

1. From Human Being(s) to Spatial Becoming(s)

'We must, rather, abandon this apposition of Being and beings: renounce the fruitful maxim whereby Being is relation [...].' Édouard Glissant 1997 [1990]: 170

Until now, childhood research has been widely based on concepts from developmental psychology and their age-based classifications, such as Sigmund Freud's five stages of psychosexual development (1991) or Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1936). In this line of research, children are conceptualised as being in a state of *becoming* determined by their anthropological difference from adults. As a result, children's perspectives and participation have been marginalised. Instead, adults and other educational or pedagogical professionals have served as representatives for children and childhood. Since the 1980s, the new social sciences of childhood and the sociology of childhood have significantly contributed to a paradigm shift (Prout/James 1997) within the conceptualisation of childhood, partly sparked by the work of the French historian Philippe Ariès. Philippe Ariès claimed that childhood, as a modern Western concept of a particular stage of life, emerged only gradually from around the 16th to the late 17th century, peaking at the end of the 19th century (Ariès 1965). In addition to Ariès, Michael Sebastian Honig (1999) also denaturalised childhood by highlighting its social construction as a generational order determined by the child-adult binary. This was during the 1990s, when childhood sociologists globally were stressing the need to understand childhood as a social construct that needs to be critically examined. As a result, children were increasingly considered as the experts of their own social worlds (Qvortrup 1987; Bühler-Niederberger 2005; Jenks 2005; Zeiher 2005). During the early 2000s, with the advent of the Anthropocene debate and inspired by posthumanism and new materialism, the new wave of childhood studies (Lee/Motzkau 2011; Ryan 2012) appeared, arguing that childhood as a social construct and children's agency had been overemphasised. Hence, a (re)conceptualisation of children's emotions and relations as 'more than social' was called for (Kraftl 2013: 19). Reconsidering the material and biological determination of children's practices and childhood, the new wave of childhood studies stresses the importance of understanding children's corporeality, as well as their relations to terrestrial and non-human others (Horton/Kraftl 2006; Kraftl 2014; Spyrou et al. 2018; Kraftl 2020).

This very short insight aimed at illustrating how figures of the child are fluid, even in childhood theory itself. As a result, children's social and more-than-social positions remain highly ambivalent. Even though I sympathise most with the approach of the new social sciences of childhood and the sociology of childhood to deconstruct the child-adult binary by putting children on an equal footing with adults, I also believe that this conceptualisation again (re)produces adultism. This is because although children's positions are conceptually 'corrected', the positions of adults remain fixed: The adult remains complete, and adulthood equals an accomplished state of being.

I am arguing the other way around: To deconstruct the child-adult binary, I would instead like to question the status of adults as complete and no longer becoming. So instead of freeing children from their position of human becoming(s), I propose to understand the human condition regardless of age as in a state of becoming. Such a perspective allows one to differentiate 'the immaturity of children [as] a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful [as] a fact of culture' (La Fontaine 1979, after James/Prout 1997: 7). 'Childism', first coined by the psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen (1975) and further developed by John Wall (2019), seems to be a good framework under which all three imaginaries – the psychological, the constructivist, and the bio-social – can collaborate towards a more comprehensive understanding of becoming under the condition of ageism and generational ordering. Childism, as John Wall argues,

represents an effort in academic and social life not only to include children equally to adults, but in addition to respond to children's marginalized experiences by [...] critically restructur[ing] historically engrained norms of adultism. Doing so requires approaching childhoods as not only research objects, but, in addition, lenses of social subjectivity with which to examine any research object whatsoever. [...] Childhoods then become prisms or microscopes through which to deconstruct historical expressions of adultism and reconstruct more age-inclusive social imaginations. (Wall 2019: 4)

Hence, by approaching childhood as a prism or microscope, the concept of childism makes it possible to look at the imaginaries of childhood in different societies, at different times, and across academic fields. Additionally, it helps to reverse the idea of development: away from the idea that we are becoming adult, which is to say complete, fully human, and so on, towards questioning what being adult actually means.

1.1 Childhood as Spatial Order and Period of Spatial Crisis

Much attention has been paid to childhood as a generational (temporal) order. Aspects of its spatial constitution, by contrast, have long been neglected. This is perhaps also an effect of the general excessive concentration on time and temporality in the humanities. Nevertheless, the spatial turns have also reached childhood studies. Children, often studied in cities, have received growing attention within critical urban studies, and as a result are increasingly invited to participate in urban design and planning, as well as policymaking, often academically driven. In Anglo-American childhood research, children's spatial relations have been the focus of the geographies of childhood and chil-

dren's geographies approaches (Holt 2011; Hörschelmann et al. 2011; Kraftl et al. 2012; Skelton/Aitken 2019). Whereas the latter concentrates on the spatial practices of children as spatial actors, the former analyses the structural aspects of the spatial production of childhood (cf. Schreiber 2015: 10; Reutlinger 2021: 14). Newer and more indirect spatial accounts of childhood have additionally pointed to the role of ontological design for childhood. Fraga (2022) and Spyrou (2022), for example, reflect on the constitution of childhood through design. Within urban studies, children appear globally as negatively affected by neoliberal urban planning and the growing securitisation of their lives in cities (Akkan et al. 2018; Severcan 2018). Susan Ruddick's work (2003), for example, illustrates how constitutive elements of capitalist globalisation, such as risk discourses or the need to modernise, are being (re)produced within Western concepts of childhood that uphold and sustain capitalistic and neoliberal systems, becoming a normative discursive element of the social constitution of childhoods on a global scale. Cindi Katz's work furthermore shows how different global restructuring processes, such as structural adjustment programmes and austerity politics, are changing the everyday lives of children in different places in sometimes similar ways (Katz 2004). On the scale of the city, studies such as that of Nadine Marquardt and Henning Füller (2009) furthermore refer to the commodification and simultaneous homogenisation of everyday spaces of children and young people, which, as the authors argue, 'can also be interpreted as an expression of a specific form of self-control by individuals' (translated from *ibid.*: 72). They also associate this type of spatialisation with a very specific type of subjectivation against the background of an optimisation strategy: 'The basis of this form of subjectivation is the overarching risk construction of a (neoliberal) competition [...]' (*ibid.*: 72). Susann Fegter's work additionally draws attention to the potential of praxeologically informed approaches, which make it possible, on the one hand, to address children as the experts of their (urban) environments and, on the other hand, to analyse spatial preferences as social practices. It is those practices, she argues, 'in which children participate as children (i.e., from the social position of children) and thereby become children, but also visible and invisible as well as more or less socially recognised' (translated from Fegter 2014: 531).

What comes closest to a theoretical conceptualisation of childhood as a spatial order are two influential spatial models of childhood, the 'zoning model' (*Zonenmodell*) (Muchow/Muchow 1998 [1935]) and the 'insularisation model' (*Verinselungsmodell*) (Zeiber 1983). Martha Muchow's study and eponymous book *The Life Space of the Urban Child* (Muchow/Muchow 1998 [1935]) was published by Hans Muchow after Martha Muchow's tragic death in 1933.¹ Martha Muchow explored the access to and experience of space among proletarian children in Hamburg in the early 20th century. Their zoning model represents childhood as predominantly placed in areas unfolding in concentric circles from children's homes. She observes how these zones are appropriated by groups of children interacting without the direct supervision of adults. During the 1970s and 1980s, and with reference to Martha Muchow's study, European sociological childhood

1 Martha Muchow can be seen as a pioneer of German ecological/environmental psychology. Tragically, due to her close relationship to the Jewish professor William Louis Stern, the National Socialists expelled her from all public positions and threatened her. She committed suicide in 1933.

research noted a growing domestication, familiarisation, and insularisation of childhood (Zeiher 1983; Zeiher 1990; Behnken/Jonker 1990; Zinnecker 1990; Zeiher/Zeiher 1994) as a result of modernisation and urbanisation during the 20th century (cf. Löw 2001: 82 ff.). The model of insularisation states that children no longer appropriate a contiguously expanding coherent area around their homes, such as in the zoning model by Martha Muchow.

At the end of the sixties and beginning of seventies, a modernisation push of the conditions of everyday life took place in Western Germany, leaving strong traces in the spatial world. New special places have emerged for children but also for adults. Both have consequences for where children find space for their daily lives. (translated from Zeiher/Zeiher 1994: 17)

These specialised places, framed as 'islands', such as the school, the climbing gym, and the many playgrounds reserved for children, contrasted with '[t]he many interstitial areas that belong to the adults and are as such less interesting, dangerous, inaccessible, and often unknown' (ibid.: 26). Whereas these two models suggest that childhoods unified generally during the first and second half of the 20th century, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa et al. conclude on the basis of a 'meta-analysis' of a wide range of children's spatial attachments from international childhood research that there is not one spatial model of childhood: 'Instead, they have become increasingly multi-layered and complex, for they are impacted by different features that simultaneously overlap, [and] become intertwined [...]' (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2023: 38).

What all these spatial approaches to childhood demonstrate is that it is necessary to theorise childhood beyond the generational order to also include a spatial order. Thus, in the following I will conceptualise childhood as a generational and spatial order against the background of the entanglement of time and space stressed by some followers of the spatial turn. Doreen Massey, for example, points out the risk of understanding space and time as disentangled, because it holds them in a binary in which 'each pure imagination on its own tames the spatial' (Massey 2005: 86). Martina Löw furthermore notes that 'it is illogical to conceive time and space as fundamental factors of human existence and to understand the one concept as a social construction, but to reify the other, for example as a territorial concept' (Löw 2016: 50). Gunter Weidenhaus's concept of a 'social space-time' (translated from 2015) addresses this theoretical and empirical gap. He calls for a determined engagement of empirical approaches with the connection between historicity and social-spatial constitution and presents this connection as a desideratum of empirical social sciences (cf. ibid.: 54 ff.). Building on these considerations, I argue that only the entanglement of a temporal-spatial order serves as a good basis for conceptualising childhood. With the spatio-temporal order as an ontological dimension for childhood, I also want to offer an umbrella term for more specific and generic proposals in the same vein, such as that of Spyros Spyrou (2022), who points to the importance of ontological design for childhood. Finally, conceptualising childhood as a spatio-temporal order is crucial to me because for most societies childhood is a structural element and therefore a social construct that unfolds global power on the basis of this order. Conversely, this order shapes children's experiences and their ideas of a 'good' life.

To further theorise childhood as a spatial order, I will apply it within Michel Foucault's work, inspired by its feminist rereading in Silvia Federici's study *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004). In the second half of the 20th century, Michel Foucault stated that,

'[w]hen, with Rousseau and Pestalozzi, the eighteenth century concerned itself with constituting for the child, with educational rules that followed his development, a world that would be adapted to him, it made it possible to form around children an unreal, abstract, archaic environment that had no relation to the adult world. The whole development of contemporary education, with its irreproachable aim of preserving the child from adult conflicts, accentuates the distance that separates, for a man, his life as a child and his life as an adult. That is to say, by sparing the child conflicts, it exposes him to a major conflict, to the contradiction between his childhood and his real life.' (Foucault 1987:81).

Even though Foucault did not consider the situations of children much in his work, this quote sums up the figuration of childhood as a spatial order, perhaps quite generally but vividly. But the figure of the child he draws here is not that of any child. It is most generally the bourgeois child. The bourgeoisie has positioned children not only within specialised pedagogical and educational spaces but also within the reproductive spheres of capitalist systems. Therefore, Michel Foucault's work, especially his concept of 'crisis heterotopias' serves as a suitable umbrella term under which the specific nature of the special spaces for children that proliferate globally can be explored as 'counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1984a [1967]: 3). Crisis heterotopias refer to spaces that are 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society [...] in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly' (ibid.: 4). His idea of 'heterotopias of deviation' furthermore refers to spaces 'in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (ibid.: 5), such as rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and retirements homes. Most of the social positions Foucault ascribes to the spatialities of heterotopias are those of subjects who are temporally or chronically unable, prohibited, or unwilling to be productive in the capitalist system – which accounts for most children in the world, except for those who are working. What Foucault notes for the old aged counts in the same way for children: 'after all, old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation' (ibid.: 4). In relation to the norm, children in modern societies are in constant crisis because they are not yet (allowed to be) what they will have to become: (productive) adults. The following subchapter will delve deeper into the genealogy of that 'unreal, abstract, archaic milieu' for children that, according to Foucault, developed in the 18th century in the wider context of the Anthropocene.

1.2 Figures of the Bourgeois Child in the Anthropocene

At the beginning of this research project, I aimed to understand how middle-class children in Nairobi grow up similarly to or differently than their Berlin counterparts. The focus of this exploration was on space, on children's spatial relations and sense of (un)belonging. I wondered how and where middle-class children in these geographically distant and culturally diverse places spend their time, and I wondered how this has changed from the 1960s until the present day. Now, after listening to the childhood memories and experiences of 46 individuals, I realise how much their (hi)stories, not only reveal insight into the spatial order of childhood in these two cities but also co-tell broader stories of socio-spatial relations in the Anthropocene.

So, I grew up in the 80s. Nairobi was stunning. It was like green city in the sun. Trees everywhere. Um, there are not that many tall buildings. You know, when you're growing up and you watch TV, you keep thinking, I want my city to be that way. But now I'm thinking, I wish my city would go back/go back to the green city in the sun. We had rain, we had fog because it was so cold. It was beautiful. (Ruby, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, N.)

I refer to the biographical narrations on which this study is based as (hi)stories, because I understand the biographical narrations as part of the discursive production of history in general and as co-constitutive of worlding processes. The complex relations revealed by (hi)stories, such as that of Ruby, tell the story not just of childhood, class, and space but of changing conditions of becoming within the wider context of anthropocentrism. In Ruby's narration, she speaks not only about her personal biographical perception of the environmental changes of Nairobi. She also refers to colonialism and the British vision of Nairobi as 'the green city under the sun'. In this way, Ruby's (and others') stories reveal the complex entanglements between personal biographical storytelling and broader anthropocentric processes of world-making. These (hi)stories are human-centred but also de-centre the human within spatial constitution. The (hi)stories constitute space from pasts, presents, and futures and from 'intra-actions' (Barad 2007: 33)² between human and non-human, their diverse power and agencies, and also from norms and values that render space into good and bad, secure and insecure, private and public. I propose that these and other childhood (hi)stories can inform the often nebulous Anthropocene debate from a biographical perspective.

The Anthropocene, also called 'Capitalocene' (Moore 2016), 'Chthulucene' (Haraway 2015), 'Eurocene' (translated from Sloterdijk 2015), or 'Technocene' (Hornborg 2015), is a very nebulous public and academic discourse. However, '[t]he core of the initially natural science-based Anthropocene idea is the diagnosis that humans or the anthropos have become the strongest geological force and that their earthly influence has set irreversible geochronological developments in motion' (translated from Block 2021: 203).

2 'Intra-action' refers to Karen Barad's understanding of relationality within 'the mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (2007: 33). 'Intra' thereby highlights that subjects do not preexist but 'emerge through their intra-action' (ibid.: 33).

As such, the Anthropocene has been debated in several academic disciplines since its advent in 2000 (Crutzen/Stoermer 2000). Although the approaches to the Anthropocene are myriad across disciplines, for the sociological tradition, Katharina Block points out a ‘consensus that the idea of the Anthropocene expresses a “caesura” [and] thus represents something “radically new”, which brings “new challenges” for sociology’ (translated from Block 2021: 212). Peter Sloterdijk speaks in this context about the loss of a ‘cosmic serenity’ (translated from Sloterdijk 2016: 20).

Within childhood research, a small but growing number of publications centre children or childhood in the Anthropocene debate (for a more detailed literature review, cf. Sjögren 2023). Within such approaches, children appear in multiple ways, most of all as victims of earthly destruction, and hence at the same time as agents drawn on to legitimise sustainability discourses (Malone 2018), firing up discourses around (in)security. But beyond the figure of victim, children also appear as bearers of hope, highlighted by their capability for intrahuman, more than human, or posthuman acting (Taylor 2020, Taylor/Pacini-Ketchabaw 2019). Very few approaches view childhood, as proposed in the earlier-cited passage by John Wall, as a prism or microscope, and thus as an analytical category for exploring the power structures within processes that constitute the Anthropocene (Ashton 2022). With my work and its findings, I would like to contribute to this perspective by reflecting on the role of childhood as a generational as well as a spatial order that can be explored as a structural element of different societies and at different times. This exploration, as I will argue and show, must go beyond the notion of societies as spatially contained by the borders of nation-states and temporally framed as continuing since their advent. Rather, I argue that childhood – and therefore generational-spatial ordering – must be more broadly understood as a constitutive part of the Anthropocene.

There are diverse proposals for a periodisation of the Anthropocene that define different starting points somewhere between 1610, due to the tangibility of the massive changes provoked a century before by the conquest of the Americas (1492 Columbus), to the entrance into the nuclear age after World War II. Another possible event that is considered to be the starting point of this geo-social epoch is the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, triggered by the invention of the steam engine around 1784 (cf. Crutzen/Steffen 2003: 61). This last periodisation shows similarities with the emergence of the child-adult binary, as reconstructed by the French historian Philippe Ariès. Ariès claimed that childhood as a ‘modern’ Western concept of a particular stage of life emerged only gradually around the 16th to the late 17th century. This shift in the perception and positioning of the child had, as Philippe Ariès argues, become tangible by the end of the 19th century at the latest (cf. Ariès 1965). Philippe Ariès saw this in correlation with the time of industrialisation, also called the time of great acceleration, and with the concurrent rise of the bourgeoisie (and bourgeois lifestyles). My aim here is not to support one periodisation of the Anthropocene over another, but to highlight the simultaneous emergence of the bourgeois concept of childhood, which positioned children within a child-adult binary alongside the productive-reproductive dichotomy, and the point at which humans became the strongest geological force. This is to read the history of anthropocentrism as extending beyond the history of a materialism that centres on the factories, machines, and wars of humankind and shifts its perspective to the sphere of

reproduction and the reproductive work that enables and sustains factories, machines, and wars within the Anthropocene. A constitutive part of that sphere is the shifting figures of the bourgeois child, the child that did not have to (or was no longer able to) work and instead was schooled.

From the works of modern political philosophy, we know that schooled meant educated to be fully human, as the disciplining hand and knowledge of pedagogues helped the child to perform its transition from nature (wild) to culture (civilised). A closer look into modern philosophy shows that conceptualizations of the nature of human, such as those of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, drew heavily on the culture-nature divide, which was constitutive of their understanding of children as feral beings that are not yet fully human (which in their understanding meant modern, bourgeois, European and white) and therefore need to be educated. To approach and theorise the entanglements of adultism and anthropocentrism, the political scientist and childhood researcher Toby Rollo offered the term '*adultocene*' (Rollo 2016: 242).³ In the following, I will focus on the entanglements of colonialism and capitalism within the axiom of power, what Rollo calls the *adultocene*, as two of the central processes which frame anthropocentrism. I am aware that these are extremely complex phenomena, as well as dazzling terms; needless to say, I will not touch deeply or by any means profoundly on either of them. My aim is more to exemplify the potential of childhood conceptualised as a generational and spatial order employed as a prism or microscope to further explore the figures that constitute and therefore define anthropocentrism.

1.2.1 The Child as Trope in Colonialism

I have pointed to the similarities between the advent of childhood and the Anthropocene periodisation. While one periodisation brings childhood into historical entanglement with industrialisation (18th/19th century), the other marks its emergence as taking place much earlier, in 1610 and in relation to European expansion. In this and the following section, I will consider both of these entanglements. I am aware of recent studies that criticise Ariès's assumption that childhood was a consciously European project (Richard-Elsner 2015; Marten 2018), and I would argue that a revision of Ariès's work is absolutely necessary against the background of the concept of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000) and historical research on the global bourgeoisie (Dejung et al. 2019). However, although the bourgeoisie has been present worldwide since its emergence, through expansion, the European bourgeoisie was highly influential in instilling the child-adult binary within and through their pedagogical practices, framed by missionarism in the colonies. This suggestion is also supported by Bill Ashcroft's (2001) research on colonialism and missionarism as collaborative projects of mental control in the form of disciplining, pedagogisation, and education. In his work, Ashcroft reconstructs links between the historical power of the imperial and pedagogical discourses to represent *the other*. The historical relationship of childism and colonialism has so far received little recognition. Therefore,

3 By referring to Toby Rollo's '*adultocene*', I do not wish to offer another term to substitute the Anthropocene but to rather add another important perspective to the ongoing debates surrounding the term.

Ashcroft takes on a highly unexplored perspective on the genealogy of the power structures between suppression and subjugation, arguing that

[t]he eighteenth century, which saw the emergence of the child as a philosophical concept, also saw the emergence of race as a category of physical and biological variation. (Ashcroft 2001: 37)

Based on the idea of the child as becoming and the adult as being, the child-adult binary is at the core of colonial and missionary ideologies. Ashcroft furthermore notes that ‘no trope has been more tenacious and more far-reaching than that of the child [...] because it absorbed and suppressed the contradictions of imperial discourse itself’ (Ashcroft 2001: 36). The child as trope was, as Ashcroft reconstructs, powerful and useful at the basis of colonial practices of suppression.

As a child, the colonial subject is both inherently evil and potentially good, thus submerging the moral conflict of colonial occupation and locating in the child of empire a naturalization of the ‘parent’s’ own contradictory impulses for exploitation and nurture. The child, at once both other and same, holds in balance the contradictory tendencies of imperial rhetoric: authority is held in balance with nurture; domination with enlightenment; debasement with idealization; negation with affirmation; exploitation with education; filiation with affiliation. This ability to absorb contradiction gives the binary parent/child an inordinately hegemonic potency. (ibid.: 36, 37)

Kathryn Yusoff also shows that the basis of colonial legitimisations to oppression, which lies in the binary of human and nonhuman, culture and nature, and adult and child, is deeply rooted in academic knowledge production. She reminds us of the scientific practices of ‘colonial earth-writing’ (Yusoff 2019: 2), which she analyses in the historical context of the language of geological science, which coded ‘inhuman, property, value, possession’ as categories that move ‘across territory, relation, and flesh’ (Yusoff 2019: 4). This geological coding became powerful enough to inform the *Civil Code of Louisiana from 1867*, in which Art. 537 claims: ‘Natural fruits are such as are the spontaneous produce of the earth; the produce and increase of cattle, and the children of slaves are likewise natural fruits.’ (Fuqua 1867: 82)

With the framing of the ‘white Adultocene’ (Mock 2025) I similarly find that the source of such de-humanisation lies in academic practice itself and trace the power of white European adultism within the history of racial oppression in the Anthropocene – which from the angle of white modern philosophy appears more as a white and adult Anthropocene. This stresses the need to reconceptualise who we are blaming when we speak of the devastating effects of anthropocentrism by asking who the anthropos is, understood in any case as an equal category of being, when humans are randomly shifted in and outside of the human realm. From here it seems highly important to trace the academic practices of what Kathryn Yusoff terms ‘colonial earth-writing’ (2019: 2) within the context of the Anthropocene debate and from the perspective of childhood. The previous considerations suggest that the concept of the complete human being should also be examined in relation to class differences. This is because being fully human was histori-

cally not only reserved for white adults but seems to have also been restricted to the bourgeoisie in general. This becomes evident in Frantz Fanon's work. In his analysis of Black psychology *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), he shows that the binary of nature and culture is still at the root of white European thought. With a focus on language, he describes how in contemporary French society Black people are still considered as the inhuman or not-yet-human other who could only become fully human (or French) by the power of white bourgeois education. In the following, I examine the basis as well as the continuity of these concepts and practices of othering and exclusions within the figure of the child as (global) human capital.

1.2.2 The Child as (Global) Human Capital

Childhood, conceptualised as a spatio-temporal order, serves as a structural element of most societies worldwide. This is because under the global capitalist condition, childhood, as a biographical stage of protection and education, is rendered more and more similarly, as many societies consider children in the function of being human capital and childhood as a period to grow that capital. That children have historically been treated as human capital is also supported by Silvia Federici's work on women's reproductive labour. She shows that the persecution of women regarded as witches during the early modern period at the transition from the 18th to the 19th century in Europe was often connected to women who did not want to have children, who performed abortions (either as mothers or midwives), or whose children died during pregnancy, during birth, or afterwards (cf. Federici 2004: 93 ff.). This shows that the bourgeois image of the child as human capital that emerged at the same time ascribed to women a completely new role that forced them into reproduction, as nations wanted to grow in their obsession for expansion and development. Later, during the 20th century, figures of the child were politically restructured once again. The value of children shifted from economic to emotional. The early 1900s brought about children's rights movements, which promoted children's legal protection and restricted child labour. The child would increasingly be drawn as a victim of anthropocentrism and a symbol of hope for a better future. Yet the emotionalisation and victimisation of children were also not innocent of developmental ideologies. On the contrary, especially in bourgeois milieus, the emotionalization and protection of children involved an excessive investment in the future of the child by making education a right but also a compulsion, in which bourgeoisie children and their families often entered into competition and normalised this developmental competition beyond their classed relations.

Development norms, together with the development phases, also specify development speeds. The individual pace of development can be constantly checked against them as against an objective yardstick. [...] The norm creates fear of falling behind the norm as well as ambition to surpass the norm. The child is supposed to be one of the best later on and already recognisably so. This creates pressure to perform even in early childhood. With baby chairs, baby swimming and intelligence-training toys, attempts are made to accelerate development. (translated from Zeiher/Zeiher 1994: 34)

While the state laid the responsibility of children's education in the hands of the family as a societal institution, in affluent nations such as Germany we can later observe a shift away from the family-centred child towards a childhood in social institutions. 'Defamilialisation' describes how the welfare state redistributes care and support services so that the individual can secure its existence independently of the family network (Lister 1997; Esping-Andersen 1999; Ostner 2007). But developmentalism does not leave the scene here either. Ever since, there have been voices criticising that social welfare systems and their child investment policies actively reproduce the modern concept of childhood, as they position children as 'human capital' within the social investment state (Olk 2007; Prout 2000; Mierendorff 2014). Thomas Olk describes the social investment state as, amongst other things, 'future-oriented [...] and it declares children to be the most important social policy target group because social investments in this population group promise the highest productive effects and profit expectations in the future' (translated from Olk 2007: 46). On this basis, Thomas Olk cautions that positioning children as future investments for societies is highly problematic, because often 'the focus on the future is bought by a neglect of children's well-being in the present[, while additionally] this investment orientation leads to a growing interest in controlling children's [development]' (ibid.: 53).

The role of children as human capital is increasingly attracting attention as a transnational phenomenon (Gerhards et al. 2016). This happens in two ways: One is that the discourse of so-called GMC also propagates child investment policies, and the second is that this investment is directed more and more towards a 'transnational human capital', suggesting that child investments are no longer only framed by national welfare systems but that parents from the middle and upper classes already prepare and equip their children for a globalised world. In this and the context of Kenyan middle-class parenting, Gunter Weidenhaus and I found that, a good parent can be both '[a] secure harbour and the gate into the world' (Mock/Weidenhaus 2022: 151). This double quality of parenthood is furthermore understood as the condition of realising what seems like a central aspect to many middle-class parents, which is, as one mother put it, to raise their 'child to become a world citizen' (ibid.: 151). These ideas of good childhood and parenthood must be seen as a product of the flexibilisation of the productive sphere and how it rescales childhoods. In this context, findings indicate that middle- and upper-class families who prepare their children for globalisation also reproduce global social inequalities by doing so (Gerhards et al. 2016). It can be summarised that the figure of the child as human capital persists across time and space in the geo-social epoch of the Anthropocene. This is because the concept of child development is based on a similar idea of development as social progress: It 'suggests a linear process of perfection, it has an evolutionist connotation[, where i]ndividual and human development [likewise] follow a [...] linear progression from lower, simpler to higher, more complex modes of functioning [towards] the fully developed adult of Western societies' (translated from Honig 1999: 61).

In sum, the short and fragmental insights of these two figures of the child in the Anthropocene illustrate that the child as a social category was used not only as a social power but also as a biological as well as geological power. This biological power connects the child as a trope in colonialism, where it served to legitimise the oppression and exploitation of African peoples as slaves by regarding them as children unable to ever fully

become human (which meant white bourgeois European adults). The geological power inherent in this child-based legitimisation strategy lies in the effect of enabling the extraction of natural resources all over the world during and after the colonial period. In the form of global human capital, the category of the child furthermore shows how modern bourgeois conceptions of the child have produced lifestyles and ideas of development that persist despite the anthropocentric social, geological, and biological crises caused by them.