

Rethinking global north onto-epistemologies in childhood studies

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For some time, critical scholars in childhood studies have been reconceptualizing the field (Bloch, 2013). Developmentally appropriate practices and notions of terms like quality have been deconstructed to expose how they normalize childhood/s and create inequities in early education and care (Burman, 1994; Dahlberg et al., 2007). While critical scholarship has problematized dominant childhood discourses, theorizing has largely come from global north scholars (Pérez and Saavedra, in press). Although concern for social justice is at the core of global north critical research and pedagogy, as a field, we must consider how global south onto-epistemologies, especially those of women of color and Indigenous peoples, have been left out, ignored, and even appropriated within critical scholarship. We contemplate whether this is one reason why efforts to make a dramatic and critical shift in the priorities of childhood studies have not made the advances we have hoped for. As global south scholars and editors of this Special Issue, we and the contributors make an important call for rethinking our reliance on global north perspectives. By centering global south onto-epistemologies in childhood studies, we aim to open a dialogue that prompts a rethinking of global north dominance in the field.

The global south/north

In addition to framing the global south and global north within geo/political/graphical locations, we define the south and north as onto-epistemological orientations that influence the creation of particular visions enacted onto the world (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Pérez and Saavedra, in press). We position the global north as propagating a Eurocentric (and later Euro-American imperialist)

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way of thinking and functioning that embodies enlightenment and modernist projects which have devastated the world over through physical and brutal colonization (Galeano, 1973; Lugones, 2007). This has followed with epistemic violence, invading the psyche of the oppressed and creating what Quijano (2007) terms the coloniality of power.

Global south onto-epistemologies have emerged from the subaltern (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 2008; De Sousa Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2000; Suárez Navaz, 2008). It is worth quoting De Sousa Santos (2014) at length to capture the essence of who the global south is and what its onto-epistemologies might be:

We are the global south, that large set of creation and creatures that has sacrificed to the infinite voracity of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and all their satellite-oppressions. We are present at every cardinal point because our geography is the geography of injustice and oppression ... We are widely diverse human beings united by the idea that the understanding of the world is much larger than the Western understanding of the world. (p. 2)

Important to note is that inhabiting the global south does not indicate that one embodies a global south onto-epistemology (Grosfoguel, 2008). As such, the exact geographical location, whether south or north, does not inevitably determine a binary category.

The global south/north in childhood studies

Without question, Foucault, Derrida, and more recently Deleuze and Guattari—all European white men—have dominated critical childhood studies. In our experiences as women of color scholars, working within critical realms has not necessarily meant that global south embodied experiences and theories in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983) have become part of the fabric of the critical movement. Whether in our writing or research collaboratives, when global south peoples have been invited to the table, at times, it's been with the stipulation of theorizing or giving credit/dominance to global north critical theorists. By continuing to insist that we draw from and center global north theories, analyses of colonial impact are “constrained and limited in the radicality of their critique of eurocentrism” (Grosfoguel, 2008: 2). This is so because critical global north theorists speak from specific localities within power configurations (Mignolo, 2000) and could not apprehend the complexity of colonial impact from their body-knowledge. As such, although we may find points of connection to global north thinkers, we struggle to envision how these works can intimately coalesce with the lived experiences of women and children of color, colonialism, and the violence experienced by global south peoples. This is why we have been inspired as editors to bring together a collection of scholarship that centralizes global south onto-epistemologies.

Global south childhood/s scholarship

This Special Issue is a compilation of global south scholarship with authors representing myriad identities and geo-political locations. To open the issue, authors Mere Skerrett, Fikile Nxumalo and Stacia Cedillo, Gregory Cajete, and Mary Carole Rowan center Indigenous ways of knowing and being in their work. Skerrett challenges the global coloniality of the doctrine of domination that represents itself in Aotearoa New Zealand as an uneven “partnership” between Māori (the Indigenous) and the colonizer (the British). The author explains how this domination has been maintained through the western positivistic one-size-fits-all “global north” policies and practices in a colonial education system which is hegemonic and racist. Skerrett contends that Indigenous knowledges and languages can mediate the power relations of colonial dominance and Indigenous subordination as

they provide the keys to unlock and liberate the spaces, places and minds of coloniality. In the next paper, Fikile Nxumalo and Stacia Cedillo center Indigenous onto-epistemologies with Black feminist geographies to consider place, the environment and “nature” in early childhood studies. They highlight how these perspectives can enact knowledge-making that politicizes, unsettles and (re)stories place-based studies of childhood. While noting the tensions between posthuman geographies, Indigenous onto-epistemologies, and Black feminist geographies, Nxumalo and Cedillo consider how together, these worldviews can enrich critical place-attuned early childhood studies.

Gregory Cajete then shares his essay that explores childhood education, storytelling, and the nature of myth from an Indigenous perspective. Cajete discusses aspects of Indigenous teaching and learning related to the ways myth and storytelling have traditionally functioned in Indigenous communities in the education of children. He also explores the deeper psychological nature of myth as an integral part of human learning, teaching and socialization. Cajete posits that these explorations form the basis for advocacy toward the re-vitalization of story as an essential foundation for intergenerational community education and as a component of global childhood education. Next, Mary Caroline Rowan’s work on Nunangat pedagogies addresses the adoption of teaching practices informed by relationships with land, water, and ice. Rowan examines an opportunity to disrupt global north dominance in the Inuit homeland through engagements with fox. Using Nunangat methodologies, which require consultations with Elders and hunters, Rowan employs a rhizomatic analysis to re-conceptualize early childhood practices in ways which enable recognition of the vitality and viability of local Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

In the next two papers, Radhika Viruru and Ramzi Nasser, and Ximena Galdames Castillo open a dialogue for global south imaginaries from the Arabian Gulf nation of Qatar and Chile, respectively. Viruru and Nasser trouble the idea that mothering is a set of instinctive “natural” behaviors that all women are born knowing. Drawing from a yearlong study of motherhood in Qatar, the authors share the “intimate” tasks involved in raising children, and how mothers have often expressed a strong sense of being overwhelmed, but at the same time, welcome their responsibilities as God-given. The authors suggest that as the nation of Qatar reconstructs itself, notions of families are also being reconstructed. Ximena Galdames Castillo problematizes the white patriarchal foundations of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Chile as colonial and androcentric. She posits that Chilean ECE omits and ignores Other sociopolitical agendas related to class, gender and ethnicity that shape the current landscape. Drawing from Anzaldúa, among Other global south thinkers, Galdames Castillo reconstructs the foundations of Chilean ECE through a reconceptualized mestiza history of the present. This approach challenges the neutrality of Chilean ECE and seeks to reclaim it by examining the underpinning regimes of truth that re-colonize children and women moving within and inhabiting the field.

In the subsequent papers, Elizabeth Quintero and Silvia Patricia Solís continue with the use of Chicana feminism as a global south theory. Quintero presents stories of bi-national children and the early childhood teacher education students working with them, which reveal daily life realities and problematize the neocolonial roots of our conceptions of children and families. Quintero’s study considers evolving theoretical stances to work with children and families based upon a third space that combines aspects of the global south and global north. Her research illustrates a focus on relations as generative encounters with Others and shared events that have mutually transformative effects. In the next paper, using a Chicana feminist orientation, Silvia Patricia Solís shares her letter to her children from a place called Land. In it, she unveils the entanglements coloniality creates in young, racialized and gendered lives through the colonial logics structuring childhood, memory, and borders. By remembering and returning to the places she calls home (the US/Mexico border), Solís is able to grapple with trauma, learn ways to respond to violence, and heal.

In the final paper, Mark Nagasawa and Beth Blue Swadener share their essay that focuses on the important, but often taken-for-granted roles that mentoring and collaborative inquiry play in rethinking childhood studies. Notably, the authors situate their work in a time of resurgent racism and xenophobia in the United States—as well as invigorated movements to affirm human rights and social justice. They are guided by learning from Indigenous and global south epistemologies and Black and Chicana/Latina/Mestiza feminisms. To illustrate their reciprocal mentoring relationship, Nagasawa and Swadener use critical personal narratives to discuss key influences, literature, pedagogies of place, and the exigencies of sustaining critical childhood studies movements in the current moment.

As a shorter colloquium piece that closes the Special Issue, author Kia Rideaux makes a poignant call to women of color to recapture silenced narratives. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's (1983) *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, Rideaux shares her open and honest letters challenging women of color to actively incorporate the process of writing into their everyday lives. Through these letters, the author reflects on the lasting impact of Anzaldúa's work and how those drawn to epistemologies of the global south might resist mechanisms of sameness. In doing so, Rideaux urges women of color to rethink how to situate their own stories within the realm of childhood studies.

A call for a global south revolution

From these powerful contributions, we, as a collective, call for a global south revolution in childhood studies. To move towards this revolution, we urge critical scholars and our global south sisters and brothers to welcome and center the voices and bodies of those who hold and embody global south subaltern knowledges—which can potentially dethrone the dominance of global north theorists. We must make room and open spaces in our own work to allow ourselves to be influenced and infiltrated by such wonderings that could lead to decolonial imaginaries (Pérez, 1999). However, we caution that although we encourage all to embrace global south theorizing, these knowledges must not be appropriated (Tuck, 2010); rather, they can be centered/incorporated if there lies a genuine interest in collaboration and learning and listening to the wisdom of global south peoples that has existed for centuries and from multiple cardinal points.

We hope that the scholarship shared in this Special Issue provokes a multiplicity of dialogues and serves as a contribution to the vast body of global south knowledges both in and outside of childhood studies and the academy.

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