

**CHILDHOOD AS A BORDER AND AMBIVALENT CONCEPT
(A POST-COLONIAL APPROACH TO CHILDHOOD)**

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ABSTRACT

This study outlines the historical, cultural and social nature of childhood as a priori principles and explains the history of the emergence of childhood concept. For this purpose, the theoretical foundations of childhood and Copernicus rotation of this concept are explained. This rotation is the distance from classic and ancient images of childhood – which know childhood as a purely biological phenomenon - to modern paradigms which moved childhood from fatalistically biological concepts and recognized its social, cultural and historical entity. Clearly, this explains the course of shift from negligence to focus on childhood. This study negates the dominant dualism of Western wisdom in the concept of childhood, by questioning the concepts of controller and powerful adults and subordinate powerless child and suggests a third space by appealing to Homi Bhabha. Using Foucauldian concept of power as repressive and fertile as well as the concept of hybridity by Homi Bhabha with the idea of both necessarily constructed and constructing child, this study shows that childhood is not absolutely constructed by adulthood, but always there are possibilities of resistance for the subordinates.

KEYWORDS: childhood, post colonialism, hybridity, Copernicus rotation, dualism, deconstruction, subordinate

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinctive features of discussions on children and childhood is that they are surrounded by a tight circle of theoretical concepts in psychology and developmental psychology, in the most superficial and most banal form possible. Developmental psychology is so dominant on this subject that the actors in the fields of literature, humanities, and social sciences have blindly followed the theories of Piaget on children. The limiting determinist view of these theories, without recognition of subjectivity, individuality, dignity and differences of children, integrates their both physiological and dynamically unique mental life in the form of phased rules. It is clear that the children who do not fit in these theories are isolated and marginalized from their peers and labeled as unusual and abnormal. In its most abstract form, these theories negate the children's social and cultural life; the discourse with analyses and theories, which have emerged from contemplation into the subjective world of a child, codify rules which claim to be timeless by connivance of outside influences which involve the subject. Certainly no one, particularly this study, reject the important role of traditional psychology in bringing attention to childhood; it was psychologists who started to consider childhood for its important role in the formation of human character and contributed to recognition of children and childhood as an independent period of life.

However, the controversial and problematic part is to limit the scope of childhood studies in the circle of theories and ignore the theoretical foundations of traditional sociology, cultural studies, and even various topics of psychology. Nevertheless, as Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (a prominent theorist of children's literature) implies, this problem is not only limited to childhood studies in one region, but also the world. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to transit from reductionist positions of the dominant developmental psychology and find a way to explain the social, cultural and historical nature of childhood. Obviously, childhood has been theorized at some point in the history of West and, moving from periphery to the center of attention, has been recognized as an independent period with its own features and characteristics. The purpose of this study is to explain the history of this process from negligence to be the center of attention. Childhood, as many other phenomena, was constructed in the West; therefore, this study will follow the history of childhood from transformation of the Western tradition.

Finally, the author expresses his position on childhood, which is derived from a postcolonial perspective. It is noteworthy that the information was gathered by documentary and archival methods through authentic and reliable texts.

History of the Concept of Childhood

For centuries, since the man broke ties with the wild nature and moved toward the civilization, the child's life swung around to be or not to be. The fate decided for the child; by the age five to seven, if survived, the child was separated from the mother and became a mother herself or learned the way to live by working alongside the father (Mohamadi & Ghaeini, 2001). Clearly, the lack of a concept of childhood here is not the biological, but social, cultural and historical concept. Children were not recognized as an independent subject with a world of its own but as a family member, and in a broader sense, a member of the tribe with responsibilities and expectations as adult members (Shahabadi-Farahani, 2006). Philippe Ariès, a French sociologist, was the first to explore the concept of childhood in the Middle Ages and analyzed this concept in his "*L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*". He writes:

"In the Middle Ages, there was no idea of the concept of childhood; not that children were forgotten, abandoned or considered worthless. The concept of childhood should not be confused with emotions about children. This concept is associated with an awareness of the special nature of childhood, a specific nature which reflects the distinction between child and adult even a premature. In the Middle Ages, this knowledge did not exist" (Corsaro, 2005). Ariès believes that these early writings on ethics and education provided a context for development of child psychology which dramatically influenced the concepts of childhood in the contemporary periods. Therefore, Ariès notes a progress from the lack of a concept called childhood to a period when children became important followed by a moralistic period when childhood is considered as a time for discipline and preparation of children for adulthood (Corsaro, 2005). Therefore, this historical shift in the attitude toward children, after a long period of "non-recognition of childhood", can be outlined as follows:

Codling approach: New European representation of children started with the shift in traditional approach to the concept of childhood based on their elegance, sweetness and simplicity. Philip Ariès called this new representation as codling and emphasized that adults approach children for entertainment, as they turn books for reading or movies for watching. Although this new insight into children did not bring the current status of children, it highlighted its role in families. Children were no longer useless before adulthood; they were able to entertain the adults around them for hours.

Education approach: codling approach did not survive for a long time. Children as delicate, defenseless and fragile creatures attracted the attention of scholars of ethics and education who felt committed to the pristine and untouched nature of children. Numerous treatises were written in disapproval of codling approach in the seventeenth century. This was the first step in considering the special nature of children. With an interest in psychology, ethics scholars noted the ignorance of children and the change in their mind in later periods. Ethicists never recommend that people ignore the stupid and wrong deeds of their children, but they recommended that parents put the behaviors and actions of children into consideration and correcting their mistakes. Advocates of this approach did not consider the child only as an attractive and elegant toy, but a divine trust who needed care and education. In this way, the undeveloped child was replaced by unformed child. This was the beginning to replace the quantitative difference of children and adults by qualitative difference of these two (Shahabadi-Farahani, 2006).

Enlightenment period which started in the 16th century brought theorists who helped further development of human sciences (Goldman, 2008).

In this period, man attained a position that has never been possible before by mental activities of Filozofs and in the light of Copernicus rotation of thought. "The philosophy of enlightenment primarily consisted of a new assessment, first, of human dignity in the world, and secondly, of human abilities to organize the life and put an end to the state of confusion from which people suffered centuries (Cassirer, 1993). In line with religious reform movements, Filozofs' efforts belied the discourse of the man caught in the grip of predetermined nature, and this time, created a man who built his own world and the meaning of this world. As Bruner writes: "Many Enlightenment thinkers abandoned the previous belief in redemption, while kept believing in a free future in line with the Western religious tradition" (Bruner, 2007). Ideas of John Locke left an important influence on the invalidity of the idea of original sin and predetermined human nature.

Locke put an end to the belief in eternally infected conscience of children and their need for discipline which was common among Christians Puritans. He believed in the existence of a clear conscience in children; he believed that this conscience was influenced by its surroundings and education could change it. Therefore, it seemed important to educate children (Shahabadi-Farahani, 2006).

Among Filozofs, Jean-Jacques Rousseau challenged the discourse of original sin and theoretically rejected the predetermined conscience. As a social evolution of modernization, this root backs to Rousseau as many important steps taken in order to civilize man. Rousseau stressed that children's cognitive faculties are different from adults and grow gradually as the child grows biologically. In every stage of development, children have certain mental abilities which enable them to understand certain issues. He said that over-reliance on children's memory in the acquisition of knowledge harms the development of their mental faculties (Pooladi, 2005). Thus, Rousseau inducted the thoughts of innocence and purity of childhood and particularly considered the child as a special person; as in contemporary theories, this plays a key role (James, et al., 2006). Following Rousseau, a new era began for childhood. From this period onwards, childhood became a concept worthy of discussion of theorists and ideologues as a vital element in human life. The twentieth century, particularly the second half, has been called the age of childhood. In this century, childhood was seen differently. This difference was mostly apparent in the relationship between parents and their children. In the past, the child's identity was dependent on the identity of parents; now, the child was an independent entity in need of special support. Society came to believe that a significant part of its resources should be devoted to physical and mental development of children. Now, children were beings with the right to life and even parents could not impose beyond what it was considered their right. Say, childhood was rediscovered in the twentieth century.

Discourse of Sociology and Concept of Childhood

What has been said about children and childhood in a general classification belongs to pre-sociologic discourses.

Among theoretical approaches of childhood in the sociology, classification of Allison James et al provides a proper conceptual framework. They noted the sociological ideas of childhood:

1. **Socially constructed child:** This theory is exclusively hermeneutic and undermines the contractual standards of judgment and reality. In this theory, children are a completely unknown and undetectable ideal type and childhood periods are variable and targeted. In opposition to the pre-sociological models of childhood, this model provides no image of a universal child which can be used to start the process. Moreover, as the oppositions of social constructivists and positivist theories and approaches reveal, they are more likely to believe that children are not shaped by social and natural forces, but rather live in a world of meanings emerged by themselves and through their interaction with adult. In this model, children are located semantically, not causally.

Tribal child: In this theory, children's worlds are considered real situations as adults' worlds. The only thing required is that the children are understood on this basis. This theory embraces the targeted childhood which is surprising fact of anthropology and proposed by interpretive methodologies. Therefore, the tribal child is authoritarian and particularistic. Tribal child is autonomous, takes advantage of his individual will and comes to social spaces on a limited basis.

2. **The minority group child:** This theory assigns children to social position of a minority group; the theory both supports and questions the power relations between children and adults. In fact, the primary title of minority is a moral classification, rather than a demographic classification and implies the concept of victimization and relative powerlessness. The advantage of this theory is that it apparently devotes itself to the interests of the child; in other words, this theory is a sociology for children, not sociology of children.

Social-structural child: Theorists consider the children as a constant element of all social structures over time, rather than marginalized in the society. In this theory, it is believed that childhood is a universal phenomenon and child has a social identity. Childhood is not a historical invention. Thus, the child is considered as a unique unit of analysis and compared with other parts of the social system.

It is noteworthy that none of the four patterns provided by James et al is fully accepted by this study; however, a significant part of the foundations of this theory is supported by this study. The rest of the article will explain the position of the research on childhood.

Poststructuralist/Postcolonial Approach to Childhood

Is childhood colonized by adulthood?

The paradigm of James et al can be summarized in outlines of Chris Jenks as "a manifesto in childhood theory":

- 1) Childhood should be considered as a social construct.
- 2) Childhood is a variable for social analyses and cannot be completely separated from category, gender and tribe.
- 3) Social relations and culture of children should be independent of those of adult.
- 4) Children should be considered as active actors in their public life.
- 5) Ethnography is an effective method for studying childhood.

6) Childhood is a social phenomenon and the new paradigm of sociology of childhood is to respond to the stages of childhood (Imanian, 2006). Clearly, this manifesto which includes the most important foundations of modern approaches to childhood is a priori principles that humanities scholars appeal to approach childhood. This manifesto well describes the theoretical foundations of childhood and analyzes the concept of Copernicus rotation; this rotation is the distance from classical and ancient notions of childhood, which know the childhood a merely biological phenomenon, and modern paradigms which move the childhood from fatalistically biological concepts and recognize its socio-cultural and historical entity. However, this manifesto is a starting point, the only point of general principles which need attention regarding childhood. This study also believes in points made in this manifesto; however, this manifesto adamantly reproduces the dichotomy of adult/child, which they deny, by their structuralism. Assuming absolute power of adults, they consider children absolutely powerless and believe, as structuralism do, that subordinate is dominated by power. The point of separation from their manifesto is the point where post-structuralism separates structuralism. Among poststructuralists, Jacques Derrida and his views are considered for this study. The criticism of dualism is central in Derrida's work. He argues that the presence or identity can be built only by absence. Children are children because they are not adults, so their presence is unrealistic. Deconstructing these dual opposites, Derrida criticizes this view that identity and truth must necessarily be represented by their opposite (Ibid: 54). He believes that meaning is not inherent in the symbolic order, but consistently is produced through a process of hierarchical differentiation culturally and linguistically, creation and invention of differences which are certainly organized in the form of opposing pairs. Derrida shows how ideas are mixed with power and non-recognition of that power hides the hierarchy. Strategic eversion of the conventionally conceptual order by Derrida provides a critically tactic (Beasley, 2006). Therefore, the main theme of this study on childhood is a post-colonial position, which, as many theories including structuralism, does not know childhood as powerlessness, subordination, and absolutely constructed by adults, but deconstructs this dualism and put an end to absolute colonialism of adulthood.

Transition from Absolute Colonialism of Adulthood

Decolonization of the concept of childhood and adulthood as a border and ambivalent concept

Roderick Mc Gillis in his "Postcolonial Studies, Children and Literature" (1997) writes:

Children always been considered second-hand creatures; if we simply talk about them and their positions, an opposition emerges in the context of post-colonial area: post-colonialism and children. If post-colonialism is considered as a political, economic and cultural reality in the late twentieth century - as the freedom of outdated patriarchal tradition which denied the freedom of speech and movement of people -, children have been considerably deprived of the advantages of this approach (Mc Gillis, 1997).

This claim of Mc Gillis is an inevitable truth. Although children's right has long been the subject of many social scientists, children have been deprived of the services offered by post-colonial theory in the field of human sciences.

According to Gandhi (1998), post-colonial approach is a complex, yet powerful intellectual and critical movement which revitalizes the understanding of history, cultural studies, literary criticism and modern political economy (Ashcroft et al; 2000). In its abstract concept, post-colonialism challenges the European procedures which look at the world in a particular manner; this concept tries to create a mental space for subordinates. Colonialism and childhood are inextricably intertwined and used as a tool for interpretation of human life in its path to perfection and clarity (Nandi, 1984/2007). However, the reader may mistakenly interpret post-colonialism as a theoretical justification for anti-Western orientation and deny "structures" such as modern childhood or the rights of the child since they are assumed Western innovations, while it is not. Post-colonialism intends to challenge this dualistic black and white view. Orientation of Edward Wadie Said on postcolonial studies in "*Orientalism*" provides outlook to examine childhood as a colonized structure. Using Foucauldian concept of discourse and power, Said portrayed the ways by which Western colonial discourse created orientalism as a phenomenon (Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

The Foucauldian model of power is an enabling factor in the post-colonial studies. Foucault's model does not assume that the power is in the hands of one group against the weak group, but power is inherent in parties and certain discourse relations happen by power. Thus, while the children can be the object of powerlessness in adult discourse, yet they are the subject of the resistance against this movement. In this way, the position of this study is the gap between constructed and constructing child, a situation that can be called "duality" or "border". Foucauldian notion of power which seems not only suppressed but producing, allows victory on a problematic conflict: the contradiction between child that we talk for him and the controlling adult.

One of the theorists who help this study under influence of post-structuralism and a post-colonial discourse is Homi Bhabha. Unlike other post-colonial philosophers who believe that colonized is always another and the owner of no place can speak and introduce himself, interests and experiences to the colonizer, Homi Bhabha believes that there is a space in which the colonized can represent his interests and experiences in the form of concepts and vocabulary. In a different reading of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha finds the relationship between colonizer and the colonized much more complex, more meaningful and more ambiguous than Said in Orientalism and Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Shirzadi, 2009). Bhabha believes that the relationship between coloniser and the colonized is a bidirectional relationship. In other words, their relationship undergoes changes through which the bipolar thinking pales and the dividing line between masters and slaves, imperial and colonial, center and periphery disappears, and a third space emerges in which the interaction between them leads to the birth of a new identity. Homi Bhabha describes this identity which is a solution of one and another as ambivalent. Hybridity refers to the process of creating an identity which is neither of them; the identity which is born at the border of these two. Ashcroft et al (2000) express the same concept with other words; they call the ambivalent identity in cross-cultural forms which emerge in the process of colonization, in the contact area or the third space of Homi Bhabha (Atashi & Tavasoli, 2013).

The term ambivalent is originally a biologic term meaning a crossbred animal or plant. In the field of linguistics, the concept refers to a term half from one language and the other from the other. This term means combining two different types by binding them and creating a third kind (Patel, 2000). However, Homi Bhabha borrowed hybridity from Mikhail Bakhtin, who differentiated the texts with a single voice (lyrical poems) and the texts with dual voice (e.g., novels in which the narrator quotes of characters with their own voice; these texts are ambivalent) (Easthope, 1998)

Using the Foucauldian concept of power as repressive and fertile and the concept of duality and the third space of Homi Bhabha, we believe that childhood is necessarily constructed and constructing and the child is never the absolute construct of adulthood, but always there is possibility of resistance for subordinates (in this case children). Of course, there is no doubt that "psychology and science create children as objects of empire, who are defined, described, recognized and controlled" (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). However as Bhabha (1994) said, "This is the inside, the cutting edge of translation and negotiation and the space between that carries the meaning of culture."

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