic child rearing begins from when you begin to look for a fiancé, if/for the fiancé is/ must be pious; for if a woman is pious even her children will be pious and obedient to a large degree, because the children do not only inherit their mother's features/look or other things, but they inherit also her character/manners/behaviour.[11] (Mswagala 2014: 6)

[11] *Malezi ya Kiislamu kwa Watoto yanaanzia tokea katika kutafuta mchumba, kwani mchumba akiwa mchamungu; yaani mke akiwa mchamungu basi hata Watoto wake pia watakuwa wachamungu na watiifu kwa asilimia kubwa, kwa sababu Watoto hawarithi sura ya mama yao tu au vitu vingine bali wanarithi na tabia yake.*

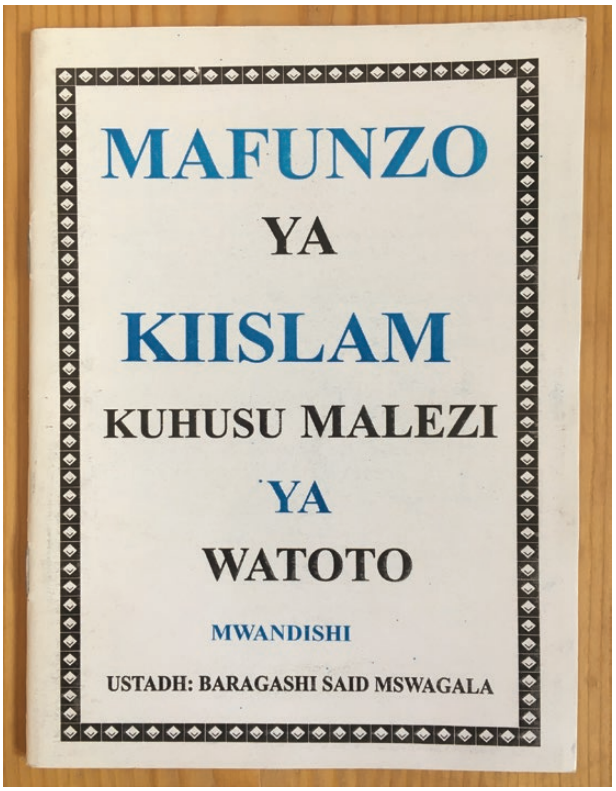

Figure 2. Booklet on the teachings of Islam about child rearing. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2014. 15 × 20 cm, 40 pages.

Thus, the author sums up, raising children in Islam begins 'when parents start dating' (*wazazi wanavyo chumbiana*), 'get married' (*wanavyo oana*), and when they 'consume their marriage' (*tenda tendo la ndoa*). If Islamic procedures are followed regarding these matters, the child that will be born 'will be good through the grace of God' (*atakuwa mwema kwa uwezo wa Allah SW)* (Mswagala 2014: 11). This alternative perspective onto the actual beginning of Islamic child rearing puts not the child, but the parents at the centre of the practice and emphasises the responsibility of the adult to adhere to religious practice to assure a child's moral becoming. It also reflects the relationality of children as social beings who come to grow up in community with others, in which something considered as ordinary as dating a potential partner may be given more meaning for the actual child's life than for the adults involved. Further, the sole reflection on women's characteristics in the quotation also reflects the heavily gendered nature of the booklets and the views they present. Exclusively written by men and communicating a sole male perspective on matters of child rearing, this poses a curious fact keeping in mind that in everyday life in Zanzibar this domain usually remains assigned to women.

Only then does the booklet move on to consider what it is that parents should do in accordance with Islamic law (*nini wazazi wanatakiwa wafanye kwa mujibu wa sheria za Kiislamu)*. Baragashi Mswagala begins by describing three steps the previous booklet laid out as relevant: reading of the Adhan (*kumuadhinia)*, a special prayer to protect/prevent the child from the devil (*dua maalum la kumkinga mtoto na shetani)*, and the ritual slaughter of a goat (*kumfanyia akika)*. Regarding the reading of the *Adhan* upon a child's birth the author offers the following explanation:

> ... [it serves] to protect the child from evil spirits or demons. Evil spirits usually possess and harm children to affect them badly until they reach adulthood, but when the *Adhana* has been read to them those evil spirits and demons run away and don't come again. So when the child is not read the *Adhan* on their day of birth, there is no surprise if that child will be bad and lacking goodness or being disobedient, for they have already taken on evil mannerism/ character/ behaviour due to being affected by that spirit/ demon/ devil since their childhood. It takes hard work to fix/ correct this.[12] (Mswagala 2014: 12–13)

This protection from evil—a part of ordinary everyday reality—is also described in connection to the mother saying a 'special prayer' (*dua maalum*) for the child in order to ask Allah 'to protect the child from evil' (*amkinge na shetani*) (Mswagala 2014: 13). And even in regard to the *Akika*, it is stated that a child for whom no *Akika* has been performed 'cannot be expected to be in a safe place in this earthly life' (*asitarajiwe kuwa katika hali salama katika maisha yake ya hapa duniani*) (Mswagala 2014: 15). The duality of good and bad as constituting of everyday life is here also considered in direct connection to its potential effects on children. This resonates with another female interlocutor's assessment of preventive child care against potential harm:

> The biggest harm for children is the devil/a demon[13] (*shetani*). Children must be protected (*alindwe*) so they won't be changed by it. When the mother goes to the bathroom, someone should look after the child so the devil cannot change it. That's also why at the *magharibi* prayer children must come inside, as during that time demons (*mashetani*) roam about (*wanaranda*). Staying inside is a good protection (*kinga*). In Islam we believe that children's bodies may be entered by demons who will make them do abnormal things (*siyo vya kawaida*) while the child is still healthy (*mzima*).

Children's vulnerability to supernatural harm and need for protection from it reflect the fragility of the state of childhood and the attention needed to assure children's

[12] *... nayo ni kumlinda na pepo wabaya au mashetani wa kijini. Mapepo wabaya kwa kawaida huwaendea Watoto na kuwadhuru ili kuwapa athari mbaya mpaka ukubwani mwao, lakini wakiadhiniwa basi hayo mapepo mabaya mashetani yanakimbia na hayamjii tena. Hivyo mtoto asiyo adhinia katika ile siku aliyozaliwa, hakuna ajabu kwa mtoto huyo akiwa muovu, na kukosa kuwa mwema kabisa au kukosa kuwa mtiifu, kwani ameshakuwa na tabia za kishetani kutokana na kuathiriwa na huyo shetani tokea utotoni mwakeo! Inahitajika kazi kubwa kumrekebisha.*

[13] Although demons/spirits may cause children harm, I was also occasionally told that they could also protect children if it was a good demon (*shetani mzuri*).

well-being. Even though Zanzibari children are considered 'pure,' they are also regarded as 'vulnerable to evil and pollution' (Boswell 2011: 105).

Alongside the practices of the *Adhan*, the special prayer and the *Akika*, Mswagala describes the child's socialisation process as a matter in need of particular attention:

> For when a child reaches an age of understanding (*umri wa kufahamu*), or put differently 'an age of knowing bad and good' (*umri wa kujua baya na jema*), it is explained that parents need to be particularly careful in regard 'to do evil deeds in front of them' (*kutenda matendo maovu mbele yake*) for those may have a bad effect on that child (Mswagala 2014: 15).

Finally, this booklet also draws out the importance of teaching a child about prayer (*kufundisha swala*). 'When a child turns seven years, they shall begin to be taught how to pray ... they shall be taught that prayer well so they will pray correctly and get used to it until they will come to consider it a great sin to miss/leave it'[14] (Mswagala 2014: 26). The hadith the author draws on to emphasise this claim is the following: 'Instruct your children to pray at the time when they reach seven years, and hit them if they neglect their prayers from when they are ten years old, and separate them for sleeping (between girls and boys)'[15] (Mswagala 2014: 26). Even though several of my conversation partners repeatedly pointed me to this hadith and cited it as the central source to contextualising physical discipline in the context of Islam, there were as many people I spoke to who disapproved of its literal translation, interpretation and application.

Overall it is the emphasis on the 'responsibility of parents, religious leaders and teachers' (*wajibu wa wazazi, maimamu na waalimu*) as important actors in the Islamic socialisation process of children in Zanzibar, that is repeatedly stressed throughout this booklet and the ways in which the respective care practices are explained, that unravel a Zanzibari understanding of care and protection as it is embedded in everyday community life. A final reference that speaks to this collaboration makes this clear:

> There needs to be great collaboration between parents at home, religious leaders in the mosques and teachers at the madrasas (Qur'anic schools) and schools, because it is the parents who build the child's body, the religious leaders who build their soul/ spirit and the teachers who build their mind/ intellect, therefore it is necessary they work together.[16] (Mswagala 2014: 31)

[14] *... anapofika huyo mtoto na umri wa miaka saba, aanze kufundishwa swala ... afundishwe vizuri hiyo swala ili awe anaiswali kiusahihi, aizoee mpaka aone ni dhambi kubwa kuiacha.*

[15] *... waamrisheni Watoto wenu kuswali hali wao wana umri wa miaka 7, nawapigeni wakizembea hali wao wakiwa na umri wa miaka kumi, na watenganisheni kulala [kati ya Watoto wa kike na wa kiume].*

[16] *Unatakiwa uwepo ushirikiano mkubwa kati ya wazazi majumbani, maimamu misikitini na waalimu huko madrasani au mashuleni, kwani wazazi wanajenga mwili wa mtoto, maimamu wanajenga roho ya mtoto na waalimu wanajenga akili ya mtoto, kwahiyo lazima washirikiane.*

Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara—'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' (Booklet 3)

A third booklet I was able to procure from a religious bookstore in Zanzibar Town in July 2021 is titled *Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara* ('Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time') (see Figure 3) and authored by Hassan Hassan J. from Tabora, Tanzania (n.d.). Inside the booklet the subtitle *Furahia Malezi ya Mtoto Wako* (Enjoy Raising Your Child) is included. In opposition to the previous booklet that drew on a hadith to suggest a child should be hit when she or he neglects her or his prayers from the age of ten, this booklet takes a decided stance against hitting and draws on a different selection of hadith to support a non-violent approach to child-rearing.

Hassan J. begins the introduction by setting out that children are the moral responsibility in order to fulfil one's obligations that are considered to be due to Allah and that the work of raising children is to be implemented in a heartfelt and cheerful way, for children are a gift[17] (Hassan n.d.: 2). He goes on to describe the goal of raising children as to prepare them to become of use (*kuwa wenye manufaa*) to parents/adults, to themselves, and to the community at large, for life on earth and the afterlife. In order to fulfil that, children are supposed to follow the orders of Allah[18] (Hassan n.d.: 2).

The booklet addresses specifically the goal of abstaining from hitting children from time to time and to speak badly to them as part of the child rearing process when they act in undesirable ways[19] (Hassan n.d.: 2). The continuation of this state is described by Hassan J. as a sign that the parent does not enjoy raising his or her child[20] (Hassan n.d.: 3). He then sets out that the Prophet Muhammad himself was well known for the way in which he empathised with and loved children, being said to have carried them, kissed them and cried for them when they died[21] (Hassan n.d.: 3). The booklet opens with referring to two hadith,[22] one about Aisha—the third wife of the

[17] *Watoto ni Amanah tuliyopewa na Allah (s.w). Kuwalea ni kazi ambayo tunatakiwa kuitekeleza kwa moyo mkunjufu huku tukizingatia kwamba Watoto ni zawadi kwetu pia.*

[18] *Malengo ya kuwalea Watoto wetu yanapaswa kuwa ni kuwaandaa kuwa wenye manufaa kwa ajili yetu, kwa ajili yao na kwa ajili ya jamii, katika Maisha ya hapa duniani, na kesho akhera. Wawe ni Watoto wenye kufuata maamrisho ya Allah (s.w) katika Maisha yao ya kila siku.*

[19] *Watoto kupigwa mara kwa mara na kusemwa vibaya pale wanapofanya jambo lisilopendeza.*

[20] *ishara kwamba mzazi hafurahi malezi ya mtoto wake.*

[21] *Mtume Muhammad (s.a.w) anafahamika vema kwa namna alivyokuwa akiwahurumia na kuwapenda Watoto. Alikuwa akiwabeba, akiwabusu, na hata kulia machozi pale walipofariki.*

[22] *Aisha (r.a) ameeleza kuwa Mtume (s.a.w) amesema: 'Hakika Allah ni Mpole, Anapenda upole, na Hutoa ujira Asioutoa kwa jambo linguine lolote wala Hatoi juu ya ukali.' (Muslim) (p.4); Abu Hurairah (r.a) amesimulia: Mtume (s.a.w) amesema: 'Mwenye nguvu sio yule awashindae watu kwa mieleka, bali mwanye nguvu ni anaemiliki nafsi yake wakati wa hasira.' (Muttafaq).*

Figure 3. Booklet on child rearing without corporal punishment. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2021. 8 × 10 cm, 24 pages.

prophet Muhammad—and one about Abu Hurairah—one of Prophet Muhammad's companions—both pointing out the importance of gentleness (*upole*), and being gentle (*kuwa mpole*), as key characteristics when it comes to child rearing and especially in the context of Islam (Hassan n.d.: 4).

In the sections that follow, Hassan J. sets out what it means to enjoy raising your child, its benefits for parents, and practical examples for implementation. A parent that abstains from using violence or abuse in order to control his or her child and instead makes use of a good relationship and teachings is considered by Hassan J. as the goal[23] (Hassan n.d.: 10). Finally, the author spells out thirteen steps to abstaining from hitting your child at the time of raising them. Alongside being calm (*kuwa mtulivu*) and controlling your anger (*dhibiti hasira zako*), the importance of teaching your child about Islam and demonstrating its implementation (*mfundishe mtoto wako Uislamu na simamia utekelezaji wake*) (Hassan n.d.: 21), as well as studying Islam and

[23] *Ni mzazi ambaye anajiepusha kutumia vurugu au udhalilishaji ili kumdhibiti mtoto wake, na badala yake hutumia mahusiano mazuri na ufundishaji …*

implementing it every day (*soma Uislamu na kuutekeleza kila siku*) (Hassan n.d.: 22), are emphasised as key.

Similar to the other two booklets this booklet on the aspect of child discipline addresses explicitly the role and behaviour of the parents in child rearing and their influence in shaping the child by raising them in a particular manner and always in accordance with Islam. The particular emphasis on gentleness and non-violent child rearing as Islamic and its derivation from the hadith and physical disciplining techniques suggested in the previous booklet points to the many interpretations that exist of Muslim religious sources such as hadith in Zanzibar in accordance with whom they are utilised by and to what end.

Regardless of the different interpretations of religious perspectives on guidance I encountered, in Zanzibar, Islam was always considered to structure children's development and for their developmental stages to be defined by it. Various religious leaders I spoke with referred to what they called the Triple Seven Hadith when I inquired about Islamic frameworks to child rearing. This hadith was explained to me to indicate three key stages in life that all Muslim children pass through as they become adults: 1) from birth to age seven, 2) from ages seven to 14, and 3) from 14 until age 21, each stage lasting for a period of seven years. One well-known Zanzibari religious leader explained that at each stage a child's particular needs of those years were responded to through specific forms of child-rearing:[24]

> About child rearing (*malezi ya mtoto*) the Prophet (saw) said: 'Play with them (*chezeni nao*) in the first seven years, teach them (*waelimisheni*) from the age of seven, and befriend them (*wafanyeni marafiki*) during the third stage.' From birth until age seven, be close to them, listen to them and play with them.[25] From seven to 14, rear them (*kumlea*), teach them (*kumsomesha*), and give them education (*elimu*) and knowledge (*taaluma*). From 14 to 21 children start sitting with the elders (*kukaa na wazee*) and being taught lessons (*mafunzo*). Start treating them as friends (*mfanye marafiki*) and do not hide anything from them (*humfichi kitu*). After passing through these stages, they are an adult (*mtu mzima*).

The retelling of this broader approach to child rearing and care orients itself towards the everyday reality of the child at the respective particular age, and it asks the parent to adjust their behaviour towards the child to the needs of those years. Similar to the guidance set out in the third booklet it is the child's specific needs at certain moments in their upbringing and the responsibility of parents to react and respond to them adequately that are put at the centre here.

[24] He referred to the Qur'an sura 26, verse 18, and *hadith* Musaffaab (kumsaba'an).

[25] Qur'an sura 12, verse 4 (1–7).

Reconfiguring discourses on African childhoods by centering the ordinary through religious booklets

The insights on childcare and protection that can be gained by engaging closely with alternative sources such as the booklets I discussed contribute to centering a sense of the ordinary that is constituting of children's everyday lives in this part of the world. In her work *Everyday Life*, philosopher Agnes Heller (1970: 3) argued that 'if individuals are to reproduce society, they must reproduce themselves as individuals' and that 'we may define "everyday life" as the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make social reproduction possible.' Such a reproduction of selves and of community—or the reproduction of everyday life, of life, at large—is partly what happens along the lines of the Islamic rules and rituals of caring for children that I have explored. Heller went on to claim:

> No society can exist without individual reproduction, and no individual can exist without self-reproduction. Everyday life exists, then, in every society; indeed, every human being, whatever his place in the social division of labour, has his own everyday life. But this is not to say that the content and structure of everyday life are the same for all individuals in all societies. Reproduction of the person is always of the concrete person: the concrete person occupying a given place in a given society. (Heller 1970: 3)

Following this, it may hold that Zanzibari children's everyday lives and their reproduction and constitution through the respective practices of care, are also a reproduction of the status of child in the social hierarchy of Zanzibari society. The Islamic rules required to reproduce moral Muslim children differ from those needed to make, for example, a moral adult, whether that be a market-seller or a member of parliament. In other words, the knowledge needed to bring the concept of a child in Zanzibar into being, to make it an epistemic reality, is religious at heart, and inseparable 'from the structural system of everyday thinking' (Heller 1970: 49). The knowledge presented in the booklets as well as the accounts of my interlocutors that reiterated or contested it present such a system of everyday thinking about children and their care and protection.

Some of the discourses on African childhoods that I became familiar with while conducting research on internationally initiated child protection programmes in Zanzibar were those of international children's rights organisations like Save the Children or UNICEF. The ways in which childcare and child protection were promoted by these actors were often insufficiently linked to and in conversation with the existing socio-religious discursive system that commonly frames child well-being in Zanzibar and as I have outlined it by means of the three religious booklets. Despite many overlaps in regard to questions of child health, protection and safety, child rearing and protection knowledge, such as that by child rights organisations, thus often remained to be considered as 'professional knowledge' by my research participants but not 'a necessary condition for the reproduction of a particular person born into a given

society' (Heller 1970: 49). This insufficient integration of existing Zanzibari knowledge production on and approaches to the child rearing process fostered a gap between circulating ways of knowing about children and how to care for them. Integrating secular, universalised policy discourses of childhood, protection and well-being with religious, Zanzibari narratives of knowing about these things would strengthen rather than divide the shared goal of keeping children safe as they grow. Due to this disregard, everyday Islamic childcare practices in Zanzibar may thus also be understood as some of the conditions imposed by that respective context that children 'must appropriate and make their own if they are to survive' (Heller 1970: 54).

Paying attention to the small acts of care in children's ordinary everyday lives in Zanzibar—such as those outlined in the booklets—may stand up to the louder events commonly in focus in larger discourses on both African childhoods and Islam. Such attention may aid our ability to transcend narratives that commonly foreground lacks and absences in African children's lives and allow to also see what *is* part of their everyday, already—such as religious ritual practices and ideas that structure their becoming of persons in society. If we shift from 'considerations of individual agency and intentionality to the place where we see the individual within the flux of collective life,' as Das (2012: 140) puts it, discourses engaged with African childhoods prove to be meaningful in respect to the power they have to speak to, and about, some conditions of all people's social lives in a place. In Zanzibar this flux of collective life is best observed through Islamic framings of growing up as presented in the booklets, that never only consider children's individual agency but also always regard them as connected within their community collective. Child protection and child health professionals could learn much from how the care for and protection of children is conceptualised through locally available sources such as religious booklets that centre ideas of prevention over those of protection and keep a health-approach at the heart of achieving children's well-being. This might present an opportunity to integrate different approaches to improving child well-being in Zanzibar within each other and to align them more strongly with existing sources of knowledge that have insufficiently been paid attention to.

Conclusion

In this article I have turned to Islamic religious booklets on child rearing in order to show what alternative ordinary sources of knowledge can contribute to discourses of child care and protection. I have explored the topics that are outlined and discussed in these sources and have tried to show why the ordinary—as it can be traced in practices of childcare and protection—matters greatly in the study of children in sub-Saharan Africa. This has led me to suggest that an increased focus on these themes and sources may contribute to reconfiguring and potentially even

transforming existing discourses on African childhoods in which these matters continue to remain marginalised. Ordinary everyday practices of care and protection during childhood—a stage of life considered to require particular attention in Zanzibar—that often go unnoticed in academic discourses and media portrayals matter precisely because of their omnipresence and their identity and community building nature. This examination of how children's everyday lives in Zanzibar are structured by diverse Islamic discourses and practices of care, that allow them to fit into and understand to navigate their local communities, supports an understanding of childhood and children in sub-Saharan Africa that is willing to also see and work with what is ordinary in those children's worlds, and not only what is out-of-the-ordinary. Religiously infused practices, such as those of birth rituals during early childhood or health routines in later years, are not interruptions to children's everyday lives in Zanzibar, but rather a part of it, that tell us about some important building parts of children's worlds.

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