



What takes ‘us’ so long? The philosophical poverty of childhood studies and education

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Abstract

My argument addresses a significant history of philosophical racism—a term borrowed from Mogobe Ramose. The argument is: philosophical racism makes the racist philosophically poor, too. I propose that two philosophical keystones, i.e., ontological simultaneity and mutual causation need to be further developed by engaging non-Western contributions. I conclude by emphasising that childhood studies could level the playing field by paying attention to the intersections of racism and adultism. In turn contribute to inseparable fields like the philosophy of education.

Keywords

Childism, philosophy of education, positionality, decoloniality, philosophical racism, adultism, intersectionality, childhood studies, Indian philosophy, philosophy of childhood, quota scheme

Philosophical commitments about childhood entail larger metaphysical considerations about the nature of being, reality and existence, and influence the everydayness of policy making and implementation (Peters and Tesar, 2017; Tesar, 2016). Scholarship at the overlaps of philosophy of education, decoloniality and childism points to the exclusion of childhood and related oppressed positionalities in Western philosophy of education and its subdiscipline-philosophy of childhood (e.g., Malone et al., 2020; Wall, 2021; Cassidy et al., 2017; Kohan, 2011; Liebel, 2020; also see Tesar, 2016; Peters and Tesar, 2017). Addressing these interrelated exclusions beckons addressing *philosophical racism*, in

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ways that unveils its backlashes for racists too; perpetually sustaining a lose-lose situation for ‘us’ all.

In what follows, I address the questions of this special issue: How can southern theories make childhood studies a more dynamic, ‘global’ research field? What is the role of southern institutions, researchers, and scholarship in developing the inter-/multi-disciplinary field of childhood studies? My argument purposefully treats the first question rhetorically to address philosophical racism—a term I borrow from Mogobe Ramose. I then discuss the implications of philosophical racism for the academic and social struggles childhood studies must confront if it desires including southern theories, institutions, researchers, and scholarship to develop the field further. I combine two approaches to argue that philosophical racism comes with its share of epistemological backlashes for the dominant side (e.g., an intellectual discipline like childhood studies dwelling in Western philosophical pre-understandings and logical basis) as well.

First, I give a birds-eye view of philosophical racism with the example of the struggle for Indian philosophies to be recognised as philosophies comparable to what Europeans called philosophy. Second, through my subjective account as a ‘Quota’ student in childhood studies at the former Norwegian Center for Child Research (Trondheim), I explain how BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) scholars can become ‘global scholars’ mainly by proving themselves within the status quo. In turn, I highlight systemic dimensions beyond individual initiatives because channels for broadening one’s socio-intellectual horizons are either limited or absent due to the colonial history looming over ‘us’ regardless of positionalities. Lastly, I propose that two philosophical keystones, i.e., ontological simultaneity and mutual causation, need to be further developed by engaging non-Western contributions to theory. I illustrate my suggestion with the examples from the Jaina and Buddhist schools of philosophy.

The philosophical poverty I have addressed here, is a state of intellectual and social destitution shared by all scholars of childhood studies and inseparable fields like education. An overview of the inclusion of Western philosophy in childhood studies, largely explicated with reference to contemporary philosophy of education (e.g., see [Alanen, 2017, 2022](#)), is a telling example of how philosophical racism is reproduced—sustaining the philosophical destitution of the dominant side. While I acknowledge that the colonial history places ‘us’ all in the same boat, I maintain that non-Western philosophies and BIPOC scholars of childhood have a burdensome historical struggle to continue ploughing through. Critical intellectual contributions remain burdened with the task of showing the socio-historical injustice of exclusion and ‘challenging the global north’ (e.g., see [Pérez et al., 2017](#)). How shall one contribute to transformation if debates and ‘re-thinking’ are still limited to either communicating the pain of one’s oppression, or at the most saying that which is oppressed will bring some value—if accepted? Even if one wins such debates, everyone is left muddling through in exhaustion, and we never arrive at embracing what we fought to prove is valuable in the first place.

In some ways ‘we’ are together, but tragically divided by the very colonial token that connects us. Perhaps this shared state of socio-intellectual destitution is what takes ‘us’ so long to ask pertinent questions, as those raised by this special issue.

The misopedy of philosophical racism

Western philosophical traditions have contributed to the colonial project. Ramose argues that descriptions of ‘human beings’ such as ‘man is a rational animal’ did not apply to non-Europeans (Maris, 2020). Non-European ‘others’ were seen as lacking rational capacities and consequently branded as sub-humans. The natural right to individual freedom was reserved for the ‘rational man’ who could free himself from physical and mental slavery. The non-European ‘others’ were attributed with a sub-human status to be colonised by superior white humans. The best the colonised could do was imitate the ways of the coloniser. The philosophical project was to impose the European epistemological paradigm upon the colonised peoples. In other words, the intent was to establish and sustain the European (Western) conception of reality, knowledge and truth in the colonised parts of the world. The conception included racist imaginations of what being a full human (which is to assume of course, a white adult) means. The ‘sub-human status’ rendered it impossible for the colonised to be perceived as capable of producing philosophical knowledge or even having something like ‘philosophy,’ as defined in Western traditions.

The struggle of ‘Indian philosophy’ to be recognised as ‘philosophy’ in the contemporary academic world is a telling example. Gokhale (2012) observes that Indian philosophy is commonly treated as ‘religious studies’ in Western universities. Gokhale finds that while some Indian scholars of Indian philosophy take pride in regarding it as essentially religious or spiritual, others—especially those trained in Western analytical traditions—highlight the argumentative aspects of Indian philosophy to establish that Indian philosophy *is* philosophy in the same sense as Western philosophy (also see Mohanty, 1985). Such debates aggravate a repetitive, chronic itch through the philosophical racism inherent in the premise of the debate itself. The premise may be unpacked: There is an absolute notion of philosophy in the Western tradition that is epistemologically superior. Non-Western traditions must first prove that they have such a notion. I interpret such underlying premises as philosophically racist because the privilege of defining ‘philosophy’ rests with the Western counterpart. Rather than a mutually enriching dialogue, this sets the tone for a rigged game of comparison. The opponent is made to start in a position where they must prove themselves in comparison with a definition that they did not participate in setting.

Furthermore, it is a paradoxically rigged game where the ‘referee’ is simultaneously the player whose rigid conception the opponent is up against. There is an insistence on exact synonymy, which is an unsaid condition for southern theories to be able to enter Western-dominated academic discourses as in the case of Indian philosophy Gokhale (2012). This colonial rule of interaction has implications for Western intellectual enterprises, that take on the ‘dominant, absolute’ role in so far as it loses grasp of its own pluralistic, flexible characteristics. Notions such as philosophers and philosophy, regardless of geographical locations, undergo changes over a period. Additionally, there is a broad spectrum of what these notions mean at any given point in time. Gokhale (2012: 158) questions the validity of the singular self-understanding of Western philosophy by listing its diverse traditions and forms such as speculative, analytical, phenomenological, pragmatic and so on.

Gokhale (2012) has proposed that fruitful interactions between ‘two cultures’ could occur if ambiguity and variability are accepted on both sides. He proposes that, instead of asking whether the Indian tradition has a concept of philosophy identical to the Western concept, the question should be whether the Indian and Western traditions have approximately close concepts of philosophy. An approach based on approximation would free up space for both sides in so far as the dominant counterpart need not continue holding up the façade of absolute definitions. In turn, there is space for the ambiguities and variabilities of the Western traditions to also take part in a co-exploration of what (in this case) philosophy could mean. Gokhale’s questions help bring forth an awareness of the diversity that is present within theoretical conceptions within the dominant side of the discourse, which hides behind the façade of absolute definitions (as in the case of defining ‘philosophy’ itself). While I acknowledge the historical, epistemological marginalisation that southern theories and scholars continue to be subjected to, I extend my understanding of the epistemological marginalisation as necessarily entailing a backlash for the dominating side too. This focus has special relevance for childhood studies and intimately related fields like education in so far as the metaphor of the ‘child’ has been used by Western thinkers to describe ‘primitive cultures’ (see Kant, 1904, cited below). While such imaginations are problematically applied to non-Western cultures, it is firstly problematic that such imaginations have been applied to children and childhood in e.g., Europe itself (!). The logic of colonialism seems to have been an adultist logic of Western childhood (Nandy, 1984; Rollo, 2018). It is particularly alarming to discover this colonial imagination of childhood in the educational philosophy of influential enlightenment philosophers like Kant, who wrote,

“It must also be shown to the child that he is under such constraint as will lead him to the use of his own freedom; that he is cultivated, so that 1 day he may be free—that is, not dependent upon the foresight of others. This is the child’s latest acquisition. For the consideration that each must rely upon himself for his own sustenance comes to the child very late. They fancy it will always be as it is in the parental home; that food and drink will come without any thought on their part. *Without such treatment, children, and especially those of rich parents and princes, become like the inhabitants of Tahiti, who remain children their whole life long.*” (Kant, 1904, Section 30c; emphasis by author)

In the example of Kant’s educational philosophy, rich white children—positioned as in need of civilisation—are equated with non-white people. The racist dumbing down of non-white persons, in this case, could be better grasped by recognising the adultism inherent in the enlightenment idea of who was worthy of being deemed civilised through ‘education’ (also see Rollo, 2018). In my understanding, philosophical racism intersects with adultism and is better grasped through this intersection.^{1,2}

When childhood studies emerged as a field towards the end of the 20th century, postcolonial works like Nandy’s (1984) brought attention to this intersectional dimension of Western colonialism. Why weren’t such premises part of the childhood studies curriculum and research frameworks that say, Quota scholars were taught? Pioneers in the field influencing curricula and research seemed preoccupied with reinforcing a narrow

conception of children's agency.³ Perhaps such works did not count as essential childhood studies literature as they first needed to prove themselves as 'childhood studies' in the Western sense(s) of the term, as in the case of more foundational areas like 'philosophy' pass through conf. [Gokhale \(2012\)](#). Non-Western philosophies either remain tucked away into 'religious studies' or categorised in other marginalised positions in the dominant academic landscape. Western-critical views, similarly, remain tucked away under 'post-colonial studies'. In turn, they entrap the dominant intellectual side in its own borders. There seems to be a deep-rooted intellectual tendency to occupy a dual position of a referee and player that continues to loop self-created epistemological restrictions, which plays out in childhood studies and intimately related fields like education.

Southern theories, scholars and critical views on the Western logic of childhood can open the self-imposed epistemological restrictions on childhood studies and intimately related fields like education. The premises of those interactions, however, must be diversified in theory and practice. Childhood studies, primarily due to its inter-/multi-disciplinary character, alone cannot achieve this goal. This is to say that the field can only release itself in liaison with larger humanities and social science disciplines e.g., philosophy, logic, education and so on. Nevertheless, it carries a responsibility to contribute to this broader direction. One of the ways of doing this has been by enabling young scholars from the global south to access the few prestigious academic spaces where childhood studies programmes are taught. The Norwegian Quota Scheme programme has been such an attempt. In the following section, I present a subjective recollection of my lived experience as a 'Quota student' educated in childhood studies at the former Norwegian Center for Child Research in Trondheim. In doing so, I offer one critical account of how BIPOC scholars can become 'global scholars' by producing knowledge within the status quo.⁴

Hjerneflukt: Where may my brain drain?

Hjerneflukt, literally 'brain escape', is the Norwegian term for the global phenomenon of human capital flight, popularly known as 'brain drain'. In theory, the term 'brain drain' is criticised for treating the embodied human brain as a commodity ([Brandi, 2004, 2006](#); [Rizvi, 2005](#)). Postcolonial perspectives have suggested taking deterritorialisations of cultures as well as subjective dilemmas arising from the global labour market into account while thinking about transnational mobility ([Rizvi, 2005](#)). A significantly related policy that expresses itself in one of the Sustainable Development Goals (number 17) is 'capacity-building', defined by the United Nations as 'the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organisations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world' ([United Nations, n.d.](#)). International higher educational partnerships aimed at training young scholars from 'developing' countries were one way that Norway participated in fulfilling a capacity building mandate.

The Norwegian Quota Scheme, introduced in the early 1990s, was one of the largest and most significant scholarship programmes in the history of Norwegian higher education. The scholarship programme offered young scholars from partner universities in

'low development contexts' access to higher education in Norway. By 2011, when I arrived in Trondheim as a Quota student in the MPhil Childhood Studies programme at the former Norwegian Center for Child Research, the Quota Scheme explicitly positioned itself as a programme intended to contribute to 'capacity building' in low development contexts and 'internationalisation' of Norwegian higher education. During the orientation week, the university's international office representative explicitly explained that our scholarships were not intended to facilitate brain drain in our respective 'home countries' i.e., the countries where we held formal citizenship. As defined by the Norwegian government, 'capacity building' was strategically integrated into the funding contract that incoming Quota students signed. The funding contract legally required us to repay 60% of the loan if we resided outside our country of citizenship after completing the study programme. The debt contract was equivalent to the government educational loan that Norwegian citizens paid on entry into the labour market. Formally, the same agreement applied to Quota students, except that it did not come with an added clause that directly impacted future aspirations Quota students could pursue. A special provision allowed complete cancellation of the education loan if the scholarship-loan recipient returned to their country of citizenship and resided there for a minimum of 10 years. Residence in any other country, regardless of the country's position on the Human Development Index, implied debt.

Formally and legally, the Quota scheme already positioned me as an instrument of carrying out a developmental function. For this purpose, I was structurally predisposed to 'upgrade' my theoretical knowledge in Norway and go back to India to apply it there. My temporary contribution to Norwegian higher education was limited to the 'internationalisation' I brought to the demographics of classrooms. Informally, as a Quota student, I was obliged to conduct research in my 'home country' and keep the focus on childhood and children-related problems in 'my' country.

At the same time, the theoretical literature for my research would need to draw upon the individual-centred Western childhood studies paradigm (e.g., James et al., 1998), partly because of the lack of programmes and scholars trained in non-Western philosophies. Unaware of this informal obligation, I was incipiently preparing myself for fieldwork in Italy. Academically I wished to learn more about childhoods in the European context, but I was discouraged. I was considering a project in Northern Italy because I had worked with educators there, and I was familiar with the region and spoke the language. Norwegian students, also funded by the state, had the freedom to choose their fieldwork locations. A long Western tradition of fieldwork abroad or in far off, 'foreign' locations, put Norwegian students in a privileged position to choose their place of fieldwork. Quota students being trained for the 'capacity building' agenda did not have any such realistic possibility. So, I finally conducted fieldwork with child monks in Ladakh (Biswas, 2016), a Tibetan-Buddhist region in the former territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Apart from Ladakh being an official part of the Republic of India, there was nothing Ladakh had in common with my birthplace Bombay (now Mumbai), in Maharashtra. As enriching as my time in Ladakh has been, the matter of fact remains that had it not been for the obligation that came with being a Quota student—I would have chosen to study Western childhoods with reference to non-Western philosophical perspectives.

Childhood studies literature that formed the theoretical premises of my work did not include any postcolonial critiques which revealed the intersectional adultism and racism of the Western imagination of childhood, e.g., by [Nandy \(1984\)](#), that I discussed in the previous section. Further, the formal courses in the programme taught to Quota scholars, only forwarded a view on children and childhood/adults and adulthood rooted in Western philosophy. Since I dealt with a Tibetan-Buddhist context, I brought in a Buddhist philosophical view in my dissertation as part of cultural contextualisation. Consequently, it was presented within the premises of children's agency that childhood studies laid out. Ironically, I spent time studying a 'paradigm shift (e.g., [James et al., 1998](#))' only to speak to it from another position years later. The referee stayed the player in this case too, and it didn't seem like the game itself could be questioned. The stakes for a BIPOC Quota scholar under institutional research supervision under such conditions are high. Losing grades, extended argumentations with professors, lecturers and its consequences were not worth risking given that one had a course to complete, bureaucracy to navigate, a loan to avoid and secure chance at future research employment prospects-because more than one's own life-world abroad hangs on successful academic performance. So theoretically settling for Buddhist philosophy as cultural contextualisation was an intellectual compromise I responded with.

The Quota Scheme was a unique, generous and considerate provision to contribute to 'global equity'. However, the narrow focus on capacity-building and resistance to 'brain drain' ironically contributed to inequity in academia and advanced a lopsided 'global' knowledge production. Young scholars from 'developed' contexts could research the so-called 'developing' contexts, while those from 'developing' contexts were systematically encouraged to research 'their own' contexts. The philosophical racism that replays itself here in practice is that the epistemological lens, used as a point of departure, was rooted in the Western philosophical traditions. Remarkably, the premise of the child as an individual being at par with the adult being remains something to contest and rework in childhood studies to arrive at more relational understandings (conf. [Abebe, 2019](#)). However, relational understandings of being human regardless of age, are challenging to arrive at while being rooted in Western philosophical traditions centred around the individual.

The notion of a 'complete' adult which the notion of an 'incomplete' child is against is universally problematic. By universally problematic, I mean that it is problematic across socio-cultural as well as age-specific conceptualisations. Furthermore, I suggest that such conceptual applications are philosophically problematic regardless of which culture or historical era the idea of any 'complete' and 'independent being' comes from. Using such images to study childhoods in the Western context is as much a methodological and theoretical error as it is to explore childhoods in non-Western contexts. This in many ways is the result of the binary thinking in sociological imaginations of childhood-adulthood found in Western philosophies of education (conf. [Malone et al., 2020](#)). The nuances of how interdependence plays out in different contexts and at various points throughout the lifespan differ. But interdependence itself seems to be a constant.

Recent theoretical developments in childhood studies include emerging critiques of the dominant premise of the 'autonomous child', which has influenced what and how

childhood researchers study (conf. Spyrou et al., 2018). Spyros Spyrou articulates that the premise of the autonomous, independent child has become an obstacle to theoretical imaginations in childhood studies (Spyrou et al., 2018: 121). As a former Quota student, in hindsight, my imagination seems to have been entrapped from the moment I entered the field through a Norwegian institution. It was this premise I was supposed to ‘take back’ to ‘my’ country and produce theoretical knowledge about children ‘there’. In turn, carry out a mandate of ‘capacity building’ which was part of the Quota contract, that I accepted because I aspired to access European academia to become part of a ‘global’ childhood studies programme in 2011. Today, when I read critiques that prominent scholars in the field like Spyrou et al. (2018) and Abebe (2019) put forth, I read that childhood studies lacked a theoretical capacity from its very inception. In my view, the field did not ‘discover’ the premise of an autonomous child; it simply projected an untenable Western premise of an autonomous adult onto the child. See, as discussed earlier, the case of Kant’s educational philosophy (Kant, 1904, Section 30c).

The theoretical incapacity embedded into the foundations of the field alludes to a more profound history of philosophical racism in ‘global’ academia (conf. previous section) that childhood studies partakes in by default. Had the founders of the field and those who designed its first curricula in the 1980s at least paid attention to the philosophical nuances of the postcolonial critique as one may for instance read in e.g., Nandy (1984), it would have been theoretically clear three decades ago, that the starting point should have at least been resisting the dominant Western notion of an ‘autonomous adult’ instead of trying to make sense of children and childhoods through the same lens. The emphasis in the critique here is not that a Western notion of childhood dominates sociological understandings of childhoods in childhood studies (e.g., Stephens, 1995: 8), but that pertinent philosophical nuances were absent. In turn, the foundations of the field served a larger philosophically racist project.⁵ There are contemporary scholars in childhood studies and education who draw upon postcolonial and decolonial perspectives (e.g., Burman, 2019a, 2019b; Malone et al., 2020; De Castro 2020; Nieuwenhuys, 2013). The observation I emphasise is there is a theoretical incapacity embedded into the foundations of the field because non-Western philosophical approaches, broadly speaking, were excluded in the point of departure for the field.

Such a starting point would have opened the pathways to fruitful dialogues with historically marginalised philosophical traditions that could have contributed to theoretical foundations of ‘global’ childhood studies and related fields. Furthermore, they could have opened different perspectives on what the Quota Scheme’s mandate of ‘capacity building’ could mean considering the politics of knowledge production and its implication for higher education policy.

Two philosophical keystones for global childhood studies

So far, I have addressed the central questions of this special issue at two levels. The first level deals with the epistemologically marginalised non-Western philosophies in academic discourses determined by dominant Western traditions. The marginalised positions could not contribute to forming the premises of the questions that drove debates. Under

such asymmetrical conditions, the non-Western theories could at the most arrive at proving that they too had concepts comparable to their Western counterpart. The Western counterpart assumed an epistemologically superior position and projected itself as holding absolute, developed concepts as in aforementioned instances of philosophical racism in defining ‘philosophy’ and ‘logic’ (e.g., Gokhale, 2012; Mohanty, 1985; Maris, 2020). Postcolonial, decolonial and Western-critical insights have offered a pertinent observation that Western notions of ‘childhood’ were central to a colonial self-understanding (e.g., Nieuwenhuys, 2013; De Castro, 2020; Malone et al., 2020). The intersection of adultism and racism evident in such a self-understanding should have been crucial to the theoretical foundations of childhood studies. Not only was this insight absent, but an individualistic Western notion of childhood agency also became one of the key concepts that Quota scholars from the global south were expected to ‘take back’. The second level of my response dealt with the contemporary pre-positioning of Quota scholars from the global south as carrying out a mandate of ‘capacity building’ in ‘their’ countries and carrying out the mandate entailed being intellectually predisposed to applying it to ‘developing’ contexts. Recent critiques (e.g., Spyrou et al., 2018; Abebe, 2019; De Castro, 2020; Malone et al., 2020) that have emerged within the field, however, now profoundly doubt the notion. In this section, I engage with this pertinent critique further. My estimation is that, had such critiques been the point of departure for childhood studies, southern theories and scholars would have been part of the field on more even grounds (see Andal, 2021: 452).

The dominant notion of childhood agency as what European enlightenment sees as individual autonomy tells us more about the prevailing adulthood notion of agency in the West, than it tells us about the lives of children globally. The Kantian understanding of white European children who would remain like Tahitians all their life if they were not taught rational autonomy (Kant, 1904), described earlier, is telling. As if to say that ‘completeness’ was/is a privilege of white European adults i.e., European children (like Tahitians) were becoming, and adults (like Kant’s fellowmen) were beings.

The ‘being and becoming’ debate has been an integral part of constructing the ‘childhood agency’ notion (see Uprichard, 2008). As in the case of non-Western philosophical traditions that were pre-positioned as ambiguous and flexible, ‘the child’ in foundations preceding the field was pre-positioned as becoming, and consequently, childhood studies scholars, emerging from sociology in 1970s, argued ‘the child is a being too’. Absolute, rigid completeness of being was projected onto ‘the adult’. Scholars like Uprichard (2008) proposed that the discipline should go beyond the ‘either/or’ approach because the full temporality of childhood can only be encompassed by viewing children as both being and becoming (see also Hanson, 2017). Similar proposals have been echoed in recent calls to reconceptualise childhood agency by emphasising interdependence (see Abebe, 2019; Abebe and Biswas, 2021). One of the deciding steps to realise this direction is to include the adult category in this reconceptualization (Abebe, 2019).

Focusing on adults’ dependence on children’s lives should have a significant place in understanding contemporary childhoods globally. This angle needs to primarily be emphasised while studying so-called Western societies where individual autonomy appears to be the norm. The appearance of adult autonomy is misleading in so far as ‘adult

autonomy' cannot be exercised without 'child autonomy'. This is true for micro as well as macro-level adult-child relating globally. For example, an indicative example of structural interdependence of 'autonomy' can be seen in the Bavarian minister president Markus Söder's assertion (08.09.2020) at a press conference preceding the second COVID-19 Lockdown, "Das Prinzip muss sein: Unsere Kinder müssen betreut werden. [...] Schule und Kita hat ja den Zweck auch, um die Wirtschaft laufen zu lassen." (The principle must be: Our children need to be looked after. [...] School and kindergarten also have the purpose to keep the economy running." trans. by author). One finds here a flavour of adultist governmentality, which is bound with macro structures, including the schooling sector, that is designed to place children and youth somewhere else so that their adult caregivers can work in the market without disturbance. Although similar insights have been part of childhood studies research (e.g., [Qvortrup, 2001](#)), 'autonomy' is not acknowledged enough as a specific kind of expression of interdependence as far as my knowledge goes. [Qvortrup \(2001\)](#) has shown how children's obligatory tasks have been historically system-immanent in so far as they necessarily correspond to dominant forms of production. As also evidenced in the Bavarian minister president's assertion, 'developed' economies cannot survive and prosper without modern children's schoolwork being a dominant part of childhood in quantitative terms.

[Gillis \(2008\)](#): 317) has described how mass-scale operations of age-based segregation give rise to adultist forms of cultural 'islanding' specific to age groups. From birthdays, Christmases, to 'own' things, spaces and activities like rooms, furniture, clothes, toys, phones, activities and so on, segregating children to raise them as 'autonomous individuals' is a common form of intergenerational relating in Western modernity. The dominant existential telos of intergenerational relationships seems to be individual agency and self-determination, not community formation ([Abebe and Biswas, 2021](#); [Nandy, 1984](#)). However, what is missed whilst obsessing with the telos of individual agency is that interdependence still constitutes the way to that goal. Agency is the projected telos governing how interdependence plays out in various contexts, but it is not the way itself.

Regardless of what a projected socio-political and cultural telos of adult-child relationships in a particular society might be, children *and adults* necessarily co-determine each other. The dichotomous counterposing of human agency and non-agency is thus theoretically unhelpful regardless of whether it is applied to children or adults. (Human) Existence in the broadest sense does not unfold as *either* complete, being, active, autonomous, competent, solid and rational, *or* incomplete, becoming, passive, subservient, incompetent, vulnerable and emotional. These qualities are present simultaneously and are emphasised depending on our given facticity, e.g., where, when and concerning/with whom we are doing something regardless of our chronological age.⁶

With this in sight, two philosophical keystones could be attentively developed in symmetrical dialogue with southern theories, scholars and institutions:

1. Ontological Simultaneity
2. Mutual Causation

By ontological simultaneity, I refer to pluralist approaches which can view phenomena as being and becoming at the same time. This would be a minimal requirement for a pluralist approach, but there are complex pluralist approaches. The Jaina Schools of classical Indian philosophy, for example, offers a complex a seven-fold propositional model, as opposed to a dichotomous model of affirmative and negative propositions (e.g., either true or false), termed *Anekantavada* or the doctrine of many-sidedness (Chatterjee and Datta, 2015; Ganeri, 2002). Within this logical framework, any judgement about reality can only be partially true and hold only for the specific aspect of the judged object. The standpoint of a particular observation and consequent assessment, forms an integral part of knowledge production. The term *somehow* is used at the beginning of every proposition to make the conditionality of assessments transparent (Chatterjee and Datta, 2015: 79).

In addition to the systematic conditional qualification of propositions with the term *somehow*, the Jaina philosophers transcend the dichotomous template of description by acknowledging the incapacity of any human observer to describe reality fully. Consequently, a third conditionally qualified proposition integrates the intellectual and cognitive limitations of any observer i.e., indescribability. The seven conditional propositions through this approach are as follows:

1. Somehow, X⁷ is Y.
2. Somehow, X is not Y.
3. Somehow, X is indescribable.
4. Somehow, X is and is not Y.
5. Somehow, X is Y and is indescribable.
6. Somehow, X is not Y and is indescribable.
7. Somehow, X is Y, is not Y and is indescribable.

Elsewhere, I explain how pluralist logic helped me suspend clock-time and tune into *Captain Duke's* temporality. Conjunctly, my spatial sense transformed and took me into 'a lava land where we flew cars, and at the same time stayed in a kitchen (Biswas, 2021)'. One need not necessarily adopt a seven-fold Jaina logic to do that. Engaging ontological simultaneity systematically opens richer possibilities for theorising *co-generational interdependent agency as a continuum in constant flux* (in italics Abebe, 2019). The endeavour is to develop ontological simultaneity as a philosophical keystone by engaging with non-Western logics. In turn endeavour to transcend the intersecting loop of racism and adultism⁸ that underlies how we grasp both 'the child' as well as 'the non-west' in relation to 'the adult' as well as the 'west'.

A methodic practise of (re)cognising co-existing realities, gives way to experiencing diverse ways in which *co-generational interdependent agency as a continuum in constant flux* occur and could occur. Here, the second philosophical keystone that must be further developed, is mutual causation or interdependence. One of the vital Buddhist doctrines of mutual causation *Pratityasamutpada* (Chatterjee and Datta, 2015) could be one example to turn to.⁹ As opposed to a linear understanding of causal connection, e.g., X causes Y, the various Buddhist schools understanding causality as a network of mutually dependent

relations that cause each other. In this sense, every phenomenon is simultaneously a cause and an effect and not *either* cause *or* effect.

Even in the most asymmetrical examples e.g., adult-child, West-non-West, developed-developing and so on, exploring the diverse ways mutual dependence occurs and could occur, offer ‘us’ strength to overcome the philosophical destitution of inseparable fields of childhood studies and education. And perhaps contribute to transforming how unexamined philosophical commitments determine the everydayness of policy making and implementation (Peters and Tesar, 2017; Tesar, 2016).

Conclusion

The inadequacy embedded into the foundations of childhood studies is an inadequate engagement with the ambiguity and flexibility of Western intellectual traditions and contemporary social contexts, which plays out through an obsession with individual autonomy. Drawing upon Western-critical insights, it appears that the premise of an autonomous (white) child was not ‘discovered’ through childhood studies. Rather, an untenable Western premise of an autonomous (white) adult was projected onto the (white) child and ‘globalised’. There is also a continued marginalisation of non-Western intellectual traditions which are not engaged on even grounds. Moreover, young scholars from the global south produced knowledge about diverse childhoods as part of a capacity building mandate using untenable Western philosophical notions. The philosophical racism intersected with adultism that reproduced itself here is that from its point of departure, childhood studies remained loyal to a particular strand of the Western intellectual tradition where the ‘referee is also the principal player’. A critical awareness of intersectional adultism and racism should have been an integral part of the theoretical foundations of childhood studies. Not only was this awareness absent, but a problematic Western notion of childhood agency became one of the chief concepts that Quota scholars from the global south to ‘take back’. Notably, the adultist Western premise of the autonomous child at par with the autonomous adult endures as a premise to be contested and reworked.

Unexamined philosophical commitments to any autonomous notion of adulthood are a methodological and theoretical error in *both* Western *and* non-Western contexts. I propose two philosophical keystones that must be further developed with scholars and theories from the global south: ontological simultaneity and mutual causation. Such a direction pre-requires that *both* white *and* BIPOC scholars grasp that: philosophical racism renders the racist philosophically poor too.

A dynamic and global childhood studies would level the playing field by paying close attention to the intersections of racism and adultism. In doing so, it will have much to offer intimately related fields that exist because of (and for) children and childhood; educational philosophy, to say the least, would be one of them.

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Notes

1. Adulthood here, is not a manifestation of philosophical racism. There is no preferred philosophical commitment on the causal relation between adulthood and racism in my use of the term. Therefore, the notion of grasping the intersection is employed here.
2. Another example that speaks to the intersection of adulthood and racism in the Western tradition is the word *pais*, which was used by the Greeks to refer to both a child and a slave of any age (Golden, 1985). Women were also understood as the same category as addressees of infantilising control/punishment (an intersectional justice issue for Western society), as husbands could treat wives as roughly as they pleased (Golden, 1985: 102).
3. Also see related discussions on children's voices e.g., Cassidy et al., (2017).
4. Scott Basford's research on the Norwegian Quota System offers insights into the way the scheme impacted Quota students' mental health, personal lives and stunts their aspirations (Basford, 2016; Basford and Riemsdijk, 2017; also see Løken, 2016). For a local student news report on how lack of language courses for international students in Trondheim (during 2011–2013) further pushed them to 'go back to share knowledge in their countries' see Larsen (2013).
5. On a similar note, I do not suggest that the founders of the field could have easily used their agency differently. While their intellectual ignorance is a privilege, it is nevertheless an intellectual ignorance that occurs on the 'dominant side' of historical and structural marginalisation.
6. Uprichard (2008) makes a similar point, already hinting that ontological simultaneity can only be explored by going beyond Western philosophies (here, ontologies).
7. 'X' and 'Y' in these propositions are placeholders for different variables and/or the subject of study and what qualities are attributed to it e.g., Somehow adults are becoming.
8. My focus rests on adulthood and racism, although other lenses relevant for intersectional considerations are no doubt important. For particularly feminist-leaning lenses, it might be worth noting that that patriarchy is about an 'adult' father (Wall, 2021; Weiss, 2021).
9. In a similar vein Abebe and Biswas (2021) draw upon Ubuntu, from the African continent, to outline possibilities for a decolonial childist reimagination of mutual dependence between generations.

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