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Intersectionality and Childhood Studies: A Critical Dialogue across Time, Space and Place

Editorial Introduction: Travelling with intersectionality across time, place and space

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This special issue is inspired by the debates generated by our Scottish Universities Insight Institute international seminar series entitled: *Children's Rights, Social Justice and Social Identities in Scotland: Intersections in Research, Policy and Practice*¹ (2013-2014). For this special issue we seek to bring together the fields of children's geographies, childhood and youth studies and key debates about intersectionality, in order to examine children's complex identities and experiences of social, political and economic inequalities in diverse social-spatial contexts. Although intersectionality is receiving greater attention among childhood/youth studies and geographies scholars, (Burman 2013; Gutierrez and Hopkins 2014; Konstantoni et al. 2014; Alanen 2016) to date, there has not been a serious consideration of the politics and practices of intersectionality in these interdisciplinary fields. This special issue attempts to fill this gap in knowledge.

'Intersectionality' refers to the ways in which race, class, gender, age, sexuality, disability and other categories of difference interact and the implications of these interactions for relations of power (Combahee River Collective 1977; Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 2000; Hancock 2007; Hopkins and Pain 2007; Valentine 2007; Davis 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011). Intersectional perspectives recognise the heterogeneity of different social groups and examine how particular individuals and groups are both systematically marginalised in different spaces, places and times but also use their positions at the intersections of certain categories as resources for activism and resistance. The concept of intersectionality has become ever more popular across a variety of disciplines and contexts, and there have been a range of debates within feminist political science and sociology which

¹For more information on our seminar series, please visit:

<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Programmes201314/ChildrensRights.aspx>

develop and contest its meanings and operationalisations. For instance, Skeggs (2005) argues that debates about intersectionality do not sufficiently attend to class production and political economy. Butler (1990) and Yuval-Davis (2011) have an ongoing discussion about the ontological bases of categories of difference. There is also a longstanding debate about additive versus constitutive intersectionality as seen in the work of Weldon (2006) and Hancock (2007). And of course, there is an enduring Black feminist critique of seeking to apply intersectionality outside the particularities of Black women's experiences and politics (Alexander-Floyd 2012; Jordan-Zachery 2013; Bilge 2013; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). Some intersectional approaches have stressed the importance of place and location (Anthias 2012) and have made use of geographical metaphors, conceptualising intersectionality, for example, as a crossroad (Crenshaw 1991) or as axes of difference (Yuval-Davis 2011).

The richness of debate about intersectionality demonstrates the complexity of processes of exclusion and inequality. This special issue does not seek to resolve these tensions, but to demonstrate how geographers and other scholars with an interest in children and childhoods might contribute to and advance these debates about the meanings and purposes of intersectionality in relation to children, time, space and place.

The contributions of this special issue to the fields of children's geographies and childhood studies are threefold:

First, this special issue brings together parallel debates in childhood studies and children's geographies in order to illuminate critical understandings of both intersectionality and childhood identities and inequalities. The special issue builds on previous work on children's experiences, identities and inequalities, particularly in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies (for a review of the key literature on this topic, see Konstantoni and Emejulu's paper in this issue). Some of the previous research on childhood identities and inequalities has tended to focus on specific categories of difference, for example, gender and sexuality, or race and ethnicity. Whilst this work recognises the complexity of children's multiple identities and inequalities, a gap exists in relation to the operationalisation of intersectionality as a framework for theorising childhood and youth identities and inequalities and for organising a programme of research and advocacy with and for children and young people.

In contrast to this, the field of children's geographies has been particularly sensitive to the intersectional dynamics of children and young people's lives in situated contexts (e.g. Hopkins and Pain 2007; Hopkins 2010; Rodó-de-Zárate 2013). Feminist and other critical geographers have drawn attention to issues of inequalities and the ways in which power operates in and through spaces and places (Bondi and Davidson 2005; Valentine 2007). There are thus close affinities between debates in the fields of childhood studies and children's geographies, and this special issue attempts to combine the insights from feminist political science and sociology debates about intersectionality with those perspectives from critical and children's geographies that attend to multiple inequalities in specific locations in order to problematise and advance knowledge about children's

identities and inequalities in childhood studies. Bringing these fields together in this special issue raises theoretical and practical applications of intersectionality that are relevant to the fields of both children's geographies and childhood and youth studies. For those interested in intersectionality more widely, this special issue provides insights into how the concept is being applied across disciplines and contexts and how it is being reshaped as it travels across particular children's spaces and places.

Second, the special issue contributes to theoretical debates about whether intersectional analyses should focus on identities or inequalities, and how the links between these levels of analysis can be conceptualised (Yuval-Davis 2011, Anthias 2013). Some authors argue that the power of intersectionality is demonstrated by the ways in which it illuminates the complex interactions between and within social, political, and economic structures that reproduce particular inequalities for particular social groups (Hancock 2007; Yuval-Davis 2011; Alexander-Floyd 2012). In contrast, other writers have focused more on aspects of subjective identities and individual narratives (McCall 2005; Bowleg 2008; Wetherell 2008). We are not seeking to resolve these tensions in this special issue, but to contribute to these debates by demonstrating how we can engage in transdisciplinary dialogues to explore the dynamics of both inequalities and identities in relation to children and young people and their positions within their respective socio-spatial contexts across the globe.

Third, in keeping with the origins of the concept of intersectionality, the papers in this special issue reflect on the implications of this theoretical framework for social justice and social change. Intersectional analyses have not only been pioneering in shedding light on the complex dynamics of inequality and exclusion; the importance of intersectionality is also in the ways in which it can be used as a resource for collective action and resistance of marginalised groups (Combahee River Collective 1977; Hill Collins 2000; Lorde 2012). Thus this special issue includes papers which analyse intersectionality and resistance in relation to children's and young people's lives.

The first article by Konstantoni and Emejulu sets out the theoretical debates which underpin this special issue. Their paper engages critically with the ways intersectionality has 'travelled' and been applied across disciplines, reminding us that its application is not a straightforward process. Konstantoni and Emejulu argue that it is important to recognise and take seriously the intellectual history and labour of Black women and preserve the integrity of intersectionality's radical praxis of emancipatory knowledge production and collective action for social justice when seeking to apply intersectionality to the childhood studies/geographies fields.

Rodó-de-Zárate's paper extends these debates by focusing on methodological issues when doing intersectional research with young people, by making links between feminist debates on intersectionality and research on children/youth. In particular, she provides a methodological contribution to the childhood and youth fields by showing an example of operationalising an intersectional framework while conducting research with young people in Catalonia. Rodó-de-Zárate also

discusses the implications of conducting an intersectional analysis and highlights the role of space.

These two scene-setting articles are followed by four articles which demonstrate the differing ways in which intersectionality can be operationalised in the fields of childhood studies and children's geographies and how it can be used for developing critical policies and practices that support children's and young people's identities and agency.

Shier's paper operationalises intersectionality to analyse the complex identities of children and young people in Nicaragua who are both school students and child workers. His study problematises polarised views of child workers as either 'victims' or 'heroes' and uses an intersectional lens for critically addressing how educational policy can best support these young people.

Spyrou and Christou's article draws on data from three different research projects in Cyprus to examine how Greek-Cypriot children understand the labels 'Greek', 'Turkish' and 'Cypriot' and their hyphenated versions ('Greek-Cypriot' and 'Turkish-Cypriot'). Their paper offers an analysis of intersectionality drawing on intersections of 'generation' and 'rationalised' understandings of 'nationalism' through imagined nationalist discourses and geographies (e.g. crossing borders) that shape children's understandings of hyphenated national/ethnic identities.

Kustatscher's paper draws on debates in the fields of intersectionality and children's emotional geographies to explore the role of emotions for young children's identities of ethnicity, race, nationality, class, gender and culture in primary school. She argues that emotions are crucial for understanding how children's intersectional identities come to be constructed and politicised. Her study suggests that paying attention to emotions enables researchers to understand how individual and structural aspects of identities and belonging are delineated and interwoven, and concludes that policymakers and practitioners who work with children need to recognise emotions as part of the workings of power and of the making and experiencing of identities and inequalities.

De Graeve and Bex discuss the experiences and relationships of young people in the Belgium care system. Their paper questions the system's focus on an 'ethics of equal rights and treatments' in drafting policies and care trajectories given that the bureaucratic apparatus of care fails to take into account the young people's actual needs. In particular, an overreliance on the category of age and a neglect of how age intersects with other axes of difference highlights the need for sensitivity to the intersectional relations of power and privilege that shape care systems and experiences.

Intersectionality is the latest 'fashion' in social science. However, in this special issue, we take intersectionality seriously in order to understand and illuminate complex processes of inequality and resistance that children and young people experience. For the diverse fields of childhood/youth studies and geographies, getting to grips with the competing theories and practices of intersectionality can

enrich scholarship and better support the agency and rights of children and young people across the Global South and North.

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