

Rethinking Childhoods in the Global South Through A Postcolonial Lens

1. Discuss an incident from your fieldwork that made you aware of the fact that children's understandings of their 'rights' was less straightforward than 'implementing' the provisions of the UNCRC?
2. How did you unpack/think about this complication? What explanatory frameworks do we have to do this?

ANOTHER EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK –

- Rights is closely intertwined with the complex history of modernity and colonialism which produced, legitimated and put into circulation certain ways of thinking about the self and the world in the non-western ex-colonial world.

- In India, for example, even though the country's liberal Constitution provides recourse to challenge these, and there exists a surfeit of progressive legislation that guarantees and works affirmatively to engender equality this does not produce individuated understandings of citizenship and equality which circulates as the norm within Western liberal democracies.
- Why this difference persists despite the Indian Constitution and the various laws reflecting the necessary liberal guarantees of equal and individuated citizenship is best understood through a comparative historical explanation.

- Citizenship develops chronologically, in the West, from the institution of civic rights in civil society to political rights in the nation state. However, in former colonies the formation of independent nation-states was preceded by colonial rule that produced its own technologies of governmentality which administered colonial subjects while not recognizing them as citizens (Chatterjee 2004).
- With independence India adopted a democratic form of government with universal adult franchise, and this meant that all Indians received the right to vote without necessarily being inserted in a particular idea of citizenship and the self that Western liberalism assumes.

- This absence, in India, of the hegemony of bourgeois and liberal practices that underlie the creation of the modern self in the West, which Ranajit Guha has famously characterized as ‘dominance without bourgeois hegemony’, does not mean that India is non-modern, but rather that modernity took a different form in former colonies.
- Ranajit Guha (1988) has discussed the ways in which the formation of modernity and citizenship in former colonial countries constructed the domain of the political as split into two distinct sensibilities that get woven together continuously.
- While the first is the formal-legal and secular networks of governance, the second is that of relationships of direct domination and subordination that derive their legitimacy from a different set of practices.

- Everyday understandings of equality, entitlement, rights and the state are thus far from indexed in liberal readings of the same although the Indian Constitution upholds this liberal text.
- In former colonies, the creation of nation states was preceded by colonial rule that produced its own governmental apparatus to administer, classify and enumerate colonial subjects for a range of purposes including education, hygiene, law and order etc.
- The enduring nature of this colonial governmental apparatus continued in large part when these nations became independent.
- As a result populations, including children, tend to identify with the state in terms of the welfare measures it makes available in their everyday lives rather than through individuated discourses of citizenship.

- Children's rights thus unfolds in postcolonial contexts as the work of governmentality, providing the state with a heightened role in mediating children's lives, and this can often get viewed by these communities as coercive rather than liberatory.

SOME FURTHER QUESTIONS –

1. Using your earlier ethnographic incident, reflect on the role played by the state/NGO in children's understandings of their 'rights'?
2. Does this postcolonial framing help open-up the ways in which we think about how children's rights circulates in postcolonial spaces and the children's mediation of these?