

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN. ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK DIVERSITY AND CONSTRUCTION OF A FIELD

MARCH 9-11, 2011

INSTITUTE OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LIEGE
(BELGIUM)

For decades, childhood and children were considered as a 'small subject' (Lallemand & Le Moal 1981). It is thus justified to wonder: 'where have all the babies gone?' (Gottlieb 2000) or: 'why don't anthropologists like children?' (Hirschfeld 2003). Whereas interdisciplinary research centres and networks, Cultural Studies, courses, projects, and meetings on the theme multiply, we propose a critical overview of anthropological accounts on childhood and children. The conference will present how this field developed in social and human sciences according to different academic traditions.

The interest in an anthropology of childhood (which includes gestation and infancy) grew throughout the world from the early works of a few founding mothers and fathers (Van Gennep, Boas, Mead, Benedict, Malinowski, Firth, Fortes, Griaule...). These works emphasized social and symbolic construction of childhood and associated rites of passage, through adults' discourses on children.

Recent and numerous studies on 'children's cultures' and on the social role of children are rooted in the concepts of 'the child as an actor' and of 'agency'. They break up with the perception of the child as an 'adult to be' and a passive recipient; they are also embedded in its recognition, as an active and creative subject, initiated by the promulgation of its rights and the evolution of its status.

Papers should question the connection between social and symbolic construction of childhood and the construction of the 'child-actor': how is the child shaped and how does it construct itself, what is its position in society and how can its voice be taken into account?

The following configurations will be considered:

- family and community break-ups (street children, child-refugees, child-soldiers),
- migration (transnational families, migrant children, interethnic relations),
- new parenthood (blended family, same-sex family, child-headed household, intergenerational relations),
- cultural transmission (between peers, within the family, within institutions),
- individual, familial and institutional care (adoption, fosterage, daily care),
- development and humanitarian action (target groups, vulnerable groups, reciprocal influences between local and global norms),

- secular and religious institutions (schools, orphanages, youth movements, trade unions),
- local societies and public policies (work, family planning, training, children's heritage),
- new technologies (virtual worlds, new reproductive technologies, communication).

In order to explore these configurations, health, body, food, language, development, gender, play or ethics are possible entry points. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Northern or Southern societies, the papers will particularly:

- enhance knowledge on children's worlds (ordinary and extraordinary daily life),
- link this knowledge to other dimensions of social and cultural life (economics, politics, kinship, religion...),
- promote a better understanding of the society, the community or the group that children belong to.

From their ethnographic reports, participants are also invited to discuss the specificities of fieldwork with children, regarding the diversity of methodological positions, personal orientations and institutional attachments of the anthropologist. How does she/he act and how is she/he perceived by children and their social environment? How relevant are age, sex and social status (parent or not, origin)? How does she/he enter the 'children's world'? What sort of observations and interviews (or other audiovisual, graphical tools...) can be used? More largely, the specific questions that ethnographic fieldwork with children addresses to fieldwork practice in anthropology will be stressed.

Finally, papers should outline the conceptual characteristics of anthropology of childhood and children. What is the heuristic utility of notions and concepts such as body and person, body techniques, socialization, interaction...)? Which are the reciprocal influences, the specificities and synergies between anthropology, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, psychology, linguistics or demography? Moreover, the Conference aims to highlight the contribution of an anthropology of childhood and children to other fields in anthropology and social and human sciences. It will also strengthen its position on the international scientific and public arena.

Sending of papers proposal (in English or French) by the 31th of May 2010: 250 words (title and 5 keywords included).

Selection of papers proposal by the Scientific Committee: 30th of June 2010.

Editorial rules and schedule for a collective publication will be sent to participants by the Coordinators after the Conference.

COORDINATION

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