Children, Culture and Globalisation: A case study response.

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This case study response seeks to critically scrutinize and examine the various concepts, interpretations and discussions surrounding globalisation and cultural identity, in regard to a case study conducted by Twum-Danso Imoh (2013). This particular case study attempts to examine children's perception of physical punishment in Ghana, as well as children's own meaning-making and lived experiences within their cultural context. The case study further explores the conflicts this may have with the global discourse, the UNCRC, which ingrains a universal standard for viewing childhood. There is a recognition that children's perceptions reveal a more complex distinction of their experience which acts in dispute with the narrow and prescriptive dichotomies of good vs bad. Therefore, there is a necessity to progress beyond these dichotomies and instead, strive to comprehend the nuance of children's experiences in their cultural context and comprehend the disparities that this may have with children's living rights elucidated within the global child rights discourse.

To begin with, when delving into the various notions and interpretations of globalisation it is necessary to clarify what is meant by globalisation. Martin et al., (2018) define globalisation as the tendency to have more elements, processes and network flow in our world to be ever more connected across the globe. Shahzad (2006) further adds, that due to this there has been a substantial increase in global awareness of the events and happenings around the world. Arguably, without the process of globalisation, Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) research would lack the means to amplify and give voice to a very opaque aspect of children's experience that is insufficiently discussed within academia. Thus, at the core of her research is children's own meaning-making that they ascribe to the custom of physical punishment in Ghana, this is due to the increasing extensification and velocity of globalisation creating greater exposure to various cultural practices. Such exposure is not only attainable but often necessary and inevitable (Hong and Cheon, 2017). This gives considerable weight to enable debates surrounding children's preception within their cultural context. Despite this, according to Suberchicot (2008), globalisation tends to make efforts to undermine and decimate culture that is not from the West, leaving those from the Global South, in particular susceptible to cultural invasion. Twum Danso Imoh (2013) questions if the UNCRC as a global instrument and a dominant rights discourse is expressed in a Western European language, it is culturally suitable enough to interpret what occurs in children's lives within other regions of the world such as Ghana.

Twum-Danso Imoh (2013) further expresses that the manner in which children within the study spoke about physical punishment not only demonstrated that it is a continuing practice in Ghana, but also demonstrated its acceptability by children. This is because they understood that physical punishment teaches them values that are required in Ghanaian society to become 'good' adults. Article 19 of the UNCRC (1989) however, contrasts this and stipulates that children should not be subjected to violence, abuse or bad treatment from their parents. This echoed that the UNCRC refuses to recognise or reflect contributions of children who undertake duties of an adult within their own society as there is an assumption that children's voices will coincide with the UNCRC. Wells (2015) asserts that this discourse essentially shoulders a dominating westernised, visualisation of childhood as a type of pure and untarnished state that must be protected. Freeman (2015, cited in Evers et al., 2015), similarly maintains that it is a romantic conceptualisation concerning the suppressing essence of adult society and the demand to keep children protected from adult conformism.

This romanticised view of childhood imposed on various regions of the world paves way for what is often referred to as cultural imperialism. This places local cultures and practices at risk of becoming destroyed due to the cultural flow from the Global North (Ritzer, 2012). Its dominating layer is compelled and forced into shaping local cultures to accommodate to, and even advance, the principles and structures of the dominating force (Collins, 2012). Despite this, Demont-Heinrich (2012) argues that cultures with less global power from undeveloped countries extract from their own customs and mix these components with the hegemonic culture. This is evident in Twum-danso Imoh's (2013) study where children were able to identify when discipline becomes

abuse and when it becomes too much. One child in the study stated that "Beating a child all over the body mercilessly is not good" (Twum-danso Imoh, pp.481), suggesting that children do indeed have a clear understanding of the dominant rights discourse, needless to say, this does not mean their own culture is disregarded. This highlights that in many contexts social agents shift to a hegemonic disposition of hybridity (Kraidy, 2002).

Furthermore, Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) study highlights the similarities between dominant child rights discourse and colonialism. Colonialism is a system often considered as the stance of the Western intellectuals, which reinserts their hierarchical power to specify the customs of the world and dominate the colonised (Fougère and Moulettes, 2016). Verwijen and Bockhaven (2019) further reinforce that the West had the means and power of imposing dichotomous binaries which deployed and maintained boundaries. For instance, the colonial power positioned the world as opposites, something with either good or bad. They held the view that black is the opposite of white, and black is 'bad' whereas, white powers, practices and behaviours were on the 'good' side of the spectrum (El-Malik, 2013). The UNCRC, as Twum Danso Imoh (2013) communicates, mirrors the former colonial power mindset, as it frames the discourse into the concept of good or bad binaries. Article 19, of the UNCRC (1989), amplifies the idea that there are harmful practices and unharmful practices, and childhood that carries out harmful practices such as physical punishment are considered a bad and wrong childhood. In essence, the UNCRC tends to compress and hinder more nuanced and complex discussion around childhood (Van De Mieroop and Pagnear, 2013). Instead it views children as individual right holders from a Global North perspective and generates a global norm of childhood, whereby childhood is viewed 'the same' all over the world, irrespective of gender, race, class, ethnicity, traditions and religion. This western perception held by the UNCRC is complementary to the Children and Social Work Act 2017, whereby local authorities are forced to intervene in situations where a child has encountered significant injuries. Whilst children's wellbeing is recognised as the conclusive and deciding element here, this is within the circumstance of a presupposition that an injured child's wellbeing is effectively supported away from the parents who caused them 'harm', with less of an insinuation that children's views must be the fundamental and core deciding element. In addition to this, in the area of child safeguarding, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) states that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. However, a contravention of Article 3 is initiated when local authorities are alert and conscious that a child is experiencing mistreatment and does not succeed in taking satisfactory and necessary measures to safeguard the child. On the other hand, there is some tension with this as it is equally apparent that over-intense, intrusive and fervent involvement/ interference from the authority is likely to also contravene the ECHR. The crucial argument is that a balance demands that the authority respond with solely such measures that is required in order to protect the child's wellbeing.

Twum-Danso Imoh (2013), however, indicates that these binary notions attached to the UNCRC, ECHR and Children and Social Work Act, 2017 in terms of the practices that should and should not occur in children's lives essentially obscure the reality of what is occurring within children's lives. She seeks to uncover why we do not question the Global North concept of a "normal" childhood when all children do not have the life narrated within the dominant child rights discourse, and questions who benefits when we look at childhood in a simplistic manner. Edwards (2015) however indicates that colonial powers viewed colonised nations as being uneducated and lacking knowledge, thus in need of these binary impositions. Though, interestingly, the children in Twum-Danso Imoh's, (2013) study appear to have a sense of right and wrong, as they seek to benefit from the moral guidance from their elders who, instruct them of the right way to behave whether this is through the means of physical punishment or not, ultimately children appreciate being a part of a culture that draws between right and wrong. This is in alignment of the African Charter of the welfare of the Child (1990) which aimed to integrate the social-cultural context and practice in Africa. Article 31 of the charter empathises on children's moral obligation to respect elders and uphold African principles within their community. Hason (2018) further maintains that

cultural customs are lived relations which necessitate accepting the correlation between agency and experience, thus the UNCRC should embed varied complexities of childhood and pave way for contestation (Quennerstedt et al., 2018).

In addition to this, Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) study demonstrates that children's sense of belonging to their community impacts their perceived experiences and perceptions of traditional customs such as physical punishment. This is often recognised as culture which encompasses learnt and socially imparted traditions, histories, knowledge, beliefs and conducts (Schaefer, 2002). It is essentially a specific arrangement of human events and the underpinnings and meanings that give these events importance and thus enabling us to differentiate between various groups. Omekwu (2006), brings to attention the interconnectedness of culture identity and cultural, cultural identity being the application of the ideas surrounding culture. A notion presented further here is the concept of collective and shared characteristics in relation to cultural identity. Collective cultural identity is elucidated as one's perception of themselves that stems from their knowledge of participation and integration within a social group/s, as well as the principles and emotional experiences accompanying it (Tajfel, 1978, cited in, Usborne and Taylor, 2010). This is exemplified in Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) article where children are experiencing a collective and shared cultural practice enabling them to put a shared meaning on what is occurring within their cultural context. Children expressed a strong devotion and assimilation to a cultural identity that is communal. They communicate the significance of physical punishment in their community, in aiding them to train to be 'good' adults in the future and contribute effectively to their society. In spite of this, the UNCRC displays a lack of regard to the realities of many people's experiences and situations, as it holds an ethnocentric stance assuming that what is prescribed from a top-down approach from a Eurocentric interpretation is what is best for the rest of the world (Clark 2010). Similarly, Bizumic and Duckitt (2012) articulate that an ethnocentric position from the West in global policy is problematic as it pre-judges other cultures and childhoods as incorrect while views one's own culture as the correct, the only way and superior to all else, in essence, it restricts cultural norms that refute entrenched principles of the children's rights discourse (Etinson, 2018).

As a result of this, Hammond and Axelrod (2006) point out, that the issue regarding culture has fuelled disputes on whether or not universal child's rights can constitute to or reflect anything other than being an instrument of imperialism. This is because it evades thorough examination of culture and instead concentrates on the extensive structural forces, which have corrupted regional culture, leaving it unable to effectively function. To put simply, this distorts the principles and demands of different cultures on what is expected of children within that social-cultural context. Instead, it intrinsically belittles cultures whose "children" experience physical punishment as a form of guidance, integral to their development and maturation, and views it as shameful and dehumanising of the child (Matuna, 2001). Chetty (2016, cited in Shukla, 2016) empathises that children should be exposed to messages in their lives, where they are able to recognise their own culture reflected back to them. This supports them in understanding themselves and strengthens their sense of self as well as grasping the concept of cultural diversity, the idea that they should comprehend other people's experiences and be accepting of it. It is also imperative that value systems positively reinforce various cultures as sufficient and valuable within their social context, as this helps children feel less inferior and take pride in their culture.

Following on from this, the idea of cultural relativism can be applied to this study as it provides the basis for readers to look within children's cultural context and understand the rationale behind their views. Cultural relativism refers to the recognition that community's contrast in their cultural behaviour and conduct in regard to social phenomena. Therefore, we must comprehend cultures on their own terms and coherences, looking within what makes sense in their culture rather than judging from the outside (Eshetu, 2017). Nevertheless, it is imperative to ensure that when we yield and preserve cultural practices, that we are not permitting detrimental practices. Twum-Danso Imoh (2013) raises the question on whether physical punishment is one of those firm limits that we should not act culturally relative towards or if we are able to say that cultures themselves

should deal with their own manifestation of child-rearing with their own conduct. Anderson (2018) critiques relativism, contending that the concept of respecting all cultures essentially leads to tolerance of cultures, which should not be greater in significance than justice and other principles. She further argues that tolerance is commonly a negative notion, as we tend to not "tolerate" things we appreciate and approve of. Notwithstanding, Harris-Short (2003) asserts that even if the UNCRC is not approaching culture from an entirely culturally relative manner, it should still take into account the influence of social surroundings and culture on children and childhood, facilitating mutual ground for discourse regarding the rights of children, whereby children's perceptions are apparent.

In conclusion, Twum-Danso Imoh's case study highlights the way cultural identity and globalisation impact child-rearing practices in Ghana. Although the UNCRC acts as a global instrument to protect and promote children's rights, it does not embrace children's cultural experiences in developing countries. Instead, it utilises the Eurocentric concept of a 'universal childhood' which is problematic as many counties do not experience the same childhood, therefore, it positions the world at risk of erasing cultural diversity.

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