Global South is a notion charged with multifaceted meanings. Geographically speaking, the Global South broadly identifies world regions such as Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania, which are situated outside of Europe and North America. Previously, those regions were designated as being part of the so-called Third World in opposition to the Western First World and the communist Soviet Union and its eastern European satellites (Second World). The countries under the umbrella of the Third World label were commonly described as underdeveloped, uneducated, and needy. Today, the Global South still identifies as low-income, less developed, and marginalized countries implying a condition of inferiority, dependence, and powerlessness vis-à-vis the rich developed and industrialized countries of the North. However, from a geopolitical viewpoint, the Global North and the Global South are a blurred binary. Countries like Brazil, China, and India, for example, that are located geographically in the Global South are engaged in economic development that makes them closer to the countries from the Global North. The children of these regions are often caught between an identity of being from the South and efforts on the part of development industries and humanitarian interventions which generally espouse and implement a Global North version of childhood as a normative ideal.

This entry discusses the various changing definitions of the Global South in relation to the Global North and how these notions relate to interdisciplinary understandings of what may be called Global South childhoods and the challenges posed to these childhoods moving forward.

The Global North/Global South Binary

Over the years, the binary of Global North/Global South has become a conceptual tool for detecting economic inequalities and dependency relationships between northern and southern countries and for making these inequalities and relationships appear to be essentialized qualities of the people in question, including children. The latter have mostly experienced colonial rule from Western imperial powers that is now translated as struggles with ongoing economic dependency, exploitation, and poverty, as well as struggles with the cultural hegemony often referred to as a postcolonial society. As such, the term Global South connotes struggles between two opposite worlds: (1) the colonial imperialist Global North and (2) the decolonized, subaltern, emancipatory South.

In this context, the social and economic development of the Global South depends mostly on foreign—namely Western—humanitarian aid through the action of a global civil society, including international nongovernmental organizations and agencies. Functioning as civilizing institutions, these organizations operate in the Global South supported by a number of international human rights codes and declarations (for instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) with the aim to disseminate and to enforce internationally defined universal standards of human rights, including children's rights. Through their humanitarian and development programs, international nongovernmental organizations and agencies export a rights-based development rhetoric that also embraces the criteria for assessing a good and normal childhood. They are conducive to globally expanding a particular dominant notion of childhood highlighting the innocence and distinctive nature of children, their vulnerability and dependency, lack of maturity, and need of protection, with the direct consequent universalization of the Western concept of childhood.

However, this notion of childhood, itself being subject to global expansion, does not necessarily correspond to local representations and experiences of childhood and children in non-Western countries, since it often tends to normalize the childhood of the Global North as an aspirational ideal and that of the South as infantilized and undesirable. Presuming that the global notion of a particular version of childhood expands globally to address or cover most conceptions of children tends to render the lived, local experiences of children and adults as abstract and decontextualized. Consequently, the Global South child appears as Other—as deviant, abnormal and improper—and consequently in need of assistance so as to be neutralized and to conform with the mainstream notion of childhood.
The various forms of childhood actually existing and being lived in the South threaten the notion that a singular, generic *globalized childhood* is a possibility or even desirable. Some children’s experiences in the Global South, such as child labor and child violence, challenge the Western model of a presumably sheltered, innocent childhood despite the fact that such experiences can be found in different parts of the Global North. Such is the hegemony of the dominant ideology and imagery concerning the South. While these conceptions recognize the inadequacy of the normative ideal represented by a Global North version of childhood as itself a kind of ongoing cultural colonialism, they also emphasize the accuracy in speaking of *childhoods* in the plural rather than *childhood* in the singular.

**Global South Childhoods Caught in a Northern, Normative Ideal**

In the 1990s, the emerging social studies of childhood provided a new paradigm, offering alternative conceptualizations for studying children and childhood around the world. One of the key tenets of the paradigm concerns the notion of childhood. Childhood is understood as a social construction that appears as a specific structural and cultural component within different societies. This means that there exist a number of childhoods that vary across time and place and not a single and universal childhood. Another essential feature of the emergent paradigm regards children. They are studied as social agents, active in the construction of their own social lives and those around them, in micro- as well as macro-social contexts. Through its emergent paradigm, the new social studies of childhood has furnished theoretical constructive critiques of dominant discourses and challenged hegemonic representations of childhood. In doing so, they have influenced interdisciplinary research on childhood and children in the Global South.

Geographical studies, for example, turned their attention to childhood and children’s lives in southern countries in the late 1990s. Perhaps their most fruitful contribution to the development of childhood studies has been to highlight the *importance of place*. By exploring childhood and children’s everyday lives in local contexts within the Global South, geographers have countered the dangers of ethnocentrism and demonstrated the truthfulness of the principle according to which childhood is constructed in different ways in different times and places. They hence proved that what is generally considered as a *normal* childhood can be far from normal in other cultural, political, and social contexts.

In practice, taking into account *place* in the analysis of children’s lives and childhood permits that the same topics addressed in the North and the South reveal different understandings of childhoods. The caring experience of children and young people illustrates this assumption. Children caring for others (ill or disabled parents, for instance) in the North often stands in tension with the conception of the child who is supposed to be free of obligation, concentrating on play, schooling, and *development*, generally speaking. Abundant evidence shows that many children in the Global North undertake such familiar caring duties. However, the cultural valuation of the activities and of the childhoods in question leaves little doubt that being a young care provider in the South is instead seen as a special experience which positively impacts their maturation process and sense of accountability but negatively impacts their education opportunities.

Southern children’s actions and lifeworlds, in this way, challenge Western dominant discourses regarding passivity, immaturity, and dependency on adults. Their day-to-day lived experiences in southern contexts reiterate the necessity to deconstruct childhood as something crafted by the Western-oriented development industry and humanitarian interventions in the Global South. Indeed, through practices and discourses, international development and humanitarian efforts tend to deploy a similar approach to childhood, one that leads to formulation of a particular narrative of childhood and to create a specific children’s category. Childhood becomes a stage of life mainly characterized by vulnerability, needs, and victimhood. As for children, their *natural* vulnerability infantilizes them, depriving their actions of any impact on their own lives and on people around them.
This way of conceiving childhood and children serves only to reinforce the legitimacy of humanitarian and development interventions in support of those who are considered the most vulnerable, such as children in the Global South. The downside of the development and humanitarian policy with their regard is the tendency to advertise images of children depicted as disadvantaged and unfortunate victims in need of interventions. Through a process of commodification, the aim of marketing this stereotyped model of children in need is clear: appealing to consumer audiences’ (i.e., donors, volunteers, organizations) emotional awareness in order to benefit from their generosity and increasing fund-raising campaigns for the development and humanitarian factory.

Some authors explain this misrepresentation of children and childhood in the Global South through postcolonial theories that underline colonial, paternalist trends that are often employed to epitomize the Global North as an adult-Northerner versus an infantilized South in need of northern aid. These theories question the well-established knowledge about the Western modern discovery of childhood or children’s rights, criticizing their universalized approach and contextualizing them. Applied concretely in fields such as child protection, the contextualization highlights the necessity to extend the protection of children’s rights in every country around the world—whether it is in the North or in the South—and to adjust them to needs and situations peculiar to each culture. While the contextualization approach helps to understand children in their own context and to recognize their participation in their everyday experiences, the further benefit of this approach is to acknowledge that southern children are not a homogeneous group and that other childhoods exist in different places, including the regions of the Global South.

Challenges of Childhoods in the Global South

Even though childhoods in the Global South raise many challenges, focusing here on some of them permits the recognition of further steps that may be helpful for addressing southern childhoods appropriately in respect to their distinct features.

It has now become urgent to analyze the world in terms other than those employed so far, particularly through the dualistic lens of a developed and rich Global North versus an underdeveloped and poor Global South. Such a dualistic conception of the world tends to highlight the differences between and within the dichotomous global parts of the world and, in so doing, underestimates the endless connections—increasingly intensified by the globalization phenomenon—existing among many from one side of the globe to another and from a global to a local context. When childhood is analyzed in respect of glocalized processes that inevitably impinge on children’s lives, whether they are in the Global South or the Global North, then commonalities of childhoods’ experiences emerge in both the world areas. This does not imply a plea for a standardized and universal childhood. Rather, while differences inevitably exist in being a child in the North or in the South—as well as differences within the North and within the South—they should be interpreted according to cultural, social, political, or economic criteria regardless of living in or belonging to the North or the South.

In this regard, a number of authors remind us of the imperative to conceive of childhoods beyond the strictures of a North/South divide that inevitably lead to an asymmetric positioning of one against the other and hence an inappropriate and discriminatory way of thinking in terms of us and them. The interconnections of a wider range of variables such as social relations, cultural heritage, historical paths, and political and economic changes at micro- and macro-scales are taken into consideration in the efforts to study childhoods beyond those binary terms. On one hand, these interconnections disclose the complexities of children’s experiences and their everyday practices in local contexts; on the other hand, they prove how historical and global processes such as colonialism, migration, and wars similarly affected children’s lives in diverse contexts. Therefore, an integrated and relational approach to childhood helps to seize the wholeness of childhoods’ experiences and to situate them contextually and historically.
This approach also permits one to take on another challenge of childhoods in the Global South, namely the assumption that a number of existing topics and problems lie exclusively at the feet of the Global South. Many issues, such as interconnections between poverty and childhood; work and childhood; and war, militarism, and childhood, seem to be topics predominantly focused on children in the Global South. Exploring childhood in southern contexts mainly through these problems leads to the construction of particular types of southern children as being out of place—such as working children, child soldiers, street children, and trafficked children. Children in and of the South appear and reappear repeatedly as victimized, disadvantaged, and vulnerable, resulting in the eclipse of children’s competence and active roles in the processes of social change, conflict resolution, peace-building, political participation, economic development, and decision making.

In order to counterbalance this trend, authors endeavor to demonstrate the nonspecificity of those themes of southern childhoods by recognizing that children in (post)industrial and rich societies from the Global North might meet with similar struggles and challenges. For instance, even though children’s militarization is an issue mainly addressed in the southern context, Marshall Beier stresses the point that focusing exclusively on militarized children in the Global South is a way to pathologize it and its childhoods and to distract from the current militarization of childhoods in the Global North.

See also Children and International Development; Global North Childhoods; Globalization of Childhood; Post-colonial Childhoods; Universalization of Childhood

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http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529714388.n312
10.4135/9781529714388.n312


