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Josefsson, Jonathan; Sandin, Bengt; Hanson, Karl; Balagopalan, Sarada

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Representing Children

*Jonathan Josefsson, Bengt Sandin, Karl Hanson,
and Sarada Balagopalan*

The Oscar winning documentary film *Born into Brothels*, written and directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, received critical public acclaim and was praised by many children's rights advocates at the time of its release in 2004. The film seductively weaves together a narrative of compassion together with showcasing the actions taken by Zana Briski, a New York-based photographer, to remove children of sex workers from Sonagachi, a red-light district in Kolkata, India, from their debilitating environments. Despite their alleged neglect by their sex worker mothers,

J. Josefsson (✉) • B. Sandin
Department of Thematic Studies—Child Studies, Linköping University,
Linköping, Sweden
e-mail: jonathan.josefsson@liu.se; bengt.sandin@liu.se

K. Hanson
Centre for Children's Rights Studies, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland
e-mail: Karl.Hanson@unige.ch

S. Balagopalan
Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey,
Camden, NJ, USA
e-mail: sarada.balagopalan@rutgers.edu

who are depicted as being both incompetent and indifferent to their offspring, the documentary does not represent children of sex workers as passive beings. Rather, Briski teaches them to use a camera and with this tool the children share their lives as active speaking subjects who, thanks to their own creativity and the lessons learned from Briski, make great photographs that document how they see their lives. Convinced of their potential, Briski takes the role of spokesperson for the children and explores possibilities of enrolling these children in a boarding school. Located at a safe distance from the red-light district of the city, this boarding school would help ensure that the children will not return easily to the brothels where their families live. A few years later, an alternative reading of the situation of children of sex workers from Sonagachi is presented in the 2011 documentary film *We are foot soldiers* (which is the English translation of ‘Amra Padatik’) directed by Debolina Dutta and Oishik Sircar who also published an article on their film in *Childhood* (Sircar & Dutta, 2011). Even if *Born into Brothels* portrays children as competent photographers, *We are foot soldiers* criticises the way the film represents children of sex workers primarily as helpless victims. The struggle over how these children get represented concerns how their portrayal in *Born into Brothels* relies upon the idea that a ‘saviour from outside’ is required to represent children’s interests and ensure they get an education and thereby improve their future life chances. *We are foot soldiers* offers a counternarrative by representing children of sex workers as active agents rather than merely passive recipients of welfare interventions by others. Also, through sharing their daily practices of resilience and resistance, which they believe were not portrayed in *Born into Brothels*, they argue that the rights and interests of children of sex workers are better represented by an advocacy group run by children themselves. This advocacy group not only speaks and acts on behalf of themselves and other sex workers’ children in Sonagachi to reduce the stigma that their mothers and they themselves face while enrolling in school, but they also work in solidarity with other children elsewhere in the world (Sircar & Dutta, 2011).

The struggle over the representation of children of sex workers denotes two central dictionary definitions of the word ‘representation’, namely, as ‘a description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way’, and, as ‘the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being so represented’ (Oxford Languages, 2022). First, a key element of children’s representation consists of how children as a group, or the child and childhood as a figure, is portrayed or described. Certain populations of children—like children of sex workers who live in a red-light

district in a megacity in the Global South—often serve as iconic symbols of poverty with their descriptive, visual and portrayals reinforcing multiple stereotypes and attendant logics of compassion. As has been demonstrated by childhood scholars before, the aesthetic depictions and dominant discourses of children and childhood have throughout the history in various ways been deeply intertwined with major political, social, and cultural processes of change (Ariès, 1962; Balagopalan, 2014; Bessant, 2021, p. 1ff; Bernstein, 2011, James & Prout, 2015, p. 202; Hallett & Prout, 2003; Nakata & Bray, 2020; Sparrman, 2017; Higonnet, 1998; Rose, 2016; Hallberg & Sandin, 2021). The portrayals and depictions of children and childhood have in this way always been embedded in institutional and political practices to achieve political or organizational aims (Rose, 2016) and display how emotionally charged images of children can both mobilise popular support and reveal different and conflicting ways of representing children (Berents, 2020; Burman, 1994; Peacock, 2014). In the case of Briski’s documentary, it demonstrates the ways that agential depictions of children also can be used to consolidate, rather than decenter, the victimization of children. Conversely, the portrayal of a group of actively engaged children such as the members of *Amra Padatik*, the collective of children of sex workers central in Sircar and Dutti’s film, needs to take into account the social and economic conditions in the red-light district. Yet, the portrayal of children as subjects of rights does not erase their vulnerabilities.

Second, children’s representation involves speaking or acting on behalf of children or children’s state of being so represented and thus involves a performative act (Holzscheiter, 2016). Representation in its performative sense, that is, when people ‘speak or act on behalf of’ someone or something (Alcoff, 1991; Seward, 2010; Pitkin, 1967), can refer to formal and institutionalised structures as found in for example representative democracies (Urbinati, 2006) or international organisations (Holzscheiter, 2016), but can also be used in reference to family settings, NGOs and the realms of global politics and social media networks, to name a few (Disch et al., 2019; Seward, 2020). Children often rely on a person or a group of people who speaks on their behalf and who represents them, for instance, in legal or political affairs. Children’s representatives can be influential (usually adult) individuals like Zana Briski but they can also be a group of children who represent other children, as in the case of the organization *Amra Padatik*. This aspect of representation is closely linked to children’s rights and participation and to the shifting complexities and dynamics that

mark the institutionalization and formalization of children's voices (James, 2007).

In addition, the two films' conflicting viewpoints of children and childhood also indicate the political dimension of children's representation. Put another way, representing children is not only linked to portrayals and performances, but also politics, where the act of speaking in and of children and childhood is both an act, and the result, of political struggle. Children's representation as portrayals and performances reflects existing formalized processes as well as long-term political changes and historical conflicts between different interests and ideologies (Berents, 2020; Holzscheiter, 2016; Peacock, 2014). Different actors struggle to claim the authority to define the portrayal of children as, for example, dependent or as autonomous subjects, or both, and use these for different political purposes with sometimes unintended consequences (Hallberg & Sandin, 2021). In the context of portraying children of sex workers, it is suggested that they should represent themselves rather than rely on a 'saviour from outside'. *We are foot soldiers* focuses on the political organization developed by children of sex workers. These children's efforts to politicize their struggle for dignity not only for themselves, but also for their mothers requires them to demand attention on distinctly different terms than those offered by the mainstream narrative of victimization. More generally, political conflicts, and for that matter, consensus building, around children and childhood illustrates how children recurrently play a constitutive role as temporary outsiders who present both risk and renewal to the demos (Nakata & Bray, 2020). Young people's involvement in social movements, mass mobilisation and extra-parliamentary action against inequalities and injustices have a long history and speaks to the importance of closer engagement with children's political representation for our understanding of politics as such (Bessant, 2021; Cummings, 2020; Dar & Wall, 2011; Hinton, 2021; Josefsson & Wall, 2020; Nakata, 2008; Wall, 2021). The struggles around securing more accurate or genuine representation of children and youth often entails organizing for self-representation to shift existing regimes of power. It further reveals the intimate interdependence between portrayals, performances, and politics in our understanding of children's representation.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHILDREN'S REPRESENTATION

The question of children's representation is particularly timely in today's world not only because of demographic shifts and the increase of the generation under 18 years of age but also because of the global challenges we face. Despite making up half of the world's population, children and youth have in many respects been denied the capacity to represent their interests, particularly on matters of political import. However, it is clear that young people in many contexts have been understood as either competent contributors to politics with a legitimate claim to represent themselves, or in other cases, have been regarded as posing a considerable risk to society and stability. Indeed, you would have to think very hard to come up with a political question that does not involve young people as central objects or agents of change. Whether it be young people organizing against the exploitative extraction of resources in indigenous areas in India (Gergan & Curley, 2021), Canada and the USA (Ibid), shaping the struggle for democracy as part of the Arab Spring (Honwana, 2019), unifying against climate change (de Moor et al., 2021) and migrant policies in Global North countries (Josefsson, 2017) and against gun violence, racism and policing regimes in the USA (Hinton, 2021), their increased participation in the political sphere has helped produce new, and emergent modes, of formal and informal representation within these global, national and local efforts.

However, these questions about children's representation, and in particular the politics involved, are not new. The debate on child labour, including how to depict or tell the story of working children as well as who is entitled to speak and act on their behalf, offers a telling example, from the late nineteenth century, of the close connection between portrayals, performances and politics of children's representation. In 1899, the newsboys of New York went on strike because the *Evening World* and *Evening Journal* had decided to lower the pay and the terms for the newspapers that the newsboys sold. The press at that time reported on the wage struggles but also illuminated the independent culture of this class of child workers and their vocal and prolific leadership in demanding their rights and fair pay. The voices of the children were, in these press stories, represented by children themselves (*New York Times*, July 25, 1899; *New-York Tribune*, July 21, 1899). At this same time, around the turn of the century, imageries of the street urchins became an important tool for the child saviours calling attention to the deplorable and degrading living

conditions of street children and child labourers. Photos by Jacob Riis and later by Lewis Hines influenced legislation and reforms as well as nurtured the ambitions of generations of child saviours, professionals, philanthropists, non-governmental organisations and government agencies that spoke out and represented the interests of children in what Ellen Key described and hoped to be a century of the child (Riis, 1971; Dimock, 1993; Aronsson & Sandin, 1996; Platt, 2009). Whereas the newspapers depicted agentive young street vendors who could very well speak on behalf of themselves, iconic photographs of passive victims of child labour later offered visual justifications for well-meaning adult outsiders to act on behalf of children. Some hundred years later, at the end of the twentieth century, images of children as active citizens went hand in hand with the promotion of children's participation rights including in political matters. In 1996, in line with these changing childhood images, a group of Danish children aged 10–12 protested in front of a government commission against the implementation of an EU directive for newspaper delivery work that would outlaw child labour between 10–13 years of age. About 3200 children would lose their work. The delegates of the commission expressed their sympathy for the cause and agency of the children that wanted to work. However, different political arguments were deployed to limit children's representation as they declared that the Danish government was bound by a broader agreement with the EU that restricted their ability to meet the demands of the newspaper boys. The Danish parliament had no authority over the matter, they claimed, and could not politically represent the voices of these children given their international obligations (de Coninck-Smith et al., 1997, 7).

A well-known example from the Global South of contestations over the way how children should be represented is the leadership of young school children in protest marches against the South-African Apartheid regime during the 1976 Soweto uprising (See Twum-Danso Imoh, this volume). In this case, the South-African government at that time did not consider that the protesters had a legitimate political right to voice an opinion which questioned the regime's racist foundations. The protest was violently suppressed, and the participants were described as undisciplined troublemakers rather than as political activists. This view on the young activists radically changed once the Apartheid regime had ended and 16 June was declared a public holiday to commemorate the actions undertaken by the 'young heroes' during the 1976 Soweto uprising (Hanson & Molima, 2019). Since 1991, on the initiative of the Organisation of

African Unity (OAU), 16 June was proclaimed the Day of the African Child. Even though it commemorates the political courage of the school children who participated in the demonstrations held in 1976, it has been turned into a continent-wide advocacy event for the promotion of children's rights to education, rather than to recognise children's political representation.

Children's representation has, hence, developed into a site of contestation and power over who represents whom, what, when and where. The opposing viewpoints about representation that we have discussed above provide a point of departure to explore the linkage between children, representation, and politics, which is the focus of this book. The controversies around the representation of children actualise the political character of different means of representing children by different agents and institutions across multiple contexts and during various moments in time. Given the intimate entanglement between portrayals, performances, and politics in representing children, how do contemporary representations of children and childhood differ from, and build on, the past? What underlies the current political representational efforts of young people and what are their effects?

In this book, we offer an interdisciplinary analysis of the complexities, and affordances, that have marked, and continue to affect, children, childhood and representation as 'portrayals', 'performances' and 'politics'. It builds on the widespread recognition that traditional forms of democratic representation having excluded the participation of children (Bessant, 2021; Schrag, 1975; Wall, 2012, 2021), as well as acknowledges how depiction of children as right bearers and right subjects has influenced the political discourse about children. However, while new forms of representing children and their rights have certainly shaped new political avenues through which young people have been represented, these have also been deployed to control and govern the younger generation (Sandin, 2012; Holzscheiter et al., 2019; Wells, 2011). This tense interplay between young people who assert their political subjectivity, but who are simultaneously entangled in processes that seek to craft them into governable citizens reveals children's political representation less as a panacea and more as a fraught exercise. The book attempts to raise fundamental questions around earlier discursive constructions of young people's agentic actions by exploring children and childhood through the concept of representation.

This book claims that the lens of representation can bring new facets into our thinking that differ from the concept of children's rights and participation that have been dominant in childhood studies and other fields (Reynaert et al., 2009; Lundy, 2018; Tisdall, 2008). By treading on grounds well-travelled by scholars in Childhood Studies in its broadest sense including those within the disciplines of history, sociology, politics and children's geography we have assembled a set of different scholarly contributions to highlight the critical importance of representation to our understanding of children and childhood. Our interest in children's representation complements also a revitalized scholarly debate about the concept of political representation where theorists have been stretching out our concepts about when and how political representation take place (Brito Vieira, 2017; Disch et al., 2019; Saward, 2020; Urbinati, 2006). In these discussions, children as a category has been relatively absent in comparison with the interest in categories such as gender, ethnicity and class. As we argue, in times of societal and political transformations, these various forms of representing children have become central to offer visions and directions, as well as long-term legitimacy and sustainability. The representation of children and youth, however, does not only come with promises, renewals and hopes, but is also accompanied by risks, reproduction of existing injustices and instability. Given this, questions around who is representing young people and what claims are being made by these representatives become key.

In order to explore how the lens of children's representation might be used to enhance our understanding of children, youth and politics, we have collected a series of papers based on empirical and theoretical research in over seven countries. These chapters address a wide range of current social and political challenges where the representation of children and childhood has become sites of contestation that need further empirical and theoretical exploration. By collecting essays on several historical and contemporary subjects that affect children's lives, including migration, democracy, child labour, street children, poverty, welfare, education and child rights legislation, the volume engages with the very fundamental challenge of how to represent a group of people in democratic societies and global politics, and more specifically, how to represent children and young people.

The book is composed of thirteen chapters that are arranged in three sections. The chapters in the first section look back at the emergence of ideas around children's rights, participation and representation and

studies how these concepts have been used, transformed and critiqued in various parts of the world. The chapters presented in the second section broadly trace the effects of the global circulation as well as limitations of children's rights discourses in international politics. Section three gathers chapters that are concerned with children's political representation in relation to structures, processes and experiences of inequalities and injustices.

CHILDHOOD POLITICS: FROM RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION TO REPRESENTATION

Young people have over the last decades received significant attention in global politics. Mass mobilisation by children and youth in various parts of the world in recent years illustrate how young people are not only affected by political processes, but also actively shape these very dynamics (Bessant, 2021; Cummings, 2020; Josefsson & Wall, 2020). The engagement of, and for, children and youth in politics constitutes a continuum of longer and multifaceted historical processes where young people have claimed rights and also gained significant formal recognition as rights holders. In this sense the social, cultural, symbolic and political representations of young people during the twentieth century have made possible new systems of welfare and governance of rights for those under the age of majority (Holzscheiter et al., 2019; Nakata, 2015; Wells, 2011, 2021). Yet, as the contributions of this volume show, while this development clearly opened up new avenues for the protection of young people and their opportunities to participate in matters affecting them (see e.g. the chapters by Balagopalan, Josefsson, Sandin, Twum-Danso Imoh in this volume), the ways in which children and youth get represented have largely been shaped by the emergence of separate and exclusive domains for children and youth (Reyneart et al in this volume).

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter: CRC) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 marked what commonly is referred to as a culmination of over 100 years of discourse on international children's rights (Stearns, 2017). The child rights movement has been led by charitable organisations and middle-class philanthropists and governments seeking to improve the conditions and welfare of children, initially in national and local contexts, and later, further afield with as part of a global outreach (Fass, 2011; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012). The Convention represented a turning point in how children were perceived in

international social policy by elevating children from ‘objects of adult charity’ to independent rights holders (Veerman, 1992; Twum-Danso Imoh & Ansell, 2014). Such discourses and policies developed in conjunction with a global history of colonial exploitation and expansion, two major world wars, the building of welfare states and rise of neo-liberal economies, the challenges of a post-colonial reconstitution of identities, societies and nations, both in the Global South and the Global North. Yet, the recognition of children as rights holders was also driven by fundamental regional, national and local transformations that developed distinctively before, and after, the breakthrough of the international discourse of children’s rights in the latter part of the twentieth century (see Sandin and Twum-Danso Imoh in this volume). The development of welfare regimes of different characters including the growth of foreign aid, missions, philanthropies and management of distant domains to the liberation, control, and governance in the Global South are some examples of how the emergence of young people’s rights, participation and representation are tied into specific historical and political processes (Balagopalan, 2019; Honwana, 2012; Kasanda, 2019; Marshall, 2004, 2013, 2014; Nehlin, 2009; Pickard & Bessant, 2018; Roberts, 2015, Twum-Danso Imoh & Okyere, 2020; Vallgård, 2015).

Against this backdrop, we find good reasons to pay closer attention to how different historical trajectories have informed the growing responsibility of states to protect and represent children during the twentieth century. The role of the state to represent children and their rights evolved as a result of the interaction between social, legal and political spheres of public authority such as education, poor relief and social welfare, labour law, family law and criminal law. The emergence of childhood politics and the representation of children must be understood in relation to the role of parents and governments, as demonstrated in Bengt Sandin’s chapter in this volume (Sandin, Chap. 2). Sandin shows how children’s rights were redefined by Swedish legislators in different branches of government from the late nineteenth century and onwards, a redefinition that continued during the 1960s and 1970s with the prohibition of corporal punishment in the family in 1979. He argues that the adoption of the new legislation was a consequence of fundamental changes in the role of the Swedish state during this period in representing, protecting, and controlling children in institutions such as orphanages, reformatories, childcare and penal institutions under government responsibility as well as in schools and in the family. It was built on the concomitant establishment of a new type of

relationship between children, the family and the state and on the advent of a multicultural society. In this sense, the chapter illustrates how state action to represent the voice and rights of others, in this case children, is always relational and intimately connected to the work of individuals, groups and various institutions. However, this means that different parts of the state apparatus or organisations outside the national state can act and have acted without coordination and with the aim of solving varying and sometimes conflicting political issues. It is this complex interaction between parental rights and responsibilities, children's autonomous rights and the responsibility of the state and government agencies that makes it necessary to examine representation as an important and transforming social phenomenon. Yet, the kind of national roots underpinning the issue of representing children and their rights in politics that Sandin describes certainly also ties into international relations, histories and orders of power.

The international diffusion of children's rights is an expression of the intricate interplay between political traditions of how to represent children by different modes of governance, legal traditions, gender relations and family roles. Children's rights and the representation of children must thus be understood as situated and as a resulting outcome of intermingling the notions of freedom, liberation and control of children innate in different forms of governance (Balagopalan, 2019; Fay, 2019; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Holzscheiter et al., 2019; Twum-Danso Imoh et al., 2019). A key component from the 1970s and onwards of the idea that children had fundamental human rights was expressed in the emphasis that children had the right to participate in matters that affect them. It was significant because earlier international children's rights discourses and programmes, it was argued, had mostly ignored children's voices or did not treat children's voices with sufficient deference, even in their efforts to ensure their welfare and well-being (Hallett & Prout, 2003; James, 2007; Lundy, 2018). The CRC aimed at responding to this deficit by not only including protection and provision rights within its contents, but by also providing for the participation rights of children. However, the limits of such participation rights become evident when we apply the lens of representation to the concept as Afua Twum-Danso Imoh does in her chapter in this volume (Chap. 3). Despite the vision behind the CRC and the excitement that the participation principle evoked around the world, it was, from the outset, limiting in its capacity for genuine transformational impact. This is primarily due to the fact that while the CRC foregrounds the importance of children's views and involvement in decision-making, it

also ensures that adults remain in control in deciding the terms relating to who participates, how they participate, the topics on which they participate and ultimately, the outcome of participatory initiatives. Thus, in this way, the control of children's participation rights is firmly handed to the management of adults. As a result, what emerges within the CRC is a persisting understanding of children's rights as being a gift of adults which they then give to children—whether this gift is linked to children's care and protection rights or their participation rights. This limitation surely then raises questions about the extent to which the CRC, a treaty regarded as representing a landmark due to its perception of children as subjects—rather than objects—of rights, represents a genuine shift from earlier human rights laws and social policies which explicitly depicted children as objects of rights dependent on the charity of adults. In her chapter, Twum-Danso Imoh calls for the need to look outside this dominant child participation framework in search for examples of genuine forms of transformative child participation and representation. An example of the transformative impact of what may be considered non-CRC-framed children's participation is provided through an analysis of the role of children in the struggle to end apartheid in late twentieth century South Africa through actions for self-representation.

In the next chapter, Sarada Balagopalan explores the interrelationship between rights, participation and representation in the context of education in contemporary India. With several states in the majority world having passed legislation around free and compulsory education and millions of marginal children are now enrolled in schools, the question of how we frame children's participation in their right to education assumes considerable significance. By drawing together discussions around children's representations, participation and educational equity, Balagopalan critically opens up the particular dynamic that has helped produce educational equity as a continually deferable goal. In her chapter, she argues that the dominant representations of first-generation learners as economically marginal children are variously, as well as continually, leveraged to justify their presence within unequal and deeply segregated school spaces. To help problematize this narrative of assumed victimhood, she studies a set of court cases adjudicated in the Delhi High Court between 1997–2001 that foreground the state's role in perpetuating existing inequalities through highlighting the effects of these dominant constructions of the experiences of first-generation learners in school. By countering a simplistic narrative around these children's presence in schools as an adequate measure

of their participation, these Delhi High Court cases help foreground the critical and structural role the state is required to assume to fulfil these children's equitable exercise of their right to education. Moreover, by highlighting their identity as learners, and not as marginal children who are recipients of state welfare services, these cases help expose how schooling for this population circulates as a critical compensatory technology that is no longer about guaranteeing educational equity.

In a related focus on courts and children's legal representation, though in a distinct geographical setting, namely Europe, Nataliya Tchernalykh's chapter focuses on the role of the courts and professional lawyers to critically engage with children's access to rights and justice. She notes how in the twenty-first century, despite the near-universal ascendance of children as independent actors and rights bearers, which have been reinforced by the CRC, children universally lack legal capacity to autonomously act upon these rights in a court of law. In this context, the indispensability of adult legal actors as conduits to children's access to justice is an undeniable reality. Through a set of court cases, Tchernalykh shows how the courtroom success of a case does not necessarily mean social justice for the aggrieved children; conversely, failure in the courtroom does not necessarily mean alienation and desperation. For children, legal experiences may play an emancipatory role, as it decentres and challenges the unidirectional model of the law (from state to citizen), delineating legal processes as merely top-down mechanisms for social control, that cannot be challenged from the bottom-up. An exercise in legal reasoning that challenges dominant discursive, epistemological, and political norms may, under certain conditions, lead to evidence that illuminate the potential reversibility of the processes of domination and exclusion, and demonstrate a more interactive approach to the law. Yet this should not be interpreted, according to Tchernalykh, as a statement that courts and litigation are the only, or even the central, means to achieve more justice for children. Rather, this chapter considers children's lack of legal standing as an important exclusionary factor, and therefore, frames children's representation by adequate legal professionals as one of the important dimensions of their access to justice. Furthermore, it considers legal professionals, representing children in both domestic and international arenas as active actors of the development and interpretation of children's rights.

Similar to the four chapters that constitute the bulk of this section of the book, several other chapters in the volume explore more closely the interrelationships between rights, participation and representation. The

chapters discussed above are mainly based on local contexts and help demonstrate the intimate connection between rights, notions of child participation and forms of representation in specific historical processes. However, as we well know, these questions often intertwine with, and are seldom separable from, the global and transnational arena in which these discourses, policies and practices circulate, develop and in which the success of their national implementation get measured. The following section presents a set of chapters that focuses more distinctively on these processes of international politics of childhood and children's rights and discusses a few of its myriad effects on the portrayals, performances and politics of children's representation.

CHILDREN'S REPRESENTATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In the 1960s and 1970s, a growing attention to children and youth as right subjects (Holt, 1974; Margolin, 1978; Schrag, 1975; Sandin's chapter in this volume) helped to drive the international diffusion of children's rights norms. This was followed by implementation of legislation, policies and institutions in the wake of the adoption of the CRC in 1989 (Holzscheiter, 2010; Holzscheiter et al., 2019). The international awareness of children as a distinct population of concern and the heightened attention devoted to their rights and interests at the time of the adoption of the Convention was certainly not new from a historical perspective. It can, instead, be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and which later manifested in for instance the League of Nation's Child Welfare Committee in 1919 (Droux, 2016), the Geneva Declaration of 1924 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1959 (Fass, 2011; Moody, 2014). Yet, in the latter part of the twentieth century, a 'new' internationalism and international politics of children's rights emerged together with the institutionalization of political bodies with the purpose of representing specifically the rights of children and youth in national and international politics. When a new landscape of actors, sites and systems of child right governance emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century, this resulted in 'new defining features' of the linkage between the representative and the represented (Holzscheiter et al., 2019, See also Josefsson chapter in this volume). The political representation of young people evolved through a complex playing field involving professionals, NGOs,

international organisations, corporations, a plurality of state agencies, families, and young people themselves; all of whom variously claimed to represent children and youth.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a general opening up of global governance institutions to non-state actors (Tallberg et al., 2013) also had implications for the representation of children and childhood in international politics. With regard to children's rights, this paved the way for new actors who claimed to represent specific or larger populations of young people on a broad range of questions such as migration, environment, health, labour, peace and security and democracy. However, the international recognition of young people as actors and as rights holders became at the same time a productive tool for governance and the advancement of different political interests (Holzscheiter, 2016, Holzscheiter et al., 2019; Kwon, 2019; James, 2007, Josefsson, this volume; van Daalen, this volume). This resulted in challenges around how children and youth were depicted in international politics (Holzscheiter, 2010, Beier, 2020, See Tabak's chapter in this volume) and also produced contestations over who could claim the authority to represent the group of children and youth (Holzscheiter, 2016, see van Daalen this volume and Hanson this volume).

This latter point is developed in van Daalen's chapter that traces the struggle of working children's movements to have their views heard within more normative debates on child labour in the International Labour Organization (ILO). The persistence of these movements and the ILO's sustained non-representation, as well as misrepresentation, of their viewpoints highlights how the particular portrayal of child labour and the curated performance of a few adult and children's voices vehemently opposing child labour can stall, but does not necessarily erase, the efforts of more marginalized population of working children at gaining increased political representation. The ways in which young people seek to reframe the debate on child labour helps open up considerations around how changing the current normative framework that marks children's representations is critical especially if we seek to integrate the experiences of marginal children and youth across the world. Despite the success and the representational power that the campaigns of banning child labour 'in all its forms' have had in the shaping of the public imaginary, van Daalen argues that highly diverse and complex phenomena of child labour will certainly remain a controversial question in relation to children's representation in international politics for many years to come.

Normative framings of children and childhood that mark this global flow of ideas and images are explored in Jana Tabak's chapter which focuses on the ways legal and representational energies combine to produce an iconic image of the 'child soldier' as pathological. She challenges this normative framing by disclosing how apparently oppositional constructions of the child soldier as either innocent or monstrous share this 'discourse of the norm'. This representational logic of opposite extremes, as Tabak argues, operates to (re)produce child soldiers either as objects of exploitation or as objects of salvation with both representations producing them as targets of international intervention (or, protection) with no chance of autonomous decision-making.

Karl Hanson's chapter scales up this discussion by taking a critical stance towards organisations that claim to speak on behalf of children in transnational politics and global governance. In his chapter, he explores the close connection between international policymaking on children, childhood and children's rights, and how transnational campaigns and entities play a dominant role in shaping public discourse. By analysing two particular international campaigns, one about minimum age legislation for child soldiering, and a second about children and young people who have taken the lead to fight climate change via international legal procedures, he points to some of the current limits of representing children at the transnational level and thereby raises fundamental questions around who is speaking on behalf of children and where their representation is being performed.

All of the above chapters draw attention to the continued exclusions that mark the performance of representational power around children in international politics on their rights. In addition, they serve to foreground the reasons why a focus on representation and the international politics of children's rights may open up new thinking and avenues about how children and youth can assert their rights and be politically represented in international institutions in ways that go beyond the implementation of rights as individual entitlements. In the next section, we discuss in what way a move beyond a traditional liberal framework of individual rights can allow us to theorize children's political representation in the face of inequalities and injustices. The significance of this move reminds us of the need to continue to remain cautious about how political representation of young people may also risk reaffirming existing exclusions and orders of domination. How might we recognize young people's efforts to reframe and reimagine political representation while being careful about not

reinforcing current geopolitical hierarchies that are based on normative assumptions around what constitutes ‘ideal’ political action?

CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATION IN TIMES OF INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES

So far, we have discussed how children’s representation can work as an analytical device to study the ways in which children and their rights have emerged historically and been shaped in close interrelationship with local, national and global contexts and processes. Yet, as we will point to in this section, children’s representation also open up possibilities to scrutinize how children and youth gain recognition and access to schemes of justice, equality and rights through struggles, contestations and (re)claims of representation (Fraser, 2005; Saward, 2020; Josefsson & Wall, 2020). In times of inequalities and injustices, the chapters of this section suggest, the political representation of children and youth cannot be reduced to a matter of identifying and transmitting interests, rights or voices from a pre-constituted group as defined in international treaties, in domestic law or through policy processes. More than anything, children’s representations become sites of contestation over portrayals and performances of children and childhood between various experiences, actors, spaces and temporalities associated with a considerable amount of social and political power (Disch et al., 2019; Holzscheiter, 2016; Saward, 2010, 2020). It is by exploring these sites of contestation that the studies in this last part of the book shed light on how children and youth claims of representation present both risk and renewal to social, legal and political orders (Nakata, 2008; Nakata & Bray, 2020).

The intimate interdependency and power dynamics between children and parents in times of inequalities is addressed by Yaw Ofofu-Kusi. In his chapter, he highlights how street children in Ghana deliberately use disobedience as a strategy for claiming rights and representation in the family. A central trait in whatever form of childhood one experiences in Ghanaian societies and in many other African societies is the tradition of respect and obedience. The emphasis on such principles is that some adults are generally enabled to claim an almost religious authority over their children or other subordinates (Ikumola, 2017; Ofofu-Kusi, 2017). However, while the majority of children accept this authority in homes and schools, others are currently questioning its absoluteness by finding ways to constructively participate in decisions affecting them or assuming some degree of control

over their lives. In the chapter, Ofofu-Kusi argues that some street children deliberately defy parents, disengage themselves from families, and assume proto-adult status as a way of claiming decision-making space in order to assert rights and self-representation in a context characterised by rapid urbanization, rising dysfunctionality in some homes and woeful economic conditions for increasing numbers of families.

In their chapter, Didier Reynaert, Nicole Formesyn, Griet Roets and Rudi Roose pick up the relationship between parents and children as an entry point to discuss children's representation and inequalities. In their study on child poverty in Belgium, they demonstrate how the creation of separate domains for children also effects the ways in which their claims for social justice are represented. In the chapter, which is grounded in Nancy Fraser's three domains of social justice, notably redistribution, recognition and representation, they discuss 'child poverty' in relation to children's rights. According to the authors, the childhood moratorium can be considered as a separate and exclusive domain for children with social provisions such as schools, youth work, youth care, etc. In this childhood moratorium, children are represented as the 'victims of poverty' and are thought of as the 'deserving poor'. In contrast, parents are represented as the 'undeserving poor', responsible for their own poverty situation and the poverty situation of their children. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 families living in poverty in Belgium, Reynaert et al argue that a segregated approach of the representation of children and parents in poverty can be considered as a problem of 'misrepresentation'. This injustice can have a negative impact on realising children's rights for children living in poverty due to the fact that such an approach narrows the social problem of poverty down to an educational problem.

The kind of misrepresentation that Reynaert et al depict in their chapter speaks to how children and young people's lives are constitutively marked by intersectional hierarchies including those of caste, class, gender, region and religion that affect their social, economic, cultural and political representation. The acknowledgment of the close and complex interdependence between children, parents and other groups in societies helps us to draw attention to the differences that frame young people's experiences and compels us to go beyond a more narrow liberal framework of rights. For example, the participation of children and youth in large-scale social movements in several countries of the Global South have produced inter-generational collectivities that give voice to their grievances and their distrust of the state (Baviskar & Sundar, 2008). These intergenerational

articulations for social justice reflect a mode of organizing that exceeds a liberal exercise of ‘individual rights’ and alerts us a longer and more progressive history of people’s political struggle and organizing (Escobar, 2018; Stephen, 1997). This volume’s theorization of political representation works with the differences that mark young people’s political organizing in different parts of the world, from experiences of today’s democracies in the Global North to the longer history of civil disobedience movements within anticolonial struggles as discussed above through the example of the Soweto uprising.

Although this edited volume does not focus on these movements *per se* it works with the recognition that these movements to overturn imperial power often drew on non-liberal traditions to offer a future roadmap around democratic representation (see e.g. the chapter by Twum-Danso Imoh about the Soweto uprising). Several social movements organized by indigenous youth and other marginalized populations in the Global South are mostly anchored in this sense of interdependency and alternate understandings of selfhood. However, not all are non-violent, and our tendency to conflate young people’s assertions around intergenerational interdependency with non-violence has steered discussions on youth political representation to exclude more violent intergenerational movements in the Global South in which youth play a major role.

In contrast, non-indigenous youth engaged in Climate Strikes and Friday for Future actions, as Frida Buhre’s paper in this volume discusses, foreground environmental concerns through alerting their peers to a future plagued by the repercussions of rising temperatures. Buhre’s paper focuses political aesthetic dimensions to children’s representation in the global online participatory culture of Fridays for Future communities on Instagram. Interested in the forms of visual rhetoric employed by grass-root activists to gain visibility and the attendant forms of childhood political subjectivities these represent, her visual analysis highlights how their rhetoric emphasizes courage, the global reach of the movement and the competency of the strikers. She argues that this visual rhetoric and political aesthetics challenges passive and futurist figurations of children in climate discourse by emphasizing the present power of children and youth thereby inviting us to recognize the political subjectivity of these activists.

As Buhre’s chapter clearly illustrates, to study both the changing portrayals and performances of children’s representations consequently provide us with a critical analytical lens to understand how the figure of the child and young people’s claims for justice border on other notions of how

children and childhoods are defined and used by different actors in longer processes of social, cultural and political change (Ofosu-Kusi, this volume; Balagopalan, this volume), but also in times of crisis, emergency and radical ruptures (Josefsson, this volume; Buhre, this volume; Twum-Danso Imoh this volume). Further, it speaks both to the temporal and spatial dimensions of children's representation. The advocacy efforts of indigenous environmental protestors against the continued capitalist extraction of resources on their lands evoke their ancestral/spiritual connections to the land as well as a past history of sustainable practices. As the indigenous scholar Kyle Whyte (2017) shares in relation to postcolonial settler colonial contexts in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, indigenous people's exercise of self-determination against what he terms as 'industrial settler campaigns' reveals the need to historicize the recent focus on the Anthropocene as what these communities have encountered over several centuries. With settler colonial campaigns already having degraded, depleted and caused irreversible damage to ecosystems, plants and animals that, 'ancestors had local living relationships with for hundreds of years and that are the material anchors of our contemporary customs, stories, and ceremonies'" it is the past that gets foregrounded within the environmental campaigns led by indigenous youth. Like in childhood studies more generally, questions about children's representation must engage with children and childhood's past, present and future (Hanson, 2017).

Let us take another example of young people's struggle against injustices with global implications, migration. The global governance and restriction of migration, which has arisen as a top political priority over the past decades to protect the interests of nation states, has developed in tandem with the nearly universal ratification and global mainstreaming of universal human rights of children. The consequence, as Jonathan Josefsson suggests in his chapter, is that the portraying of young asylum seekers as particular vulnerable and in need of protection with reference to children's rights, has in public discourse and asylum processes turned into an efficient instrument for the state to legitimize restrictive border regimes and deportations. In the chapter Josefsson highlights the ways young Afghan migrants in Sweden make use of particular strategies of self-representation to contest state governance of migration in a struggle for their right to stay in the country. In dialogue with ongoing political theoretical debates around democracy and representation (Disch et al., 2019; Brito Vieira, 2017; Saward, 2020), Josefsson show how these young political actors reject and recast the ways in which they are politically represented by others to claim political space and a voice of their own.

Many of the chapters in this volume consider the historical dimension of children and childhood as key to our understanding of children's representation today. But as Buhre, Josefsson, and also Sana Nakata and Daniel Bray show in their respective chapters, future dimensions of time appear to be just as central to grasp children's representation. In their chapter, Nakata and Bray explore the opportunities of political representation of First Nation youth by connecting historical and contemporary injustices faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. The cases of First Nation youth in Australia are used to illustrate how children play a constitutive role as temporary outsiders who present both risk and renewal to the demos. The first case focuses on the Northern Territory Don Dale Youth Detention Centre that became a site of political controversy in 2016 for its mistreatment of youth detainees. The second case explores a 2020 campaign by the conservative Liberal National Party in a recent Queensland state election to implement a youth curfew in Townsville, a city with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. As evidenced by these debates, about youth crime and incarceration, Nakata and Bray argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are often represented as a source of risk which lies in tension with the potential of representing indigenous children as sources of renewal. These cases reveal the representative terrain in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must resist and speak back to a white national imaginary that works to limit the possible futures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples imagine for themselves.

CONCLUSION

A central endeavour of this book is to engage in a discussion about how representation as an analytical prism can deepen conversations in childhood studies and neighbouring fields about children, rights and politics. As legal, social, and political traditions have evolved in different parts of the world, these have configured multiple representations of children and childhood. Sometimes these representations have converged into coherent modes of portraying children and speaking on behalf of children. Other times, the portrayals and performances of children and childhoods have evolved into more conflicting or ambiguous understandings of their representation, not least in contexts where young people have advanced claims to represent themselves.

Our interest in children's representation, as argued in this book, complements ongoing theoretical and empirical work in childhood studies and related fields and ties into broader revitalised scholarly debates in political theory about how, where and when political representation takes place. Such a turn, we hope, can help us to bridge scholarly divides and challenge limiting notions of children's representations. From the perspective of politics, which obviously constitutes a red thread throughout this book, we seek to critically engage with how the political representation of children and youth through parliamentary politics, legislation, child ombudspersons, administrative procedures, welfare systems and implementation strategies of children's rights mobilise policy agendas and schemes of governance. The different contributions pursue to offer new concepts, sites, routes, actors and networks of children's representation across various parts of the world and put these into conversation with each other.

The chapters presented are thus mindful of young people's uneven access to citizenship as well as to the need to open up our framing of contemporary youth political representations to a longer history of youth action and organizing and its ethico-political affordances. In recognizing the transformative possibilities of children's political representation, this volume offers in addition a critical reading of child rights regimes and the ways in which democracies are organized to disclose exclusionary, racialized and colonial pasts of international and national politics. Several chapters push back against the dominant representational politics of marginalized childhoods in the Global South. Their efforts to read the epistemological weight of a normative childhood against the grain is what constitutively frames this volume's overall approach. While we acknowledge the opportunities of young people's struggles to gain recognition through new modes of political representation, we treat political representation as an uneven and contingent terrain where the continued risk of reaffirming existing intersectional hierarchies, that for long have marked children's participation, is still very much alive.

The portrayals and depictions of children and childhood have always been embedded in institutional practices to achieve political aims. We can provide required analytic space only by our efforts to disaggregate, historicize and contextualize children and childhood. In that vein, we hope that the contributions in this volume will stimulate further explorations and scholarly interchange about the politics of children's rights and representation.

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