

## **Call for contributions cArgo 16**

### **“How to place children at the core of anthropological traditions”**

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The title, abstract (10 to 15 lines), and keywords of the article must be submitted in French or English to the coordinators of the special issue ([alice.sarcinelli@u-paris.fr](mailto:alice.sarcinelli@u-paris.fr)) and to the editors of the journal ([cargo.canthel@gmail.com](mailto:cargo.canthel@gmail.com)) before Friday, May 27th, 2025. The contributors will be notified before June 30th, 2025. Articles, in French or in English, should be between 30,000 and 50,000 characters including the bibliography, and may include copyright-free illustrations. The first draft of the article should be submitted to the coordinators and editors by September 29th, 2025. The second draft, revised according to the team's suggestions, should be submitted for double-blind peer review by November 30st 2025

#### **Abstract**

The anthropology of childhood is doubly invisibilized. On one side, it stands apart from the human sciences that have firstly and foremost studied children, such as psychology and psychoanalysis. On the other, it is still little considered by its own discipline.

Nevertheless, in 1981, a major article by Suzanne Lallemand and Guy Lemoal already revealed the neglect of “a small subject”, small both in terms of the actors involved - children - and in terms of the little space accorded to this theme. In the 2000s, other researchers consider that traditional anthropology has neglected children (Hirschfel 2003, Lenclud 2003). However, major anthropologists, from the very dawn of the discipline, have questioned the dominant knowledge surrounding childhood in human sciences such as Malinowski (1927, 1929), Mauss (1994(1937) and, more centrally, Mead (1928).

It is also worth recalling the contribution of the historical discipline, which has contributed, albeit in different ways depending on the context, to the émergence of new approaches to childhood in the social sciences (Becchi and Julia 1998; Dasen et al. 2001; Ariès, 1960, DeMause, 1974, Zelizer, 1994, Pollock, 1983). Representatives of these currents forged fruitful collaborations with anthropologists, leading to works of historical anthropology focusing on transformations in child-parent relations (Viazzo 2004).

A genuine field of anthropological research thus emerged before the 1980s, presenting itself as the first to put children at the center of research. Several decades later, it can be said that childhood is now “part of the ethnographer's classic toolbox” (Bonnet 2012, p. 253).

If today “we no longer need to worry about legitimizing” a field that is now consolidated (Cruz Rifiotis et. al 2021), it is now possible to take a critical look at this field of research. While children, as the next generation, not only manufacture and interpret norms, but also transform and contest them, albeit not necessarily in an open or conflictual manner, their participation in social worlds is still too often overlooked, whatever the fields investigated: from the religious and medical (Gottlieb 2004, Figueiredo 2019, Teixeira 2019, Daugey, Razy and Campigotto 2020) to kinship (Sarcinelli et al. 2022, Razy et al. 2024), via age (Salgues 2024).

It has to be said that the anthropology of childhood has developed more as a minority and minoritized field of research, narrowed in on itself and on the peer groups (Cohn, 2013, p. 223 in Cruz Rifiotis *ibid*) and on children as social actors (Vinet & Zaltron 2020).

Several obstacles make it somewhat difficult to think about childhood from an anthropological point of view. The most obvious is anthropology's lack of legitimacy among the disciplines that study and produce knowledge about childhood, despite the fact that important work has been produced on childhood and has entered into dialogues on the subject with representatives of “dominant” disciplines such as Vygotski, Freud or Piaget (Mead, but also Malinowski and Mauss). But the most insidious problem is internal to the discipline, i.e. what Scheper-Hughes & Sargent (1998: 14) call “the hermeneutics of suspicion” that hangs over children's speech and their credit as informants for anthropological studies. While including children as informants is accepted among childhood anthropologists, it is not at all self-evident when dialoguing with the anthropological community at large. Why is it so difficult to think of children as qualified interlocutors in our ethnographies? The implicit idea is that children can only be grasped by other disciplinary fields, such as psychology, psychoanalysis, educational sciences and so on.

How, then, can we break out of this impasse and respond to Mauss's original project of studying children in order to better grasp more general sociological issues, and draw on general theories (such as his theories on the body) to understand childhood?

The present issue will bring together contributions from anthropologists from different national traditions (i.e. French, North American, Brazilian, British) to reflect on how childhood helps us to think about more general anthropological questions and, in mirror image, how general theories can help us to think about childhood.

It will show how anthropologists from different national traditions have sought to place children at the heart of an anthropological project beyond disciplinary subfields. The goal is to test the heuristic scope of an anthropology based on children from a methodological, theoretical and epistemological point of view. To place children at the heart of anthropology is not to involve children in understanding childhood, but to include children in our understanding of the social world as a whole.

How have anthropologists sought to break with the adultocentric paradigm of knowledge production by, for and about adult (mainly men) ? What are the consequences of this break on the very production of knowledge? How does taking on questions about children and childhood influence the very vision of anthropology? And how is this question posed differently according to the academic universe of affiliation, whether in the North or the South, with production in global

or local language and according to disciplinary divisions? Such questions will be addressed in this issue, in an attempt to decompartmentalize both methods of inquiry and theories about children, by making them a “major subject” of anthropology.

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