

## Child as method: A device to read the geopolitics of childhood

Erica Burman<sup>1</sup>

Received: 10th November 2022 / Accepted: 25th January 2023 / [OPR](#)

**Abstract.** Child as method is an analytical approach addressing socio-political practices focusing on the positioning accorded the child/children that highlights the necessary intersections between political economies of childhood with geopolitical dynamics, while countering normalized and hegemonic functions (of abstraction and individualization) typically enacted by figurations of the child/childhood. It is presented as a creative transformation of Chen's (2010) *Asia as method*, engaging Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) *Border as method* as well as feminist, specifically intersectionality, theory. The status of 'method' in child as method, is considered, alongside its potential contribution to childhood studies and social theory as a psychosocial counter to dominant technologies attending childhood.

**Keywords:** Asia as method; border studies; feminist theory; migration studies; postcolonial studies.

## [es] 'El niño como método': Un dispositivo para el análisis de las geopolíticas de la infancia

**Resumen.** 'El niño como método' es un recurso analítico que toma al/la niño-a/los-as niños-as como punto de encuentro o nodo de una serie de una serie de prácticas políticas, económicas y geopolíticas, para contrarrestar la abstracción e individualización inherentes a las representaciones hegemónicas de 'el niño' y la infancia. El dispositivo 'niño como método' se inspira en una interpretación particular de los libros *Asia as method* (Chen, 2010) y *La frontera como método* (Mezzadra y Neilson, 2013/2017), al igual que en la teoría feminista, en particular, la interseccionalidad. La condición de 'método' de este recurso analítico, además de su posible aportación a los estudios de la infancia y la teoría social, permite articular una respuesta psicosocial a las tecnologías dominantes interesadas en la infancia.

**Palabras clave:** Asia como método; estudios fronterizos; estudios sobre migración; estudios postcoloniales; teoría feminista.

**Table of Contents.** 1. Introduction. 2. Resources informing child as method. 3. A method? 4. Final Comments. 5. References.

**How to cite:** Burman, Erica (2023). Child as method: A device to read the geopolitics of childhood. *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, 20(2), 243-250. <https://doi.org/10.5209/tekn.84628>

### 1. Introduction

'Child as method' (hereafter used without quotation marks) is an analytical approach that addresses socio-political practices focusing on the positioning accorded the child/children. While it shares features with other critical approaches currently informing childhood studies and social theory, it arises from and has a specific engagement with transnational and postcolonial studies. Further, it is informed by feminist and psychosocial commitments foregrounding materialist models of subjectivity and emotions as necessary for a politics of social transformation. A guiding concern is to counter the widespread cultural practice of abstracting children from wider cultural-political contexts and dynamics. This abstraction both individualises social conditions, and also warrants the spurious globalization of culturally and

historically particular modes of childhood. Focused on children and childhoods, this approach is oriented both to situating these within wider socio-political relations and to explore how this also intervenes in and contributes to the social and human sciences.

A key starting point for child as method is the understanding that constructions of childhood, including those attending the figure of 'child', function to produce and constrain those forms of childhood that individual children live and practice. The absence of either definite ('the') or indefinite article ('a') qualifying 'child' reflects the problems that each qualification poses - of both normalisation and differentiation. For as soon as child is qualified as 'the' or 'a', the question immediately arises: which child, from what context/time/class/gender etc? The discipline of childhood studies speaks to and of many other meanings childhood

<sup>1</sup> University of Manchester (United Kingdom)  
E-mail: [erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2504-5120>

carries, including other designations beyond minority status such as cultural minoritisation/marginalisation. This includes as a subcultural group rather than being defined only by developmental or legal models relying on (contestable) notions of capacity or competence. These diverse meanings reflect distinct cultural histories and corresponding philosophical positions, and they function far beyond (albeit also impacting very significantly on) the lives of specific historical and embodied children. Yet, as is widely acknowledged, using the plural form, ‘children’, ushers in further difficulties, since it risks subordinating specificities and diversities to an implied generality or commonality associated with the collective noun, again returning the analysis of children’s lives to a spuriously universalised account (Hanson et al., 2018).

Child as method is therefore concerned with the positions produced for and about children, and how children engage with these positions. But it is equally concerned with the consequences of such constructions for others mobilised and organised by and through childhood, including adults; and the other roles and identities with which children and childhood are interwoven and enmeshed. Attending to these positions necessarily includes critical reflexivity or what some have called critical diffraction as part of the ethical-political framing of the project.

While the status of ‘method’ will be considered later, here the work done by the preposition ‘as’ must be noted. Connecting ‘child’ and ‘method’ with ‘as’ indicates a relationship between the two terms (‘child’ and ‘method’) that does not imply an identification between them. This immediately invites consideration of what is included and excluded in the alignments or juxtapositions of terms implied, including questions of recognition, misrecognition and corresponding symbolic violence perpetrated, while it also topicalises how the viewing position from which such alignments are made are necessarily involved, implicated or entangled.

Acknowledging the socio-political conditions for the constitution and performance of childhoods should not be read as meaning that such constructions directly or completely determine those childhoods. Far from disallowing children’s agentic activity, attending to the modes of childhood available within specific cultural-political contexts invites attention to how children navigate and negotiate these, and acknowledges their necessary engagement with these. Psychotechnologies of childhood clearly inform and regulate children as well as other parties around them, iteratively and interactively. Similarly, conceptual questions around the status of children’s perspectives or ‘experiences’ while clearly important, are here temporarily displaced in favour of an analytic focus addressing how these connect with and are constituted in relation to specific material and relational conditions. However, as will be further discussed below, child as method, is not a meta-theory, but rather a research analytic aiming to formulate innovative inquiries for, about, and with

children, also including the study of cultural artefacts of and about childhood.

## 2. Resources informing child as method

Two specific conceptual resources inform the project of child as method, as I have come to understand it. These are: Kuan-Hsing Chen’s (2010) *Asia as method* and Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson’s (2013) *Border as method*. As I discuss below, the third resource—intersectionality theory—is best understood as a set of debates that figure within and traverse these two books, alongside their corresponding disciplines, but which (in my view) also requires further emphasis. Hence, I outline key points about each resource and its relevance for child as method in turn. In keeping with the proposed ‘off-disciplinary’ approach, these three resources should be read as working in mutual tension, as well as potentially deepening each other’s analyses through their mutual encounters.

### 2.1 Asia as method

Kuan-Hsing Chen’s (2010) influential text *Asia as method* sets out an agenda for decoupling cultural studies from orientalist and colonial imaginaries and practices. Tracing intellectual and political contributions from Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Edward Said, Stuart Hall among others, Chen argues for a geo-materialist analysis (that is, a cultural-economic analysis sensitive to local/global politics and relations) comprising three aspects: decolonisation (considered as a political moment or event); de-imperialisation (addressing affective investments and desires on the part of both the coloniser and the colonised); and de-Cold War (considering this as a key global dynamic that has configured, and continues to configure, local, regional and transnational relations).

*Asia as method* evaluates the current state of postcolonial cultural studies, addressing the problem of the continuing orientation towards colonial centres that, whether favourable or hostile, still maintains their structuring influence. It analyses ‘Asia’ as an imaginary space but also discusses the complex and contested historical and current relationships between the different countries comprising contemporary Asia. Chen’s analysis wards off essentialised readings of both colonial and pre-colonial/‘indigenous’ cultural practices. *Asia as method* engages discussions about the status of modernity, challenging its alignment with westernisation or the Euro-US. His treatment corresponds with recent calls for connected sociologies, rather than analyses subscribing to multiple modernities that neglect continuing global inequalities arising from colonialism (Bhambra, 2014).

What I am here calling child as method is a creative transformation of *Asia as method*, rather than an application of it, as Chen’s project and agendas and disciplinary address are clearly different. Rather, child as method arises from a resonant reading of *Asia as Method*, to envisage convergent preoccupations with

decolonisation and materialist approaches 'as applied to' childhood studies.

Chen's analysis can be read as connecting with key debates about how conceptions of childhood, and children themselves, relate in complicated ways with histories of colonialism, as also the ways children and childhood are enlisted into (neo-colonial) development projects. It is important to de-naturalise the 'social investment' and human capital models now informing international development policies (whether of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organisation, or indeed of UNICEF and UNDP), whereby children as well as women are focused upon as the primary material for social and economic development.

Appropriating and reformulating Chen's arguments, child as method takes as its topic the problematic of the decolonization of childhood. Clearly an exact application to the domain of childhood would be both impossible and undesirable, the latter because it would imply precisely the kind of recruitment and elision between child, nation and transnational relations that needs to be dismantled. Yet child and childhood clearly figure as imaginary spaces, and approaches enabling disorient(alisation), or destabilisation of these from their Euro-US cultural-historical anchors are needed (see also Rollo, 2018, 2023).

Alongside these, child as method engages two key points: focusing on specific cultural-historical moments and the interests, relationships and affective investments of the diverse and multiple actors and agents involved. While these points resonate with current posthuman-influenced accounts, it attempts to resist the abstraction and corresponding neo-colonial impulses that these risk by the explicit origination within and alignment with postcolonial theory.

At least three relevant points for child as method arise from Chen's treatment. First, questions of subjectivity as well as structural positioning and specific geopolitical relations come to the fore. Chen draws on the work of the revolutionary psychiatrist Frantz Fanon as a key critical source to enable the grounding of subjectivity and change within political conditions, specifically considering experiences of racialisation under colonial conditions in relation to political transformation. A second issue addresses the problematic trope equating childhood with colonisation, notwithstanding some alignment of positioning of colonised peoples with children through common practices of disempowerment and minority status. Thirdly, countering the methodological nationalism of many current analyses in social theory and cultural studies, Chen highlights longstanding mutual and mutually constitutive influences between national contexts.

Rather than only being concerned with critique, Chen moves on to advocate specific interventions, including what he calls 'inter-referencing'. This is a practice of re-orienting focus away from traditional sources of power/knowledge (originating from Europe or North America) to attend to local and regional relations and noticing new 'syncretic' practices combining the old and

new, or traditional/indigenous and modern/'Western', as indicative of critical and emergent new modalities.

Three points are noteworthy. Firstly, while the dis-investment from the primary colonial relation advocated by Chen invites engagement with cultural and geographical neighbours, these proximal relations are acknowledged as also having been colonial and often hostile. Hence addressing historical grievances and building regional alliances is a significant and challenging political project, even if some such divisions were precisely those manufactured by European colonial powers. This can be seen as politically relevant to considering the practical alliances that need to be forged not only across modes of childhood that are privileged and marginalised, but also alongside, across, between and within differently positioned children and adults.

A second point is Chen's reformulation of the notion of 'syncretism'. While this has long been a core concept in cultural and colonial studies, understood as a blending of practices especially evident in colonised contexts, Chen revisits and deepens its analysis to make it a mode of subjectivity that is both resolutely anti-essentialist and also conscious. His detailed analyses show how hybrids, blends, and reformulations of cultural and political practices, between and across states, have always and will always take place, so enriching discussions of local/global dynamics.

Resonant analyses within childhood and educational studies can be seen with the current attention to and diverse cultural reformulations of sociocultural (Vygotskian) theory (Burman, 2019a). Not only is sociocultural theory an increasingly influential model within childhood and educational studies, but that is also based on sociomaterialist premises of subjective construction and configuration (González Rey, 2014). As an approach formulated from revolutionary Russia, its intellectual trajectory can be read as an exemplification of Chen's problematic of both the Cold War and the need to De-Cold War (Yasnitsky and Van der Veer, 2016). (As one reviewer has noted, we might also call this approach 'revolution as method').

Thirdly, drawing on these ideas, Chen instead argues for attending to how cultural practices are forged through and as responses to current conditions and then become recognised through prevailing histories of the present. Such nuanced and critical accounts of cultural studies practices clearly also apply to childhood studies, enabling clearer analyses of the claims to be made for and about cultural forms of childhood as also practiced by children, as studies of children's consumption and the gender reinscriptions and exploitations performed by children's digital labour so clearly indicate (Gill-Peterson, 2015).

## 2.2 Border as method

A second, related, resource inspiring child as method is Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's (2013) *Border as method*. This book is an intervention in and from geography and development studies that focuses specifically on migration and labour. Their key claim is



that borders include as well as exclude, and so demand study of the specific and active forms of inclusion/exclusion they produce. By focusing on the figure of the migrant, Mezzadra and Neilson's project is to deepen Marxist analyses of dispossession and exploitation beyond the too generalised notions of 'neoliberalism' and 'globalisation'. Marginal labour—'outsourced', mobile, informal, insecure, unregulated, and low paid, precisely because it traverses the production/reproduction binary—is what capital increasingly relies upon for its extraction of surplus value. Significantly, like Chen, they do not discuss children and childhood.

Of particular interest is what Mezzadra and Neilson identify as forms of 'differential' or 'relative inclusion' produced through borders (seen as not only national, and indeed not only physical, but also cultural and affective). Taking up this point for a childhood-oriented perspective, it could be argued that, like migrants, children are not only 'excluded' from practices that shape their lives. Because this exclusion is both economically productive (in the service of global capitalism), it also produces particular forms of participation (for some actors, if not for the excluded). Hence, precisely by virtue of their exclusion, the excluded become «...central protagonists in the drama of composing the space, time and materiality of the social itself» (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 159). Developing this argument in relation to children and childhood studies invites research agendas exploring not only how, for example, children produce work for adults (as teachers, carers, social workers etc.), but also how the divisions and distinctions between adult and child, specifically those which exclude children from this, thereby configure the construction of what the social is and does. That is, it enables a perspective that not only analyses the consequences of such political economic positioning for children, but also how this works to constitute that social, whether they are seen as participants in this or as excluded from it.

Similar to Chen's analysis of syncretism, Mezzadra and Neilson's formulation of differential inclusion draws attention to its distributed and locally navigated, and so variable, practice. From case studies across many national contexts, they highlight how, under globalised and multi-national capitalism, governmental powers are devolved across and between nation states such that local non-governmental organisations may be delegated to assume governmental authorities, so complicating how national international policies are enacted (whether enforced or resisted). This analysis of contradictions and divisions in action helps to disrupt too easy or unambiguous designations as might be seen within adult-child binaries, instead inviting close attention to where, when, and how such inclusions, exclusions and migrations between categories occur.

Borrowing tools and analyses across disciplines is fruitful. Social geographers and critical psychologists are now attending to how the dominant developmental lexicon of individual and child development mobilises quasi geographical metaphors (of journey, migration, transition across borders etc.). The naturalisation and corresponding abstraction of these metaphors from

socio-political conditions works to recast these as norms that then become mobilised as standards (Coons, 2014). A geographical reading of these terms enables a more situated, relational, and embodied analysis that can resist individualisation and psychologization (Gordo and De Vos, 2010; De Vos, 2015). These two inter-related dynamics (individualisation and psychologisation) work to strip away the socio-political from the interpretation of inequalities. In policy terms, this concentrate focus on individuals, families and communities as the site for (ever earlier) intervention and change and also thereby occluding the role state and wider agencies in producing those inequalities (e.g. Millei and Joronen, 2016). Instead attending closely to spaces and contexts in which such norms and practices emerge and are practiced enables the socio-political configuring of the conditions of, and for, activities to be documented.

A key strategy to resist teleological readings of childhood as mere preparation for adulthood has been to attend to the journey, rather than the destination, while also indicating multiple and non-progressive trajectories that can be identified at larger spatio-temporal scales (O'Dell et al., 2017), including enabling more agentic as well as interdependent readings of these (Holt, 2013). The relevance of *Border as method* to child as method, however, is not simply to transpose the standpoint and trajectory of the figure of the migrant to the embodied chronological developmental journeying of children. Doing this would miss the point of both ventures, which instead is concerned with showing how these (in some respects equivalent, but distinct) marginal subjects of economic and social development in fact 'constitute by their very deviation' those very norms to which they are so—in some cases devastatingly—subject.

Further, re-tracing the spatial turn in social theory, Mezzadra and Neilson's call to consider temporal as well as spatial features as necessary to understanding the complex and shifting subjectivities at play speaks to the transitional and complex embodied- historical dis/continuities inhabited by children (as also adults who were once children), while attending to (what they call) 'borderscapes' as well as border crossings as multiply encountered (including as 'subjects in transit') also deepens analysis of children's lives. Even though, astonishingly - given children's social necessary role in production, especially in (what is often inadequately called, notwithstanding the many Norths within the South and vice versa) the Global South, the relative youth (demographically-speaking) of the Global South for significant reasons), and perhaps especially the key role of transnational apparatuses of migration regulation and control constellated around children (Christinaki 2022)—Mezzadra and Neilson say almost nothing about children and childhood. Nevertheless, this text can be seen to be relevant to considerations of childhood, inviting a deeper social and materialist analysis not only of the ways national borders mark children and childhoods but also of the complex and specific local, as well as global, dynamics produced by these transnational economic processes.

### 2.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory forms a third key resource for child as method. This distinctive contribution from feminist theory arises from Black, Indigenous, Latina and Asian feminist activism from the 1970s onwards (Combahee River Collective, 1981) as a way of acknowledging the mutually constitutive but spatio-temporally (cultural-historical and politically) complex relations between key statuses or positions that produce and structure each other, such that gender (for example) cannot be considered except in its mutually constitutive relation to 'race', class, (dis)ability or sexuality (for example).

Among the many resources intersectionality theory brings to childhood studies, and so also child as method, is not only an attention to the mutually interwoven, relational and socio-structurally situated character of children's diverse sexed, gendered, classed, racialised, (dis)able-bodied and geographical positionings (to name just a few relevant possible axes) that frequently modulate and moderate generational orders and status. The incorporation of intersectionality approaches into institutions, across disciplines and within transnational discourse offers an example of how a civil rights issue has been taken up within human rights policies. A further insight is that, depending on the specific context or encounter, these intersecting positions may become more salient in determining children's actions, interactions and indeed treatment by others beyond (but also in relation to) than their childhood status. Not only does such feminist theory, arising from critiques and debates formulated by Black women and women of colour, prefigure the wider attention to border theory and theory from the margins, it also carries implications for knowledge claims (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). Specifically, along with other feminist theories, what is highlighted here is how knowledge –including that of the researcher –is necessarily situated and perspectival, which carries implications for the conduct as well as interpretation of research.

Debates continue over the status of intersectionality as a theory or an approach to other theories. These include, first, whether it is a methodology (Nash 2008), and, secondly, if so, how (Winker and Degele, 2011); third, whether it can be used only to challenge inequalities, or, fourth, whether it escapes—and even should escape—the trappings of identity politics (focused initially on black women) whose philosophical and political limitations (solipsism and hierarchies of oppression, respectively) had in part generated the need for it in the first place (Cho et al., 2013). Further discussions concern, fifth, whether its origins in a standpoint epistemology favours structure over experience (or felt identifications), or vice versa. In my view, valuable as these discussions have been to clarify the status and uses of intersectionality approaches, they largely miss the point that what makes an analysis intersectional is how it is used or put to work. It is both a critical inquiry and a critical praxis (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016), combining both theory and action (Grzanka 2020).

The explicit marking of intersectionality theory as arising from black feminisms usefully foregrounds questions of racialisation and colonialism in ways that preceded the preoccupation with differential claims and entitlements to citizenship, rights and mobility of *Asia as method* and *Border as method*. Not only does such feminist theory prefigure the wider attention to border theory and theory from the margins, but it also carries implications for knowledge claims. Specifically, along with other feminist theories, what is highlighted here is how knowledge—including that of the researcher—is necessarily situated and perspectival, which carries implications for the conduct as well as interpretation of research.

There are four reasons to include intersectionality theory as a key resource for child as method. Firstly, as a specifically identified feminist intervention in social (and human) science discourse since feminist contributions are too often relegated as derivative or subsidiary to other 'grander narratives'. Its knowledge claims also chime with recent calls for modest or immature theory, both in relation to childhood studies (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Kraftl, 2020) and elsewhere (Haraway, 1997). Secondly, the focus in intersectionality theory on relationality, interdependency and the necessary and constitutive relationships between structural positioning and subjectivity (however configured) bridge appropriations of Marxist theories of praxis and consciousness with more recent feminist engagements with performance and performativity (Butler, 1990). Thirdly, there is a corresponding focus on the role of power relations in constituting and constraining how and which axes of subjectivity and positioning acquire their salience. Finally, as already indicated, intersectionality is explicitly referenced and mobilised in both *Asia as method* and *Border as method* (perhaps as one way of marking alignment with feminist approaches generally).

### 3. A method?

Like *Asia as method*, and *Border as method*, child as method is informed by post-structuralist, specifically Foucauldian frameworks, feminist debates on intersectionality, and social psychoanalytic perspectives. Corresponding with these, then, method is understood not a matter of technical procedure, but rather an 'epistemic angle' or 'narrative imaginary' (Park, 2016). This is a conceptual intervention to enable the posing of more interesting and engaged questions that can better address the cultural-political complexities and fluidities of children's positions and lives. Child as method is less a technical or procedural method, then, than research analytic or set of epistemological commitments. As a technocultural device, it takes child as a nodal point in a set of practices, social relationships, and institutional arrangements as a way of reading cultural-political practices, including academic practices. While not committed to any specific model or theory of childhood, child as method aims to support the generation of

ethically-politically engaged and theory-developing, as well as theory-driven, empirical research.

Such conjoint perspectives-across *Asia as method*, *Border as method* and intersectionality theory clearly invite critique of prevailing models of research, and corresponding techniques and practices, as (at least) complicit with colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy. Feminist and decolonisation research approaches also refuse the separation between theory and method, as between methodology and method, advocating for an activist, ethical-political responsibility and engagement that transcends research technologies or paradigms (Takayama et al., 2015). Further, feminist researchers have long argued that what counts as knowledge, and how it is received and interpreted, reflects how, where, when and by whom it was generated. Thus, ontological questions about the perspective and status of the knowledge-generator enter into the epistemological status of the knowledge that is generated in ways that can be embraced and actively harnessed, rather than obscured.

I see child as method as drawing on these conceptual interventions to enable the posing of more interesting questions that better engage with the cultural-political complexities, diversities and fluidities of children's positions and lives. Like 'southern theory' (Connell, 2014), its epistemological commitments aim to generate new research agendas. As Mezzadra and Neilson, put it, «provid[ing] productive insights on the tensions and conflicts that blur the line between inclusion and exclusion, as well as on the profoundly changing code of social inclusion in the present» (p. 6).

Nevertheless, as would be expected from a specific epistemological stance, some methodological considerations follow. Chen's (2010) 'inter-referencing' could be applied to describe the decoupling forms of childhood away from the normalising teleology of (rich, northern, advanced capitalist) models of development, to focus instead on the local relations (both crossovers and frictions) between various (spatially or temporally distinct) competing and consecutive practices of childhood. This would be consistent with Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) call to move research agendas away from comparative studies (or what used to be called 'area' studies) to undertake transnational analysis that instead, drawing on their notion of differential inclusion, attend to «resonances and dissonances produced by the encounters and clashes between concepts and a materiality that can be very distant from the one within which they were originally formulated» (p. 8).

Recent sociology of education literature has mobilised equivalent arguments, motivating for a move away from comparative educational studies towards transnational studies (Takayama et al., 2017), in particular highlighting the covert nationalist and statist politics presumed by prevailing cross-national educational comparison instruments, and identifying how this suppresses attention to global processes maintaining and reproducing local and regional inequalities, and environmental pressures (Shahjahan et al., 2017). Moreover, a recent fruitful line of critical

childhood and educational research is precisely exploring the ways nation states have historically produced, and still currently produce, specific narratives of childhood (Millei and Imre, 2016).

Together, these resources displace focus on origins in favour of encounters, meetings, crossings, and crossovers, which offer helpful concepts for framing critical childhood inquiries. As research analytic, then, far from method not being a concern of child as method, the aim is to foster and bring into dialogue diverse, innovative and creative research approaches in the service of documenting how child/childhood/children are understood, and the institutional practices that surround them, across a range of geopolitical and disciplinary arenas. Importantly, though, the process of documenting goes beyond one of description to bring under critical scrutiny the ethical-political practices involved in the crafting, interpretation, application, and reception of the material.

Whilst maintaining a role for the empirical, then, the emerging model of research is far from traditional scientific and even social science approaches, whether experimental approaches concerned with prediction, manipulation of variables and refutation of hypotheses, or even ethnographic stances that merely describe and do not seek to alter or change what they record. As with *Asia as method*, and *Border as method*, I see child as method as allied to activist approaches to research, that understand research as a set of socially negotiated and co-enacted practices conducted in solidarity with, and often co-produced with, marginalised and oppressed groups. The aim is to make possible some change, even if this change is—in the first instance—at the level of conceptualisation, alongside an epistemological commitment to attend closely to lived experiences and perspectives of those most affected. Clearly how such documents (whether of experience or of other kinds) are generated and interpreted would depend on the specific topic and focus.

#### 4. Final comments

In this article I have outlined the rationale and conceptual resources informing an approach I have called child as method, as a contribution to debates about the status of child/childhood within social practices and relations. This is an evolving approach to inspire and connect inquiries across disciplinary debates, rather than a dogmatic or complete model. While readers may consider that such sentiments and questions have long been engaged with, what is perhaps distinctive is the analytical framing highlighting the necessary intersections between the political economy of childhood with geopolitical dynamics. Such dynamics, local and global, must figure as part of wider postcolonial, anticapitalist initiatives, wherein children should figure as more than policy or theory tropes.

Notwithstanding the almost total absence of children and childhood in both *Asia as method* and *Border as method* (the latter especially striking considering



its focus on labour), child as method mobilises these critical frameworks not simply in the service of cross-disciplinary conversation with cultural studies, postcolonial studies or migration studies, nor as direct equivalent of those, but rather as a syncretic emergence from common problems and resources that aims for mutual engagement, rather than mere application. My claims for child as method, therefore, are not of originality—as this would in any case run counter to its commitments to the socio-political, relational, and material politics of knowledge-generation. Rather, the aim is to crystallize emerging analytical concerns already underway to enable further conceptual and practical inquiries both to engage with, and intervene in, current debates in cultural and social theory.

As research analytic, rather than model, the precise form child as method takes is necessarily oriented to the specific domain and intervention undertaken. However, there are clear possibilities for elaborating it in relation to

various arenas of cultural production involving children, including representations of, and activities with and by children. In addition to explicating child as method as a way of reading educational practices as well as a way of reading sociocultural theory (Burman, 2019a), it has been used as an explicit framework for a critical reading of the writings of Fanon (Burman, 2019b). Currently I am developing it as an intergenerational participatory narrative methodology appropriating the art practice of ‘found objects’ to analyse forms and spaces of ‘found childhood’ (Burman, 2022c), while other researchers have used it as an analytical frame for ethnographic (including autobiographical) memories of (post)socialist childhoods (Millei et al., 2018; Burman and Millei, 2022), and as a means of reading the gendered and neo-colonial dynamics recapitulated through British child protection policy guidance on transgender recognition (Cassal, in progress). Child as method, then, aims to bring childhood as a central analytic into the analysis of the social.

## 5. References

- Bhambra, Gurminder K. (2014). Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues. *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2), 115-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966414>
- Burman, Erica (2018). Brexit, ‘child as method’, and the pedagogy of failure: How discourses of childhood structure the resistance of racist discourse to analysis. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 40(2), 119-143. <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/32eIRUMCuMXdrvDTSnGX/full>
- Burman, Erica (2019a). Child as method: Anticolonial implications for educational research, *International Studies in the Sociology of Education* 28(1), 4-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2017.1412266>
- Burman, Erica (2019b). *Fanon, education, action: Child as method*. Routledge.
- Burman, Erica (2022a). Child as method and/as childism: Conceptual-political intersections and tensions. *Children & Society*, 00, 1-16. <http://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12615>
- Burman, Erica (2022b). Child as method as a resource to interrogate crises, antagonisms and agencies, *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, 22(4), 1314-1328. <https://doi.org/10.12957/epp.2022.71744>
- Burman, Erica (2022c). Found childhood as a practice of child as method, *Children's Geographies*, 20(3), 271-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1566518>
- Burman, Erica and Millei, Zsuzsa (2022). Post-socialist geopolitical uncertainties: Researching memories of childhood with ‘child as method’, *Children & Society*, 36(5), 993-1009. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12551>
- Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.
- Cassal, Luan C. B. (in progress). *Child as method and trans rights: The developmental trap within Legal Gender Recognition (LGR) in the UK* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Manchester.
- Chen, Kuan-Hsing (2010). *Asia as method: Towards deimperialization*. Duke University Press.
- Cho, Sumi, Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. and McCall, Leslie (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs* 38(4), 785-810. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>
- Christinaki, Artemis (2022). *Age assessment and migration control: ‘Child as method’*. Paper presented at the workshop interdisciplinary perspectives on age determination in the context of asylum, at the Center for Children’s Rights Studies, University of Geneva.
- Combahee River Collective (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Kitchen Table Press.
- Coons, Ginger (2014). The replacement of geography by standards and what to do about it. *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts* 6(1), 31-40. <https://doi.org/10.7559/citarj.v6i1.126>
- De Vos, Jan (2015). Deneurologizing education? From psychologisation to neurologisation and back. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34(3), 279-295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-014-9440-5>
- Gallacher, Lesley-Anne and Gallagher, Michael (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through participatory methods. *Childhood* 15(4), 499-516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568208091672>
- Gill-Peterson, Julian (2015). The value of the future: The child as human capital and the neoliberal labor of race. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 43(1/2), 181-196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43958484>
- González Rey, Fernando L. (2014). Advancing further the history of Soviet psychology: Moving forward from dominant representations in Western and Soviet psychology. *History of Psychology* 17(1), 60-78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035565>
- Gordo, Angel and De Vos, Jan (2010). Psychologism, psychologising and de-psychologisation. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* 8, 3-7. [www.discourseunit.com/arcip/8.htm](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcip/8.htm)
- Grzanka, Patrick R. (2020). From buzzword to critical psychology: An invitation to take intersectionality seriously. *Women & Therapy*, 43(3-4), 244-261. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/02703149.2020.1729473>
- Hanson, Karl, Abebe, Tatek, Aitken, Stuart C., Balagopalan Sarada and Punch, Samantha (2018). Global/local research on children and childhood in a global society. *Childhood*, 25(3), 272-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568218779480>

- Haraway, Donna J. (1997). *Modest-witness@ second-millennium. FemaleMan-meets-oncomouse*. Psychology Press.
- Hill Collins, Patricia and Bilge, Sirma (2016). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press
- Holt, Louise (2013). Exploring the emergence of the subject in power: Infant geographies. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31(4), 645-663. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d12711>
- Kraftl, Peter (2020). *After childhood: Re-thinking environment, materiality and media in children's lives*. Routledge.
- Mezzadra, Sandro and Neilson, Brett (2013). *Border as method*. Duke University Press.
- Millei, Zsuzsa and Imre, Rob (eds) (2016). *Childhood and nation: Interdisciplinary engagements*. Palgrave.
- Millei, Zsuzsa, Silova, Iveta and Piattoeva, Nelli (2018). *Childhood and schooling in (post)socialist societies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Millei, Zsuzsa and Joronen, Mikko (2016). The (bio)politicization of neuroscience in Australian early years policies. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(4), 389-404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1148780>
- Nash, Jennifer C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 89(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2008.4>
- O'Dell, Lindsay, Brownlow, Charlotte and Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, Hanna (eds) (2017). *Different childhoods: Non/normative development and transgressive trajectories*. Routledge.
- Park, Jae (2016). Asian education and Asia as method. In Chi-Ming Lam and Jae Park (eds), *Sociological and philosophical perspectives on education in the Asia-Pacific region* (pp.205-225). Springer.
- Rollo, Toby (2018). The color of childhood: The role of the child/human binary in the production of anti-Black racism. *Journal of Black Studies*, 49(4), 307-329.
- Rollo, Toby (2023). The Coloniality of child being (or domestic intergenerational coloniality), childism and decoloniality, Childism Institute, February 9. [Events | Childism Institute](https://www.childism.org.uk/events)
- Shahjahan Riyad A, Blanco Ramírez, Gerardo and Andreotti, Vanessa de Oliveira (2017). Attempting to imagine the unimaginable: A decolonial reading of global university rankings. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), S51-S73. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690457>
- Takayama, Keita, Sriprakash, Arathi and Connell, Raewyn (2017). Toward a postcolonial comparative and international education. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), S1-S24. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690455>
- Takayama, Keita, Sriprakash, Arathi and Connell, Raewyn (2015). Rethinking knowledge production and circulation in comparative and international education: Southern theory, postcolonial perspectives, and alternative epistemologies. *Comparative Education Review*, 59(1), v-viii. <https://doi.org/10.1086/679660>
- Winker, Gabriele and Degele, Nina (2011). Intersectionality as multi-level analysis: Dealing with social inequality. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 18(1), 51-66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506810386084>
- Yasnitsky, Anton and Van der Veer, René (eds) (2016). *Revisionist revolution in Vygotsky studies*. Routledge.