# Adultist violence in the pandemic context in Latin America: Invisibilized childhoods, violated childhoods

Gabriela Magistris[1]

## Resumen

En el presente artículo abordaré la matriz sociocultural adultocéntrica que sella las relaciones intergeneracionales y su especificidad en la región de América Latina, tanto de manera genealógica como en el contexto actual de pandemia y aislamiento obligatorio. Partiré de comprender que esta matriz ha sido profundizada en estos tiempos mediante dos estrategias centrales íntimamente relacionadas: el aumento de las violencias contra las infancias, y su invisibilización como sujetos sociales y políticos del presente. Para este objetivo, recuperamos algunas imágenes centrales de esta coyuntura que ilustran esta situación de opresión específica dirigida hacia niños y niñas, especialmente referidas a la dimensión simbólica de la violencia adultista, para a partir de ellas ensayar nuevos caminos de reflexión y acción que no omitan sino consideren sus necesidades, intereses, deseos, así como sus aportes a la construcción crítica del presente.

## Palabras clave

Adultocentrismo. Violencia adultista. Niños, niñas y adolescentes.

## Abstract

In this article I will address the adult-centric sociocultural matrix that seals intergenerational relationships and its specificity in the Latin American region, both genealogically and in the current context of the pandemic and mandatory isolation. I will start from the understanding that this matrix has been deepened during these times through two closely related central strategies: the escalation of violence against children, and their invisibility as social and political subjects of the present. For this purpose, we recovered some central images of this scenario that illustrate this situation of specific oppression directed towards boys and girls, especially referring to the symbolic dimension of adultist violence, in order to test new paths of reflection and action that do not omit but in fact consider their needs, interests, desires, as well as their contributions to the critical construction of the present.

## Keywords

Adult-centrism. Adultist violence. Children and adolescents.

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[1] Doctor in Social Sciences at Universidad de Buenos Aires. E-mail: gabrielamagistris@gmail.com.

# 1. Introduction

This paper will discuss some reflections and analyses made from research and practices, in which I am personally involved, in relation to the connection between children and violences in Latin America[2].

We could find several starting points to contextualize this discussion. In this case, I would like to focus on the episodes that reflect the persistence of the adult-centric, colonial, and patriarchal matrix that rules, in a structural fashion, relations with children to identify some contemporary images that illustrate a reinforcement of intergenerational violence in the world today, affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its medium to long-term effects.

Studies that reveal the adult-centric matrix of our societies, particularly in the *nuestroamericana* [T.N.][3] region, are not at all a novelty (Cf. LIEBEL, 2007; CUSSIANOVICH, 2008, among others). However, what does represent an innovation is a different analysis, focused on the social processing of age groups within the context of the social studies of childhood – its construction, modalities, and effects – situated in the discussions and debates about the Latin American region. In this sense, the works of the sociologist Claudio DUARTE QUAPPER (2012, 2015), on the characteristics of the adult-centered process of Chilean society, are an important starting point to explore how this matrix translates into adultist practices in our region [4].

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[2] My institutional position in the context of this article is multiple. On the one hand, my role in the Free Discipline of Human Rights (Facultad de Filosofía y Letras [School of Philosophy and Letters] of Universidad de Buenos Aires), where I have worked for more than 10 years in the area of childhood (both as a professor and a teacher for children and adolescents). On the other hand, my many years of academic research in the framework of Programa de Estudios Sociales en Género, Infancia y Juventud [Program of Social Studies in Gender, Childhood and Youth] (Universidad Nacional de San Martín), especially in the field of protection of the rights of boys and girls. Lastly, the collective efforts of the cooperative of training, research, and publishing of which I am a member, where we promote the participation and the main role of children called *Ternura Revelde* (https://m.facebook.com/ternurarevelde/). This text is written with this plurality and synergy of debates, dialogs, and active advocacy on the theme.

[3] In the original text, the author uses the term *nuestroamericana* to refer to the Latin American region. This term has its fundaments on the decolonial concept of *Nuestra América* by José Martí, a nationalist politician and Cuban hero who defended the liberalism of Latin America.

[4] It is not our interest here to make a precise differentiation between adult-centrism and adultism (because we consider that this separation is not so clear). But, with the purpose of achieving more clarity for this paper, we refer to adult-centrism when we talk about the domain system, the structural matrix of oppression against boys and girls, while we reserve the term adultism to analyze the interactions between adults and the youth. On the latter, we refer to the behaviors, actions or languages that limit or doubt the capacities of boys and girls, because they have been alive for a shorter amount of time (FLASHER, 1978; UNICEF Chile, 2013; ALEXGAIAS, 2014). We

In fact, the work of the Chilean scholar unveiled how an unequal world cosmovision has been built, simultaneously and intimately upon patriarchy and adult-centrism, which will be later reinforced in the capitalist system. Thus, the author understands adultcentrism as an extension of the patriarchal dominance, which he demonstrates in his research through a historical genealogical analysis of the Chilean society. For Duarte Quapper, this dominance concentrated on the adult-centered focus implies the construction of a subordinate subject based on three impositions. The first one is material, related to the access and production of material and immaterial assets. The second one is symbolic, which implies the implementation of a sociocultural matrix that naturalizes the subordination of children. The third and last one – called bodily or sexual – relates to the imposition and maintenance of the heteronormative and sexist patterns, as well as the authoritarian adult relationship built with corporeality, especially towards girls.

Likewise, it is interesting to see how this domain system is translated and reclaimed particularly in Latin America. A singular trait, as mentioned by SCHIBOTTO (2015), may be observed in the cultural decontextualization Latin American childhoods have suffered in contemporary critical schools of thought, in a clear appropriation of colonial/colonizing postulates and theories. This happens to the extent that a single and hegemonic model of childhood is adopted, strongly shaped by a Eurocentric profile, sentencing Latin American children to marginalization and marginality, through converging processes of naturalization and decontextualization that historically disregarded and made invisible their specific and unique identities and needs.

In this paper, our analysis will focus on the violences against children, assuming they are integral parts of this sociocultural matrix that reinforces positions of power and builds subordinate subjects (SPIVAK, 2011)[5]. We talk about "violences", plural, to account for the different underlying expressions

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decided that the distinction is a difficult one because, effectively, there is a dialectic, dynamic and mutual feedback between adult-centrism and adultism. This intertwined and inseparable relationship is also developed in the field of violence, as we will observe later.

[5] Thinking about children as subordinate subjects invites us to consider the conditions of possibility, the audibility of the voices of boys and girls as inferiorized minorities, not due to quantity (because in fact they are not inferior in strictly demographic terms), but because of their capacity to bring their own demands and needs to the agenda, due to their (scarce) historical accumulated power. This is particularly relevant in the case of boys and girls where the adult-centric structural matrix has been built alongside their invalidation as social and political subjects (See also MAGISTRIS, 2020).

and modalities of violence. Also, we start from the assumption that suggests that these violences function as a continuum, not as a single act, not as an exception, but as part of the current "normality" (SCHEPPER-HUGGES, 1997).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight here that, in the historically built meanings and definitions, both in the research field and through social intervention on violence against children, the power relation in which they are inserted seems blurry. Therefore, violence is reduced to a strictly individual level — the family nucleus —, making invisible the role of the State, social norms and cultural traditions in the constitution and reproduction of such violence. At the same time, we highlight that, at this point, there has been a prevalence of reductionist definitions for the violences and their intersection with children, limited to the biological, psychological, and individual/interpersonal level.

The main goal of this paper is understanding — at an exploratory level — in what way this adult-centric matrix was exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic, and the health care policies associated to it, in our — already disturbed and unequal — Latin America. Consequently, we will question how, in current times, there was an empowerment of that image of a world that not only does not think of boys, girls and the youth, but makes them invisible and sentences them to the margins of regulation and social surveillance. This is the face of adultist violence, which is (re)produced and fueled every day in Latin America, intensified in the current context by confinement and other associated policies (MAGISTRIS Y MORALES, 2021), as we will demonstrate throughout the text.

To achieve our goal, we will focus on the different symbolical violences that disregard and invisibilize boys, girls, and the youth, and we will avoid limiting ourselves to the mere level of individual interaction which, once again, upon our reflection, would reinforce the naturalization, essentialization and reprivatization of childhood.

Why did we choose to focus on the symbolic violences? Even though all violences derived from the adult-centric matrix occur in an inseparable manner, accentuating the asymmetry, the difference, and the subordination of the child to the adult, in this paper we chose to aim especially at the symbolic dimension that provides special support to adultist violences which happen daily and dynamically. In fact, we know very well that the forms of violence towards children are multiple, plural, and heterogeneous; we also know that the violences – in their most tangible forms of expression (physical, psychological, sexual) continue having exponential rates all over the globe and,

particularly, in our region[6]. Besides, such violences against children are the most naturalized and least problematized ones[7]; nevertheless, they heavily support the other violences against children, happening intertwined and in unison. (PAVEZ SOTO and others, 2020). This is the reason why we have focused on this modality of adultist violence with a specific outlook associated to the power relation it entails, particularly in this global context we are facing.

## 2. Symbolic violence as the basis and support for adultist violence in Latin America

Symbolic violence is a concept coined for the first time by Pierre BOURDIEU (1988, 2000)[8] and it is used to describe a social relation where the "dominator" exerts a form of indirect violence, not direct physical violence, against the "dominated". The key to this violence is that the dominated do not perceive it, which would be proof of the non-conscious level of such practices (BOURDIEU, 2000).

Such violence is internalized and naturalized to the extent that we truly believe that things "have always been like that" and, therefore, our values and places in society are not only unquestionable, but also unchangeable. For him, it is paramount to consider the role of images, discursive regimes, messages that invade our different spheres every day (mass communication, as an example). So, within this field, all action that reinforces stereotypes, roles, mandates, in this case regarding the relationship between adults/boys/girls, has the purpose – often unconsciously – of maintaining the current status quo

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[6] Alice Miller has in her academic production a book that is of particular interest, elaborated to trace the foundations of violence towards boys and girls in the field of education. In this text, the author seeks to explore how, including the "softer" and less authoritarian pedagogies (the ones she calls "*pedagogias blancas"*[white pedagogies]) start assuming that smaller or higher doses of violence towards children are "necessary", and thereby legitimized as necessary instruments for education and social peace (MILLER, 1998).

[7] Chris JENKS (1996) defends that the violence exerted against girls and boys reflects the position of subordination, inferiority, and vulnerability they are situated in our culture, due to the social relations of power based on age, which turn them into potential victims of violence to a greater extent that other social groups.

[8] It is fair to say that, effectively, it was Pierre Bourdieu who systematized and provided the foundations for this type of violence, it is certain that this concept was inherited from the Marxist and Althusserian tradition (and Gramscian as well), who tried to account for the division between the structure and the superstructure of operations necessary to sustain the former, in the interactional, dialectic, and dynamic levels.

and increasing the process of subordination and/or subalternization of some subjects, in this case: boys, girls and the youth.

As we have been alerting, before the pandemic, Latin America recorded a high prevalence of different forms and degrees of violence against children, adding this factor to the long and complex chain of vulnerabilities that affects them[9]. Just to name a few instances of such violences, the authoritarian parental methods must be highlighted – including the use of physical forms of punishment –, which affected almost 75% of the boys and girls between 3 and 4 years old, from which more than half suffered physical punishments[10]. Violences that, as previously mentioned, are exerted upon the basis of another chain of violations, happening in an intersectional manner, and within the framework of a sociocultural matrix that naturalizes subordination, as a violence machine and an asymmetric power relation.

Over this global pandemic, and according to the few research studies focused on the expressions of these same boys and girls (which we will mention further in this paper), they have appreciated being in their homes, having the attention of their family members who had never spent so much time with them. However, not all boys and girls had this same "luck", what is evidenced by the increase in the rates of mistreatment and sexual abuse, which usually happens inside their houses, since it is more space of risk than a place of protection. Even worse, without the possibility of relying on external actors that problematize these violences experienced every day[11], as we will do next.

Upon what is this adult-centric matrix of symbolic violence based, in the case of boys and girls in the region? We can find an example in the image that reinforces boys and girls as part of the family property, the appeal of saying "childish" as something derogatory or inferior[12], the insignificance of childhoods that considers boys and girls as subjects of the "future" (subjects to-

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[9] Inequalities of all kinds have, in fact, been given new opportunities to increase during the pandemic (MAGISTRIS and OTHERS, 2020), particularly in our affected region, characterized by a high degree of poverty, inequality and structural violence that severely affect boys and girls specifically.

[10] https://www.unicef.org/lac/comunicados-prensa/la-pandemia-incremento-la-violencia-contra-los-ninos-y-ninas-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe

[11] Particularly, this issue is translated into identifying the boys and girls as victims, especially in relation to violence, and therefore incapable of action, including asking others for help.

[12] Note how the adjective "childish" is used daily and naturally as a form of devaluating attitudes or qualities of people in general, placing childhood as a mere synonym of a biological stage one has to overcome in order to achieve the desired and appreciated state of adulthood.

be) and not of the present, denying their participation in the public space (CUSSIANOVICH, 2010).

In this sense, we highlight that, in relation to violence against children, there always seems to be different qualifiers that disconnect them from the other matrices that employ violence, in the intersection with other social differences like class, gender, or ethnicity.

Thus, we are not approaching violence in general, but ill-treatment. We are not speaking about violence against or towards children, but "childhood violence", making invisible the power relations in which they emerge, and (not only the individual, but especially the collective) subjects target of aggressive actions. All very powerful symbolic strategies to defuse the political and disturbing character of adultist violence against children, relegating its commission to the private, individual, interpersonal, and fragmented sphere.

## 3. Adultist violence(s) in the pandemic context of Latin America

As we mentioned previously, in this paper we will focus on identifying some images that build, (re)produce and support adultist violence, particularly focusing on symbolic violence.

We believe that these three images we have selected account for very naturalized and rooted manners of understanding children in our societies, observing them from a standpoint of absence, denial, and incapacity; at the same time that they allow the establishment of shared horizons of meaning which reinforce violence against these children.

### 3.1. First image. The "happy childhood", revisited

As we have stated in this article, the issue of adult-centrism and the consequent adultist violence is not a mere addition to the pandemic context we have been facing, but a structural, historical, and political long-term reality, aggravated by the current context.

The first image that emerges with force of law in this context is a re-enactment of the "happy childhood" myth, free of concerns, devoid of responsibilities, with demands and needs that would be "naturally" attainable – and especially fulfilled by the primary care group –, without dispute or tensions. It has been widely explored that this way of understanding childhood operates as a clear essentializing drive, abstracting from the concrete reality

experienced by millions of boys, girls, and adolescents in our region (MAGISTRIS y MORALES, 2021; MAGISTRIS, 2020). Furthermore, this essentialization corresponds to a certain naturalization of the needs of these age groups in a universal and non-localized manner, dismissing plural childhoods and their intersectional differences. This is one of the reasons, among others, for the late prevalence of children's rights rhetoric in the field of social studies (as well as intervention studies) of childhoods (MAGISTRIS, 2020).

Since March 2020, when the world was affected by the COVID19 pandemic, this idea of happy childhoods, with needs satisfied by the people closest to them, and that do not deserve greater discussion nor tension, has been exacerbated. Along these lines, it is worth asking ourselves: Who defines the basic needs of boys and girls? Is it possible to define them with no debate or tension? What needs are we discussing? These questions make us think that there is nothing natural about the sphere of needs, nor is there anything natural in the case of children.

A symbolic form of violence derived from this first myth is thus the one that triggers a unique image of childhood, that collaborates to both ignoring the complex and diverse needs children may demand and underestimating the impact on them produced by health care policies (especially confinement) adopted after the beginning of the pandemic.

In addition, not to say the least, there are always others speaking on behalf of boys and girls "for their own sake", as state by Alice Miller. This well-being measured by adult criteria and outlooks never appears to correspond to that of boys and girls. This lack of correspondence is, in any case, an unsolvable tension, but at the same time it needs to be debated. The case is that this lack of consideration has assumptions which are seldom mentioned and made visible. In fact, as part of the traditional adult view that considers boys and girls objects of protection, the care to be provided and needs to be met by adults belong to the domestic space, that is, the most private family environment where boys and girls learn the hegemonic norm and social duties according to their age and sex (TORRES, 2020).

This universalizing image of a happy childhood has been symbolically reinforced with how the younger populations have been challenged lately, that is, a call for discipline and control summarized by the motto "stand, resist and behave well". A huge sacrifice was asked of them – even bigger than the one asked on adults – to avoid spreading the virus (MAGISTRIS AND OTHERS,

2020), giving them little in return[13], since not even remotely are they understood as valid interlocutors to transform the present. This was also translated into health care policies which have addressed them only from that standpoint, or only in some specific social roles, as sons/daughters, students, but not as part of the community in which they are inserted as children. In fact, even in the messages targeted at the population in support of health care measures that implied great efforts from the younger population, little was adapted to their contexts, their ways of being in the world as children and adolescents[14].

On the other hand, according to data by UNICEF (...) "At least 1 in 7 children- or 332 million globally - have lived under required or recommended nationwide stay-at-home policies for at least nine months since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, putting their mental health and well-being at risk"[15].

Therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind that the pandemic has affected especially the mental health of boys and girls. Then, why does no one think of children's suffering? Due to this same image of a happy, worry-free childhood that comes out of this universal and hegemonic childhood matrix. However, in what way is it translated into violent actions against already vulnerable children? During this pandemic, there was an expansion of this idea of the plasticity of boys and girls and their capacity to adapt to all the changes imposed by these new times, which is much higher than adults have. Now we ask ourselves: is this truly favorable to them? According to their stage of development, boys and girls have manifested their discomfort towards this new reality in their actions, in their bodies and in diseases. And this brings us new risks: that these diseases, these mechanisms of repelling this adaptation

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[13] https://www.elsaltodiario.com/coronavirus/marta-martinez-infancia-gran-ausente-agenda-politica-confinamiento

[14] It is worth recalling a campaign (the only known one, at least from an official national government plan) portraying the prime minister of Canada with a spot targeted specifically at children, talking to them from their place of boys and girls in the community, with accessible language and illustrations for this group. On the contrary, in Argentina, it draws our attention that in a single occasion, in mid-2020, they tried to convey this similar idea sharing on national TV, on mass media, the measures to be renewed and implemented during the pandemic where the president of the nation broadcasted the message with a member of a children's music group dressed as a clown. This gave rise to several types of criticism. The question asked at the time was: How was a person dressed as a clown while she was talking about deaths? The severity and the jokes, in opposition, always reinforcing this overwhelming dichotomy that separates children from adults, as if boys and girls had not suffered this reality, as if the deaths had not affected them. On this campaign and its impact, see: https://www.clarin.com/politica/dia-nino-payasa-aparecio-informe-diario-coronavirus_0_oyHpYjSGz.html

[15] https://www.unicef.org/argentina/comunicados-prensa/salud-mental-jovenes-covid

transform into new pathologies. Then, it is paramount to disarm this idea that boy and girls can endure everything, adapt to everything, that they are "okay", and that their needs are interpreted and met only by their families (JANIN, 2020).

As mentioned above, everyone talks of the needs of boys and girls. Everyone, but their protagonists. Paraphrasing Francesco Tonucci in some of the various conferences he participated during the confinement in this global pandemic, it is paradoxical that everyone asks psychologists for advice for fathers and mothers, and pedagogues for orientation for teachers; and, at the same time, nobody thought about consulting boys and girls themselves. Nobody is concerned with their opinions, except when demanding that they fulfill their duties. Except for honorable and isolated exceptions[16], there has been no research with certain systematization and strictness that analyzed their feelings, thoughts, and contributions to this state of things to which nobody has had the right answer. Again, the needs, demands and voices of boys, girls, and adolescents (who have their own specificities) have been annulled and undermined, as the foundation of these new forms of symbolic violence against them.

### 3.2. Second image. Girls and boys as objects of care

The issue of care has established itself in the international agenda as soon as the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic began. Health care emerged as a concern at a global level as never witnessed before (BATTHYANY, 2020, among many others), opening up a problematization field that aimed at identifying and reviewing the mode of distribution of care within households, especially in relation to gender. Nonetheless, once more, as we will witness,

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[16] We refer to some investigations focused on determining the opinions, meaning and assessments that bear in mind boys and girls in the current context. In particular, we recommend: 1) MARTÍNEZ MUÑOZ AND OTHERS (2020). *Infancia confinada. ¿Cómo viven la situación de confinamiento niñas, niños y adolescentes?* [Confined childhood. How do girls, boys and adolescents live in situations of confinement?] Carried out in Madrid, Spain. 2) MELEL XOJOBAL (2020). *¿Cómo viven las niñas, niños y adolescentes de San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, la pandemia del Coronavirus?* [How do girls, boys and adolescents of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, live the Coronavirus pandemic?]; 3) COLECTIVO DE DERECHOS DE INFANCIAS Y ADOLESCENCIAS (2020). *Las voces de niños, niñas, adolescentes y jóvenes en contextos de pobreza y de movilidad humana en Argentina.* [The voices of boys, girls, adolescents, and the youth in contexts of poverty and human displacement in Argentina.] All these investigations are mentioned extensively in the bibliographical references.

children were included in the debates only as objects, but not as subjects who are also an active part of care.

If we think of care outside the contexts, policies, and systems in which it is inserted, we are not in a good path. It is indispensable to take into account the complexity of care, the intersections with other vulnerabilities, especially considering Latin American boys and girls. That is, the intersection with social inequality, poverty, physical and psychological violence, trafficking, (im)migration, among other emerging (and urgent) topics.

Within this framework, children are portrayed as naturally dependent, as beings for whom we must exclusively care. But is this really the context of the region we have described previously? Do we really think boys and girls are nothing more than objects, and not subjects of care?

In order to answer some of these questions, it is key to, firstly, review the way this care is implied on childhood. And this may be observed in three fundamental aspects. On one hand, because of how much this population effectively requires a reproductive work of higher quality and intensiveness for their full growth; on the other hand, because the unequal gender conditions also impact girls to carry out domestic work. (TORRES, 2020, p. 1). The third point is the most neglected one, a result of the statements we have been making about the symbolic strength derived from seeing boys and girls as mere objects of protection and care. This last item invites us to rethink the place of children also as a central part of the care system. And this pandemic has exposed this clearly. Children and young adults have taken on so many more responsibilities than they used to have, collaborating to the support of their families, working at home taking care of their siblings, carrying out household chores and heading community actions, such as supporting soup kitchens and/or other bonding and/or emotional activities (MAGISTRIS and MORALES, 2021).

To include the latter as a central topic of care, and thus avoid reproducing the symbolic violence that sentences boys and girls to a mere place of objects, it is necessary to assume that care is an ontological dimension of all human beings, understood as fragile, vulnerable, and precarious (BUTLER, 2006).

The pandemic has shown us how true it is that the precarious situation in which all human beings find themselves is a shared one. As a consequence, it is necessary to move away from the discussion of autonomy–dependence, which collaborates to placing children in a situation of inferiority, as if they are reduced to subjects with an immanent weakness and deprived of some fundamental element to be full subjects (SHABEL and MONTENEGRO, 2020).

The very scope and content of care must then be revised to manage to incorporate boys and girls as active subjects, including the notion of interdependence, through which we understand that we all require care throughout our lives and this care is to be covered mutually and not unidirectionally[17].

## 3.3. Third image. The privatization of childhood, (re)versioned

In the current context, we see a clear process of reprivatization of childhood. Once again, children are sentenced to the private space, ultimately annulling them as social and political subjects.

The coronavirus crisis, as stated by César Rendueles[18], is a type of adult-centric paradise. Children have completely disappeared from public sight, the streets were voided of boys and girls, which resulted in an exclusively private matter of mothers and fathers. And this is so because, effectively, they are the only segment of society that has taken longer to have the possibility of leaving their houses and enjoying the (partial) autonomy they had before (MAGISTRIS and MORALES, 2021).

The condition of children's confinement in domestic private spaces is not a novelty. Much on the contrary, this condition is constitutive of the emergence and invention of childhood as a category, particularly in our region, with a differentiation within it (Cf. "Children" and "Minors"). The privatization of boys and girls associated with the "home" has established a device that produces differences and hierarchies between boys and girls, powering unequal precarious situations (LLOBET, 2020). This privatization of childhood is also shared with women within the patriarchal system, since the public streets, spaces, and affairs, as well as socio-political issues are the domain of male adults. (TORRES, 2020).

In the last decades, children's public space (and with it, their autonomy) has become more and more enclosed and reduced purely and exclusively to school (even more so in large urban centers and non-popular social sectors) (MAGISTRIS and MORALES, 2021). Seldom are children incorporated as social

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[17] This follows the provisions of the ethics of care that problematizes the very notion and reach of such care, understanding that needs are not reduced to biological-physiological, but also other types that are only possible to be covered collectively, for example: socialization. (TRONTO, 1987).

[18] Recovered from: https://gsia.blogspot.com/2020/03/la-asombrosa-desaparicion-de-7-millones.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+GsiaInfanciaYAdolescencia+%28GSIA%2C+Infancia+y+Adolescencia%29

actors with significant representation to intervene for themselves in society. They exist in the public space if (and only if) accompanied by an adult. Autonomy is severely limited (before, and now more than ever). Cities are not designed for boys and girls, they were not built with them in mind and there are only some spaces planned for them to gather (schools, squares, football fields). Less so in our region, where social violence, child trafficking and sexual and commercial exploitation are part of the structural violence in cities every day. But there is not conception of city where boys and girls contribute, coexist with the rest of the people, and build it in a responsive dialog (MAGISTRIS and others, 2020).

During the pandemic, the debate about "what is public" in relation to children was limited to the educational institution[19]. All over the region, discussions have taken place about the return of face-to-face classes after one year of virtual education that did not work very well, did not form bonds, did not sustain the "commonality" that unites us. Having said that, I do not wish to disdain the huge effort of teachers in Latin America in favor of the so-called "pedagogical continuity". But we must mention how, in these debates, boys and girls were absent once more. Again, adults took over their demands, their voices and raised the needs they found best for children.

We must problematize this public-private dichotomy even further. Does it work the same way and with the same scope as when we think about gender? What is public, when we refer to children, reduced to these specific spaces built for them, such as schools? What is public in rural spaces? What community do they think of and support, and how boys and girls participate in it? These are factors we have to consider when we sustain a space that banishes the symbolic violence that sentences them to "children-beings", "student-beings", and identify alignments to support the participation of boys and girls as subjects of thought and action, as part of a new society status.

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[19] We have questioned this since *Ternura Revelde*: "How much have we naturalized that schools are the only proper space for education and children? If formal education during most of this year will be virtual, will educational policies not be implemented – beyond the school grounds – to guarantee children's right to the public space? To whom the right to education belongs? To whom the schools belong?" (full post: https://www.instagram.com/p/COEDJSmgBBO/)

## Conclusions

We live inserted in an adult-centered sociocultural matrix that subordinates and subjects younger ones – an adultocracy, as mentioned by HERRERO AZORIN (2020) –, which simultaneously implies and applies violence and oppression, intensifying the social and political exclusion of children.

We have observed a world (and, particularly, our Latin American region) where, in spite of a profuse and normative institutional framework linked to the recognition of children's rights, adult-centric violence continues being the order of the day. As we have seen, it is a product of taking part in a world of oppression towards the younger ones who sustain and reinforce this dependent, subordinate, essentialized outlook of boys, girls, and young adults.

In this paper, we reviewed some of these hegemonic images of children that have become central in the current context (re-enacting or updating themselves, according to each case). We have demonstrated that, somehow, such images were established, with intense symbolic strength, to the extent that they legitimize and normalize violence(s) against children.

The annulment of boys and girls as social and political subjects, as subjects of thought, is the main pillar of these forms of symbolic violence developed here. Through the establishment of this "non-place" destined to children, these violences (and soon, other types of violence), find a fertile ground to settle, grow and re-edit themselves.

We agree once more with HERRERO AZORIN (2020), when he says that dissidence in the face of violence is not evident, but rather it is necessary to practice it daily, and it implies a deconstruction at all levels.

We have a big challenge ahead of us, a radically transforming political bet that advances the transformations desired, but with the commitment that such transformation will never again be achieved without this *potencia-niña* [childhood-power] (COLECTIVO *FILOSOFARCONCHICXS*, 2021), without ever losing the support of the "newly arrived" (in Hannah Arendt's words) to the construction of a renovating, situated, and insurgent critical thought.

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