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To cite this article: Jonathan Josefsson & John Wall (2020): Empowered inclusion: theorizing global justice for children and youth, Globalizations, DOI: [10.1080/14747731.2020.1736853](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1736853)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1736853>



Published online: 24 Mar 2020.



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# Empowered inclusion: theorizing global justice for children and youth

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that contemporary child and youth experiences of globalization call for retheorizing global justice around a new concept of empowered inclusion. The first part of the paper examines three case studies in globalization – child labour movements, child and youth migration, and young people's organization around climate change – and shows how, in each case, young people, through their struggles against injustice, are simultaneously disempowered and empowered by their deep global interdependency. The second part proposes new theoretical advances in global justice that better respond to child and youth experiences through a childist concept of the empowered inclusion of both children and other marginalized groups. And the third part advances some preliminary suggestions about how a more child-responsive conception of global power and justice might be operationalized in practice across global policies, institutions, and culture.

## KEYWORDS

Children; empowerment; globalization; inclusion; justice; youth

## Introduction

Children and youth are impacted by and participants in the full range of contemporary processes of globalization. Since a third of all persons in the world are under the age of 18, and up to half in some countries of the Global South, the category of children and youth constitutes a significant population that faces injustices resulting from global dynamics. Children's concerns in some of the most pressing challenges of globalization have gained significant attention in recent years, especially since the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the formulation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Children and youth have been identified as one of the 'major groups' (United Nations, 1992, section III, chapter 25; United Nations, 2012, p. 11) whose empowerment is critical if the world is to create just, effective and accountable global institutions and to 'ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels' (Agenda 2030, Goal 16, 30).

However, as we argue in this paper, efforts toward global justice for children often fall short because they lack solid theoretical grounding. In particular, little attention has been paid to how young people's struggles for justice call for changes in what could be meant by global justice in the first place. As illustrated by political activism by working children in Latin America, ongoing anti-deportation campaigns in the Global North by young migrants, as well as school strikes for the global climate initiated by 16-year-old Greta Thunberg in August 2018, many young people

around the world contest the legitimacy and ability of global governance institutions to find just and effective solutions to global challenges. The failure to attend to the experiences and struggles of the young, in all their global diversity and marginalization from power, leave global justice theorization limited and flawed.

This article uses theoretical and empirical resources to develop a new approach to global justice that provides an antidote to contemporary forms of tokenism and passive inclusivity of young people. By taking its point of departure from young people's experiences of global injustice, it proposes the concept of empowered inclusion to challenge and transform shared global norms and practices and as a way to advance the scholarly debate on global justice and childhood (Hanson et al., 2018; Holzscheiter et al., 2019). The first part of the paper takes three case studies of labour, migration, and climate activism as diverse data points to understand young people's experiences of struggle against global injustice. The second part uses these overlapping but diverse cases to help retheorize global justice in less adultist and more childist or child-responsive terms (Wall, 2010, 2019). And the third part advances some preliminary suggestions about how such a conception of global justice might be operationalized in practice across three dimensions of global policies, institutions, and culture. Overall, our argument is that global justice needs to be rethought in a way that makes sense of human beings' deep global interdependency – whether they are children or adults – and need therefore for what we call empowered inclusion.

### *Three contentious cases*

In recent decades, systems of global governance have taken new forms that have particular implications for the analysis of global justice for children and youth (Holscheiter et al., 2019). The traditional monopoly of national governments has been challenged, ushering in a 'dispersion' of authority and responsibility in global governance systems to include also transnational actors (TNAs) such as international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), philanthropic foundations, scientific communities, and global corporations (Stroup & Wong, 2016; Tallberg et al., 2014). Such TNAs are largely run by adults and often hold only tenuous kinds of accountability to children and youth. Moreover, there is an increasing interest from international organizations (IOs) like the UN and its different bodies to seek dialogue, support, and legitimacy in policy-making from this broader range of actors, including more horizontal dialogues and stakeholder engagement (Agenda, 2030; Tallberg et al., 2014; Global Compact on Migration and on Refugees, Paris Agreement). IOs have increasingly come to recognize children and youth as a group of major concern for global justice issues, such as through Agenda 2030 but often struggle with how to respond to young persons' concrete experiences or provide them with meaningful avenues to influence global policy-making.

These developments in new global governance processes point to the deeper problem of how to respond to the concerns of the young in today's increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Below we flesh out this problem by examining three different illustrations. In each case, young people themselves seek to raise awareness of global injustices and in various formal and informal ways contest the norms, practices, and institutions of contemporary global governance systems. The cases illustrate how young people's political action in local, national, and international spheres has become a key tool through which individuals and groups are empowering themselves to respond to authoritative structures and become shapers of global governance (Holscheiter et al., 2019, p. 272ff). At the same time, each case also illustrates the normative limitations faced by children and young people because of their youth. While global justice mechanisms of the international political system often disempower groups because of their gender, class, ethnicity, geography, and other

factors, we show here that they also often disempower groups because of their age. That is, being young is an important dimension of intersectional exclusion, and one that is often under-addressed (Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017). By taking our starting point in contestations and concrete experiences, we seek to lay the groundwork for a more complex theoretical architecture that can account for the ways that young people, but also other marginalized groups, are simultaneously disempowered and empowered by current global structures and processes.

### *Child labour*

The issue of child labour rights is one illustrative example of how children have struggled in grassroots local communities for their own senses of justice in the face of globalized neoliberal marketplaces and international policy-making. While labour conditions were concerns of the very earliest children's legal rights such as the UK Factory Acts of 1802 and 1833 (Pike, 1966, pp. 101–177), recent decades of rapid globalization have challenged traditional nation-based approaches and ushered in international child and youth labour movements. Here we find various instances in which global labour norms as promulgated by the United Nations (UN), International Labor Organizations (ILOs), and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are sometimes met with opposition from child and youth activists themselves who assert new kinds of labour rights against the presumed international norm. Likewise, the academic literature is divided between arguments for protecting children from labour (Gumus & Wingeback, 2016; Lamar et al., 2017) and arguments for children's labour inclusion (Aufseeser, 2014; Jariego, 2017).

On the one hand, global policy-making is largely united around eliminating child labour altogether. The ILO's 1973 Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) seeks 'the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work,' starting with a total ban on all labour below the age of 14. More recently, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, the ILO seeks to 'by 2025 end child labor in all its forms' (ILO, 2015). Likewise, INGOs like the Global March Against Child Labour was formed in 1998 to end child labour through a transnational civil society network of NGOs, teachers unions, and adult trade unions. And the UN's Global Compact, established in 2000 as a partnership with businesses, in 2012 developed a Child Labour Platform (CLP) that requires businesses to eliminate child labour in their supply chains.

On the other hand, children themselves and some child advocates have argued that this dominant approach imposes a Western model of a labour-free childhood that ignores global realities of deep poverty in which children often seek to work in order to survive, help support families, gain work skills, and in many cases pay for school fees (Fontana & Grugel, 2017). Despite opposition from sometimes competing adult labour unions (Taft, 2015), child and youth labour unions have found occasional success fighting for such issues as rights to work, fair wages, limited work hours, legislation against exploitative practices, and recognition of child labourers' dignity and value to society (Jariego, 2017). For example, child labour activists succeeded in forcing the national Bolivian government to lower the working age from 14 to 10, in part through the support of President Evo Morales, himself a former child labourer (though some provisions were later softened under international pressure) (Liebel, 2015).

But even though child and youth labourers have found occasional success in giving new meanings to child labour rights through both formal legislation and informal protest, young people's voices are still generally marginalized in international labour discussions. For instance the Global March Against Child Labour has been criticized for channelling children's voices through 'adult selection rather than child representatives' (Ennew, 2000, p. 48) and failing to 'address child workers'

empowerment' (Boyden & Levison, 2000, p. 6). And the ILO-sponsored International Child Labour Conference in the Hague in 2010 actually banned child worker organizations from participating (Holzscheiter, 2016, p. 221). Young protesters were forced to host alternative events nearby and issued a statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2011 demanding a voice for child labour unions and a clear distinction between exploitative and legitimate child labour (Cordero Arce, 2012, pp. 408–409).

The struggles by young workers to influence global labour rights against the agendas of some of the most powerful international institutions demonstrates a paradoxical mismatch between global justice efforts on children's behalf and the voices and concerns of many of the world's children themselves. And while the issue of global child labour tends to be framed by international organizations by vocabularies of victimhood and protection, many children themselves seek labour rights in terms of participation, empowerment, and fairness. In this way global child labour demonstrates a complex interplay between children's disempowerment and empowerment on the global stage where the power mechanisms of international bodies and corporations meet counter-movements and struggles for power by child labourers and activists.

### *Youth migration*

Youth migration provides a different kind of illustration of children and young people's struggles for global justice. Global migration has been on the international political agenda for decades and turned into an even more pressing issue in recent years. In 2018, 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations, among whom children under 18 constitute about 50% (UNHCR, 2019). A fundamental problem of the injustices facing young migrants is that many in practice lack access to basic resources such as education, health, security and political representation (Bhabha, 2009; Bhabha et al., 2018; Josefsson, 2017b, 2019). The precarious situation of young migrants has in the last decade led to several global efforts to address and find governance structures for the protection of rights for this group (Bhabha, 2019). Most recently, the 2018 UN Global Compacts on Migration (GCM) have sought to ensure 'a safe, orderly and regulated migration' which specifically 'upholds the principle of the best interests of the child at all times, as a primary consideration in all situations concerning children in the context of international migration' (A/CONF.231/3, Art 15(h)).

Nevertheless, despite decades of efforts to mainstream and implement rights of young migrants through policy work and governance institutions, the simultaneous enforcement of restrictive immigration politics by recipient states, primarily democracies of the Global North, has undercut the possibility of realizing rights of young migrants (Bhabha, 2009, 2019; Bhabha et al., 2018; Josefsson, 2017b; Sedmak et al., 2018; Smyth, 2014). Scholarship has shown how child rights principles such as the best interest principle not only have poor normative force in asylum procedures, but moreover can be interpreted and used by migration authorities and courts in such a way as to enforce and legitimize deportations in the name of protection or family reunification (Anderson, 2012; Josefsson, 2017a, Lind, 2019, Sedmak et al., 2019). Interpretations and uses of children's rights in asylum processes often stand in stark contrast to the rights claims made by children and youth themselves (Josefsson, 2017b, 2019).

For example, in the Swedish context, young migrants and other youth activists have for decades organized themselves in anti-deportation campaigns to contest state authorities' interpretations and uses of rights language (Josefsson, 2017b). Sweden has for a long time identified itself as a state of humanitarianism and solidarity in migration politics and foreign affairs (Stern, 2014), so that it has strategically and ambitiously implemented the CRC in the aliens act since its ratification in

1990 (Josefsson, 2016). It has also proclaimed itself to be one of the most ‘child-friendly’ countries to grow up in (Swedish Government Offices, 2014, p. 12). This has not, however, hindered the Swedish state from rejecting and deporting a large number of migrant children over the last decades, many times under distressing circumstances (Eastmond & Ascher, 2011 Josefsson, 2017b).

Immigrant children and young citizens have responded, often starting in local communities, by mobilizing a wide range of extra-parliamentary political repertoires such as marches, hunger strikes, hindering transportation of deportees, sit down strikes, and petitions in social media (Ataç et al., 2016; Corruner, 2012; Josefsson, 2017b; Rosenberger et al., 2018). Through such mobilization they have publicly challenged the normative limits of contemporary asylum regimes concerning *what* and *who* ought to be recognized by law (Josefsson, 2017b). These kinds of socio-political practices of claim-making in the public sphere are based on arguments about children’s health, well-being, and community belonging to contest the Swedish state’s authority and ability to interpret and secure fundamental youth migrant rights (Josefsson, 2019).

By protesting, young migrants seek to empower themselves in a situation of deep disempowerment in which they are not only globally marginalized but also without many of the effective tools of state citizenship. They do so by claiming global human rights such as freedom of movement, fair asylum procedures, and nationality. These demands challenge the consensus of global bodies and states like Sweden around how to implement and interpret rights and the best interests of children, demanding more complex understandings of child migrant concerns and experiences. What is more, because it is precisely states that young migrants are calling into question, they often turn to alternative political spaces like squares, streets, detention centres, and social media, and to informal political repertoires such as sit-in strikes, petitions, blockades, marches, street protests, and public statements. This is a way to empower themselves at simultaneously local, national, regional, and global levels to actively contest public discourse and policies.

### *Climate change*

Yet a third different kind of illustration of children’s global struggles for justice can be found in the political activism of children and youth fighting the climate emergency. This issue concerns the young especially sharply, since both now and in the future they face the effects of human produced global warming more intensely than any other age group. It is a question of intergenerational justice writ large on the broadest possible scale. In part because children make up high proportions of poorer countries already being harmed by global warming, ‘the World Health Organization estimates that children suffer more than 80 percent of the illness and mortality attributable to climate change’ (Currie & Deschênes, 2016, p. 4). Children are also more immediately impacted in terms of health issues such as ‘increased heat stress; decreased air quality; altered disease patterns of some climate-sensitive infections; and food, water, and nutrient insecurity in vulnerable regions’ (Council on Environmental Health, 2015, p. 992). In terms of the future, current estimates suggest that even the Paris Agreement is insufficient for avoiding catastrophic climate warming (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2018, A1), and the IPCC predicts dramatic and irreversible ‘risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth’ without ‘rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure ... [that are] unprecedented in terms of scale’ (IPCC, 2018, B5 and C2). While older generations may escape the major consequences of climate change in their lifetimes, today’s youth are staring at the possibility of a radically poorer, less healthy, and more conflict-ridden world.

Children and youth as young as six years old have fought for climate change regulations at every level from local activism to national politics and international policy (Olson, 2016, p. 81; YOUNGO,



2019). 16-year old Victoria Barrett was named one of nine ‘top attendees’ at the Paris climate talks (Roston & Wieners, 2015) and more recently the Fridays for Future campaign, initiated by then 15-year old Greta Thunberg, has gathered millions of children around the world in synchronized school strikes for change in global and national climate policies. A group of children and youth in the United States filed a lawsuit against their government for failing to act on climate change, claiming it violates their Fifth Amendment ‘due process’ right to protection from government actions and ‘equal protection’ under the law, as well as being ‘discriminatory against the plaintiff’s ability to exercise their fundamental constitutional rights to their lives, liberties, and property rights’ (Olson, 2016, p. 82). In 2019, Greta Thunberg and 15 other child activists filed a formal complaint to the United Nations against five signatory countries for failing to live up to their Paris Agreement commitments, arguing that these countries thereby violated children’s rights under the Third Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019). Other young people are responding to the climate crisis in less formal ways that challenge the cultural assumptions and norms underlying climate action complacency (Buirski, 2013).

The difficulty of acting in empowered ways for children on this issue is similar to that for adults, but it is also compounded by children’s relative lack of political empowerment in the first place through traditional political avenues such as voting and direct representation. Not only is local, national, and international politics up against (and in part beholden to) economic and societal forces arraigned against effective climate action, but children and youth have little sway even over these limited mechanisms. Climate change highlights the vulnerabilities of traditional nation-state politics when it comes to addressing global affairs, as well as the need for more effective means of global organization to negotiate humanity’s increasing global interdependency. If even global scientific bodies like the IPCC find it sometimes difficult to impact global policy-making, marginalized groups like the young and the poor, who are precisely those groups with the most at stake in climate discussions, face even more hurdles. At the same time, it is in a way precisely because of their youth that activists and the millions of children and young people speaking out about climate change find themselves empowered to at least disrupt global norms and bring their concerns to the global stage.

### *Theorizing child and youth empowerment for global justice*

The struggles of children and youth in the global arena, such as those described above, highlight the ways in which young people are both marginalized by globalization processes and yet actors in fighting for global justice. Children’s experiences of injustice illustrate in the sharpest possible terms the problem, indeed the paradox, of globalization as a force of simultaneous disempowerment and empowerment. Young people are in many ways systemically excluded from global power and yet able to exercise global power in dissenting ways for themselves. As nation-states lose ground to increasingly global political actors, ordinary individuals and groups find themselves at once more vulnerable to global domination and yet with new opportunities for global organization and activism. Children’s global empowerment under such conditions presents a particularly helpful test case for theorizing global justice empowerment itself.

Our suggestion in this section is that a diversity of theoretical resources can be combined to formulate a more complex theorization of young people’s struggles for global justice. To this end, we first argue that young people’s simultaneous disempowerment and empowerment is best understood as an expression of a larger political problem that we call global life’s deep interdependency. Then we argue that that an adequate response to this problem can be formulated around a new conception of

empowered inclusivity, one that better describes the aim of global justice for children and adults alike.

### *Deep interdependency*

One lesson from children's struggles concerning labour, migration, and climate change is that the lived experiences of global injustice can provide an invaluable resource to imagine new routes towards global empowerment. Global institutions are sufficiently weak and distant, and the global landscape sufficiently complex, that any theory of global justice must account for particular and diverse experiences of global disempowerment. Even though they rarely consider the experiences of children and youth, theorists of global justice have advanced the idea of starting with the experiences of injustice and 'real world problems' (Appadurai, 2000; Tan, 2013; Young, 2000). Global justice from this point of view depends on the ability to participate in a diverse struggle for recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

In its most obvious and widely understood sense, global interdependency means that men, women, and children must struggle to find recognition and power in relation to vast networks of global interconnectivity. Power does not arise from independent agency alone, but rather from within interdependent networks of relationship. As Arjun Appadurai well puts it, global flows of goods, people, resources, and images result in part in particular experiences of global 'disjuncture' such as inequalities, frictions, and suffering (2000, p. 16). Global marginalization rarely has a single type of source, but is a convergence of a diversity of interconnected political, economic, cultural, historical, and other factors. A Bolivian child labourer must stand up all at once to political disenfranchisement, neoliberal corporate power, adult labour unions, anti-indigenous oppression, the remnants of colonialism, racism, ageism, and much else. Globalization intensifies such interlocking forces and demands that those facing global injustices not merely assert their own global interests but rather change the passive-active dynamics of their interdependent relations with others near and far around the world.

What is more, however, marginalized groups experience a further dimension of global interdependency, namely their reliance on shared global norms for participating in global discourses in the first place. As third wave feminists have noted, women, for example, must not only give voice to their experiences of injustice, but also, in a kind of 'double bind,' do so in a context in which they are already denied normative authority by their patriarchal contexts (Anderson, 1998; Butler, 2000). This double bind is just as problematic for children and youth, since the young are often considered not yet competent enough to give voice to their experiences in public debate and hence dependent on representation by adults (Hanson & Niuwenhuys, 2013; Josefsson, 2017b; Wall, 2016). Patriarchy, it must be remembered, empowers the pater or father as not only male but also adult. Young migrants, for example, as we have seen, confront not only ordinary injustices but also, due simply to their youth, lack of political and even legal resources to make their own experiences known.

Here we can also turn to postcolonialist analyses to point out that not only are globally marginalized groups oppressed, but they are also frequently downgraded on the global stage to a 'childlike,' irrational, or less than fully 'developed' status that suppresses the means for them to address their oppression. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously asks, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988, 1999): that is, how can global norms of power be challenged by the very subaltern groups that they silence? Children and young people similarly face a problem of legitimacy to speak on the global stage to begin with, since they tend to be constructed as dependent on adults for global political expression. As Jacques Rancière puts it, suppressed groups face the problem of not just participating



in forging political ‘consensus’ but also engaging in a politics of ‘dissensus’ that can challenge the oppressive status quo by which they have ‘no reason to be seen’ in the first place (Ranci re, 2010, p. 46).

It is perhaps no accident, however, that feminist and postcolonial constructions of the problem of global power have not so far focused on issues of children or age, prioritizing instead issues of gender, class, and ethnicity. For here the problem of global interdependency takes on an even more profound dimension. Children and youth reveal the sense in which global injustice is not just a problem of marginalization from power, but, *in addition*, one of deep reliance on others for standing together with children in their justice struggles. Here, the traditional distinction between ‘independence’ and ‘dependence’ finally has to be deconstructed altogether, to reveal it as the profoundly unjust binary opposition that it has long been.

What children reveal particularly clearly is that all groups are globally interdependent in the sense of being simultaneously independent of and dependent upon one another. As Judith Butler argues, oppressed groups need in part to perform for others their fundamental political ‘precarity’ or vulnerability and dependency in regards to the larger social whole.

If we are living organisms who speak and act, then we are clearly related to a vast continuum or network of living beings; we not only live among them, but our persistence as living organisms depends on that matrix of sustaining interdependent relations. (Butler, 2015, p. 86)

Young people calling for global action on climate change are not simply asserting their voices. They are, at the very same time, articulating or demonstrating their dependence on active responses from the powerful in the global community. They are pointing out humanity overall’s deep global interdependency. It is precisely adults’ failures to recognize their own and others’ global vulnerabilities to one another that stands in the way of real climate change justice.

Deep interdependency thus refers to the reality that global disempowerment arises not just from global relations and interconnections, nor just from global norms of who can speak. It arises, in addition, and hence in a more complex sense, from the inescapable global reliance of all upon all. As young people suggest especially clearly, but as is just as true for us all, the problem of global power dynamics is not just that only some groups have voices or that different groups’ voices are constructed as more important than others. The problem is also that all groups are dependent on other groups for hearing and responding to them. In a global environment, everyone is deeply interdependent. Regardless of age, global injustice involves what could be called a ‘triple bind’ of all at once being denied agency, being normatively marginalized, and not being responded to by others with power (Wall, 2019). An exploited child labourer faces the problem of simultaneously finding a powerful public voice, gaining normative authority to have that voice heard, and relying on powerful other groups for making that voice a response.

### *Empowered inclusion*

How can efforts to advance global justice respond to this problem of deep interdependency? Here we argue that global justice empowerment can be reimagined by revising existing notions of political inclusivity. As noted earlier, the call for increased inclusivity of children and youth by international institutions and organizations is considered critical to achieving the ambitious goals for a more efficient, accountable, and just global order (Agenda, 2030; United Nations, 1992). What children’s struggles for global justice show is that this inclusivity needs to be imagined as more than a traditional mainstreaming of international conventions or merely having a voice and participating in global discourse. Such an approach is found in political theorists who assume the discussion is

only or chiefly about adults (Dahl, 1998, 79; Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 45; Rawls, 1997, 1999). Global justice must involve instead, in a more complex way, practices that respond to individuals' and groups' multiple and diverse interdependencies on one another, both in formal global political institutions where decision-making takes place as well as in public and political arenas that are situated outside these formal institutions. We describe this social justice aim with the term empowered inclusivity.

When child labourers in Peru march for fair wages, or detained migrant children in Sweden go on hunger strikes, or youth sue the United Nations for climate discrimination, what are they hoping to achieve? Beyond giving expression to their own particular concerns, they are generally demanding that their experiences and perspectives be provided an active, informed, and deliberate response. They wish not only to be heard but also to exercise influence over policies and practices based on their deep-rooted beliefs and claims about a more just global future. Such aims oppose tokenism or merely being instrumentalized by power structures (Gallagher, 2008; Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007, 2018; Warming, 2011). They mean instead being included in making a real difference in global discourses, decision-making processes, and outcomes.

Global justice depends crucially on empowering specifically those who find themselves normatively disempowered, those whose particular lived experiences are most likely to be made invisible in the corridors of global political life. It involves a kind of global inclusion that is not just open to new voices but also actively empowering of them.

Such a notion of empowered inclusion goes beyond merely giving all interests 'equal global concern' (Nussbaum, 2006; Pogge, 2013; Tan, 2004). In some theories of global justice, as well as in key international treaties and agreements such as the CRC and Agenda 2030, inclusion is grounded in a broadly cosmopolitan notion of giving all an equal voice in achieving global consensus. Rights and interests are to be implemented through a politics of mainstreaming and with states as the key actors. But as the struggle by, for example, young migrants demonstrates, highly influential principles of international law such as the best interests of the child (CRC Article 3) offer in practice relatively weak protections to remedy the injustices this group faces in terms of a lack of access to health, safety or a decent life (Josefsson, 2017a, 2017b). On the contrary, these struggles show how, in the hands of a sovereign state (and its different legal and political bodies), child rights principles can be used to enforce other interests than those of children and youth in areas of migration, labour, climate, education and child protection (Holscheiter et al., 2019). As children's rights scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, more implementation of children's rights principles is no guarantee for overcoming structural inequalities and oppression (Balagopalan, 2019; Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Reynaert et al., 2012).

Hence, a theory that fundamentally rests on the coordination or competition of interests fails to account for the profound normative exclusions of those already marginalized from global power. Young people in particular – and especially young people who are also marginalized in other ways such as through poverty, gender, ethnicity, queerness, or disability – are easily reduced in the global governance system to incompetent, pre-rational and non-political persons. Inclusion cannot, then, be reduced to a flat or shallow cosmopolitan conception of persons as 'citizens of a world of human beings, [who] ... have to share this world with the citizens of other countries' (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 6). Such a notion fails to understand persons' deep vulnerabilities to normative disempowerment and their reliance in part on others to respond actively to their experiences of disenfranchisement.

More helpful notions of global justice will aim instead for purposeful inclusions of experiences of normative difference. It is precisely such differences, we have argued, that children's struggles for justice must begin with, by performing and asserting them in the global public sphere and global

governance institutions. The political philosopher Iris Marion Young develops a concept of ‘inclusive democracy’ that ‘encourage[s] the particular perspectives of relatively marginalized social groups to receive specific representation’ (2000:, p. 8). This she develops also in global terms, so that,

ideally, global democratic institutions would be designed to encourage inclusive communication ... so that structurally differentiated global perspectives have explicit voice. Poor people of the world, for example, deserve a specific voice on the global stage ... [and] women everywhere have specific issues of subordination and vulnerability that any global forum ought regularly to hear. (Young, 2000, p. 271)

Young’s concept of political inclusion does not address children, but it takes us a step in the right direction. As Nicola Ansell argues using Young in the context of child poverty in Africa, ‘rather than honing in on young people’s agency, research should adopt a social justice lens to examine the contextually situated processes through which poor southern African children are systematically oppressed’ (2016, pp. 173–174). Children too need to be included in global affairs, not just passively through openness to their participation, but also actively through efforts to respond to their experiences as a distinctly different and subordinated group.

But a final step must be added to get us to the kind of empowered inclusion that children show is ultimately demanded. Empowered inclusion is more than just providing children and other marginalized groups an active and deliberate space in which to have their voices heard. It additionally calls for recognizing global groups’ deep interdependency by taking steps to empower them actively. Marginalized groups’ experiences and concerns must be specifically and critically empowered to make an impact on global systems and norms as such. It requires, in other words, moving beyond the multiplication of global voices toward a deliberate, never-ending expansion of global political consciousness in response to those systematically disenfranchized by it.

This more active kind of empowered global inclusiveness makes better sense of the struggles of young people described above. An impoverished child worker fighting against exploitative conditions certainly needs a voice at the global table. But she also needs for global political leaders such as at the UN and ILO, as well as global corporations, national governments, and NGOs, to make an active and self-critical response to her life conditions and transform their own normative understandings and uses of power accordingly. The ILO, for example, needs to develop more complex frameworks for addressing diverse child worker situations, not just those reflective of global northern assumptions. A youth immigrant locked in legal limbo demands not just a day to be heard in court, but global and national legal and policy procedures that deliberatively empower his concerns as meaningful to the political order. A young climate change activist is asking for more than just to be heard on the global stage. Since that global stage is dominated by powerful corporations, neoliberal logics, and elite adult constructions of policy, she is really asking for a thorough recognition of all people’s global interdependency and an expanded global imagination of the climate problem.

Beyond the three examples we have pursued in this paper, the notion of empowered inclusion also finds other illustrations in childhood studies, albeit without being theorized as such. For instance, Nigel Thomas uses the work of Young to argue that political ‘representation is most inclusive [of children] when it encourages marginalized groups to express their perspectives’ (2007, p. 210). What is required are political spaces in which children are not just enabled but also specifically encouraged to articulate their own distinctive points of view. Or as Mehmooa Moosa-Mitha has described it, using ideas from feminism and postcolonialism, including children demands a ‘difference-centered’ theorization of political life that is based on children’s ‘own lived reality’ and hence ‘the right to participate differently in the social institutions and culture of the society’ (2005, p. 375).

This ‘right to participate differently’ means in part the right not only to an equal voice but also to an empowered one able to express itself in its difference and marginality, its particularity and distinctiveness beyond global norms.

Our contribution is to suggest that true global interdependency calls for a kind of global justice that not only allows for inclusivity but also actively empowers it. Empowered inclusion can thus be defined as interdependent engagement with lived experiences of difference in ways that challenge and transform shared global norms and practices. Put in highly schematic terms, this more profoundly childist theorization of global justice aims at neither a *dependent* inclusion in which the elite are empowered to act on behalf of the many; nor an *independent* inclusion in which all individuals are empowered to lend their voices and interests to political life on their own autonomous terms; but, rather, an *interdependent* inclusion in which all persons and groups are actively empowered to transform global power relations based on shared responsiveness to lived experiences of difference.

### Advancing child-responsive global justice practices

Let us return to the children’s experiences of global injustice with which we began in order to illustrate how the theoretical advances suggested in this paper may offer different kinds of concrete practical guidance. What could young’s people’s empowered inclusion look like in terms of global justice practices? How could empowered inclusion be effectively operationalized, both formally and informally, in the face of global power imbalances supported by historical adultism? We can only offer brief sketches here. But let us use our three starting examples of labour, migration and climate to illustrate, respectively, three different dimensions of global justice practice: namely, policy, institutions, and culture.

In terms first of policy, we have seen that child activists and advocates around the world have sometimes pushed back against UN and ILO conventions aimed at eliminating child labour. Activists criticize international policies for imposing global northern constructions of childhood, failing to respond to many poor children’s global lived realities, and losing sight of children’s interests amidst the contradictory currents of adult-dominated global institutions and neoliberalism. In the face of these diverse forms of child disempowerment, young people have nevertheless empowered themselves through child labour unions and organization, public protests and demonstrations, and working with legislatures such as in Bolivia to resist globally imposed child labour norms. Such efforts have at least forced a degree of global recognition of children’s diverse labour realities, but they have yet to make a significant difference in global child labour policy.

How could global policy-makers take children’s grassroots labour concerns better into account? First, global policy-making should be made in open and continuous dialogue with any group it may impact regardless of age or other marginalizing factors. A ban on child labour, for instance, impacts not just adults but also children and youth of all ages. Rather than assuming that such groups cannot articulate their own interests, or do not have interests at all in the global labour sphere, the assumption should be that all human groups have vital global perspectives that deserve to be examined and understood. Such is especially important in cases where children’s concerns might clash with dominant adult or global northern understandings of childhood and protection. This means that global policy-makers have an obligation to find ways to respond to the full range of constituents’ lived experiences and to do so actively and intentionally. As a growing body of childhood studies research is showing, active inclusion of children and youth can be accomplished through various kinds of

ethnographic and sociological methodology that uncover and thereby empower young perspectives to make a difference in policy-making.

Second, children's groups demanding seats at the policy-making table should not be ignored simply because they are led by children. The acts of protesting and resistance ought to provide sufficient evidence to convince global policy-makers that children and youth are indeed capable of expressing globally important views. While children are sometimes represented in global policy-making through passive processes of hand-picked representation and tokenism, young labour activists seek to make their own meaningful contributions and deserve a definitive voice and room for contestation in the policy-making process.

Finally, global policy-making should inculcate permanent structures to make sure children's concerns are empowered systematically. Currently only (some) adults have a guaranteed seat at the table. Since children already lack voices in their own localities and countries to begin with, it is doubly important that both children and children's advocates are intentionally included as integral members of global decision-making bodies. No global labour policy should be made without having provided ample and open space for understanding the fullest possible diversity of views of the young. Considerations of age are just as important to build in to global policy-making as are considerations of gender, class, and ethnicity. Consequently, policy-makers should purposely seek out diverse age perspectives in order to challenge their own normative assumptions and expand their own decision-making imaginations.

In addition to impacting policy is the question of how to develop more inclusive global institutions. How can existing institutions be transformed and new ones created to provide a more solid foundation for actively empowered inclusion in the long run? As experiences of young migrants demonstrate, in order to respond to the global injustices faced by this group, institutions need to become more actively self-critical at local as well as national and global levels. It is important to bear in mind that the last decades have witnessed a trend to increasingly include the voices and interest of youth in global governance. Individual young people have been invited to act as 'young experts' for consultations in global institutional processes and as keynote speakers at national assemblies and international top level meetings (Lundy, 2018; United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, 2017; Warming, 2011). Young people have also been offered their own parallel forums and formal constituency status at international negotiations. One of the most recent examples is the involvement of youth in stakeholder dialogues on the Global Compact for Migration (Youth for Migration, 2019), climate change (YOUNGO [Children and Youth Constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change], 2019), and the SDGs (United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, 2019). But as noted by the experience of young activists and researchers for a long time, for youth to be given voice and participation under these forms is no guarantee that they are heard or empowered, and indeed they face the constant risk of tokenism and the reaffirmation of existing power structures (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007, 2018; UNMGCY, 2017; Warming, 2011). Global institutions need to make it possible for young people and other dispossessed groups to 'object what is done in their name' and 'lend momentum to dissent,' so that 'no official or unofficial body could claim to speak for the people absolutely and definitively' and so as to mitigate passive absorption by elite communications (Disch, 2011, p. 111ff). Young people deserve the kind of inclusion in global institutions that can ensure influence over agenda setting, opportunities for contestation, and political accountability.

A first way to offer better inclusion for youth in decision-making institutions would be to expand their right to vote in local, regional and national elections. This could be an instrument to increase the incitement for agenda setting and political accountability on the global level. In the case of young

migrants, this can be done by lowering voting age limits and doing away with restrictions on non-citizens' rights to vote and eligibility in political assemblies. The inclusion of marginalized groups through voting has a long tradition in the history of democratization and we find in political theory a rich resource of sound philosophical arguments to expand the franchise to young people and non-citizens (Beckman, 2006; Song, 2009; Wall, 2014).

A second way to institutionalize empowered inclusion in institutions could be through the creation of new bodies of political representation where marginalized groups such as young migrants are provided official channels for reviewing policies and legislation. Such institutional reform would empower the young to object to what is done in their name and to take part in the actual decision-making process. This can for instance be organized through special youth migrant councils that are given consultative status, or full membership in political assemblies at local, national and global levels in order to systematically be included in political debates. The basic idea is for youth representatives to be guaranteed a seat at the political table that gives them the means to put political representation to the test. Political calculations should be made, to use Disch's words, 'not by simple immediate refusal, but by a system of interlocking sites of opinion formation and decision making' (2011, p. 107). At the global level this would mean that political institutions take steps to make themselves systematically accountable not only to government representatives but also through other channels such as non-state actors advocating for children, initiatives such as the Global Compact of Migration, inter-governmental organizations, and other transnational actors like NGOs, philanthropies, cities, and corporations. It will then be key, not only that some of the most powerful actors in international institutions are ready to share their power and authority, but also that they develop new forms and requirements of political accountability and legitimate group representation of young people (UNMGCY, 2017).

A third way to institutionalize empowered inclusion could be through new organizational bodies of youth representation in not just political but also bureaucratic and administrative branches of government. Such initiatives would open the way for the continuous review of administrative and legal processes in light of youth experiences. In the field of child migration, this would be a way to level up the requirements on responsible agencies and courts to be responsive to the forms under which the experiences of young migrants are made visible and taken into account in the process. This could for example result in an institutional and continuous opportunity for organizations of youth migrants to review administrative processes of state agencies in order to open up room for new child-specific provisions of protection and reconsiderations of evidential requirements concerning land reports, proofs of identity or poor state of health.

Finally, on an even broader level, how might empowered inclusion impact global political culture? Child and youth activists have succeeded in showing that their voices and concerns are uniquely important in fighting for climate justice. Age is a clear factor in who will be most affected if the international community cannot come together to solve the climate emergency. And yet, as these activists have found, their strong and powerful voices are up against what have so far proven to be even more powerful global cultures of neoliberalism, adultism, and environmental complacency. Greta Thunberg got to the heart of the cultural problem in her speech at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit: 'We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth' (Thunberg, 2019).

Global culture transformation is complex and does not follow a fixed recipe. However, we would suggest at least the following guidelines when looked at from a childist or child-empowered point of view. First, it needs to be recognized that global culture, like all of human history, suffers from a profound and rarely articulated systemic adultism. Adultism is a little discussed dimension, as we have



noted, of almost all the world's deep and longstanding historical patriarchalism. The disempowerment of the young, just like the disempowerment of women, is deeply rooted in centuries of biased politics, economics, mores, literature, art, language, and just about every aspect of social life. We suggest that global political culture needs to respond to problems like the climate emergency in part through a kind of broad-based cultural self-critique that actively empowers rather than just passively tolerates historically marginalized voices and experiences.

Second, responding to these cultural depths of the problem requires a multidimensional civil rights movement on the same global scale as for other historically disenfranchized groups. Global justice for children, as for example around the climate crisis, calls for the inclusion of children's experiences through not only policy-making and changed institutions, but also transformations in literature, art, film, and music as well as scholarship, public attitudes, and social norms. Like other civil rights movements, global children's rights will ultimately be transformed through cultural changes in attitudes and beliefs. This is how our globally interdependent lives may respond to the fuller richness of human experience.

And third, because of children and other marginalized groups' deep global interdependency, challenging global cultural norms depends on the development of meaningful and mutually supportive alliances between children and other diversely marginalized groups. Culture change has to be intersectional. Feminists have pointed to the need for social justice alliances with multiple dispossessed groups (Burns, 2006; Feminist Alliance of Rights, 2019). Likewise, childism suggests that cultural alliances must be made, not only through greater global openness to diverse expressions, but also through the active and intentional joining of forces with women, minorities, the poor, and other globally marginalized parties.

These suggestions about global policy, institutions, and culture are mere illustrations, meant as starting points for broader conversations about how children's inclusion may be empowered in the world. There are no simple answers when it comes to justice for a third of all humanity. Children's experiences are just as diverse as are those of men and women and so empowered in no single way. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize both that children as a class are systematically marginalized across the globe, and that, as a consequence, global justice for children depends on new avenues of inclusion beyond those historically designed only with adults in mind.

## Conclusion

This paper's argument has been that children's and youth's experiences of and struggles against global injustice call for a more complex and critical theorization of global justice itself. Under conditions of globalization, no one's efforts to act as citizens on the global stage are a simple matter of exercising voice or agency or responding to each others' interests. Rather, as illustrated by child and youth labourers, migrants, and climate fighters, global justice involves a recognition of individuals' and groups' deep interdependency, their simultaneous empowerment as agents and disempowerment through historical marginalization and social vulnerability. In order to respond to the true depths of this problem, which confronts not just children but all groups, global justice needs to be theorized in a new way as empowered inclusion, that is, as active engagement with lived experiences of difference in ways that challenge and transform shared global norms and practices. This concept of empowered inclusion is intended to provide a conceptually rich framework to enable children's experiences and concerns to make their rightful impact on thinking and practice around global justice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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