Implementing Child Protection: Contesting (Universalized) Notions of Childhood, Violence and Authority

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ABSTRACT

The protection of children in different contexts has a long history and there are many concepts of “childhood”, “violence” and “authority” - neither of them possible to be summarized under one unifying notion. Many development actors that promote child protection base their efforts on “western” narratives and norms of childhood assuming their validity in all context of their implementation - thereby neglecting local concepts. The dynamics and tensions between these local and global notions and their meanings in different settings, as well as how these factors affect the production and representation of success and failure of child rights policy, request renewed attention in multi-layered arenas. Discursive processes actively contribute to this differing representation and, especially local ones, are still not being focused on enough. In local contexts child protection measures are often considered “corrupting western concepts” that lead children to misbehave, condemn practices that are not considered “violent” but rather as disciplining and that contest traditional authority, by organisations appointing children a large and in society uncommon participatory role. Many outcomes of positively meant intervention are unpredictable and bring about situations that do not work with “input/output”-agendas of development organizations. Often situations arise that bring about new conflicts and tensions within frameworks of ambitious intervention. The possibility of an alteration of forms of governance through the application and focus on child protection is connected to the issues of power relations and how the exercise of power may transform herein. The local normative orders child protection rights are embedded in within different societies and how these are intertwined with global networks of power and meaning that go beyond this locality, are in this regard to be equally considered. Anthropology of development and childhood needs to be relocated within international development practice to unpack overlooked conflicting notions of concepts and contradicting realities.

KEY WORDS discipline, rights, children, universality

Introduction

This paper considers international child protection efforts as a contestation of norms. My focus is on the Archipelago of Zanzibar, part of Tanzania, and I will discuss norm
contestation in this context in a two-fold way: the contestation of global, universalized norms from the side of the host society and local discourses that differ from the ones relied on by international actors, and the contestation of local norms through the implementation of international ideas about child protection within the chosen societies. Notions of childhood, violence and authority are challenged within such political processes of development.

My question is, why do actors of international development assume that international standards of child protection can be rendered a technical issue and applied to different contexts without major contestation arising? I intend to suggest a different way of thinking about child protection: of considering it first and foremost in regard to children, and then in its political and philosophical terms as it has drifted away from children themselves and is focused too much on rules, standards, and bureaucratic structure. There is a need for improving the actual connection between child protection and the child itself and its consideration as a person with already developed moral sensibilities and a voice that is valued as much as that of an adult.

The paper is based on my work experience in the development sector of education, education in emergencies and child protection as well as on field stays in Swahili society in Tanzania and Zanzibar over the course of several years of Swahili language learning. The paper is part of my current doctoral research in Social Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and tries to draw together preliminary thoughts on the different theoretical strands that are of need to consider in course of preparing my leave for 12 months of ethnographic field work in Zanzibar from January 2014.

I will investigate and explore the duality that underlies the aim to influence a society's attitude towards the upbringing and treatment of children. I intend to do this by considering child protection from a child-focused, political and philosophical perspective and to regard
the matter from an anthropological point of view - a standpoint which I consider indispensable for political matters of all sorts, as it is a perspective that shifts the focus from the structure to the people within the structure. Framing the politics and philosophy of protecting children is an attempt to stress the need for the political contextualization of children in their worlds and the philosophical questioning of implementing standards that carry ideas of moral and modernity. The consideration of children and their roles in the context of such political efforts that directly address their well-being and their place in society often falls and needs to be focused on to mediate that evolves out of norms being contested locally and globally.

**Background: Child Protection in Zanzibar**

Zanzibar is the site for the first official implementation of an integrated child protection system in Africa led by the government and Save the Children. Only over the past five years it has emerged as one of the central sights of implementation of a multi-level approach to protecting children. This resulted out of Tanzania becoming the first African country to conduct a nationwide survey on violence against children in 2009 and identifying the latter as part of ordinary everyday life on the islands (Das 2007). A 5-year *National Plan of Action to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children (2011-2015)* was launched building on the UNCRC and MDG 2 (*Universal Primary Education*).

Since the 1960s child abuse is of particular concern for Western societies as it has become less common in the West and therefore stands out elsewhere (McGillivray 1992). Different views of children affect the ways in which they are punished and what is considered abuse: violence against children draws together precisely the contrasting conditions of well-being and social suffering as it is at once "normal" and "unacceptable" (Montgomery 2009; Das 2007). However, many Zanzibaris consider the participatory and child-agency focused
international approach to child protection a "corrupting Western concept" (Save the Children 2011) that leads children to misbehave and appoints an uncommon role to Zanzibari children who traditionally do not outspokenly engage with adults. Additionally, since most Zanzibaris are Muslim, parents refer to the Qur’an when reasoning about e.g., making use of corporal punishment (Al-Azmeh 1993).

Advocates for child protection often base their efforts on a Western narrative of childhood (Aries 1962) even though they lack underpinning by a single unifying theme and thereby tend to neglect local social norms and values (Saleh 2004; Banda 2003) as well as differing ideas about children and their well-being (Crewe 2010). In my PhD research I will investigate the interrelations and tensions between children’s perceptions and global protection policies to examine to what extent they (dis)agree. This includes exploring children’s relations with others – peers, parents, teachers – and how those inform their practices and world views. I will focus on the education sector and the child’s body as locus of intervention for both humanitarian efforts and acts of discipline or punishment - both being inseparable from the practical aim to protect children.

In half-autonomous Zanzibar – consisting of Unguja and Pemba – different child protection measures than on the mainland are implemented because even though Zanzibar is not in an acute conflict situation, some Zanzibari nationals consider the current state of the education system and the general problem of violence against children an “emergency” itself. The island’s society represents an example of circumstances in many contemporary settings in sub-Saharan East Africa (Askew 2002; Caplan and Topan 2004; Burgess 2009): situations in which new social forms emerge as citizens build their lives in innovative ways by combining elements from or choosing between “past and futurity” (Appadurai 2004; Parkin 1994), which means often adapting old values to new circumstances promoted as important for “development”.


Anthropological questioning of the global applicability of universalized standards (Montgomery 2009; Korbin 2003), the understanding of power relations (Foucault 1979) and the production of project outcomes (Mosse 2005; Ferguson 1990; Axelby and Crewe 2013) are of importance in the context of NGOs like Save the Children trying to impact normative orders in society and the tension arising from that (Gledhill 2003). While efforts to promote the protection of children are undoubtedly good, many outcomes of positively meant intervention remain unpredictable and bring about situations that do not accord with “input/output” agendas of development organizations (Boyden 1997). Is it possible that organizations in Zanzibar aim to create new modernities by importing universal and moral notions of ideal childhoods (Boyden 1997) and new social norms concerning child rearing? How do children regard these ambitions and to what extent does Zanzibari society “indigenize” these global orders (Sahlins 2002)? My intention is to demonstrate the importance of considering children’s perspectives in programs aimed at them and the interrelatedness of these perspectives with official “common sense” and “regimes of truth” (Bourdillon 2004; Crewe 2007).

The Normativity of Child Protection

Rather than a biological fact, anthropologists have come to consider “childhood” to be a social and cultural construct. Speaking of cultural constructs, it is evident that with my inquiry I am trying to investigate something that might as what we imagine it to be not even exist in another place. This causes a fundamental tension of my work and particularly stresses its normative and political character. The concept of childhood can be considered an “idea” and a cultural product of industrial modernity that can also be deconstructed through historical reasoning as done by Aries in Centuries of Childhood (1962). He suggests that the concept of childhood was invented in Europe in relatively recent times and that only in the
17th century with economic and social change childhood came into being as a concept. Prior to that children were simply considered to be smaller versions of adults. Today, in industrialized societies, children have become relatively worthless from an economical point of view but psychologically priceless (Sheper-Hughes 1992) at the same time, which is a reversal of the perception of a child compared to a century ago. The "modern Western" idea of childhood considers it a life stage qualitatively different from that of adulthood. Today anthropologists consider the concept of childhood more of an impossible ideal than a realistic fact. The concept varies depending on its cultural context and therefore various concepts instead of one universal concept of childhood are existent – even though a general distinction between child and adult can be considered a universal phenomenon. Gender is central to this concept and often determines the length of the phase that we consider childhood. For girls this phase is often shorter than for boys, who often experience more freedom and less restraints to staying and working in the home (Montgomery 2009).

Conceptualizations of childhood vary strongly across societies and different assumptions about what a child is and should be are inherent to different worldviews. In Zanzibari society particular assumptions about children and childhood are just as present as they are, for example, within international development organisations such as Save the Children or the UN. The latter build their policy and programme planning on a certain concept of what they define a child to be, to need and to be entitled to - Zanzibari citizens do this as well but their ideas are usually slightly different to what is suggested internationally. So when we now try to consider the matter of child protection from various perspectives, the underlying notion that persists is that all talk about protecting children is based on a certain set of assumptions of what a child actually is. If children are considered wealth or a burden, "real" persons or human becomings, in need for protection or in need for disciplining - all
these factors affect how children are treated in different societies and the logics that are used to reason for it.

Until the 1970s various kinds of physical disciplining methods were part of private and public education in countries considered as part of the West such as Germany or Sweden, and are now fully forbidden by law in the public and private sphere. In the UK corporal punishment is banned from schools, but not fully from the private sphere only forbidding punishment that leaves visible traces on the child's body. Such countries are now leading actors in the sector of international development that works to abolish all forms of violence against children. There is no society that did not make use of some sort of disciplinary form to raise children – many of them by official standards today considered violent. Standards such as the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) define childhood as a violent-free period in life. They were created by Western countries as those named above but are today used as an evolutionary benchmark of what is necessary to reach – often without taking into consideration the particular context, political situation and other cultural factors in a society. The use and acceptance of corporal punishment in a society indeed depend on prevailing social norms which in many aspects change over time and therewith also influence what is considered as "right" or "wrong".

The intention of protecting children from harm therefore builds on certain norms and assumptions about what children and childhood actually are – child protection is normative. Social norms that influence parents’ behaviour towards their children i.e. in the UK differ to those that influence it in Tanzania and both build on differing concepts and understandings about what children are, what is classified as violent behaviour, and what role authority plays. These norms arise out of discourses prevailing in those societies – discourses that are “a claim to truth” that “normalise[s] and make[s] natural” (Axelby and Crewe 2013: 12). But not only opposing discourses about childhood and children are important in regard to child
protection, but also discourses of violence and authority. All this shows that implementing child protection also implies implementing new social norms and therewith contesting the ones that are in place. Western standards for the protection of children from violence also embody Western notions of what childhood and violent behaviour are. Applying these to non-Western contexts suggests a universality of their applicability which has often been criticized.

Another key point that explains the normativity of child protection is its claim to modernity. The implementation of universalized modernities (Sahlins 2002) through "transnational governmentality" (Ferguson and Gupta 2005: 114) must be considered in regard to child protection measures that suggest new social norms in child rearing and protection and children's roles within a society. Child protection intervention seeks to "shape the conduct of individuals and populations in order to effect certain ends" (Inda et.al. 2005: 17) and thereby aspires the "implantation" of so-called "Western modernity" (Sahlins 2002). The underlying idea of being able to proceed towards a certain state of modernity, i.e. one where corporal punishment in schools is not regarded disciplining but violence and therefore unacceptable, or even to implement modernity through child protection policy and the "good government of children" (Inda et.al. 2005: 2) is questionable in regard to the actual universality of global norms. The implementation of child protection has become a "measurement of modernity" (Axelby and Crewe 2013: 118), an assumed to be predictable and possible to plan intervention with inputs and outputs, targets and indicators (Axelby and Crewe 2013).

The Politics of Child Protection: a Contestation of Norms

International child protection is political. It questions local prevailing norms for child treatment and therewith suggests that the social norms that are in place are insufficient or
wrong and need to be replaced with what is presented as universally applicable – and inevitably also comes from the West. Nevertheless “there exists no unifying Logos of discourse” (Rabinow 2001: 134) of childhood, violence and authority and both global and local norms become contested in the attempt to classify one conceptualization as the “right” one. "Discursive regimes" (Foucault 1981: 53) steer our own opinion about whom we consider entitled to what, which behaviour is classified as abuse and whom we consider in need of protection and from what.

The de-politicization and de-contextualization – the “rendering technical” (Li 2007: 123) - of child protection matters serves to fit children into aid agendas (Crewe 2007) but ignores the contestation of measures and ideas that are to be found in the “interstitial spaces” of development aid (Mosse 2005). It is this challenging of universally applied ideas, and the challenging of global norms therewith, that must be paid more attention to, as it carries the socio-political meaning of the intervention.

**Childhood**

To engage with the matter of child protection it is not sufficient to discuss the concept of "the child" but necessary to look at the far more fundamental discourse that underlies the one of the child itself inevitably - the discourse of personhood. What a child is regarded as in society depends on the respective definition of personhood which defines social roles and the things that can be claimed in connection with that. What a child is considered to be entitled to is dependent of what people think the child as a being needs and deserves. Adulthood is regarded a different personhood as childhood - a line between these life stages is drawn in all societies around the world.
Discourses about children and the life stage of childhood vary across societies - there is not only one idea about children but there are many, not one universal discourse but several. Messer argues that “different notions of personhood can create categories of privileged (protected) or underprivileged (denied protection) under customary or national law” (2002:321) and points out the exclusive character that this notion can take on. She further elaborates that “to promote human rights in Africa, advocates need better information on how traditional societies ascribe and how individuals achieve human dignity, full social adulthood, and community membership” and asks precisely for an investigation of the standards “for treating those not yet considered to be full human beings or social persons, such as children or strangers” (2002: 327). Axelby and Crewe, who offer a comprehensive anthropological insight into the field of rights and childhood, support this and claim that "promoters of universal rights struggle to cope with the diversity and complexity of social reality" (2013: 114). Having to look closely at what it means to be ‘human’ in different cultures and societies therewith becomes inevitable in the context of child rights promotion. Ennew points out the same issue in regards to children, stating that "those who plan policies and programs for children would be well advised to take into account detailed information about the ways children actually live in their communities, as well as local beliefs about childhood" (2002: 350). Particularly the Western discourse of childhood has been opposed to a non-Western one by anthropologists from the field. The way children are treated and thought about arises out of prevailing discourses through e.g. the state or the school that suggest and set norms and standards and therewith create a common sense approach regarding what behaviour is considered right and wrong in a society. This means that how a parent in Germany, for example, speaks to his or her child in a public place is influenced by the internalized discourse about how one should speak to children. The Western idea of childhood questions
the one prevailing in Zanzibar and vice versa since the concept of a rights-bearing person is not automatically included in all different concepts of childhood (Mayall 2002).

**Violence**

In Zanzibar corporal punishment is lawful in the home and an accepted part of child rearing as “parents may discipline their children in such a manner which shall not amount to injury to the child’s physical and mental wellbeing” (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment in Schools 2012: 2). Regarding the secular school setting a policy against corporal punishment has been adopted by the Ministry of Education, whereas under the 1982 Education Act it continues to remain lawful and also the Zanzibar Children’s Act does not explicitly forbid the use of corporal punishment in schools. In madrasas (Quranic schools) corporal punishment is allowed. In mainland Tanzania corporal punishment remains lawful in the home under the National Corporal Punishment Regulations (1979) as well as in schools (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment in Schools 2011).

“In rejecting the recommendations to prohibit corporal punishment made during the UPR (Universal Periodic Review) in 2011, the Government asserted that ‘corporal punishment does not apply in the education system’ but that caning is administered in schools and is ‘a legitimate and acceptable form of punishment [not intended to] be violent, abusive or degrading’ (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment in Schools 2012: 2).”

It becomes clear that universal definitions of what violence or abuse is portrayed as vary tremendously. Whereas in the UK caning in schools might be categorized as violent behaviour towards a child, in Tanzania it is an accepted disciplining method that is regarded to differ from an intentional violent act. In mainland Tanzania corporal punishment is generally allowed whereas in Zanzibar the situation is evidently more complex and nuanced with current efforts in the child protection sector emphasizing the protection of children from abuse but still not explicitly forbidding corporal punishment.
There is no universal concept of violence. It varies from whichever context we apply it to and embodies a similar to the idea of childhood, in many ways “Western”, social and cultural construct. Montgomery argues that “different views of children affect the ways in which they are punished” (2009: 156) and according to Korbin “the cultural construction of violence is influenced by its portrayal” (Korbin 2003: 441). Crewe claims that, “‘violence’, ‘harm’ and ‘abuse’ have many meanings in different contexts” (2010: 49) and supports the former viewpoints. A contemporary anthropological understanding of the notion is described as “pre-eminently collective rather than individual, social rather than asocial or anti-social, usually culturally structured and always culturally interpreted” (Barnard and Spencer 2002: 839). Violent acts against children have a long history in all parts of the world. For a long time physical punishment has been accepted as a form of socialization in homes and schools and “it is only with the emergence of a child rights perspective that physical punishment has begun to be questioned by anthropologists and the line between abuse and discipline discussed” (Montgomery 2009: 157). Many societies have or still do make use of shaming, teasing or corporal punishment “to socialize children and bring them into conformity with adult expectations” (Lancy 2008: 178). Who then receives protection from certain acts and contexts relates directly to who is considered a human being deserving protection. This demands studying “human classification, political rhetoric, culturally diverse understandings of ‘the good life’, and the basic rights and obligations underlying social structure and social relations (Messer 2002: 333)” – essential questions to social transformation in regards to children’s well-being. There is a need for exploring local ideas behind certain behaviour that makes it possible to shed light on the multiple local cultural and scientific layers of probable causation.

The international discourse on children and violence has been led by standards such as the UNCRC and has crucially - but too simplistically - shaped international aims to
prevent and protect children. A rather universal approached has been taken to violence in this regard, even though violent behaviour cannot be condemned from an assumed to be generally applicable perspective. Here, the understanding of violence ignores the complexity of the notion. The responses to what we consider violent are just as much socially and culturally constructed as they rely on a singular understanding of what behaviour towards children we consider acceptable or not. Every society has individual standards of what is and is not regarded as abuse of children, however, all societies define a line between acceptable and non-acceptable practices (Archard 2004, Korbin 2003). What we see as violence towards children is often “tied to wider philosophies of socialization and ideas about the correct relationship between people” (Montgomery 2009: 161). The ways in which we treat, discipline and punish children is fundamentally connected to the ideas we have about their nature and their place in society related to the expectations we place on them (Montgomery 2009).

**Authority**

No less contested becomes the concept of authority and the global and local understandings of what authority is and who should hold it. The underlying aim of child protection measures is to change social norms and behaviour in society. This simultaneously implies the intention to change power structures and relations and to redistribute positions of power and authority. In Zanzibari society authority lies with the elders and not with children. A Save the Children Report makes this clear:

“*When, for example, the children raised their right to participate, adults would respond saying, ‘what is your right? Your right is to get food and drink and you can’t demand to have another extra right.’ Changing perceptions that children’s rights is a corrupting Western concept that will lead their children to misbehave is a challenge (Save the Children 2011: 27).”*
Organisations such as Save the Children stress a particularly participatory approach within their child protection programme by i.e. supporting children to form child committees in schools (Save the Children 2009) through which children are encouraged to speak up against corporal punishment and like that try to initiate a reorganization of society’s power structure. An understanding of children as active agents in society that outspokenly phrase their own concerns may be more acceptable in Western societies but is not in common in, for example, Zanzibar. The power to participate is usually not identified as to lay with children, and their roles remain more passive.

Sayyida Salme¹, the former Princess of Zanzibar and Oman, recalls in her personal memoirs on attending a madrasa. Her memories can be taken as evidence for a pedagogical approach that did not support or even allow the participatory or reflective agency of children in an educational system that until today has not experienced much change.

"Those who could read [the Qur'an] pretty fluently read in a chorus, and rather loudly too. But this was the extent of our schooling, for we never got any explanation of what we were reading about. (...) To meditate or to speculate upon its contents is considered irreligious and condemnatory: people are simply to believe what they are taught, and this maxim is rigorously carried out (Said-Ruete 1886: 73)."

A passive and top-down teaching style is common among Zanzibari teachers in both state school and madrasa and is closely linked to the use of corporal punishment in schools. Not allowing critical contribution in a class room can be regarded as similar to physically disciplining of a student, for both do not grant the child's individual agency and opinion, which might contradict the teachers view. Active participation is suppressed with the underlying intention of keeping power hierarchies up, since allowing a child to openly formulate an own opinion would indicate a shift in the holding of power and a more equal ground for teacher and student to stand on together.

¹ After marrying a German and moving to Hamburg she became known as Emily Ruete.
The continuing and widely accepted use of corporal punishment in the education system in Zanzibar represents a complex set of social norms in society that that again point towards the underlying concept of what a child actually is and what it is therefore understood to be entitled to. Authority is not naturally located as something children hold so granting them this power challenges local distributions of authority and the position of holders of authority such as in educational settings teachers. “If participation means that the voiceless gain a voice, we should expect this to bring some conflict (White 1996).” Concepts of childhood, violence and authority can be regarded as norms that are inherently dialectic in the sense that their local and global understandings challenge each other and are dynamic in the meanings they take on.

The universal validity that is assumed by development workers becomes far-fetched when opposing narratives of childhood and violence are contrasted. Global norms, such as the UNCRC or the child protection system implemented in Zanzibar, become contested when applied in non-Western societies and often tend to devalue local standards of child rearing. The consideration of child protection efforts as a “corrupting Western concept” by Zanzibars shows how a universal applicability cannot easily be assumed and how standards are questioned by voices from the local context. Local discursive processes of contestation are often left aside when judging policy implementation as successful or not but in fact represent a crucial reflection of a society’s perspective on international efforts that already suggests how sustainably opinions and behaviour will change within a social context. Local norms are challenged just as much as global norms within the context of child protection implementation. The UNCRC might suggest universal standards for how children should be treated but it does not define what is classified as violence against a child and therewith can be undermined and contested in the context of different environments and contexts.
The Need for a Philosophical Reconsideration of a De-politicized Intervention

The contestation of global and local norms when child protection measures are implemented in a society is inevitable but might be addressed with a reconsideration of these measures that shifts its focus to people and approaches such an engagement from a more philosophical, or anthropological – fundamentally people-centred – standpoint. Thinking about child protection as primarily in regard to children makes possible a consideration that departs from what the current one appears to be. Like that the connection between the idea to protect children from harm and children themselves can be improved.

If child protection interventions are acknowledged as a political project that contests social norms in societies and in return also contest the ones that are to be implemented, a shift of emphasis onto the role of children can help to mediate the gap that emerges out of contradictory understandings of norms. Child protection implementers working solely with the framework of the UNCRC may not be ideal and it should not remain the only solution “as it takes individuals out of their social and historical context” (Crewe 2010: 44), in other words de-politicizes their situation and the denies the complexity of their lived reality regarding the discourses that structure their social life and the understanding of concepts such as the ones discussed here. Issues such as normalized violence against children, i.e. corporal punishment in schools, need to be analysed in their political and ethical complexity (Das 2007) taking into account an awareness overarching political struggles and underlying philosophical concepts of humanity.

A philosophical and at the same time anthropological analysis of children in this context allows to regard a child as a person with already developed moral sensibilities and a voice that is valued as much as that of an adult. Thinking that you have to hit a child to get it to conform to how you want it to behave suggests a certain idea or concept about what you
think a child is. Following this logic, being a child implies a condition or state of being that indeed needs hitting to make it conform. This is generally a rather different assumption than the one that is common about adults and which does not include hitting as a necessary form of disciplinary or educational method or way of communicating wished and demands to the other.

The question remains, how the application of Western norms of child treatment is justified. Establishing a focus on children and their views on implemented norms or contested ideas is one of the possibilities I consider able to reconcile a lack of explanation and reason. Therefore I suggest focusing situation analysis and policy making for the implementation of child protection on questions such as: What is and can a child be in a society? What are children’s perceptions of child protection measures? How do these contrast with officially supported universalized notions of childhood, violence and authority? What does the study of children in educational contexts tell us about the discourse of children in development?

Focusing on and working with children always implies a field of tension (Gluckman 1963) but is important in a global arena of norm contestation if children’s best interest is actually to be reached without letting it commonly remain defined by adults (Boyden 1997). Works that emphasizes “voice” on all levels of citizenship – such as the one of the child, which is less prominently associated with political agency – is still rare but necessary for an anthropology that includes and represents all human experience. To navigate norm contestation such as the one discussed here “to convey the meaning of an event in terms of its location in the everyday, assuming that social action is not simply a direct materialization of cultural scripts but bears the traces of how these shared symbols are worked through, that it can be most effective” (Das 2007: 217) is something anthropologists can contribute to the political and complex field of child protection. As suggested by Rabinow, “to place oneself midst the relationships of the contending Logoi (embedded as they are within
problematizations, apparatuses, and assemblages) is to find oneself among anthropology’s problems (2001: 146)” is what I regard necessary for the field of child protection, especially on the implementers’ side. To "anthropologize the West" (Rabinow 1996; Escobar 1995) is necessary to put into perspective standards and norms that are assumed to be universally applicable in other societies that might not even share the discursive preconditions these standards are built on. A focus on children and their perspectives and situation on and in society will be inevitable in the long run, since childhood itself is a permanent component of societies and concentrating on children must be emphasized to fully understand how societies work (Mayall 2002) and therewith how we must deal with norms that become contested within child protection intervention.

**Conclusion**

I conclude that global norms of child protection are dynamic in the sense that they are continuously contested within the contexts they are applied to and in which their meaning and intention changes and is remade through discourses. I have shown that the international implementation of child protection implies a normativity that is intertwined with concepts of modernity and that the understanding of childhood and standards of child rearing have changed over the course of history. I have argued that through the implementation of protection measures for children global norms and ideas about children and childhood, violence and authority are contested and lead to oppositions. I suggested that this evolving gap of common sensualities must be addressed through a focus on children – their roles and their perspectives – that builds on a philosophical and political understanding of the matter. This paper aims to contribute to the discussion of child protection practice in development and the underlying intention of norm changing in society. It supports previous ethnographic
work, such as that of Hecht (1998) and Boyden (1997) that shows that children and how they make meaning does play a vital role in political processes of policy implementation.

Moving away from a structural focus and emphasizing one on children as central to development matters that concern their well-being in the first place is vital if the duality of global norm contestation that shall be addressed in multi-layered socio-political contexts. Anthropological approaches to political issues have the ability to stress the sensibility of contexts and the consequences of the application of global norms within them.

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