

Children's representation in the mirror maze of transnational organisations

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Abstract

Charlie Chaplin not only was a famous actor, filmmaker and composer but also a great visionary and talented supplier of metaphors. In his 1928 film *The Circus*, the Tramp character escapes the police and takes cover at the local fancy fair in a mirror maze. The maze's interlocking mirrors and glass panes make it difficult for the little fellow to hide from the police but also for the police to catch him. The mirror maze obfuscates rather than enlightens where one stands and how to move ahead. International organisations that represent children's rights and interests, such as UNICEF, the ILO or international NGOs, present themselves as counterforces to transnational public power and contribute to struggles for children's emancipation. However, given their embeddedness in contemporaneous Westphalian territorial power distribution, they are themselves exercising important portions of the transnational public power against which they are struggling. Like in a mirror maze, one cannot simply take for granted whose interests they represent nor the aims of their interventions and discourses. This paper investigates children's representation in a globalized, postwestphalian world order and will look at what the content is of children's rights claims; who decides what that content is; and how that decision is made. In doing so, the chapter engages with what is, according to Frazer, one of today's key political questions, that is, "How can we integrate struggles against maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation within a postwestphalian frame?" (Frazer, 2005, p. 21). To develop these arguments, the paper will draw on examples from published empirical work on the translation of children's rights in international realms on general and specific themes such as child labour, child soldiering or child marriage (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013, Holzscheiter, Josefsson and Sandin 2019). The paper builds on the theoretical framework presented in Nancy Frazer's book *Scales of Justice* about the weakness of accountability mechanisms that are directed at transnational public powers. It will look at children's representation that deals with acting or speaking on behalf of children, as it will investigate how the concept of children's representation can be better understood and facilitate gaining insights into discussions on children's rights, child advocacy, children's participation and child agency at transnational level. Furthermore, it will in dialogue reflect on the forms in which the 'Problematic of Representational Power' (Holscheiter 2016) is raised in the field of transnational children's rights, including the claims of different powerful transnational actors around the representation of children and their rights.

References

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Presenter - Bio

Karl Hanson is Professor in Public Law and Director of the Centre for Children's Rights Studies at the University of Geneva in Switzerland. His research and publications in interdisciplinary children's rights studies deal with theorizations on children's rights and childhood studies, working children and child labour norms and policies, children's rights advocacy and juvenile justice. He is co-editor of the journal *Childhood* and chair of the Children's Rights European Academic Network (CREAN).

Discussant - Bio

Patricio Cuevas-Parra is the Director for Child Participation and Rights at World Vision International. Mr Cuevas-Parra leads strategies and programmes to ensure that children and young people are at the centre of the advocacy and policy debate. He has a keen interest in adopting cutting edge advocacy tools and models to enhance children engagement in decision-making. His research interests fall into four main categories: children and young people's perspectives on violence and abuse; children's rights and participation in public policy and decision-making; child-led research, methodologies and impact; and children and young people's identities and inequalities.