Alternatives: Global, Local, Political
37(2) 165-177

DOI: 10.1177/0304375412447933
http://alt.sagepub.com

Children— Democracy and Emancipation

Lucia Rabello de Castro[1]

Abstract

Modern conceptions of politics are intrinsically related to theories of subjectivity shaped by a teleological narrative expressing claims about instrumental rationality, moral and psychological autonomy, and individualized selfhood. Consequently, children have been considered to be lacking both the credentials necessary to act and participate in politics and the subjective dispositions of proper political subjects. This overwhelming conception of subjectivity as a purposefully and rationally oriented individual produced by a sovereign politics may be contested. Empirical data deriving from recent research on children's and youth's participation in schools are presented to show how children and youth effectively manage "to speak" and build a different point of view from those of adults about their school experience. Such research provokes analysis of insidious but unpublicized forms of domination and resistance. The inclusion of children in politics seems to depend on our capacity to overcome taken-for-granted truths about adult-centered society.

Keywords

politics, childhood, subjectivity, rights, democracy

The scientific study of children in different disciplinary fields has largely treated children and politics as two distant domains. Even when, more recently, children have been considered in relation to politics, the discussion has avoided any consideration of children as political actors. Rather, "child politics" refers to the gradual appearance, from the first decades of the twentieth century, of children as objects of public policies, culminating in the ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child by almost all nations in 1989.[1] Thus, child politics has become an expression referring to the tense configuration of differences among countries in the way that they understand and implement children's rights in view of the international legislation. Given different levels of economic development among nations, and different kinds of political regimes and types of relationship nations develop toward international conventions and social issues, international child politics highlights the significantly diverse interests of nations in children's rights, and not children's significance and contribution to modern political life.

[1] Centre for Research and Study of Contemporary Childhood and Youth, Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Corresponding Author:
Lucia Rabello de Castro, Centre for Research and Study of Contemporary Childhood and Youth, Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Email: lrcastro@infolink.com.br

More importantly, perhaps, politics understood as the public and institutionalized domain in which decisions about goals and values of collective life are discussed and negotiated has been considered the preserve of self-centered (and, consequently, self-satisfied) adults. There has been very little debate or public argument, by politicians or by political theorists, about why children should be kept away from the polis or why politics should be tacitly assumed as an adult matter. On the contrary, the exclusion is regarded as entirely normal. Thus, in a recent contribution to the relevance of children in political theory, Robert Taylor addresses the value attributed to children in liberal theory—as persons or as projects.[2] He argues that the position of children is skewed by their treatment both as objects of adult concerns (being considered either part of adults' life projects or adults' condescending evaluation of them as persons-to-be) and as objects of society's cost/benefit calculation of how much class investment they should receive. Thus, children remain an object of adult concerns. This status requires reevaluation.

This article explores some possible connections between the field of political theory and that of childhood studies. The question I would like to raise addresses the grounds on which children can be considered as plausible political subjects and whether the persistent view of children as objects of adult concern and unconcern can be historicized so as to demonstrate that there is no irrevocable and essential incompatibility between children and politics. As my response to this question unfolds, it will ultimately engage with adult-centered institutions such as democracy, and adult-centered ideals such as emancipation, from the position of the child. I will argue that we must problematize the exclusion of children from politics, and that this exclusion especially limits the ways in which democracy and emancipation are conceived.

My argument is structured in four different steps. First, I will discuss how conventional ideas about our modern polity have an intrinsic relationship with theories of subjectivity, establishing what Jacques Rancière calls a vicious circle between the political relationship and the political subject: "In short, politics is explained as the accomplishment of a way of life that is proper to those destined to it."[3] Only adults are in a position to fulfill the moral and psychological requisites to act as proper political subjects, children being considered the "other" of the modern ideal subject, placed as outsiders of relevant social and political practices. In this vein, childhood has come to represent the stage that needs to be duly overcome so that children can, at last, be considered liable political actors. Grounding such views of childhood are theories of subjectivity espousing a teleological perspective about human biography whose endpoint consists of the achievement of an instrumental rationality, a moral and psychological autonomy, and an individualized selfhood. Once the attribution to children of a contra-nature antithetical to that of adults is problematized, a more nuanced, complex, and rich conception of children's subjectivity emerges.

Second, revisionist conceptions, within the area of child studies, have recently considered children in a less patronizing and condescending perspective. Viewed as "rights holders," a more participative role for children in society has been claimed. The discourse of children's rights has provided the normative ground for legitimating a new subject position for children, although the question remains about how the rights discourse does affect current cultural and political practices in which children are involved. Even so, the emergence of children's rights has provided an opportunistic device to problematize the taken-for-granted subordinate status of children.

As a third move in my argument, empirical data deriving from a recent research project on children's and youth's participation in schools will be presented in order to discuss how children and youth effectively manage to speak their own voice and build a different point of view from those of adults about their school experience. Children's actions against humiliation and injustice in schools are analyzed and this provides relevant clues to look at how foundational notions and institutions of our modern societies, such as liberal democracy and the school system, circumscribe and restrict the scope of what can be made public and the public subjectivities who can legitimately play a role therein.

The emergence of Western nation-states in Europe involved a process of social and cultural reorganization in which new centers of sovereign power were to be consolidated and enforced. Science and instrumental forms of reason shaped the secularization of man's relationship with the world and nature, and thus the social representation of man as a master apt and competent to conquer, dominate, and control. In his *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Ian Watt delineates the multifaceted construction of individualism in Europe, the outcome of disparate and yet converging conditions of modern subjectivity: the self-sufficient individual entrepreneur (represented by Robinson Crusoe), the Utopian conqueror (represented by Don Quixote), the self-centered and powerful master of knowledge (Faust), and the labile emotional nomad (Don Juan).[4] This social and political transformation of the world in the modern age was intrinsically intertwined with a silent yet enduring transformation of the human subject itself and its social relationships. The colonization of the world proceeded according to a program of increasing subjugation of nature and its stripping of whatever qualities and values that could restrain the voracious assault of the human subject to manipulate, use, and control it.[5] As Akeel Bilgrami compellingly shows, the "thick notion of scientific rationality," which views nature as brute and inert was very much embedded in the project of the centralized political oligarchy of the incipient nation state within the new economic relationships of modernity.[6]

The colonization of the world paralleled the colonization of the self. Domination and conquest presupposed a radical separation and discrimination between man and nature, and the latter's reduction to an inferior ontological status. If nature could be subdued, it was because man could be its legitimate master, allowing for the supremacy of the logos, the principle which could endow with order and meaning the inexorably chaotic external reality. However, by such an omnipotent strategy, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer pointed out, the human subject also reduced the scope of his subjective constitution.[7] By making nature "without quality," man became hostage of his own self-imposed access to it, for a logocentric rationality implies a closure to other forms of understanding and communion with nature and with others, as it prioritizes a uniform and univocal order of apprehension and relating. Thus, the evolving self of modernity had to curb one's own multifarious propensities and psychological possibilities in order to bolster one type of subjective disposition.

The evolving processes of institutional differentiation and rationalization of modern societies have molded processes of subjectivization conducive to circumscribing and constraining modes of feeling, knowing, and acting. The rational autonomous individual has fitted into the demands of rationalization processes emergent in modern Western societies. Values such as calculation, control, and efficiency have served to regulate the institutional practices of the public sphere in Western modern societies devoted to the construction of specific public subjectivities apt to respond to such demands.

The notion of the public sphere, despite its context-bound explanatory power, related to the very specific historical and cultural conditions of nineteenth-century Europe, has disseminated widely and informed what came to constitute a quasi-universal vision of civic societies under nation-state sovereignty. European scholars like Ranciere have ironically noted how this notion has established a doctrine regarding what is to be considered the adequate territory of politicalness opposing the " . . .obscurity of domestic and private life, and the radiant luminosity of the public life of equals."[8] In the same vein, the Indian scholar Sudipta Kaviraj, also refers to the public sphere as a "European superstition' brought . . . into colonial society."[9] One should not underplay the thrust of this concept in the construction of new institutional arrangements of the modern state and its normalizing impact on the required process of subjectivization to form the modern citizen. A notion of subjectivity was at stake, one who could perform ideally in the idealized arena of public negotiation and decision. Who was able to participate and in what ways, became very much part and parcel of the process of building up the separation between the public—that what should be counted as important and noteworthy in everybody's eyes—and what should belong to the sphere of the individual's own business. Public manners and composure externalized the internal process of self-building and cultivation, which was demanded in the new social practices of civic life.

The notion that human subjects "develop" and "evolve" provided for the grounding episteme and moral code through which processes of subjective formation could be erected. "Development" named the overarching understanding or *weltanschauung* presiding over a twofold trajectory: that of the human species as it disentangled itself from lower ones, but also, the trajectory whereby human beings had to overcome and surpass their own lower forms of existence located in childhood.[10] "Development" also entailed the normative commandment of self-improvement for individuals[11] as well as the directives and teleologies of achievement for nation states.

This notion of Individual self-building encompassed a long-standing program of sequential stages toward the apex of adult rationality.[12] According to Ashis Nandy, this view of the western subject institutionalized an ideology of masculine nondependent adulthood popularizing "a sterile concept of autonomy and individualism which has increasingly atomized the Western individual."[13] Furthermore, the analytic of development consisted of a systematically ordered sequence of stages going from what was considered the quasi nonhuman/irrational beginning of human existence to the supposedly humanized individual subject owner of socialized, mature, competent and rational attributes.

To cut a long story short, at the baseline and lowest position of such a linear process of self-cultivation stood the child, and at the end and supreme position stood the rational man of modern age. For example, Rainer Dobert, Jurgen Habermas, and Gertrude Nunner-Winkler, in a specific contribution about their views on the process of subjective formation in the modern era, argued that the evolving competences of human individuals did and should show a capacity to decenter, to objectify social and material reality and thus build up an autonomous rational self who can act in a system of reciprocated behavioral expectations: "thus, we are talking about a capacity of the self that, when making an utterance, is able to take the perspective of the other toward himself or herself, simultaneously to neutralize his own and the other's perspective from the third-person point of view, and then to return to his or her participant attitude."[14] Intellectual decentration means skipping out of and back to one's own skin, in a simultaneous move, in order to hypothetically consider both one's own and anyone else's point of view from the same angle, thus allowing for the uprooting of reason from body, space, time and context. Reason was catapulted to an abstract "nowhere" where decentered from any local or contextual limitation will ascend to its universal and homogeneous potency. Thereby, differences between individuals can be eradicated and communication made possible insofar as all men can acquire the competence to look at the world from the same "universal" point of view. Decentration allows for dialogue and negotiation, a procedure necessary to public debate in the emerging civil societies of modernity.

The requirements for this subjective formation demanded a process of specific intervention and long preparation. The enduring privatization of children in schools and households for the sake of their preparation as eventual full-blown citizens was therefore sealed.

Under developmentalism, children's nature was construed as incomplete. Their ordeal consisted of laboring in the present for coming into social existence in the future, thus being set aside from all relevant social interactions because not yet prepared to take part in them. Constructed as the other of the adult, children's identity was constructed as what the adult was not. Kaviraj notes, as he comments about the discourses of the colonial other, that all narratives about "the other" consist of very thin descriptions, while "thick descriptions" are reserved to identities chosen as models for subjecthood: "the self is portrayed as historical, determinate, laden with actual attributes, capable of radical reformation of its structures, and the other is seen as empty, abstract, a repository of negative characteristics (negative, not always in the sense of bad, but nonexistent)."[15] Thus, developmental sciences described minutiae of what children could not do, rather than what they were, or, in fact, would be able to do. Their attributes mirrored the nonadult and what he was not: irrational, vulnerable, immature, and dependent.

Collective representations and identifications concerning how children and adults should be, act, and feel regulated a range of possibilities for subjective constitution of both children and adults.

Modern children were to be insulated in private spaces positioned as subjects-to-be and devoid of any subjective density. Ipso facto, they could not stand as speaking subjects in public spaces of civic life. They had to await their maturity so that their speaking capacity could emerge as the outcome of flourishing innate capabilities under adequate social engineering.

The situation of children changed in the late decades of the twentieth century once they became the objects of legislation of specific rights. In 1989, the United Nations promulgated the International Convention of Children's Rights, supported by all world state nations, except the United States and Somalia. From this followed national statutes and bills which could secure and enhance the international legislation. Thus, a new subject position was secured for children as "subjects of rights." Noteworthy is the fact that children's rights have not been the result of children's own mobilization and dispute over their social condition of subordination and oppression, and consequently, were not sustained by ongoing changes of children's subjective and collective experience about themselves qua children. Granted by their representatives, who could speak in their "best interests," children's rights did not enhance a clearer understanding, from the point of view of children themselves, about what were the oppressions they suffered and in what directions relationships of oppression which involved them should be changed.

As new subjects of rights whose dignity and specific guarantees were legally secured, children were rescued from the position of inhuman subjecthood. Rights established the platform of universal dignity to children as well as secured for them the position of equals in relation to adults as far as basic human prerogatives were concerned. In Brazil, notwithstanding the horizon of equality, the new legislation interspersed equality with the idea of children's specific condition. The moral dignity of children came hand in hand with the legal need to be protected, cared for, and educated by adults.

The upgrading of children's positions to that of upholders of rights has enhanced their visibility as objects of public policy. Despite their social visibility, it remains a question to what extent the discourse of rights has provided them with a "counterideology"[16] to developmentalism, so as to give support to children's practices of resistance to oppression and to enhance their speaking capacities.

Outrageous situations of indignity toward children can now be deterred, once the juridical establishment has secured for them a position of humanity and dignity. On the other hand, it is still about the child's specificity that the legal texts are concerned highlighting the special conditions of her humanness that require adult's protection and tutelage. The same classificatory system postulating a "natural hierarchy" between adult and child has remained untouched even in face of the new juridical status whereby children came to be viewed in a positive light, rather than in the former cloak of a "lacking identity." As legitimate rights upholders, a sense of worth for being children has positively qualified their identities in the public esteem. However, the upholding of rights, and this is one first paradox, has not reverted children's positions as privatized creatures doomed to pre-political spaces and pre-citizenship existence. Rights of protection have often been invoked to underscore children's incapacity and take away their participatory rights.[17] The latter, according to the juridical statement, should only be "given" to children on the condition that they demonstrate beforehand their cognitive and linguistic competence to participate.

It is thus on the grounds of contradictory advances, postulating equality and safeguarding hierarchy, granting children's participation and conditioning its legitimacy, that new children's subject positions are being constructed today. Children's rights discourse has also percolated down children's mentalities as a new idiom that provides for a position other than that of the passive emptied learner who must be silent and acquiescent to learn from the omnipotent adult figure.

There is a vast territory, still to be duly researched, on the impact of the discourse of children's rights on the social practices involving children, which escapes the scope and main thrust of the argument here. On one hand, it seems that the basis of intergenerational bonds has been challenged to the effect that children—as many daily situations have shown—now openly defy adults to give them what they think is their rights. In countries like Brazil, this has brought about, among other

things, a litigating slant in intergenerational relationships paralleled by an unprecedented prevalence of the judiciary in solving conflicts.[18]

More specifically, one important question concerns the effects of the rights discourse on the subjective constitution of children, so that new possibilities to be, act, and feel are open to children once they feel entitled to claim, as upholders of rights, what they feel is due to them. The natural position of authority once enjoyed by teachers is likely to face now much more opposition and contestation,[19] as children do not feel as their unquestionable duty to obey elders whom they see as undeserving. Thus, adults are in the position of having to build up the social distance with regard to children with no initially given guarantee. Have those changes been precipitated by children's rights discourse? It is to this scenery opened up by children's rights discourse that we turn to in order to understand what kind of changes it has brought forth: whether children's more dense subjective position, as subjects of rights, has favored children's actions making public veiled arenas of humiliation and oppression.

I propose to examine these questions by looking at some aspects of the empirical data of a research project on children's participation at schools in Brazil. This research project involved a multistage approach including interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions with approximately 2,600 students and 180 school staff in ninety-six state and private schools in the state of Rio de Janeiro over the years 2006–2009. Children and youth from an age range of nine to eighteen years old participated in the research. For the purpose of the present discussion, the analysis has focused on how children fare to make sense of their experience at school with its demands, duties, and frustrations on one side, and its rewards and joys on the other. Their narratives account for what, from their point of view, is not going well and the expressed expectations and desires about how to make school a more enjoyable and happy place to be at. The present analysis discusses four main themes: the experience of injustice and humiliation at school; the construction of a collective students' viewpoint; the denaturalization of the adult–child hierarchy; students' resistance to situations of oppression.

Schools provide an interesting context to investigate how children are making sense of their supposedly novel entitlements that made them subjects of rights, once children's position in schools still keeps them in a clear subordinate role—as learners and, many a times, passive recipients of adults' endeavors. Children are captured between two contradictory references for subjective construction: one which positions them as "subjects to be," recipients of adults' actions who assign to them an insignificant participation in construing their learning experience at school; and the other, as subjects of rights, which grants them a formal position of enunciation and positivity though uncorrelated and disparate with regard to their substantive lived experience at schools. Therefore, conflicts are likely to emerge and resistance is bound to take place, as more room to maneuver is created to cope with situations children find humiliating and oppressive.

Children's realization of injustice in school is enmeshed in a myriad of different situations when they are led to put into question their relationships with adults and ask why things happen in the way they do. Often these situations encompass a let-down of children's expectations when the normative encoding of teacher–pupil relationships is not ensured by adults' fault. The feelings aroused are that a *wrong* is being done to them. A case in point is that of teacher absenteeism, unfortunately a very common problem in Brazilian state schools whose clientele is made up of the poorest children. For these students, not to have classes because adults are not there for no good reason means a breaking down of contract rules, leading to legitimate claims to what they consider their due entitlements. However, it is not easy for them to speak out their minds even if they feel justified to do so. Competing with feelings of being treated unfairly, they fear retaliation by teachers, the expectation that adults will not listen to them and have the feeling that nothing will really change whatever they do. Thus, a deep internalized feeling of adults' inconsiderateness toward children goes hand in hand with feelings of being wrongly treated, producing ambivalent attitudes toward putting forth their claims. Persisting feelings of being neglected, devalued, and jeopardized in their future perspectives

lead to what James Scott has called "hidden transcripts"[20] when resistance and the acting-out of dissatisfaction and revolt are expressed covertly, behind the teachers' backs. In many of our discussion groups, children showed intense feelings of rage and frustration, to the point of saying that "they would like to burn the school" or, that "they would like to call X or Y (the names of well-known journalists) to put their claims in the papers or on the radio," or that, "they should go on strike, as teachers do." In all these situations, even if children have a clear awareness about a wrong being inflicted on them, it becomes difficult, even impossible, to find the means to revert the injustice, either because there is a lot to lose (if teachers retaliate, more suffering is on the way), or, available and known initiatives, like going to the head to complain, have been shown as ineffective. Clearly, children's struggles often end up with an inquisitive amazement at what—what enunciations and what actions—can have the effect of changing their situation.

Children also realize injustice as present in other more liminal situations when a more nebulous encoding of duties and rights cut across teacher–pupil relationships. In these situations, the ill-treatment felt by students is often couched in terms of being disrespected: concretely, when teachers yell at them, when they are punished unfairly without being listened to or when their "fair complaints"—about the lack of drinking water, for example—are treated with indifference. In these situations, what seems at stake is children's realization of adults' failure to treat them with dignity, which entails the appreciation of someone's value for being a person and the corresponding attitudes of consideration and respect for such a status. Teachers' attitudes of nonreciprocity evoke students' complaints because they are made to feel "less" than teachers, as if not made of the same humanity as them. It is not surprising that the normative language whereby students make explicit their demands is that of not being respected.[21] The idiom of disrespect comes close to what Sanjay Palshikar notes as humiliation, which is the language used by the powerless to address inhuman treatment, callousness and neglect performed by those who are superiors.[22]

The above situations stand in a normative zone where children have a less clear perception of what can stand as a legitimate claim on their part. As students, they had to internalize the attitude of respect for their elders and superiors. On the other hand, they feel justified to claim to be treated with the same dignity as teachers would expect it from them. Respect for superiors is conjoined with children's demand for dignity and recognition. Frequently, teachers seem entrenched in conventional expectations as holders of unquestionable authority, whereas children are increasingly aware that their subordinate status as learners does not slide automatically into a self-perception of their being devoid of feeling, knowledge, and will. Thus, for students, their place in school does not necessarily entail being positioned as a caricature of humans emptied of sentiments and desire. Litigating attitudes become more frequent as questions like the following tend to arise in school situations: should children listen to adults in silence in whatever circumstances? . . . should they never complain about whatever treatment they receive? . . . should they not reciprocate negatively, even when ill-treated, for instance, trading a yell for another yell?

This nebulous normative zone in children–adults' relationships is, most importantly, subject to a politics of naming whereby it is up to the actors involved to define to what extent, and if, certain situations are disrespectful. This is when students have to recur to their own resources—for instance, their spare time, to discuss among themselves the meanings of their mishaps at school. Given the fact that in Brazilian schools students have less and less time to spare, be it to play, to gossip, to socialize, or even to eat, as interval time is reduced to a mere 15- to 20-minute slot along a school day of five hours, it is to be expected that this kind of discussion will figure very sparsely in their conversations.

There are still other situations when school rules are considered arbitrary, senseless, or just unfair, even when students admit that they need to be followed. For instance, that they should wear uniforms, while teachers do not; or, that they are not allowed to go to the bathroom whenever they need it; or, that they cannot go home earlier if the teacher is absent. In these situations, the realization of injustice is often intertwined with the realization of their structural condition of being subjected to

adults' norms as part and parcel of school life. Among students themselves, there is often considerable ambivalence about the extent to which these situations must be confronted and resisted. First, there is the recognition that elders know better than they, rules being representative of their will; and second, there is the fear that chaos can prevail if children are left to themselves. Even when these situations lead students to question hierarchical positions in school, students' claims do not demand the straightforward suppression of school hierarchy but a major qualitative change in how these relationships are lived out by students and teachers.

As has been noted elsewhere, while resistance should lead to a "diagnosis of power,"[23] children's resistance expresses their very specific condition of subordination to teachers characterized by a double bind: they are subordinates insofar as they are dependent on teachers to learn; but they are often made inferiors and thus disabled in addition to their subordination. Children can hate their teachers for ill-treating them while also depending on them as learners and envying their knowledge and status. Teachers' position of superiority, and thus power, over students is constitutive of the teacher-student relationship itself, so that a "magical disempowering" of teachers sometimes leads to the extinction of the very same relationship. As students resist ill-treatment and injustice, they are not claiming an egalitarian subject position with regard to teachers whom they recognize as being different. They demand that this difference, and the power that supports it, should not be used to humiliate them, much in the way that an unfair tyrannical master can lose his legitimacy and, thus, can be impeached. Ultimately, as Christine Castejon puts it, "those who engulf us are those for whom we exist, the Other who supports our desire."[24] In the case of students, teachers are those whom students have to identify with in order to be what they want to be making theirs what is, initially, Other's.

Resistance poses enormous difficulties for children at school, as they lack the institutional means to support mobilization in this direction. For instance, "social sites of insurgence"[25] where they can escape surveillance by adults are rare; they have little time on their own to interact among themselves, exchange opinions, and build a "collective viewpoint." Students' interactions at school are planned to happen at certain moments and under certain circumstances, most often directed to respond to adults' requests and expectations. Intense feelings of anger that unfair situations arouse in students are not automatically conducive to the construction of collective action. As Upendra Baxi points out with regard to situations of humiliation and injustice, actors do not often have worked out approaches to counteract injustice, or the strength—collective or individual—to resist it.[26]

Feelings of anger and dissatisfaction cannot be overtly expressed, at least before teachers, but can constitute "a background" which leads the course of thoughts as well as determine how feelings are consciously experienced.[27] They are often displaced as forms of "covert resistance," like the destruction and ill-treatment of school objects and place; a purposeful misinterpretation of school rules; the ridiculing of school staff behind their backs; the purposeful acting out ignorance. It has been reported elsewhere that dissatisfaction and frustration with school routines and staff has also been related to refusal to learn[28] and school evasion.[29]

What is of interest concerns what mobilizations situations of injustice can lead to, and whether children can do anything about it. Dissatisfaction and frustration can stand as the starting point from which collective action can take place. Students' resistance takes place in a tortuous way whereby children, although limited in their resources, on one hand, and registering their dependence on adults, on the other, attempt to construe events from their own perspective. Thus, as shown by our research, resistance at schools does not aim at subverting the school hierarchy but at widening the scope of children's agency in constructing values and practices of school life. First of all, it has been noted among both younger and older students, there is an overall conviction that students "do have their own opinion on what happens at school" and that "their opinion should be listened to" since very often it does not coincide with that of the elders. Here "opinion" stands for the affirmation of a subject who, recovered from the psychological void where she used to be, possesses substantial

presence and vitality. Furthermore, students' opinions should be publicized and be known by all. For that, students' boards of opinions, student radio stations, and similar devices can be deployed to make known the students' views known more broadly.

As overt actions have an enormous subjective cost, given that children can be and are punished if they entrench themselves in opposition, the "moment of negativity" has to take into consideration a reality principle: attempts to prevent further jeopardy as a result of resistance can lead to compromise or "softened negativity." The option of "talking to the head" transmutes their discontent into a complaint to the authorities in an explicit gesture of calculating the head's authority in relation to their own submissive and deferential position. In situations of explicit nonreciprocity and unfairness, exemplified in cases of teacher abstenteeism, children show a conviction that they must do something. Ideally, they would like to protest in a collective form, by signing petitions, for example, or going on strike as teachers do. Two aspects to be noted here are: collective protest is found to be the best reaction before an injustice; idealized action becomes a "contemplated action," an idealized projection of one's own strength and one's situation and not a toughening force affecting one's body and will to transform the present situation. Thus, anger can also be "de-dramatized," leading to a subjective disinvestment in professed values and cherished actions.

One important outcome of students' de-dramatized anger manifested as an impossibility to make any changes in the school status quo is a growing feeling of indifference and dismay toward school. Under these conditions, it seems that students' bond with school falters, and they are just waiting for the moment to leave.

The educational relationship between adults and children poses interesting challenges as far as relations of subordination are concerned. Paraphrasing Ranajit Guha's description of the peasant's condition of subalternity, we can describe a student's position as (substituting appropriately): " . . . his subalternity was materialized by the structure of property (age), institutionalized by law, sanctified by religion (naturalized by biology) and made tolerable—and even desirable by tradition (custom and authority)."[30] Persuasion in schools, in order to obtain the consent of subordinates, has deployed the idiom of getting prepared for adulthood, while for coercion, the idiom is discipline.[31] Discipline was effective insofar as there was an identification of students with school ideals professed by values such as the importance of knowledge, the relevance of work and personal effort. Discipline was also supported by a natural distance between children and adults, given the unquestionable right of the latter over the former. In Brazilian schools today, teachers are frustrated because they no longer get conformist, docile, and motivated students anymore. The teacher's natural position of authority has eroded, even if teachers and pupils alike do not know where to go from there. Formerly an adult—the teacher—could yell at the child, or even beat him or her, and the child would accept those attitudes on the basis of the unquestionable authority of the teacher who was adequate because she knew better. Yelling, beating, and punishing students were accepted as part of the teacher's mission to educate. However, today hardly any urban Brazilian child would fail to find fault with such a behavior, and even in the rural areas of the country, such behaviors would meet with strong student disapproval and revolt.[32]

Students do not accept a tacit position of submission toward elders anymore, feeling instead that they have to be respected, that relationships should be based on reciprocity, that school life should be worthwhile, and that they—as children—should have a say in school affairs. Former understandings about children's attitudes to adults and of adults' to children come to be in dispute, making daily life at school a battlefield on which novel expectations of what a child is, or should be, and what an adult is and should be (to the child) are contested.

The discourse of rights has rescued children from their psychological void, "filling them up" with human dignity and value; nevertheless, it stands as a coded formal language providing few clues about particular situations of conflict between children and adults. Perhaps this discourse constitutes the ultimate reason grounding claims about the relevance of a more "democratic

government'' of schools, as runs the jargon of Brazilian educational bills, for which there is no dispute even among teachers. However, granting children rights has not altered the concept of children's citizenship as a pre-political actor, nor challenged the concept of citizenship itself based on the profile of the rational autonomous subject.[33] The rhetoric of children's rights, despite the advances made in signaling a situation to be corrected in terms of the social and psychological statute of children, has not enhanced a process of decentring adult's society from its hegemonic values. Thus, from the vantage point of where we stand now, the concept of children's rights has not advanced the problematization of current truths about our ''good-enough society'' with its ''good-enough institutions.''[34]

If democracy engages with children, it will expand the public domain so as to make public what is privatized, thereby widening public actorship for many of those who are doomed by law or by powerful interests to remain in private spaces.[35] As children become legitimate actors, intergenerational issues such as the transmission of knowledge and of the cultural heritage are likely to become politicized, creating a public arena of dispute and negotiation between children and adults. This may be an absurdity for some, perhaps even a haunting image of disaster. However, a more consequential view of children's rights inevitably leads to questioning the exclusion of children from the polity on account of the ideology of their incapacity. What is urgently needed is a problematization of the stipulated subjective profile thought adequate to act in the democratic political system that modern societies have for long cherished. Children have remained outsiders to this system on account of their status as not yet adults. Nevertheless, what has been missed is their specific contribution to society and to cultural transformation. The serious undertaking of children's contribution to society will bring about an ''infantilization of culture,'' an expression that echoes Georg Simmel's concern with culture as objectifying male forms of existence to the detriment of a possibly desirable feminization of culture.[36] For Simmel, our objective culture reflects a process of masculinization of language, artifacts, and values in a reified sense. Women, on account of their different mode of being, might bring forth a ''feminization of culture,'' which would do justice to feminine modes of existence. In the same vein, it is argued here that an infantilization of culture would bring about the transformation of today's adult-centered institutions in order to acknowledge and reflect children's ways of existence.

Children's resistance in schools seems to be articulated in a discourse of nonconformity to the former subject position of children as a subdued pupil. As such, children remained as narcissistic extensions of adults who were eager to obtain children's conformity and acquiescence. In this sense, children's nonconformity is telling about their refusal to adhere to adult desires and subjectivity. It is also telling about the ''negative creativity''[37] constitutive of separate subjectivities and emancipation. On the other hand, children's resistance in schools bound by multiple constraints has been unable to go from a ''raw'' anger to a ''cooked'' indignation[38] that would imply building up collective meanings for their suffered wrongs. It is to be noted that students' attempts to be a collective or act collectively are very much feared by teachers[39] who see imminent trouble as soon as students gather. One of the tenets of discipline management at schools becomes a monadization process leading students to live out and apprehend school experience as increasingly the effect of individualized efforts, desires, and actions. In this sense, school life today is not conducive to building up ''communities of fate'' that can work either in favor of strengthening students' identities and solidarity, or in the direction of building up values of social cooperation and empathy.

Adults sometimes complain that children's rights have been a disservice to children's lives because they have not entailed a notion of duties. There are no rights without duties, so the argument goes. Perhaps, this is a fair demand in view of the fact that liberated from their encumbering social insignificance, the position of children has been dogmatically construed and exalted as mere receivers of social recognition. Jean-Francois Lyotard insightfully comments that ''there is, strictly speaking, no natural right. It is of the essence of a right that it be merited; no right, without duty.''[40] Meriting a right thus implies a duty to act as one ought to act, and not simply to claim back what one deserves. Lyotard speaks of the capacity to speak to others as ''the most fundamental human right,''

which ought to be sought through toil and discipline, through what he names "civilization." This means that human beings—young or old—must learn to enter the interlocutory space and must merit it against all possible odds of being deprived of the chance to learn, or even, of being made silent.

Following Lyotard's line of reasoning, we can see that granting children rights did not automatically legitimate them in the interlocutory space but conceded to them the possibility of not remaining silent forever. Looking at our research results, it seems that children are striving to make use of the possibility of speaking, even though in a contingent, incipient, and haphazard way provoked by this cultural shift of the rights' discourse,[41] and very often unaware that their legitimation as interlocutors still needs to be secured. On the other hand, it also seems to be true that the granting of rights to children was inconsequential to the effect of really including this new interlocutor in the public scene. To start with, this would imply an openness to listen to these new interlocutors on the adult's part, but also, most importantly, the courage to be challenged in the position so far unabashed of being the only one who defines the situation. Thus, for both children and adults, the "duties" have not been secured adequately, leaving both sides confused and bitter as they deal with their daily frustrations and let-downs in intergenerational relationships.

As they carry out the task of legitimating themselves in their new position of rights upholders, children demand reciprocity from adults. This encompasses a myriad of situations: from the questioning of former old-stylish ways of treating children as inferiors and brute to the defiance of school rules which seem senseless and arbitrary in children's eyes. Thus, reciprocity stands for a signifier addressing various impasses in student–teacher relationships and children's claims for changes. On the other hand, teachers' dissatisfactions with their working conditions have generated a climate of dismay and professional deterioration. Teachers complain about low salaries, violence in schools, lack of autonomy, and inconsistent educational plans which are imposed from top to bottom. The chaotic state of public schools in Brazil and the pressure on state and municipal governments to present a façade of concern with a deteriorating public educational system (at the fundamental level), has led to an increasing governmentalization of aspirations and actions[42] into appealing formulae of efficient behavior and administration.[43] As the public educational situation gets worse and worse, teachers, on one hand, and students, on the other, seem defensively entrenched in different and antagonistic positions blaming each other for their frustrations. However, some flimsy changes are making way to bring teachers and students together in these somber times of Brazilian public education. In a recent teachers' strike in the state of Rio de Janeiro, students participated in teachers' public manifestations; in students' own public appearances for the improvement of public education, they have sung jingles in favor of teachers backing up their struggles for better working conditions.[44]

School goals of our adult-centered society have been established so as to prepare children to adult roles. Such unequivocal goals need to be problematized if children are to be included in the construction of school life. Priscila Alderson has put it cogently, "Schools cannot simply ignore democracy; they can either promote democratic practices or actively contravene them, there is no neutral middle ground."[45] Maybe deep anxieties concerning what future awaits schools and other institutions—and what unknown challenges are to be faced—constrain firmer advances of our thinking about democracy.

Author's Note

This is a modified version of a lecture presented at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India, in May 2011. The author thanks her Indian colleagues for their questions and discussion. The author also thanks the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education in Brazil (CAPES/MEC) for granting a Senior Leave for the stay in India.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author thanks the National Research Council of Brazil (CNPQ) and the Carlos Chagas State Research Foundation (FAPERJ) for financial support for the development of the research project.

Notes

1. Goran Therborn, "Child Politics Dimensions and Perspectives," *Childhood* 3 (1996):29–44.
2. Robert Taylor, "Children as Projects and Persons: A Liberal Antinomy," *Social Theory and Practice* 35, no. 4 (2009): 555–76.
3. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001): 24–35.
4. Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
5. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialética do Esclarecimento*, trans. edn., (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1986).
6. Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, Newton and the Enlightenment," in *Indian Political Thought*, ed. Aakash Singh and Silika Mohapatra (London: Routledge, 2010), 165.
7. Ibid., 21–25.
8. Ibid., 31.
9. Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony," in *Politics in India*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 149.
10. Erika Burman, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1994); Lucia Rabello de Castro, "Da invisibilidade à ação: crianças e jovens na construção da cultura," in *Crianças e Jovens na construção da cultura*, ed. Lucia Rabello de Castro (Rio de Janeiro: Nau, 2001), 19–46.
11. John Broughton, "An Introduction to Critical Developmental Psychology," in *Critical Theories of Psychological Development*, ed. John Broughton (New York: Plenum, 1987), 1–24.
12. As an example see, Jerome Kagan and H. A. Moss, *Birth to Maturity* (New York: Wiley, 1962); L. Stroufe, "The Coherence of Individual Development," *American Psychologist* 34 (1979):834–40.
13. Ashis Nandy, "Towards a Third World Utopia," in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias, A Very Popular Exile*, ed. Ashis Nandy (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 50.
14. Rainer Dobert, Jurgen Habermas, and Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, "The Development of the Self," in *Critical Theories of Psychological Development*, ed. John Broughton (New York: Plenum), 292–301.
15. Ibid., 155.
16. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 118.
17. Ruth Sinclair, "Participation in Practice: Making it Meaningful, Effective and Sustainable," *Children and Society* 18 (2004):106–18.
18. A case in point is the recently approved law of Parental Alienation (Law 12.318/2010), which foresees punishment for those divorced parents who prevent their children from having a "good, normal relationship" with the other parent. It seems that more and more the judiciary has assumed the role of setting norms and penalties standing as an evaluator of what should consist good intergenerational relationships.
19. Julio G. Aquino, *Indisciplina na escola: alternativas teóricas e práticas* (São Paulo: Summus, 1996); Yves La Taille, L. Souza, and L. Vizioli, "Etica e Educação: uma revisao da literatura de 1990-2003," *Educação e Pesquisa* 30, no. 1 (2004): 91–108; and Suzana Menin, "Valores na escola," *Educação e Pesquisa* 28, no. 1 (2002): 91–100.
20. Ibid., 6–10.
21. See, L. Rabello de Castro et al., *Falatório: participação e democracia na escola* (Rio de Janeiro: Contracapa, 2010).
22. Sanjay Palshikar, "Understanding Humiliation," in *Humiliation Claims and Context*, ed. Gopal Guru (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79–92.

23. Lila Abu-Lughod, "L'illusion romantique de la résistance: sur les traces des transformations du pouvoir chez les femmes bédouines," *Tumultes* 27 (2009): 9–35.
24. Christine Castejon, "La résistance qui s'ignore," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychosociologie* 7 (printemps), (2009): 22.
25. Ibid., 120–35.
26. Upendra Baxi. "Humiliation and Justice," in *Humiliation Claims and Context*, ed. Gopal Guru (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58–78.
27. Andrzej Leder, "La haine comme force formatrice dans le champ symbolique," in *Les sentiments et le politique*, ed. Pierre Ansart and Claudine Haroche (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 65.
28. Ligia C. Leite, "É possivel a volta para a escola," *Educar em Revista* 15 (1999):73–78.
29. Maria Helena S. Patto, *A produção do fracasso escolar: histórias de submissão e rebeldia* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1990).
30. Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-insurgency," *Subaltern Studies II*, 2010 (1983): 1.
31. Ranajit Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography," *Subaltern Studies VI*, 2010 (1989): 210–309.
32. Regiane Carvalho, "Participação Infantil: reflexoes a partir de crianças de assentamento rural e de periferia urbana," Master's Dissertation, University of the State of São Paulo, USP Ribeirão Preto, 2011.
33. T. Cockburn, "Partners in Power: a Radically Pluralistic Form of Participative Democracy for Children and Young People," *Children & Society* 21 (2007):446–57.
34. L. Rabello de Castro, "The 'Good-Enough Society', the 'Good-Enough Citizen' and 'the Good-Enough Student': Where is Children's Participation Agenda Moving to in Brazil?" *Childhood* 19, no. 1 (2012): 52–68.
35. For a discussion, see Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006).
36. Georg Simmel, "Female Culture," in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, ed. Guy Oakes (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984 [1911]), 65–100.
37. Dominique Lhuilier and Pierre Roche, "Introduction," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychosociologie* 7 (printemps), 2009: 7–18.
38. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 119.
39. Castro et al., *Falatório: participação e democracia na escola*, 204.
40. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Other's Rights," in *The Politics of Human Rights*, ed. Obrad Savic (London: Verso, 1999), 184.
41. Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007).
42. See, Partha Chaterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
43. For instance, very recently the state government has leased to every teacher a laptop computer. This has generated a lot of revolt by teachers, as they were not consulted about what they needed most; furthermore, they were critical of the fact that other priorities in school which should be cause of public concern and expenses were left unattended.
44. The jingle ran: "The teacher is my friend, to ill-treat her, is to ill-treat me."
45. Priscila Alderson, "School Students' Views on School Councils and Daily Life at School," *Children & Society* 14 (2000):132.

Bio

Lucia Rabello de Castro is a professor of Child and Youth Development at the Institute of Psychology, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she is the founder and scientific director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research on Contemporary Child and Youth.