

Feminist Philosophy

Time, history and the
transformation of thought

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Chapter 12

The Child as the Other

– Some Epistemological Considerations

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Critical childhood studies has drawn attention to and critically examined common conceptualizations of childhood in a wide range of scholarly works.¹ These works discuss how in various fields and theoretical outlets, childhood is often described as a stage of formation and children as becoming-adults, and how this, in turn, produces a generic and a largely ahistorical, de-politicized and decontextualized child figure. The pre-subjectal generic infant has been pivotal in representations of human ontology yet is usually dehumanized. As a prefix to subjectivity, the child figure stands for the pre-modern, that which is perceived as beyond history, yet paradoxically, prior to, and in the process of becoming civilized.² A universal childhood biography

¹ Some common subfields go under the name of *new sociology of childhood* and *anthropology of childhood*. See, for example, Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005); Alan Prout & Allison James (Eds.) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1990); Jens Qvortrup, William A. Corsaro & Michael-Sebastian Honig (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Andrea Szulc & Clarice Cohn, “Anthropology and Childhood in South America: Perspectives from Brazil and Argentina.” *AnthropoChildren*, Vol. 1, 2012, ff. 1–17; David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

² Erica Burman, *Developments: Child, Image, Nation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008); *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017); Claudia Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration: Toward a Politics of Privilege”, *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001, ff. 29–53; *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002); Jenks, *Childhood*; Nick Lee, *Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001); Alan Prout & Allison James, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems” in Alan Prout & Allison James (Eds.) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1990); Jens Qvortrup, William A. Corsaro, & Michael-Sebastian Honig, “Why Social Studies of

has therefore come to stand for more than the core and formation of the individual under development and becoming. It has come to stand for that very process of becoming a civilized human being in general. In myriad scholarly attempts to show how these meanings are ascribed to childhood, other generic concepts have emerged. Common terms of reference for the symbolic figure of ‘the child’ is the child as a figuration, idea, category, metaphor, temporality, and the Other.

Similar concerns and critiques once directed at philosophy, developmental theory, anthropology and social theory, to name a few, have been addressed in relation to feminism. While some feminist works address children and childhoods,³ and more recently girlhood,⁴ children and childhoods have remained on the margins. A vast majority of feminist works are oriented toward adults, privileging the perspectives of adults and, at best, providing adult-centric objectifications of childhoods. This is how the debate about the child as the adult Other becomes inevitable also in relation to feminist theorizing.⁵

In this chapter, I present some *epistemological advantages* and *dangers* of conceptualizing Otherness in relation to children and childhoods. The chapter distinguishes between *the child as the Other* – a figure mirroring the dominant image of children

Childhood? An Introduction to the Handbook” in Jens Qvortrup, William A. Corsaro & Michael-Sebastian Honig (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) Jo-Ann Wallace, “Technologies of the Child: Towards a Theory of the Child Subject”, *Textual Practice*, Vol. 9, 1995, ff. 283–302.

³ de Beauvoir, *The second sex*, Vol. II, Part I; Shulamit Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The case for feminist revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972); Barrie Thorne, “Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where Are the Children?” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, ff. 85–109; Valerie Walkerdine, *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997); Wallace, “Technologies of the Child”; See also Burman, *Developments; Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*; Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”; *Figurations*.

⁴ In more recent girlhood studies, the at times gender-neutral childhood and youth have been replaced with the notion of girlhood. See the journal *Girlhood Studies – An Interdisciplinary Journal*, published by Berghahn Journals; Claudia Mitchell & Carrie Rentschler (Eds.) *Girlhood and the Politics of Place* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016). See also *FlickForsk! Nordic Network for Girlhood Studies*.

⁵ Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”; *Figurations*.

as incomplete unfinished projections of adults – and *the childhood Other* as those children’s childhoods that are othered by dominant ideas about childhood. I use this distinction to critically discuss a simplified analogy between the child and the (adult) Other and, in turn, the epistemological danger of using the notion of the Other in relation to the child as a figuration. Using this distinction, I argue that inscriptions of Otherness come with a risk of limiting the theorizing of multiple relations of power and, thus, fail to account for the pluralistic character of childhoods. At the same time, I discuss the epistemological advantage of opening up for inscriptions and contestations of the notion of Otherness in relation to childhoods.

I briefly introduce the chapter by discussing the notion of the Other in different critical schools of thought. Then, drawing on perspectives from intersectional, postcolonial feminist and critical childhood studies, I discuss how the debates surrounding the child as the Other share parallels with feminist scholarly debates. Such a debate concerns the attempts to de-centre the normative image of Woman. This includes the issues that come with the problematic use of this figuration as if it applies to all women while considering only a few.⁶ Furthermore, I argue how the tools offered by postcolonial feminism *and* critical childhood studies are necessary to deconstruct the idea of a universal childhood and simplistic notions of Otherness. Such a bridging poses critical questions about why childhoods should be the subject of feminism and why postcolonial feminism should be relevant for studying childhoods.

The Other and Othering in Postcolonial Feminist Thought

In philosophy, the first introduction to the concept of the Other is perhaps mostly associated with the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who, in the early 19th century, used

⁶ Avtar Brah & Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 5, 2004, ff. 75–86.

the Other in contrastive manners in relation to the Self.⁷ From thereon, Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre provided their own approaches to the Other.⁸ Finally, a well-known point of reference for feminists is the work of Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir used the notion of the Other to articulate dominant views of women's inferiority to men.⁹

Postcolonial scholars have introduced additional notions: the colonial Other and the subaltern.¹⁰ Scholars discuss how race is central for the conception of humanity in modernity. Consequently, those who fall outside these narrow definitions of humanity are also constituted by race but racially othered.¹¹ However, the Other and othering also link to axes of power other than race. Processes of othering may be applied broadly to denote anyone oppressed, discriminated, dehumanised, and deprived of subjectivity, which historically has been ascribed to the White enlightened heterosexual bourgeois European male subject. In this vein, othering could also apply to white heterosexual women in the colonial settler communities who had been in the shadows of the White colonizer. Yet, the status of these women differed from the subaltern in the so-called Third World. The postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. Peter Fuss & John Dobbins. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2019).

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations: an introduction to phenomenology*, transl. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969[1958]).

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex [Le deuxième sexe]*, transl. Constance Borde & Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011[1949]).

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004[1961]) Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Lawrence Grossberg & Cary Nelson (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995); María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System", *Hypatia*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2007, ff. 186–209; Toby Rollo, "The Color of Childhood: The Role of the Child/Human Binary in the Production of Anti-Black Racism", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2018, ff. 307–329.

(re)used the notion of the subaltern to describe what it means to be located outside hegemonic discourse, subjectivity, lacking voice and representation altogether.¹²

Where in all this are childhoods to be located? Analogically, a line of continuity has often been drawn between children as the adult Others and colonial Others, and vice versa.¹³ As I will discuss below, the child as the adult Other has been useful in discussions about the asymmetric power relations between children and adults. In this broader conception, children are acknowledged as having lower status than adults because of the dominant conceptualizations of children as different or simply a lesser and not fully accomplished adult version. Some scholars instead turn their attention to constructions of the childlike, childish and processes of infantilization when reflecting on the logic of power and domination in contexts that are not necessarily or primarily linked to child subjects but address processes of othering in general. However, the childhood Other I discuss in this chapter is also the subaltern of childhood itself.

Childhood as Temporality, Power and Otherness

In 1962, in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Philippe Ariès argued that childhood, as 'we' know it in modern times and as a distinct phase of human existence, was not accessible to our understanding until the seventeenth century.¹⁴ This modern and European conception of childhood shifted from the child as a smaller version of the adult to childhood as distinctively different from our conception of adulthood. For instance, childhood today is thought of as a temporary life phase that transitions into adulthood. In social theory, childhood as temporality appears in relation to what is often referred to as socialization. Socialization is represented as a temporality during which individuals undergo practices and rituals that

¹² Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

¹³ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

¹⁴ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, transl. Robert Baldick. (New York: Knopf, 1962).

introduce the young person to normative adulthood but also to that which constitutes manhood and womanhood in different contexts.¹⁵ In developmental psychology, the temporality of childhood is more intelligible as a phase consisting of specific life stages or ‘timings’ against which development can be measured. What transpires during these stages determines how and if the individual will develop.¹⁶

As Ashis Nandy notes, the modern conception of childhood implied a distinctiveness in terms of inferiority. Children are the origin of adulthood and simultaneously

a blank slate on which adults must write their moral codes – an inferior version of maturity, less productive and ethical, and badly contaminated by the playful, irresponsible and spontaneous aspects of human nature¹⁷

The idea of children as inferior to and more formative than adults has been a central object of critique in critical childhood studies. Critical childhood studies summarize long-standing critical scholarly debates and historical analyses of the emergence of childhood. While childhoods and children have been the object of research in many disciplines and bodies of knowledge, such as developmental psychology and anthropology, critical studies of childhood provide new approaches to childhood as a historically contingent and social construction.

Childhood, on the other hand, has biological and cognitive connotations in theories of socialization and development, as Erica Burman points out. References to chronological age are harder to interpret as social constructions and point more readily to essentialism. Therefore, biological age and cognitive

¹⁵ See Danny Hoffman, “Like Beasts in the Bush: Synonyms of Childhood and Youth in Sierra Leone”, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2003, ff. 295–308; Walkerdine, *Daddy’s Girl*.

¹⁶ Burman, *Developments; Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*; Castañeda, *Figurations*.

¹⁷ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), f. 15.

development are used to deprive children of voice rather than to address age-related power relations. For instance, within the framework of children's rights, biological age and maturity serve as benchmarks in assessing a child's right to be heard. Put differently, age may be depicted as a ground for discrimination and at the same time can be stated as the very ground which legitimately allows adults to exclude children from participation, if children are assessed as not old and mature enough.¹⁸

Yet, unlike gender, sexuality and race, age as an axis of power is sometimes viewed as a more flexible category that can be more easily transgressed, of course, in due time.¹⁹ To be more precise, the meaning of age on a power axis shifts throughout a person's life-course. For instance, age helps to raise issues about adultism, that is, adult-centrism, adult power and misopaedic attitudes at a certain point in time.²⁰ Yet, at another point in an individual's life, age may help in identifying the consequences of ageist societies and disadvantages for older people, or gerontocratic societies that privilege the elderly. Both children and old people are frequently associated with their 'deviant' category in contexts where the 'productive' life phase is associated with adult work life as the norm. However, being granted a socially lower rank due to young age does not apply to all children, at all times and circumstances.²¹ Therefore, being a child of young age does not necessarily entail Otherness nor subalternity if used alone. Thus, age in interplay with other axes of power needs to be considered.

However, I argue that while older people are also associated with a (temporary) life phase that can only be inhabited at a specific point in the life cycle, this temporality cannot be revisited. Yet, the very idea that childhood is a phase that can be re-appropriated is what makes it distinct as a temporality, seem-

¹⁸ Burman, *Developments*; Lee, "The Challenge of Childhood"; Karen Wells, "The Politics of Life: Governing Childhood", *Global Studies of Childhood*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011, ff. 15–25.

¹⁹ Burman, *Developments*.

²⁰ Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

²¹ Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

ingly timeless and susceptible to colonization. There are multiple ways of appropriating childhood, one among which is, according to Claudia Castañeda:

the turn back to one's childhood to repair the adult or to reclaim "the child within" (as in many psychotherapeutic regimes and in wider popular discourse. Once the adult's temporal distance from childhood has been secured, the adult draws on the past as a resource for the present. The adult returns to childhood to reappropriate the child he or she once was in order to establish a more stable adult self. Here, the child is primarily valuable insofar as the condition of childhood can be revisited in order to be left behind once again.²²

The ideas of a decontextualized childhood and disembodied child contribute to the colonizing of childhoods, i.e., *a posteriori* knowledge claims to children's lives make it possible to have *epistemic access* to (others') childhood retrospectively in the sense that 'I have been there, thus I know'.²³ In addition, colonizing practices include the forming and predicting of futures by making claims on *a priori* knowledge about children's (future) best.²⁴ From an epistemic perspective, the decontextualized childhood never entirely belongs to children themselves. The idea of the disembodied 'inner child' or 'the child within' is very telling. So is the idea of childhood trauma as shaping adult life, and in more drastic ways than it 'otherwise' would have done. There is, in fact, in these medicalized and psychologized approaches to childhoods and adulthoods a distinct understanding of time as something concealing issues rather than healing them. Childhood, in this sense, stands for the wound. And yet, if therapy enables a 'traveling' in time, it seems less effective on those bound to their childhoods instead of mastering the time that has a hold on them. For those who are considered chronically fixed

²² Castañeda, *Figurations*, f. 5.

²³ Castañeda, "The Child as a Feminist Figuration"; *Figurations*.

²⁴ Zlatana Knezevic, *Child (Bio)Welfare and Beyond: Intersecting Injustices in Childhoods and Swedish Child Welfare* (Västerås, Mälardalen University Press, 2020).

in a deteriorated maturity level, childhoods are non-reclaimable, yet colonisable (i.e. knowable). Epistemic access to childhood as a temporality does not necessarily imply othering in purely negative terms. These accounts nonetheless highlight how adults and adulthood serve as the backdrop in theorizing and imagining children and childhoods. ‘The child’ and a generic childhood become theoretical resources in both mainstream and critical theories, as I will discuss below.

The Child as the Adult Other

The feminist critical childhood scholar Claudia Castañeda has insightfully analyzed how ‘the child’ figures in poststructuralist- and feminist philosophical scholarship. Castañeda shows how children, as figurations, lack subjectivity in some central post-structuralist and feminist works and theories on the subject.²⁵ According to Castañeda, the presumed subject in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Judith Butler, Valerie Walkerdine, and Teresa de Laurentis is the adult, according to which the child figures as the Other. She discusses how the child in some of these philosophical works stand for other ways of being and becoming and alternative spaces for the possibility of thought and for the disruption of normative orders that are open to the male philosopher to occupy. Otherness, in these accounts, is not automatically linked to inferiority *per se*. It is rather associated with desired spaces, times and states, albeit devoid of subjectivity. Castañeda writes how

the desire for possibility – or what might otherwise be called ‘resistance’ or ‘agency’ – is not in itself problematic. Rather, it is the embodiment of possibility in and through an Other that is the problem. So, too, to identify with and think through one’s own childhood [...].²⁶

²⁵ Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”; *Figurations*.

²⁶ Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”, f. 60.

As creative and analytical feminist uses of Woman, the Black subject, the Cyborg, etc. demonstrate, figurations play an important role in whose stories are heard and what kind of yearnings for transformation are expressed. Thus, despite not being used to primarily or directly depict actual people, figurations as ‘conceptual personae’ nevertheless imply some material embeddedness in the sense that they emerge from ‘embodied accounts of one’s power relations’.²⁷ However, as Castañeda shows, the figuration of the child lacks material embeddedness and the accounts that inscribe the child into theories of subjectivity are accounts by which the scholar’s power is reproduced. For instance, she explicates how the feminist Valerie Walkerdine, in her analysis of young working-class girls, does not reflexively position herself as an adult researcher. Instead, Walkerdine draws on her own childhood experiences that are not even *in situ* but are retrospectively merged with those of the child subjects under analysis.

Psychoanalysis, even in its feminist guises, emerges as a technology of childhood that figures the child as the adult’s ontological origin, and as such an origin that the adult theorist can claim to know by way of psychoanalysis itself.²⁸

Castañeda’s answer to her own question ‘Who or what counts as a feminist subject?’ points thus to adult subjectivity, and hence foregrounds age. Her analysis prompts me to ask: If the child-figure is the subject’s Other, what conceptualisations of Otherness does this leave us with? Theories of subjectivity and subjugation, apart from being adultist, are also racialized and gendered, as postcolonial theorists have demonstrated.²⁹ Such an

²⁷ Brah & Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman?”; Rosi Braidotti, “Dympna and the Figuration of the Woman Warrior” in Rosemarie Buikema & Iris van der Tuin, (Eds.), *Doing Gender in Media, Art, and Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), ff. 243–244; Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.

Braidotti, “Dympna and the Figuration of the Woman Warrior”, ff. 243–244.

²⁸ Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”, f. 29.

²⁹ Rollo, “The Color of Childhood”; Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.

analysis is central in theorizations on Otherness in childhoods, and consequently also in acknowledging how the child as the adult Other renders other processes of othering invisible.

While what it means to be a child is vastly different across the world, children inhabit a world in which specific geopolitical ideals shape what can be claimed as their rights, what is regarded to be in their best interest, and what it means to be a normal child. In addition, children's own views of their childhoods interlink with the various meanings associated with childhood in the public discourse.³⁰ For example, children may stand for that which is desired, such as purity and innocence, as well as the undesired, such as danger, irrationality and disobedience.³¹ Furthermore, children may be linked to other time-spaces, philosophically, as discussed above, to otherworldly spirit worlds in regions of the world where spirit belief is widespread, or in terms of better and progressive futures.³² Because of the multiple and contradictory meanings ascribed to children, they evoke identifications but also disidentifications. I argue that the ambivalences and contradictions that permeate portrayals of children help to analytically distinguish the child as the adult Other from other 'Others' in, and beyond childhood.

For instance, the figuration of the child frequently appears in critical studies as representing the future.³³ However, as José Esteban Muñoz has pointed out, this figuration does not seem to apply to all children. Queer and Black kids are left out of these

³⁰ Tatek Abebe & Yaw Oforu-Kusi, "Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods: Introduction", *Childhood*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2016, ff. 303–316; Lucia Rabello de Castro, "Why Global? Children and Childhood from a Decolonial Perspective", *Childhood*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2020, ff. 48–62; Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush"; Walter Omar Kohan, "A conversation with children about children ...", *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2018.

³¹ Steven Angelides, *The Fear of Child Sexuality. Young People, Sex and Agency* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush"; Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood*; Anneke Meyer, "The Moral Rhetoric of Childhood", *Childhood*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007, ff. 85–104.

³² Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004); Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush".

³³ Edelman, *No Future*.

futuristic imaginaries, according to Muñoz.³⁴ Following Muñoz's lines of thought, racialized, queer and class-situated childhoods that do not fit into the normative script of what childhood should be, are disregarded. For instance, the lifestyles of child (sex) workers, the child soldiers, street children or a child living in what is considered to be a dysfunctional family do not seem to qualify as *the* childhood with a capital C.³⁵ What can be learned from intersectionality is that figurations, including the notion of the Other, are adult re-inscriptions of some childhoods, while others are left out. A lesson from incorporating the gendered and queer Others into mainstream politics suggests that 'some versions' of Otherness become normalized, mainstreamed, and finally used for Euro-American nationalist and imperialist ends.³⁶ The child as the adult Other seems predominantly to be associated with the asexual and seemingly genderless child who inhabits a world without racialization and classism.

³⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³⁵ Sarada Balagopalan, "Constructing Indigenous Childhoods: Colonialism, Vocational Education and the Working Child", *Childhood*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2002, ff. 19–34; Elisabeth Chin, "Ethnically Correct Dolls: Toying with the Race Industry", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 101, No. 2, 1999, ff. 305–321; *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush"; Knezevic, *Child (Bio)Welfare and Beyond*; Lee, *Childhood and Society*; Conrad John Masabo, "Should Children Work? Dilemmas of Children's Educational Rights in the Global South", *Southern African Journal of Policy and Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016, Article 5; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Oishik Sircar & Debolina Dutta, "Beyond Compassion: Children of Sex Workers in Kolkata's Sonagachi", *Childhood*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2011, ff. 333–349.

³⁶ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist assemblages. Homonationalism in queer times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Leticia Sabsay, "The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen: Orientalism and the Modernisation of Sexuality", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 5–6, 2012, ff. 605–623, f. 605.

The Child as the Other or the Othered Childhoods? Bridging Postcolonial Feminism and Critical Childhood Studies

In this chapter, I argue that the conceptual tools postcolonial theory and theory of intersectionality have to offer to childhoods are invaluable, although, as some commentators claim, postcolonial readings of childhoods are downplayed compared to other schools of thought.³⁷ Axes of power such as race, migration status and gender in intersection with age emphasize childhoods, not as singular but plural.³⁸ From such a perspective, childhoods are a great concern for feminist scholarship, and it is equally important to stress that postcolonial feminism is fruitful for studies of childhoods.

The idea of the colonial Other has not only had negative effects on the lives of colonized adults and adults facing the effects of colonial legacies but also on children.³⁹ Some scholars actually highlight that the conceptualization of the Other, while predominantly being linked to the Oriental, the Barbarian, and the Foreign (adult) in postcolonial school of thought, fails to be adequately addressed without an analysis of how children and childhoods figure in processes of othering.⁴⁰ To understand the child from a postcolonial feminist perspective, it is necessary to consider the interplay between the naturalization of colonialism, the nuclear family, and patriarchy. They all imply exclusions and

³⁷ Viruru, Radhika, "The impact of postcolonial theory on early childhood education." *Journal of Education*, Vol. 35, 2005, ff. 7–29.

³⁸ Abebe & Ofofu-Kusi, "Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods"; Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush"; Knezevic, *Child (Bio)Welfare and Beyond*; Olga Nieuwenhuys, "Theorizing Childhood(s): Why We Need Postcolonial Perspectives", *Childhood*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013, ff. 3–8; Prout & James "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood?"; Qvortrup, Corsaro & Honig, "Why Social Studies of Childhood?"; Sircar & Dutta, "Beyond Compassion"; Szulc & Cohn, "Anthropology and Childhood in South America"; Viruru, "The impact of postcolonial theory on early childhood education".

³⁹ Balagopalan, "Constructing Indigenous Childhoods"; Liz Conor, "The 'Piccaninny': Racialized Childhood, Disinheritance, Acquisition and Child Beauty", *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2012, ff. 45–68; Hoffman, "Like Beasts in the Bush"; Nieuwenhuys, "Theorizing Childhood(s)"; Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

⁴⁰ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

oppositional logics, and they all have created and made hierarchies seem natural.⁴¹ Children have been central in this process of the naturalization of power. As Anne McClintock points out, the White ‘family man’ occupied the dominant image of the ‘civilized’ colonizer to whom women, children, and the colonized were inferior. The colonial hierarchy is clearly heteronormative and patriarchal. Power is exercised over the unruly and immature sub-human children and adults whose path toward maturity and progress were to be accomplished only by guidance by “superior White male Europeans”.⁴²

McClintock’s work, as well as the work by Ashis Nandy, suggests parallels between the child and the savage. Nandy distinguishes between the ‘childlike Indian’ and the ‘childish Indian’. While the former was reformed, the latter was repressed. The ‘corrigible’ but childlike, loyal, masculine, innocent and ignorant, yet willing to learn, differed from the childish, who instead was unable to learn, was savage, disloyal, ignorant and unpredictably violent – the incorrigible.⁴³ Both the childlike and the childish were ascribed to the colonized, albeit in different geopolitical contexts and in relation to the level of a perceived threat of the people’s resistance toward colonial ‘civilizing’ missions.

This helps to understand complex processes of infantilization of the colonized and othered adults. At the center of this polemic is an image of the European bourgeois boy-child while the savage stands for the childlike or childish unaccomplished adult. Unlike the developing white boy, the savage is fixed in terms of underdevelopment and permanent childishness. In addition, the white male child is closer to civilization than the white female child.⁴⁴ And yet, nowhere in the polemic that shaped and still shapes the modern notion of childhood as a stage of

⁴¹ Braidotti, “Dympna and the Figuration of the Woman Warrior”; Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁴² Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Rollo, “The Color of Childhood”.

⁴³ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, f. 16.

⁴⁴ Castañeda, *Figurations*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Rollo, “The Color of Childhood”; Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

development, irrationality, unruly passions, and problematic resistance is the *child of the colonial Other* – the Other of childhood *per se* – represented. In this context, the child as the Other is not merely othered but can be viewed as a subaltern, the figure lacking a figuration altogether.⁴⁵ Sandrina de Finney makes a similar remark concerning an absent indigenous analysis in girlhood studies.⁴⁶ Similarly, Sarada Balagopalan notes how ‘indigenous’ childhoods, which are often displayed as ‘discrete categories’, are rendered invisible in a univocal and hegemonic ideal of a western model of childhood.⁴⁷ (Girl)children who do not display or are assumed as unable to display the ‘right’ sense of agency and knowledge – which in western societies are those children who are in schools and part of peer cultures – become the very pre-modern childhoods. Such differentiations of childhoods, according to Balagopalan,

continues to serve the project of modernity as constructed in the European imaginary, that we will be able to invoke both the premodern and the history of the modern in the Third World, to critique the global circulation of a modern western childhood as the hegemonic ideal.⁴⁸

The *childhood Other*, then, is not to be conflated with a common conceptualization of the child as the (adult) Other. The childhood Other is not adulthood but marginalized, othered childhoods themselves that remain absent in critical discussions about the child as the adult Other or infantilized adults.

Only in the encounter between postcolonial feminist scholarship and critical childhood studies is such an analysis of otherness possible. In this vein, using the Other to say something

⁴⁵ For example, see Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.

⁴⁶ de Finney, “Under the Shadow of Empire”.

⁴⁷ Balagopalan, “Constructing Indigenous Childhoods”; See also Sandrina de Finney, “Under the Shadow of Empire: Indigenous Girls’ Presencing as Decolonizing Force”, in Claudia Mitchell & Carrie Rentschler (Eds.), *Girlhood and the Politics of Place* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), ff. 19–37.

⁴⁸ Balagopalan, “Constructing Indigenous Childhoods”, ff. 32–33.

about the child as a figuration or actual children and childhoods becomes, to paraphrase Keith Pringle, both an *epistemological advantage* and an *epistemological danger*.⁴⁹ The epistemological advantage, as discussed above, lies in highlighting children as a socially disadvantaged group in adult-centric societies and knowledge production, including critical schools of thought.⁵⁰ Feminist and postcolonial school of thought reminds us of the myriad of epistemological disadvantages resulting from simplistic conceptualizations of power. Besides including only some childhoods, non-normative childhoods are thought of in rather static ways and without acknowledging how colonialism and modernity have transformative power over them too.⁵¹

Discussion: Analogy in Dissonance?

This chapter has discussed some epistemological advantages and dangers of using the notion of Otherness in relation to the child as a figure (the child Other) and childhoods that are excluded from dominant ideas about childhood (childhood Other). I have argued that the child, as the Other, occupies a central place in some postcolonial and critical analyses. Yet, even with this centrality of the child in analyses of power, the generic conceptualization of children it reproduces renders many relations of power invisible. By deconstructing the colonial imaginary, not only is White supremacy disturbed as natural, but also the subordinate position of children. However, elaborations on the latter leave many chapters yet to be written. As discussed, critical childhood studies have challenged the idea of childhoods representing the ontological origin of the adult human or the path toward civilization and maturity. Yet, childhoods still figure as theoretical resources in philosophical, feminist and

⁴⁹ Keith Pringle, "Epilogue: On Developing Empowering Child Welfare Systems and the Welfare Research Needed to Create them" in Hannele Forsberg & Teppo Kröger (Eds.), *Social Work and Child Welfare Politics: Through Nordic Lenses*. (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011).

⁵⁰ Castañeda, "The Child as a Feminist Figuration"; Figurations; Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

⁵¹ Balagopalan, "Constructing Indigenous Childhoods".

poststructuralist conceptualizations of the pre-subjectal, the alternative and modern power itself.⁵² Moreover, using words such as ‘infantilized’, ‘childish’, or ‘childlike’ imply epistemological dangers. These words and the ways in which they are used not only describe processes of othering and degradation of adults but also of anything related to children and childhoods. Consequently, the childlike continues to be viewed as something less vis-à-vis the adultlike. As pointed out by Toby Rollo, to address childhoods without reproducing the idea of children as inferior, postcolonial feminists are forced to abandon the modernist project of imagining equality for whatever and whoever fulfils the status of the rational, mature adult *Human*.⁵³ Thus, while contesting adult power, the child as the Other still portrays a generic and decontextualized childhood. The issue of why axes of power other than age become invisible even in many feminist analyses, I argue, has to do just as much with conceptualizations of children and childhoods as much as it does with feminism and, to paraphrase Castañeda, the subject of feminism.⁵⁴ The child as the Other of feminism gives the impression of feminism as adult-centric but also as white.

In contemporary feminist theory, the analogy of the Other is heavily inspired by postcolonial scholarship and other scholarship of the margin, which have decentered dominant ideas of Woman, and which yet looms largely absent in discussions about childhoods. This may be because critical theory lacks interest and insight into children’s lives and the tools for analysis that are not easily applied to child subjects. Thus, it is worth considering how conceptual tools such as gender, sexuality, race and class, which are used to analyze power have historically enabled conceptualizations of certain forms of othering over others. The question is less which analytic tools we use, but rather which associations they evoke or how we use them. The

⁵² Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”; *Figurations*; Rollo, “The Color of Childhood”.

⁵³ Rollo, “The Color of Childhood”.

⁵⁴ Castañeda, “The Child as a Feminist Figuration”.

notion of the Other seems to bear the tendency of ending up with, to borrow Sara Ahmed's⁵⁵ term, 'sticky' biases and categories like those encountered in other intersectional theorizing. Queer theory has made visible stereotypes of othering where 'the homosexual other is White, the racial other is straight'.⁵⁶ In a similar manner, I have argued that the racialized Other is assumed to be adult and the child as the adult Other is assumed to be white, middle-class and as feminists and girlhood studies scholars have noted, possibly a boy-child. In this chapter, I have argued that the analogies, both when considered separately and in relation to each other, fail to give justice to othered adults and children alike. Instead, they imply the vanishing of certain subjectivities, paradoxically even in advanced analyses of the Other of the subject. This chapter adds racialized children and their 'disappearance [...] from theoretical and political considerations'.⁵⁷ As I have tried to show, childhoods bring new contexts into this picture, opening up for alternative combinations of tools other than age for analyses of power. They also show these tools being unstable, albeit 'sticky'. Axes of power such as gender, sexuality, class and race are heavily interconnected with adult worlds. An epistemological advantage of bridging feminist scholarship with critical childhood studies lies in their possibility to transform these categories to understand what sexuality means in a 5-year-old child's life or what class and livelihood is for a 10-year-old, beyond mere analyses of parents' educational backgrounds and statuses.⁵⁸

Children and Otherness, moreover, are constituted through representations of agency or lack thereof.⁵⁹ Children resist not

⁵⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁶ Puar, *Terrorist assemblages*, f. 32; see also Sabsay, "The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen".

⁵⁷ Gurinder K. Bhabra, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues", *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2014, ff. 115–121, f. 119; see also Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System"; Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

⁵⁸ For example, see Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi, "Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods"; Angelides, *The Fear of Child Sexuality*.

⁵⁹ Angelides, *The Fear of Child Sexuality*; see also McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Meyer, "The Moral Rhetoric of Childhood"; Rollo, "The Color of Childhood".

only the adult world but also ideas about childhood, peer cultures and gender, sexuality and class stereotypes. In these resistances or the threat of these resistances, othered childhoods become visible. From such a perspective, childhoods should be of great concern for feminist scholarship dedicated to analyses of multiple and intersecting axes of power, including resistance.

Critical childhood studies, girlhood- and boyhood studies have made significant contributions in this regard, including to the world of theories that influence views on children and childhoods.⁶⁰ Despite these contributions, developmental psychology still holds a very important place in the theoretical landscape of childhood. Following this, it becomes an epistemological *obligation* to ask how postcolonial feminism can *contribute to* childhoods after having excluded them for decades and how to reclaim childhoods from developmental psychology and life sciences or age-based universalist rights discourses. The disciplinary distinctions produce theoretical divisions between what appears to be the societal world of adults and the psychologized de-politicized child world, even though the concerns they face are the same.⁶¹ From this point of view, epistemological advantages and dangers relate to the location of childhood in certain disciplines and the epistemological limitations of certain knowledge production that continue to naturalize relations of power in childhoods while addressing the same as “inequalities” in adulthoods. The proposed bridging urges a prompt answer as to whether feminism is invested in women – however, multiple and contradictory constructed – or if the subject of inquiry is more acutely related to intersecting power relations. If the latter is the case, how come feminism remains adult centered?

Critical childhood studies and postcolonial feminist studies share the same interdisciplinary faith that requires bridging with

⁶⁰ Balagopalan, “Constructing Indigenous Childhoods”; Mitchell & Rentschler (Eds.) *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*.

⁶¹ Burman, *Developments; Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*; Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*; Knezevic, *Child (Bio)Welfare and Beyond*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay”, *Social Text*, Vol. 29, 1991, ff. 18–27; Thorne, “Re-Visioning Women and Social Change”.

other schools of thought.⁶² Only by bridging critical childhood studies and postcolonial feminism can ‘undutiful daughters’⁶³ become a designation in the full sense of the phrase.

⁶² Joanne Faulkner & Magdalena Zolkos, *Critical Childhood Studies, and the Practice of Interdisciplinarity: Disciplining the Child (Children and Youth in Popular Culture)* (Lanham, Boulder & London: Lexington Books, 2016); Viruru, “The impact of post-colonial theory on early childhood education”; Gloria Wekker, “The Arena of Disciplines: Gloria Anzaldúa and Interdisciplinarity” in Rosemarie Buikema & Iris van der Tuin (Eds.), *Doing Gender in Media, Art, and Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁶³ Braidotti, “Dympna and the Figuration of the Woman Warrior”, f. 244.