

Dilger, Hansjörg: Learning Morality, Inequalities, and Faith: Christian and Muslim Schools in Tanzania.

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How does one attain a “good life” in a religiously diverse landscape? In *Learning Morality, Inequalities, and Faith: Christian and Muslim Schools in Tanzania*, Hansjörg Dilger engages with this question ethnographically following ten months of fieldwork between 2008–2010 in six Muslim and Christian schools in Dar es Salaam. He explores the roles that global inequalities and local searches for socio-moral belonging play in younger and older people’s religious experiences and practices.

Throughout the book’s seven chapters, Dilger demonstrates in a thorough and rigorous manner how we can understand everyday moral formation as inherently embodied, situated and affective if we turn our attention to the spaces and relations within which moral-ethical training and self-formation take place. Dar es Salaam’s new faith-oriented schools were mostly established in the wake of privatization from the 1990s onwards to cater to a growing, mostly middle-class demand for moral-ethical education beyond the secular subjects that are taught in government schools. By zooming in on these differently positioned sites of moral socialization, Dilger’s choice of field site allows us to understand deeply how the process of learning morality is intertwined with “both individual and political affairs” (p. 16).

The book consists of two parts, which work well in complementing historical contextualization with ethnographic case studies. In the first part, Dilger offers a historical and political genealogy of the emergence of religious difference and education by showing how (post)colonial histories and related memories of educational and religious difference have shaped Christian and Muslim encounters in Dar es Salaam (Chapter 2) and by describing the historical entanglements of Tanganyika/Tanzania’s educational system with increasing socio-religious inequalities (Chapter 3).

The book’s second chapter offers a critical discussion of various aspects of coloniality. Dilger traces convincingly how the ‘Christian missions became indispensable to the educational system of the colonial state in Tanganyika’ (p. 46) and shows how on the one hand this was accompanied by an overall favouring of Christian associations in the general building of the colonial state, accompanied on the other hand by a critical neglect of Muslim organizing with regard to, for example, the colonial government’s social service provision. Equally important is the attention Dilger repeatedly pays to the paradox of the continuing use of English instead of Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education in Tanzania today. This privileging of English is made evident by the ongoing policing of the speaking of Swahili in the form of, for example, ‘the rule to speak English at all times’ (p. 200) or of the use made of student ‘class monitors’ who ‘reported Kiswahili speakers to the teachers’ (p. 202) – another result of colonial oppression which continues to play a role in the shortcomings of Tanzania’s educational system today.

Methodologically innovative and insightful is the quantitative analysis presented in the third chapter of two different sets of government registration books, including data on the official registering and deregistering of religious organizations between 1980 and 2009. This analysis allows him to shed new light on inter-religious similarities where diversity or difference may be assumed by default, and to question productively how competition for registration and institutionalization genuinely takes place in addition to the state's attempts to organize and order it.

The genuinely evocative ethnographic chapters in the second part then zoom in on the varied experiences and practices of moral becoming across Christian and Muslim faith-based schools – schools 'with a distinct ethical and social spirit' (p. 222) – in an overall context of socio-economic inequality. Dilger manages to demonstrate how learning values in Dar es Salaam has itself become a highly diverse phenomenon by taking us through the examples of two schools under the authority of a neo-Pentecostal church (Chapter 4), two Islamic seminaries (Chapter 5) and a Catholic primary school and its corresponding high school (Chapter 6). These chapters are particularly dense but are usefully broken up with 'intermediate conclusions' that help the reader move through them. The book concludes (Chapter 7) by highlighting the convergences and divergences in the striving for a good life across the Christian and Muslim educational fields.

Particularly impressive in Dilger's ethnographic analysis of the neo-Pentecostal schools is how the categorization of 'Christian' in itself, alongside the 'implicit presence' (p. 128) that faith had in the schools' everyday operations, is best understood alongside internal conflicts. Dilger illustrates this by zooming in on the spirit possessions and their healing that take place in the spaces of the Christian school. The fact that these spirit possessions occur almost exclusively in female Muslim students 'became a powerful moral counternarrative' (p. 136) and reflects patterns of extreme social stratification that affect the population's access to educational institutions and the 'good life' and people's moral evaluations of an increasing neoliberal market orientation.

In the ethnographic part on the two gender-segregated Muslim-only Islamic seminaries, the interrelatedness of religious difference and social status comes to the fore and makes the reader aware of how students' structural positions in society and the wider educational market – usually 'at the lower end of the scale' (p. 149) – are affected by it. The explicit religious and ethical framework of the seminaries thus functioned as 'an arrangement with these injustices' (p. 150), providing 'protection against the vagaries of everyday life' (p. 152) and the socio-economic conditions both students and teachers were exposed to.

Finally, in the Catholic school where Dilger conducted his research, a privileged social status and the Catholic church's continuing 'dominant place in the educational market in Tanzania' (p. 177) is evident and tied to broader notions of (middle-)class formation. The extent to which the Catholic schools' students from mainly elevated socio-economic backgrounds are themselves 'highly conscious of their own privilege' (p. 195) is especially recognizable when the learning of values in this context of faith is

exercised by, for example, the visit to an orphanage and students' immediate reactions of empathy and compassion.

A particularly important achievement of the book is its comparative framework, which genuinely serves to demonstrate a nuanced view of how the quest for a good life in a setting of religious diversity has been shaped by post/colonial histories of education and interreligious encounters. Through his focus on the coexistence of different Christian and Muslim school settings, Dilger allows the reader to see not only the internal diversity in each field, but also, and more importantly, the complexities that define the relationality between them. This angle makes visible the extent to which both Muslim and Christian engagements with how values are learned and taught are united by entangled struggles for moral becoming and how they 'have to be understood in relation to the larger societal and political-economic conditions they share' (p. 233).

Another striking achievement of this ethnography is its dedication to unmaking and countering political discourses that have contributed to deepening socio-religious marginalization and to widening the gap between the structurally weak position of Muslim educational institutions and their associations with 'educating "future terrorists"' (p. 151), while Christian schools remain in an "excellent" position' (p. 177) and enjoy an 'overall privileged status' (p. 19). By demonstrating how this discrepancy can be traced back to the 'governance of religious difference during colonial and political times' (p. 19), Dilger's analysis helps us reflect on how power dynamics have long been experienced negatively by Muslim actors in the field of schooling specifically, as well as contributing to marginalization in society more broadly.

Particularly rich and important in this account of ethical subject formation is Dilger's conceptual and theoretical engagement with childhood, the body and humour. Dilger helpfully does not frame his ethnography as one of 'childhood' per se but treats children with great sincerity and compassion as equal conversation partners and interlocutors in their own right in his endeavour to shed light on how values are learned and good lives lived. This book is striking proof of the necessity to engage more with children for an anthropology of ethics that takes seriously how children are 'actively involved in making values ordinary' (p. 13) and that truly engages with philosophical reflections on life as lived and experienced by different generational groups.

As I have demonstrated in my own book in the context of Zanzibari schools (Fay 2021), in Tanzania young people's moral (self-)formation takes place to a large extent in, on and through the body. By integrating discussions on physical discipline in schools, such as the use of kneeling as a form of punishment that is frequently considered 'less "psychologically affecting" than caning' (p. 201), Dilger productively foregrounds 'the body as the central site of proper self-care and conduct' (p. 197) and makes it possible to think of the constitution of a moral landscape as taking place within and outside a physical and embodied sphere, but always in close interaction with it.

Finally, Dilger intriguingly proposes to think more with joking and humour as another way 'of dealing with potentially conflicted moralities' (p. 225) and overall moral ambiguities. This suggestion should be taken seriously in future engagements

with ethics in anthropology because it helps us engage more directly with those spaces and expressions of contestation and refusal that reflect how people – like the students and teachers in this book – ‘express a stance on, or merely raise, issues that could not be addressed otherwise’ (ibid.)

If for anything additional, I would have been intrigued by a more direct engagement with what Saba Mahmood has termed ‘the subject of freedom’ and what James Laidlaw has discussed extensively in advocating an anthropology of ethics and freedom. The discussions in this ethnography, especially where they reveal the deep ambiguities inherent in, for example, the structural marginalization and economic deprivation of the Muslim schools’ settings that do not seem to stand in the way of students’, teachers’ and parents’ commitments to those spaces, would have potentially offered themselves to this question of freedom.

With its profound insights into how ethical subjects and the ‘good life’ are always in formation in ordinary educational spaces, how these spaces are deeply entangled with the colonial past and capitalist present, and how young people are some of the most interesting conversation partners from whom we can learn about these processes, *Learning Morality, Inequalities, and Faith* makes a unique contribution to the fields of the anthropology of ethics, political anthropology, the anthropology of childhood and youth, and Swahili Studies more broadly.

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